



Here and Elsewhere

Transposed Deities, Substitute Pilgrimages and Geographic Imagination in North India

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and Geographic Imagination in North India

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In memory of Kedarnath Vyas

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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

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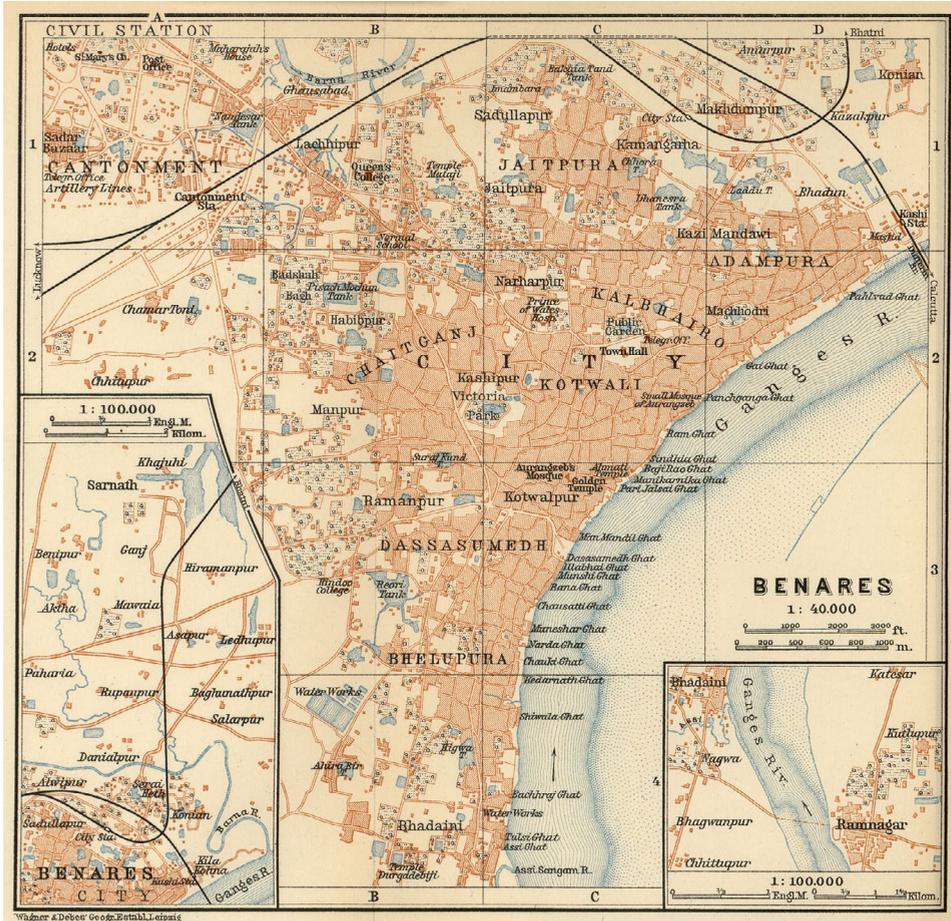


Fig. 1 Map of the centre of Banaras from 'Indien: Handbuch Für Reisende' published by Verlag von Karl Baedeker in Leipzig, 1914. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

was also the fundamental interpretative key for examining the traditions of the other temples in the city that house local forms of *vyotirliṅgas* (*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 *vyotirliṅgas*, one of many clusters of deities in Hindu sacred geography. The *vyotirliṅgas* 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 *vyotirliṅgas* 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

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

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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 *jyotirlingas*. 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 Brahmins—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 *jyotirlingas*, 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 *jyotirlingas*, 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 *jyotirlingas* 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]).

Before beginning, it is necessary to make a clarification that might further complicate notions of 'original' and 'transposition'. Those familiar with the group of *jyotirlingas* 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 *jyotirlingas*. In

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Banaras Viśvanāth is the only ‘original’ *jyotirlinga*. 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.

Note on the Spelling of Indian Words

Sanskrit and Hindi terms are transliterated according to Caracchi (1992), but with some modifications:

- In commonly used Hindi words, the final short 'a' is omitted (for example, I will write *ghāṭ*, not *ghāṭa*). The final short 'a' is retained in the case of endings of consonant clusters where pronunciation requires an abbreviated vowel sound. The short 'a' is also omitted within a word according to pronunciation rules.
- For recurring Sanskrit terms used in Hindi in ritual and religious contexts, for those indicating elements of sacred geography, classes of deities, months of the lunar calendar and proper names of deities, I have chosen to maintain the Sanskrit-derived transliteration (thus I will use Śiva, *darśana*, *liṅga*, *bhairava* and so on).
- The specific names of divine forms corresponding to contemporary shrines, however, are transliterated according to the rules used for Hindi as mentioned above (Kedārnāth, Kedāreśvar and so on).
- For historical and contemporary figures, contemporary geographic names, the proper names of interlocutors and Indian authors, and the names of Indian publishers, I have chosen to adopt a simplified spelling without diacritical marks.
- Both sonorant and cerebral *r* found in Hindi words are transliterated as *r*.

1 Sanctification of Territory and Divine Transpositions: An Introduction

A Network of Connections

It is February 2011 and I am sitting cross-legged on the ground, waiting for the elderly man to come and speak with me. His son promised me a meeting a few days ago when I had entered the temple during the evening ceremony, a time of great crowds. We are on the cusp of Mahāśivarātrī,³ the great night of Śiva, and all the temples dedicated to this god are frequented by gesticulating but orderly crowds, perpetually in line. Both father and son join me and sit with me in the secondary hall of the Kāśī Karvāṭ temple, where the Upadhyaya family⁴ lives and takes care of the resident deities. In an underground cell, the complex hosts Bhīmaśaṅkar, one of the local manifestations of the pan-Indian *jyotirlingas*, whose more famous form (the ‘original’?) is in Pune. The father begins, ‘The description of the twelve *jyotirlingas* is given by the *Śiva Mahāpurāṇa*; the *jyotirlingas* are located in various places...’ He is reciting the *Jyotirlingastotra*,⁵ the hymn that pairs the names of the *jyotirlingas* with the places where they are found. He then continues:

In this group, there is also Viśvanāth, who is the *jyotirlinga* of Varanasi,⁶ while the others are scattered throughout India. However, in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa, another story is told, another story... that is, in ancient times the twelve *jyotirlingas* were also perceived (*anubhav honā*) here in Kāśī. Among these local *jyotirlingas* is the one that resides in this temple, Bhīmeśvar, which in Pune is known as Bhīmaśaṅkar. That *liṅga* is here, in the Kāśī Karvāṭ temple. Similarly, all twelve are found in

3 Mahāśivarātrī is a Hindu festival dedicated to the worship of Śiva, celebrated annually on the night between the thirteenth and fourteenth day of the month of Phālguna (February–March). A description of the celebration can be found in the sixth chapter.

4 Ritual specialists are often publicly known local figures, thus their names are not anonymised.

5 The hymn is discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

6 Here he uses the official name of the city. Later he also uses Kāśī, which means ‘the luminous’, and is frequently used, especially in narratives that recount mythological episodes about the city. I have chosen in general, however, to call the city Banaras in this book, because that is what it is most commonly called by its inhabitants.

1 Sanctification of Territory and Divine Transpositions

Kāśī within an area of about ten kilometres. In ancient times, when Śiva had to leave Kāśī, all the goddesses and gods, the serpent deities and the spirits also left, and the city remained empty for thirty thousand years. Only after many attempts did the Lord manage to return... but that's a long story... anyway, when he returned, the *jyotirlingas* manifested in the territory of Kāśī, along with all the other deities: they no longer wanted to leave this city.⁷

While we talk, some worshippers make their way to the main hall of the temple, where a golden fence marks the spot from which devotees can lean over to observe the *liṅga*—a symbol of Śiva's presence—situated on a lower level, in a cell accessible only to temple personnel. From above they have the *darśana* (literally 'vision') of the deity, throw their offerings and watch the cleaning and decoration practices that precede the lamp ceremony (*ārtī*). Other devotees approach and listen attentively to the explanations and stories that the temple's Brahmans are telling this curious foreigner. Like me, when they get a chance to speak they ask questions and enquire about the locations of other local manifestations of *jyotirlingas* in the city. These people are pilgrims or city residents who surely aren't hearing the stories about the city's all-encompassing ideal space for the first time. However, imbued with these images, they, like me, naively look for their materialisation in the temples of the city.

Similar dialogues between temple officiants (*pūjārīs*), who often present themselves as the authoritative representatives of mythic wisdom about the city, and myself, a foreigner needing instruction on the places and their stories, were recurring moments during my field research. As illustrated in the narration of my interlocutor above, the ethnographic context in which I found myself—sometimes with patience, sometimes with restlessness—consisted of places that are never narrated in just a single way.

The Kāśī Karvaṭ temple, located in the heart of the old city of Banaras, belongs to the city, Amla Shankar tells us, but it is also the abode of a deity who is situated here and elsewhere simultaneously. As we will discover in discussion of other transposed forms, the deity from elsewhere is nonetheless thought to be primarily and fully present in Banaras. Amla Shankar explains that certain forms of Śiva—the *jyotirlingas*—are described by a specific authoritative narrative that places them at various sites across the subcontinent; however, he immediately clarifies that there is also another story, equally important and locally more significant, that describes how these same divine forms have come to be in the territory of Banaras, making accessible to its inhabitants and visitors the fruits of

7 From an interview with Amla Shankar Upadhyaya and his son Dinesh, *pūjārīs* of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple, February 2011.

a pilgrimage that, if undertaken in its pan-Indian form, would require far more time, resources and effort.

Amla Shankar is ready to speak when he sits with me; he knows his role as a storyteller very well and believes he knows what I want to hear. His account of the presence of all the *vyotirlingas* within the local urban territory, and the consequent possibility of undertaking substitute pilgrimages to otherwise distant, pan-Indian deities does include important features of the glorification narratives and the image of Banaras that has been formed over time. It also reflects a certain ‘indigenous anthropology’, that considers who might benefit from such narration and what those people are willing to hear.

This book addresses all these matters: plural places composed of many stories that give life to layered traditions, and the ways in which social actors define the contours of their locality by engaging with realities situated elsewhere, as well as mythical spatial dimensions. More simply, it will discuss connections, a term that in anthropology has acquired deep meanings that challenge the clear division between universality and locality (Amselle 2001). The weaving of such connections between individual localities and ‘elsewhere’ places, I argue, constitutes a principal mode of sanctifying the Indian territory and, therefore, of forming, informing and transforming the sacredness of places. Indeed, I don’t think it would be an exaggeration to say that India can be read geographically as a vast network of connections, whose nodes are formed through divine transfers, repetition of names and references to corresponding spaces situated elsewhere.

The field of investigation here is primarily that of Hindu landscapes and religious practices in a city that, as I will discuss in the second chapter, has over time been shaped and transmitted by many voices as ‘the ancient Hindu centre par excellence’, despite its actual cultural and religious heterogeneity. However, it is not uncommon for pilgrimage places in India to be shared, conceived, and co-produced by other religious communities, who have been there for centuries, making the intertwining of meanings of places even more complex.⁸ The cultural mosaic that we call Hinduism does, however, provide a vast wealth of connections between places, people, and deities.

Observing the centrality of place-centred traditions for Hindus, Jacobsen states that:

[...] it is perhaps not an overstatement to say that, for a large majority of Hindus, their religious practice is more oriented around sacred space

8 According to the 2011 census, alongside Hindus (79.90%) there are in India people of Islamic faith (14.23%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.72%), Buddhists (0.7%) and Jains (0.37%). The remaining population belongs to ‘other religions’ (0.66%), such as Zoroastrianism and Judaism, or does not declare a religious affiliation (0.24%).

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than around sacred books and that the ritual of pilgrimage and visits to temples is of more relevance in their religious life than rituals involving books. For many Hindus, visits to sacred landscapes and places, including their temples, rituals and pilgrimage festivals, are probably considered high points of their religious life.⁹

Pilgrimage centres and practices related to visiting various types of shrines are undoubtedly among the immediately visible characteristics of Hinduism. The countless holy sites across India reflect the well-documented belief in a variety of gods and goddesses, gurus, ascetics, saints and heroes who—according to written, oral, or visual narratives, whether ancient or modern—have passed through and acted in the places of the subcontinent. It is thus a sort of immense geographic text that can be read through travel. This space-text reflects the deeds of divine personalities or special humans, whose presence for the faithful is inherent in elements of the local landscape. Most of Indian rivers, as is well known, are considered earthly descents of specific female deities; mountains are equally known as divine figures whose mythical deeds are inscribed in the land and revived in the local memories of the people who dwell there; trees, stones, and even caves and furrows in the soil are interpreted and narrated as signs of a deity's presence, sometimes even as its limbs. Each place will likely have multiple stories, host more than one divine form (each with multiple names) and embody multiple voices that describe its qualities and define its boundaries.

In the pages of this book I will present a snapshot of such a reality, analysing the ways in which narrative traditions about some of these places have, over time, been established and transmitted, and how they are being embodied and reshaped in the present. I will describe how the people I have conversed with establish various connections: between places and spaces, localities and universality, between gods and humans. Ultimately, though, they continuously cultivate their connections with the places to which they belong.

The Sacred Place: A Brief History of a Powerful Idea

Given the centrality of places and devotional practices associated with specific sites within Hinduism, and before introducing the various spatial dimensions through which this research has navigated, it is necessary to engage briefly with the cultural history of Hinduism and question the origins of this 'locative' attitude.

9 Jacobsen 2013, 5.

It is essential to recognise that many practices, beliefs and traditions in Hinduism are the result of a long and ongoing reinterpretation of ideas, terms and practices. Any observer of the present must inevitably take account of this in order to produce a nuanced description of ethnographic reality.

As many scholars have pointed out (for example, Bharati 1963 and 1970; Bhardwaj 1973), devotion to places and pilgrimage are not widespread in the Vedas, the earliest textual traditions of Indian religious thought.¹⁰

The intimate link between physical territory and divine landscape can be traced in the etymology of the term most commonly used today to refer to sacred centres in Hinduism. *Tirtha* derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *tī*, which means to cross a body of water. The term—later interpreted as a place where one transcends human dimension and encounters the divine—is essentially a geographical expression identifying specific sites where one could cross or bathe in one of the numerous rivers of the subcontinent. It should be noted that crossing any river, and especially the formidable watercourses of South Asia, was not an easy task in ancient times. Rivers, though, have always been an important cultural symbol for the indigenous populations of the Indian subcontinent, as well as for the peoples speaking Indo-European languages who settled there from the middle of the second millennium BCE. In the Vedic imagination, rivers are already powerful metaphors of connection between various planes of reality: waterways are considered celestial entities that originate in the sky, descend through the atmosphere to the earth, and bring life, inherent in the water, to its inhabitants (Eck 1998).

Travel is a central dimension in the Vedas; however, the gods are described as being in constant motion through an indefinite and placeless space. Angot's (2003) comprehensive analysis of the concepts of space and place in the earliest literature shows that Vedic deities are not typically associated with specific places; space seems to be 'the indefinite territory of the gods' actions' (ibid., 12). Stasis and inactivity do not belong to celestial beings because fixed places are perceived as constrictive at this stage and are quickly abandoned in favour of resuming movement. In the Vedas there are very few place names; the focus is entirely on movement, journeying and the transit of gods and humans, rather than on

10 The Sanskrit term *veda* means 'knowledge' and also 'science' and is related to the Latin *video*, 'to see', which by extension refers to discerning and understanding. The Vedas are the literary corpus of the *ārya*, the population speaking an Indo-European language that settled in northern India around 1500 BCE. Various sections contain hymns to Vedic deities, explanations of rituals, comments on religious practice and reflections on the cosmic order. The Vedas represent the evolution of religious, social and philosophical thought of a nomadic population that gradually settled in a new territory. They are considered by most Hindus to be the product of divine revelation.

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actions contextualised in specific locales.¹¹ The area of sacrifice itself—central to the religiosity of the ancient Brahmanism—is also temporary and disappears once the ritual actions are completed. Angot also observes that another term, *kṣetra*, in this phase of religious thought, meant simply a field of human action, entirely unrelated to the presence of a deity; whereas in later texts, it is often paired with a place name or a deity's name and does indicate a specific 'field' of the divine. In Vedic times not only did gods not have privileged relationships with specific places, they did not dwell in images or symbols either. That became an important characteristic of deities in later Hinduism.

The terminology and practices related to *tīrthas*, and the acts of crossing, traversing and descending—a characteristic of Indian deities with numerous earthly descents (*avatāra*)—evolve over the centuries. The reworking of Vedic imagery associated with watercourses goes hand in hand with the assimilation of devotional attitudes and attachment to specific sites, believed to stem from the so-called popular substratum or pre-Vedic religious forms.¹² Artistic and epigraphic evidence also documents the spread among indigenous populations of devotional attitudes towards specific locations and cults related to natural elements and place guardians such as *yakṣas* and *nāgas* (Eck 1981, 334; Kessler 2009). The influence of such local cults is also evident in Buddhist and Jain artistic testimonies. *Stūpas*, funerary monuments for preserving relics, are the first true religious buildings known in South Asia; specifically, the journey to the oldest *stūpas*, located in places connected to the life of the Buddha and established during the Mauryan period, is the first documented form of pilgrimage (Schopen 1997). The iconography and decoration of these monuments seems to incorporate symbols and features associated with local deities, which were presumably already widespread and understood by the indigenous population that Buddhism sought to attract. Furthermore, it appears that experimentation with the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha originated from possibly competitive artistic dialogue after the production of colossal images of *yakṣas*, to which devotees made substantial offerings. Evidence of attempts to 'domesticate' such nature spirits and their incorporation into new religious systems is also found in Buddhist texts and, later, in Hindu mythology (ibid., 248; cf. Coomaraswamy 1928–1931).

11 Some scholars have identified a Vedic precursor to pilgrimage in the *sarasvatīsattva*, a ritual that includes a journey along the Sarasvatī River; however, this interpretation has faced criticism. The various positions are summarised in Jacobsen 2013, 45–46.

12 Parpola (2003) argues, for example, that the people of the Indus Valley civilization were familiar with a form of pilgrimage to water places and to the abodes of renowned ascetics.

The popularity of local cults and the establishment of the first Buddhist centres of worship are early forms of what I call ‘locative piety’ which refers to an acute sensitivity and participatory devotion to specific places. This was later adopted and adapted in post-Vedic Hinduism, eventually becoming its most visible characteristic. Locative piety developed during this period, however, simultaneously with the critique of sacrificial religiosity brought forward by new philosophical and religious movements that saw a need for changes in religious attitudes within the Brahmanic community. By the beginning of the Common Era, during the Kushan period, we see the first responses to this crisis in Brahmanism and, perhaps as early as the second century, we find the first remains of temple buildings, never in urban centres but always in rural or isolated areas, likely near the residences of ascetics. Around the same time, the first depictions of deities that would later be assimilated into Hinduism were produced. However, it was only in the middle of the first millennium that normative texts began to include reflections on divine images and the significance of temple reality (Olivelle 2010).

While Brahmanism was beginning to experiment with different forms of worship—focused on temples and deities with tangible forms—there was also resistance to these new religious attitudes and practices. The normative literature on *dharma* (literally ‘law’ or ‘norm’, and by extension used to refer to religious doctrine), that was mostly systematised in the early centuries of the Common Era, reflects a certain scepticism about the worship of divine images, and especially towards the first ritual specialists (*devalaka*) associated with temple worship (ibid., 202). These ritual figures were evidently in competition both with Buddhist monks and more ‘orthodox’ Brahmans who continued to practice sacrifice as the sole form of religious activity, presumably wanting to attract the same clientele (Nandi 1979). From the beginning, temple Brahmans were viewed with suspicion, perhaps because they moved to places where temples were established, coming into contact with people of perceived lower rank and thus jeopardising their own ‘purity’. Moreover, such ritual specialists have always been associated with the practice of donation (*dāna*)—which they receive from their clients or patrons—and which is still considered a source of contamination and impurity (Goodwin-Rahejiya 1988; Michaels 2004, 197–198; Solinas 2010).

Despite the initial resistance and prejudice against the new ritual specialists, forms of locative piety centred on *tīrthas* emerged as dominant ideas starting in the Mahābhārata.¹³ Within this vast epic, we find numerous sections concerned

13 The dating of the epic and its various sections is a subject of intense debate among scholars. Hillebeitel places its composition between the mid-second century BCE and the turn of the first millennium CE (2001, 31), and summarises the positions of various scholars on the issue (ibid., 20–31).

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with sacred places and the practice of pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*).¹⁴ These sections, presumably composed and adjusted over time as a reaction to the crisis in early Brahmanism, testify to the appropriation and reworking of already widespread non-Brahmanical religious practices and ideas by Brahman compilers.

In the descriptions of the journeys undertaken by the Pāṇḍava heroes we can glimpse early forms of geographical imagination and first attempts to systematise the vast subcontinental territory. There is also an explicit effort to promote the practice of pilgrimage as a valid alternative to sacrifice-centred religiosity. The routes described in the epic, however, along with the catalogue of merits associated with specific destinations, seem to reflect a set of already mature geographical and devotional practices, likely borrowed from contemporary realities and non-Brahmanical cults.

The progressive expansion of pilgrimage and the encouragement of offerings and donations at temples housing divine icons appear to emerge as responses to the specific socio-economic situation in which the practice of sacrifice, already questioned by the ethical demands of Buddhism and Jainism, was in deep crisis. The rise of *tīrthas* as new focal points of religious activity should be understood within the broader and progressive cultural evolution that saw the transition from early Brahmanism—with its formless and intangible deities—to what can be called popular Hinduism, a multifaceted religion largely centred on the worship of deities present in defined forms and locations.

The literature of the Purāṇas, which consistently and repeatedly emphasises the importance of pilgrimage and making donations to the Brahmans of the sacred centres mentioned, bears witness to the results of this evolution. Locative piety becomes paramount and pilgrimage sites become the new centres of wealth and cultural development, constantly interacting with political power (Bakker 1992; Sax 2000). As well, the encyclopaedic Purāṇas, composed from the early centuries of the Common Era, gather cosmologies and sectarian narratives and contribute to the spread of devotional currents centred on the worship of the deities Śiva, Viṣṇu and Devī. Each emerges from time to time as the centre and origin of the universe, encompassing and incorporating other deities and having places in the territory dedicated to them.

Despite the pervasive presence of *tīrthas* in sources from various genres (Jacobsen 2013, 12–15), it is in the Puranic literature of glorifications that we find the culmination of the devotion to sacred places and promotion of pilgrimage that

14 In addition to the well-known Tīrthayātrāparvan of the Vanaparvan or Āraṇyakaparvan, the Śalyaparvan contains twenty chapters dedicated to pilgrimage. Vassilkov (2002) argues that the entire epic should be understood as a text on various forms of pilgrimage.

has come to characterise Hinduism. *Māhātmyas*,¹⁵ the main textual sources about pilgrimage sites, are often sections of the Puranas but circulate as independent texts. They detail mythologies and explanations of the origins of the temples as well as devotional practices to be performed. This is a rich and varied production that contributed significantly to increasing the importance of places and the spread of the fame of *tīrthas* in popular Hinduism. *Māhātmyas* dedicated to cities, divine *kṣetras*, temples, rivers, mountains, pilgrimage routes, caves, forms of deities both widely-known and local, sacred tanks and so on present a wide range of ways people have developed to connect their land to divine deeds and sanctify their places.

Many of the techniques used today by ritual specialists and officiants to convey the power, qualities and meanings of sacred places draw directly from the narrative motifs and methods of sanctification found in local *māhātmya* traditions. For this reason, an ethnographic study focusing on specific temples and their traditions (often systematised hegemonically by Brahmins) must constantly engage with this diverse written production. Although *māhātmyas* are valuable sources for understanding pilgrimage places and traditions, they have to be approached critically and treated as products of their own kind, namely as ‘advertisements’—as Lochtefeld put it—crafted by those whose livelihood was dependent on the success of a specific place among pilgrims (Lochtefeld 2010). However, I contend that *māhātmyas* should also be read ‘against the grain’ (Ginzburg 2000), that is ‘against’, or independently of the intentions of their creators. The aim is to deconstruct the worldview these sources produce to uncover the underlying socio-cultural mechanisms of their production and selective transmission. Moreover,

15 A *māhātmya* is a glorification. The literal meaning of the term is ‘greatness’ and by extension glory, glorification or praise. It generally refers to the glorification of local entities, including sacred places, and the focus of praise in any *māhātmya* is the centre of the devotional universe within that text. According to a traditional classification reported in Piano (2000, 229), a *māhātmya* can concern:

- Immobile sacred places (*sthāvara-tīrtha*), such as mountains, rivers, confluences, etc.
 - Specific times, such as lunar months or particular days auspicious for worshiping relevant deities.
 - Ritual activities or meritorious actions.
 - Sacred places of the mind (*mānasa-tīrtha*), or holy persons (*jaṅgama-tīrtha* or, ‘moving sacred places’) or the inner pilgrimage, which involves devotion and surrender to the deity (*bhakti*).
 - Deities, in their many forms and names.
 - Puranic texts themselves, for their salvific and educational qualities.
- The importance of the *māhātmya* genre for the study of the dynamics of place sanctification and diverse approaches to these texts are discussed by several authors, including Hardy (1977) Porcher (1985), Granola (1998) and, more recently, Ambach, Bucholz and Hüsken (2022).

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as we will see, the glorifications are tools in the hands of those contemporary individuals who continue to craft the traditions about these places, shaping and creating new material as they see fit, with clear financial ends in mind. ‘Modern *māhātmyas*’ and guides for pilgrims continue to be written in the present day, as the constant interplay between texts, living practices and sites updates and amends the traditions.

The Grammar of Sanctification and Geographical Imagination

Each glorification provides its own unique account of the origins of a particular site. Generally, the sacredness of places is explained through the connection of parts of the landscape to specific ‘mythological’ events, which, according to the most widespread conception, are actually historical: as Piano (2000, 129) notes, both *itihāsa*, which refers to epic literature and literally means ‘thus indeed’, and *purāṇa*, meaning ‘ancient’, do not merely refer to events that took place a long time ago but also to things that have always existed, transcending time, while simultaneously belonging to a historical past. The glorifications develop numerous explanations to account for the history and power of places, using a specific language with stylistic devices, rhetorical figures, and specific rules reinforced by repetition. As often happens in genres of Indian literature, the *māhātmya* genre has accumulated a set of rules and narrative motifs that new productions must adhere to and refine. Through this continuity with the past new productions can be incorporated into the tradition and recognised as its continuation.¹⁶

To explain how the territory is imbued with meanings and connections, Eck (1988 and 2012, 17–34) referred to a ‘grammar of sanctification’, a phrase that effectively conveys the idea that there seem to be some more or less rigid rules guiding the mechanisms of sanctifying places, and consequently forming sacred geography, but perhaps does not fully capture the vast range of techniques used to create connections. Some places might, for example, be sites of *avatāraṇa*, meaning they have hosted in a mythic past the earthly manifestation of a deity, or they might host a *svayambhū* form of a deity, which has self-manifested, often in natural elements. Holy places might also originate from *pratiṣṭhā*, which is the spontaneous or invoked adherence of a deity to a specific spot on the earth, from which it has never departed. The origins of a large number of sites on the

16 On the concept of tradition, the relationship with the past and the value of ancient things compared with novelties in the Indian context, see Squarcini 2011, 11–38.

subcontinent are traced to an occurrence of divine body dismemberment—the most notable group of places derived from this ‘rule’ is the Śakti Pīṭha, which are the various locations of the body parts of Sāṭī. The ‘rules’ of the grammar of sanctification are obviously fluid and each has a range of regional variations, but the result is numerous local sacred geographies that are shaped by references and resonances with the broader pan-Indian landscape.

Divine duplications and transfers are integral, if not foundational, to the ‘grammar of sanctification’; indeed, I will argue that the repetition of places, names and homonymous deities is what sustains and constitutes all processes of sanctification. A pilgrimage centre or divine abode is never unique or isolated but is embedded within a vast system of trajectories and references extending across the subcontinent. The sites in this geography are interconnected through a logic of references and proliferation, rather than relying on a single hierarchy or dynamics of exclusion and uniqueness. At the same time, each *māhātmya* has a rhetoric of uniqueness, greatness and antiquity and, each site is said to be the most powerful sacred centre and the only one capable of granting liberation from the cycle of rebirths (*mokṣa*). Around each new object of glorification, the hierarchy of all places in the subcontinent can be rewritten.

Regarding pilgrimage—which I will examine in detail in Banaras in the fifth chapter—many scholars suggest that the networks connecting pilgrim destinations across the subcontinent have contributed to the creation of a continuous sacred space, in which regional differences are diminished through the movement and trajectories of pilgrims (e.g., Bhardwaj 1973; Varma 1990; Fleming 2007; Eck 2012). However, we should be careful in mobilising the idea of pilgrimage as a practice that anticipates a sense of territorial (and subsequently national) unity because this has often been embraced by Hindu nationalist forces. As is well known, in the early decades of last century the ideology of Hindutva (Savarkar 1969 [1928]), or ‘Hinduness’, emerged. It includes the notion that a significant portion of the population of the Indian subcontinent—the non-Hindus—could not be considered part of what was then still an abstract concept, namely the nation of India. The exclusion is informed by the idea that religious minorities, unlike Hindus, do not regard the lands of the subcontinent as sacred, and therefore cannot be considered part an Indian nation. Hindutva and other militant and political forces that draw from this ideology—including the Bharatiya Janata Party, which currently forms the Indian government under Narendra Modi—stress religious affiliation, territorial attachment and national belonging.

A more nuanced approach regarding the concepts of community and otherness related to the practice of pilgrimage, has been introduced by Feldhaus (2003, 134) when she emphasised that, on the one hand, pilgrimage has been a fundamental means through which Hindus have constructed the idea of a religious community. Not only has it helped to define this community ritually and geographically, but it

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has also fostered connections across a vast territory marked by regional, linguistic and social differences. On the other hand, though, this idea of community, like other constructions of identity, delineates boundaries that necessarily exclude ‘the other’, thus reinforcing sometimes fluid and less well-marked differences (Remotti 1996). The population of the subcontinent has included non-Hindus and indigenous people for centuries and these minorities have knitted their own connections to the very land that Hindu nationalists claim as exclusively their own, and developed equally complex dynamics of sanctification, which often intersect with those of the Hindu majority.¹⁷ Furthermore, while it is undeniable that the network and trajectories traced by pilgrimages have fostered a powerful sense of territory from ancient times to the modern pilgrimage industry—accelerated by infrastructure development from the colonial era—this territory remains deeply marked by regional differences.

Despite the fact that regional pilgrimage centres often compete with each other, my investigation will show that the Indian territory can be understood as the result of continuous attempts to establish connections. Individual temples themselves will emerge as plural realities with constant resonances between the here and the elsewhere. Connections, resonances and the visceral plurality of places will thus reveal how discordant and misplaced is any exclusivity claimed by Hindu nationalist forces in contemporary India.

Explaining Transposition: The State of the Art and New Perspectives

The spatial transposition of divine forms is a common phenomenon in several religious traditions. There are numerous instances in the Christian world, for instance, of places designed to ‘replicate’, even spatially, the geography and attractions of Jerusalem—perhaps the quintessential Christian pilgrimage destination. For example, there are several Calvaries and Sacred Mountains in Italy. These spatial transpositions, which reference and crystallise the final events of Christ’s life, seem historically to have offered an alternative route that mirrored the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, potentially bestowing similar spiritual benefits even when the pilgrim was unable actually to go to Jerusalem, for whatever reason.¹⁸

17 Lazzaretti and Jacobsen 2024 and Lazzaretti 2023 elaborate on the functioning of Hindu majoritarianism through the cooption of local pilgrimage traditions.

18 About the sacred mountains of Piedmont and Lombardy, see Barbero 2001 and 2004, and Cardini 2004.

A phenomenon as complex and central to the Indian context as transposition has, though, received relatively little attention from scholars and there has been a lack of consideration of the perspective from specific places and the social actors involved in reproducing this mode of territorial sanctification. The dynamics of divine transfer and the presence of numerous homonymous entities has, however, certainly been recognised and examined in the *written* sources describing the traditions of various sacred centres. A first consideration is that the intrinsic qualities of universality and transcendence attributed to *tīrthas*, or parts of the sacred landscape such as rivers and mountains (Gutschow 2006, 343–344), recur often as necessary and constitutive features of transposed spaces, as will be noted presently in some of the cases discussed here. Due to their universality and transcendence, this reading suggests, sacred places seem naturally to lend themselves to being evoked and ‘replicated’ in various contexts, just as certain mythical prototypes and narrative patterns are subject to countless local variations.

The proliferation of homonymous places has also been explained in terms of the appropriation of widely-known deities and landscapes by minor kings, who validated their limited power by re-creating distant realities and making them accessible to their subjects (Pelissero 2012, 30). Indeed, the local need to reference far away realities, high-sounding names and sites connected to mythical events has been explained as the ‘geographical equivalent of sanskritization’ (Eck 1981, 336), and discussed as part of the complex debate on the dynamics of sanskritisation and the dialectic between the so-called great and little traditions. However, as I will argue, this explanation reduces the transposed forms to lesser realities that must authenticate and promote themselves through reference to pan-Indian pilgrimage centres. In contrast, through my ethnography of the transposed *jyotirlingas* in Banaras, the places of transposition themselves emerge as vehicles of fame for the ‘original’ realities they ‘replicate’.

Moreover, the rhetorical and stereotypical nature of references to ‘original’ forms and names has been discussed, for instance, in the case of the repetition of Indian toponyms in Southeast Asia (Salomon 1990, 161). The author points out that the presence of homonyms should not always be interpreted as evidence of actual links between the ‘model’ and the ‘copy’; rather, the latter may be seeking not to reproduce the ‘original’ Indian form but perhaps, as in Southeast Asia, another version present in locally known geographies (ibid., 160). This rather testifies to the fact that it is the names themselves that have resonant power, so that they are worthy of being reproduced everywhere, without the need for direct knowledge of the ‘original’. The place names of Hindu sacred geography are usually divine names; the temples themselves almost always have the name of the main deity they house, as do the associated *tīrthas*. Such names are open systems that can take on new meanings and correlations (Wilke 2008, 72), while

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still remaining carriers of the past traditions; they are bearers of narratives, encompass mythological episodes and geographical references and help to connect the landscape to divine history. Names of places in Hindu sacred geography are illustrative of Basso's assertion that:

[...] placenames are arguably among the most highly charged and richly evocative of all linguistic symbols. Because of their inseparable connection to specific localities, placenames may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations—associations for time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life.¹⁹

We will see that the evocative power of names, and their ease of 'exportability', undoubtedly plays a major role in the modes of transposition observed in Banaras.

