THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF BHAKTI II
Royal Bhakti, Local Bhakti

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Afterword

Richard H. Davis

Why an Archeology of Bhakti?

At first glance the terms "Bhakti" and "archeology" do not seem to fit together. The Sanskritic religious term "Bhakti" refers preeminently to an interior attitude, a human feeling of respect and veneration. It points to an inner sense of love towards and a desire for participation with a divinity conceived in personal terms. The Latinate disciplinary term "archeology," by contrast, denotes a scientific enterprise directed at material objects, utilizing the fossilized remnants of the past that have been unearthed to reconstruct the past.

But a second glance reveals areas of promising connection. After all, the interior attitude of Bhakti does not remain inside. It manifests itself in human activities such as venerative practices, rituals, construction of shrines, and various forms of religious literary productions like songs, mythical narratives, and paradigmatic biographies. And these actions leave behind material remnants, the "fossilized results of human behavior," as V. Gordon Childe (1962: 9) once defined the data proper to archeological study. The discipline of archeology naturally recognizes that the material data upon which it relies are the expressions of human thoughts and practices. Accordingly, archeology seeks to reconstruct those thoughts and practices from their material remnants. Thus, an "archeology of Bhakti,"

as the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) and the Centre d'études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud (CEIAS) proposed for their 2011 and 2013 Workshops, appropriately aimed to deploy archeological methods towards an "integrated and multi-layered approach to Bhakti," involving the study of both texts and artifacts.

Still another glance suggests that this pairing of archeological approach with Indian expressions of Bhakti may provide some definite benefits to the scholarly study of South Asian religions. First, by foregrounding the material remains of devotional practices—such as carved inscriptions, sculpted images, and constructed religious sites—an archeology of Bhakti can redress an imbalance. Much of the scholarship on Bhakti over the past several decades, especially in the United States, has centered on textual materials, and especially on vernacular-language devotional poetry. Since the seminal poetic translations of Bengali Vaiṣṇava songs by Edward Dimock and Denise Levertov (1967) and of Kannada Vīraśaiva poems by A.K. Ramanujan (1973), a proliferation of publications have sought to make the great wealth of devotional poetry in Indian vernacular languages available in compelling English translation. No one would deny the immense value of this literary-scholarly enterprise. Of course, these bodies of devotional literature are also "fossilized results of human behavior," that is songs and hymns composed, remembered, and transmitted orally or in writing over time down to the present. Attention to this one mode of Bhakti expression, however, can overbalance the study of other forms of devotional religion in South Asia, such as the historical study of ritual practices. We hope that an archeology of Bhakti can point towards a more balanced, integrated historical view.

Second, adapting the archeological principle of stratigraphy, which it borrowed from geology, may assist in thinking more historically about Bhakti. The idea is basic: in the excavation of an undisturbed deposit, the lowest layer of fossilized remnants will be the oldest, and the uppermost the most recent. This principle enables archeologists to sort their finds into chronological sequences. The kinds of physical evidence for Bhakti we are most interested in are not recovered from under the ground, of course. We cannot hope to find undisturbed deposits of devotion. Still, it is helpful to think of Bhakti materials as if arranged in a typological sequence, in a succession of religious cultures, showing both continuities over time as well

as moments of disruption and transformation. Too often Bhakti is treated as an ahistorical religious modality, a kind of unchanging substratum of Indic religious life. Thinking archeologically leads to a more historically varied understanding of Bhakti. An archeological approach to Bhakti can be carried out at a particular religious site, within a geographical region, or in India as a whole.

With this in mind, I invite the reader to regard the essays of this volume (and the volume preceding it, i.e. *The Archaeology of Bhakti I: Mathurā and Maturai, Back and Forth*, Francis & Schmid eds. 2014) as providing archeological evidence concerning different layers of Bhakti. We can approach the essays as a series of excavation reports, which present information about different strata in the complex history of Bhakti, particularly in southern India. In many instances, such archeological information calls into question or challenges long-standing assumptions about devotional religion. My remarks in this "Afterword," also arranged stratigraphically, are meant to highlight just a few of the many valuable observations and challenges in these essays that I see for the historical study of South Asian religions.

