Grounding the Texts: Kanchi's Urban Logic and Ambitious Extensions[1]

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Introduction

Railway Road marks the unofficial eastern border of Kanchipuram's urban core but not the end of the city's expanse. A lofty gateway, modeled after a traditional *toraṇa* (archway leading to a temple), announces that crossing Railway Road will soon lead to the neighborhood of Māmallaṉ Nagar (figure 1). Here some of the roads are unpaved but the houses are made of poured concrete, brightly painted in flat planes of primary colors (figure 2). A four-storey home boasts three lotiform balconies accentuated with pink and white flourishes. This grid-like, suburban sprawl follows the railway tracks east for a spell, then gives way to eventual paddy fields and the flood plain of Nathapettai Lake.

Māmallaṉ Nagar's name is drawn from *Mahāmalla*, an epithet of the Pallava dynasty that ruled much of northern Tamil Nadu using Kanchi as their royal capital from the third through the ninth century, and from Mamallapuram, the Pallava's seaside town. The neighborhood's central street is named after the great Pallava king, Mahendravarman I (ca. 580–630 CE), who is credited with commissioning the first temples in the region to be made of stone. Although such titles suggest a desire to connect the neighborhood with historical Kanchi, Māmallaṉ Nagar is a new development advertising ready-to-occupy, budget homes. It bears little resemblance to the historical city.

However, the formation and development of this neighborhood represent much more ancient processes of urbanization that have been at work in Kanchi for millennia. Māmallaṉ Nagar's expanding footprint once belonged to the rural hinterland that

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still surrounds much of the city. Now, as in the past, the natural landscape is being incrementally converted into settled, civic construction. Flows of water are being diverted, soft surfaces transformed into hard ones. Temporary structures are being replaced with buildings made of more durable and more fashionable materials. Schools and temples are being built, and new populations or sectors of society are arriving.

Fig.1: Gateway to Māmallaṉ Nagar, Kanchi.

Māmallaṉ Nagar is the newest neighborhood in this eastern part of Kanchi. If we were to turn east off Railway Road a half-kilometer farther south, we would instead encounter a very different type of settlement (figure 5). Here the streets are circuitous as opposed to gridded. This enclave is a more ancient place that was transformed over time from a rural area into a part of the city. It is known variously as Tirukkāli-mēṭu and Vēppaṅkuḷam. Although many of the people here work inside the urban center, the area retains a sense of autonomy. Residents have lived here for many generations and the local knowledge about the area and about Kanchi runs deep.

Fig. 2: House in Māmallaṉ Nagar, Kanchi.

Fig. 5: Tirukkālimēṭu village, Kanchi.

Fig. 6: Tirukkālimēṭu village.

Fig. 7: *Ciṉṉa* (little) Vēppaṅkuḷam, Tirukkālimēṭu.

Each name for the enclave is derived from an aspect of the local topography or perhaps the society who lived there in the past. The name Vēppaṅkuḷam [neem tree + pond] refers to a neem tree-surrounded pond that provides water for the village. Today, there is not one but two ponds known as *Vēppaṅkuḷam* (figure 6). *Ciṉṉa* (little) *Vēppaṅkuḷam* is a circular pond enclosed on all sides by the backs of wooden houses that are built in Kanchi's local domestic architectural style (figure 7). *Periya* (big) *Vēppaṅkuḷam* is a larger, oval-shaped pond that is also known by its Puranic name, Indra Tīrtham. It is difficult to know which pond is the eponymous *Vēppaṅkuḷam*, if indeed it is not both.

Fig. 8: Tirukkālīśvara temple, Tirukkālimēṭu.

As for Tirukkālimēṭu, the suffix *-mēṭu* has a dual etymology. Literally defined as "eminence, little hill, hillock, ridge, or rising ground" (*Tamil Lexicon*), *-mēṭu* can be used to mean a physically high expanse of land, but it can also refer to the place where the higher echelons of society dwell. For example, while *paḷḷu teru* (low street) is where workers and lower caste members live, *mēṭu teru* (high street) is reserved for higher castes, such as brahmins and ruling elites.[2] That *-mēṭu* here likely refers to the social rather than the physical landscape can be seen through a topographical map. At only eighty meters above sea level, Tirukkālimēṭu has one of the lowest elevations in the city.[3]

2 My thanks to A. Valavan for alerting me to this dual meaning, and for providing the example.
3 https://en-ca.topographic-map.com/maps/87a/Kanchipuram/ (accessed July 2020).

According to senior residents, Tirukkālimēṭu and Vēppaṅkuḷam are not exactly the same village, but the borders are ambiguous and the names are used interchangeably. Two names for an area can comfortably coexist. Since Tirukkālimēṭu is the name more frequently used today, I will refer to the area as Tirukkālimēṭu.[4]

Besides the lay of the streets and a connection with the natural landscape in the local nomenclature, a characteristic of this older type of settlement is the presence of a prominent temple that functions both as a place of worship and as a community center for residents and occasional visitors to gather. In Tirukkālimēṭu and many similar villages in northern Tamil Nadu, the temple is made of granite stone and was built during the Chola era (ca. 850–1275 CE). Often the Chola-period temple is a reconstruction from an even earlier shrine that had been made of less permanent materials, such as brick and wood. The Chola construction could then be renovated and expanded or added to in subsequent centuries. Constructional activity facilitated the life of the temple, as it continues to do today.

Fig. 9: Kanchi temple map (Stein 2017).

4 I am grateful to A. Valavan for providing the local knowledge about nomenclature, and for being an invaluable fountain of local histories.

In Tirukkālimēṭu, the main temple is situated directly between the two neem tree ponds, on the south side of Tirukkālimēṭu Street, the main point of access from Railway Road into the enclave (figure 8). It is a stately stone structure with a shrine (*vimāna*) and vestibule (*ardhamaṇḍapa*) that date to the late tenth or early eleventh century, and surrounding enclosures (*prākāra*) and a gated entryway (*gopura*) that were added in the sixteenth century.[5] Like the village and its ponds, the temple has several names. Locals and Kanchi residents refer to the temple as Tirukkālīśvara (for the Lord who dwells at Tirukkālimēṭu). The signboard at the temple's entry announces the god as Satyanāthasvāmī. Devout elders call the temple Kacci Neṟi Kāraikkāṭu, a variant of which also appears below Satyanāthasvāmī on the signboard and is the name used in the *Tēvāram* hymn by Campantar. And in the temple's inscriptions, the name is Tirukkāraikkāṭu, similar to Kacci Neṟi Kāraikkāṭu, and the god is Tirukkāraikkāṭu-Mahādēvar or Tirukkāraikkāṭu-uṭaiyār. For the purposes of this essay, I will refer to the temple with the most common local name, Tirukkālīśvara.

Kanchipuram grew into a city in an agglomerative manner, which means that autonomous villages like Tirukkālimēṭu were gradually incorporated into the urban area. A widely known example is the part of town now called Little-Kanchi. This was originally the independent village of Attiyūr, which became part of Kanchi in the thirteenth century. Up until that time, inscriptions refer to Attiyūr as distinct from Kanchi, but a record reportedly on the north wall of the second *prākāra* at the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple mentions *kāñcipurattu-tiruvattiyūr*, meaning "Attiyūr, a part of Kanchi" (*SII* IV no. 859-860). The inscription documents the conjoining of two parts of the city that would always remain uneasily separated. In the sixteenth century, former Attiyūr accrued the epithet Viṣṇu-Kanchi due to the predominance of the Varadarāja Perumāḷ and other Viṣṇu temples in the area (Mahalingam 1991, Tp.-1460, 322–323).

