5. Conclusion

To the utterly at-one with Śiva
there's no dawn, no new moon,
no noonday, nor equinoxes,
nor sunsets, nor full moons;
his front yard is the true Benares, O Rāmanātha.
(Dēvāra Dāsimayya 98)[1]

Banaras has become a symbol of sacred spatiality whose reach extends far beyond the physical borders of India and South Asia. It attempts to both incorporate all other Indian sacred sites, and to transcend its own boundaries by being accessible in other parts of India as well. Two examples of Banaras' pervasive influence as a sacred centre with translocal status are the sacred thread ceremony (*upanayana*) and the promise often exchanged by newly married Hindu couples (*kāśīvrata*). In the former, the initiate makes a declaration to leave home ostensibly bound for Banaras in order to begin his religious education. He dons monk's attire, sollicites alms from friends and relatives and then makes a pretense to actually set out for Banaras (*deśāntara*). In the case of the married couples they vow to journey together to Banaras at least once in their lifetime.[2]

These are only two examples that demonstrate that the cultural production of an image of sacrality transcending the borders of the north-Indian pilgrimage site has been successful. The appropriation and incorporation of the sacred qualities of other sacred places into one sacred area, the *kāśīkṣetra*, is mediated by numerous spatial texts, pilgrimage practice as well as through the pictorial and graphical representations found in the religious cartography of Banaras. Both textual practice as well as the practice to visualize the sacred space form part of the cultural and social construction of the sacred territory of Banaras. In other words "in mapping a space (...) a community constitutes and unfolds a consciousness of itself, relating to the mapped land, sites and related histories as major constituents of this imaginative act." (Brosius 1997: 24). This specific space is constantly created and re-created via spatial practice which enacts through the performance of numerous processions in the course of its yearly cycle, the complex interrelation between the

---

1 Ramanujan (1973: 105).

2 See Pandey (1969: 139), Michaels (1998: 111–112) and personal communication by Parameswara Aithal.

sacred places, i.e. shrines, temples, water places etc. and the sacred spaces, such as the various areas of the city (*kṣetras, khaṇḍas*). The agents evolved in this continous process of cultural production are the authors, commentators, and editors of spatial texts, the local pilgrimage priests with their ritual and spatial knowledge, and the mapmakers that create pilgrimage maps. As the studied examples have shown, there often exists a close collaboration of these actors in their effort to extoll the fruit that is gained by entering into and moving within the territory of Kāśī. The promises for otherworldly merits lead to worldly gains of the whole city: the circulation of texts and maps enhances the circulation of pilgrims and is thus an important factor for the cities economy.

A wide range of cartographical representations of Banaras, produced in North India and Banaras, has been presented in this study. This underlines that South Asian cartography is not solely based on maps produced by mapmakers of the western cartographical traditions. The *Stylised map of Vārāṇasī* is dated to the second half of the 18th century and therefore the oldest of the presented maps. The production of the maps preserved in the presently inaccessible collections of the Jaipur City Palace has been tentatively ascribed, by Bahura & Singh (1990), to the 17th century. To my knowledge, no map of Banaras has been preserved that predates the 17th century. The question whether independent sources and traditions of South Asian cartography pre-date the circulation of the European-made terrestrial globes and maps can therefore not be answered. I would argue that this question presupposes independent, homogenous spheres of spatial representations. Raj (2003) has convincingly shown that the practice of mapping during the last centuries is in many cases best described as a joint Anglo-Indian venture. The British were consciously aware of the surveying skills in South Asia and made use of the existing practices:

> Quantitative terrestrial surveying was as commonly practised in South Asia as it was in Britain in the precolonial period and these practices were, in both cases, linked to the fiscal, administrative, royal, and military needs of the respective regimes. (Raj 2003: 51–52)

Dealing with celestial globes in the context of the visualizations of India's geo-body Ramaswamy notes on the production of these globes:

> northern India being one of the key sites for their production from the end of the 16th century well into the colonial period. (...) From the closing years of the 16th century into the 19th, there are also scattered examples of the appropriation of the globe-form to represent Puranic territorial conceptions, incommensurable though they might be with the Puranic notion of the earth as a flat disc. (...) The continued production of such Hindu "cosmographic" globes in the colonial periods leads me to suggest that the European terrestrial globe (...) did not displace older enchanted notions of terrestrial space. (Ramaswamy 2002: 160–162).