EARLY ARTICULATIONS OF BHAKTI

Several essays in this volume (as well as in the previous volume) focus on the earliest recoverable expressions of Bhakti in India. By and large these take the form of transmitted texts, composed in the classical period (which for my purposes spans the period from the Mauryan empire through the Guptas), rather than material remnants.

Many historians have traced the origins of Bhakti to the *Mahābhārata*, and particularly to a few distinctive sections of the epic, such as the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nārāyaṇīya*. The term "Bhakti" may show up briefly in a religious usage in the earlier *Śvetāśvatāropaniṣad*, but teachers in the *Mahābhārata* like Kṛṣṇa gain credit as the earliest recorded theoreticians of Bhakti. Here we see full articulations of a form of devotional religion centered on Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu in both theological and practical terms. This origin story, however, assumes that Bhakti takes shape solely with a Vedic-Hindu trajectory, and this is a point that needs to be questioned. Scholars like John Cort (2002), Tracy Coleman (in the first volume), and Greg Bailey

in this volume persuasively argue that we should consider seriously the role of the heterodox religious formations of the Jains and the Buddhists in the early articulations of Bhakti.

If we define Bhakti, as Bailey does here, as involving a "belief in the efficacy of a personal relationship of worshipper(s) with an object of devotion, usually a deity," (*supra*, p. 128) then certainly the venerative practices that grew up around perfected beings such as Mahāvīra and Buddha Śākyamuni are part of the developing framework of devotional practices in classical India. As John Strong (1977) has argued, the etiquette of honoring the person of the Buddha Śākyamuni described in the early Buddhist texts contributed significantly to the vocabulary of devotional practices that were largely shared among Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and others. The Jains and Buddhists naturally oriented their Bhakti in accord with their own distinctive religious commitments. This should not be surprising.

In the religious landscape of classical India, with its climate of vigorous debate and competition over disciplinary paths and practices, it makes sense that a religious term and modality as important as Bhakti (no less than terms like *dharma*, *veda*, and Brahmin) would be ripe for appropriation and redefinition. Even within that eminently Hindu work, the *Mahābhārata*, Alf Hiltebeitel observes an "immense variety of Bhakti expressions" (*supra*, p. 37) with no overarching editorial effort to homogenize them. Hiltebeitel points to positive descriptions of devotional cults to Rudra-Śiva, the Pitṛs, and the Goddess within the great epic, alongside the better-known accounts of Bhakti directed towards Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa.

In light of this diversity of forms of Bhakti portrayed in classical Indic texts, it seems wise to abandon the attempt to identify a single point of historical origin for Bhakti. Instead, we might adapt the archeological method of the chorological classification. Within the same chronological period, we find a variety of types (in this case, varieties of devotional religion), fulfilling the same function, which for the archeologist points to a divergence of traditions involving distinct groups (in this case, different religious communities). In our case, the difference is not a geographical one, as it usually is for archeologists, but a matter of differing religious commitments. How does Bhakti manifest itself differently within different religious communities, directing themselves towards different recipients?

What about the geography of early Bhakti? Where in the Indian subcontinent do we dig to excavate the early articulations of devotional religions? Most of the preserved textual sources for Bhakti in Sanskrit and Sanskrit-derived languages originated in northern India. (The classical-period Tamil poetry of southern India made its own important contributions to the subsequent development of Bhakti, but does not articulate a clear devotional ethos until later, in works such as the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai* portion of the *Pattupāṭṭu*.) But what are the specific social contexts within which it develops? In light of the overarching question of the 2013 workshop entitled "Royal Bhakti, Local Bhakti," do we see "local" or "royal" forms of Bhakti?

Hiltebeitel proposes one type of location for Bhakti innovations: the *tīrtha*. The several *tīrthayātrā* narratives in the *Mahābhārata* provide a rich description and textual validation of diverse devotional practices directed at specific localized manifestations of divinity. The *tīrtha* cults represent a "brahmanic" mode of religiosity that can develop and flourish without need of royal patronage, during a historical period without proper Kṣatriya rulers. At the *tīrtha*s, Hiltebeitel notes, one can see the theological doubleness of the gods. They are simultaneously identified as broader pan-Indian deities (Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī) and as linked directly to the *tīrtha* locales by some past action or salvific event at that place. The theology of divine doubleness, which the later Vedānta-Bhakti philosopher Rāmānuja defines as simultaneous "supremacy" (*paratva*) and "easy accessibility" (*saulabhya*), is a key tenet for Bhakti in its many contexts (Carman 1974). From the north Indian *tīrtha*s of classical times to the early medieval south Indian shrines of the Śaiva Nāyaṉmārs and the Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs, where the same divine doubleness becomes a principal poetic theme, is not such a large step.