It was precisely through the building of temples that Kanchi became the compact city that it is today, and that its scope expanded in the proverbial four directions. Kanchi was a major political, commercial, and sacred epicenter during the era of stone temple construction under the Pallava and Chola dynasties, especially during the eighth through thirteenth centuries (figure 9). In this essay I focus primarily on the Chola-era city, which I refer to as "Chola-Kanchi," meaning not only the royal precincts but the entire political and cultural milieu of Kanchi during the era. The Chola's city established and entrenched a sacred geography that still undergirds the city. This geography was unique, not described in any text, and deeply rooted in a local sense of spatiality expressed through the placement of temples. Overlaying the local urban structure, the circulation of a cosmopolitan population and ritual culture widened the scope of the city.

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5 The earliest noticed inscription on the temple dates to ca. 1018 CE, and the *vimāna* and *ardhamaṇḍapa* conform to the architectural style of that period. My thanks to Crispin Branfoot for confirming on-site a sixteenth-century date for the expansions.

The essay first sketches the basic footprint of the Chola city as it compares with the urban area we encounter today. I consider a plausible location for a royal palace, and a main road that served multiple functions as a point of passage and of orientation for the city and its temples. I then return us to the village of Tirukkālimēṭu and its temple as a case study of an area that retains a sense of independence despite its connection with the city. By correlating the physical and mythological histories of the temple with features of the natural landscape and records contained in inscriptions, we can see on the micro level processes at work on a larger scale and with greater complexity throughout historical Kanchi. Through the establishment of temples and the laying of roads that led to them, Kanchi became a great city.

Fig. 10: Lakṣita cave-temple, Maṇṭakappaṭṭu.

Chola-Kanchi

In art historical and political histories of South India, Kanchi is best known as a Pallava city. Famed for their sponsorship of literature and temple architecture, the Pallavas fixed their seat in Kanchi from the third through the ninth centuries and were among the great South Indian dynasties. Technologies of building for sacred edifices radically transformed under their reign. Previously reserved for funerary architecture, stone became the preferred material for building elite temples. King Mahendravarman I (ca. 580–630 CE) sponsored the very first cave-temple in the Tamil speaking region, situated in the village of Maṇṭakappaṭṭu, and he had its façade

inscribed with a famous verse that lay claim to this new technique. *Vicitracitta* (brilliant minded), he had fashioned a home for Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu without the use of brick, timber, metal, or mortar (figure 10) (*EI* XVII, no. 5).

Fig. 11: Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchi.

Once construction of temples in stone was established, the practice steadily increased in complexity and sophistication. Temples made fully or partially of brick continued to be built—even at the elite level—for centuries, but stone became a significant and widely favored choice.

The Pallavas' artistic legacy is best materialized in their monumental Kailāsanātha temple at Kanchi (figure 11). Built under royal patronage by King Rājasiṃha in the first quarter of the eighth century, the Kailāsanātha was among the largest freestanding temples in the entire Indian subcontinent at the time of its construction. Its scale, as well as its aesthetic and formal virtuosity, were unprecedented. The compound included a large central shrine and freestanding entry hall, surrounded by an enclosure wall of crenelated, single-occupancy shrines. Each space in the temple was conducive to different classifications of ritual activity (figure 12). Although the Kailāsanātha is not presently a central focus of devotion in Kanchi, it continues to draw attention, primarily from foreign travelers who visit the temple for its finely carved and painted figures of deities, its intricate ornamental motifs, and its florid inscriptions, all of which cover nearly every surface of the walls.

Fig. 12: Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchi.

The Kailāsanātha and some of the other Pallava temples, most notably the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ, have dominated scholarly research on Kanchi (Gillet 2010; Hudson 2008; Kaimal 2021). These studies help us understand much about the development of courtly culture, streams of religious praxis such as Śaiva Siddhānta, the evolution of architectural knowledge and techniques in South India, as well as colonial-era reception and afterlives of temples, including the formation of the Archaeological Survey of India. However, the tight focus on one or even several Pallava temples cannot accommodate a broader view of the city. Consequently, the myriad other temples in Kanchi have been overlooked, even those that stand just meters away from the Pallava edifices.

If we move away from the Pallava temples and take a bird's eye view of the city, we begin to see that Kanchi is a structured urban landscape that is peppered with manifold temples (see fig. 9). Many of the old temples can still be found—or at least bits and pieces of them. Sometimes entire shrines survive. More often, however, fragments are built into later walls or transformed almost beyond recognition through centuries of renovations and expansions. In addition to the more than thirty full temples that survive from the eighth through thirteenth centuries, dozens of shrines and fragments can still give us a picture of a city packed with temples.

At least twenty-five stone temples in Kanchi date to the Chola period, and disengaged sculptures attest to the former presence of a far greater number. Six temples bear inscriptions and have an architectural style that corresponds with other

dated tenth-century temples. A dozen extant temples can be dated to the eleventh century through similar means. Construction continued in the twelfth century, most notably with the Jvarahareśvara temple, an ornate construction with no parallel in northern Tamil Nadu. Well into the thirteenth century, temples continued to be built, renovated, realigned, and expanded. It was also in this period that the bulk of village areas within and around Kanchi was subsumed by or integrated into the city. In subsequent centuries, under the auspices of the Vijayanagara rulers, many temple complexes were expanded or redesigned significantly, and roads were widened to facilitate access to them. Villages like Tirukkālimēṭu and temples like Tirukkālīśvara increasingly became integrated with the city.

Fig. 14: Central Kanchi, with *maṇḍapas* marked in yellow.

Nearly all of the temples dedicated to Śiva that have physical components from the Pallava or Chola period find their way into the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, one of Kanchi's legendary histories (see the contribution by Buchholz in this volume). Jonas Buchholz has undertaken correlating the temples mentioned in this text with existing shrines in Kanchi. The only temples with ancient components that are not mentioned are the Ruṭrakoṭīśvara temple and the Pallava-era Mukteśvara temple. Ruṭrakoṭīśvara is a small temple that houses a Pallava-era fragment of a lion-based pillar on the premises. The temple's main structure is quite recent and would not have been built at the time the text was composed. The presence of a Pallava-era fragment generally indicates that the temple site is ancient, but it is possible that this particular

pillar base was moved to a newly established site because it is the only early component in the entire complex.

The *Kāñcippurāṇam* does not give any special priority to the older temples. Instead, it seems to aim at a comprehensive cataloguing of sacred places in the city dedicated to the deity of choice. In this way, Kanchi's history is homogenized for religious purposes, yet living local knowledge both acknowledges and preserves the city's layered history. In addition to Ekāmbaranātha, Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ, and Varadarāja Perumāḷ, less widely known temples including Kāyārohaṇeśvara, Karukkiṉil Amarntavaḷ, Tirumēṟṟaḷinātha, Tirukkālīśvara, and Brahmapurīśvara (in Tēṉampākkam, a Kanchi outpost similar to Tirukkālīmēṭu) are known to Kanchi's elder generations as important sites specifically because they are ancient. Some of the priests are familiar with the inscriptions and the temples' physical as well as religious histories. For these members of society, multiple truths can comfortably coexist in the space of a single temple—each temple in Kanchi can simultaneously be "one thousand years old" and have a very specific date of construction in the Pallava, Chola, Vijayanagara, or more recent era. Historical and mythological time are not mutually exclusive.

Royal Palace

The Chola city lay the basic footprint of the urban area we encounter today.[6] While temples provide tangible pinpoints, certain absences in the built environment indicate other civic structures that have not survived, such as a royal palace.

Made of perishable materials as it would have been, the remains of a palace can no longer be detected. However, inscriptions affirm that there was a Chola palace in Kanchi by at least the tenth century, and that it was recognized as a legitimate administrative headquarters throughout the Chola's domain. Dated to ca. 998 CE, an important copper plate charter records an order that the king made while he was seated in the *citramaṇḍapa* (painted hall) of his golden palace at Kanchi.[7] This order concerned the expenditures and income of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, over which he apparently held jurisdiction. On the royally sponsored Bṛhadīśvara temple at Gangaikondacholapuram, an inscription dated ca. 1068 records another order regarding temple expenditures that was given by the Chola king Vīrarājendra while sitting in his palace in Kanchi (*ARE* 1892, no. 82; *SII* IV, no. 529; Mahalingam 1991, 322–323).[8]

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6 My field surveys of temples correlate well with epigraphic studies by James Heitzman, who arrives at the same conclusion about the footprint of the city (Heitzman and Rajagopal 2004).