I have chosen to use the term 'transposition', to capture and define the mode of connection between places as observed in the Hindu context, distinguishing this from, for example, the *duplication* of sacred centres in Christianity. To transpose—from the Latin *transponere*, thus *trans* + *ponere*—means 'to change something from one position to another, or to exchange the positions of two things'.²⁰ A second meaning, used in music, is 'to play or write a piece of music in a different key [...] from the one used originally'.²¹

The term 'transposition', then, shifts the focus away from comparing the transposed form with the 'original'. Unlike Christian Jerusalem—a place representative of an event about which some historical facts are fairly certain and can be crystallised in the paths proposed by its local 'replicas',²² the 'original' in the Indian context is often a completely different reality, situated in that previously mentioned dimension of historical ahistoricity and thus inherently unknowable to those experiencing the transposed forms.

'Transposition' captures the creativity inherent in the act of re-placing—exchanging the position of two things, reversing the order or changing the musical key—and thus the concept is able to foreground the reformulation of the narratives that establish and explain the qualities of a space. This creativity emerges from the non-fixity of the 'original' and thus the potential for infinite local

19 Basso, 1988: 103.

20 <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/trasporre/>.

21 Cambridge Dictionary online (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/transposition>).

22 An interesting study of Jerusalem and the dialectic between its celestial and earthly versions can be found in Stroumsa 2017. For various approaches regarding the historicity of Jesus, see Gaeta 2009. For information on the geography of the Sacred Mountains and the events they 'replicate', see Barbero 2001.

variations. These transposed forms, as we will see, constitute new and peripheral centres—centres that gain value in their physicality and experiential dimension, and whose ethnographic study contributes to the ‘disintegration of the notion of centre’ (Remotti 2014, 270). The term ‘transposition’ embodies the reversal of the order of ‘original’ and ‘replica’, and thus between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ of divine presence—a theme on which the narratives presented by sources on transposed forms and the voices defining local *jyotirlingas* particularly insist.

It is crucial to acknowledge that there are no corresponding terms in Hindi for these pairs of divine forms. A transposed deity is sometimes characterised as *pratirūpa*, literally ‘counterpart of a real form’, but also ‘correspondent’ or ‘suitable form’ and thus, by extension, it could also be understood as ‘that which is equal’. Transposed forms, like other deities and the places where they dwell, are primarily referred to by names that have their own resonance and are never mute but always evocative, and whose sound already conveys meaning. I suggest that the term ‘transposition’ helps capture this reversal and also accounts for the nuances of local terminology used by my informants, thus proving to be a useful analytical term. When discussing transposed forms, sometimes I do use the terms ‘original’ and ‘replica’, but in quotation marks, because not only do they not correspond to local terminology, they are also far too simplistic when applied to the phenomenon I am dealing with.

Despite the many explanations offered by scholars about the meanings of transposition there has been little discussion about the specific forms it takes in particular contexts. The work of Feldhaus (2003) is an exception; the scholar provides an exhaustive set of criteria to distinguish between ‘original’ and ‘replica’ which I will examine in the fourth chapter, discussing the methods used in the transposed *jyotirlinga* shrines of Banaras.

Literally entering transposed sites can, in my view, provide new insights, especially by informing us about the local variations of a practice that I argue is foundational in the imagining, making and remaking of Hindu geographies. In addition to constantly engaging with written production about these sites, my research was conducted in the field, in specific locations, in order to understand the role of transpositions *vis á vis* the ‘production of locality’ (Appadurai 2001 [1996]).

In addition to being integrated, like most Hindu divine forms, into a system of references and trans-regional connections, the places subject to this research are part of a more specific context that physically encompasses them and influences their reality: the city of Banaras, which itself is exemplary of the phenomenon of spatial transposition. As illustrated by the field notebook excerpt at the beginning of this chapter, the glorification literature and contemporary narratives transmitted in its shrines describe it as the seat of the universe, replicating within itself the places of the entire subcontinent; the pilgrimage paths within its territory ideally trace the trajectories of all of India; the entire city is interpreted

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as a cosmic *jyotirlinga*, the supreme manifestation of Śiva, and the god himself. As a well-known proverb states—*Kāśī ke kankar Śiva Śaṅkar* (the stones of Kāśī [are] Śiva Śaṅkar)—Śiva is felt to be present in the stones that make up the city's streets and walls. Moreover, some famous places in Banaras, such as the Viśvanāth temple and even the city itself, are replicated throughout the subcontinent. It is with this context—to understand how to conceptualise it and how to read the connection between the city and its parts—that we must come to terms before delving into the sites of transposition.

Let us now take an initial look at the complexity of Banaras, before outlining the theoretical framework that will help us navigate its stories and guide us in the study of its places.

2 Finding One's Way in Banares: Between Imagined Spaces and Lived Places

Encountering the City

My first encounter with the city happened more than twenty years ago during a brief but intense visit. It was my first trip to the subcontinent and Banaras is almost inevitably included in the itinerary of a first visit to northern India: those who have been there, travel guides, informational materials and much academic literature contribute to igniting the imagination about a city that, according to what has become a literary trope, is an ancient centre and a microcosm of Indian, particularly Hindu, religiosity. In short, its myth precedes it, obscuring many aspects of the city. Despite the long and difficult process of deconstructing this myth, which I have done by engaging with scholars who aim to restore the city's historicity, and by discovering its diverse dimensions through research, the impressions from that first visit remain latent even when I think I have moved past them.

When I arrived in the city it was nighttime. I was guided by a rickshaw puller (*riksāvālā*) through dark, strangely silent alleys toward my accommodation. It was early September, and the monsoon was particularly heavy that year, leaving the streets wet and muddy. I remember slipping in my plastic sandals as I tried to keep up with the nimble man who was almost gliding through the alleys while I struggled several meters behind. In subsequent years, whenever I ventured into new parts of the city, I often preferred this method of navigating its streets—following a swift and sure-footed stranger who knew the city like the back of their hand.

That night, I passed by a cow that had just given birth; exhausted and nonchalant, it sniffed and licked its calf as they lay in the alley. With these first images of the city in my head—its dark streets, the mud, the stones under my feet and the birth—I fell asleep that night brimming with impressions. The next morning I stood on the terrace of my lodging, wanting to catch my first glimpse of the river and the famous *ghāṭs*—the massive steps leading to the riverbanks, forming a kind of architectural barrier that controls the floodwaters during the rains. But the Gaṅgā (Ganges) had risen to the level of the terrace: its brown waters carried vegetation swept downstream, electrical poles emerged from the water and there was no trace of the *ghāṭs*. My first visit to Banaras lacked the

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waterfront; for me, the city was not what most visitors know and where they spend much of their time, but rather it was defined by a vast river, one I would continuously rediscover every time I got lost in the alleys near it. That first time I found an infinite city, where getting lost was inevitable every time I stepped outside and left behind the reassuring terrace that overlooked the river, for me the city's most comforting side.

From then on, I often spoke about the city: one that was made of the oblivion brought by the flow of a river and an immense, disorienting tangle of voices and gestures that I couldn't decipher. I immediately began forming a bond with the city, becoming entangled in what I later learned to think of as its 'imagined space'. From that first visit, I haven't stopped thinking about it, recalling it or dreaming about it the way I first saw it—vast and drenched. Even today, after so many returns, long stays for study and research, after writing about it, desiring it from afar, experiencing and fighting it up close, I still have many questions about Banaras—about the myth that cages it and often obscures its more material and historical nature, and about its many places. These pages are, in part, an attempt to answer some of those questions.

During my subsequent stays, as I visited the city's temples and listened to the narratives my interlocutors provided to explain the origins and qualities of local deities and their locations, I came to realise the exchange that occurs between the city's physical places and the image of Banaras. The myths that have defined it over time are living, inexhaustible material that the individual sites—through the mediation of various officiants—seem to draw upon to define and narrate themselves. The city carries with it a kind of aura—of antiquity, eternity, tradition, authenticity, essence and ahistoricity—that travel literature, popular writing and academic work have helped perpetuate. The extensive body of work categorised as the 'city of light genre'²³ portrays Banaras not only as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities since ancient times but also as the place that has always been the quintessential pilgrimage centre for those who identify as Hindu. This 'idea of Banaras' (Dodson 2012), with which any scholar intending to study the city must engage, has its own history, just like the city itself.

Many critical studies have helped to reveal that many images of Banaras—like many of the places in this city that we are led to believe are ancient—are actually of relatively recent creation or became reified during the colonial period (Bayly 1992 [1983]; Cohn 1987; Kumar 1988; Freitag 1989; Dalmia 1997; Desai 2007, 2017).

23 Dodson (2012, 1) refers to this type of monographic study on the city, with the classic *Banaras: City of Light* by Diana Eck being a prime example. Such works favour an ahistorical view of the city and often endorse perspectives found in glorifications and rehearsed by Brahmans, who have been primary interlocutors for scholars since the colonial period.

Post-colonial approaches shifted attention to the changes brought about by the power dynamics that emerged from the encounter with European rulers. However, at times, this scholarship seem to suggest that the changes, redefinitions, and self-classifications of the ‘colonised’ are merely the result of the presence of the ‘colonisers’ and that differences between local communities in the city were emphasised, or totally superimposed by the powerful onto the people during the colonial period. However, in such analyses, those local communities rarely emerge as active participants in the processes of urban transformation. Desai, in particular (2007, xxvi), argues that studies of colonial discourse have engaged poorly with the indigenous city, often reducing pre-colonial Indian cities to traditional and static realities that only experience change when they encounter the foreign.

It is evident, however, that to grasp the complexity of a city in continuous development, one must maintain an approach that considers the *longue durée* of events and examines the structural evolutions of society and economy in pre-modern India (Bayly 1985). At the same time, it is important to study local contexts, actors and histories (Pinch 2012). The history of the myth and idea of Banaras, which I will refer to as its ‘imagined space’, does not begin in the modern era; rather, it has been and is being continuously rewritten and has as many faces as its promoters. Deconstructing the ‘idea of Banaras’ goes hand in hand with studying the forces and factors that have constituted and reconstituted it. However, once the fiction of the imagined space is revealed, one must recognise its multifaceted endurance and engage with its contemporary evolutions in Banaras’ lived places.

As we begin to see, the city should be understood as an entity with multiple spatial dimensions, as many scholars have highlighted (Parry 1994; Gutschow 2006; Gaenzle and Gengnagel 2008). At the same time, the ways in the various temples of the city are made sense of and experienced by various actors testifies to the spatial complexity of the *lived* places. We will see later how these multiple spatial dimensions of both imagined and lived places interact and cross-fertilise each other.

To begin understanding the contemporary dialectic between lived places (such as the sites of our study) and the imagined space of the city, it is essential to know something of Banaras’ history, its built space and its myths.

A Brief History of Banaras and Its Myths

Based on excavations conducted in the area known as the Rājghāṭ Plateau, at the northern edge of present-day Banaras, it has been concluded that the earliest settlements near the current city did not exist before the 8th century BCE (Bakker

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1996, 33; Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 19). During a period of significant social, political, economic and cultural change that saw the development of a flourishing urban civilisation across the Gangetic Plain from the 6th century BCE, the Rājghāṭ area became an important commercial hub, likely due to its strategic location at the confluence of the Ganges and Varuna rivers. Perhaps it was the area's commercial dynamism that attracted the Buddha and later the Buddhist community to nearby Sarnath, a village a few kilometres from the present city, where he delivered his first sermon. Generally, Buddhist sources describe the splendour and wealth of Banaras.²⁴

Archaeological evidence suggests that the city did not play a dominant role in Brahmanical religion in the centuries BCE. The only significant evidence of non-Buddhist or Jain cults is represented by a few sculptures of *yakṣas*. This suggests the presence of the kind of local cults that were dedicated to nature-related divine beings and later absorbed by the major devotional traditions.²⁵ The *Tīrthayātrāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, which represents an early systematisation of Hindu sacred geography and catalogues various regional centres, assigns a minor position to the city of Banaras, mentioning only one shrine dedicated to Śiva.²⁶

It was only from the 4th century CE to the early 6th century, during the unification of north India by the Gupta dynasty, that the city gradually developed into a pilgrimage centre. During this period the construction of temples is evidenced by archaeological finds and a large number of seals issued by both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava institutions (Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 22). The main temple of Gupta-era Banaras was Avimukta, which is indeed the only place of worship attested to by both seals and early glorifications (Motichandra 1985 [1962] fig. 15; Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 22–23). In addition to Avimukta, a form of Śiva associated with renunciation and death (Bakker 1996), another ten *liṅgas* are mentioned by the seals; however, these are not referred to in the literary sources of the first millennium. Excavations at Rājghāṭ show that Śaiva temples were only a part of Banaras' territory; in fact, there were many Vaiṣṇava institutions in the area as well (Thaplyal 1972, 161), indicating that the religious landscape was diverse and different devotional currents were likely competing for dominance.

24 The opening of numerous *jātakas*, the narratives of the Buddha's previous lives, is well-known: 'Once, when Brahmadata ruled in Benares...'. This phrase indicates the city's prominence from ancient times; it was chosen to set the scene for the Buddha's past lives to anchor the narrative to a renowned and significant site. In the imaginative geography of the *jātakas*, Banaras appears not only as a royal residence but also, and primarily, as a centre of commerce. See Gnoli 2004.

25 For a description of the earliest images, see Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 22 and note 41.

26 *Mahābhārata* 3.82.69 recommends visiting Varanasi to worship Vṛṣabhadhvaja, bathe in the Kapilāhrada tank, fast and pay homage to Maheśvara.

With the collapse of the Gupta Empire and after a brief period of Hūṇā domination, the Ganges valley came under the control of the Maukhari before the mid-6th century. Their capital was Kannauj, formerly known as Kānyakubja. Puranic literary sources of the time (which I will discuss below) indicate that Varanasi experienced religious development during this period and the first *māhātmyas* entirely dedicated to the city were composed. Archaeological evidence from the second half of the first millennium is, however, quite scarce, most likely due to the gradual relocation of the city centre from the Rājghaṭ area to the south, the territory of the present-day city, where no archaeological excavations have been conducted (Bakker and Isaacson 2004: 34).

The discovery of what has been termed the ‘original’ Skandapurāṇa (SkP), preserved in Nepali palm-leaf manuscripts of which the oldest dates to 810, has provided us with access to the earliest *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya*, tentatively dated between the 6th and 8th centuries.²⁷

An overview of other sources from the period preceding the second millennium can be obtained through the citations of such texts in Lakshmidhara’s compendium, the *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, from the early 12th century.²⁸ In it, he primarily draws on four texts to compile a comprehensive description of the sacred territory of Banaras, not only naming his sources but also citing entire illustrative passages from them about the various divine forms present in Kāśī. Thus he provides an insight into the textual material predating his own era and available at the time of his writing. Additionally, this helps in dating the various glorifications and understanding the perspectives of different compilers on the boundaries, locations and qualities of the described space.²⁹

27 Chapters 26, 29, and 30 provide the oldest examples of *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* and the first description of the sacred topography of the city. The critical edition of the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* is included in Bakker and Isaacson 2004. For a chronology of studies on the Skandapurāṇa, see Bakker 1996, notes 13, 14, and 15.

28 Lakshmidhara was a minister of King Govindachandra of the Gahadvala dynasty, who reigned from 1104 to 1154. The *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* (TVK) is a section of the *Kṛtyakalpataru*, a compendium of fourteen parts dedicated to aspects of *dharma*, referencing sources available at the time. The TVK is the section that deals with pilgrimage, included in the enumeration of *dharmic* practices. Nearly half of the compendium is devoted to a description of Varanasi.

29 His sources are, in chronological order: the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyā* of the ‘original’ Skandapurāṇa, the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyā* of the Matsyapurāṇa, the Brahmāpurāṇa and the Liṅgapurāṇa (LP). Notably, citations from this version of the LP—of which only the TVK provides evidence—seem to have been introduced so as to include descriptions and lists of many *liṅgas* present in the city in his time but not mentioned in earlier sources. The parts of the LP cited do not show connections or overlaps with older texts. For information on the dating of these sources and their correlations, see Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 39–41.

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The *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyā* of the *Skandapurāṇa* describes a territory that likely took shape during the Gupta period, and where the favoured deity is Avimukteśvara or Avimukta—a name that could denote either the entire urban area or a part of it. The city is depicted as a preferred location for ascetics and *yogīs*, especially frequented by followers of the Pāśupata order, one of the oldest Śaiva philosophical schools. These ascetics, who apparently had significant influence over the political centre of Kannauj, likely established ascetic communities and monasteries in ancient Banaras and were involved in the dissemination of their doctrine through most of the city's shrines. Besides its ascetic disposition, the city is described as connected to death and liberation: dying here meant salvation. The city's association with death and salvation, a feature evident continuously since classical times, took shape during this period. As the city expanded southward, the cremation ground (*śmaśāna*), usually located on the southern outskirts of a city because it was considered contaminating, was incorporated into Banaras' centre (Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 42–46). This space was crucial for ascetic practices, and particularly for the Pāśupatas. By settling in this contaminated and marginal space, the ascetic takes a further step towards detachment and total renunciation of the world, precisely through the violation of conventional purity norms. Thus it was the ultimate challenge for the ascetic, as it was outside the usual pilgrimage and devotional routes. The presence of ascetics, though, helped transform the cremation ground from a polluted and abominable place to a transit ground towards the otherworldly dimension and liberation; ascetics, seen as living examples by ordinary pilgrims, identified the path to salvation in death at Avimukta's *śmaśāna* (SkP 29.58–59).

In addition to these important insights into the transformation of the sacred landscape during the second half of the first millennium CE, it should be noted that the SkP records what is possibly the first pilgrimage or list of *liṅgas* in the city. Besides the shrine of Avimukteśvara, twelve *liṅgas* are listed (SkP 29.58–59), some of which are *svayambhū* (self-manifested), while others were established by deities. The sequence may correspond to a sort of route around Avimukta but the term *yātrā* (pilgrimage) does not appear (Bakker 2008, 23). It is important to note that the listed *liṅgas* do not correspond to any of the seal inscriptions, which mention shrine names and deities not found in any of the early glorifications either.

It appears from the *māhātmyas*, that some members of the intellectual elite, strongly influenced by Pāśupata ascetics, were attempting to reinforce a certain image of the city by emphasising what had been a distinctive feature of Avimukta from its origins—its association with practices related to the transition from earthly life. By filtering a reality actually shaped by heterogeneous cults (as documented by material finds), the early composers of glorifications preferred to represent Kāśī as the supreme cremation ground, where one can achieve detachment from life and death. This marks the first phase of myth construction, in which the city

has chosen its uniqueness: it is, above all, the place of liberation—a feature that will shape the deities and future practices throughout the city.

With the decline of the Kannauj kingdom, Varanasi became a contested territory among the feudal kings who claimed their independence. Although the city was never the political capital of these kingdoms (until the rise of the Gahadvala dynasty), it was nonetheless a stage where various princes could make prestigious displays (Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 59). As often happened in Indian kingdoms, patronage and funding of religious institutions was a favoured means of celebrating and showcasing a ruler's grandeur and power.

With the initial incursions of foreign invaders into the Ganges valley—following Mahmud of Ghazni's lead—the main centre of Kannauj began to decline. Banaras was plundered by Sultan Ibrahim of Ghazni but around 1079 Chandradeva Gahadvala took power, marking the first time the city became a political centre (Motichandra 1985 [1962], 11). In response to the challenge posed by invaders, the Gahadvala rulers declared themselves from early inscriptions to be protectors of the sacred sites of northern India (*Epigraphia Indica* IX: 302–305; Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 66–68) and contributed to further enriching the already complex sacred landscape with the construction of new shrines. The city now also became an expression of royal religiosity and the stage for its ceremonies and the further expansion of the sacred territory is also evidenced by the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyā* of the Bhairavaprādurbhāva—in which we find first mentions of Viśveśvara, and which will serve as a precursor for the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (Bisschop 2021)—and the likely commissioning of the TVK by the most important ruler of the dynasty, King Govindachandra.

In the TVK, Kāśī emerges as a complex network of temples and shrines; besides Avimukta, Lakshmidhara lists 285 *liṅgas*, including Viśveśvara (TVK 17 and 27). However, Avimukta remained the primary sacred centre until the end of the 12th century, eventually giving way to the new shrine of Viśveśvara / Viśvanātha (a name for Śiva meaning 'Lord of the Universe'), a deity that remains patron of the city in the present day.³⁰ The rise of Viśveśvara / Viśvanātha is generally placed after the sack of the city and the destruction of numerous temples by the army led by Qutb-ud-din Aybak and General Muhammad ibn Bhaktiyar in 1193–94 (Elliot and Dowson 1867–77, vol. II, 223).³¹

30 The origins of Viśvanātha are obscure. Some hypotheses about its original location and its relationship with Avimukta are summarised by Eck (1983, 130–135), Bakker (1996), and Smith (2007a and 2007b).

31 Recent discoveries, however, reveal that the temple was known from the first half of the 12th century; see details in Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 72–75. Smith (2007a and b) reviews various positions on the origins of Viśveśvara and proposes new hypotheses.

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Despite the grandeur of the testimonies of its rulers, the Gahadvala dynasty failed to prevent or address the external threats to northern India and was defeated by the Ghūrid army in 1194 (Bakker and Isaacson 2004). For about fifty years after the fall of the the Gahadvala dynasty (and other north Indian kingdoms), the situation remained unstable and fighting continued around the city (Motichandra 1985 [1962]; Bakker 1996). We know that around 1212 a pillar was erected to commemorate the victory of King Sena Vishvarup in Banaras, now designated as the abode of Viśveśvara (*Epigraphia Indica* XXXIII, 322). From this time on, Viśveśvara replaced Avimukta as the patron of the city, the divine hierarchies were rewritten around him and the city's image began to be redefined.

The 13th century is a turning point, not only in the history of northern India but also for the city of Banaras. Throughout the century, and in the beginning of the next, we witness the reorganisation of traditions and in some cases the creation of new conceptualisations of its territory. According to Motichandra (1985 [1962], 256), this happened in response to the encounter with Islam. The combination of this encounter with new Islamic rulers, the ruins of the old city and political instability seems to have particularly stimulated the imagination of the Brahman classes. In their attempt to recover the forms and places of a presumed past splendour, they began a process of organising and systematising narratives about the city's sacred sites. This effort led to the creation of a text that would become the principal authority and textual framework for all subsequent reinterpretations up to the present day (Bakker 1996, 43). As we will see in the fifth chapter, the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (KKh)³² remains an authoritative source for oral transmission in contemporary places of worship and for the redefinition of local pilgrimages in recent times. References to it often draw on a kind of 'ideal' rather than the actual content of the text, but referring to it at all, even if inaccurately, is seen to be drawing on the highest and most authoritative tradition.

The KKh is a section of the edited *Skandapurāṇa*, interspersed with spatial references. For many sites, there are references to earlier myths and an ancient location—presumably before the destructions—and then to a new site, thus integrating the heritage of the past with the new geography of the city (Sukul 1977, 278–279; Eck 1993, 10; Gutschow 2006, 32). The KKh reorganises the narrative material of previous glorifications to promote the new landscape described, validating the transition of the city from a sacred field centred around Avimukta to the residence of a large number of deities who have settled here, with Śiva now in his form as Viśvanāth (Smith 2007b).

32 The KKh consists of 100 *adhyāyas* and is usually dated to the 13th – 14th centuries. See Eck 1983, 347 and 1993; Bakker 1996; Bakker and Isaacson 2004. Alternative dates are proposed by Smith 2007a and b.

Following the invasions of Sikandar Lodi in 1494 and Babar in 1529 there was a further literary elaboration of the sacred landscape: the *Kāśīrahasya*³³ was likely composed in the 16th century with the intention of reinforcing and integrating the mythological material about the city's sites established by the KKh (Gutschow 2006, 32). In particular, chapters 9–11 are dedicated to describing the *Pañcakrośīyātrā*, 'the pilgrimage of the five leagues', which is the most well-known route of the city and traces the perimeter of the *kāśīkṣetra*. The *Pañcakrośīyātrā* will be the subject of constant debate and revision, even in recent times.³⁴

During the Mughal period, temple construction in the city did not cease: numerous donations from regional rulers are recorded for the reconstruction of ancient temples destroyed during invasions and the building of new temples (Motichandra 1985 [1962], 150–155). Moreover, the city continued to be a centre for ascetics and followers of various renunciation traditions and a place for the lively exchange of opinions (ibid.). In 1585, during the reign of Akbar, the Viśvanāth temple—presumably destroyed in the 12th-century invasions—was rebuilt either by the minister Todar Mal or under the patronage of Raja Man Singh of Jaipur,³⁵ who also constructed a variety other temples, *ghāṭs* and sacred tanks (Motichandra 1985 [1962], 162, 168; Gutschow 2006, 32, 34; Rötzer 1989).

Aurangzeb, undoubtedly the most controversial Mughal ruler, is often described as a ruthless monarch and bigoted destroyer of Hindu temples, particularly in Banaras. However, examination of the sources provides a more nuanced view of his actual policies and the motivations behind temple demolitions, while concrete details about the constructions attributed to him are often lacking (Truschke 2017). In the case of Banaras, he generally had a policy of respect for temples, practices and priestly groups, prohibiting actions that disturbed or obstructed Hindus.³⁶ Some temple destructions are confirmed: notably, the Viśvanāth temple was demolished by Aurangzeb in September 1669, apparently in retaliation against landowners and descendants of Rājā Man Singh, who were suspected of

33 The *Kāśīrahasya* (KR) is considered an appendix to the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* but circulates independently. It is composed of 26 *adhyaīya* dedicated to the description and glorification of the city as a whole, rather than focusing on individual sites. For instance, the city itself is interpreted as a *jyotirlinga* or identified with the *brahman* (KR 7.65, 17) and is considered to be the abode not only of Śiva but also of Viṣṇu.

34 For more detail about the *Pañcakrośīyātrā* see Singh 2002; Gutschow 2006, 113–204; Gengnagel 2008, 145–164; and Gengnagel 2011.

35 Motichandra (1985 [1962], 168) identifies Narayan Bhatta and later Todar Mal as the proponents of this reconstruction; other sources attribute the patronage to Rājā Man Singh (Asher 1992, 254).

36 In a *farmān* from 1659, a copy of which is held at the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan museum in Banaras, Emperor Aurangzeb issued instructions to the officer Abdul-Hasan in Banaras. This document shows that the ruler's general policy was to protect temple activities. The full translation can be found in Eaton 2001, 71.

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helping the Maratha fighter Shivaji, an enemy of Aurangzeb, escape from imperial authorities in Agra (Sinha 1974, 65–68). It is believed that the demolition was intended to strike both at the rulers who supported his enemy and at the dominant political forces in Banaras—namely, the landowners and Brahmans of the main temple—to reaffirm his authority during a period of political instability (Asher 1992, 254; Eaton 2001, 74–75). Apparently, part of the demolished temple was used as the base for Gyān Vāpī, a mosque built on the site where the temple presumably stood. However, evidence about the construction of Gyān Vāpī is lacking, and neither the patron nor the date of its construction is known (Asher 1992, 254).

During the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the progressive entry of colonial forces onto the political scene in the 18th century, the city came under the control of the Nawabs of the Avadh (Oudh) province. In 1738, they installed Rājā Balwant Singh as their feudal lord in Banaras, thus founding the city's Kāśī Nāres dynasty.³⁷ This period marked the beginning of a fruitful transcultural interaction, where various social groups collaborated on multiple fronts to materialise the city described in the glorifications in the urban landscape.

Solidification of Banaras' Hindu Sacred Geography: Architecture, Maps and Pilgrimages

Patronage for the construction or reconstruction of temples and structures for cultural and religious gatherings contributed greatly to the reformulation of the myth of Banaras as a Hindu centre. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the major landowners of the city were Rajputs, who displayed their wealth and power by sponsoring the building of palaces, shrines and other religious institutions. In particular, the riverfront was transformed into a showcase where various patrons could display their prosperity and participate in the architectural and cultural revival of the city. Among the principal builders were the Peshwas (Marathas), who, in addition to renewing the city's architecture, were also active promoters of Brahmanical traditions. Maratha Brahman families had begun to settle in Banaras several centuries earlier and exerted significant cultural influence.³⁸

37 For a comprehensive description of the various rulers and their individual activities see Cohn 1987, 346–355 and Dalmia 1997, 64–94.

38 For an account of the constructions undertaken along the riverfront during this period, see Desai 2012: 27–29. Motichandra (1985 [1962], 277–286) traces the settlement of the Maratha Brahmans from the 16th century when, after the fall of Vijayanagar, large

Other land was owned by families associated with the Muslim dynasties and they actively participated in the Indo-Islamic culture of the city (Kasturi 2012). In fact, in the centuries preceding the establishment of British rule the city had a strong Indo-Islamic character. Freitag describes its main characteristics as follows:

In the early eighteenth century, like many of the other celebrated holy places such as Prayag (Allahabad) and Ayodhya, Banaras had been a 'mughalizing city', owing much to the cultural patterns established first by the Mughals and then fostered by the Nawab of Awadh's court. The physical world of Banaras certainly reflected this mughalization—in its Muslim buildings, the establishment of *muhalla*, and the dotting of Muslim shrines. The social world, too, had been mughalized, with configurations of such urban functionaries as the 'service types, sufi orders, pirs... and scribal groups'. No doubt this mughalized style accounted, in part, for the strong ties established early in the career of the Banaras dynasty with the Muslim lower-caste groups such as the weavers.³⁹

Indo-Islamic culture was also encouraged and sponsored by the early local *rājās* (Dalmia 1997, 67–73). Only after the direct takeover by the British colonial government, with changes in land ownership regulations and the emergence of new social classes, did the Kāśī Nāreś become active promoters of the 'Hinduisation' of the city's religious and cultural life (Dalmia 1997).

From the 18th century onwards new social forces emerged, shaping the dominant classes of the following years: the *baniyās* (merchants) and *kāyasths* (scribes).⁴⁰ These groups became landowners and significantly influenced the city's religious life throughout the 19th century, helping craft its new image, not only for local appreciation but also for foreign observers. That is because alongside the Brahmans, they became key interlocutors for foreign scholars interested in Hindu history and traditions, and for the colonial government. Initially, these families controlled fiscal affairs and soon began serving as bankers for the British, as well as becoming major allies of the local *rājās*. Later, particularly after the change in the official language of administration from Persian to English in

communities arrived in Banaras and initiated many of the Vedic study institutions. For further details on the activities of the Maratha Brahmans, also see Dalmia 1997, 54, 94–95.

39 Freitag 1989, 9; for a discussion on the *qasba* style and 18th-century Banaras, see also Bayly 1992 [1983].

40 Cohn (1987, 341–342) discusses the emergence of a new landowning class, which can be defined in European terms as such, starting from the latter half of the 19th century.

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1840, the colonial government integrated them into its administrative apparatus (Cohn 1987, 320–342; Motichandra 1985 [1962], 313–330). Rejecting ties with the old Nawabi aristocracy, merchant groups focused on sponsoring Hindu traditions through substantial donations to temples and organising religious festivals and events. These activities reflect a trend of merchant castes—lower in the caste hierarchy—adopting Brahmanical customs to elevate their social status (Bayly 1999, 178–79, 220, 377).

The city's reputation as a centre of traditional studies had spread among the European intellectual elite in Calcutta, and by the end of the 18th century the British arrived in Banaras. It was perceived by the British as a centre encompassing the literary, legal, and religious traditions of the entire country and thus the primary place for gathering traditional knowledge. As mentioned, the primary informants for the British were initially the Brahmans, who transmitted the teachings and values of their textual tradition and the city's glorified image. The choice of the Brahmanical class as the preferred interlocutor by the English and, to some extent by missionaries, stemmed from a desire to distance themselves from the intellectual influences of the old ruling class. The Mughal court and administration was a multicultural, polyglot reality with officials and intellectuals from various religious traditions; but they were primarily bureaucrats and historians, not priests or jurists. The British preferred to promote other groups, distant from previous power structures and seemingly the sole bearers of ancient traditions that, from an orientalist perspective, needed to be preserved and brought to light (Torri 2002, 23–26).⁴¹ Interaction with the priestly elite was an important colonial strategy but partially concealed the intent of domestication and control that the new rulers needed to exercise over an influential group in the city (Bayly 1999, 86–87).

Banaras was also of great strategic importance; it was at the centre of the trade network connecting Bengal to Maharashtra and played a dominant role in the regional economy. Economic and political interests thus aligned with the desire to know and preserve the 'ancient traditions' of the Hindus; this activity not only brought renown to the scholars who mediated the transmission of

41 As is well known, the term 'orientalism' and the adjective 'orientalist' refer to the set of representations that various European institutions have produced over time, forming a particular idea of the Orient. The debate about orientalism began with the work of Said (2001 [1978]), which contributed to the renewal of cultural and literary studies by exposing the attitudes and prejudices that European intellectuals, administrators, explorers and academics had towards 'oriental' countries. In relation to South Asia, Said's publication sparked numerous debates and lines of study that have utilised, criticised or revisited the concept of orientalism. The volume edited by Breckenridge and van der Veer (1993) still provides a good overview of the various applications of the concept to the Indian context.

acquired knowledge to the 'civilised' world but also constituted a necessary step for establishing colonial control at all levels.

Colonial-era scholars, historians, artists and colonial administrators all contributed to the reinterpretation of Banaras as a sacred and eternal city, the centre of the ancient splendour of the Hindus and representative of the religious and cultural traditions of the entire country. In this process of interpreting and re-writing the city's image, ancient texts, particularly the Purāṇas, were considered the closest sources to historical material. Believing that Indian society, like other Asian realities, was static and timeless, and, above all, did not have historiography, scholars turned to mythological texts and normative treatises to interpret a history that was in fact very different from the one depicted in Brahmanical literature (Cohn 1987, 142–143). The writing of the history of Banaras by colonial-era scholars was thus heavily based on the belief in its antiquity and the information transmitted by Brahmans, rather than on artefacts or a study of other evidence. As Desai puts it:

Thus, the construction of a past for Banaras was derived from a larger European tradition of classical archeology. In its case however, the past was constructed on the basis of conviction rather than material remains. The belief in the city's antiquity preceded any evidence that might be found for it. The lack of the latter did not shake that predominant belief.⁴²

Throughout the 19th century, though, there were numerous archaeological excavations and inscriptions were deciphered. But when the the British developed an 'official' history of India they fitted this new evidence into existing notions and structured it around a rigid chronological framework—consisting of the Ārya and Vedic periods, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Islamic period and the arrival of civilisation with European rule—that served as a model until it was questioned in the post-colonial period. In particular, the perception of the centuries of Islamic rule as a dark and contaminating period for the ancient Hindu traditions contributed to 'cleansing' the Indo-Islamic cultural heritage that had characterised the major cities of the empire. This process also promoted the reification of religious communities—a reification that, as highlighted by numerous studies, was notably implemented through the colonial practice of census-taking.⁴³

42 Desai 2007, 54.

43 The census is a crucial moment (along with the creation of topographical maps and the establishment of archaeological museums) in the process of forming the nation-state as a colonial product (Anderson 1996 [1991]). The census represents the creation of categories of religious and linguistic identification that radically alter local perceptions and recognition dynamics, imposing units of enumeration and measurement

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We have seen that the 18th and 19th centuries were crucial for the reformulation of the myth of Banaras. Another aspect of that process was the mapping and projection of divine names and places mentioned in glorification texts onto the physical territory. The promotion of reconstructed temples and the establishment of pilgrimage paths were key elements of this, involving various actors: the patrons of these constructions, including the newly emerged landowners such as merchants and bankers, and the local *rājas*; the Brahmans, as the knowledgeable custodians of authoritative texts; and the colonial administration, which often provided the technological means to measure and redraw the territory and as well initiated debates about pilgrimage routes.⁴⁴

To attest to the process of topographical adjustment and the establishment of numerous urban pilgrimages—which, as we will see, will also anchor the vast divine population mentioned in the texts to the territory—the extensive production of visual material on the city also played a role. The colonial administration began creating topographical maps of the city in the 18th century but there was already a rich indigenous tradition of visualising the city. In fact, the creation of maps, diagrams and textile paintings depicting sacred sites has been widespread in India at least since the 15th-16th centuries.⁴⁵

In particular, the *paṭas*, or *paṭṭas*, are representations of sacred centres whose viewing acts as a devotional substitute for visiting the places represented, and a *tīrthapaṭṭa* also encapsulates the essence of a *tīrtha* in a single glance. Many *tīrthapaṭṭas* focusing exclusively or partially on Banaras (Fig. 2) were created in Rajasthan, presumably funded by wealthy patrons who sought to appropriate and promote an idealised and powerful image of a *tīrtha* whose sacred landscape they may well have helped shape architecturally.