FROM CLASSICISM TO BHAKTI

In the brilliant "Afterword" to his translation of the poetry of the ninth-century Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saint Nammāḻvār, A.K. Ramanujan points to a "many-sided shift" that took place within Hindu culture and sensibility between the sixth and ninth centuries CE. "Bhakti," he asserts, "is one

name for that shift" (1981: 103). Ramanujan goes on to set out a series of changes that constitute a veritable religious transformation: from passive to active, from hearing to speaking, from a religion of the esoteric few to one of anyone who can speak, from Vedic fire rituals performed by specialists to worship done by all, from the non-iconic to the iconic, from the non-local to the local, and more (1981: 135).

The local landscape Ramanujan focuses on lies in southern India of the early medieval period, when a new "Bhakti culture" did indeed take shape in the Tamil-speaking region. During this period Śaiva Nāyaṉmārs and Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs undertook wide-ranging pilgrimages throughout the region, composing and reciting devotional songs to the manifest forms of Śiva and Viṣṇu they encountered at each new holy place. These became the new *tīrtha*s of Tamil Nadu, where shrines became local cultic centers. Composed in Tamil and written in highly personal voices, the hymns high-lighted the personal and emotional relations between human devotees and their venerated gods at these local shrines. At the same time, they linked the local manifestations of the divine with the pan-Indian and universal nature of the god they were honoring (Davis 2006). Alexander Dubyanskiy's contribution to the first volume explores one fine example of early Tamil Bhakti poetry, Āṇṭāḷ's *Tiruppāvai*.

The poetry of the Nāyaṉmārs and Āḻvārs represents a new kind of devotional expression in Indian religious history, at least in the religious literature that has been preserved. The Tamil Bhakti saints of the period, Ramanujan notes, included members of all classes, both male and female. Ramanujan points to the importance of their use of the "mother tongue" of Tamil rather than the learned language of Sanskrit. It was a language choice, he observes, that privileged the "natural" over the "cultural." (No doubt Ramanujan overstates the distinction here, as the Tamil devotional poets relied on and adapted a highly literary tradition of Tamil poetry and poetics already developed in the classical or Caṅkam period.) In his well-known study of *Viraha-Bhakti*, Friedhelm Hardy (1983) similarly distinguishes the "intellectual Bhakti" of earlier classical works like the *Bhagavadgītā* from the "emotional Bhakti" that develops in the southern Indian milieu of this period, not only in Tamil language poetry but also in South Indian Sanskrit compositions like the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

This set of dichotomies might lead one to imagine a disruptive break in the history of Bhakti, between its early northern articulations and the new southern forms of devotion taking shape in early medieval times. Yet Ramanujan also points to the importance of north Indian foundations, especially of the Gupta period, in the construction of Tamil Bhakti. The early south Indian devotionalists, he writes, "used whatever they found at hand," and "changed whatever they used" (1981: 104). What was at hand included both a rich and sophisticated Tamil poetic tradition and a well-developed mythology and iconography of the Hindu gods recorded in Sanskrit texts. The archeological remains of the period provide an important counterbalance to the poetry of the devotional saints.

The dominant ruling power of the South during this period, the Pallavas of Kāñcīpuram, illustrate this synthetic transformation. As members of an ambitious royal dynasty, the Pallava rulers situated themselves within a larger pan-Indian world of competing polities and participated in a shared rhetoric with other powers to the north. They adopted models of courtly culture formulated in the north, utilized Sanskrit in their royal directives, and constructed large temples in permanent stone for the worship of Hindu gods in and around the capital. In these ways they participated in what Sheldon Pollock (1996) has called the "Sanskrit cosmopolis." This royal expression of devotion occurred during the same period that the Tamil poet-saints were making their decidedly local peregrinations from place to place and singing their new Bhakti hymns in Tamil at each one. This raises again one of the primary issues of the 2013 workshop. How should we understand the coexistence and interaction of these two levels of devotional religion in early medieval Tamil Nadu, the royal and the local?