7 For discussion of this charter (Uttama Cōḻa, 986 CE), see Nagaswamy 2011, 19–24.

8 The record is on the northwest corner of the monument and is dated in the king's fifth regnal year (ca. 1068 CE). See also Ali 2012.

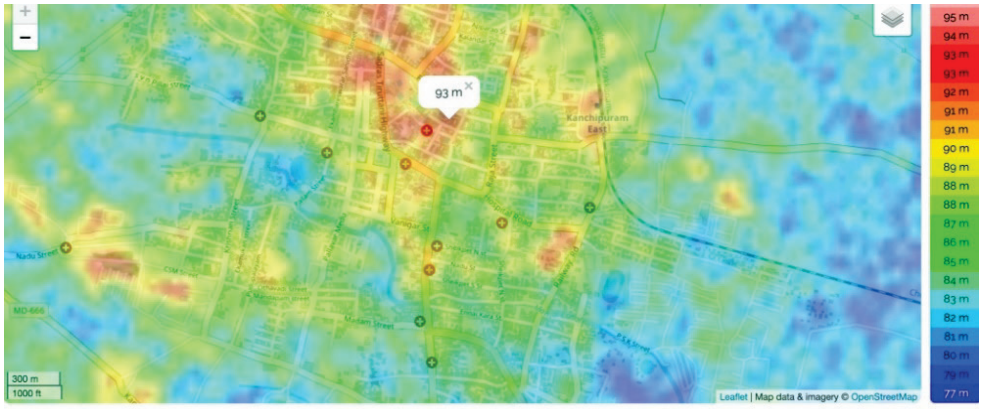

Fig. 15: Topographical map of Kanchi, courtesy https://en-ca.topographic-map.com/maps/87a/Kanchipuram/

An area that is devoid of historical remains at the very center of Kanchi suggests the site where the royal palace likely stood. The palace's former presence is indicated first by four broad streets arranged in a square around a noticeably elevated region, spanning half a kilometer on each side (figure 14). At ninety-three meters above sea level according to topographical studies of Kanchi, this is one of the highest points in the otherwise relatively uniform city (figure 15).[9] The four streets are called the Rāja Vītis, meaning king's streets. There is an East, West, North, and South Rāja Vīti.

At the square's four corners, as well as at the place where the southern Rāja Vīti is met by a large north-south running road (to which we will return), the remains of stone and mixed-media pavilions (*maṇḍapas*) can be detected through layers of urban development (figure 16-17). Some of these *maṇḍapas* have become shelters for makeshift restaurants or repair shops, while others have accrued street-side shrines as well as monumental billboards built up against their walls. Difficult to see as the original structure is, these vestiges of the ancient city are easily overlooked. Even local residents pass by them daily without taking notice. However, their combination of granite, sandstone, and brick construction is matched only by the ancient parts of temples in the city (figure 19). While the pillars and architectural elements in the *maṇḍapas'* street-facing sections appear to date to the Vijayanagara period—probably the sixteenth century when ample construction was taking place in the city—other parts of the structure may well be older.

9 Elevations range from approximately 83–93 meters above sea level. https://en-ca.topographic-map.com/maps/87a/Kanchipuram/ (accessed July 2020).

Fig. 16: *Maṇḍapa* on west side of main road in central Kanchi.

Fig. 17: *Maṇḍapa* on east side of main road in central Kanchi.

Fig. 19: *Maṇḍapas* in central Kanchi, seen from above.

Rather than having a building at the center, the Rāja Vīti streets enclose a dense buildup of shops and domestic structures. Also within the square is the tenth-century shrine of Cokkeśvara and the larger temple complexes of Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ and Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, which both have portions that date to the Chola era. The main body of Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ was built in the eleventh century, and Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ was a cluster of earlier shrines that became unified into a large complex not before the fourteenth century.[10] Although we cannot determine the precise expanse of the palace itself, Sanskrit architectural treatises, such as the *Mayamata* (ca. tenth century), specify that royal precincts include shrines of varying sizes (see Dagens 2007). Unlike the temples and the *maṇḍapas*, the palace itself would have been made of perishable materials, such as brick and timber—the same materials employed for domestic architecture. This is why little physical evidence of palaces survives from anywhere in premodern India. A rare example of palace ruins in South India can be seen at Gangaikondacholapuram, where the brick foundation structure was exposed through excavation.[11] Visiting the site makes an informative counterpoint to the grandeur of the all-stone temple.

Literary descriptions provide us with an idealized picture of palatial complexes. Texts across a range of genres, such as the *Cilappatikāram*, the *Daśakumāracarita*,

10 For an excellent study of this temple's development, see Venkataraman 1973.
11 The excavation is reported in IAR 1955–1956, 27.

the *Mayamata*, and the *Periyapurāṇam*, describe royal complexes as vast, sprawling compounds with fortified gates (see Ramachandra Dikshitar 1978; Onians 2005; Dagens 2007; McGlashan 2006). According to the poems of the *Pattuppāṭṭu*, specifically the *Perumpāṇārṟuppaṭai* and the *Maturaikkāñci*, the surrounding gates and walls were made either of stone or of brick (see Krishna 1992, 2 and Rajarathnam 2000, 169). In the Sanskrit travel novel, the *Daśakumāracarita* (circa eighth century), the hero has an arduous journey to reach his beloved in the palace's inner quarters (*Daśakumāracarita*, chapter 8). He first has to cross a moat and skillfully scale a rampart, then climb up "a flight of steps built from piled baked bricks [that] led to the upper floor of the principal gate." Upon descending, he turns down avenues of tree-lined garden paths, while "feeling the bulging wall of the enormous palace" (see Onians 2005, 301–303).

In the twelfth-century hagiography of the Tamil saint Appar, petitioners assemble at Kanchi's palace gate and must explain their purpose to the guard, who serves as an intermediary (*Periyapurāṇam* 1350, see McGlashan 2006, 131). The epic *Cilappatikāram* [*Tale of the Anklet*] (variously dated between the second and ninth centuries CE) includes an episode in which the anklet's thief encounters watchmen at the gates to Madurai's palace (see Ramachandra Dikshitar 1978, 224–225).[12] Across genre and period of composition, texts place the palace in a centrally located position in the northern part of the city, just like the Rāja Vīti area in Kanchi.[13]

Royal Road

If the Cholas found an ideal place for a palace in Kanchi's naturally elevated urban core, they also managed to construct the more than proverbial *rājamārga* of Sanskrit literature, the King's Road or alternately the "king among roads."[14] Piercing the center of Kanchi is a wide avenue today known as Kamarajar Salai, which gave access to the palace precincts and branched off into a network of streets that led to the city's growing number of temples. As a major corridor through the city, by the year 1000 CE this road had stolen the city's focus. It was deemed so important that it is specifically mentioned in inscriptions on a number of Kanchi's Chola-period temples, and it endures as the city's main artery even today.[15]

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12 The walled and gated palace formation seems even to have been emulated in temporary architecture associated with military travel. Elsewhere in the text, the Chera king on a military campaign resides in a portable palace encircled by textiles supported by wooden stakes and guarded by gatekeepers (see Ramachandra Dikshitar 1978, 363).

13 The *Cilappatikāram* provides a long description of the port-city of Pukār (Canto V). Mapping out the different quarters enables one to see that the palace is situtated in the northern quarter of the city (see Ramachandra Dikshitar 1978, 322).

14 Kasdorf (2013, 69–70) reminds us that "king among roads" is a more accurate translation for *rājamārga* or *rājavīdhi* than "royal road."