Ways of visualising the city were reshaped locally in the 19th century, when numerous images were produced in Banaras using techniques other than the traditional illustrative techniques of Rajasthan. The encounter with colonial cartographic systems, the development of lithographic techniques and the spread of printing stimulated local artists, who now incorporated topographical details or forms representative of colonial surveying into their creations. Indigenous maps also inform us about the spatial rewriting of the image of the city. The extensive production of this period is likely due to the need to convey—through a new and

previously foreign to the area. For discussions about the practice of enumeration applied to territory and caste, see also Appadurai 2001 [1996], 149–176.

44 Gengnagel (2011, 55–72) conducted a comprehensive study of the definition of the *Pañcakrośīyātrā* in the 19th century, which illustrates well the collaboration of these social forces in the establishment of routes and ideal spaces within the city's territory.

45 For an overview of the various genres and subjects, see Gole 1989 and Schwartzberg 1992.

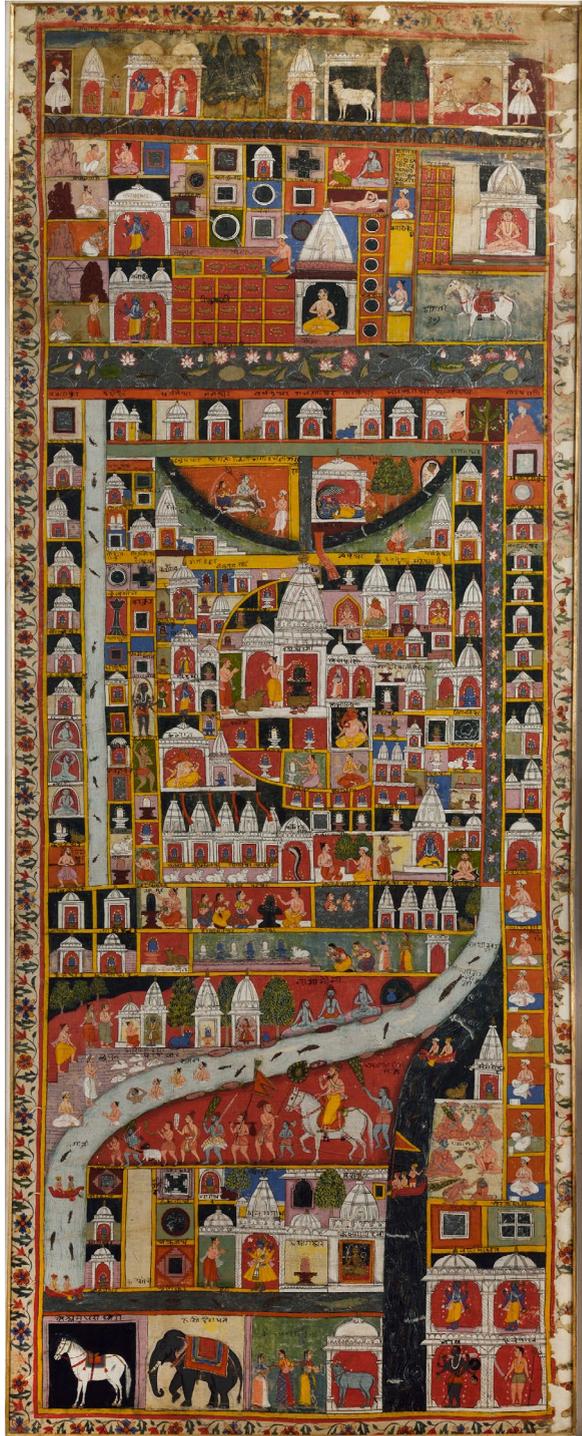


Fig. 2 *Tirthapaṭṭa*, National Museum, New Delhi; acc. no. 56.59/58, Mewar, Rajasthan, circa 1700, 178 × 70 cm. Courtesy of the National Museum, New Delhi.

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different medium—the image of the sacred space after a period of transformations and reconstructions of its physical territory. Like the glorifications of the past, the maps served to visualise the results of the processes of reconstruction and systematisation of the sacred landscape (Gutschow 2006, 36).

An iconological approach to the study of landscape and cartography interprets maps as vehicles for the agendas and values of the societies that produced them (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, 1–10). Scholars have described and analysed the close link between cartography and the exercise of power: maps conceal the desire to know and dominate a territory, often through its objectification on paper (Edney 1997; Anderson 2000 [1991], 196–202).

Regarding religious cartography, however, the interpretation of symbols as expressions of power is controversial: earlier maps of sacred territories in India generally do not explicitly promote the domination of space through the objectification of boundaries and areas. Instead, they often seem to showcase the magnificent qualities of the holy centre, conveying its universality and transcendence; to achieve this, the artist frequently combines various representational types (Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2008, 11–13; Michaels 2008, 131–132, 140–141). However, with the recent resurgence of Hindu nationalism, pilgrimages, the representation of holy centres, and rituals of place, are mobilised more often as tools for Hinduising a landscape and coopted to advance majoritarian agendas (Lazzaretti and Jacobsen 2024).

The influence of the context in which the pictorial map is created, though, should not be underestimated. As suggested by the term ‘picture map’, introduced by Gutschow (2006, 18), visual sources cannot be considered merely as representations of an ideal space; they are also creations emerging from a specific context, which they reveal through the dynamics of space definition and appropriation, even if their creator was not aware of doing so.

The religious cartography of Banaras has received considerable attention in the last decades. As highlighted by studies focusing on the city’s visualisation practices,⁴⁶ the extensive production of indigenous maps is an integral part of the process of sanctifying the urban territory (Gutschow 2006; Gengnagel 2011).

The dissemination of images in manageable and visually impactful forms has clearly contributed to the wider transmission of the mythical image of the city. The image that emerges from most visual representations is that of a transcendent and highly symbolic space, characterised by the presence of temples—most

46 The systematic study of this material began with the ‘Varanasi Research Project: Visualized Space—Constructions of Locality and Cartographic Representation in Banaras’, conducted by the South Asian Institute of Heidelberg (2000–2002). Publications by Gutschow 2006, Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2008, Michaels 2008, and Gengnagel 2011 are part of the results of the project.

of which are dedicated to Śiva—and traversed by various pilgrimage routes. This represents a Hindu *tīrtha*, from which the Islamic element is progressively excluded or filtered.

Thus, visual production effectively serves as a means of promoting an idealised image of the city, as it visually repeats and completes the imagined space of the texts, making it more tangible. As we will see, some examples of visual production are used as sources in reconstructing the process of transposing the pan-Indian *jyotirlingas* onto the territory of Banaras. More recent representations were printed in small paper formats and sold to pilgrims on *ghāṭs* or at book stalls until a few years ago but, as observed during field research, these are now hard to find. Nonetheless, visual production about the city has not ceased but is evolving into new types of representation, which I believe are replacing the previous ones: I will discuss some of these new representations in the fifth chapter.

Interpreting the City and Its Spatial Dimensions

The spatial dimension has long been marginal in anthropology, so much so that even in the early 1990s Rodman (1992, 643) could assert that: ‘The idea, well-established in geography, that places produce meaning and that meaning can be grounded in place, has yet to attract much theoretical interest in anthropology’. It is precisely thanks to the influence of cultural geography studies that, starting from the second half of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, anthropologists began to reassess the spatial dimension as an object of interest for anthropological enquiry.⁴⁷ By focusing on human groups, anthropology initially reduced places to mere backdrops for human action or, in some cases, turned them into allegories for certain images and ‘topological stereotypes’ (Appadurai 1988b, 46). India’s spatial dimensions in particular, though, at first did not attract much scholarly attention, but this was later evaluated in (Berti and Tarabout 2003). The critique of the simplification of spatial dimensions, along with renewed interest in the relationships people maintain with their places, partly stems from the debate surrounding the plurality of ‘voices’ in anthropology and reflections on ethnographic representation.⁴⁸

47 Some key works of the so-called ‘spatial turn’ include Appadurai 1988a; Rodman 1992; Feld and Basso 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1996; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995.

48 The issue of voice is central to a discipline that originates as an account of the cultural practices of other peoples. Through a monograph, the ethnographer aims to convey or reconstruct the voice of other people for readers. Verbal exchange and dialogue are foundational pillars of any fieldwork. Starting with Clifford Geertz’s interpretive

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Starting from what is often referred to as the 'crisis of representation', the concept of voice has been rethought as polyphonic. The anthropologist must speak and write not by trying to reduce plurality to a single unified voice, but rather by engaging in conveying the multivocality—even if it is contradictory—of their field experience, and the process of negotiation of meanings that takes place in the dialogue between researcher and informants (Fabietti, Malighetti, and Matera 2002, 83). Consequently, space itself becomes a complex dimension to observe when taking into account the intrinsic multivocality of every place. That multivocality, when connected to a place, can be characterised also as 'multilocality' (Rodman 1992), a concept that proves particularly useful in the study of transposed places.

The process of enhancing place reaches its full expression in the phenomenological approach, which revalues the places of experience in contrast to the abstract dimension of space. By reversing the dominant scientific paradigm that interprets place as a derivative of space—understood as absolute, infinite and *a priori*—phenomenology considers places of experience as preceding and foundational to space. It is precisely through the bodily experience in lived places that the abstract and conceptual idea of space is constituted (Casey 1996, 14). The bodily dimension, central to phenomenological reflection (Merleau-Ponty 2003 [1945]), takes on particular significance in the devotional context and in the Indian attitude of locative piety. The divine body, as a representation of the universe and the territory of the subcontinent, is, as mentioned, a recurring metaphor in the grammar of sanctification.

Numerous practices of internalising sacred places, such as visual diagrams and maps of *tīrthas*, bear witness to the multiplicity of experiences of the sacred place, which is not only felt and experienced in specific locations of the territory but also in 'affective spaces' located in what has been described as 'body-as-place' (Sarbadhikary 2015).

If phenomenology goes so far as to revalue place to the point of making it potentially universal, phenomenological anthropology seeks to bring to light the

turn, which freed anthropological data from presumed objectivity, and the subsequent reevaluation of ethnographic writing and representation, the anthropologist is led to question the multiplicity of voices heard during field research and the methods available to convey this plurality. Fieldwork brings the researcher into contact with a variety of local thoughts and voices, while the phases of transcription, and finally the writing of the monograph itself, bring out the internal voices of the ethnographer, who organises, mediates, comments and conveys local voices through his or her own. For key theories on ethnographic writing, see Clifford and Marcus 1997 [1986], Clifford 1999 [1977], Fabietti, Malighetti, and Matera 2002, 81–87, and Piasere 2002, 14–21. For the dynamics of representation related to the ethnographic encounter, refer to Gallini and Satta 2007, and De Lauri and Achilli 2008.

contexts and dynamics of the communities that traverse these places and from which the stories and processes of spatial entities, such as regions or nations, emerge. The anthropology of places aims to collect and recount ‘local theories of dwelling’ (Feld and Basso 1996, 8) that enrich the many ways of thinking, knowing and representing the spatial dimension. To value place over space also means giving voice to local discourses, hidden, for example, in the practice of naming, in mythic narratives about the presumed origin of places, in the use of physical space and in the postures and attitudes of the body as a tool for embodying places. More profoundly, it involves rereading culture as an imprint on space (Remotti 1994). The relationship between humans and places has been analysed in terms of ‘embodiment’, or the visceral relationship between lived world and bodies (Harris 2016; Mascia-Lees 2011); this lens—together with the dimension of dwelling proposed by Ingold (2000)—proves particularly fruitful, as seen in the fifth chapter, for interpreting the attitudes that some ritual experts and promoters of local urban pilgrimages have towards the city of Banaras and its places.

Explicitly referring to the dialectic between space and places theorised by phenomenological approaches in geography, archaeology and anthropology, Gaenszle and Gengnagel (2008) propose an approach that I find particularly effective for the city of Banaras, and from which I derive the idea of the ‘imagined space’ that I propose here. The city is characterised as multiple: the fundamental tension that seems to emerge is the one previously theorised between the abstract and mythical dimension of space as an ideal entity and the experiential and local level of places in everyday life. The ideal space is not fixed or timeless, handed down solely by Brahmanical tradition, but is continually rethought by various individual actors and social forces. The scholars assert:

Normative space is the subject of exegesis and largely defined by members of the upper castes, in particular the Brahmans. But such norms, even if it is claimed that they exist from time immemorial, continually change, old models are modified and new models are adopted, so that there are layers and layers of meaning which never completely erase the earlier ones. This has been likened to a palimpsest, which retains a trace of the past.⁴⁹

This ongoing process of rewriting, it should be noted, takes place within specific places. What I wish to emphasise, and what will emerge from the case of the transpositions I examine here, is that the imagined spaces—be it that of Banaras or of the pan-Indian group of *vyotirlingas*—can be visualised and understood only through the mediation of lived places. From the phenomenological perspective, it

49 Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2008, 17.

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is the active practices in individual places that produce and sustain the multiple imagined spaces, which, for simplicity, I will now refer to in the singular form. As we will see, places are the sites of processes of individualisation (Fuchs and Rüpke 2015), where individual actions influence the evolution and transmission of traditions. As will emerge from the study of narrative traditions and the ethnographies of places, these specific realities—in our case, the transposed temples, which by definition already reproduce, duplicate and refer back to another presumed 'original'—emerge as laboratories where the imagined space is conceived, staged, rewritten and kept alive.

I thus set out to engage through the phenomenological approach with the power attributed to specific places, highlighting the influence that localised practices in individual temples, and the contributions of the individual voices of social actors, have on the broader dimension of space, whether real or imagined. I will identify the ways in which specific places stage and recreate the rhetoric of the imagined space of the city, constantly and creatively reconstituting its features, while at the same time staging and recreating the 'original' sites themselves which, more often than not, will be knowable not directly but only through their transpositions.

3 The Divine Group and Its Relocation: Textual Sources and Religious Cartography

The *Jyotirlingas*

Before delving into the exploration of modes of transposition illustrated by ethnographies of local *jyotirlinga* manifestations in Banaras, I want to provide a brief overview of the establishment of the worship of the twelve sites known throughout India as *jyotirlinga* shrines, which today form one of the major pan-Indian pilgrimages (Fig. 3). Despite the immense popularity of the myth of Śiva's manifestation as a fire column, identified as one of the mythological explanations for the origins of the *liṅga* cult,⁵⁰ the individual *jyotirlingas* and the related pan-Indian pilgrimage have received scant scholarly attention.

The work of Fleming (2007, 2009), to which I primarily refer in this reconstruction, has filled many gaps by providing a comprehensive account of the evolution of the narrative material connected to the *jyotirlingas*. Fleming places the origins of the *jyotirlinga* cult within the broader context of the development and systematisation of the cult of Śiva, from the 9th to the 13th centuries. In particular, by analysing medieval material related to the twelve forms, Fleming shows that the group is based on an elaboration of Vedic imagery of light and fire and its materialisation in specific locations. He also highlights how stories about the twelve *jyotirlingas* illustrate a series of ritual practices and devotional attitudes in relation to Śiva that were presumably prevalent before the rise of the *liṅga* as the primary symbol of the deity's presence in shrines. The narratives related to the individual sites are therefore essential sources for understanding the crystallisation of the worship of Śiva in the form of the *liṅga* (Fleming 2007, 10–11).

The emergence of the group of twelve *jyotirlingas* reflects a widespread mode of sanctifying territory through the systematisation of lists of divine groups, where individual elements are never isolated but, as highlighted in the first chapter, are part of networks of connections and trans-regional pilgrimages. The names of the *jyotirlingas* appear in various Purāṇas and are part of other

50 Another cycle of myths referred to for explaining the origin of the *liṅga* cult is that of 'Śiva in the forest of pines'; see, for example, Doniger 1997 [1973], 169, 264 and Shulman 1986. For the origins of the *liṅga* form, see Srinivasan 1997.

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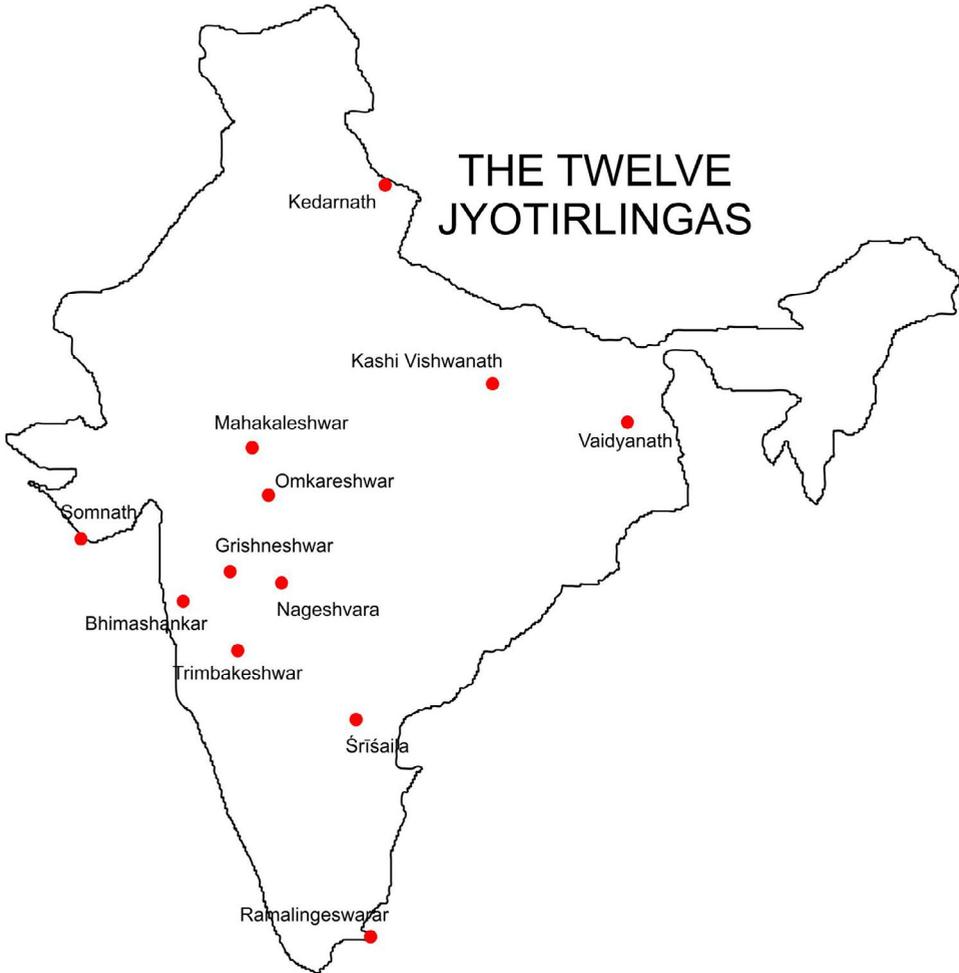


Fig. 3 Map of the locations of pan-Indian *jyotirlingas*. Source: commons.wikimedia.org.

lists and divine groups as well.⁵¹ The well-known hymn *Jyotirlingastotra*,⁵² in its numerous regional variants, also conveys the idea of a group. As I observed during my research in the temples of local *jyotirlinga* manifestations in Banaras, those questioned about the location of the pan-Indian sites or the inclusion of a divine form in the group often recite from memory the verses of the *Jyotirlingastotra* to recall the other locations; the hymn serves as a form of invocation, prayer and concentration.

The primary and oldest sources that group the stories of the twelve are, however, to be found in the tradition of the *Śivapurāṇa*, particularly in two collections that appear in different editions of the text.⁵³ The first is the *Jñānasamhitā* (JS), dated by Hazra (1975, 92–96) as post-950, with chapters 45–58 being the stories of the twelve *jyotirlingas*; and the second is the *Koṭirudrasamhitā* (KS), dated around the 13th century (Fleming 2007, 19–20), in which chapters 14–33 are a reworking of the material in the JS.

The JS seems to be the first attempt to collect the mythological material associated with the twelve places later to become the pan-Indian group. However, it is somewhat unmethodical; for example, the term *jyotirlinga* is not used in reference to all the divine forms and the term *liṅga* is not widely used either. These two terms were, however, adopted and commonly used by the compilers of the later KS.

In both collections, the stories of the individual places generally follow a recurring narrative pattern: a protagonist—sometimes from whom the name of the *jyotirlinga* derives, such as its founder, installer or a character from the story—finds themselves in a critical situation and seeks help from Śiva, propitiating him with worship. Eventually, the Lord appears to the devotee in the form of light (*jyotirūpa*, *jyotis*) and grants the requested aid. The deity is then requested to remain on earth in the form of a *jyotirlinga* for the benefit of his devotees.

51 For example, the Skandapurāṇa (Kedārahkhaṇḍa 7.28-35) lists twenty-five *liṅgas* spread across the entire subcontinent, including Omkāreśvara, Mahākāla, Viśveśvara, Tryambakeśvara, Someśvara, and Kedār. For a comprehensive examination of sources that mention the names of the twelve, see Fleming 2007.

52 The *Jyotirlingastotra* is a hymn traditionally attributed, without evident proof, to Śaṅkarācārya. The most common version is the short one, which recites the names of the various *liṅgas* and their corresponding geographic locations: ‘Saurāṣṭre somanāthaṃ ca śrīśaile mallikārjunam/ujjayinyāṃ mahākālam omkāre parameśvaram// Kedāraṃ himavatprṣṭhe ḍākinyāṃ bhīmaśaṃkaram/vārānasyāṃ ca viśveśaṃ tryambakaṃ gautamītaṭe//vaidyanāthaṃ citābhūmau nāgeśaṃ dārūkāvane/setubandhe ca rāmeśaṃ ghuśmeśaṃ tu śivālaye//dvādaśaitāni nāmāni prātar utthāya yaḥ paṭhet/sarvapāpāir vinirmuktaḥ sarvasiddhiphalaṃ labhet/’ (version reported by Fleming 2007, 28 with my corrections).

53 For a discussion of the editions of the *Śivapurāṇa* and the collections in question, see Fleming 2007, 13–17.

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Connections between the stories are provided by the introductory chapters that list the names of the group and by summary colophons included in some chapters dedicated to the individual places. In the JS, these devices are sporadic and appear only in four chapters (JS 46, 47, 50 and 58), whereas the compilers of the KS take care to provide a clearer and more systematic overview.⁵⁴

The lists of twelve provided in the introductory chapters (JS 38, KS 1) are almost identical, except for the variation in the fourth *jyotirlinga*. In the JS it is Omkāreśvara; the name does not appear in the KS and is replaced by Parameśvara. Both the JS and KS present the narratives in the same order as the introductory list. Despite that consistency, the mythological material reveals the individual nature of the stories associated with the specific places; in particular, the versions presented by the JS, which seem to be collected from local traditions, lack references to the group as a whole and appear to be independent and self-referential narratives. It should also be noted that the group does not seem to constitute a pilgrimage route: in the the order presented, the route would be long, illogical from a territorial perspective and highly impractical. It is more likely that the individual places initially belonged to regional routes and later gained fame as nodes in trans-regional trade networks, as often happened in the history of sacred centres on the subcontinent (Bakker 1992). In any case, the dissemination of the stories or, at least, the names of the divine forms in question, seems to precede the systematisation of the group.

The construction of the group of twelve—like many other so-called pan-Indian groups—reflects the intention of the various compilers to create a trans-regional project: by renaming already known and dispersed places throughout the country as *jyotirlingas* and identifying them as forms belonging to a specific group, the compilers of the Purāṇic collections imagined the territory as a single sacred landscape dedicated to Śiva. Once that is established, pilgrimage around the twelve is the next step, and along with the practice of gift-giving (*dāna*), would have ensured their continued prominence.

54 For example, Fleming provides the translation of one of these colophons (KS 14): ‘This is the fourteenth chapter of the *Koṭirudra Samhitā*, which is the fourth book of the blessed Śiva *Purāṇa* containing a description of the origin of the Somanāth *jyotirlinga*’ (Fleming 2007, 24).

The Presence or Absence of the *Jyotirlingas* in the Geography of Banaras: The Glorifications

Before delving into the transposed temples of Banaras themselves, I will outline the ‘transfer’ of the twelve *jyotirlingas* (actually eleven, since Viśvanāth, the most prominent temple in Banaras, is already present as an ‘original’ in the city), according to the glorifications.

As we have seen, the pan-Indian *jyotirlingas* came into existence between about the 10th and 13th centuries; the decisive moment is marked by the compilation of the *KS*, which classifies them as *jyotirlingas*, thus initiating the history of the group as we know it. Of course, there remains some room for manoeuvre and negotiation: while in written sources each *jyotirliṅga* is claimed to be authentic, the list as a whole varies by region.⁵⁵ Popular transmission, moreover, presents an even more complex situation because the status of *jyotirlingas* is based on discourses and narratives tied to specific locations and alien to the Puranic sources. To call a *liṅga* a *jyotirliṅga* differentiates it and elevate it above other *liṅgas*; however, as we will see when hearing the voices of our sites in Banaras, there remains some confusion about the necessary qualification to be a *jyotirliṅga*. The term certainly confers something extra that makes that *liṅga* recognisable, authoritative and powerful; however, as shown by Fleming’s analysis, the names and divine forms we know as *jyotirlingas* precede the formulation of the very idea of *jyotirliṅga* and of the group itself. A similar situation can be observed in Kāśī; as I will demonstrate by analysing the main glorifications, particularly the *KKh*, some divine forms that would later become known as *jyotirliṅga* transpositions seem to exist before and independently of their affiliation with the group.

Some of the homonymous *jyotirliṅga* shrines carry particular weight in the geography of Banaras; this is the case for Kedāreśvar, to which the concluding chapter is dedicated, and Oṃkāreśvar. Together with Viśvanāth, they give their names to the three areas (*khaṇḍas*) into which the city is ideally divided in the *KKh*. Oṃkāreśvar has more than one chapter of glorification in the *KKh* (73.70-74.122), indicating that it was, or at least was imagined to be, one of the prominent centres of the city. Kedāreśvar and Oṃkāreśvar are part of a series of fourteen *liṅgas* listed in the *KKh* (73.32-36) whose layout constitutes the *muktikṣetra*, literally ‘field of liberation’, meaning the space in which one can attain liberation (*mukti*) if one dies there.

55 It is interesting to note that the narrative material in the *JS* and the *KS* about sites with dual ‘originals’ retains some ambiguity about the location of the place. For stories of the *jyotirlingas* and narrative references that reflect geographical uncertainty, see Fleming 2007, 101–116.

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In addition to Oṃkāreśvar and Kedāreśvar, the KKh mentions almost all the other divine names that would later become known as *jyotirlingas*. Some of these are said to be *tīrthas* located elsewhere that have come to Kāśī. Mahākāl, for example, is mentioned several times in the text: initially, in the description of the seven sacred cities (KKh 7), Ujjain is glorified as the city that saves the universe from all sins and its Mahākāl *liṅga* is said to be the one that frees from encountering the god of death, Yama (KKh 7.97). This reference places the divine form in its 'original' location and seems to have no connection with the city of Banaras. In the myth of King Divodāsa, however, which is a significant narrative later in the KKh (39-64), Mahākāl is one of the emissaries sent by Śiva to Kāśī to check on the other messengers of the god who had stopped in the holy city, been dazzled by its beauty and not returned (KKh 53.8-15). Like the others, Mahākāl, having seen the splendid divine abode and knowing the merits obtained there, establishes his own *liṅga* and decides to stay in the beautiful city (KKh 53.26-29).⁵⁶

Someśvar is mentioned several times in the text as part of a series of *liṅgas* (KKh 10.95; 83.95; 97.197), without any reference to the homonymous site and the 'original' *jyotirlinga*. When it does appear it is as Somnāth, one of the stops of the Antargṛhayātrā, the well-known spiral pilgrimage that traverses the innermost section of Banaras (KKh 100.81). Tryambak and Rāmeśvar⁵⁷ are mentioned in a list of sixty-four *tīrthas* that have emerged in Kāśī from elsewhere.⁵⁸ Vaidhyanāth is mentioned first as a *liṅga* installed by Dhruva on the advice of Viṣṇu (KKh 21.126-127), and again later, with indications of its location (KKh 97.235-236); it then appears as a stop of the Antargṛhayātrā (KKh 100.82), as does Nāgeś (KKh 100.83-86).⁵⁹

Bhīmāsaṅkar, Mallikārjun and Ghuśmeśvar *jyotirlingas* do not appear in the KKh but a Bhīmeś *liṅga*, which shines in Kāśī, is mentioned as having come from the Saptagodāvarī *tīrtha* (KKh 69.119-122).⁶⁰ The name Bhīmeśvar appears again, but it is associated with Bhīmacañḍī (KKh 70.72-73), a village and the seat of the

56 Mahākāl's arrival in Kāśī from Ujjain is also mentioned in KKh 69.18-20, and KKh 97.131-132 also references his placement in Kāśī.

57 A Rāma *liṅga* is also mentioned in TVK 113.

58 KKh 69.78 quotes Rāmeśvar as the sacred place from which Jaṭīśvara came to Kāśī, while KKh 69.79 explains that Tryambakeśvar came from Trisandhya. KKh 69 describes the sixty-four sacred places that have moved to the holy city.

59 In KKh 84.44, a Nāgeśvar *tīrtha* is also mentioned in a list of sacred places in Banaras between the confluence of the Gaṅgā and Varaṇā rivers and Maṅikarṇikā. The location given does not seem to match the current site of the Nāgeśvar temple, which stands between the Bhomsalā and Gaṇeśa ghāts. Instead, the KKh appears to place it further north, beyond Pañcagaṅgā.

60 The Saptagodāvarī *tīrtha* is in Andhra Pradesh, near Solangipur, while the Bhīmāsaṅkar *jyotirlinga* is near Pune. The narrative tradition recorded by the ŚP collections, however, preserves indications of this divine form's connection with Assam (Fleming 2007,

goddess of the same name on the Pañcakrośiyātrā route. Although Mallikārjun is not mentioned, his abode Śaileś or Śrīśail is repeatedly referenced. The place is described as a renowned sacred centre and a marvellous mountain residence inhabited by Śiva (KKh 6.11),⁶¹ and is compared with other divine forms such as Kedār, which is declared superior to Śrīśail in conferring merits (KKh 6.69). The *jyotirlinga* Mallikārjun is also identified with Tripurāntakeśvar; in fact, this is described as a divine form coming from Śrīśail (KKh 69.73-76). The text here clearly expresses the sense of divine transposition: the merit gained by visiting the peak of Śrīśail can be achieved by visiting Tripurāntakeśvar in Kāśī, which is in an elevated position on the perimeter of the Avimuktakṣetra to the west of Viśveśvar (ibid., cf. Gutschow 2006, 274); the same *līṅga* is also mentioned as a stop on the route of the eleven *āyatanas*, another term for a divine residence (KKh 100.63-66).

From these brief mentions of the presence or absence of the *jyotirlingas* in the KKh we can infer that at least some of the divine forms with *jyotirlinga* names were present in the geography of Banaras in the 13th-14th centuries. A few of these were apparently important shrines in the city, as demonstrated by the extensive narrative material in the text (some of which we will detail in the chapter on Kedāreśvar). Most of them, however, appear within lists of *līṅgas*, or as divine forms established by devotees or deities (Vaidhyanāth, Śrīśaileśvar, Mahākāl) on their visits to Kāśī; others as divine forms manifesting in the city from elsewhere (Tryambak, Rāmeśvar, and Tripurāntakeśvar/Mallikārjun/Śrīśaileśvar); and still others as stops on known pilgrimage routes (Somnāth, Nāgeś, Vaidhyanāth, Oṃkāreśvar, and Kedāreśvar).

It is evident that in the KKh these divine forms do not appear as part of a group or as a sequence or pilgrimage route that mirrors the pan-Indian group of *jyotirlingas*. Moreover, none of them, except for Mahākāl (KKh 7.95), seems to be known as a *jyotirlinga* or as a transposition of a *jyotirlinga*. Rather, confirming the logic of emergence and multiplication that seems to regulate the rise of places and the formation of Hindu sacred geography, they appear as independent divine forms, situated in different cities and regions and emerging through an interplay of references, resonances and echoes of names and forms, each with a rooted local tradition.

90–93), showing that the multiple emergence of some forms and their names has been happening since ancient times.

61 This chapter describes a series of well-known *tīrthas* that bestow significant merits on devotees; these will later be compared to Kāśī. Śrīśaila appears as a sacred mountain alongside the Himalayas in KKh 25.36.

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Some names are picked up in the KR about two centuries after the KKh.⁶² The KR mentions Someśvar, Rāmeśvar, Kedāreśvar, and Nāganāth as part of the Pañcakrośīyātrā, to which chapters 9–11 of the text are dedicated. In this way, those transpositions of *jyotirlingas* are anchored to the territory of Kāśī and to the route that is the most emblematic of the holy city. These are generally the forms that, as we will see when discussing the individual shrines, have multiple representatives in the city; a notable example is Somnāth, which is found in four different shrines (two named Somnātheśvar, two Someśvar) on the Pañcakrośī route.