Padma Kaimal's detailed analysis of the eighth-century Kailāsanātha Śiva temple (or Rājasiṃheśvara) in Kāñcīpuram, the largest and best-preserved of Pallava-period royal temples, provides great insight into one side of this duality. (Charlotte Schmid also discusses this crucial temple in the first volume.) Because the temple was largely abandoned a generation after its construction, it is possible for us to imagine the temple more or less as it was first built. It is like a single undisturbed

archeological layer in an excavation of the Pallava past. And it is clear that the agents for its design and construction—probably including royal patrons, courtly advisers, Brahmin supervisors, head architects, and a myriad of skilled artisans—demonstrate a mastery of the pan-Indian knowledge of Śiva's multiple manifestations and mythical exploits. They are able, moreover, to incorporate these into a complex and innovative iconographical program that also includes new south Indian innovations, like the Somāskanda iconographic grouping of Śiva, the Goddess Umā, and their son Skanda.

Like any Śaiva shrine, the Kailāsanātha temple invites the god Śiva to enter and inhabit it as a new home. The foundational inscription of the temple (*supra*, pp. 195ff.) playfully imagines a competition between this new human-fabricated Kailāsa in Kāñcīpuram and Śiva's eternal abode on Mount Kailāsa in the Himalayas. Of course, Śiva need not make such a choice. In devotional theology, the god can easily inhabit both, and many more shrines large and small besides. As primary patron of the temple, the Pallava king acts as host to Śiva's visit here.

Kaimal follows the lengthy Sanskrit inscriptional *praśasti* as it winds counter-clockwise around the outer wall of the temple, and attends simultaneously to the sequence of figural imagery on the exterior sides. Inscription and iconography reinforce one another, in her analysis, though not in a simple or matching manner. This analysis highlights one of the important Bhakti tropes, at least in its royal mode. While the Pallava king places himself in a devotional relation to the preeminent god Śiva, as host and foremost worshiper, the inscriptions and icons repeatedly suggest analogies between the royal sponsor and divine figures: with Skanda (as Śiva's son), with Viṣṇu (as Śiva's chief attendant), and even Śiva himself (through devotional convergence).

The devotional doubleness of the king, as both primary *bhakta* of a god and as a semi-divine figure himself, reappears throughout South Indian religious history. Caleb Simmons's essay traces an example of this in colonial-era Mysore, where the Wodeyar rulers reemploy this devotional trope as part of a project of royal restoration. Similarly, S.A.S. Sarma's contribution to this volume highlights the replication of the pattern among recent kings of the Travancore princely state in Kerala.

Bʜᴀᴋᴛɪ ɪɴ ᴛʜᴇ Tɪᴍᴇ ᴏꜰ ᴛʜᴇ Iᴍᴘᴇʀɪᴀʟ Cōʟᴀs

By the late tenth century, the Cōḻa rulers based along the Kāvēri River in central Tamil Nadu had gained a regional hegemony and began to assume the signs of imperial status. During their period of political power, many historians have stated, Cōḻa kings involved themselves actively in the promotion of public Bhakti culture centered around the god Śiva and the Śaiva poet-saints of an earlier period. The Cōḻa ruling power, writes Uthaya Veluppillai, "*is said* to have established the ritual singing of the hymns, the worship of saints in temples, the compilation of the Tamil Śaiva canon, the *Tirumuṟai*, and to have rebuilt temples which have been hymned" (*supra*, pp. 548–549, italics mine). So goes the standard historical narrative, which dates back at least to the influential writings of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (1955), and which has since been repeated by numerous scholars of South Indian religion, including myself (Davis 1991: 3–19). But once we look more closely at the archeological evidence of the period, especially the abundant inscriptional remains carved on the stone walls of temples, the Cōḻa imperial hegemony over Tamil Bhakti dissolves, and a more complicated historical picture of more localized devotional religion begins to take shape. Essays by Uthaya Veluppillai, Nicolas Cane, and Leslie Orr in this volume explore some of the fossilized remains left from the period, and point the way to a more nuanced account of both royal and local Bhakti during the period.