15 The inscriptions are mentioned in Heitzman 2001, 127 and no. 10.

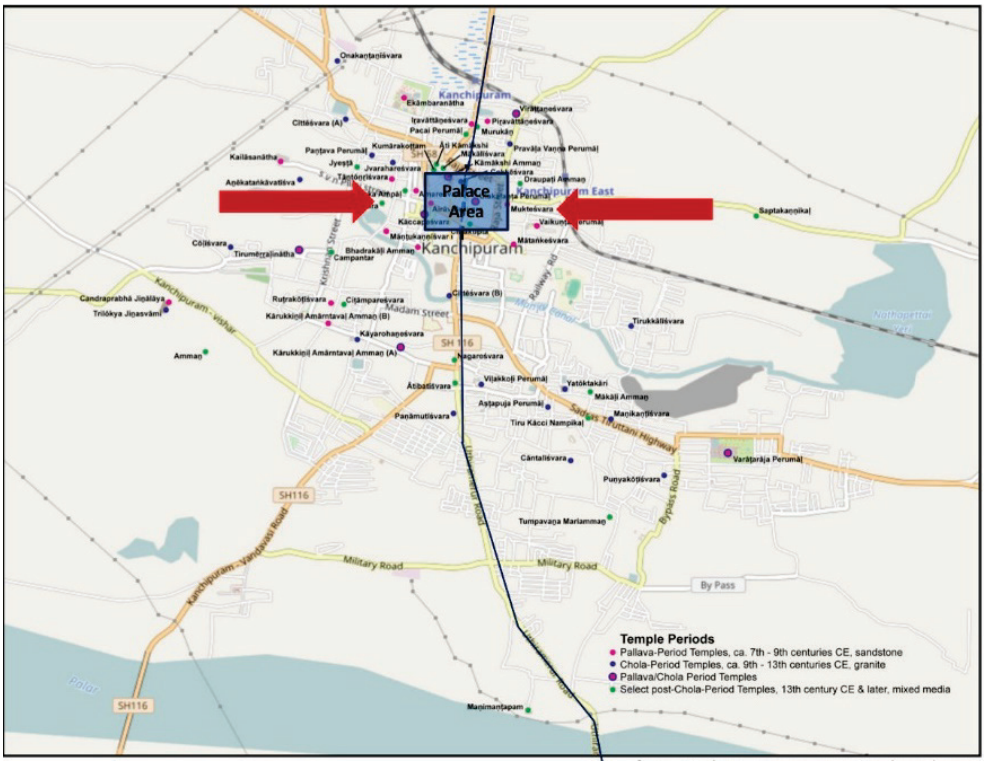

Fig. 21: Temple orientations in Kanchi.

Uniquely within Kanchi, a local convention of coordinating temples with the main road developed. The orientation (east or west) of any given temple in Kanchi was determined by the temple's spatial position in relation to the central avenue, no matter when the temple was built. To put it plainly, if the temple is situated anywhere to the west of the road its main entrance faces east, and if it is situated anywhere to the east of the road its main entrance faces west (figure 21).

This convention became fully standardized during the Chola period, and it has continued to be followed till this day. With only a few exceptions (each with its own explanation), it holds true that regardless of dedication, material, or period of construction, temples in Kanchi all orient towards the city's main road. To give just a few examples, situated immediately to the east of the main road, the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ and Mukteśvara temples face west. Just a few blocks west of the road, the Kacchapeśvara and Amareśvara temples face east. The difference in orientation is determined entirely by placement, not deity of dedication or another factor. Whereas the Maṇikaṇṭheśvara temple (dedicated to Śiva) faces west, the Pāṇḍavadūta Perumāḷ temple (dedicated to Viṣṇu) faces east.

Where exceptions arise, the explanations can have to do with the dedication to a deity that is not Śiva or Viṣṇu, the temple's recent date, or its location in an area that

was not originally part of Kanchi. For example, the goddess temple of Bhadrakāḷī Ammaṉ and two temples for Karukkiṉil Amarntavaḷ face directly north, the direction traditionally associated with the goddess. The east-facing Śiva temples of Cāntālīśvara and Puṇyakoṭīśvara can be explained by their location in the southern part of former Attiyūr, which did not become part of Kanchi until after they were established.

It is significant that before my research the pattern of orientation towards the road had never been noticed in scholarship. In the dense tangle of Kanchi's urban landscape, it is not possible to see it from the ground. Nevertheless, certain clues alerted me that orientation in Kanchi might be worth paying close attention to, beyond my usual process of documenting temples. Some of the older priests remarked that in Kanchi, temples were connected, or that the gods saw eye to eye. As I walked through the city, it seemed as though the temples were somehow responding to each other, that the gods were looking out across space at other gods, or at something in between. I found that when I approached a temple for the first time, I could predict which direction it would face. However, the pattern only became clear when I placed the temples on a map.

By the close of the Chola period, temples lay at every juncture. They demarcated the city's centers and peripheries. They pointed to avenues, hydraulic features, and royal establishments. They also fostered vibrant circuits of mobility and exchange.

Ambitious Extensions

Kanchi's Chola-era main road did not end at the city limits. Instead, it connected Kanchi with a network of suburban temple-sites both north and south of the city. The placement of these temples—or "emplacement," to use Leslie Orr's apt term—marks out pilgrimage routes that wove otherwise discrete villages together.[16] As devotees traveled along this and other pathways, they made donations to the gods in each place they visited. These gifts are recorded in inscriptions on the temple walls. The pious donations and their remembrance enabled temple life to continue and ritual culture to thrive across the region.

It is likely that many pilgrimage routes and sacred grounds are more ancient than the structures of temples, just like the ideas, narratives, legends, and histories contained in a manuscript are often older than the physical book. The presence of a temple or a text marks a point in time when the ideas and practices it contains were coalesced into a unified form. That form was not singular or static, but subject to continuous transformation, renovation, or interpolation over time. The question of how old a temple is, or when—precisely—a temple was established, can be as difficult to answer as asking the same questions of a text. However, architectural and