The KR is dedicated to the glorification of the city in general and its symbolic meanings, and as such contains few geographical descriptions of the territory or individual praise of *liṅgas* and *tīrthas*. There is, however, an interesting description of Kāśī itself as a cosmic *jyotirlinga*: the appearance of the column of fire (*liṅgodbhavamūrti*) is placed as an event in the city's history. The 'city as *jyotirlinga*' is then described as the only form that survives during the cyclical dissolution of the universe (KR 7.65 and 17). The explicit relationship between Banaras and the form of light was already present in the KKh (26.131-132), where the city of Avimukta, which extends five *krośa*, is identified with the *jyotirlinga* Viśveśvar, whose light is compared to the solar disc.

The Presence or Absence of the *Jyotirlingas* in the Geography of Banaras: Visual Sources

The placement on the territory and the eventual multiplication of the transposed *jyotirlingas* in Banaras begins to be documented by pictorial maps from the late 18th century. Such maps, as mentioned in the previous chapter, do not represent an objective reality and thus can not be taken to show whether the temples depicted were actually present in the city at the time of their creation. They do, however, project the ideal geography and divine population described in texts onto the physical territory, visually materialising the imagined space that had, in part, already begun to materialise architecturally.

As mentioned, the earliest pictorial maps dedicated to the representation of Kāśī are of Rajasthani origin and are presumed to be from the 18th century. The

62 Somnāth (KR 10.22, 30, 43, 48), Rāmeśvar (KR 9.71,122; 10.47-8, 50, 83; 13.32), Oṃkāreśvar (KR 13.72), Nāganāth (KR 10.33) and Kedāreśvar (KR 10.23; 13.66).

‘Stylized Map of Vārānasī’ (or ‘Victoria and Albert Museum picture map’),⁶³ and the ‘Pilgrims in Banaras’ map⁶⁴ represent some of the *jyotirlinga* temples, using inscriptions. Of these, some have features recognisable in the current urban geography; for example, Tripurāntakeśvar appears, along with Trimukhavinayāk—the three-faced Gaṇeśa actually located near it—on a hill, which can be identified, as we will see in the next chapter, with the elevated area that hosts the temple of Ṭilā Bābā (the Lord of the Hill), a local transposition of Tripurāntakeśvar. Moreover, in some cases, *jyotirlingas* with more than one representative in the territory appear in different places on the maps—such as Vaidhyanātheśvar and Someśvar/Somnāth. Despite both pictorial maps apparently including some pilgrimage routes in the urban territory, they include neither the entire group of *jyotirlingas* nor their pilgrimage route, which presumably emerged more recently.

A clearer idea of the ways in which divine groups (such as the *jyotirlingas*), which would later develop into local urban pilgrimages, are represented can be gained by analysing the *Kāśīdarpaṇa* by Kailasnath Sukul,⁶⁵ dated 1876. The projection in a visual form of the imagined space described in textual sources can be said to culminate with this work. Reproduced in about 5000 lithographed copies on paper and fabric, the ‘Mirror of Kāśī’ constitutes the most well-known icon-image of the city, depicted here in a circular form reminiscent of the cosmic symbolism of the *maṇḍala* (Fig. 4). The *Kāśīdarpaṇa* has been defined as a ‘spatial text’ or ‘word picture’ (Gengnagel 2011, 162); in addition to symbolically depicting some of the locations, a large number of them only appear through inscriptions. The direct connection to textual tradition and the space described in Purāṇic material, particularly with reference to the KKh, is explicitly stated by the author in a note following the title of the map; here it is explained that the *Kāśīdarpaṇa* represents the sacred territory of Kāśī based on six Purāṇas,⁶⁶ the map, defined

63 Exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, 09322IS, 90 × 104 cm, fabric. The map, identified only in 1999 by Gole and Crill as a representation of Banaras, was already displayed with the incorrect caption ‘Pictorial chart of Shivpur. The heavenly city of Shiva’. It was first published in Gutschow (2006); the most comprehensive study is found in Gengnagel 2011, 73–105.

64 Preserved (but not exhibited) at the National Museum in Delhi, cat.no. 63.935, 234 × 330 cm, fabric, restored in 1998, dated around 1830, probably from Rajasthan. This map is the largest known depiction of Banaras, with a few black and white images published by Gole (1989, 65). Gengnagel (2011, 106–148 and plates 2.1–16) conducted the first detailed study of the map and reading of all legible inscriptions.

65 The *Kāśīdarpaṇa* was printed by the Vidyodaya Press. It is 79 × 92 cm and reproductions are preserved at the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi, at the British Library (Cat. no. 53345.2) and in private collections. Gutschow (2006, 483 and note 29) and Gengnagel (2011, 162 and note 73) provide an exhaustive bibliography on it. The most recent description of Sukul’s map is in Gengnagel (2011: 162–185).

66 The *Linga*, *Shiva*, *Nandi*, *Skanda*, *Ganesha* and *Agni Puranas*.

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Fig. 4 Kāśīdarpaṇa of Kailasnath Sukul, printed in 1876 by Vidyodaya Press, Banaras, 79 × 92 cm. Courtesy of Niels Gutschow.

as *parilekha* (literally ‘description’ or ‘portrait’), aims to make the city constantly visible to those who do not dwell there (ibid., 165).

Through the combination of geometric elements and the symbolic refiguring of elements of the sacred landscape, the map proposes a highly idealised image of the city. The Gaṅgā flows sinuously, ideally tracing the shape of the trident of Śiva, the *triśūla*, which supports the city. The river crosses the outer circle, meeting its tributaries, Asī to the south and Varanā to the north. Unlike the previously described pictorial maps, the Kāśīdarpaṇa does not seem to focus on the practice of pilgrimage; the only explicit reference to routes is to the Pañcakrośīyātrā, about which two routes are mentioned: the one actually practiced and the Cau-rāsīkrośīyātrā, which would be much longer but is purely conceptual or ideal.⁶⁷ The presence of other routes on Sukul’s map can be inferred from the depicted locations or inscriptions corresponding to groups of deities, which generally match those mentioned in the KKh. The Kāśīdarpaṇa does not represent people, houses or inhabited places but rather an abstract space where often the name written simply replaces the icon of a site. The map, however, is not estranged from the topographical reality of the city; scholars have, for example, highlighted the correspondences of the Kāśīdarpaṇa with the topographic map of 1928–29 (Gutschow 2006, 70–73). The emergence of Sukul’s contemporary reality is evident not only in the often precise location of sacred places, such as temples and water places, but also in the presence of ‘profane’ buildings and recent constructions, incorporated perhaps as a mark of the colonial presence. His topographic reality is, however, selective: few Islamic structures, for example, are included.

Compared with the earlier pictorial maps, the Kāśīdarpaṇa includes a larger number of *jyotirlingas*. Ghuśmeśvar and Bhīmāśankar are missing but their absence, as I will discuss, will be remedied later through renaming practices. We do not know whether the *jyotirlingas* represented had a physical presence on the territory at that time; however, given the documented slowing of reconstruction activities after 1850, the attention shown by Sukul to the topographical reality and the correlation of the locations shown with those of current local *jyotirlinga* temples—of which Sukul often includes more than one representative—it is possible to assert that the objects included in the ‘Mirror of Kāśī’ corresponded to places actually present in Banaras at the end of the 19th century.⁶⁸ Nevertheless

67 Sukul (1977, 217), the nephew of Kailasnath Sukul, reports on the confusion surrounding the practice of this route in the mid-19th century and the dispute about the correct route. The presence of both new and old temples for some deities in the route testifies to attempts to establish a new route, as highlighted by Gengnagel (2011, 64–72). For a comprehensive account of the debate, see Gengnagel 2008, 145–163.

68 A detailed analysis of the representation of the *jyotirlingas* transposed in Sukul’s map can be found in Lazzaretti 2013.

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the *vyotirliṅgas* do not appear as a group or as a pilgrimage route. Instead, however, the *Kāśīdarpaṇa* often alludes to a route or a class of deities through the representation of some of its components. Groups of deities, for example, are often included in incomplete numbers,⁶⁹ but it is their placement or the name by which they are referenced that alludes to the class of divine beings. In other cases, it is precisely through the chosen figurative modes and the explicit placement in the visual medium that the author contributes to transforming still somewhat unsystematic sets of deities into true groups present in the urban space.⁷⁰

The textual and visual sources, then, show that completeness, systematisation and fixity are not characteristics of divine groups; these, instead, seem to form over time and be transmitted as open, mutable and inconsistent systems, in which, however, the idea of the group remains. As we will see in the fifth chapter, discussing the evolution of lists and pilgrimages, groups have aspects that differentiate between members and aspects that connect them (Feldhaus 2003, 131).

Now let us see how the individual parts of a transposed group conceive their belonging to such a system and, at the same time, negotiate their position in the imagined space of Banaras.

69 *KKh* 72 is dedicated to the description of a divine army deployed to defeat the demon Durga. The divine groups are described along with their spatial locations in the territory of Banaras, forming a sort of protective shield around the inner space. The text lists ninety-six *śaktis* (72.3-14), eight *durgās* (72.90-91), eight *bhairavas* (72.93) and sixty-four *vetālas* (72.97-100). For a discussion of the case of the *vināyakas*, see Gutschow 2006, 64–66.

70 This is the case with the *śaktis*, analysed by Gengnagel (2011, 171–173). He highlights that Sukul's representation divides the list of ninety-six goddesses into eight groups of twelve *śaktis*, with each group positioned in one of the eight cardinal and ordinal directions on his map. This case prompts reflection on the actual contribution of maps to the realisation and objectification of the sacred textual space.

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The Places of Transposition

The sources about the transposed *jyotirlingas* in Banaras provide limited details about the relationship between the ‘original’ locations and their transpositions. In her study of the landscape and geographical imagination of Maharashtra, Feldhaus (2003) offers several examples of how locations are connected through identification and comparison. The local site or deity can be defined as identical to its counterpart (x is y), or as another form of it (x is another y). Other examples define the local form as a secondary version of the ‘original’ (x is a *upa* y) or as a manifestation of the invisible ‘original’ (x is the invisible y). The latter is well-suited for ‘replicating’ sites that are only symbolically present, such as the city of Prayag and the mythical Sarasvati River, which is said to flow through its territory even though it is not visible.

A widespread method names certain places in the region as the southern version of famous northern locations or natural landscape features (x is the y of the south). Many examples exist of Dakṣiṇ Kāśī (the southern Banaras) and rivers called Dakṣiṇ Gaṅgā. Feldhaus also highlights various methods used to connect places in Maharashtra with renowned pilgrimage sites or northern natural landscapes through comparison. A place in the region may not only be said to be like or similar to one in the north (x is like y), but statements can be made such as ‘x confers the same merits as y’, ‘x possesses the same qualities as y’ or ‘x functions similarly to y’. Other types of connections between sites are relative: a place may be identified with another only during specific times of the year or for particular people.

In some of our study sites these comparisons take the form of a claim that the local site is superior. This will be articulated in various ways, for example ‘x is better than y’, ‘x is more powerful than y’, ‘x is older than y’, ‘x is more significant than a given multiple of y’, ‘x, is heavier than y’ or ‘x is more ancient than y’). Superiority can also be as simple as the local site’s name appearing first in certain listings or divine groups, but can extend to comparing the merits gained by visiting the local site to those gained from the performance of specific rituals at a distant site during auspicious periods. As well, the comparison of merits can extend beyond pilgrimage or visiting a site to references to living there, thinking about it, hearing about its glory (through texts that extol its qualities and stories) or even expressing an intention to visit.

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Comparisons between places can develop into complex series of equivalences, reflecting a common feature of *māhātmyas* and prescriptive literature: if there is a rule, or if a place is known for being particularly suited to solving certain human problems, there will always be alternatives available. The idea of substituting one action or thing—or in this case, one place—with another to achieve the same result is found in various ritual and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, I illustrate how connections with distant locations, and the appropriation of meanings and qualities from those locations, take even more specific forms in places of transposition. Only through frequent visits, prolonged observation and listening at these places can we begin to understand the web of connections that sustain each locality and document the ways in which the phenomenon of transposition is explained, and how the narratives from textual sources are integrated. We must listen to the places of transposition to hear what they have to say to us.

I have chosen to focus on the shrines included in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, the substitute pilgrimage to the twelve local representatives of the *jyotirliṅgas* promoted and practiced by the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti (KPDYS), which I joined in the summer of 2011. In cases where specific transpositions have multiple local representatives I will mention those, but it seems to me that the places in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā have been intentionally promoted as ‘official’ transpositions through the practice of pilgrimage, the variations of which I will analyse in the fifth chapter. Kedāreśvar (Kedār jī) has its own chapter at the end of the book.

Versatility and Stratification at Tripurāntakeśvar- Mallikārjun: The Lord of the Hill

As we will see in detail in the next chapter, locating the transpositions in Banaras requires careful bibliographic research about the various lists of divine groups and their respective urban routes, and then comparison with what local people know about the divine locations. Having the address of a temple, including the building number and the name of the area, does not guarantee on the ground success. Here, I quote my field notes from the day I searched for the Tripurāntakeśvar temple:

The temple is located in the Sagra area [a developed commercial area where contemporary shopping centres are located]; the area is quite large and the address lists only Shivpurv, as a single name (of a street? of an

area? of the area occupied by the temple itself?), but I thought that the name of the temple would be enough as a reference (blessed innocence!) to get a direction and find it. However, when I arrived at one of the main intersections in Sigra no one seemed to know the Tripurāntakeśvar temple; the rickshaw driver asked a couple of shopkeepers, taking the opportunity to buy some *pān*, which certainly makes conversations easier (!), and everyone pointed us to the nearest Śaṅkar jī kā mandir [temple of Śaṅkar, another name for Śiva], having asked me which deity the temple I was looking for was dedicated to. The search is becoming long, and the rickshaw driver is getting impatient, not understanding why I don't simply settle for visiting any temple of Śiva and insist on finding a specific one, especially one that no one seems to know. So I abandon the vehicle and continue my search on foot, going to the various temples that are suggested to me; I visit several, and in each place I try to ask where my temple is, with little success. Instead, I end up with a kind of interview with the usual questions (Where are you from? Where do you live in Banaras? How come you know Hindi? Are you married? Where is the temple you are looking for? (!)). Almost losing hope, I accept a ride on a motorcycle from a man who says he understands what I am looking for... but look at what I'm doing, I find myself on a motorcycle with a stranger searching for yet another hidden *liṅga*... the usual image of a *videśī* [foreigner] who is unprepared and also meticulous, insisting on finding an unknown temple, which maybe isn't so important if no one remembers its name!⁷¹

In the end I found the temple, not because the motorcyclist recognised it but because in a well-frequented shrine the *pūjārī* explained to me that the name Tripurāntakeśvar, which I had been using, is not common in the area; instead, the temple is widely known as Ṭilā Bābā—Lord of the Hill. Indeed, the temple is situated on a rise beside Mahmoorganj Road, and can be reached by a staircase leading to a large, tree-covered terrace where the small building is located. It consists of two similar cells, one dedicated to Tripurāntakeśvar and in the other, facing the entrance, is Trimukhavinayāk, the three-faced Gaṇeśa. Next to the terrace there is another small shrine dedicated to Hanumān.

On the staircase leading to the temple there is a sign with the names Tripurāntakeśvar and Mallikārjun, the pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga*. A few months after my initial visit, two more signs alluding to the connection were added near the temple. At the base of the staircase, one of these signs lists the 'official' names of the shrine: 'Śrī Tripurāntakeśvar Mahādev jī, Śrī Mallikārjun Mahādev mandir'

71 From my field notes, February 2011.

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Fig. 5 The stratification of names at Tripurāntakeśvar. Author's photo, November 2012.

and below, in smaller characters, 'Giriśvar Ṭilā (Sigrā Ṭilā Bābā), Mahmoorganj Road, Sigrā, Varanasi' (Fig. 5). At the top and in smaller characters the temple is identified as part of the group of twelve and described as an ancient temple (*prācīn mandir*), and '*kāśīkhaṇḍokta*' (literally 'expressed in KKh'),⁷² wordings that serve as a kind of guarantee of authenticity. The diversity of names and descriptions of the temple highlights the complex layering of traditions present in the transposed locations.

We can know something about the recent history of the temple thanks to the current *pūjārī*, Ramesh Kumar Mishra, who allowed me to review the documentation in his possession. The surrounding land belonged to a family of *zamīndārs* (landowners) from the nearby district of Gazipur and a series of heirs, appointees and affiliates; in 1936, the *zamīndār* family arranged for the Rāmākṛṣṇa Mission to manage the temple, which it did until 1974, when the staff of this institution declared themselves unable to continue the work. The area was then abandoned and the shrine left to itself until administration was returned to the heirs of the previous landowners in 1984, before they in turn delegated the task to new administrators. These administrators eventually transferred the responsibility to

72 For the expression *kāśīkhaṇḍokta*, see also the studies by Gengnagel (2005 and 2011) and Zeiler (2014).

the current *pūjārī*, who has been officially in charge of the temple since around 2008, although he had been voluntarily conducting the daily rituals before then.

The area is located near a Muslim cemetery (*kabristhān*) on land that was presumably donated to the *zamindars* by a regional ruler. Mishra jī states that the temple buildings as we see them today must be about a hundred years old, while the place and the *liṅga* are—as per the tradition—thousands of years old. We can assert that there must have already been a temple with the Tripurāntakeśvar *liṅga* inside when the pictorial map ‘Pilgrims in Banaras’ was created in the mid-18th century because the map includes, as has been mentioned, a temple similar to the current one, with some features that are found at Tripurāntakeśvar.

The current temple seems to legitimise itself as a transposition not so much through the reinterpretation of the narrative of the ‘original’ *jyotirliṅga*, of which there is no resonance in the explanations about the nature of the local temple and its connection with the pan-Indian site; rather, the status of the local representative of Mallikārjun seems to be based on the transposition of spatial elements and its territorial qualities of *tīrtha*. Let us hear from Mishra jī:

This was once a residence of ṛṣis, where there was a small pond (*tālāb*) which, like the one in Pokharā, has been drained [another water point in the city that has been reclaimed], when there was nothing built. When the land originated, the *tālāb* was not created by men, but the water manifested itself. Mallikārjun, following celestial guidance (*ākāśvāṇī*), performed *tapas* [ascetic fervour] here, and because of this heat, the river Kṛṣṇā was drawn here from underground. That water emerges once a year and is pure, like that of the Gaṅgā, and with it rituals are performed during Śivarātrī and in the month of Śrāvaṇa.⁷³

In other conversations Mishra jī explained that the name ‘Lord of the Hill’ comes from the temple’s location on high ground that somewhat resembles a mountain. This reflects the fact that the *jyotirliṅga* Mallikārjun is situated on the mountain of Śrīśail or Śaileś.⁷⁴ These names are also associated with the Himalayas, the quintessential mountains in the Indian imagination, and ‘mountain’ is a landscape

73 From an interview with Ramesh Kumar Mishra, February 2011.

74 Śrīśail, located in the south of Andhra Pradesh, appears to be one of the first places ‘replicated’ in Kāśī; indeed, the sequence of *liṅgas* listed by the SkP around the 7th century begins with Śaileś. It is described as the *liṅga* installed by the Himalaya, which allows a person to avoid rebirth (SkP 29.39-40). However, Śaileś is described as being situated near the river Varāṇā to the north of the city’s territory. The same story is reworked in the KKh (Kālika Purāṇa 66.33-149), and the *liṅga* referred to is then identified with the one at the temple of Śaileśvar on the banks of the Varāṇā at Maḍhya Ghāṭ. This *liṅga* is given as a ‘replication’ of Mallikārjun in lists of the last

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element often ‘replicated’⁷⁵ Thus, the status of Mallikārjun as a ‘second’ form seems to be legitimised through the ‘replication’ of the sacred geography of the ‘original’ site; the sacred mountain Śaileś and the river Kṛṣṇā are recalled here from elsewhere and are represented in the urban hill and an almost dried-up water source—depicted in the ‘Pilgrims in Banaras’ map—which serve as spatial evidence of the *jyotirlinga*’s presence.

In all the documents reviewed the temple is referred to as Giriśvar Ṭilā, and only some specify it as Tripurāntakeśvar, the name mentioned in the KKh. Despite this, Mishra jī insists that the ‘official’ name, used in government records and the land registry, is Tripurāntakeśvar. The name Giriśvar Ṭilā is mentioned only later, when Mishra jī explains that local people have given the temple on the hill a Bhojpurī name,⁷⁶ which, however, is justified as a descriptive name for the type of place where the temple stands: Ṭilā, Mishra jī explains, indicates the elevation or mountain, and immediately evokes Mallikārjun, the *jyotirlinga* that stands on the famous mountain. The name found in documents and correspondence, where Tripurāntakeśvar is used only in some cases, seems to favour the local tradition of recognising and identifying the temple as the Lord of the Hill; the name Giriśvar Ṭilā in everyday communication becomes simply Ṭilā or Ṭilā Bābā.

The ‘official’ name, or at least the one defined as such by interlocutors when speaking with me, is the one mentioned in sources and used in explaining its tradition. For foreign researchers, as well as for pilgrims from other regions of the country, the place will be known as Tripurāntakeśvar, the ‘replication’ of the *jyotirlinga* Mallikārjun, even before they visit. This is confirmed by Mishra jī’s efforts to persuade me of the place’s authority and power, as well as by what he says about visitors to and their understanding of it:

This is an international temple; that’s why its name is found in the Kāśikhanda. People come here from all over, from every region, and those who have a map will find it marked as a *jyotirlinga*. For those who don’t know, it will be up to us to tell them!⁷⁷

Mishra jī uses the English word ‘map’ presumably to refer to the maps included in guides to the city, which circulate among pilgrims and also include addresses. In

century. The Tripurāntakeśvar temple on the Sagra hill is listed by Vyas (2011 [1987], 135).

75 For information on the symbolism of the mountain see Pelissero, Shastri and Giuliano in Barbero and Piano (2004). For the mountain as a mythical prototype of the sacred place, see also Eck (1998, 171–174).

76 Mishra jī uses this term almost as a synonym for local; Bhojpurī is commonly spoken in Banaras as a daily and familiar language but *ṭilā* is also a Hindi word.

77 From an interview with Mishra jī, February 2011.

this type of illustrative material, temples mentioned in the KKh that have trans-regional resonance, such as the transpositions of pan-Indian centres, are included as evidence of Kāśī's universality, representing the *tīrthas* of the entire country and transformed into local pilgrimages. The temple of Ṭilā Bābā thus has a connection with another level of local geography, that of the pilgrimage routes and classes of deities that connect and systematise the variety of local divine forms, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Thus, pilgrims and visitors unfamiliar with the city know in advance about the imagined space, and the experience of the lived place then becomes a means of verification, a tangible confirmation of knowledge they believe is derived from textual sources. It is expected that the place and its officiants will confirm, or rather *embody*, the description transmitted, often with creativity, by the informational material. I myself was searching for the temple by its 'official' name, the only one I knew before encountering the place and its various voices.

Many other devotees are in direct contact with the place and its daily reality. For these individuals, the 'official' name, as well as the tradition that considers the *līṅga* a 'replica' of Mallikārjuna and the entire spatial reality a reference to the mountain of Śaileśa, seem to be a subsequent addition, an enhancement of the temple's power and qualities rather than its original significance. The daily activity of the temple does not seem connected to its status as a transposition or to its inclusion in city routes. The emergence of a local tradition that overlaps with the 'official' one does not seem to pertain only to the practice of naming.

In addition to the daily ritual activity, which revolves around two *ārtīs* (ceremonies involving offerings and ritual lamps), one conducted in the morning and one in the evening, with times depending on the season, the place serves as a gathering and recreation spot for the local community. Devotees meet and talk with Mishra jī, who is present for most of the day, in addition to visiting the temple and making offerings to the *mūrtīs* (divine icons installed in the temples that are believed to embody the divine presence once consecrated). Mishra jī, apart from being a fundamental agent in the revitalisation of the place, is a reference point for local devotees; he also provides astrological services and family consultations, which attract a considerable crowd daily.

A further differentiation between traditions, in order to meet the needs of the local community, is reflected in the temple space itself. As mentioned, the main temple consists of two similar cells, housing Tripurāntakeśvar and Trimukhavinayāk, while a small shrine dedicated to Hanumān is also present on one side of the terrace. The devotee can, however, now have *darśana* of four different divine figures, because a cell housing Kālī has recently been added to the central structure. This construction was funded by devotees and as such does not appear in documents listing the *mūrtīs* present at Giriśvar Ṭilā. Unlike other temples in which accessory *mūrtīs* are clearly distinct from the main one, here the space seems to be shared without hierarchy.

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The practices and discourses of the Lord of the Hill temple constitute a varied tradition and the place presents itself in its plurality. It does so through the fundamental mediation of Mishra ji, who uses and discusses its names, versions and connections as needed, presenting one or more of its various specificities and ‘services’ to the devotee, the pilgrim from other regions and the foreign researcher.

Filling the Void and Renaming God: Ghuśmeś and Bhīmāśaṅkar

As is evident from the case just illustrated, the names and various designations of a place play fundamental roles in the traditions of the transposed places. The previously mentioned study by Basso (1988) suggests that the activity of naming could be a universal method that humans use to appropriate physical territory. In our case, the act of naming involves establishing various kinds of connections.

Ghuśmeś and Bhīmāśaṅkar, as has emerged from the overview of the presence of the *jyotirlingas* in the sources on Banaras, are the two great absentees. The Puranic tradition does not record a *liṅga* called Ghuśmeś in Kāśī. Therefore, this name is a sort of void that needs to be filled. Among the pan-Indian *jyotirlingas*, this is one of the most controversial; in many lists of the twelve Ghuśmeś is not included or its name is changed to Ghṛṣmeśvar. Fleming hypothesises that the story of Ghuśmeś is a later addition to the collections of the ŚP coming from different narrative traditions (Fleming 2007, 124–136).⁷⁸ The ‘original’ location of Ghuśmeś is also a subject of debate.⁷⁹ Similarly, Bhīmāśaṅkar (whose ‘original’

78 In the ŚP the name appears as Ghuśmeś, but in Maharashtra, the region of its ‘original’ location, the *liṅga* is known as Ghṛṣmeśvar. The narrative that circulates near Ellora about the origin of the *liṅga* and Śivālayā, the water source associated with the temple, is completely different from the one in the collections of the ŚP. According to local *māhātmyas*, the *liṅga* was formed by Pārvatī, who pounded the red earth common in the region (the root *ghṛṣ* refers to this action), and the SkP is cited as the source for this, suggesting the presence of two distinct traditions (one from the ŚP and one from the SkP). However, the local *māhātmyas* are not found in the published editions of the SkP (see Fleming 2007, 31). Another possible name of the temple is Guheśvar, which appears in an inscription on a copper plate from 742 AD, citing Elāpura (Ellora) as the origin of the tribute and mentioning the Guheśvar *tīrtha*. The site may have existed, therefore, before the 10th century; for more details, see Fleming 2007, 124–125.

79 In addition to the site near Ellora, a temple in the Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan also claims to be the *jyotirlinga* Ghuśmeś. The website <https://ghushmeshwar.com/jyotrllinga/> (last accessed on 19 February 2025) includes it in the list of the twelve *jyotirlingas*.

form, as noted earlier, is in Pune) does not appear in the tradition of glorification connected to Banaras.

It is possible that the lack of specific indications of these two places in Banaras gave rise to the complex history of their placement. In any case, the uncertainty about local representatives of the two *jyotirlingas* seems to have been resolved with the emergence recently of places named Bhīmāśaṅkar and Ghuṣmeś. These locations appear to be accepted as local transpositions of the respective *jyotirlingas*, as they are included in the route of the Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā, the pilgrimage around the twelve. Their identification is the result of a process of appropriation—of both a specific space and a narrative framework that connects them to a known group—through naming. This process, as I will illustrate, has not been without criticism and disapproval from certain ritual authorities.

Ghuṣmeś is undoubtedly the most recent example of the relocation of the local transposition of the pan-Indian *jyotirlinga* and an attempt to revitalise a place through the renaming of its main deity. The name Ghuṣmeś began to be associated with the territory of Banaras in sources from the past century, specifically in the lists of local ‘replicas’ of the *jyotirlingas* compiled by the authors of *māhātmyas* at that time (cf. Chapter 5). Although these various lists do not always agree on the location of each divine form, they do seem to concur on the location of Ghuṣmeś. It is identified with an auxiliary *liṅga* located in the courtyard of the Kāmācchādevī temple, not far from the Baṭuk Bhairav temple. When visiting the Kāmācchādevī temple—also a local transposition of the famous pilgrimage site of Kāmākhyādevī in Assam—one of the *pūjārīs* I consulted confirmed the location of Ghuṣmeś in a secondary hall behind the temple of the goddess, where a series of *liṅgas* is sometimes offered flowers by devotees: ‘*Yātrī log unko Ghuṣmeś mānte hein*’, he said (‘the pilgrims believe, or accept, it as Ghuṣmeś’).

It is difficult to argue that a Ghuṣmeś temple itself has always existed in Banaras if no textual or visual sources mention its name, so the identification of Ghuṣmeś with an auxiliary *liṅga* in a well-known and frequented temple, like Kāmācchādevī, might seem like a way to overcome its otherwise complete absence. This identification perhaps represents a moment just before the compilation of the first local lists of the *jyotirlingas*, which I will discuss later. Such lists included addresses, so the issue of missing members of the group would have arisen, perhaps prompting the need to ‘discover’ the existence of Ghuṣmeś in, for example, an already known temple. Over time, however, the group of sacred sites solidified and an auxiliary *liṅga* in an unremarkable room at the back of a separate temple likely became insufficient to serve as the local representative of a pan-Indian *tīrtha*. The logic of representing the whole with just a part, or the group with only a few members (as in the visual production discussed in Chapter 3), no longer seems applicable. Absences and poorly represented members needed to be filled or replaced.

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A new Ghuṣmeśvar has indeed emerged possibly in the first decade of the present millennium, although the building near Śivālā Ghāṭ that houses this new transposition of the *jyotirlinga* predates its renaming as such. At the time of my research, the existence of this Ghuṣmeśvar was not recorded in any published lists but its location appeared in the list of addresses provided by the KPDYS to participants on the day of the pilgrimage to the twelve *jyotirlingas*. In the list I obtained during my participation in the pilgrimage on July 24, 2011, Ghuṣmeśvar had two different addresses: the first referred to the new temple and the second to the one in the courtyard of Kāmācchādevī. In fact, the group of pilgrims visited both manifestations. Had it not been for that pilgrimage I would have had no knowledge of the existence of the Ghuṣmeśvar temple at Śivālā Ghāṭ. It is evident that this shrine remains relatively unknown as a transposed *jyotirlinga*, and is not widely known as Ghuṣmeśvar.

The temple does not seem to be particularly popular. It remains closed for most of the day, opening only for the two daily *ārti* ceremonies, when its caretaker, locally known as Baṅgālī Bābā, is present. He is a renunciant originally from present-day Bangladesh, who has been looking after the temple for about twenty years. The shrine consists of a single square room with the *liṅga* at its centre, and the building has recently been renovated thanks to donations from south Indian devotees.

In my conversation with the *bābā*, I learned about the renaming of the temple in line with its location at Śivālā—a name that references the mythical lake where the pan-Indian *jyotirlinga* Ghuṣmeśvar is said to arise. There are three distinct stages in the transformation of the site.⁸⁰

Baṅgālī Bābā explains:

In the beginning, there was no name; the temple is very old, and the *mūrti* is a product of nature. It was a stone from the Narmadā River, and therefore it can be called *mahāliṅga* [literally ‘great *liṅga*’] or Narmadeśvar. Someone must have lifted it from beneath the river to bring it here, where it was installed. It is not a self-manifested *liṅga* because it was brought here; however, it comes from nature, not crafted by any artisan.

Contrary to the narratives that typically explain the manifestation of both pan-Indian and local *jyotirlingas* as self-manifested (*svayambhū*), this one is thought to have been placed here by someone. Its significance and uniqueness, however, are highlighted by the natural formation of the divine form, referred to by the *bābā* not as a *liṅga* at first, but as a *śilā*, meaning ‘boulder’ or ‘stone’. Even though the

80 The material presented is a reorganisation of an interview with Baṅgālī Bābā in March 2012, along with unrecorded personal communications that took place in April 2012.

name *Narmadeśvar* is used to explain its formation, he says clearly that initially the form had no name, and it is possible that the shrine had been abandoned for a long time: ‘When I first arrived here, daily activities and care of the temple were resumed; at the beginning, I called it Paśupatināth, and even today this is one of the names by which it is known.’ So with the arrival of the *bābā*, the temple—whose name had presumably been forgotten—was ‘renamed’ with a name chosen by him. The choice of the name indicates a desire to connect the shrine to a powerful entity, Paśupatināth (the Lord of Animals), in Nepal; a place that is likely known to the *bābā* as a known gathering centre for ascetics and a hub of renunciation traditions (also ‘replicated’ in Banaras elsewhere). Baṅgālī Bābā further explains that:

After a few years, on the advice of Swāmī Shivanand Sarasvati, a disciple of Karpatri jī, this was considered a *vyotirliṅga* and was given the name of a *vyotirliṅga*; thus, the temple became known by two different names, Paśupatināth and Ghuśmeśvar, but it is primarily recognised as Ghuśmeśvar. The name was given to it over ten years ago. In fact, the name of the surrounding area, Śivālā, is that of the location of the *vyotirliṅga*.⁸¹

The renaming is justified based on the already explicit evocation of the broader space of the *vyotirliṅga* at the local site of Banaras. Shivalā, a name that appears in the *Jyotirliṅgastotra* as the geographical location of Ghuśmeśvar, is already present at the temple: the building is indeed located at Shivalā Ghat, and the transposition of this space precedes that of the *vyotirliṅga* itself.

It should be noted that narrative material related to the pan-Indian *vyotirliṅgas* is not invoked at all in this type of transposition; the name alone is sufficient for the authentication of the local *liṅga*. It is the practice of pilgrimage, as we will see in the fifth chapter, that consolidates the new reality, formalising and disseminating the renaming of the temple and promoting an ‘invented’ tradition. In the case of Ghuśmeśvar, its renaming seems primarily designed to provide a stop on the pilgrimage route; the temple itself does not seem to benefit significantly from this.

The situation of Bhīmeśvar is quite different, even though in this case the transposition is also based on the renaming of a pre-existing site with the name of a pan-Indian *vyotirliṅga*. Today, Bhīmeśvar—or its transposition recognised by pilgrimage practice—is located in the well-known temple of Kāśī Karvaṭ, not far from the Viśvanāth temple complex in the heart of the old city. The renaming is

81 Swami Shivanand Sarasvati was a notable figure from Banaras belonging to the Dandiswami order. Karpatri jī was also a Dandiswami, and a controversial figure in orthodox Hinduism in the last century. We will meet both again in Chapter 5, where some further details can be found.

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not as recent as in the case of Ghuśmeśvar; in fact, the tradition that identifies the central *līṅga* of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple as Bhīmeśvar has been recorded at least since the publication by Kubernath Sukul (1977, 211), nephew of the author of the Kāśīdarpaṇa map and author of a comprehensive guide to pilgrimages that I will discuss later.