The mutual relationship between British and Indian cartographic practices could be demonstrated in the case of Prinsep's map *The City of Bunarus* (1822) where the

mapping of a procession, listing of mosques, shrines and temples as well as religious festivals forms an integral part of this first topographical representation of Banaras. On the other hand, as in the case of the *Kāśīdarpaṇapūrti* (1877), maps produced in Banaras do explicitly refer to British cartography, booklets that give additional information on maps (*Saptapurīyātrādipatra* 1873) are available at the bungalow of the Station Master. The District Magistrate Gavins and his staff is involved in the measurement of the Pañcakrośīyātrā that was undertaken in the latter half of the 19th century in the course of a debate concerning the correction of position of the processional route. The search for the origins or independent roots of South Asian cartography is therefore questionable. What has been found for the colonial period, the existence of a hybrid culture with a "constant circulation of ideas, practices and personnel" (Markovits & Pouchepadass & Subrahmanyam 2003: 8) should rather be postulated for pre-colonial and pre-modern periods as well.

An Indian tradition of pictorial representations of sacred spaces is documented by paintings on cloths (*paṭas*) representing sacred places, the so-called *tīrthapaṭas*. By simply looking at these "sacred hangings" one gains religious merit and there is evidence–at least in the context of Jain religious practice–that these *paṭas* are displayed for the devotees "in open areas so [that] they might have darshana of the holy site" (Talwar & Krishna 1979: 83). The very images of temples and pilgrimage sites thus become objects of veneration. These paintings on cloth are extremely perishable, and have not been preserved but rather replaced by newer versions with brighter colours, and are therefore only rarely found in collections. This tradition of sacred hangings with representations of sacred spaces certainly merit further study, and would hopefully yield new findings with regard to one of the practices of visualizations that influenced the Indian religious cartography.

The tradition of mental visualizations (*bhāvanā, dhyāna*) ties ritual practice and textual sources to the religious practice of internal and external visualizations of gods and sacred places. The sacred space of Banaras consists of numerous sacred places inhabited by sacred beings "living" within this space, or temporarily invoked in temples, shrines, fords, tanks, wells, etc. The devotee might visit these sacred places by going directly to the respective location, or by participating in one of the many processions that constitute the sacred spaces of the *kāśīkṣetra*. He might circumambulate the condensed space of Kāśī as represented by the Pañcakrośī temple in Banaras, as well. Or he might visualize the images of these sacred places mentally by looking at the pages of the *Kāśī Dhyāna Mālā*. Or one might–as Dēvāra Dāsimayya, the south-Indian Vīraśaiva poet of the 10th century, put it–visualize one's front yard as the "true Banaras". The religious maps of Banaras that have been studied are situated at this junction between outer and inner space. These sometimes idealist and abstract, sometimes highly sophisticated maps visualize both the sacred spatiality and the outer space of Banaras and thus serve for internal visualizations (*dhyāna, darśana*). Seeing and visualizing the sacred space of

Banaras in religious maps is one of the many forms of an external representation of the sacred spaces of Banaras that has contributed to the widespread fame of this pilgrimage centre.