16 Leslie Orr persuasively employed this term during fieldwork in *The Archaeology of Bhakti* workshop, 2014.

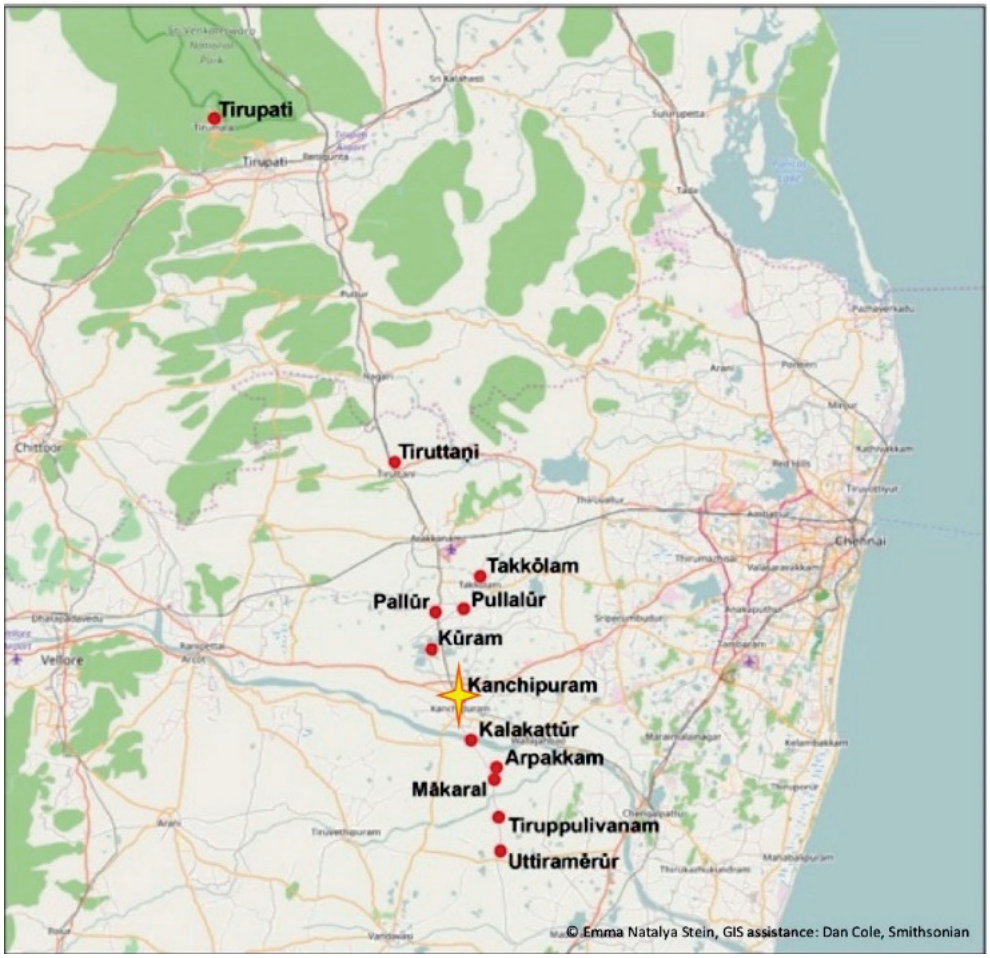

Fig. 22: Sites along the main road's extension.

sculptural style, material, and techniques of carving, as well as dated inscriptions, help us establish a relative chronology for at least portions of a single temple, a complex, or across a broader sacred landscape.

Zooming out from Kanchi city to that larger landscape, we find a series of sites situated directly along the extension of the main road (figure 22). Each of the sites marked on the map is a village that contains at least one large-scale temple that was built during the Chola era, between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Inscriptions and architectural style make the dating of these particular temples relatively precise. At each site, travelers found communities that maintained the suburban temples and that were also responsible for cultivating the surrounding paddy and agricultural lands. For a royal procession from the city, each stop gave opportunities not only for rest and ritual, but also for diplomatic relations with these areas (Orr 2004, 437-470).

While processional pathways are subject to change over time, some have endured for centuries. Records of these pathways come to us through scattered mentions in inscriptions.

Fig. 23: Inscriptions on Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, Kanchi.

In Tamil Nadu, inscriptions are typically carved along the walls of stone temples or onto stone slabs, or else they are incised into copper plates. They serve primarily to document legal determinations concerning temple property, and they record pious donations, such as supplies and lamps, as well as divine bronze sculptures, which were offered to the temple's gods (figure 23).

Through the epigraphic record and continued lived practice, the relationship between Kanchi and Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, at the northern extent of the road, emerges as a particularly ancient connection. Processions and pilgrims still regularly traverse the one hundred-kilometer distance between the two places. In her useful study of the multi-temple town of Tiruttaṇi, about half way between Kanchi and Tirupati, Valérie Gillet mentions two eleventh-century inscriptions on the Vīraṭṭāṉeśvara temple that record funding for feeding pilgrims coming from and going to Tirupati, precisely along the Kanchi extension road (Gillet 2016). These two records indicate that the Tirupati road was already a significant pilgrimage route by the eleventh century, when the inscriptions were commissioned.

Fig. 25: Village deity procession in Kanchi.

The Chola's road through Kanchi to Tirupati was perhaps the most bustling avenue around the year 1000, but it was not the only way to access Kanchi. The numerous temple-sites that surround the city plot out roads that extend in all four directions. Many of these places are little more than minor villages today. However, the presence of large-scale stone temples covered in donor inscriptions indicates that the villages were once prosperous places with enough resources to support the regular

comings and goings of travelers. Processions brought the urban gods to the villages, and the village gods also came to see the city (figure 25).

Just like the places along the road to Tirupati, the temple-sites elsewhere in the hinterland served as rest stops for travelers and political nodes for rulers (figure 26). Some sites stand out as especially important. For example, a temple on the road from Kanchi to the eastern seacoast stands in the now tiny village of Tirumukkūṭal. This temple sits dramatically on the southern banks of a confluence of three rivers, which are now dry (figure 27). I have argued elsewhere that the drying of the rivers contributed to the gradual decline of places around Kanchi that thrived in earlier periods (Stein forthcoming). Little-Kanchi and Tirumukkūṭal retain a strong connection through Vaiṣṇava devotional circuits today, with an annual procession that brings the bronze icon of Varadarāja Perumāḷ to Tirumukkūṭal for *pūjā*.[17]

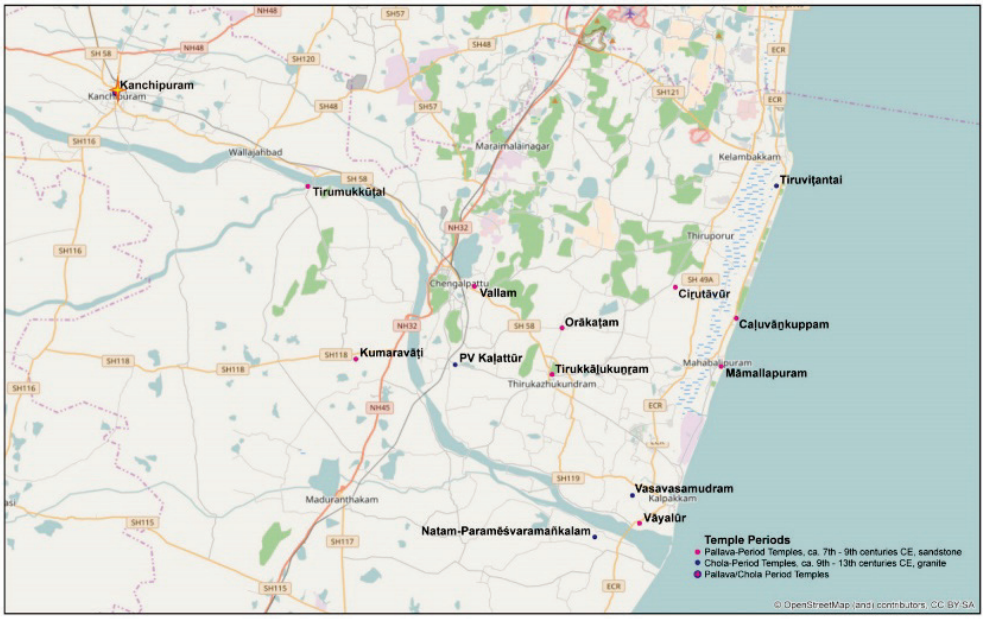

Fig. 26: Temple sites east of Kanchi.

Integration

Kanchi's central road holds a prize of place within the city. It functions as a point of orientation for all temples in the city, it directs visitors into and out of the city, and in the past, it led directly to what was a palace complex. The road remains a constant bustle of traffic and shopping, as well as a great artery of travel. This road and the four Rāja Vīthis preserve a sense of grandeur, the *rājamārgas* so eloquently described in literature (figure 29).

17 In January 2020, Ute Hüsken participated in this annual festival.

Fig. 27: Veṅkaṭeśvara temple, Tirumukkūṭal.

Fig. 29: West Rāja Vīti, Kanchi from south looking towards Kumarakkōṭṭam temple, Sankaracharya *maṭha*, and Ekāmbaranātha temple.

Fig. 30: Ekāmbaranātha Sannadhi Street, Kanchi.

Elsewhere in the city, other roads have very different characters. On the Ekāmbaranātha temple's Sannadhi Street, individual devotees and groups of pilgrims arrive in chartered tour busses, cars, or other motor vehicles (figure 30). Others arrive on foot after long journeys. They stretch and gaze awestruck at the towering southern *gopura*. Soon they walk up the street, past the sari shops and sweet sellers, to enter through the towering exterior gates and into the sprawling campus that today makes up the temple (figure 31). Once inside Ekāmbaranātha and the other complexes that pepper the urban landscape, they crowd through constricted aisles and strain to catch a glimpse of the city's many gods.