The choice of the location of Bhīmeśvar at Kāśī Karvaṭ is contested by Kedarnath, another author of a comprehensive pilgrimage monograph (1987) and a member of the family which has resided near for generations and holds hereditary rights over the Vyās Pīṭha, a central hub for pilgrimages. Without delving into the debate over the routes, which I will address in the next chapter, I refer to the information that Vyas jī provided about the transposition of Bhīmeśvar, in order to compare it with what has been communicated to me by the officiants of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple. Vyas jī locates Bhīmāśaṅkar as one of the accessory *līṅgas* situated in the Viśvanāth complex, to the southwest of the central deity near the image of the planet Bṛhaspatī (Jupiter).⁸² Another identification suggested by Vyas jī places Bhīmāśaṅkar in the temple of Tilbhāṅḍeśvar, in the area of Pandey Haveli while the designation of the temple of Kāśī Karvaṭ as the site of the *jyotirlinga* is considered by Vyas to be a genuine error or invention by Sukul.⁸³ Due to his ritual role and personal history, which we will explore, he sees himself as the unique and natural interpreter of the traditions about the divine forms of the city, and says that the previous name of the central deity of this temple was Jaṭāśaṅkar. This name indeed appears in a publication shown by Vyas jī (Varma 1925) and in the Jaipur Survey Map of the 18th century (Bahura and Singh 1990, 105–106, map no. 191, figs. 55–56).

It is possible that in systematising the list of the twelve transposed *jyotirlingas* gaps have been filled in and missing sites found and verified where there were no sources to identify certain local *jyotirlingas*. Bhīmāśaṅkar does not appear on 19th-century maps. Thus, it seems that two different traditions have emerged regarding the location of this *jyotirlinga*: one places it as a secondary *līṅga* while the other locates it in an already prominent temple, Kāśī Karvaṭ. It is in the latter that the most active promotion of the Bhīmāśaṅkar *jyotirlinga* takes place, and the origins of its renaming are lost.

The officiants in charge of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple—whom I met at the beginning of my journey—belong to the Upadhyaya family, which has been managing the temple for about a century. Both father and son indicated that the current form underwent renewal (*jīrṇoddhār*) in 1951.⁸⁴ It is likely that the date of this

82 The complete identification of the divine forms present in the Viśvanāth complex, as made by Vyas jī, is documented by Gutschow (2006, 146).

83 Personal communication with Kedarnath Vyas, March 2012.

84 From an interview with Amla Shankar Upadhyaya and his son Dinesh, February 2011.

restructuring coincides with its renaming as the site of Bhīmeśvar—a renaming that may have been intended to revitalise a temple with a rather dubious and obscure reputation. It seems sadly to have been known in the past as a gathering place for officiants of questionable character, and as the site of ritual suicides of pilgrims wishing (or compelled) to die in this divine abode in order to attain liberation from the cycle of rebirths.

The term ‘*karvaṭ*’ (*karvaṭa* in Sanskrit means ‘village’ or ‘slope’ of a mountain) may also suggest a sort of heavy blade (*karvant*) that was placed in the ceiling to fall on devotees chosen by the deity, in an underground room thought to be directly connected by a passage to the nearby cremation ground at Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ.⁸⁵ It is possible that the renewal of the temple and its promotion as a transposed Bhīmeśvar are responses to a desire to restore dignity to a well-frequented shrine in the sacred centre and improve its macabre reputation.

Repositioning of Divine Stories in Rāmeśvar

The popular story about the origins of the *liṅga* of Rāmeśvar, installed by Rāma to pay homage to Śiva before embarking on his journey to Laṅkā, is not found in the Rāmāyaṇa, the epic poem dedicated to the exploits of Rāma. Instead, it is an episode added by the ŚP tradition, which incorporates it into the story of Rāma’s crossing to Laṅkā to defeat Rāvaṇa.⁸⁶ The name of the *liṅga* is clearly inextricably linked to its originator, allowing devotees to infer its origins even without knowing the story in detail. The widely-known tales of Rāmacandra, particularly conveyed through the Rāmcaritmānas—an all-pervasive work in the culture of Banaras, the birthplace of its author—have ensured the special prominence of this *vyotirliṅga*.

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Rāmeśvar is one of the divine forms with the most transpositions in Banaras. The KKh mentions among others a Rāma *tīrtha*, a water site for bathing in order to attain the abode of Viṣṇu (KKh 84.69), which may be identified with the present-day Rām Kuṇḍa. This is the large pond where a temple dedicated to Rāmeśvar now stands and is part of the route of the twelve *vyotirliṅgas* of the KPDYS. Other transpositions of the *liṅga* in the Banaras area include one located in a small temple at Mānmandir Ghāṭ, near the

85 Personal communication with Om Prakash Sharma, former director of the Swedish Study Centre for Indian Culture in Banaras, October 2010.

86 The story is introduced in JS 57 and further elaborated in KS 31.

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transposition of Someśvar,⁸⁷ mentioned by Sukul and Vyas but not by Sarasvatī, another composer of modern *māhātmyas* who we will meet soon;⁸⁸ one at Hanumān Ghāṭ, mentioned only by Sukul (1977, 211); and that of the village of Rāmeśvar, located on the Varanā river, which is not included on any list of the twelve but represents one of the most important stops in the Pañcakrośīyātrā.

It is, however, the temple near Rām Kuṇḍa to draw most attention here. Apart from its inclusion in the KPDYS pilgrimage, it is much bigger and more widely-known than the temple at Mānmandir Ghāṭ, which is now infrequently visited. The latter is known in the area of the *ghāṭ* and honoured during the Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā (possibly as a result of the visit on that route to the nearby Someśvar) but its *darśana* can only be obtained through a small window from the outside or during the two daily ceremonies.

The temple near Rām Kuṇḍa (Fig. 6) is included as one of the transpositions of the pan-Indian *jyotirlinga* by Sukul (ibid.) and as the only one by Sarasvatī (1993, 251), but it does not appear in the work of Vyas, despite his personal confirmation that he does recognise it. The temple is located not far from the more famous Lakṣmī Kuṇḍa, close to Laksa Road, in the centre of a rather affluent residential area. Unlike other water bodies in the city that are evidently neglected, the pond at the back of the temple seems to be well maintained and managed. The area of the tank and the temple are identified as *paurāṇika tīrtha* (ancient and / or Purāṇa-transmitted sacred places), as indicated by signs placed around the water area. Meanwhile, the entrance to the temple bears the inscription: ‘*Śrī kāsīkhaṇḍokta dvādaśa jyotirlinga, śrī prācīn rāmeśvar nāth mahādev mandir*’, identifying the temple as one of the ancient *jyotirlingas* described by the KKh—the expression *kāsīkhaṇḍokta* being seen again. Below, the address of the temple is provided (*akhārā rāmkuṇḍ, laksā, vārānasī*); indeed, the outer area of the complex is occupied by an *akhārā*, a local gymnasium.⁸⁹

In the centre of the pond is a platform housing the *mūrtis* of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. The temple’s location on a body of water is also a characteristic of the temple of Rāmeśvara on the Varanā river., and the presence of water can be seen as a necessary element that recalls the ‘original’ landscape of Rāmeśvara, almost surrounded by the Indian Ocean. However, this transposition is not explained

87 Rāmeśvar and Someśvar are often located close to each other; in fact, near the temple of Rāmeśvar on the Varanā river there is also a *liṅga* named Someśvar.

88 Sukul (1977, 211) and Vyas (2011 [1987], 136) note that Setubandha Rāmeśvar, or Setubandha yātrā, is present at Mānmandir ghāṭ. For this reason, Sukul considers this transposition the most important, listing two other forms alongside it. Vyas jī includes only this one among the transpositions and does not, for example, mention the presence of the one at Rām Kuṇḍa.

89 For the importance of these places in Banarsi society, see Kumar 1988 and 1992; Alter 1992; Freitag 1989, 120–121.



Fig. 6 The Rāmeśvar *liṅga*, decorated with offerings. Author's photo, March 2011.

through the repetition of spatial elements from the southern site; instead, it is explained through the appropriation of the narrative about the establishment of the *jyotirlinga*. Both the temple officiant and one of the regular devotees with whom I often shared the spacious and ventilated *maṇḍapa*, while contemplating the sacred pond, recount that the *liṅga* was established by Rāma himself to worship Śiva and seek his favour for the impending battle against the demon Rāvaṇa.⁹⁰ This account places the local transposition of Rāmeśvara as contemporaneous with or even prior to the establishment of the eponymous form in the south of the country,⁹¹ thus reversing the hierarchy between the 'original' place and its transposition.

Another example of inversion between the 'original' site and its local version, articulated in more detail in a myth that narrates the transfer of the actual deity

90 The versions presented in the JS and KS of the ŚP place the action before the battle. Other variants of the episode have Rāma installing the *liṅga* after his victory, as an act of thanksgiving and atonement for the sin of killing a Brahman (*brahmahatyā*) (Fleming 2007, 119–120).

91 Similar versions are recounted by Shankar Prasad Yadav, the priest of the temple, in an interview in March 2011; and Anil Kumar, a daily devotee, in March 2012.

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from one place to another, will be encountered when discussing Kedāreśvar in the concluding chapter. The case of Rāmeśvar, however, demonstrates how transpositions can be understood by devotees as identical and simultaneous forms of the object they might be said to ‘replicate’. For the devotee, the venerated, local form is primary; from this perspective, it was the same Rāma who came here first and then to the south, establishing both forms and conferring upon them the light.⁹² The priest’s discourse also echoes this inversion of hierarchy when asserting that *darśana* of Rāmeśvar in Kāśī yields greater benefits than that in south India. This is attributed to the KKh, and it is indeed not uncommon, as we will see in the case of Kedāreśvar, to find such assertions in *māhātmyas* about local shrines compared with those in other regions. Something about the very territory of the city of Banaras seems incontrovertibly to make its places and divine forms superior. In the case of Rāmeśvar, however, the reference to the KKh is purely rhetorical; as often happens, the KKh is cited to lend validity and authority to the discourse, without actual correspondence between the source and what is transmitted orally.

The inversion of the hierarchy between ‘original’ and ‘replica’ can be seen as the ultimate expression of the desire of compilers of local *māhātmyas* to construct the myth of the city as a comprehensive space. However, it is the places themselves that embody and reinterpret these all textual traditions in anything but ‘orthodox’ and predictable ways. In the present case, the transposed temple of Rāmeśvar, a space imagined by Brahman compilers of *māhātmyas*, is managed by a family of Yadavs, a pastoral caste group. They assure me that the temple belongs to no one in particular and that no Brahman serves as *pūjārī*. Instead, they describe it as a communal reality: it is primarily the attendees of the adjacent *akhārā* who take care of it. Like the *akhārā* members, other regular devotees of Rāmeśvar are part of the surrounding community. In fact, it is not a temple located in the area of the *ghāṭs*, or in a frequented passageway where it might attract the interest of casual passers-by. In addition to being a form that encapsulates the power of Śiva and recalls the deeds of the hero Rāma, however, it also symbolises the will of Viṣṇu, who guided the actions of the epic hero and personally participated in the installation of the *liṅga*. As a result, devotees of Viṣṇu also revere this form.

92 Personal conversation with Anil Kumar, March 2012.

The Faded Fame of Oṃkāreśvar

The case of Oṃkāreśvar in Banaras is quite singular and highlights the fundamental contribution of individual sites and local actors to the production and continuation of a tradition or its fall into oblivion. Both Oṃkāreśvar and Kedāreśvar, are described in textual sources as important *liṅgas*, but Kedāreśvar has developed differently.⁹³

Oṃkāreśvar is to the north of the city, on what were once the shores of Matsyodarī, a lake that was drained and reduced in size during colonial rule in the 19th century. The temple area features a large earthen mound where there are the three shrines that make up Oṃkāreśvar, as well as several Muslim graves. This space serves as a gathering point for the local community of Muslim weavers who come together to spread and prepare their textiles. The divine form is believed to be divided into five parts, corresponding to the sounds of the sacred primordial syllable Oṃ: A-kār, U-kār, Ma-kār, along with the nasalisation (*bindu*) and the resonance (*nād*). Of these, only the first three parts are said to be visible and physically present in the shrines that make up Oṃkāreśvar. Their manifestation in Kāśī is narrated in the KKh (73.79-88).

The small shrine commonly referred to as Oṃkāreśvar, representing the Ma-kār, is the only one visible when approaching from the main road. It is a modest structure that can accommodate not more than one devotee at a time, while another shrine, U-kār, is lower down, slightly larger and better maintained. Its *liṅga* is situated below ground level. During my visits in the spring of 2011 this temple was undergoing restoration; the project included the reconstruction of the building's walls and possibly the renewal of a *śikharā*. The other part of Oṃkāreśvar, A-kār, is in a more hidden spot near a large *pīpal* tree, and seems to be less well-known; indeed, during my initial visits, it was not pointed out as part of the complex. As noted during my participation in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅga pilgrimage, however, pilgrims are guided to this third temple for a complete *darśana* of the portions of Oṃkāreśvar. Current *pūjārī* Shridar Pandey has been tasked with the management and upkeep of the temple by its well-known owner, Bhavani Shankar Pandey⁹⁴ and the *pūjārī* and his family reside in the area.

93 In the sources, starting with the compendium of Lakshmidhara (TVK p. 57), Oṃkāreśvar is given considerable attention. The KKh dedicates almost two chapters (73–74) to it, referring to it as a miraculous and radiant *tīrtha* (33.118, 61.189, 69.167, 76.156, 86.108-10, 87.15). Additionally, it is included in a route of the fourteen divine abodes (*āyatana*) (100.43-47). This highlights its significance within the broader context of sacred geography and the tradition surrounding divine worship in the region.

94 Bhavani Shankar Pandey is a central figure in the religious life of Banaras, as the owner of shares in the rotation system for revenue distribution among the temples (*pārī*) of the Śitala temple at Daśāśvamedh Ghāt, one of the city's most popular shrines.

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The name Oṃkāreśvar appears in the KKh as a *liṅga* that is part of a sequence of fourteen divine abodes (*āyatanas*) that delineate the *muktikṣetra*, or ‘field of liberation’.⁹⁵ The sequence begins here and traces the territory known as Avimukta, the broader spatial entity of the city, which is described as a *liṅga* extending for five *krośa*. Vyas jī includes a list of deities near the temple, which together constitute the Oṃkāṛ Antargrhīyātrā, a pilgrimage that prescribes visiting 108 divine forms found in the Oṃkāṛ *khaṇḍa*—which, starting from the north, is the first of the three sections into which the city’s territory is divided. The first eight stops mentioned are part of the Oṃkāreśvar complex, indicating that the space around the current buildings has been perceived ideally as rich in divine forms, many of which Vyas recorded as having vanished (*luṭta*) in the last century.

Since the beginning of the last century, the glory of Oṃkāreśvar must have faded, indicating that the richness of the imagined space cannot live on past glories but must be sustained by local practices and the ingenuity of the individuals involved in the daily life of the place. Oṃkāreśvar, though, is one of the few transposed *jyotirliṅgas* that has had an independent local tradition since the Puranic glorifications, which narrate its origin in a myth entirely disconnected from that of the homonymous *jyotirliṅga* and place it among the predominant and constitutive forms of the urban territory. However, this apparent renown is not enough to maintain activity at the site that remains today after past glories have faded. Oṃkāreśvar is now a temple with few regular devotees and has been forgotten even by many people living nearby, who, as my research reveals, prefer to go to other temples located a little further south. The only promoters of the place seem to be ‘outsiders’, as communicated sadly by Shridar Pandey, who explains that the restoration work has been funded by devotees from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, along with a few other individuals interested in the fate of the temple, such as some prominent ritual specialists from Banaras.

Shridar Pandey explains that the neighbourhood is inhabited by very poor people, unlike the area just south near Trilocan, where some devotees go and support the ancient temples, as he believes they should support Oṃkāreśvar. He attributes the temple’s low profile as well to the strong Islamic presence in the area and says that it is only during festivals specifically dedicated to the worship of Śiva that there is a certain influx of visitors, which is completely absent for the rest of the year.

This highlights the complexities of temple management and the significance of individual roles within the broader religious ecosystem of Banaras. For more details, see Chapter 6.

95 A summary is in KKh 100.43-47, but the route had been previously described in chapter 73, which is dedicated to the greatness of Oṃkāreśvar.

As noted, the presence of most of the *jyotirlingas* in Kāśī is transmitted by local sources as if they have always been connected to the city's territory, regardless of their belonging to the group. Only for some of them is the 'original' location mentioned from which they were transferred or moved to the city. Others seem to have independent traditions, originally connected to the territory of Banaras, and Oṃkāreśvar appears to be one of these cases: the narrative explaining its manifestation in Kāśī has nothing to do with the tradition associated with the 'original' site in Madhya Pradesh, where Śiva manifests in response to worship from the Vindhya mountain. The status of *jyotirlinga* is not mentioned in the KKh description of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī, and neither is the site on the island in the Narmadā River. On the other hand, the KKh refers extensively to the sacred river and a corresponding *liṅga*, Narmadeśvar, installed in Kāśī and 'replicated' in numerous variants throughout the region.⁹⁶

In the myth introduced in the KKh to illustrate the greatness of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī, the narrative device involves a visit by the Brahman Damāna to the 'original' Oṃkāreśvar, said to be on the banks of the Revā—another name for the Narmadā River—near Amaraṅṅak. This *liṅga* is said to be near the source of the sacred river (KKh 73.70-75 and 74.7-8), seemingly ignoring the existence of the island where the *jyotirlinga* recognised today is situated. On the Narmadā near Oṃkāreśvar, then, Damāna is seeking a guide to achieving mental detachment and encounters Pāśupata ascetics who narrate the greatness of Avimukta, describing its places and divine forms and indicating the existence of the *liṅga* of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī, whose *darśana* bestows great merit (KKh 74.1-122). To demonstrate the greatness of this place, the Pāśupatas recount the story of a devotee of the *liṅga* who, in addition to her daily devotional practices, physically unites with the *liṅga* on the night of the fourteenth day of the bright half (*śukla pakṣa*) of the lunar month of Vaiśikha in April–May (KKh 74.96-98). The text then describes the incredible power acquired by the *liṅga* at this time, when all sacred places merge into it (KKh 74.100), and praises other places around the *tīrtha*. Remarkably, the praise in the KKh for the *liṅga* of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī is said to take place near an 'original' Oṃkāreśvar (near the source of the Narmadā rather than in its current location), but indicates the superiority of the distant *tīrtha* (in Kāśī) compared with the place where the action occurs (Oṃkāreśvar in its presumed 'original' location).

The mention of the divine form originating elsewhere appears, in this case, to be a later addition to the KKh aligning with its totalising logic of and the promotion of the city as a universal centre where all deities and *tīrthas* have come to reside in the house of Śiva. The narrative of the origin of the local Oṃkāreśvar

96 KKh 92 is dedicated to the glory of Narmadeśvar; for the different manifestations of this *liṅga* in the region, see Gutschow 2006, 364–365.

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describes a divine appearance in the form of the primordial syllable to Brahmā, completely detached from any myth about the appearance of a *jyotirlinga*,⁹⁷ and seems to indicate the existence of an independent tradition.

The same can be said regarding the myth of the devoted girl, which seems to testify to locally defined worship practices; indeed, it indicates a specific time of year and describes other locations around Oṃkāreśvar. For example, it mentions Śrīmukhī, a cave or well where those who stay for five nights can see the Nāgini, or serpent deities associated with water places, who will reveal both auspicious and inauspicious events (KKh 74.101-102) and the lake Matsyodarī, whose waters are considered a repository of celestial rivers (KKh 74.105).

The case of Oṃkāreśvar demonstrates how a tradition centred on a place is always composed of overlapping layers and connections to spaces from elsewhere—and we will explore this more thoroughly in our encounter with Kedāreśvar. On the other hand, a rich and articulated tradition like that of Oṃkāreśvar seems to have faded, for reasons that are not well understood, but likely depend on a lack of vitality in its transmission within the place itself.

Other Forms of Transposition: Narratives and Textual References in the Temples of Vaidyanāth, Mahākāl, Someśvar, Tryambakeśvar and Nāgeśvar

The transposition of the *jyotirlinga* Vaidyanāth is now located in Banaras at the Baijnāth temple in the Kamacchā area, within a residential complex surrounding the temple. The building was constructed at the behest of Ahilyabai Holkar and the Kāśī Nareś, as noted on a plaque placed at the base of the staircase leading to the temple entrance in 1984. The activities and management of the donations that sustain the temple have been in the hands of Shriram Suvedi and his son Hari for about forty years, since the family arrived in Banaras from Nepal. Shriram Suvedi informs me that the owner of the land and temple—a Gosvāmī—has not managed it for a long time and has handed over all responsibilities to them. The current officiants explain that they rely on devotees for any renewal expenses and

97 The appearance to Brahmā does recall the myth of the column of fire, where Śiva emerges as a *liṅga* of light, as in this case (KKh 73.143). Here, however, Śiva manifests to grant a boon to Brahmā, who has praised and propitiated Him. As is customary, the devotee expresses the desire for the deity to remain where he has manifested, in the form of the *liṅga*.

for organising special ceremonies.⁹⁸ The system seems to be working, as during my last visit I noticed that the building has been entirely repainted in bright colours and renovated. In front of the main temple, behind Nandin (gazing at the *liṅga* of Vaidyanāth or Baijnāth), there is a small cell dedicated to Hanumān. Behind the building, there is another entrance to the temple that accesses it directly from the residential complex; here we also find a well of sacred water used for ceremonies and as a common resource by the surrounding community.

The temple officiants explain the existence of the transposed form in terms of *prātirūpa* of the ‘original’ form located in Jharkhand;⁹⁹ there is no reference to any narrative about that, but it is identified as *svayambhū*, meaning it was not installed by human hands. The officiants then explain the presence of transposed divine forms from across India in Kāśī by echoing the repeated narrative motif of the city as a universal abode where all deities, names and forms have a representative, allowing devotees to accumulate the same or greater merits with a visit to the city. The verses of the Jyotirlingastotra are carved on a votive slab on one side of the square building, and some devotees stop to recite the names of the *jyotirlingas*.

The remaining transpositions of the *jyotirlingas* in Banaras do not seem to be particularly significant in the contemporary religious life of the city. Neither are they prominent in the imagined space outlined by textual and visual sources. In particular, the *liṅgas* of Someśvar, Tryambakeśvar and Nāgeśvar are currently housed in small shrines that receive little attention.

Mahākāl presents a somewhat different situation, as it is the only name in the group explicitly designated as a *jyotirlinga* in the KKh, which also highlights its presence in the city more than the others (apart from Kedāreśvar, Oṃkāreśvar and Viśveśvar). It is located in the expansive complex of the Mahāmṛtyuñjaya temple in Daranagar, a part of the commercial area known as Koṭval, near the well-known temple of Kāl Bhairav. The transposition of the Ujjain *liṅga* is housed in one of two similar cells: the other hosts the Vṛddhakāleśvar *liṅga*. These cells were likely intended to be an independent temple but were later incorporated into the larger complex, which was undergoing renovation during my research. This name Mahāmṛtyuñjaya refers to another *liṅga* in a different part of the building. The temple was presumably previously known as Vṛddhakāl; indeed, in the lists of addresses of the pilgrimage route to the *jyotirlingas*, Mahākāl is noted to be ‘within the perimeter of Vṛddhakāl’ (Sukul 1977, 173; Vyās 2011 [1987], 136; Singh 1993, 159). The Kāśīdarpaṇa places it nearby. The merging of Mahāmṛtyuñjaya

98 From an interview with Shriram Suvedi, March 2012.

99 Vaidyanath has an additional representative in Parli, Maharashtra.

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with the surrounding shrines must, then, have happened in relatively recent years.¹⁰⁰

Above the cells of Mahākāl and Vṛddhakāl, a series of frescoes illustrates the manifestations of the *liṅgas*, accompanied by verses.¹⁰¹ As we will see, the text relating to Mahākāl reproduces in a condensed—and in some cases modified—form the stories collected in the ŚP about the greatness of the eponymous ‘original’ divine manifestation. The section related to Vṛddhakāl, draws from narratives presented in the KKh.

The first narrative about Mahākāl, depicted in four panels, tells how he manifested to defeat the demon Dūṣaṇa, who had disturbed a group of sages, or devotees of Śiva, in Avantī, (Ujjain). This form is described as supreme among the twelve *jyotirliṅgas*, with its locations indicated as Kāśī and Avantī. The next scene shows the climax of the story, grouping various moments into a single depiction: the sages are shown in devotion around the *liṅga* at the centre. The demons are seen in two places: on the left, they are in an attacking stance, while on the right they are defeated and in flames. Above, in the centre, Śiva triumphs, evidently having caused the depicted events as a result the veneration of the *liṅga* by the sages. A final scene illustrates the fusion of the deity’s anthropomorphic form with the *liṅga*, as the sages pay homage. This story, conveyed through the images and the inscribed verses, relates to the origins of Mahākāl in Ujjain as narrated in the ŚP collections.¹⁰²

The transposition of Mahākāl is the only case among our examples that visually presents the narrative about the origins of the *liṅga*, making it accessible to all visitors. The appropriation of the ‘original’ site’s narrative by the transposed reality, however, recalls what we have seen at Rāmeśvar, enriched here by an intrusion of local reality into the narrative. At the conclusion of the story, the text states: ‘kāśī madhya avantī yah mahākāl kā sthān’, indicating that Avantī, the place (*sthān*) of Mahākāl, is in the centre (*madhya*) of Kāśī (Fig. 7).

The second narrative depicted in three scenes concerns the king of Avantī, who seeks refuge in Mahākāl when tormented by difficulties. This story draws directly from the KS (17), which is not referenced in the earlier JS material, where the only myth regarding the origins of Mahākāl had no connection to Banaras.¹⁰³

100 Sarasvati (1993, 251–252) adds a visit to Mahāmṛtyuñjaya to the pilgrimage path, considering it an independent and separate place

101 During a later visit, I noticed that the frescoes had been transformed into bas-reliefs, now painted in much brighter colours. The depicted events remain the same.

102 The story of the demon Dūṣaṇa is narrated in JS 46 and KS 16. For a comprehensive collection of myths related to Mahākāl, including those in the SkP tradition, see Fleming 2007, 64–74.

103 The story was included at a later stage in the compilation of material about the twelve *jyotirliṅgas*. The JS dedicates only one chapter to Mahākāl, while the KS includes



Fig. 7 Depiction of the manifestation of Māhakāl in the images above the cell of the *liṅga* at the Mahāmṛtyuñjaya temple. Author's photo, March 2011.

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A further narrative focuses on the exploits of King Vṛddhakāl, as described in the KKh (24), which references the salvific qualities obtained by repeating the name of Mahākāl (KKh 24-83). This establishes a connection between the two divine forms, likely contributing to their interconnection in the real geography. The Mahāmṛtyuñjaya complex is currently managed by the Dikshit family, and the *mahant* of the temple participates in the pilgrimages of the KPYDS.

The Power of Transposition

From the ethnography of the various transposed realities, a polyphony of voices has emerged. Places form and reform by weaving connections between sites and divine forms located elsewhere; simultaneously, they cultivate ties—sometimes purely ideal or rhetorical—with other places in the city itself, such as the other local homonymous *jyotirlingas*. The temples where I conducted my research emerge as multivocal and multilocal expressions, sites that shape themselves based on the ability to create and, importantly, *maintain* significant references to other spaces and divine forms. These places are inscribed in plurality, and the transposition is characterised as one of the possible connections—sometimes one among many, as we will see in the case of Kedār jī—that express this plurality.

We have seen that the transposition of the ‘original’ sites is expressed and enacted in the local *jyotirlinga* shrines in various ways. It can occur through the repetition of a purely imaginary spatial prototype that is not directly known: the presence of a natural element, such as water or a hill, or simply a toponym, evokes not so much the ‘original’ site itself as its geographical context, but serves as the essence of the transposition (for example, in the cases of Mallikārjun, Rāmeśvar and Ghuśmeś). Alternatively, it can occur through the appropriation of the narrative of the ‘original’ site and the re-narration of the events that led to the manifestation of the ‘original’ *jyotirlinga*, now relocated within the geography of Banaras (Rāmeśvar and Mahākāl, in different ways). Another strategy employed, which ultimately supports all transpositions, is the act of renaming a local place with the name of a *jyotirlinga*: transposing the name is almost equivalent to transferring the location and the divine form itself. Indeed, the toponyms of *jyotirlingas*—like those of many other holy places on the subcontinent—correspond to divine names: in our case, they are names of Śiva that identify the deity as ‘Lord of x’.

two, the first of which (16) repeats the JS material with slight modifications, while the second (17) presents the myth of King Chandrasena.

The evocative power of such linguistic symbols is infinite: a vast range of mental, geographical, and emotional associations is encapsulated in the sounds that identify the various places encountered (cf. Basso 1988). The names of *jyotirlingas* carry with them the narratives of origins, confirmations and qualities—elements that can be re-positioned, in the sense of the verb ‘transpose’, by changing the original order of elements (cf. Ch. I).

It is important to emphasise that the range of possible modes of transposition relies, as shown by the cases illustrated, on the initiative of the officiants of the various temples. Each individual, with his own history and particular ritual roles, is active in the care of a shrine and in transmitting the traditions of the individual divine forms. His mediation between specific places and various worshippers is crucial to the ‘success’ of the temple. The traditions of these places thus depend on processes of individualisation (Fuchs and Rüpke 2015); this concept, which will resurface in the next chapter in the analysis of ritual specialists who systematise and promote local pilgrimages, sees the individual as fundamental to the development of religious traditions and, in our case, as influencing and defining the contours of various imagined spaces within the urban geography of Banaras and the wider Indian context.

The voices of the places speak to us about the possibility of mobilising, transmitting and defining the contours of a particular ‘original’ divine form in dispersed centres (cf. Remotti 2014), such as the urban framework of Banaras. Beyond attempts to connect with the powerful places of the elsewhere, the places of transposition maintain a continuous dialogue with the imagined space of the city. On one hand, it is the quality of universality and the magnificent power of the urban ground that explains the presence of these ‘replicas’, as emphasised by my interlocutors. On the other hand, the confirmation of these qualities of the city is found precisely in the presence of transposed places, which in turn uphold the tradition of the imagined space and reformulate it through daily acts and narratives. The ethnographies of transposition are, in phenomenological terms, examples of the creative reconstitution of imagined space by specific practices. *Kāśī*, glorified as a universal city that possesses every *tīrtha* within its territory, becomes such only through the narratives transmitted in its physical places and through renaming, revitalisation and reconstitution; situated and localised activities that evidently support the myth and universality of the city.

Similarly, the ‘original’ sites themselves, positioned in another dimension and distant from the here of the city, seem to be known only through the reflection glimpsed in their ‘doubles’. One might argue that it is precisely the transposition into local forms that keeps alive the sites and landscapes of pan-Indian significance in the imagination of pilgrims and local devotees. The power of transposition lies in the infinite possibilities for connection; plural, stratified and highly localised places can be experienced as resonant parts of a whole,

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composed of classes of deities and groups whose fragmentation, incompleteness and exportability to various elsewheres do not hinder the quest for unity at all.

Connections and resonances, however, are mutable and intrinsically fragile. The ties between sites here and elsewhere can lose vitality and even fall into oblivion because they depend heavily on the individual mediation of officiants and, ultimately, on the willingness and ability of devotees and pilgrims to see connections. These need to be cyclically reactivated through the redefinition of 'locality' (Appadurai 2001 [1996]), which I will discuss in detail in the final chapter. Both textual and visual sources, as well as observed reality, seem far from promoting the transposed *jyotirlingas* at Kāśī as part of a group. The concept of *jyotirlinga* and belonging to this divine class is certainly mentioned as a guarantee of importance and authenticity by promoters of the shrines, but inclusion in the whole often remains a purely ideal or rhetorical reference and does not translate into the cultivation of ties between them.

Now let us see how the pilgrimage route of Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā—and, more generally, local urban routes—provide further contexts for thinking about and constituting divine groups, and anchoring them to the urban reality of Banaras.

5 Local Urban Pilgrimages: Lists, Routes and Deviations

Pilgrimage and Pilgrimages: The Indian Context

The study of pilgrimage emerged as an independent area of investigation in anthropology relatively late, with the now-classic study by Turner (1978) on the modalities and meanings of this practice in the Christian world. The proposed model draws from studies on rites of passage and their stages. In particular, the journey of the pilgrim is compared to the experience of liminality that characterises many rites of passage; however, unlike someone preparing for initiation, the pilgrim voluntarily chooses the temporary detachment that this journey entails and shares this experience with fellow travellers. Pilgrims find themselves temporarily sharing something unique that creates a sense of communion among them; this is made possible by the fact that in this liminal period, according to the Turnerian model, everyday social divisions, rules and hierarchies diminish.

As pilgrimage studies developed, Turner's model has been reassessed, criticised and ultimately described as a possible ideal description of pilgrimage rather than an accurate empirical account (Eade and Sallnow 1991, Morinis 1992). Instead, religious travel is seen as encompassing the complexity of a broad spectrum in which both religious and secular meanings are shaped and debated by various social actors, and which can not be understood through a universal model, particularly one centred on the Christian world. More recent studies emphasise the need to view pilgrimage as a complex practice with social and economic impacts, one that extends beyond the performance of a specific route by pilgrims and directly or indirectly involves other social groups in the phases of preparation and promotion (Albera and Blanchard 2015). These are aspects that will prove fundamental in the case of the urban local routes of Banaras.

India provides an extraordinary example of the diversification of forms and meanings of this religious practice. Pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) to the holy sites across the vast subcontinental territory is one of the most significant and visible forms of Hinduism, and other Indian religious traditions frequently share destinations with the majority religion. Studies of this phenomenon in Hinduism have explored its origins and historical development, as well as the experiences and forms of pilgrimage at specific locations. Many scholars agree that through the promotion of pilgrimage—especially when it crosses regional boundaries—networks of

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places are created that, as in the case of the *vyotirlingas*, contribute to the spread of pan-Indian cults and shared landscapes (for example, Bhardwaj 1973; Varma 1990; Eck 1998 and 2012; Gutschow 2006, 340–346 and 367; Fleming 2009; Jacobsen 2013). As previously noted, however, creation of such a ‘community’ also entails the exclusion of those who do not belong, leading to a certain demonisation of the ‘other’, especially in contemporary India as highlighted by several scholars (Assayag 1997; Brosius 2003; Freitag 2008; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Lazzaretti 2023; Jacobsen 2024; Lazzaretti and Jacobsen 2024)

The study of Hindu pilgrimage practices inevitably intertwines with studies of specific destinations and their historical transformations. The literature of glorification (*māhātmyās* and *sthālapurāṇas*) tends to focus on detailed descriptions of these places, but neither elaborates the stages of pilgrimage nor defines it merely as a journey to reach a destination. Glorifications do, however, list the various places and divine forms that constitute the sacred geography of holy sites (Jacobsen 2013), and these lists often translate into local routes within the territory of a relevant *tīrtha*. Thus, lists of divine groups form the theoretical and prescriptive foundation for a level of pilgrimage comprised of urban routes commonly referred to as circumambulations (*pradakṣiṇā*, *parikrama*). These routes through or around, rather than towards, a sacred centre are integral to the activities pilgrims can engage in once they reach a specific destination, such as a city like Banaras.