By all accounts, the Cōḻa period does represent a time of consolidation and institutionalization of Bhakti within the Tamil-speaking region. During the time of the Cōḻa rulers, many new stone temples dedicated to Śiva and Viṣṇu were constructed, including several massive royal structures. The Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava poet-saints were remembered as exemplars of devotional life in hagiographical narratives like Cēkkiḻār's *Periyapurāṇam*, composed in the twelfth century. Collections of their hymns were compiled and incorporated into the liturgical programs of temples. Images of the poet-saints joined the icons of the gods, and laid the groundwork for a veritable Tamil cult of the saints. The question is one of agency: who was responsible for these religious developments? Was this a top-down policy emanating from the Cōḻa center, or were these developments a matter of more local initiatives outside the Cōḻa sway? What were the motives that led to the promotion and patronage of devotional religion in the Tamil region during these centuries?

Velupillai's inscriptional investigation focuses on sites closely associated with Campantar, one of the three principal Śaiva Nāyanmārs of the *Tēvāram*. The standard narrative of Campantar's life leads us to expect that Cōḻa royalty would take a close interest in these important places of pilgrimage, in consideration of his importance to Tamil Śaiva Bhakti. The archeological evidence leads to a different conclusion. Patronage of the temples at Cīrkāḻi and Accālpuram, Veluppillai finds, was decidedly a local affair. It involved local-based individuals and small corporate groups like the assembly of Brahmins, an army squadron, a group of palanquin-bearers, temple employees, local landlords, and petty authorities. Even in these Kaveri basin sites not far from the capital, the Cōḻa authority sounds as a distant echo, heard only in the stereotyped praises of a few inscribed *meykkīrrti*s.

The contributions of Cane and Orr explore an intermediate level of agency: royal women and "chiefly queens" situated ambiguously between the local and the royal court. There is no doubt that female patrons contributed significantly to devotional religious institutions during this period, as Orr (2000) and others have persuasively documented. But the identities and affiliations of women able to act as patrons were not always so clear cut.

Cane examines closely the preeminent female patron of the time, the tenth-century Cōḻa queen Cempiyan Mahādevī. Her contributions to temple institutions in areas under Cōḻa rule were abundant, and she appears to have been a forceful advocate for the cult of the Śaiva saints. Cane argues that she consciously promoted sites previously associated with the Nāyanmār poet-saints, and she arranged for the incorporation of their hymns into local temple practice at those sites. In her inscriptional record we can see the gradual augmentation in her identity. She identifies herself initially as a daughter of Maḻaperumāḷ, probably a local chieftain of Māḻanāṭu, then as spouse of Gaṇḍarāditya, who ruled briefly as Cōḻa sovereign, and finally as mother of the more powerful Cōḻa ruler, Uttamacōḻa. As princess and queen in a patrilocal elite, a royal woman could identify herself in terms of local birth, matrimony, or motherhood. In Cempiyan Mahādevī's case, she appears to have chosen the royal route. Through her ability to channel resources and promote innovations in devotional practice she became one of the pivotal figures in the consolidation of Bhakti in South India during Cōḻa times.

Questions of agency and motivation become more complicated in Orr's examination of several "chiefly queens"—a step below a "dynastic queen" like Cempiyaṉ Mahādevī in status—of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. During this period of diminishing Cōḻa imperial sway, Orr observes, women associated with the Cōḻa court do not appear in the epigraphical record. However, females affiliated with lesser ruling powers, chiefdoms in border areas of uncertain political control, appear to have been prolific in their patronage of temples in their locales.

What did these chiefly queens hope to accomplish through their inscribed donations? The common historical assumption portrays the royal patronage of Bhakti institutions in South Asia as an act of political "legitimation," that is, in terms of political aims. Devotional patronage is understood to be an investment in one's legitimacy as a ruler. This assumption might apply in the case of Cempiyaṉ Mahādevī, whose patronage (as Cane argues) may have "played a substantial role in the Cōḻa integrative policy" (*supra*, p. 377), while at the same time substantiating her own personal attitudes of Bhakti towards Śiva and his devotees. Looking at the later chiefly queens of Tamil Nadu, Orr challenges the common political explanation. In these cases, motives are complicated: family considerations, local political concerns, and the desire to participate actively in the devotional world of local temples may all have been involved in the actions of these female donors.