At the large temples in the center of town, there is often devotional music, the buzz of the resident priests chanting *mantras* and ringing bells, the sounds of water and other sacred substances splashing to the floor, the scrape of whisk brooms quick to the chase. In Kanchi, ritual can be colorful and constant (figure 32). In the evening, temples large and small become places for communities including city residents and visitors to gather. Interspersed with gardens and sheltered seating areas, the larger complexes provide the only open spaces in the city center, and people take full advantage of them (figure 33).

Fig. 31: Ekāmbaranātha temple, Kanchi.

Fig. 32: Festival at Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ temple, Kanchi.

Fig. 33: Evening at Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ temple, Kanchi.

Fig. 34: Tirukkālīśvara temple, Tirukkālimēṭu.

Back on Railway Road on the eastern side of the city, at six o'clock in the morning Kanchi is not a temple town but a market town. Lorries piled high with produce rattle in from the agrarian areas. The vehicles also carry day workers wearing mint-green *vēṣṭis* and hauling hemp bags overflowing with all the staples of South Indian cooking—coriander, carrots, onions, and a wide assortment of gourds. We can imagine a similar, unmotorized scene playing out in the year 1000, though the bags would not have contained tomatoes, which came to India with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Railway Road is its own distinct kind of enclave. The market at the road's southern end whirls throughout the morning and then slows in the midday heat. At the northern end is the railway station, and about midway up the road is Kanchi's hospital.

Shortly before six each morning, a contingent of young children and assorted other people turns east off Railway Road opposite the hospital—just south of the gateway to Māmallaṉ Nagar—and slaloms their way down a buffalo-dung smattered path. Nicely paved, this road leads not to a temple but to a sportsground with an Olympic sized swimming pool. While the swimmers practice, other Kanchi residents walk briskly around the vast racetrack as the sun begins to show its face. These are local people. They typically do their daily worship at the smaller temples near to their homes or on their way from place to place. For the most part, they enter Kanchi's destination temple complexes, such as Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ or Varadarāja Perumāḷ, only on major festivals. Different temples in the city are important to different people for their own individual reasons. While one person may select a temple for worship because of proximity to home or office, another may specifically seek that same temple out from afar because their family has been devoted to its deity for many generations. Other people may visit a temple on occasion because its deity is propitious for a particular life event, such as childbirth. Still others may make a tour of all the Viṣṇu temples in the city, or all those associated with the devotional hymns compiled in the *divyaprabandham* (Vaiṣṇava) or *Tēvāram* (Śaiva) anthologies.

For residents of the village of Tirukkālimēṭu, on the outskirts of Kanchi where we began this essay, the Śiva temple of Tirukkālīśvara is just their locally zoned shrine. Like many ancient monuments in the area of the Kaveri river, it functions as a place for both individual worship and communal gathering. The temple is loosely surrounded by paddy and cattle, and approached by a dirt road. Particularly in the evenings and especially on the festival of *pradoṣa*, Tirukkālīśvara becomes a community center where people arrive not only to have auspicious sight (*darśana*) of the gods but also to converse with, and seek advice from, the single priest who diligently maintains the temple. *Pradoṣa* is a bi-monthly lunar festival, during which it is considered particularly auspicious to worship Śiva during the hours just before and after sundown. On these days, Kanchi is ablaze with rituals.

Fig. 35: Tirukkālīśvara temple, Tirukkālimēṭu.

On one such evening, just as many visitors were preparing to leave from Tirukkālīśvara, heavy rains began to pour. Not wanting to walk through the dark and muddy streets back home or into the city, we all remained together to wait out the rain. We sat in the appended western *maṇḍapa* that sheltered devotees in earlier centuries, gossiping and watching the children run through the pillared hall.

At the same time as it is a local place of worship, Tirukkālīśvara is part of a more widespread temple network. In addition to its association with the *Tēvāram*, it shares certain patterns in its architecture, relief carvings, and sculptural program with temples both in Kanchi and northern Tamil Nadu, as well as in the southern Chola heartland of the Kaveri region. Despite its relatively remote location well outside Kanchi's urban core, visitors to the city sometimes include Tirukkālīśvara in their pilgrimage circuit because it was sanctified by Campantar (hymn 3.65), and because it contains a *liṅga* believed to be *svayambhū* (self-born).

The temple itself is a west-facing monument built fully of stone. The structure retains its original *devakoṣṭha* (niche) icons, and the top of its bulbous stone *śikhara* (roof) is just visible from outside the outer *prākāra* (enclosure) that subsumes the structure. The Tirukkālīśvara, Sīteśvara, and Paṇāmuṭīśvara temples in Kanchi all have the same type of *śikhara*. Aside from this enclosure and one more *prākāra* to mark the boundary of the sacred space, the Tirukkālīśvara temple has had few further additions or expansions, leaving the original form nicely preserved (figure 34).

In Sanskrit architectural terminology, the *vimāna* (main shrine) and *ardhamaṇḍapa* (vestibule) stand on a stately *pādabandha-adhiṣṭhāna* (series of basal mouldings) over an exposed *upapīṭha* (platform), with a particularly lovely Nandi gazing into the sanctum in perpetual adoration (figure 35). The *devakoṣṭhas* (niches) feature a standard Chola-era program of Durgā and Brahmā (north), Liṅgodbhavamūrti (east), and Dakṣiṇāmūrti and Gaṇeśa (south).

Fig. 36: Dakṣiṇāmūrti shrine supported by pillar fragments, Tirukkālīśvara temple.

At Tirukkālīśvara, the format of the walls can be compared with the Umāmaheśvara temple at Kōṉērirājapuram in the Kaveri region. Kanchi's Karukkiṉil Amarntavaḷ temple also uses the same pilaster forms, but its wall pattern, projections, and basement mouldings beneath the *devakoṣṭhas* are instead closer to the Siddhanātha temple at Tirunaraiyūr in the Kaveri area. The tenth-century date of all these sites re-confirms the similar dating for Tirukkālīśvara and connects it with an even wider temple network that was forged through a shared architectural language.

Throughout Tamil Nadu, urbanization took place principally through the recognition of villages loosely grouped together as single administrative units (Heitzman 1987, 817). The recognition was often officially marked by the construction of a stone temple (or, more often, the conversion of part or all of the local shrine from brick to stone) and the appointment of a lineage of brahmins responsible for its maintenance (Heitzman 1987; Veluthat 2009). By the date of the first noticed inscription (ca. 1018 CE), the temple of Tirukkāraikkāṭu-Mahādēvar (Tirukkālīśvara) was already part of Kaccippēṭu (Kanchipuram) but the temple's construction predates the inscription by some number of years (Mahalingam 1989, 300, Cg.-1185).

The mention of a *maṭha* (monastery) in one of the temple's inscriptions indicates that Tirukkālimēṭu was a place of higher learning, with a population that included a significant number of brahmins (Mahalingam 1989, 301, Cg.-1186). There would have been no shortage of support for the construction and maintenance of the temple. What resulted was an impressive monument that could mark the occasion of Tirukkālimēṭu village being incorporated into Kanchi municipality, though the recorded inscriptions do not mention this specifically.