The sources that document and visualise divine groups, the channels of their transmission, the social actors who have facilitated their formation and popularity and those who promote their development into actual routes constitute a complex field of research. Such research, though, can enrich understandings of the meanings of pilgrimage in its multiple dimensions, and contribute as well to understandings of the concept of *tīrtha*. This chapter, then, rather than dealing with the experiences of pilgrims, which has been the general orientation of most anthropological work on pilgrimage, focuses on the individual experiences of those I called elsewhere ‘pilgrimage makers’ (Lazzaretti 2019), namely the actors involved in ‘designing’ the practice and routes. This ‘design’ manifests in the extensive production that catalogues divine forms and locations and prescribes the rituals associated with pilgrimage, as well as ways in which source material from the past is interpreted and transmitted. All of this is done by individuals, in various ways and with different approaches.

Influenced by the reflections of several scholars on the concept of heritage and the dynamics of cultural heritage formation (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Hafstein 2007; Smith and Akagawa 2008; Bendix 2008), I propose to interpret local urban pilgrimages as a particular form of cultural heritage. The process of constructing cultural heritage has been defined as the selection of cultural fragments that, once imbued with value by a particular community, acquire the

status of heritage (Bendix 2009). This is a complex dynamic of cultural production that relates to the interpretation of the past and characterises all societies across all eras. The forms of local pilgrimage, the process of transmission of information about them and the various actors involved can therefore be understood as a specific form of heritage—one in which the individuals involved are not merely carriers of heritage but rather active agents in its elaboration (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 58).

In their own era, various compilers and promoters of local urban pilgrimage in Banaras have selected sacred locations to include in the routes, named them, transmitted information about their worship and helped ensure their fame. As we will see when analysing the substitute pilgrimage to local *jyotirlingas*, contemporary pilgrimage makers continue to rewrite and select from the sources and the work of compilers in previous eras, ‘reorienting the past’ (Acri and Pinkney 2014) and ‘making the story new’ (Lazzaretti 2019), albeit through different methods. The various interpretations and individual ways of embodying traditions in the urban pilgrimage scene in Banaras is, in my view, a fundamental illustration of the importance of a microscopic and ethnographic approach to investigating the processes of individualisation (Fuchs and Rüpke 2015), or the influential actions of individual people in the evolution of religious traditions. The dimension of the individual, and especially the continuous exchange between the person inhabiting a place and the place itself, which nourishes and shapes both in a process of continuous becoming (Ingold 2000), will emerge in the case of Kedarnath Vyas and other experts and practitioners involved in the making of urban pilgrimages in Banaras.

Local Urban Pilgrimages of Banaras, Yesterday and Today: Sources, Actors and Research Context

As noted when discussing the history of Banaras, the establishment of urban pilgrimage routes marks a crucial stage in the ongoing reimagining of the city by various actors and social forces. These routes, often described and perceived as having been handed down from ancient sources, have development paths that are not well understood and are presumably quite distinct from one another. As mentioned above, glorifications often mention the locations of various deities and enumerate, albeit not systematically, a series of divine places, but the mechanics of actual pilgrimage is not detailed. By the time of the KKh, the most authoritative and comprehensive glorification of the city, however, the destinations of thirteen

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routes are listed in the final chapter.¹⁰⁴ The KKh as well mentions more than three thousand names of places and deities associated with the city (Dimmers and Gengnagel 2003). The panorama of pilgrimage routes expands in the seventeenth century, with the KR detailing the Pañcakrośiyātrā, currently the most well-known urban route. Its 108 stages and its path were, however, formalised only in the 19th century (Gengnagel 2011).

There are also numerous compendiums (*nibandhans*) that draw primarily from the KKh and KR to reproduce and reinterpret lists and sometimes quote entire passages from the glorifications. Gengnagel (2011, 43) highlights the diversity of lists, orders and enumeration in texts from the period immediately following the compilation of the KR. The routes then seem to gain greater importance between the 18th and 20th centuries, amidst the architectural ‘resurrection’ (Desai 2007) of the city and the ‘Hinduization’ of the urban landscape. As noted, the materialisation of the textual geography onto the urban fabric is also facilitated by the prolific production of pictorial and printed maps; through the visualisation of the routes, the divine groups from the glorifications are projected and anchored to the physical territory (Gutschow 2006, Gengnagel 2011).

In the 19th and 20th centuries secondary literature that describes the city introduces more systematisation of routes: new schemes and methods are developed to circumscribe and organise the diverse material collected.¹⁰⁵ Alongside lists and routes, places themselves also evolved. Individual shrines, often competing with one another to attract more devotees and offerings, presumably viewed urban pilgrimage and connection with other shrines as a potential way to achieve fame and success. We have seen something of this in the renaming of Bhīmāśankar and Ghuśmeśvar (cf. Chapter 4). When the urban landscape features different homonymous representatives of a single divine form, as noted for several transpositions and as in the case of the substitute route for the twelve *jyotirlingas* that I describe later, we see evidence of the ongoing negotiation between ritual specialists of individual places and the compilers of modern lists to select and sanction the inclusion of one representative or another in an ‘official’ list for the specific route.

The flourishing of local pilgrimage practices led to the crystallisation of a central space that, until very recently, served as the ritual arena for them and remains at the centre of debates regarding the routes. The area near Jñānavāpī, with its

104 In KKh 100 the routes mentioned are *pañcatīrthiyātrā*, *vaiśveśvarīyātrā*, *aṣṭāyatanayātrā*, *śubhayātrā*, *caturdaśaliṅgayātrā*, *ekadaśaliṅgayātrā*, *gaurīyātrā*, *vighneśayātrā*, *bairavayātrā*, *raviyātrā*, *caṇḍīyātrā*, *antargṛhayātrā* and *viṣṇuyātrā*.

105 The most notable example is the canonisation of the number 108 for the stops that make up the Pañcakrośiyātrā, introduced only in the 19th century. For more on this route, see Gengnagel 2005.

ritual specialists—the Vyas family, whom I will discuss shortly—likely became the focal point for *saṅkalpa* rituals in the first half of the 19th century.¹⁰⁶ This practice, prescribed by both the KKh for the Antargṛhayātrā and the KR for the Pañcakrośīyātrā as having to take place in the Mukṭīmaṇḍapa (the ‘Pavilion of Liberation’, where the Jñānavāpī well is located), was definitively anchored to this site and, at least ideally or rhetorically, extended to all other pilgrimages from this period onward.¹⁰⁷ The systematisation of the routes thus coincides with attempts—by compilers, ritual specialists, patrons and city administrators—to canonise rules, spaces and ritual authorities, thus establishing boundaries that, as we will see, are nevertheless inherently porous and subject to ongoing negotiation.

Through painstaking study of past glorifications and on the ground exploration of the city by various individuals—some of whom I will introduce shortly—the divine population described in the texts gradually solidifies within the urban fabric. A crucial testament to this process is the publication of the Hindi edition of the KKh edited by Narayanpati Tripathi (1908), which includes the Kāśīyātrā as an introduction.¹⁰⁸ This provides lists of the various urban routes with names of the divine forms, along with their geographical locations, the most auspicious times to visit and textual references for each. The Kāśīyātrā collection would later circulate independently, prompting the compilation of additional pamphlets, guides, compendiums for pilgrims and modern glorifications of the city—a body of work that has so far attracted the attention of only a few scholars, albeit tangentially (for example, Gengnagel 2011, Desai 2017). As detailed elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2019), numerous other publications of this kind, which I term ‘modern *māhātmyas*’, elaborate past material in various ways, updating locations as urban geography change. In more recent works, the geographical indications become specific addresses that, as we will see, remain a source of heated debate.¹⁰⁹

106 The term *saṅkalpa* refers to formulas pronounced by the officiant and participants in a ritual. In the case of pilgrimages routes, there are initial and final formulas. More generally, *saṅkalpa* indicates a promise or an oath. For a study of some types of *saṅkalpa*, see Michaels 2005.

107 In first half of the 19th century, Jñānavāpī (‘the well of knowledge’) was the focus of an architectural restructuring that culminated in the construction of the pavilion housing the well. This restructuring was sponsored by Baija Bai, the widow of Daulat Rao Sindhia of Gwalior—whose family were patrons of other architectural projects in the city—and promoted by the colonial administration (Sherring 1868, Medhasananda 2002). For the history of Jñānavāpī, see Lazzaretti 2017.

108 The Sanskrit text was published by Hariprasad Sharma in 1908 and the Hindi translation by Narayanpati Tripathi appeared as *Kāśīkhaṇḍabhāṣā* in the same year, published by Venkateshvara Steam Press, Bombay. Both versions are in a four-volume publication edited by Karunapati Tripathi (son of Narayanpati Tripathi), released between 1991 and 1998.

109 The list of references in this book has an overview of the sources analysed.

5 Local Urban Pilgrimages: Lists, Routes and Deviations

Despite the large number of publications of this kind, negotiation of the locations, deities and stages of pilgrimage routes continues to this day. The most extensive modern *māhātmyas* are those of Kubernath Sukul (1977) and Kedarnath Vyas (2011 [1987]), which incorporate increasing numbers of pilgrimages and lists of locations: it is worth noting that apart from the thirteen *yātrās* explicitly mentioned in the KKh, these texts contain no fewer than fifty lists of divine forms and their locations, corresponding—at least on paper—to urban pilgrimage routes. Variations continue, and as we will see in the case of the substitute pilgrimage to local *jyotirliṅgas*, the contemporary dynamics of redefinition of urban pilgrimages is a vital area for the production and reproduction of religious heritage.

During two research periods in 2011, alongside my occasional visits to Kedār jī, I began to gather material on other local transposed *jyotirliṅga* shrines. To find out the location of a minor shrine in the city, it is necessary to obtain modern *māhātmyas* that lists the divine groups of Kāśī. Then, given the variety of selection criteria used by the authors of those glorifications, which often present more than one representative for each divine name and form, it is essential to compare them. At the same time, I spoke with various interlocutors—temple officiants, devotees and local scholars—to construct a picture of the complex reality. Obviously, this process was not linear; interactions with interlocutors meant that each presented their own ideas about the exact location of shrines, and referred to the relevant textual material to sustain their interpretations, leading me constantly to revise my few certainties.

Some of my interlocutors spoke to me about a pilgrimage to the twelve local *jyotirliṅga* temples, the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, and placed it in the summer month of Śrāvaṇa. Until then, the idea that such a route was being practiced in contemporary times was merely a hypothesis; my reading had not clarified whether the lists of divine names were actually used as prescriptions for routes by individual pilgrims or whether pilgrimages were being undertaken by organised groups. According to several interlocutors, it was both: I was told that both individuals and groups of pilgrims used the lists as a basis for pilgrimage to the various shrines. I wanted then to understand who the organisers, guides and individuals involved were.

Subsequently, I discovered that there were several associations involved in organising local routes, particularly the Pañcakrośīyātrā, which was the only urban pilgrimage known to most local people and pilgrims I spoke with. It was by pure chance that I became aware of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, promoted by what turned out to be the most active organisation dedicated to the actual practice of the pilgrimage routes in the city. At the end of my first research stay I found the annual program of the KPDYS posted outside several temples and decided that I would return to Banaras to participate in the route of the twelve,

so that I could begin to integrate the disparate information about the group of temples with the living practice. Participating in the KPDYS pilgrimage, and later talking with the organisers and participating in other urban routes organised by the KPDYS and others, allowed me to develop a description of that living practice. I was also able to access the list referenced by the KPDYS to compare it with lists in the publications of other local experts, assess the deviations introduced and question the causes and effects of changes in the tradition of urban pilgrimage, thus opening new research avenues.

A crucial point in my research came after I returned to Banaras and encountered an exceptional guide, after having participated in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā and completed my work on the group of twelve. Until then, I had engaged with many informants, choosing not to have a privileged interlocutor and preferring to collect a variety of voices. We have already seen that the names and addresses of the shrines do not guarantee success in finding them, and the researcher's mood is often affected as they try to navigate through apparently contradictory lists and addresses, as well as the complex urban fabric of the city. It is no surprise, then, that many local and foreign scholars have had the personal guidance of local ritual specialists¹¹⁰—illustrating that such knowledge is transmitted from individual to individual, where the 'instructor' is someone who has an understanding of both textual material and topography.

The name of Kedarnath Vyas had been mentioned by interlocutors since my early stays in the city but looking back it is clear that meeting him changed my life and shaped my subsequent research interests. Vyas jī became, and was until he passed away in January 2020, a privileged interlocutor—a central narrative voice, both subject and object of research—at the convergence of a series of paths of which our first encounter was only one. At that time, he was already a well-known figure in Banaras, and perhaps a sort of reverential awe had kept me at a distance until then. As a member of a local Brahman family which holds hereditary rights over the rituals of *saṅkalpa* and the area around Jñānavāpī, and as a teacher to many scholars, Vyas's reputation was further enhanced by the fact that several promoters of local routes recognised him as an authority and somehow representative of the urban pilgrimage tradition. I was aware before meeting him of his ability to navigate the names, stories and locations of the rich divine population of Banaras. Niels Gutschow describes him this way:

110 Singh mentions Vyas as his local guide to the routes. Eck refers to Sukul's tradition and mentions other informants including the Tripathi family of Viśvanāth. Michaels, Gutschow, Gengnagel and the Varanasi Research Project group from Heidelberg University gained access to the temples and routes through the collaboration of Singh and Vyas, who served as mentors and guarantors during their stays.

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Walking briskly at the head of them is Kedarnath Vyas, always with a clear objective. He is a walking atlas of the city. So it is not surprising that despite his 70 years, he knows every single thoroughfare. Born directly next to the temple dedicated to the Lord of the World, or Vishvanath, this Brahmin son is himself part of the centre. One could even say he personally represents the centre. He brings to life the universe that has been realised in the sacred landscape about the city. Which is why he can set out without any hesitation for any of the hundreds of places named in the fourteenth century texts. Vyas guarantees not only orientation in space, but also in the texts. He knows all the paths that connect the temples of even the most diverse pilgrimages, so that the routes the group takes, from a to b or from temple 97 to temple 98, seem to open up by themselves. Often the struggling group loses contact with the Brahmin as he hurries down the alleys in his white dhoti. They would be lost without him, sucked into the seemingly endless hubbub of the backstreets which only an initiate can read as a subtle hierarchy. Vyas is not only a municipal atlas and scholar in one, not only a means of orientation in space and in spirit, but also a kind of protective shield. [...] In his search for hidden places, Vyas acts as the key to long sought and at times truly hidden chambers, sometimes located two storeys beneath the city's present ground level. Set in the bowels of the city, they recall a long lost topography of the city that has been covered over. Vyas leads the way through the chaotic space and locates the desired places. There's scarcely an alley in which he doesn't meet someone he knows [...].¹¹¹

When I met him about fifteen years after Gutschow he was over eighty years old, but he still knew about the multiplicity of gods, and especially of places; and he knew the lists of divine names, the appropriate timing, the gestures to perform and the formulas to pronounce when starting a pilgrimage in the city. He still had the heavy aura of authority surrounding him but Kedarnath Vyas was much more than that. When I knew him he had visibly aged and was an old man in decline, whose role—painstakingly built and reinforced over time—was being questioned by new logics, different conceptions of space and other looming projects for the city. I have always preferred the fragile and sad man to the ideal ritual specialist I had envisioned before meeting him; he still embodied a municipal atlas, even though could only walk the streets in his mind, because he had memorised the names of the gods and the corners of the city. I think I was fortunate to meet him when he was already in his old age, even though we could

111 Bau and Gutschow 2006, 13–15.

not venture in search of hidden *liṅgas* as other scholars had done, because I feel I had a paradoxically privileged access (as a female researcher in a world of male interlocutors). I was able to discover Kedarnath Vyas as a person, and not just Vyas the local authority—a discovery based on a relationship of trust and friendship over some years,¹¹² the meanings and ambiguities of which I aim to reflect on in my future writings. Sitting with him on the roof of his old house, in a panoramic position between the Viśvanāth temple and the Gyān Vāpī mosque, listening to his uncertainties about the new trends in pilgrimage routes, his fears for the present and his memories of the past, and about the weight of his declining authority, Vyas provided me with new insights into the variations in tradition and opened countless paths of research and human understanding which I am still exploring. Kedarnath Vyas presented himself to the foreign researcher as a supreme expert and the natural heir to local pilgrimage traditions, justifying his authority by highlighting his family’s role at Jñānavāpī. He explained that the Vyas family has always had a connection to this central ritual arena, and their ritual authority is rooted in their home’s location there, at the heart of the city. They saw themselves as the owners and managers of the area, a position that distinguished them from the other ritual specialists we will encounter later, but which evolved and changed after my research and I have detailed elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2019 and 2021).

Vyas’s life can be understood through the perspective of dwelling proposed by Ingold (2000). He embodies a constant ‘sensory engagement’ with the space he has inhabited; his stories reveal the ongoing exchange between the individual Vyas and the city as a lived space—an exchange that shaped and reshaped the person he became. In the last part of his life he genuinely felt at one with the space of Jñānavāpī, and that he embodied the city itself. He was one of four rather quarrelsome and competitive brothers and had not been formally educated, having completed only three years of schooling before needing to work to support his family. Vyas then has traveled extensively while working in various sectors; he is described by his brother’s son as the family member who worked the hardest.

At fifty, Vyas returned to Banaras and dedicated himself to what he believed was his true calling. He began researching the city, comparing past materials with the urban geography, spending days and nights searching for places and becoming one of the foremost experts of his time. Vyas considered his personal library an inexhaustible treasure in which he could find answers to questions about the sacred territory, and relocate the past in the present. Eventually he published his monograph (Vyas 2001 [1987]), which includes lists for 57 *yātrās* and 293 sacred water sites (ibid., 218–231). The work was fuelled by the continuous

112 A reflection on friendship as an ambiguous relationship between ethnographers and field interlocutors can be found in Monsutti 2008.

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exchange between Vyas as a person and the city's locations, mediated by a series of encounters throughout his life. One significant encounter was with the voices of the past, such as the authors and experts who came before him, as he gathered and systematised glorifications, reorienting the past and making it relevant and tangible. His encounter with places, though, initially through their divine names mentioned in historical sources and later in the tangible geography of the city, has undoubtedly helped shape both the places and the individual (Ingold 2000). On one hand, Vyas was deeply attached to the city's space and always striving to immerse himself in it. He dreamed at night of the locations in the city and even in old age, when he could move less, he tried to place the divine forms precisely, visualising them in his mind and feeling them in his body. On the other hand, the places he sought, measured, selected, transcribed and narrated have undoubtedly gained recognition, becoming 'official' representatives of specific divine forms.

Other encounters that shaped the vital exchange between Vyas and the city's space include the people he has met throughout his life. Many of them, he recalls, recognised something special in him—a light (*rauśnī*) or a particular beauty—something he described with humility and timidity. These individuals, he felt, acknowledged his authority before he even realised it. He holds negative memories, though, of encounters with other pilgrimage experts, most of whom he considered impostors.

Additionally, the meetings he had in his seventies with a series of international researchers facilitated his process of self-recognition. These exchanges have solidified his status as the 'representative of the centre' that Gutschow describes. Vyas kept the publications of many German scholars as part of his treasure, often showing newcomers—like me—his name in them. Paradoxically, perhaps, he had more respect for foreign researchers than those local pilgrimage 'experts', whose assertions about sacred locations he often criticised.

As for us, our encounter and my role as a listener opened the door to his life story, now reconstructed from a perspective different from the way he had typically presented himself to other researchers in the past. Rather than focusing on his role as a guide and local expert, his narrative shifted to emphasise the precariousness of his authority, which stemmed partly from ongoing transformations in the area traditionally inhabited by his family—a topic I will briefly touch upon later, but which is explored further elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2021a and 2023).

Vyas's testimony speaks of a continual struggle for recognition within a Brahman class that, contrary to the way it is often perceived, is anything but unified and exhibits internal hierarchies, prejudices and competition. His case, while unique because of the specific ritual role his family carved out over the centuries, is significant because it demonstrates the centrality of the individualisation

process—driven by personal initiative—in the reformulation of ritual and religious traditions. Vyas was motivated by personal drive and specific inclinations, competition with his brothers, faith and especially love for the city's places. He dedicated himself to local urban pilgrimages during a specific period of his life and from that moment, he based his existence on this 'mission', becoming one with it. We will see later, in discussing other promoters and organisers (who have roles quite different from Vyas) that the drive toward a goal, specifically the promotion of local pilgrimages, often seems to be a task for which those individuals feel chosen or predestined.

The Transposed *Jyotirlingas* as a Group

From the multiplicity of voices that have reached us in the sources on local *jyotirlingas* (cf. Chapter 3) and from the ethnographies of the places of transposition (cf. Chapter 4), it is difficult to think of the *jyotirlingas* in Banaras as a unified group. They are individually present both in glorifications and visual representations of the sacred space as independent entities, disconnected from each other, whose connections with the city and with spaces elsewhere are based on well-differentiated narrative modes and strategies, not attributable to a single type of transposition.

The transposed *jyotirlingas* emerge as part of a group relatively late in the history of the city, and perhaps never definitively; as noted, the maps of the 18th and 19th centuries initially depict only some of the locations in question. Sukul's *Kāśīdarpaṇa* includes almost all the *jyotirlingas*, but some of the locations do not correspond to those later recognised and the omission of some elements indicates that those temples were still missing from the group at the end of the 19th century. As noted, the case of the *jyotirlingas* is not comparable to other lists of deities in the *KKh*, indeed the text does not provide a systematic list of them and rarely identifies them as *jyotirlingas*. The same fragmented situation is found in the maps.

We might be tempted to characterise the idea of the presence of the group of twelve *jyotirlingas* in the territory of Banaras and the formation of the related pilgrimage route as an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In the now widely accepted sense given by these scholars, invented traditions are defined as sets of practices that are established in short periods of time and that, while openly referencing a selectively constructed past, assert themselves as ritual and symbolic customs intended to instil certain values or beliefs. They present themselves as immutable realities, though, while asserting a purely fictitious continuity with the historical past. These scholars emphasise that immutability

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is a criterion for identifying invented traditions and distinguishing them from customs and what they call ‘authentic traditions’ (ibid., 3–4). The latter, unlike the former, are characterised by adaptability, vitality and the ability to reinvent themselves.

In my view, however, when looked at in light of the revision of the dialectic between great and little traditions, and between Sanskritisation and ‘deshification’ (which I will mention in the final chapter), the distinction between authentic and invented traditions seems to lose significance. Rather, each tradition appears to be built on continuous inventions, borrowings and reformulations, and above all every place has a plurality of connections that are always evolving. As the case of the *vyotirliṅgas* shows, immutability might be more of an ideal than an actual characteristic, a quality to which a tradition appeals in order to present itself as strong, along with its claim of antiquity.

The secondary literature records the appearance of the local group of twelve rather late: the *Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā*, unlike the routes mentioned in the *KKh*, does not appear in the 18th and 19th-century manuscript sources analysed by Gengnagel (2011, 44–49), nor, for example, in the 1908 *Kāśīyātrā* collection, whose list of *yātrās* is referenced in many subsequent publications on the topic.¹¹³

The group seems first to have been included in Kubernath Sukul’s 1977 publication. It may therefore be presumed that the author introduced the route, deriving it from a source that can probably not be traced now, and conducted research on the presence of these locations in the territory. By formulating the list, he most likely initiated debate on the authenticity of the locations of the transposed *vyotirliṅgas*. The source provided by Vyas (1987) for his list of the twelve is the *Śivarahasya*, considered an *upapurāṇa*;¹¹⁴ however, the same reference does not appear in Sukul’s bibliography—indicating that two leading experts of the last century about the sacred geography compiled their lists of the twelve independently, referring to different traditions and sometimes selecting different locations for one or more representatives of the group. This hypothesis would not be undermined by the already noted critical stance of Vyas towards

113 An overview of the primary sources consulted for this research can be found in the list of references. Between November 2016 and March 2017, I was given access to the private library of Kedarnath Vyas, which includes the sources he used in compiling his 1987 monograph. Only one source emerged that includes a list of the twelve and their locations: a *Kāśīyātrāprakāśa* (a title used by several publications of this type), edited by Keshav Krishna Pavgi and published by Hitacintak Press, Banaras (second edition, 1951). The list has some variations from those of Sukul or Vyas; in particular, *Someśvar* is absent, while *Gokarneś* is included. Some recorded locations seem to have fallen into disuse in later years.

114 The source has so far proven to be untraceable.



Fig. 8 ‘Map of Kashi’, or *Aslī kāśī kṣetra kā nakṣā*, 20th century. Author’s private collection.

some of Sukul’s choices, which he considered arbitrary and not in accordance with tradition.

The idea of the group of twelve *jyotirlingas* became more prominent with the distribution of maps in the 20th century. The ‘Map of Kashi’ or ‘*Aslī kāśī kṣetra kā nakṣā*’ (Fig. 8), widely circulated until a few decades ago but nowadays found only in a few bookshops, includes the *jyotirlingas* in its picture border but does not locate them in the territory. Gutschow (2006, 105) suggested that the places depicted in this border could be interpreted as representing the divine space of the whole subcontinent. In my opinion, however, the inclusion of places that are elsewhere in the border of a map of Banaras could also be intended to appropriate these divine manifestations within Kāśī—an idea far from alien to glorification discourses. In more recent images of the city the *jyotirlingas* are a consistent presence and the group is now undoubtedly associated with the space of Banaras. At their pan-Indian sites, popular depictions typically show the local *jyotirlinga* as the central figure, surrounded by the other members of the group. However, particularly in one postcard-like image that I interpret as a direct reworking of ‘*Aslī kāśī kṣetra kā nakṣā*’, the ‘original’ Viśvanāth *jyotirlinga* does not seem to be the central focus of the representation. Instead, it depicts the riverfront, now an undisputed icon of

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the city, in which Viśvanāth is just one of the members of the group along with the others. The entire class simply appears to be present in the urban space (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9 Postcard image of Kāśī with the group of *jyotirlingas*, 21st century. Author's private collection.

The Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā in Banaras: From Lists to Practice

The diversification of criteria, sources and interpretations in the evolution of the lists and their practice emerges from a comparison of the two main versions of the list of local *jyotirlingas* to which contemporary practitioners likely refer: those by Sukul (1977) and Vyas (2011 [1987]). Like the main lists of pan-Indian *jyotirlingas*, the sequences proposed by Sukul and Vyas do not seem to consider the practicality of the pilgrimage route but practicality would later become central in pilgrimages promoted by the KPDYS. The lists differ from each other, as shown below:

| SUKUL (1977) | VYAS (1987) |
|---------------|------------------|
| Somnāth | Someśvar |
| Mallikārjun | Śaileśvar |
| Mahākāl | Mahākāleśvar |
| Oṃkāreśvar | Oṃkāreśvar |
| Vaidhyanāth | Kedāreśvar |
| Bhīmāśaṅkar | Bhīmāśaṅkareśvar |
| Rāmeśvar | Viśveśvar |
| Nāgeśvar | Tryambakeśvar |
| Tryambakeśvar | Vaidhyanātheśvar |
| Kedār | Nāgeśvar |
| Ghuṣṛṇeśvar | Rāmeśvar |
| Viśveśvar | Ghuṣṛṇīś |

The Vyas list reflects one of the most widespread variants of the Jyotirliṅgastotra; it seems, therefore, that it was compiled by following the order of recitation of a sequence of names already validated by tradition rather than derived from practice.

We do not know whether Sukul’s list stems from a different recitation of the Jyotirliṅgastotra, from a previous list or (less likely) whether it reflects an actual route on the ground. Such lists—especially those of classes of deities that do not explicitly constitute a *yātrā* in the source texts, as is the case here—seem to represent an attempt to inventory the places corresponding to the names and divine forms mentioned in the glorifications, first among them the KKh. This tendency toward collection is also inherent in the compilation of Purāṇic lists, which are not necessarily created to prescribe routes but only later stimulate the emergence of practice.

The list of the transposed *jyotirliṅgas*, initially transcribed following a canonical order of recitation of their names—detached from the spatial context—subsequently becomes a prescription for an actual route to be walked and later, in a subsequent phase, adapts according to the topographical reality and to facilitate ritual performance. Today, the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā is organised only by the KPDYS, which also promotes about twenty other urban pilgrimages throughout the year. The KPDYS follows the lists used by the association’s founder, Shivanand Sarasvati (1993), while introducing slight variations (as I observed

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in practice). The association has been operating since 1979 and was officially registered in 1999 according to Sarasvati (2001, 249), or in 2000 according to Uma Shankar Gupta, the current organiser of the association. According to him, the association aligns with the traditions promoted and recorded by previous experts, including Kedarnath Vyas and Kubernath Sukul; however, today the KPDYS operates completely independently, aiming to spread the practice and knowledge of various shrines excluded from the classic visitation routes of the sacred territory.¹¹⁵ In addition to organising pilgrimages on specific dates, the association also arranges private ad hoc urban pilgrimages on the request of interested pilgrims and visitors.

The founder and spiritual leader of the KPDYS, Shivanand Sarasvati, was a disciple of Swami Karpatri ji (1907–1982),¹¹⁶ an ascetic of the Dandisvāmi order and a key figure in opposition to the reform movements in Hinduism in the 20th century. Karpatri notably opposed the reformist Ārya Samāj and in 1940 founded the Dharma Saṅgha in Banaras, which later established branches in cities across northern India (Marchetto 2009, 21–22). This institution was one of the associations that emerged in response to Christian missionaries and reform movements, and wanted to defend what was proclaimed to be the ‘orthodox tradition’ or *sanātana dharma* of Hinduism.¹¹⁷ In Banaras, the memory of Karpatri ji is inextricably linked to his involvement in the cow protection movement, for which he was incarcerated, and to the establishment of a new temple of Kāśī Viśvanāth, which so-called ‘untouchables’ were not permitted to enter. He is widely regarded as an icon of orthodoxy and served as a reference point for local religious authorities in Banaras until his death in 1982.¹¹⁸

The KPDYS emerged first as the Kāśī Yātrā Darśana Maṇḍala (Gengnagel 2005, 76). An initial period of collaboration between the Vyas family and Shivanand Sarasvati’s organisation is reported by both Vyas jī and Gupta jī, who considers Vyas an undisputed authority and confirms that the organisation relies heavily on

115 From an interview with Uma Shankar Gupta, July 2011.

116 For a comprehensive account of the life, work and thoughts of Karpatri, see Pellegrini 2009.

117 The first association for the defence of *dharma* was probably the Dharma Sabhā, which was established in 1830 in Bengal and opposed movements for the reform of Hinduism. It particularly spoke against notions that Hinduism should be purified from practices considered ‘primitive’, such as the worship of images. The frequent visits to Banaras of Dayanand Sarasvati, founder of the Ārya Samāj, sparked heated debates among the intellectual elite and Upadhyaya (1983, 824–829) reports, for example, on clashes at the end of the 19th century between Dayanand and the local Brahman community, in relation to the worship of *mūrtis*.

118 There has been much discussion about Karpatri and his political activities, which many consider to be aligned with Hindu nationalism. Zolli (2009) offers a different interpretation.

his published work. However, this initial collaboration—during which all urban pilgrimages began with rituals at the Vyās Pīṭha, the ‘throne’ where a member of the Vyas family sits and guides pilgrims in reciting the *saṅkalpa*—came to an end for reasons I will discuss later. Subsequently, Vyas jī has been highly critical of the activities of the KPDYS, which has become the most active organisation of its kind.

In addition to accusing its leader of plagiarising material from his publications,¹¹⁹ Vyas jī considers the routes promoted by the KPDYS to be incorrect (he uses the terms *tūtā* or ‘broken’ and *ultā* or ‘upside down’) because they follow an incorrect order, prioritising the practicality of the path and, above all, failing to respect the *saṅkalpa* ritual. Open argumentation about the correct execution of the routes has ruptured relationships, as evidenced by Vyas jī’s eloquent reactions of regret and irritation about the matter, which I have witnessed several times.¹²⁰

As I observed in the case of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā (July 24, 2011), pilgrimages organised by the KPDYS generally begin at the first temple listed in the sequence, where the *pandā* or *pujārī* of the site performs the initial ritual for the pilgrims, rather than at the Vyās Pīṭha. This means that the Vyas family is no longer involved and has progressively lost some of its ritual authority, along with a significant source of income; indeed, as with many Hindu rituals, the offering to the officiant is an integral and necessary part of the rite itself. Moreover, the Vyās Pīṭha, the starting and ending point for all routes, is overlooked during the association’s pilgrimages, thus losing its specific role as a ritual arena. In addition to the above criticism of the KPDYS, Vyas jī believes that some locations in the lists followed by the association are incorrect and not authentic.

We know that, as has happened with the route of the *jyotirliṅgas*, some temples identified as part of routes in previous centuries have fallen into disuse, and new shrines dedicated to those deities have emerged and continue to emerge to renew and revitalise interest in the tradition. The contemporary routes of the KPDYS do seem to prioritise newer locations, such as the ‘new’ Ghuśmeśvar discussed in the fourth chapter. This logic strongly contrasts with the position taken by Vyas.

Sarasvati appears to have reformulated the lists for the KPDYS so that they correspond to more easily practicable routes. In the case of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, though, even that is subsequently modified slightly—indicating that the execution of the pilgrimage takes precedence and in turn influences the prescription, or the list itself. Its latest version (which is to say, the one developed by taking cues from Sarasvati’s material and integrating it with knowledge of

119 Vyas jī refers to a case from 2008, in which the judge established that the references in Sarasvati’s publications originate from the Purāṇas and do not constitute plagiarism of Vyas’s material.

120 Gengnagel (2005, 78–79) describes the state of the dispute during the years 2000–2002.

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the geography), is very practical, following a direct path without long detours or deviations that would extend the journey, or make it more difficult.

However, it should be noted that while the main route followed has gradually been shaped to simplify the pilgrimage, deviations and additions to the route are commonplace. As I have observed, there are frequent detours to visit deities and shrines not listed as on the pilgrimage route; in the case of my participation in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, a stop at the second form of Ghuśmeś was included, as well as a stop at its newer shrine at Śivālā. This allowed for the addition of *darśana* of Baṭuk Bhairav as well as of course Kāmākhyādevī, the shrine where the auxiliary *liṅga* of Ghuśmeś is located. Baṭuk Bhairav is very close to Kāmākhyādevī, and its inclusion in the route was justified because it was Sunday, a day on which visiting Baṭuk Bhairav is auspicious; indeed, KPDYS routes are usually held on Sundays to encourage greater participation by workers.