The study of the religious maps and the sacred spatiality of Banaras requires a twofold perspective, encompassing both ritual practice as reflected in processions and textual practice as found in spatial texts. The eulogical literature on Banaras in all its diverse forms of edited texts, manuscripts, digests, manuals, hand lists etc. is an essential point of reference for the mapping of Banaras. Sources such as the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* and the *Kāśīrahasya* provide both an authoritative textual background and framework for the performance of processions in Banaras, and for the practice of visualization of sacred spaces in the religious cartography of Banaras, as well. These texts serve as an overarching referential textual frame for the evolving structure which constitutes the sacred topography of Banaras, and as such are inscribed into the cartographic space as well as the physical space, i.e. on shrines and temples etc. The reference to and incorporation of textual sources in the religious cartography includes literal quotations, as in the case of the map *Pilgrims in Banaras,* as well as the "echoing" of passages in slightly changed or corrupted forms as found in Sukula's *Kāśīdarpaṇa*. In addition, visual representations and images are, as in the case of the anthropomorphic map showing Śiva's body covered with 19 *liṅgas* that forms part of the map *Saptapurīyātrādiprakāśapatra*, rendered authoritative by the reference to the corresponding textual source. This close interrelation between religious cartography and ritual as well as textual practice, allows the latitude, nevertheless, for disputes and negotiation of specific pilgrimage practices which are, in turn, reflected in the religious cartography.

No uniform representation of centrality and inner and outer space has been found on the studied maps. Only on the *Stylised map of Vārāṇasī* is the main temple of Viśvanātha located in the middle of this symmetrically constructed map, forming the centre of its east-west axis. In contrast to the other maps we examined, we have this one striking example of a religious map of Vārāṇasī where a construction of centrality is obviously intended. Symmetrical concerns about Madhyameśvara, the "Lord of the Centre" forming the ideal geometrical centre of the Pañcakrośīkṣetra, evidently did not influence the structure of this map. Lord Viśvanātha, the main deity of Banaras, constitutes the sacred centre rather than the geometrically constructed centre, and he is consequently highlighted as the centre of the sacred territory.[3] The *Stylised map of Vārāṇasī*, however, is the exception to the rule. In contrast, Sukula's *Kāśīdarpaṇa* is characterized by diversity and complexity and the mapmaker was obviously not concerned with symmetry or centrality. Although Lord Viśvanātha is depicted as somewhat larger than the adjacent shrines he was not assigned a size that dominated the map. The circular shape of this map does however create the visual impression of a centralized inner

3 See Michaels (2000: 194–197) for a more detailed discussion of the notions of the centre, the middle and centrality in the religious cartography of Vārāṇasī.

space. Significantly, Bahadur Singh's *Saptapurīyātrādiprakāśapatra* depicts the temple of Viśvanātha in the same standardized form as all of the other temples. One is only able to identify Viśvanātha's temple through the use of the map's legends.

One of the reasons for the variation in dealing with the notion of centrality lies in the basic tension inherent in the concept of the *kāśīkṣetra*. The main temple of the present day *kṣetra*, with the *liṅga* of the Lord of the Universe, does not comprise the geometrical centre of the *kāśīkṣetra* that is demarcated by the circular procession road of the Pañcakrośīyātrā. The map's geometrical centre is occupied by the Lord of the Middle, Madhyameśvara, who was previously mentioned as the centre of the Avimuktakṣetra in the early versions of the *Skandapurāṇa*. The remains of this temple, however, and its present status in the religious landscape of Banaras are rather insignificant in comparison to the Viśvanātha temple complex. A choice must therefore be made, when creating a cartographical representation of Vārāṇasī, between the geometrical construction of the *kṣetra* and visualization based on the significance of the depicted temples. This apparent tension offered a variety of possible perspectives to the mapmaker. As was described in the case of the debate which occurred in Banaras during the latter half of the 19th century, the attempt of the religious elite of Banaras to alter the path of the Pañcakrośīyātrā, as then performed, was justified by projecting the measurements calculated by surveying physical space onto the sacred topography of Banaras. In this case I was able to demonstrate that this conflict and tension between actual pilgrimage practice and the textual definitions of sacred space has influenced the making of maps in this period.

Another important factor to be considered regarding the complexity and variety of perspectives on centrality is that over the centuries the history of the main temples, Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara as well as many of the other sacred places is a continuous story of construction, destruction, shifting of places, reconstructions and restorations. The fact that these sacred places were continually threatened and had, at times, to be re-located has certainly contributed to a multi-layered perspective on the sacred spaces of Banaras. Each religious map has to be placed in its specific historical context. At the same time it incorporates in most cases the existing layers of sacred spatiality, i.e. it combines a synchronic as well as diachronic dimension. In other words, the religious cartography of Banaras generally represents, in the same fashion as the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, "a timeless Vārāṇasī centering around Viśveśvara" (Bakker 1996: 43) and depicts elements that are specific to the time of its production and the persons involved.