This temple and the village in which it is situated also holds a special place in Kanchi's lived local history. Recall that the suffix *-mēṭu* refers to high society. There is a tradition that the Cholas had a palace in Tirukkālimēṭu. In the absence of further evidence, it is only possible to speculate that some portion of the royal family may have had a residence there, where the people were fewer, the soil was fertile, and the air was fresh. Nevertheless, inscriptions help us flesh out a picture of the area, and the resident society emerges as elite. The mention of a *maṭha* (monastery) in the village, called Tirukāraikkāṭṭumaṭam, is contained within an eight-line inscription that wraps around the walls of the main shrine, dated to the sixteenth regnal year of Rājendra Chola (ca. 1028 CE) (Mahalingam 1989, 301, Cg.-1186). The inscription records that the *sabhās* (defined as brahmin councils, assemblies of learned men, village leaders) of five settlements entered into an agreement with the head of the *maṭha*, in which their villages would supply paddy to the temple instead of paying interest on a sum of gold that the temple had granted to them. The consortium of *sabhās* also agreed to certain other responsibilities, such as supplying meals to the workers who had to come to their respective villages in order to collect the paddy and transport it back to Tirukkālimēṭu—we might think here of the workers in green *vēṣṭis* who come to man Kanchi's markets, bringing supplies of food for the city. The inscription also records that another settlement (*ūr*) agreed to similar terms. Twenty

years later, another inscription tells us that an officer communicated a royal Chola order assigning certain *śivabrāhmaṇas* (temple priests) the responsibility of maintaining the paddy supplied by those same five *sabhās*, which shows that the agreement was sustained. The royal nature of the order indicates that Tirukkālimēṭu was within the Chola's dominion, as was the rest of Kanchi by this point in time.[18]

Other inscriptions on the Tirukkālīśvara temple reveal that Tirukkālimēṭu was a powerful place, responsible for alliances and tax agreements with numerous surrounding settlements, and that it was the overseer of water distribution for irrigating the all-important paddy fields. Like many temples, it was also in possession of jewels and other valuables. An inscription of indeterminate date records that some of the temple's jewels and property was stolen and later recovered (Mahalingam 1989, 303, Cg.-1190). It specifies that the theft took place on the occasion of the stone temple's construction, when a certain Gaṇapatidēvan (Kākatīya Gaṇapati) was visiting. Since this king postdates the earliest inscriptions on the temple, as well as the architectural style, the inscription in question must refer to a repair or renovation to the temple rather than its initial construction.[19] The record in fact goes on to mention repairs that were made possible by the funds from the recovered valuables—the shrines for Gaṇeśa (Iḷayapiḷḷaiyār) and the saint Kampavanīśvara in the circumambulatory pathway (*tirunaṭai-māḷikai*) were fixed up.

These records further reveal that Tirukkālīśvara has been a Śaiva temple since its inception, despite another local tradition that a Buddhist center existed in Tirukkālimēṭu. Kanchi has a long and important Buddhist history that is well documented in literary works ranging from the acclaimed travel memoirs of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (seventh century), to the Tamil epic *Maṇimēkalai* (probably sixth century), to the Sanskrit *Mattavilāsa Prahasana*, a farcical drama by the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (ca. 580–630 CE) (Monius 2001; Bhatt and Lockwood 1981). There is much physical evidence to support the texts—large-scale stone sculptures of the Buddha that date variously to the sixth through twelfth century can be discovered throughout the city and in a constellation of nearby villages. While Tirukkālimēṭu certainly could have been home to Buddhists and even a *vihāra* (Buddhist monastery), I believe the tradition that it was a Buddhist place derives from two sixteenth-century pillar fragments carved with Buddha images that are now in the Tirukkālīśvara temple's inner *prākāra*. These fragments presently support the extended shrine for the form of Śiva as teacher, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, but they originally would have been part of the enclosure that subsumes the temple (figure 36). Most likely, these Buddhas are not in fact Buddhas but avatars of Viṣṇu. Such Vaiṣṇava

18 Inscriptions in Kanchi starting in ca. 922 CE are dated in the regnal years of the ruling Chola king, and Kanchi is described as the center of Jayankonda-*chola*-mandalam, the Chola's northern precincts that had Kanchi as its capital. The earliest recorded inscriptions with Chola dates are on pillars in the *maṇḍapa* of the Kailāsanātha temple, followed by an inscription on the Yathoktakārī temple (Mahalingam 1989, 120, 153).

19 Kākatīya Gaṇapati was active ca. 1199–1262.

images can be found at the (Śaiva) Kacchapeśvara temple, still in their original positions. At Kacchapeśvara, each pillar holds a different avatar carved multiple times. At Tirukkālīśvara, the Vaiṣṇava affiliation is made all the more explicit by the presence of Viṣṇu on the adjacent pillar face at the same level as the Buddha (figure 38).

Fig. 38: Pillar fragment in Tirukkālīśvara temple, Tirukkālimēṭu.

Fig. 39: Yogis at Tirukkālīśvara temple.

Fig. 40: *Liṅga* worship, Tirukkālīśvara temple, Tirukkālimēṭu.

On the main body of the temple, several of Tirukkālīśvara's decorative panels contain tiny scenes that show ascetics in yogic postures or devotees worshipping *liṅgas*. These images are positioned along the basement and superstructure mouldings, as well as above the niches (figure 39-40). Similar images of *liṅga* worship similarly appear in the sculptural programs of the Tirumēr̲r̲aḷinātha and Puṇyakoṭīśvara temples in Kanchi, as well as in a number of temples in the Kaveri area. While they could have been included merely for decoration, it is more likely that their presence has to do with the site's association with local *bhakti*.[20] Like Tirukkālīśvara, Tirumēr̲r̲aḷinātha is a *Tēvāram* site, sung by Appar and Cuntarar (4.43 and 7.21 respectively). It may be these two saints who are depicted on the east wall of the eleventh-century *ardhamaṇḍapa*, just flanking the entrance to the inner sanctum (figure 44). At Tirumēr̲r̲aḷinātha, as if to reinforce the temple's association with the Tamil saints, a small shrine for Campantar has been built at the opposite end of the street, facing west towards the temple. The structure (of unknown date) was completely dismantled and rebuilt during 2014–16, which shows that the site continues to be a focus of devotion.

Campantar's long hymn to the Lord who dwells in Tirukkālimēṭu (here called *Ner̲ikkāraikkātu*) is worth quoting in full for its beauty and its repeated trope describing Kanchi as a "city full of bustle."

> In Kacci which has sound that is produced at the end of the world and has beautiful storeys near which the clouds come close.
> Civan̲ in ner̲ikkāraikkāṭu which has natural tanks full of water in which there are flowers,
> having on one half a young lady on whose breasts the bodice adheres,
> holding in the opalm a battle-axe fixed for warfare,
> will adorn himself with white sacred ash.
> In the great and fertile city of Kacci in whose streets cars move slowly.
> Civan̲ in ner̲ikkāraikkātu which has natural tanks having flowers, in which water spreads,
> has a beautiful neck which is like the sable cloud,
> dwells in the scorched cremation ground
> holding a broken skull,
> wanders from village to village, to receive alms,
> dresses in a skin flayed from a spotted deer.
> The Lord in ner̲ikkāraikkaṭu in Kacci of great bustle
> had Umai who has a waist like the creeper, as one half,
> wore on the cool jaṭai a crescent with a river,
> became eminent by adorning himself with dancing cobras,
> adorned his flag with the form of a bull,
> wore bones and sacred ash

20 Kaimal (1995) explores the implications of similar figures.

Fig. 44: Saints? Tirumēr̲r̲aḷināṭha Temple, Kanchi.