Another deviation occurred during the stretch that leads from the relatively distant Oṃkāreśvar back towards the city centre; a visit to Kāl Bhairav was included, which is also considered auspicious on Sundays. Ironically, the instructions printed on the pamphlet distributed to pilgrims also anticipated a visit to Jñānavāpī, where the route would be completed with the *saṅkalpa*; this indication seems to be a faded trace of past practice—a trace that perhaps helps maintain, at least formally, some continuity with tradition.

For a certain period, the absence of a visit to Jñānavāpī and the Vyās Piṭha was fixed by a compromise of sorts that involved delivering an offering to the Vyas family.¹²¹ However, Vyas jī reported no connection with the KPDYS any more, and seemed unaware of most of its current practices. The issue of the *saṅkalpa* is apparently the focus of the clash between a ‘traditional’ and ‘orthodox’ view, in which the actions taken by the pilgrim must be sanctified ritually and in a specific location, and a more pragmatic vision, as taken by the KPDYS. In response to the criticisms made by Vyas jī, who, as we have seen, believes he is the embodiment and sole natural representative of the pilgrimage tradition, the arguments raised by the association are pragmatic. Gupta jī says that keeping the tradition of the routes alive is the primary goal of the association; attention is thus focused on the vitality of a practice that, in his view, risks disappearing due to a lack of successors to past experts, the limited activity of other institutions (Gengnagel 2005, 79) and a lack of interest and commitment to pilgrimage, especially on the part of the city’s residents.¹²²

121 This is the situation described by Gengnagel (2005, 79), which presumably developed in 2002, following discussions between the organisers and Vyas.

122 Gupta jī says ironically: *‘yahām ke log khālī viśvanāth kā darśana karte hein’* (‘people here only have the darshan of Viśvanāth’), meaning that the people of Banaras only want to visit Viśvanāth, rather than the other temples of the city. (From an interview

Gupta jī's argument, that it is better to perform modified routes than let the practice fade away, is not new in debates about the correctness of pilgrimage routes.¹²³ Modifications of tradition include the simplification of routes, the use of motor vehicles and the conduct of the *saṅkalpa* at the first stop are all measures adopted by the KPDYS to save time and make pilgrimages more convenient and accessible. These adaptations respond in part to changed expectations of the participants, many of whom join a pilgrimage because of their curiosity about the places in their city and willingness to share the experience in a group, rather than for an interest in a normative ritual. The KPDYS also attracts some foreign visitors, who often prove to be genuinely interested in the routes but perhaps more as a way alternatively to discover the city.

It should be noted that, in relation to these routes, the positions of Vyas and the KPDYS are not the only ones, and at least two other associations promote pilgrimages in Banaras. Vishvanath Narayan Palande, an heir to a tradition started by Datar Shastri, claims to have been 'called' by the gods and his guru to dedicate himself to the continuity of pilgrimages, and conducts an annual route of the Pañcakrośī. The other association, the Śrī Karapātrī Svāmī Smṛti Kāśī Pañcakrośīyātrā, is led by Bathuknath Shastri and based on the teachings of Karpatri. Each group follows its own rules: for example, Palande has chosen to relocate the *saṅkalpa* rituals of his Pañcakrośīyātrā, thus excluding the involvement of the Vyas family, while Shastri's group continues the tradition of visiting the Vyās Pīṭha despite the difficulty of doing so.

To understand those difficulties, we need to understand something of the recent history of the area. The Vyās Pīṭha is in the Mukṭīmaṇḍapa, near Jñānavāpī, at the centre of the complex that includes the temple of Viśvanāth and the Gyān Vāpī mosque. Given the controversy about the locations of previous Viśvanāth temples, the entire area has long been a symbolic centre of contention between Hindus and Muslims. However, in 1992—the year of the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalist activists—a protective enclosure was constructed around the mosque and a larger security zone created, resulting in the surrounding access roads being blocked by security barriers, and entry regulated by strict police checks (Lazzaretti 2020 and 2021b). At the time of this research it was already difficult and time-consuming for groups of pilgrims to access the Vyās Pīṭha, and before each visit they had to request special permits from the authorities to perform the *saṅkalpa* there. Both Gupta jī and Palande

with Uma Shankar Gupta, July 2011) In contrast, *kāśīvāsi* or pilgrims from the south who have vowed to reside in the city, are more likely, seek the association's help to visit lesser-known deities. (Personal communication with Gupta jī, April 2012.)

123 For a report on the debate regarding the correct route of the Pañcakrośīyātrā in the 19th century, see Gengnagel 2011, 63–64.

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explain how difficult it had become for groups of pilgrims to do this. Thus the paths of pilgrims even adapt to contested, securitised places, possibly undergoing irreversible changes.

With redevelopment of the area starting from 2017 and the construction of the ambitious and controversial Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor, the geography of the temple-mosque compound and, indeed, of the whole neighbourhood changed substantially and so did the roles of the Vyas family and other religious authorities (Lazzaretti 2021a and 2024). The impact of this transformation on urban pilgrimage is yet to be studied and assessed.

Concluding Note: Variations to the Norm, or on the Changing of Traditions

Debates about the correct performance of urban pilgrimages are connected on one hand to the relationship between practice and textual prescription (Gengnagel 2005, 80), and on the other hand to the dialectic of exchange and influence between lived places (and the practices enacted there) and the imagined space described by the glorifications. The example of the route of the twelve *vyotirliṅgas* shows how a practice seemingly derived from a desire to adhere to the dictates of the imagined space—to the idea of Kāśī as a universal and all-encompassing space that includes all the sacred centres of the entire country—mutates when coming into contact with physical places (the various shrines that house the transpositions and their voices) and in the process of reinterpretation and design by individual personalities. We could say that tradition adapts to reality. The imagined space is then seen not to be fixed at all but to transform as much as the places and practices, being reconstituted and taking the form of a developing palimpsest on which we find traces of the past (Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2008, 17), but whose meaning can only be understood through experience in lived places and the practice of pilgrimage.

Thus, the list of the twelve *vyotirliṅgas*, which began as a purely notional sequence, possibly stemming from the recitation of the *Jyotirliṅgastotra*, is transformed in practice according to the exigencies of the territory. Once it is included in the prescriptions of an association such as the KPDYS it becomes a new and ‘official’ route of pilgrimage and Gupta jī in fact hopes for and anticipates the drafting of new texts that convey the changed traditions. He told me: ‘Abhī itnī moṭī kitāberñ kaun likhegā? Pūrānī kitāberñ dhīre dhīre gāyab ho gaye heim.

To *abhī nayā karnā paṛegā*.¹²⁴ The old books to which he refers are presumably those of Sukul, Vyas and Sarasvati, and he sees the need for new ones. Through a process of ‘classicismation’ of traditions (Chatterjee 1993, 76–77), new texts with modified lists would seemingly establish and fix the practice as it is implemented now, facilitating its recognition as the ‘official’ tradition; the imagined space would then take this as incontestable fact, ancient and always existing in the holy city.

Debates about the correct performance of urban pilgrimages are also intertwined with reflections on the meanings and functions of rituals. Long interpreted as static and repetitive events, rituals have been rethought as mutable instances and ‘propositions for alternatives and as symbolic actions, thus as highly productive elements for social interaction and the creation of meaning’ (Michaels and Mishra 2010, v–vi). The ‘ritual dynamics’ strand in anthropology has revealed that changes and variations to rituals do not emerge solely as the result of the confrontation of an alleged ancient period with modernity, but rather as an integral part of the ritual itself (Husken 2007; Michaels and Mishra 2010). From this perspective, and as we have seen in the case of the *jyotirlingas* in Banaras, both textual tradition and practice evolve, are transmitted and survive through change. In a sense, it could be said that this type of ritual practice exists precisely *because* it transforms; thus, it is in the continuous exchange between written sources, individual interpreters of those sources and practice that the tradition is transmitted and transposed. The agents of change in the ritual tradition are individual people.

As noted in the case of Kedarnath Vyas, and as has emerged from examining the positions embodied by the promoters of local pilgrimages in Banaras, continuing such traditions is felt to be a kind of ‘mission’. Each of these men, albeit with different motivations and interpretations, feels that he is facilitating the continuation of these pilgrimages because he could not do otherwise. The practice of these individuals illustrates the ‘sentient involvement’ (Ingold 2000), which they have and cultivate over time with the space that is the city.

124 ‘Who will write such thick books now? The old ones are gradually disappearing, so now we will have to make new ones’. (From an interview with Uma Shankar Gupta, July 2011.)

6 Supremacy of the Transposed Place and Production of Locality: Kāśī's Kedār

Movements of Traditions

In previous chapters I outlined the formation of the pan-Indian group of *jyotirlingas* and their 'transposition' to the territory of Banaras, as documented in textual and visual sources. Then, in the ethnographic account of the various temples, plural narratives of the places of transposition emerged. Subsequent analysis of the various forms of substitute pilgrimage to the twelve *jyotirlingas* contributed to painting a complex picture of traditions centred on the divine places and forms, in their dispersed but connected localities, the study of which can enrich the interpretation of aspects of Hindu sacred geography.

Spatial transposition, as mentioned at the beginning of this work, has often been explained in terms of the geographical equivalent of the phenomenon of Sanskritisation (Eck 1981: 336), assuming that local divine forms need to reference already known pan-Indian forms to authenticate themselves—a view that, as I have suggested, I find rather reductive. The concept of Sanskritisation—initially developed to explain mobility within castes (Srinivas 1955)—is often associated with the assumption that there is a 'great' Brahmanical and pan-Indian tradition that interacts with, influences and, as in the case of 'replicas', inspires the elevation of 'little' regional traditions, otherwise often associated with popular and 'folkloric' forms of worship. Early theorists wrote about great and little traditions mainly to explain the social interactions observed in rural contexts (Redfield and Singer 1955; Mariott 1955a)—the village, as is well known, was long the main focus for anthropological studies in India (Berger 2012). These concepts, along with Sanskritisation, were then extended and used in the historical analysis of religious and cultural phenomena. To explain the exchange of elements between great and little traditions, two distinct movements were identified. The first, known as 'parochialisation' and defined as 'a downward devolution of great-traditional elements and their integration with little-traditional elements' (Mariott 1955b, 197–200), is generally what we refer to when speaking of the Sanskritisation processes of folk and local elements. The second movement, through which aspects of the little tradition are absorbed and generalised within the great tradition, was called 'universalisation'. This is what Doniger (2009, 6) calls 'deshification', that is, the process by which the Brahman elite—and in particular, the compilers of Sanskrit

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texts—adopt and adapt local (*deśi*) elements, such as characteristics of popular deities or specific attitudes and ritual forms. This process has been observed in the historical evolution of Brahmanical religion, from at least as far back as the centuries in which the ideology of sacrifice was in crisis and Brahmanism had to reformulate itself to compete with new religions. I mentioned some effects of this in the introductory chapter; in particular the influence that local cults had in, for example, the development of the idea of the sacred place and the rise of locative piety, which was absent in an earlier phase of Brahmanical religion.

The interpretive paradigms of the great and little traditions have seen various applications and, more importantly, received much criticism.¹²⁵ It is clear, though, that the debate has helped bring attention to the complexity of the interactions, both within the cultural universe we call Hinduism and in Indian society more generally. More specifically, it has led to a reconsideration of the influence of so-called ‘folk traditions’ on ‘high culture’, which is primarily represented by Sanskrit texts. The value of archaeological and artistic evidence has been recognised, after previously being more often used to support hypotheses based on the study of texts; it has become indispensable in providing different perspectives and testimonies not available in those Brahmanical texts.¹²⁶

However, in my view what has often been lacking is a critical ethno-indological approach (Michaels 2004) to the so-called great tradition—one that combines analysis of texts from the Brahmanical tradition with historical and ethnographic study of places, actors and practices. Studies of acculturation, adoption and adaptation within the Brahmanical tradition have certainly contributed to revealing its dynamism, especially by highlighting the exchange with so-called little traditions. However, such dynamics are not only found in such ‘outside’ exchanges but, I argue, also *within* particular ‘great’ traditions. This is evident in the traditions about holy places recorded in the *māhātmyas* and *sthalapurāṇas*: not only is a *tīrtha* (for example, Banaras) praised differently by sources that emphasise its various aspects—highlighting different parts of its territory and excluding others depending on specific political-religious affiliations, for example¹²⁷—but within the territory of each sacred centre individual places have layered traditions and are praised differently by different sources.

125 For a comprehensive overview of the debate, see Berger 2012.

126 For an overview of the debate on the relationship between archaeology and texts in the study of ancient India, see Guha 2012, 43–44 and the bibliography in notes 4, 5, 6.

127 See Chapter Two. For a more detailed analysis of the competing perspectives expressed in the glorifications of Banaras, see Bakker and Isaacson 2004 and Smith 2007a and b.

The situation becomes even more complex when we consider the current traditions being propagated in individual temples, examining the modes of transmission and considering the strategies employed by social actors in the life of these places to narrate, promote, explain and reimagine the locality. I argue that it is the *locality*, rather than the interchange between great and little traditions, that provides a lens through which to observe modification, change and development of traditions in these places.

The concept of locality, liberated from one of the commonplaces of social theory that regards it as a distinctive feature of social life subjected to the challenges of modernity and the dangers of homogenisation or globalisation, has been reinterpreted as something inherently fragile, which must therefore be continuously rethought and reaffirmed (Appadurai 2001 [1996], 52). The spatial production of locality—that is, the naming of places, the techniques of treatment, protection and demarcation of territory, and, I would add, the ongoing narrative about the meanings and specificities of places—provides insight into how communities regard locality not as an unassailable fact but rather as a ‘ephemeral good that must be produced and maintained’ (ibid., 233) and continuously reconsidered. The layers of tradition regarding Kedār jī that we are about to explore will thus be read as instances of localisation and attempts to design the locality by the many voices that comprise, interpret and reinterpret it. From a phenomenological perspective, the places of transposition—far from being the geographical equivalent of the Sanskritisation process outlined by Eck—will emerge as the true laboratories for the constitution of both imagined space and the ‘great’ traditions. In our case, such traditions can be identified as the glorifications both of Banaras and of the various ‘original’ sites of pan-Indian *jyotirlingas*.

Introducing the Universe of Kedār jī

Kedāreśvar—or Kedār jī to give the temple its familiar local name—represents both the chronological beginning and the conceptual conclusion of my research journey. Located in the eponymous area (Kedāra *khandā*) south of the city, Kedāreśvar stands high above the Kedār Ghaṭ, just north of Hariścandra, one of the two cremation grounds along the river in Banaras.

The building used to be recognisable by its façade, which was till recent years painted with vertical red and white stripes, mirroring the colours painted on the *ghaṭ* itself and the style of many shrines and houses of south Indian Brahmans. Several statues, also reminiscent of southern temple architecture, adorn the roof of the temple. Kedāreśvar is indeed considered by many to be a ‘southern’ temple; the current shrine is said to have been established by Kumāragurūparar,

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a poet and saint from Tamil Nadu, who was a follower of Śaiva Siddhānta¹²⁸ and is presumed to have settled in the city in the 17th century and established the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh.¹²⁹ Legend has it that Saint Kumāragurūparar entered the royal palace to meet Dara Shikoh accompanied by a lion he had tamed himself; the Mughal emperor then granted him land to start a monastery and build a temple (Zvelebil 1975, 229–230). The saint apparently settled in the city in 1658 and remained there, teaching his numerous followers, until his death in 1688. He is said to have restored the worship of the ancient *liṅga* that lay in ruins when he arrived and built the *maṭh* to accommodate pilgrims from the south, manage the temple and spread his teachings.¹³⁰ Even at the time of this research, the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh was the institution that oversaw daily ceremonies, and the *pūjārīs* who perform the collective rituals were paid by the monastery. The surrounding area had historically been occupied largely by businesses catering to pilgrims from the southern regions who reside in nearby *dharmasālās* (pilgrim lodges). This area continues to be home to many Bengalis, who, alongside Tamils, have long been considered primary devotees of Kedāreśvar (Eck 1983, 137).

Kedār jī is the devotional focal point for a large area of the city and serves as a kind of southern counterpart to the more famous and geographically central Viśvanāth temple (Fig. 10). Kedār Ghaṭ is a popular spot for morning ablutions, and in the evening hosts an *ārti* ceremony dedicated to the river; the ceremony is more modest than the spectacular ritual performances staged near Daśāśvamedh Ghaṭ but attracts an increasing number of participants. In addition to the dramatic entrance from the riverfront the temple has a second access point from the busy lane behind it. Here, the entrance portal blends into the vibrant array of stalls, shops and eating houses and is flanked on either side by small areas dedicated to the sale of flowers and garlands to be taken inside and offered to *bābā*. During the busiest times of the day a group of renunciants, widows and elderly people can be found near the entrance, soliciting alms from passersby, especially those going to the temple.

Entering from the rear, we leave behind the chatter of the market. Crossing the threshold and touching the golden step that marks the boundary between external and internal spaces, we find several renunciants (*sādhus*) seated on the colonnaded porch, intent on collecting the offerings given by departing devotees. The wall directly in front of us is entirely covered with votive plaques in various

128 The Śaiva Siddhānta is a philosophical school in the tradition of Śaivism that is deeply rooted in south India. For a comparison with other schools of thought within Śaivism, see Flood 1996, 192–196.

129 Motichandra (1985 [1962], 219) places the origins of the institution in the reign of Akbar but other sources place Kumāragurūparar in the 17th century and describe his journey to Kāśī during the reign of Dara Shikoh (Zvelebil 1975, 229–230).

130 For an overview of the works, see also Arunachalam 1990; Ghosh 1991.



Fig. 10 Front view of Kedār jī, November 2012. Author's photo.

regional languages and is the rear of the sanctum (*garbhagrha*). A darker mark on the wall at eye level indicates the point that coincides with the position of the *liṅga*, and here those entering from the back pay their initial homage to the deity by bowing their heads.

Completing half a circumambulation of the sanctum to the left, we find ourselves in the spacious pavilion (*maṇḍapa*), where various activities take place, depending on the time of day. From here, one can enter the *garbhagrha*, but before accessing the inner chamber of the *liṅga* we may have the *darśana* of Daṇḍapaṇī and Kāl Bhairav—the two guardians of the city, situated in an auxiliary room to the right of the entrance to the sanctum—as well as Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya. In a more secluded position, we find Gaurī, whom devotees can contemplate from the pavilion through a gridded opening directly in front of her. The actual *darśana* of Kedār jī is sometimes only attained with difficulty on crowded days, and devotees sweat profusely as they jostle to touch the *liṅga*, which is covered with milk, fruit, flowers and water from the Gaṅgā (*gaṅgā-jala*). The *liṅga* is certainly not common in appearance—the stone, which is slightly elevated from the ground, reveals grains and grooves. As I will describe, the most pronounced groove at its centre, where the oblation liquids converge, is considered by the faithful as evidence of a divine manifestation.

Like most foreign visitors, the first times I visited Kedār jī I was ‘unprepared’ and overwhelmed by the activities and the people; it was impossible at first to

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distinguish who was responsible for what and who the key figures in the ritual scene were. In the first weeks of attending the temple, I simply tried to acclimatise to its space, observe everything that happened and allow the temple-goers—regular devotees, pilgrims and officiants—to become accustomed to my persistent presence. This was a process that primarily involved my body; I soon learned how to sit correctly, getting used to staying for several hours with my legs crossed and, in any case, never pointing my feet toward the sanctum or a conversation partner. I learned the appropriate gestures to honour the main deity and greet the secondary ones. I focused on the practices I observed, and before long I became an object of interest to those I encountered, who saw me writing apparently endless notes each day. I was interviewed often, before I could conduct any interviews myself, and repeatedly touched by the many women with whom I could often exchange only smiles and gestures because they were pilgrims from the south who spoke languages I did not know.

After some time I decided to begin to conduct interviews to try to understand the prevalent myths about this place. The choice of semi-structured interviews in this initial phase was due to my still relatively limited command of the Hindi language during those first months but I soon realised the inadequacy and rigidity of those interviews. After I became familiar with the concepts and terms used by my interlocutors, and more used to conversing in Hindi, those semi-structured interviews transformed into dialogues in which my questions were posed in the order that naturally presented itself, but served only as general prompts for my interlocutors. It has been highlighted that simply asking a particular question can provoke a certain type of response (Piasere 2002, 12–13) or, at the very least, introduce terms and concepts that do not always belong to the interlocutor and therefore have an impact on the spontaneity of their expression. Aware of the reductive nature of this tool and the power dynamics inherent to the practice of ethnography itself (De Lauri and Achilli 2008), I found however that interviews, if used flexibly and integrated with other spontaneous interactions, can be valuable tools. Listening to recorded voices to transcribe the words used by interviewees allows for reflection not only on recurring terms, ways of responding and meanings, but also on the gaps, the unanswered questions and the turns that some responses take without prompting if the interlocutor is not interrupted. For example, assessing the length of a response relative to others already reveals much about the preferences and mental hierarchies of the speaker and, of course, what our interlocutors believe we are seeking. Over time, one stops seeking precise data and analysing each collected sentence in detail; familiarity is gained with the lexicon used by interlocutors, and especially with those key indigenous categories that have the potential to stimulate fluid and spontaneous storytelling (cf. Kumar 1992).

The first interviews were primarily of the devotees I met, especially at the times of the rituals that, as I will describe later, structure the day and mark

specific moments of divine time. Initially, I visited the temple at those times, and the time of the *ār̥ti*, reasoning that during those moments the activities of the temple were at their most vibrant, providing an opportunity to meet the community and observe the officiants at work. It was only after I began to frequent the temple at other times, such as in the very early morning, that I started to glimpse the complexity of the work and roles at Kedār jī. In addition to those I had identified as *pūjārīs*, many other figures were engaged in various activities and discussions, and I struggled to ascertain their positions. While initially my visits and interactions with interlocutors were conscious efforts to pursue my research, over time they transformed into less planned daily activities. Interactions were no longer confined to dialogues clearly relevant to my research; they merged with recreational activities and pastimes and the flow of life itself. Although not always obviously productive for my research, this was a gradual learning process about behavioural codes, courtesy and dialogue, combined with a more subtle and invisible process of ‘impregnation’ (Olivier de Sardan 1995), whereby the knowledge accumulated, even unconsciously, becomes sedimented in the researcher’s body and mind and resurfaces during reflection, serving as a framework, or indeed a binding agent, for the transcribed data and field notes and enabling the writing of the ethnographic account.

Indeed, my notes—which include descriptions, local terms, names, maps of locations, transcriptions of interviews and questions—are just fragments that need to be reworked at the writing stage, something that would be almost impossible without being able to draw on that latent substrate of impregnation. From the perspective of impregnation, the first year of research spent in Banaras was fundamental, despite my initial naivety. The periods of study in Italy, the traumatic separation from the field and my subsequent stays were all shaped by that initial period, in which impressions, knowledge, mistakes, awkwardness and joy remained deposited somewhere in my body. One could say that the very structuring of the first written account, and (why not?) this book, are all attempts to respond to those months of continuous immersion in the reality of Kedār jī.

Kedār in Textual Sources: The Layers of a Narrative Tradition

Kedār is the only one of the ‘replicas’ of *jyotirlingas* in Banaras that possesses a textual tradition focused on transposition. Indeed, we have seen that almost all the *jyotirlingas* mentioned in the local glorification tradition appear as names of divine forms already present in the territory, and which are part of routes or

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lists of deities. In some cases it is stated that a form originates elsewhere, but no articulated explanation of their manifestation in the local context is provided. The only exception is Ornkāreśvar, which as we have seen retains an independent tradition explaining its local manifestation.

The name Kedār becomes known as that of the Himalayan *jyotirlinga* from the time of the formation of the tradition of the ŚP between the 10th and 13th centuries (Fleming 2007 and 2009); it was later adopted by the KKh to indicate a prominent form within the sacred geography of Kāśī. The text includes the narrative about the origins of the local form of Kedār in the context of a list of fourteen *liṅgas* that constitute the field of liberation (*muktikṣetra*)¹³¹. The chapter dedicated to Kedār introduces what is effectively a myth of transposition, in which the presence of the form in Kāśī is explained as the result of the transfer of Śiva (in the form of Kedār-nāth) from the Himalayas. It is evident that the compilers of the KKh were well acquainted with the Himalayan form of Kedār, indicating that it must have been known at a trans-regional level by that time.

The KKh tells the tale of the son of a Brahman who, upon arriving in Kāśī from Ujjayinī, takes a vow of chastity and is initiated into the Pāśupata order, taking the name Vaśiṣṭha. At the age of about twelve, along with his beloved guru Hiraṇyagarbha, Vaśiṣṭha embarks on a pilgrimage to Kedār-nāth in the Himalayas. Half way through the journey, however, the guru dies and the attendants of Śiva carry him away on a celestial chariot to the divine abode on Kailās. Indeed, the myth recalls that those who die during the pilgrimage to Kedār will live long in the celestial abode of Śiva. Witnessing this miracle, Vaśiṣṭha becomes convinced of the superiority of Kedār among all the *liṅgas*, and upon returning to Kāśī he decides to undertake the pilgrimage to the mountain site every year during the auspicious time. Vaśiṣṭha completes sixty-one of these journeys while remaining chaste.

The devoted ascetic prepares for yet another pilgrimage, despite being old and unwell. His fellow disciples are worried about his imminent death and try to dissuade him from going. Vaśiṣṭha thinks to himself: ‘Even if I die along the way, I will attain liberation like my master’. Pleased with the resolve of the ascetic, Śiva appears to him in a dream, ready to fulfil a request. Vaśiṣṭha asks the deity to bless his companions, and Śiva, impressed by the devotee’s generosity, insists on granting another wish. Vaśiṣṭha then asks Śiva to take residence in Kāśī, transferring from the Himalaya to the city. The god decides to remain in his mountain abode with only one-sixteenth of his power and to establish himself otherwise in Kāśī (KKh 77.41).¹³² In a sort of procession formed by Vaśiṣṭha himself and the

131 The list can be found in KKh 73.32-36. Subsequent chapters describe the *liṅga* mentioned in the list. KKh 77 is entirely dedicated to Kedār.

132 The sixteen parts of Śiva are called *kalās*.

attendants of the deity, Śiva (as Kedār) then moves to Kāśī. The text goes on to list the merits obtained by coming to Kedār in Kāśī, even in comparison to the pilgrimage to the Himalaya. It is said, for example, that by seeing Kedār in Kāśī one obtains seven times the merit acquired from the pilgrimage to Kedārñāth in the Himalaya; it also advises devotees considering that pilgrimage that touching the Kedār *liṅga* in Kāśī just once will achieve far superior results.

The narrative tradition collected in the KKh indicates the fame of the Himalayan site at the time the text was composed; in fact, the myth shows how popular the pilgrimage to Kedārñāth must have been. The initial part of the chapter dedicated to the narrative about the *liṅga*, refers to a series of merits that Kedār confers (KKh 77.4-12); here the glorification seems to refer to the ‘original’ abode of this form. The KKh thus seems to base the greatness of Kedār in Kāśī on the connection created with the Himalayan Kedār, representing a first level of localisation through which a local form gains power and fame.

The textual tradition about Kedār in Kāśī is further enriched by the later compilation of the Kāśīkedāramāhātmya (KKm). The KKm is considered an appendix of the Brahmavaivartapurāṇa but circulates independently and seems to be currently available in two versions based on the same edition.¹³³ This *māhātmya* is divided into thirty-one *adhyāyas* and is generally dated around the 16th–17th centuries, a period that probably coincides with the construction of the current temple at Kedār Ghāṭ on the orders of Kumāragurūparar.

The work is dedicated to the glorification of the Kedār *khaṇḍa*, the southern area of the city, and its various sites; the most important temple is, of course, Kāśī Kedāreśvar—our Kedār jī. The text narrates the origins of Kedār in the Himalaya, the appearance of the *liṅga* in Kāśī and the connections between the two places; it then describes the singular importance and powers of Kāśī Kedāreśvar, which in the hierarchy promoted by the glorification appears to be the main, if not the only, place where liberation can be achieved. The *māhātmya* also includes its own versions of some myths from the Puranic tradition that are associated with the city or known at a pan-Indian level. These include myths about river deities, in particular the descent of the Gaṅgā, and the stories of King Divodāsa that are central to the KKh (Smith 2007b). The narrative about the Kāśī Kedār in the KKm represents an additional level of localisation that reinforces the notion of the local form as a transposed deity (as established by the KKh), and further sanctions its superiority over the ‘original’. As we will see, the KKm reworks material from the traditions of the ŚP and the KKh in its own way, not only to establish the importance of the local form and to reestablish connections between the namesakes, but also to rewrite the hierarchy of divine forms within the territory of Kāśī.

133 Both appear in the list of references in this book.

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The KKm contains two fundamental myths about the transposition of Kedār from the Himalaya to Kāśī. The first appears as one of the early stories presented (KKm 1.60-103) and concerns Brahmā at Kedārnāth; the episode, based on the well-known rivalry between Śiva and Brahmā, explains the origin of the Himalayan Kedār, the journey of Brahmā to Kāśī and the appearance of the *liṅga* in the holy city. We may note that the description of the appearance of the *liṅga* in its Himalayan abode, as presented by the KKm, is a reworking of the manifestation myth of the same *jyotirliṅga* contained in the KS (19.13-17) of the ŚP. In the KS the Pāṇḍava brothers go to seek Śiva in his Himalayan dwelling but the god evades them and transforms himself into a buffalo. Although recognised by Bhīma, one of the brothers, he burrows into the ground so that the Pāṇḍavas can see only his rear end as a buffalo.¹³⁴ The Himalayan Kedār is indeed considered to be the backside of the god in animal form.¹³⁵

The narrative is echoed in the KKm, but the protagonist is Brahmā rather than the Pāṇḍava brothers and the appearance of the Himalayan form, as well as the one in Kāśī, is connected with his desire to contemplate Śiva in the form of Kedār. Taking the form of a buffalo in a herd, Śiva hides from Brahmā, who had boasted of his superiority. Brahmā, though, much like Bhīma in the KS version, recognises the deity and attempts to detain him as he burrows into the ground. Śiva ensures that Brahmā and the other beings are granted a *darśana* of his buffalo form at the Himalayan site but the *liṅga* itself is not visible there. This will manifest later in Kāśī, after Brahmā has atoned for the sin of defaming Śiva. The chronology of the story is rather curious: Brahmā goes to Kedār because he has heard of the place's greatness; however, upon arriving he seems to be the cause of the manifestation of Śiva in buffalo form. The narrative also appears to assume the emergence of the supreme form of the *liṅga* at Kāśī, at a moment not described but rather taken for granted. It is noteworthy as well that in the KKm story the term *jyotirliṅga* does not appear.

The other myth in the KKm about the origins of Kedār in Kāśī is particularly important for us, because in my research it was the only one transmitted orally in the Banarasi temple.¹³⁶ The episode centres around King Māndhātā and the appearance of Kedār in a plate of *khicrī*—a rather simple dish made of rice, lentils (*dāl*) and vegetables. The tale narrates how King Māndhātā, after leaving

134 The earliest JS (47), on the other hand, associates the origins of the *liṅga* with the sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa. For a comparison of the two collections, see Fleming 2007, 81–84.

135 The myth of the Pāṇḍava brothers appeared to be the most widespread at the 'original' Kedārnāth at the time of my research in August 2009. The interior of the temple also features *mūrtis* of the brothers.

136 KKm 19-21 are dedicated to the entire narrative. The central core of the myth recounting the episode of the transposition of the *liṅga* is in KKm 19.31-78 and 20.26-55.

his kingdom to his son, settled near the Himalayan Kedār, eager to have a vision of the supreme *liṅga*. There he remained absorbed in prayer for a hundred *yugas* (cosmic ages) but his wish was not fulfilled. Śiva then appeared to him, explaining that due to an offence given by Brahmā the vision of the *liṅga* was no longer accessible except at Kāśī, and invited him to go to there. Māndhātā did so, yet for a long time he still did not achieve the desired *darśana* although he continued to make daily pilgrimages to the Himalaya, empowered by the ascetic practices he had undertaken. As he grew old and weary, he maintained his routine and prayed to the Lord for the supreme *darśana* because his strength was waning. Śiva advised him to cook and nourish himself before undertaking the pilgrimage to the Himalaya to regain his strength, disregarding the customary practice of eating only after completing a pilgrimage. After much hesitation, the king decided to follow Śiva's advice and prepared *khicrī*, which he resolved to share with a needy person before departing on his journey. When it seemed that no such person would pass by, Māndhātā feared he would not be able to fulfil his duty, but finally Śiva appeared in the form of a beggar, asking for food. Māndhātā went to fetch the food, already divided into two portions, but found that the *khicrī* had turned to stone. In despair, he began to cry, believing he could not satisfy the beggar's request and thus could not complete the pilgrimage. At that moment, the beggar vanished, merging with the *khicrī*. Śiva, his family and attendants then appeared in a celestial chariot and escorted Māndhātā to the god's abode.

This myth represents another level of localisation: the origins of the local form of Kedāreśvar are explained in the KKm through a narrative that is different from the earlier myth in the KKh, of which there is no trace except for the motif of the daily pilgrimage to the Himalayan site. Furthermore, as noted, the myth of Māndhātā is the focus of oral transmission in the contemporary temple. What remains from the two glorifications for most devotees—and what is presumably transmitted by the temple officiants—is reduced to the elements of the myth of Māndhātā; these, however, acquire resonance and authenticity in the temple space, in the material form of the *liṅga* and during specific celebrations.

In addition to the reformulation of that myth, the KKm is a formidable attempt to rewrite not only the hierarchy of 'original/pan-Indian' and 'replica/local', but also the position of Kedār in the urban landscape of Banaras. Numerous myths associated with the city in the KKh find new formulation in the KKm, which re-introduces well-known scenarios but changes the spaces in which these events take place. An example of such appropriation of events already linked to the geography of Banaras—and no longer to the pan-Indian landscape—is the description provided by the KKm of Gaurī Kuṇḍa. This pond (Fig. 11) is located at Kedār Ghāṭ and is itself a spatial transposition, as it 'replicates' the eponymous *tīrtha*

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Fig. 11 The Gaurī Kuṇḍa tank at Kedar Ghat, March 2011. Author's photo.

located along the pilgrim route to the Himalayan Kedārñāth.¹³⁷ Gaurī Kuṇḍa is also referred to as Ādi Maṇikarṇikā, where the prefix *ādi* denotes something that precedes, establishes and belongs to an ancient, mythical and eternal time, while Maṇikarṇikā is the name of the main cremation ground in Banaras. The KKh (2.21-108) places the 'original' site of the quintessential cremation ground here and thus recognises the existence of two Maṇikarṇikās: the first, the 'original' one, is the most powerful and significant and is situated at the foot of Kedār jī. The location of a locally well-known mythical event—the fall of a jewel from Śiva's ear, which created a pond in the time of primordial creation (KKh 26)—is relocated near Kedār, rather than near the better known Maṇikarṇikā to the north of the city, and to a time preceding the foundation of the latter.