Religious maps of Banaras are generally oriented towards the west, the exception being the *Kāśīdarpaṇa* which displays an eastern orientation or a multiple orientation with varying perspectives. The purely conventional practice of "northing" maps in western cartography has not influenced the religious cartography of Banaras. Deviation arises only in the case of reproductions given in

secondary literature where, as in the case of the *Kāśīdarpaṇa*, the orientation of the map has been deliberately changed and "corrected" according to western cartographic standards. The standardized spatial structure of all of the studied maps is characterised by the river Gaṅgā being depicted at the bottom and in the east. The temple of Dehalīvināyaka–the Guardian of the Western Threshold–is shown at the top of the maps in the western direction. The limits of the sacred territory are defined by the rivers Asī on the left, in the southern direction. The river Varaṇā forms the limit on the right side in the northern corner of the maps.

The example of Sukula's *Kāśīdarpaṇa* has shown that the indigenous religious cartography of Banaras, as represented by Sukula's map, does not necessarily exclude modern buildings like the town hall or public spaces, such as the Mandākinī pond. This is an important example regarding the concept of fluidity, and the seemingly clear-cut distinction between the representation of sacred and profane space. Modern infrastructure is sometimes included in the depiction of Banaras' "sacred" topography. While this feature is found only sporadically on the 19th century maps it, along with scenes from everyday life, becomes more prominent on maps from the 20th century. We begin to see railway lines (see Plate 6), cars, the post office etc. represented as integral parts of the city's topography.[4] A strict distinction between everyday topography ("Alltagstopographie") and religious or sacred topography ("Sakraltopographie") in religious cartography as suggested by Hauser-Schäublin (2003) seems therefore problematic. Everyday topography and infrastructure has, nonetheless, been entirely omitted from the studied pictorial maps.

The religious cartography of Banaras does not intend to orient pilgrimage practice in topographical space and is therefore not "designed to help the pilgrims find their way round the holy sites" (Pieper 1979: 215). The visualization of sacred space rather serves as a medium to represent the experience of the sacred spatiality of Banaras. It is therefore fitting to say, as Benedict Anderson has articulated, that the studied pilgrim maps–like other cosmological representations of sacred space–are "useless for any journey save that in search of merit and salvation" (Anderson 1993: 171). It is not the pilgrimage map that creates practice. None of the studied maps serves the purpose of a guide map for pilgrims carrying out their processions. The medium for guiding pilgrims are the hand lists like the manuscript *Prayāgayātra* (Fig. 1) that contain the sequences of places to be visited. And it is most probable that these lists were used by the mapmakers who then created graphic representations of these processions. The pilgrims are provided with a picture and souvenir of the city that depicts the basic elements of its sacred topography: a large number of sacred places, and important landmarks drawn in an idealised, abstract form; not to scale, but, in most of the cases, in correct relative position to each other. This correctness in spatial relations does not, however, assist with orientation in physical space. The sacred spaces of Banaras are "mirrored" or

4 See, for example, the modern pilgrimage map analyzed by Michaels (2000).

visualized on the religious maps, and are thus transformed into an "imagined space". Unlike "scientific" topographical maps, the studied religious maps do not represent an impersonal type of knowledge of the depicted territory (Harley 1988). The visualized space is not empty or desocialized, there is no abstract territory but a "lived territory".[5] The imaginative act that aims at a visualization of spatial texts is therefore based on the continued spatial practice of both the inhabitants and the pilgrims visiting the city.

5 See Ramaswamy on cartographical representations of "India" in the form of bodyscapes: "As such, these maps–and I insist that bodyscapes *are* maps–transform abstract territory into lived nation." (2001: 98).