as ornaments on his chest which is like the mountain.
The jaṭai on which the crescent stays to hang on the nape,
dancing along with the pūtaṅkaḷ which sings vētam,
holding a battle-axe,
Civan̲ in ner̲ikkāraikkaṭu situated in Kacci of bustle which fills the city,
the swarms of bees get disgusted with the honey in the flowers and lay hold of the honey dripping from the sweet fruits.
The god who is full of grace and gave moral instruction long ago,

sitting under a banyan tree,
fixing the bow-string of a killing cobra in a bow which does not decrease in its cruelty.
The Lord who remained being unmoved at the sight of all the three cities of the enemies who were destroyed by being burnt,
is the Lord in ner̲ikkāraikkāṭu in Kacci of great bustle.
The celestials make obeisance by bowing to the feet of many flowers,
the spotless god who destroyed by discharging an arrow in an instant which is the time measure of the finger, all the three cities of the strong avuṇar who had no good nature
is in ner̲ikkāraikkāṭu in Kacci of great bustle.
The Lord who has a bull and a jaṭai which bears a cruel cobra that lives in the anthill, beautifying kon̲r̲ai flowers, datura flowers, water which is moving and never ceases from dashing, and a crescent,
has on one half a lady,
has one eye on the forehead.
Civan̲ has a nature of fixing his small toe in the beautiful mountain on the King of beautiful ilaṅkai surrounded by the surging ocean,
His punishment was also good to the arakkan̲.
He is the god in ner̲ikkāraikkāṭu in Kacci of great bustle and long beautiful streets surrounded by a wall of fortification, surrounding fields and a deep moat.
To Civan̲ the food is the poison which rose in the roaring sea,
will receive alms in the broken skull,
will adorn as ornament the bones of dead persons,
the god who wore as ornament a beautiful shell of a tortoise along with a cobra with lines on it,
and who shot up high as a rising column of fire, so that the two,
Māl and Ayan̲ could not know him.
The words spoken by camaṇar who are low in character, and by buddhists who wander doing mischief and covering their bodies with an upper cloth,
do not contain any truth.
The Lord who placed on one half of his body which is like a mountain a lady on whose tresses of hair bees hum loudly,
Singing songs of benediction at the feet of the Lord who has on his holy body a lady and who dwells in ner̲ikkāraikkātu of Kacci of great bustle is pleasing to the eye.
Those who are able to recite the Tamil̲ verses combined with melody-types composed by ñān̲acampantan̲ well-versed in Tamil̲ who is a native of Kāl̲i which has cool gardens, will remain in the superior world of Civalokam.
In Kacci which has sound that is produced at the end of the world and has beautiful storeys near which the clouds come close.[21]

21 Translation by V.M. Subramanya Ayyar (see Chevillard and Sarma 2007).

Fig. 45: Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara temple, Kanchi.

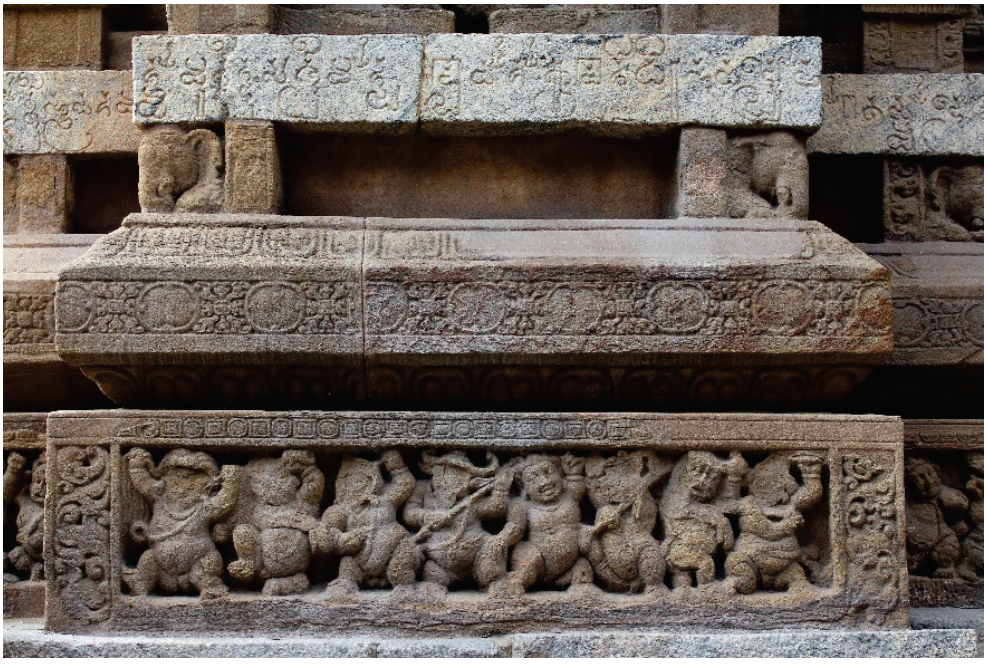

Fig. 46: Chain motif on central moulding, Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchi.

Fig. 47: Chain motif on pilaster, Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara temple, Kanchi.

Tirukkālīśvara's association with the *Tēvāram* makes it possible to speculate that the temple was established or more likely converted from brick to stone through local rather than royal sponsorship, perhaps through collective donations.[22] In a similar enclave on the western border of the city, another temple likely had a trajectory of development that parallels that of Tirukkālīśvara. Overlooking a picturesque pond just meters away from the Pallava's great Kailāsanātha temple, Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara is a shrine that has undergone multiple reincarnations (figure 45). It was originally a humble shrine sung by Saint Cuntarar (hymn 7.10), yet it gained attention during the Chola period. The temple was rebuilt in stone in the late eleventh century, and its walls were inscribed with two records concerning royal allocations of land and property (Mahalingam 1989, 156-57, Cg.-640 and 157, Cg.-641).

Fig. 48: Temple pond, Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara temple, Kanchi.

While the Kailāsanātha temple gradually faded from prominence, Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara may have become the preferred destination in western Kanchi for local devotees. Nevertheless, a relationship between the two temples was established and literally set in stone. Even if Kailāsanātha was already little used at the time of its neighbor's construction, the Pallava temple seems to have provided a roster of local motifs that the later shrine incorporated. As one of several examples, a motif of interlocking chains that encircles the entire base of the Kailāsanātha is employed for decoration on Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara (figure 46-47). I have not seen this motif on any

22 For exploration of this topic, see the essays in Schmid and Francis 2016.

other Chola-period temples, in northern or southern Tamil Nadu, in person or in print. Similarly, Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara harkens back to other Pallava monuments outside of Kanchi city. The motif depicting the foaming cosmic ocean of bliss along the pilasters, complete with tiny figures emerging, recalls the offering pedestals at Māmallapuram's Shore Temple (ca. 700–725 CE), as well as the abundant ornamental carvings on the beautiful Sundaravarada Perumāḷ temple at Uttiramērūr (ninth century). Perhaps these motifs are used at Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara as a kind of act of reverence to the Pallava monuments.

Fig. 49: Devotion at Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara temple, Kanchi.

This temple is in a quiet part of town, much quieter than Tirukkālimēṭu, and it has not been studied by scholars. However, Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara continues to hold importance for at least some members of Kanchi's society. After a period of total disrepair, in 2015 the temple was completely renovated. Paint was peeled from the walls, the superstructure was repaired and repainted in dayglow multicolor, and the pond was cleaned and widened (figure 48-49). Birds and other wildlife returned to the water, and the structure of the temple again shone through. With the elements exposed, so too shone the temple's participation in a wider network of art and devotion inside—and beyond—the city of Kanchi.

Kanchi's temples and urban structure have developed cyclically, with some shrines falling out of devotion while others come to the fore. In the center of the city, a structured urban landscape emerged that coordinated temples with a central main road, the more-than proverbial *rājamārga* of Sanskrit literature. With few exceptions, temples in Kanchi positioned their main entrances—and thus their main deities—to face towards this road. The road itself connected Kanchi with a wider network of commercial and devotional exchange that extended beyond the city. Temple sites were established not only north and south of Kanchi, but also to its east and west. Connected through patterns of inscriptions, architectural forms, and legendary histories, these temples broadened the scope of the city. At the same time, temples in village areas that were incorporated into Kanchi maintained a level of autonomy that still can be felt today. In their own quiet way, temples like Tirukkālīśvara in the village of Tirukkālimēṭu have continuously contributed to Kanchi's vibrant urban life.

Abbreviations

ARE *Annual Reports on Epigraphy*
EI *Epigraphia Indica*
IAR *Indian Archaeology: A Review*
SII *South Indian Inscriptions*

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