At the same time, the fall of an earring from the goddess Gaurī during her bath is also said to have created the Gaurī Kuṇḍa and led to the decapitation of her son

137 The village of Gaurī Kuṇḍa, where the sacred pond of the same name is located, is at an altitude of about 2000 meters and is a necessary stop on the pilgrim route to Kedārñāth, at 3552 meters. It is the starting point of the final 14 km ascent, which pilgrims undertake on foot or on donkeys.

Gaṇeśa by his father Śiva, who had not recognised him. In this way, a mythological episode well-diffused across India (the genesis of Gaṇeśa's particular form) merges with one already connected to the urban space (the fall of the jewel and the origins of Maṇikarṇikā), creating an additional ad hoc narrative. The specific location is thus anchored to mythical elements and embodies, once again, the deeds and names of ancient times, so that it surpasses in importance and antiquity the place it was inspired by. Maṇikarṇikā is one of the best-known names and places in the geography of Kāśī; the city, long a dispenser of liberation, finds its essence in the cremation ground. Moreover, Maṇikarṇikā embodies the site of cosmic creation and dissolution. The transposition in the KKm of such grandeur to Kedār Ghāṭ is equivalent to activating a strategy of local appropriation of the symbolic meanings of Maṇikarṇikā. Furthermore, calling the transposed site Ādi Maṇikarṇikā, and asserting its pre-existence, is an attempt to re-establish the geography of the imagined space with a new centre.

The KKm also compares Kedār with Viśvanāth, another significant site in Banaras, and one that emerged as a prominent divine form relatively late in the city's history, primarily through the KKh (Bakker 1996). Several sections of the KKm make the comparison (KKm 9.14-18; 13.12-16; 21.5-9). A declaration of the identity of the two places is included, and both are said to dispense liberation to devotees who contemplate different forms of Śiva. On the other hand, however, despite the greater fame of Viśvanāth, Kedār is said to be more powerful precisely because it is less known, and indeed, secret (*gupta*). This distinctive element of Kedāreśvar seems to have been, in the last century and to some extent today, the focus of its oral glorification; Eck (1983, 143-144) refers to interviews conducted near the temple, in which devotees and *pūjārīs* claim that Kedār jī is older and more powerful than Viśvanāth, but less well-known. In my conversations around Kedār jī a desire continued to be expressed to stress secrecy as a distinctive feature of the temple. A place untainted by the masses who visit the city's patron, Viśvanāth, is seen as more powerful and only for those who are truly worthy.

A final example that speaks to the desire of the compilers of the KKm to reposition Kedār in the sacred geography of Banaras is its promotion of the route of the Kedārāntargṛhayātrā, a counterpart of the well-known Antargṛhayātrā pilgrimage centred on Viśvanāth and described in the KKh (Vyas 1987, Gutschow 2006). By prescribing the Kedārāntargṛhayātrā, the KKm again promotes a new centre and glorifies the Kedār Khaṇḍa as a special area, excluded for example from the punishments of Bhairava, the divine form that in Kāśī replaces Yama, the god of death. In these ways, the KKm openly challenges the hierarchies promoted by the KKh.

Transmission of Locality at Kedār jī

We have seen the levels of localisation of the Kedār tradition in Kāśī through analysis of glorification texts, and the way their narratives enrich and connect the divine form to other spaces in the pan-Indian and local geography. The picture becomes even more complex, however, when we turn our gaze to the contemporary reality of a temple that is now among the most prominent in the city, and question what has become of these narratives over time.

Some shrines in Banaras, both prominent and less so, distribute simplified or abridged versions of *māhātmyas* and collections of stories related to the temple deity, but such written material is not available about the myth of Kedāreśvar either inside the temple or in the nearby shops that sell pamphlets and other texts for pilgrims. The only written source dedicated to Kedār, apart from a chapter of the KKh—which does not circulate independently—is the KKm, of which I have found no simplified or abridged versions produced for the common devotee. A recent reissue is not very accessible; indeed, at the time of my research it was not available in bookshops that distribute religious texts or openly at the temple itself, but was being given to educated devotees who requested it or purchased by wealthy devotees in contact with Chandra Shekar Pandey, one of its editors, who is a *paṇḍā* at Kedār jī.

A possible explanation for the lack of written material glorifying the temple is the vitality of oral transmission there. The people I spoke with rarely claimed to own or have read the KKm; some are aware of its existence, while others refer to the more famous ŚP or the KKh, even though the mention of these sources is often purely notional or rhetorical. The transmission of myths about the origins of Kedār thus occurs mainly in oral form: the various officiants—whose nature and roles we will examine further—narrate it to devotees.

In addition, however, the temple and *liṅga* themselves serve as vehicles for the transmission of the narrative. Not only is the space of the temple the arena in which the transmission occurs, it is also a visual text, its walls adorned with inscriptions in various regional languages that highlight parts of the myth, record the names and offerings of donors and indicate the various festivals. During the annual Makar Saṅkrānti festival, as we will see, the temple becomes a stage on which the hierophany of the divine form is reenacted. As well, we will see that the *liṅga* of Kedār jī is said to constitute proof of its own origins; devotees describe it as a form with extraordinary characteristics that themselves narrate it as a divine manifestation that came from food, and one that could not have been established by humans.

References to the pan-Indian connections of Kedār jī can be found in images hanging inside the temple. There is, for example, a portrait of Kumāragurūparar that evokes a link with the historical founder and the southern traditions he

represents. Additionally, hanging at the centre of the pavilion that leads to the cell containing the *liṅga*, and visually connecting the local temple with the ‘original’, there is an iconographic image of the Himalayan Kedār. It is, then, not only the oral narration of stories from the texts that keeps the traditions of Kedār alive; other elements of the material space of the temple, along with tangible visual references, also reiterate the connections that establish the locality of Kāśī Kedāreśvar.

Regarding the myth of the origins of the *liṅga*, not all devotees provided the same details and many only have a general idea of the story of Māndhātā. However, analysis of the variants reveals recurring elements in the characterisation of the *liṅga* and the local interpretations of its status and meaning as a transposed form. One constant, encountered elsewhere (see Chapter 4) and used to explain most transposed *vyotirliṅgas*, is the nature of the Kedāreśvar *liṅga* as *svayambhū*, or ‘self-manifested’; for all the consulted devotees and officiants, this is a divine form not installed by humans or even by a god, but rather the result of a theophany.

Another element that appeared frequently in the accounts collected is the origin of the *liṅga* as *khicṛī*. Even devotees with limited other knowledge of the temple and its mythic origins would mention this, probably because the uncommon appearance of the Kedāreśvar *liṅga* visually evokes its ‘origins’. Indeed, devotees seem to remember or want to convey elements that can be ‘verified’ inside the cell where the deity resides. For example, they refer to the graininess of the stone of the *liṅga*, which resembles the *khicṛī* from which Śiva manifested, and to its distinct shape, which is in two parts, said to symbolise the presence of the god alongside his consort, Gaurī. Another widespread belief among devotees, is that the goddess Annapūrṇā (‘full of food’, where *anna* is a Sanskrit word for cooked rice, the quintessential food) also resides within the *liṅga*. The goddess is commonly associated with Viśvanāth, and locally seen as his consort, but her connection with Kedār jī possibly contributes to enhancing the association between the *liṅga* and its origins.

Perhaps surprisingly, few devotees mention the connection of the Kedāreśvar *liṅga* with its Himalayan counterpart. When directly asked about the matter, some acknowledge a connection between the two *tīrthas* but many have no knowledge of it. Those devotees who *are* aware of the Himalayan Kedār refer to the myth of spatial transposition as narrated in the KKM, in which the focus is on the transfer of the *liṅga* to Kāśī and the consequent possibility of having *darśana* of the ‘original’ there, without a long journey to the Himalaya. They invariably insist on the greater power of the local *liṅga*. Although most local devotees do not link the origin of Kedāreśvar to the transfer of the *liṅga* from the Himalaya, temple officiants certainly do when they address other interlocutors, such as pilgrims not from Banaras and foreign or Indian researchers. Officiants also convey the myth of King Māndhātā.

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The reference to the myth of transposition does not appear to be used as a means to construct an authoritative link for the local temple. Rather, when recounted by officiants it serves as a prelude to the inversion of the canonical hierarchy between ‘original’ and ‘replica’, affirming the superiority of the local form over the pan-Indian site. For example:

The Kedār of Kāśī is the most important because the most significant part of the body has been given here; therefore, this Kedār is the most important, as the *liṅga* is present here. Śiva is here with fifteen of his portions (*kalās*)—in total, there are sixteen, with fifteen in Kāśī and one in the Himalaya. For this reason, the *darśana* here is more desirable and more powerful.¹³⁸

Badri Kedār Śiva manifested himself in the rice bowl and said to the king, “Here in Kāśī I will give you *darśana* in my entirety, while up there you remain only with a part of me!” Seeing the king’s devotion, Śiva was satisfied and asked him what he wanted for himself. The king replied, “I do not want anything. Those who come to Kāśī like me will have your *darśana*, they will see your *liṅga*; whoever comes here will get liberation with your *darśana*.”¹³⁹

The Kedār of Kāśī is the most important; here there are 15 parts (of the powers, the portions) of Śiva, while in the Himalaya there is only one. What a pilgrim gains from having the *darśana* sixteen times in the Himalaya, here is obtained in a single visit.¹⁴⁰

The assertion of the supremacy of the local form is not foreign to other temples praised in the KKh tradition. As we have seen, transpositions in Kāśī seem to acquire greater importance, power and fame simply by being situated in a territory particularly auspicious and dear to Śiva. It is here that the divine forms are present in their entirety and with all their powers, while in the ‘original’ places they retain only a small portion of themselves. Paradoxically the ‘original’ place, in its ‘original’ location seems to play the role of ‘replica’, ‘substitute’ or a kind of historical memory.

138 From an interview with Ramesh Tivari, a *paṇḍā* at Kedār jī, April 2009.

139 From an interview with Narayan, a *pūjārī* at Kedār jī, April 2009.

140 From an interview with Gautam Chakravarti, known as Damu (short for Bengali *dada* or brother), a devotee doing *sevā* (voluntary service) at Kedār jī, April 2009.

The Management of the Locality and Its Spatio-temporal Dimensions: *Pūjārīs* and *Paṇḍās*

Kedār jī hosts various types of Brahman ritual specialists. Some manage the temple, while for some it is their ‘workplace’, where they conduct a range of activities. As noted, the temple is partly managed by the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh, an organisation that continues the teachings of the founding saint, administers properties, maintains certain shrines and engages in charitable activities.¹⁴¹

In relation to management, at the time of my research the Maṭh was responsible for paying two *pūjārīs* (originally from south India) who perform the four daily ceremonies, for providing economic support for the rituals and for maintaining a temple caretaker. The ritual ceremonies here were often described by my interlocutors as connected to southern traditions: Tamil Brahmins, and those from the south in general, are widely considered to be better, more skilled ritual specialists than locals (Vidyarthi 2005 [1979], 92–93). Thus they are highly valued, because correct recitation is believed to render the rituals effective and, in the case of the lamp ceremony (*ārtī*), to have a greater impact on the deity and the devotees present. Kedār jī is renowned locally for performing particularly exact and rule-compliant rituals, thanks to its officiants and the management by the Maṭh, an institution also of great renown in the city. The *ārtī* ritual at Kedāreśvar follows the Puranic guidelines of *pūjā* in sixteen steps (*ṣoḍaśopacārapūjā*).

There are four ceremonies every day, performed in rotation by the two *pūjārīs* employed by the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh: *maṅgala ārtī*, *bhoga ārtī*, *śṛṅgāra ārtī* and *śayana ārtī*. These generally take place shortly after the temple opens, between 3:30 and 4:00 am; in the morning between 10:30 and 11:00 am; in the afternoon, just before sunset between 6:30 and 7:00 pm; and in the evening before the temple closes, between 9:30 and 10:00 pm. The timings vary depending on the seasons, the light and any festivals. The four rituals mark moments of the divine day as it relates to human activities and needs: *maṅgala ārtī* celebrates the awakening of the deity, offering a kind of wish for a prosperous and fulfilling day; *bhoga ārtī* accompanies the deity’s meal, typically symbolised by the offering of cooked rice; *śṛṅgāra ārtī* involves adorning and caring for the deity’s aesthetics, and is regarded as the most lavish *ārtī*—comparable to those held at only two other temples in the city (Zeiler 2014, 177)—and is also the most appreciated by devotees, who can behold the deity in all his splendour; and finally *śayana ārtī* marks the end of the divine day and the beginning of rest. The last *ārtī* must be followed by silence, out of respect for the divine slumber.

141 From an interview with Annapurna Mishra, former director of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh in Banaras, January 2010.

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The *pūjārīs* of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh usually only come for the *ārtī* ceremonies. In some ways they are like salaried workers, as they receive a fixed compensation for their services; they are not responsible for collecting offerings, accepting donations near the *liṅga* or performing other rituals within the temple space. It is possible, however, for them to provide some services elsewhere to earn extra income, for instance, by assisting pilgrims from the south in performing rituals for their ancestors (*śrāddhā*) and making devotional offerings to the river (*gaṅgā pūjā*). Other than at *ārtī* times, the temple is a ritual arena and ‘workplace’ of other Brahmans.

These fall within a broad category identified as *pandās*, and like the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh they claim ownership of the temple. The term *pandā* generally refers to a specialist who is entitled to maintain *jajmānī* (inherited client-based exchange) relationships with pilgrims. For their pilgrim-clients, the *pandā* organises accommodation (historically even in their own homes), arranges the performance of rituals (for which they hire other officiants and specialists) and they may also organise visits to other deities and *darśanas* elsewhere in the city. In some ways, it could be said that *pandās* are not so much ritual specialists or officiants as intermediaries between the pilgrim and the Brahmans who perform agreed-upon rituals on their behalf; the situation is more complex than that, though, because in some cases, or in the absence of appropriate other specialists, they do themselves perform ceremonies for their clients. Additionally, the term *pandā* is often loosely extended to refer to their subordinates and collaborators, who are also involved in serving or ‘managing’ pilgrims. These subordinates, often non-Brahmans, may take on new roles and assert their membership of the group but the *pandās* themselves typically maintain a higher position in the hierarchy (Vidyarthi 2005 [1979], 97).

In Banaras, the ‘property’ of a *pandā* is made up of the right to manage certain pilgrims (typically divided by their region of origin), the records of family genealogies (*bahī*) of their clients (*jajmān*) and a share of offerings made by devotees to particular deities in particular temples (*pārī*, or duty). A portion of this property can be transferred, gifted or sold according to a principle established, with regard to Banaras, by the colonial administration in the mid-18th century (Parry 1994: 94). Claims, disputes and transfers of ownership seem to be a daily occurrence in the lives of *pandās*, who have, moreover, acquired a generally poor reputation among pilgrims.¹⁴² The *pandās* refer to themselves as *tīrthapurohitas*, a term that

142 Countless anecdotes can be collected about the misadventures of pilgrims at the mercy of shady figures who communicate in a secret language to organise the ‘*mokṣa* business’, a term coined by Om Prakash Sharma, a collaborator with Parry in research about specialists connected to funeral rituals (Parry 1994). About so-called secret languages, see also Mehrotra 1993. Regarding the decline of the *pandā* figure and the

indicates pilgrims priests but that in Banaras has often been translated as ‘sons of the *tīrtha*’ or ‘sons of the Ganges’.¹⁴³

Three interrelated lineages of *pandās*, the Dubey, Pandey and Tivari families, participate in the everyday life of Kedāreśvar and have the right to collect *pārī* made to central and ancillary deities within the temple, according to a rotational system from day to day. The Dubey and Pandey families appear to have majority shares, while the Tivari are minority shareholders and at times seem to be employees or salaried workers for the other two families.¹⁴⁴ Since members of the three families often leave their religious duties to pursue more profitable activities, appearing at the temple only during busy periods to support their relatives, numbers of ‘employees’ (*naukris*) of the three families also work at the temple. These people are responsible for collecting offerings and managing, on behalf of their employers, relationships with the pilgrims. When members of the three families are not present, offerings are collected in a box, the proceeds of which are divided at the end of the day by the family in charge that day.

A system similar to the broader *pārī* system operates in relation to managing offerings to secondary *mūrtis*. Among those that receive special worship by devotees, and therefore require attention and management from officiants, are those in cells at the back corners of the temple, near the rear entrance. At the end of a corridor, where a devotee performing the *parikramā* (ritual circumambulation) passes, for instance, is the cell of Badrīnāth, a transposition of the Himalayan deity which belongs, in its mountain location, to the *cār dhām* (‘four abodes’) route in Uttarakhand. This route is itself a regional ‘replica’ of its namesake pan-Indian pilgrimage that also includes Himalayan Kedārīnāth.¹⁴⁵ The fame of the name and divine form of Badrīnāth attracts many pilgrims from other regions who,

profession generally, linked to changing *jajmānī* relationships and the emergence of a more impersonal religious market, see Van der Veer 1988 and Parry 1994, 97–109.

143 In Banaras, the term was originally used to refer to *naukulsardars*, nine family lineages considered in myth to have been the first inhabitants of the city. However, it is difficult to find an agreed list of the families; Vidyarthi (2005 [1979], 99) does provide a list of the nine, all of whom belong to the Kanyākubja group of Brahmans. Of these families, only six have survived. Two of those, lacking male heirs, broke the custom of endogamous marriage and intermarried with the Tivari family, Brahmans of the Saryūpārīṅ subgroup, who now claim original belonging as *tīrthapurohitas*. (Parry 1994, 99).

144 The *pārī* system in Banaras is very complex and offerings at the various temples are reportedly divided among three (alliances of) *paṇḍā* families; within each temple, the principle of rotation of offerings between families seems to vary. According to Parry (1994), the term *pārī* and the rotation of offerings also apply to funerary activities.

145 Also known as *chotā cār dhām* (‘little four abodes’), the route in Uttarakhand includes visits to Yamunotrī, Gaṅgotrī, Kedārīnāth and Badrīnāth. The last is also a stop on the pan-Indian *cār dhām*, the route of the four cities that symbolise the divine abodes

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having come to the temple for the *darśana* of Kedār, are offered by the *paṇḍā* the opportunity to contemplate this manifestation of Viṣṇu as well. Opposite and parallel to Badrīnāth is the shrine of Viśālākṣī, a ‘replica’ of the goddess already located in the city at Mīr Ghāṭ and considered a *śakti pīṭha*. The *darśana* of the goddess is normally managed by a woman member of the Tivari family.

Women from *paṇḍā* families do typically manage feminine deities in the temple. They take turns throughout the day to occupy, for example, a position just to the right of the entrance to the central hall, at the opening directly in front of the *mūrti* of Gaurī. This image is situated within an auxiliary hall that opens off the corridor that leads to the innermost part of the *garbhagrha*, and is visible to devotees only from that point. On either side of the opening are small *mūrtis* of Śītalā and Saṅkaṭā, two goddesses of particular local importance, to whom devotees—particularly regular worshippers who are familiar with them—pay great attention. Their presence seems to enrich the divine form of Gaurī because these other manifestations of her are important to the everyday concerns of devotees, such as healing and the removal of obstacles, and thus attract a wide range of requests and vows.

Responsibilities of the *paṇḍā* women in the management of the goddesses include collecting coins and banknotes offered by devotees and placed near the *mūrtis* of Śītalā and Saṅkaṭā or at the feet of Gaurī (whose actual *mūrti* is not directly accessible to devotees). The coins and banknotes are collected exclusively by these women, who take turns in a sort of cyclical ritual of cleaning and changing the offerings. The *paṇḍā* women are a routine presence at Kedār jī; their spatial placement is also fixed, unlike their male counterparts and their agents, who tend to transit through the space. The heads of the *paṇḍā* families appear at the temple very rarely and then usually only to attend rituals organised by their own family for wealthy *jajmān* or during special festivals, as will be discussed shortly. It is the younger brothers, sons, women and employees who appear daily.

The apparent harmony in the presence and rhythmic alternation of the *paṇḍā* families and the *pūjārīs* of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh in the management and life of Kedār jī comes after reported conflict in the past. Some local residents, who are regular attendees of the *ārtī* ceremonies, consider the temple to be the property of the Maṭh and report attempts by the *paṇḍās* to take possession of it. On the other hand, the *paṇḍā* families assert an inalienable belonging to the urban space and hereditary rights over the temple and its offerings. The secretary of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh described a fairly tolerant attitude, with *paṇḍās* reminded of certain rules: they are required to vacate the inner cell for cleaning and daily

at the cardinal points of the subcontinent. These are: Badrīnāth in the north, Puri in the east, Rameśvar in the south and Dwarka in the west.

ceremonies and must not flaunt their power within the temple.¹⁴⁶ Conversely, the *pūjārīs* of the Maṭh do not interfere in the activities of the *paṇḍā* families and are not authorised to receive offerings from pilgrims or provide extra services within the temple.

The presence of the various officiants does alternate in space and time but beyond the daily routine marked by the four *ārtī* ceremonies there is a cycle of other special moments in life, activities and worship at Kedār jī. Some extraordinary days and months are dictated by the general calendar but in Banaras the year is rich with pan-Indian, regional and local festivities. There are moments that are particularly significant for the temple itself, while other Pan-Indian festivals take on local forms and include activities specific to Kedār jī. These are opportunities to reinvent and transmit the traditions of the temple, establish meanings for the community and reaffirm the position of Kedār jī in the broader urban space. Other moments are occasions for *paṇḍā* families to assert their belonging to and authority over the temple space; while still others allow pilgrims from distant regions to relive experiences connected to their own land and region, creating extended spatial connections throughout the country.

In Banaras, time and space are intrinsically linked; the passing of the seasons accompanies the changing landscape and waterscape and consequently influences human activities of all kinds, from devotion to work and from celebrations of rites to daily concerns. The most tangible change is the disappearance of the recreational, cultural and social activities on the *ghāṭs* that so characterise certain images of the city; these activities are interrupted when the Ganges floods half of the riverside palaces and the city's inhabitants 'relocate' to the rooftops where they might also find some coolness during the humid monsoon days. Viewed from there, the *ghāṭs* do not exist, and neither does the opposite shore, where some rituals and recreational activities take place in other seasons.

Around the time of important festivals, such as Diwali, Mahāśivarātri, and Holi, Kedār jī attracts increased numbers of devotees who crowd in to have *darśana*; however, it is the lunar months of Kārttika and Śrāvaṇa, and the period leading up to Mahāśivarātri, that draw the largest crowds, as a result of the influx of pilgrims into the city on these occasions. The lunar months are marked by vows, fasts, specific *darśanas* on particular days and required offerings. Specific *vratas* (vows) regulate and influence the lives of individuals and the very geography of the city, often entailing *snāna* (ritual bathing) as well as donations to Brahmans. Ritual fasts, prescribed for certain days, or for the deity one wishes to honour, involve the preparation of particular foods that replace meals and are prepared

146 From an interview with Rajaraj, secretary of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh, January 2010.

in the streets near the major shrines. All these activities condition the life and geography of the places of worship and the city itself.

The pattern of vows, fasts, *darśanas* and auspicious activities marks the passage of time for many of the city's inhabitants; festivals, even if not directly observed, become temporal markers on which to base concepts, fix memories and remember events. Spending a year in Banaras, even for the foreign researcher, means submitting, physically and geographically, to the flow of local time, marked as it is by festivities and practices connected to the gods and their places in the city (cf. Kumar 1992).

Some of the particularly significant moments at Kedār jī occur weekly or bi-weekly rather than annually. For example, on the thirteenth day of each lunar fortnight the *pradośa vrata* (fast for Śiva) is always exuberantly celebrated by *pūjārīs* of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh. On the morning of that day, special brass *mūrtis* of Śiva and Pārvatī—originating in Tamil Nadu—are placed on a large image of Śiva's divine vehicle Nandin, so that they can be admired during the rest of the *pradośa vrata*. Then, after the day's *śṛṅgāra ārtī*, Nandin is lifted by a group of devotees, and the gods, richly dressed and protected by a tall parasol, are accompanied in a series of circumambulations around the central worship hall by the enthusiastic faithful, led by the *pūjārī*, who walks behind Nandin to regulate the pace of the fervent crowd. This event is felt to be exclusive to Kedār jī and a great honour for the *pūjārīs* of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh, who say they know of no other place in Banaras that has the same observance. *Pradośa vrata* is experienced as an extension of time and an expansion of the space of the temple, symbolised by the figure of the *pūjārī* who manages the entire celebration.

During Diwali and Kārttika Pūrṇimā (the major festivities of the month of Kārttika) and for Mahāśivarātri (the great night of Śiva), Kedār jī becomes a destination for crowds of devotees who come to perform the ceremonies and rituals prescribed by tradition. For Kārttika Pūrṇimā, locally known as Devdīwali, the temple space is literally overwhelmed by the *pūjā*, which is primarily performed by women.¹⁴⁷ The festival of Mahāśivarātri in Banaras is a time of frenzied devotional activities in all the shrines dedicated to the god. In the period leading up to the night, the city, conceived and built over time as the abode of Śiva, aligns itself with this image and presents itself to visitors as a colourful realisation of the imagined space. During this time—as many of my interlocutors in places of transposition noted—groups of pilgrims visit otherwise less frequented sites and officiants enact the narratives and explanations that connect local centres to pan-Indian mythical events.

147 In relation to the celebrations of the month of Kārttika in Banaras, see Pintchman 2005; which also discusses the *pūjā* of Kārttika Pūrṇimā (ibid., 83–87.)

On the day before Mahāśivarātri, Kedar ji is an important destination for visitors and the local community; the *darsana* of Śiva and his consort at this time is considered to be most auspicious. The union of the couple is, as noted, an observable fact in the temple, where the stone *liṅga* preserves a groove that divides it in half, marking its duality and thus sanctifying its greater power. The faithful spend the night in the spacious *maṇḍapa*, absorbed in prayer and contemplation or engaged in joyful exchanges with neighbours. They also share *prasāda*—the food offered and consecrated through contact with the divinity, and then distributed to devotees. At Mahāśivarātri, the *prasāda* mainly consists of *thaṇḍāi*, a drink made from milk, spices and dried fruits, typically consumed in the city during social and recreational occasions and often enriched with *bhāṅg*, a paste derived from *gāñjā* that is widely used in the worship of Śiva during major festivals.

Mahāśivarātri is a communal moment not only for the diverse devotees gathered in the temple but also for the groups of officiants at Kedar ji. It is a pan-Indian festival, and felt as such in a temple that, for some, is connected to the far south of the country. While other celebrations are identified by *pūjārīs* from the south and staff of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh as ‘*hindustānī*’—and thus connected to local rituals rather than southern traditions—Mahāśivarātri is regarded as a shared festival. For devotees from south India, it is also an opportunity to remember nostalgically the celebrations held on this occasion back home. The month of Śrāvaṇa (July and August) also sees significant religious activity in Śiva shrines throughout the city, and Kedār jī again is an important hub of devotion.

Acting Out Tradition, Reenacting the Myth

A festival worthy of particular attention is Makar Saṅkrānti, the only pan-Indian celebration timed according to the movement of the sun. It takes place on January 14th and marks the transit of the sun into Capricorn (*makar*) and the beginning of its northern journey, thus signalling the end of the darker winter period during which many activities are suspended. Makar Saṅkrānti marks the start of a new phase in the calendar, symbolically seen in the resumption of ritual ablutions, which had been suspended or reduced. It is celebrated as a harbinger of good fortune and prosperity and the day is spent on rooftops, where colourful kites soar and special foods are prepared. In Banaras, offerings are made particularly to Śani (the planet Saturn, lord of *makar*), and of course to Śiva, the patron of the city.

At Kedār jī, however, this pan-Indian festival is transformed into a local celebration commemorating the foundation of this specific divine form. On this day,

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a sort of birthday is celebrated for its deity; it commemorates the manifestation of *bābā* Kedāreśvar in *khicṛī*. Particularly in the southern neighbourhoods of the city, the day is known as *khicṛī kā din* (the day of *khicṛī*), but the preparation of *khicṛī* is considered auspicious elsewhere in the city as well. About two weeks before the festival, the *paṇḍās* begin preparations and collect offerings of money, rice, *dāl* and ghee. The Dubey family has been responsible for organising the event for about ten years, probably being responsible for its current form, and the particularly authoritative member of the family is Anand Prakash, known as Pappu Guru. Several signs announce the details of the day, summarise the founding myth and thus identify Makar Saṅkrānti with the day of the manifestation (*prakatyotsāva*) of Kedār jī through the *khicṛī* of King Māndhātā.

About one hundred kilos of *khicṛī* are cooked in large pots in the *maṇḍapa*, along with an equal quantity of *khīr*, a type of rice pudding. This food will be offered to Kedār jī and later distributed among the devotees, who will consume it directly at the temple or collect it in metal baskets for their subsequent meals, as is customary for *prasāda*. A central aspect of the day is the special decoration (*śṛṅgāra*) of the *liṅga* and the divine cell where it resides (Fig. 12). The decoration includes not only garlands of flowers placed directly on the *liṅga* but also the creation of a panel positioned behind the deity, facing the entrance of the cell and clearly visible to devotees approaching the *garbhagrha* entrance. This panel is made of intertwined leaves and flowers, along with other plant offerings dear to the god, and features a face—an anthropomorphic form of the deity—at its centre.¹⁴⁸ The uniqueness of the face depicted in the *śṛṅgāra* lies in its dual nature: it draws inspiration from the iconography of Ardhanārīśvara, the form of Śiva that is half woman, although only the head is shown here, rather than the full body. The left side of the face represents the goddess, Pārvatī, beautifully crowned with jewels, while the right shows the disheveled hair of Śiva, topped with a crescent moon.

The idea of the presence of the two deities in Kedār jī, mentioned in the glorification myth and reinforced by oral tradition, is further strengthened during this celebration. The duality is already evident to the devotee in the stone, which is effectively divided in half by a groove, but it is more vivid in its anthropomorphic depiction in the *śṛṅgāra*. This face portrays the dual image as constitutive of Kedār, reinforcing its intrinsic connection to Annapūrṇa and to food. The *śṛṅgāra*, commissioned from specialised artisans, is a source of great pride for

148 This description is based on my experience of participating in preparations for Makar Saṅkrānti in 2010. However, I observed similar details during the festival of 2011 and Asu, the son of Pappu Guru, showed me photographs of similar details in previous years.



Fig. 12 The special decoration (*śṛṅgāra*) of Kedār jī with food offerings at Makar Sankranti, January 2010. Author's photo.

the organising *paṇḍās* and devotees express awe and reverence for it during the majestic *darśana*.

A special *ārtī* is offered by the *paṇḍās* rather than the official *pūjārīs*, but not at one of the usual *ārtī* times. This extraordinary event appears to be based on the suspension of daily time and the inversion of usual roles. Just once every year at Makar Saṅkrānti, instead of being excluded from official rituals in the cell, the connection of the *paṇḍās* with the divine form is enacted. The celebration can thus be read as an instance of creativity and subversion that questions but simultaneously confirms the accepted roles and the usual divisions of space and time, all of which will return once the festival concludes. This is in line with what much anthropological literature on rituals and festivals demonstrated about temporary inversion of social roles and its necessity,¹⁴⁹ and we might presume that Makar Saṅkrānti helps to maintain the usual order and division of roles during the rest of the year. Certainly, the festival serves to spreading the narrative about the origins of the divine form, involving and informing new devotees each year and reinforcing the specific contours and characteristics of their locality.

Final Note: A Polyphony of Voices

Traditions surrounding Kedār jī consist of a polyphony of voices and meanings depending on the compiler of the *māhātmya*, the devotee, the officiant or the occasion; at the same time they exhibit a series of instances of individualisation and localisation. The narrative about the origins of Kedār jī, and its definition as a transposed deity, is initially established by the KKh, a text that serves as an authoritative framework for most oral accounts of the city's sacred sites. That myth is then reformulated and enriched in the KKm, a glorification that adds a level of localisation centred on a section of the entire city—the centre of which is precisely Kedār. From an analysis of these *māhātmyas*, several devices and strategies emerge that are used to make connections with pan-Indian sacred sites, invert the hierarchy of 'original' and 'replica' and, just as importantly, make comparisons with places that belong instead to the local sacred geography. These devices and strategies are then reused and enriched by oral transmission and practices within the temple.

Another particularity of the locality of Kedār jī emerges because of its appeal to pilgrims from the south. It has a ritual tradition, a priestly costume and iconographies that they recognise as familiar, thus activating the kind of reflexive

149 See, for example, van Gennep 2012 [1909], Turner 1969, Falassi 1987, Scarduelli 2000, Caillois 2001, Picard 2015.

relationship between people and places described by Rodman (1992, 646). In this sense, Kedār jī evokes and makes accessible for pilgrims from the south, whether visitors or residents of Banaras, something that they feel they ‘own’ and can be proud of, but which is at the same time in a ‘distant’ Indian city.

The promotion of Kedāreśvar takes place on multiple levels, addressing various types of devotees and pressing various buttons, while the fragility of its locality—which has to be reconstituted, re-enacted and redefined daily—provides various layers and costumes to be adopted at the right moment. The quality of being a transposed place is only one of the possible faces shown by the place. Temple officiants tend to feel that this face is appropriately shown to pilgrims from other regions or foreign scholars who are thought to be seeking lofty references. Local devotees, however, are more often shown a different face: the officiants present the temple as primarily inscribed in the locality, comparing it with well-known sites in the surrounding sacred geography to elevate and reaffirm it as a uniquely significant centre. From all this, the site emerges as a web of connections and references that can be drawn upon to strengthen the locality and offer each individual devotee the specific characteristics, qualities, parallels and services that meet their needs.

The unifying experience underlying the sacredness of a *tīrtha*, then, may not so much be the uniqueness of the place or any of its fixed qualities; rather, it may lie in the connections that the place weaves—connections that we have seen are original and foundational modes for the temples we have visited in these pages. The myriad of voices collected in the texts, along with the voices of officiants, devotees and pilgrims, seem to tell us that the more a place creates connections between the here and the elsewhere, the more it exists and exerts its power.

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Here and elsewhere offers a grounded study of crucial modes of sanctification and imagination of Hindu geographies: spatial transposition and substitute pilgrimage. It looks at the local representatives of the pan-Indian *jjyotirlingas* in Varanasi (Banaras) and the urban pilgrimage connected to them by combining interpretative analysis of glorifications (*māhātmyas*) with in-depth ethnographic research. This enables the author closely to observe the strategies that a variety of social actors employ to knit together and reproduce connections between places of the here and the elsewhere, and to locate deities and themselves within multiple spatial dimensions, both lived and imagined.

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