What is clear from these archeological explorations is that broad characterizations of religion during the Cōḻa period require careful rethinking in light of the inscriptional evidence. Just as social historians of South India, starting with Burton Stein (1980), challenged the centralized depiction of the imperial Cōḻa regime presented in the works of Nilakanta Sastri and others, it is necessary to decenter our understanding of the role of Cōḻa royalty in the promotion of devotional religion during their time. Certainly attention to the great achievements under direct Cōḻa patronage, such as the royal temples at Tanjore (Tañcāvūr) and Gangaikondacholapuram (Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōḻapuram) and the works of court literati like Cēkkiḻār and Oṭṭakkūttār, is important to render one side of the historical account. But Cōḻa-period devotional religion is more complicated than this trickle-down model suggests. The full range of archeological remnants, especially inscriptions, point us toward a fuller portrait involving myriad actors, male and female, from various social classes, contributing to Bhakti in Cōḻa times.

Another part of this fuller portrait—discussed at the workshop but not explored in the essays submitted for this volume—would involve the historical development and consolidation of temple practices like daily liturgy and festivals through the Cōḻa period and after. This requires coordinated exploration of both the ritual guides preserved in the Hindu priestly schools (Śaiva Siddhānta, Vaiṣṇava Pañcarātra, and others) and the abundant references to temple practices of the time recorded in inscriptions.

BHAKTI PEOPLE

Both inscriptions and ritual guides of early medieval South India alert us to the question of participation in devotional religion. Who were the Bhakti people? What social classes and occupational specialists participated most directly in the creation and maintenance of the culture of religious devotion?

In the scholarly literature on Bhakti, certain categories of persons receive abundant attention. First of all, the devotional saints—in South India, the Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs and the Śaiva Nāyaṉmārs—warrant close study. As is often emphasized, these South Indian saints came from all classes of society, both male and female, though with the greatest proportion of upper-class males. Likewise, research has explored the roles of kings and Brahmin priests as well as of theologians in patronizing and officiating in the institutional forms of devotional life. The attention these groups receive corresponds to the abundance of remnants they have been in a position to leave behind: transmitted poetry and song, ritual and theological texts, stone temples, and the like. But an archeological approach allows us also to look beyond these dominant groups and to trace the activities and contributions of other communities of important devotional specialists. The essays of Tiziana Leucci and Sudalaimuthu Palaniappan explore two such groups.

A temple festival or *mahotsava* provides one indication of the multiplicity of participants in the culture of devotion. As medieval ritual guides and modern practice both affirm, South Indian temple festivals are intentionally inclusive and congregative religious events, meant to bring gods and humans of all categories together (Davis 2010). Such festivals require the active collaboration of multiple specialists. Medieval priestly guides and inscriptions describe the many agents who participate in South Indian *mahotsava*s of

the late Cōḻa period (Davis & Orr 2007). Two key groups were the male drummers and the female dancers, the *devadāsī*s. Both specialist groups were crucial to the success of a devotional event. Leucci traces the history of the *devadāsī* community in southern India.

Leucci begins her excavation with ethnographic observations of modern *devadāsī*s, based on her own dance training among them starting in the 1980s. From this starting point in the present, she works her way backwards in time, much as an archeologist digs from the surface downwards towards increasingly ancient deposits. This itinerary takes Leucci back through fascinating European observations of temple women in travelers' reports of early modern times, through inscriptional references on medieval temple walls, to the classical portraits of the courtesans in the Tamil literary epics, *Maṇimēkalai* and *Cilappatikāram*, composed somewhere between the second and sixth centuries CE. Going one step further back in tracing the genealogy of the *devadāsī*s, Leucci describes the mythical Apsaras, heavenly dancers of Sanskrit literature, as legendary ancestors of the community. Such a longitudinal study necessarily raises questions of change and continuity. Leucci assumes a significant continuity in moral codes and religious roles for this community over many centuries, until the disruptions of the twentieth century. At that time the relations between the *devadāsī*s and temple culture were decisively sundered. The resulting loss to the liveliness and artistry of temple festivals has been no doubt great, and the gifted female practitioners were left alienated from their former ritual roles and livelihood.

Palaniappan traces the long-term history of another community that has made significant contributions to the South Indian culture of Bhakti, the Pāṇars. In the earliest strata of Tamil literature, Pāṇars appear as itinerant bards who play the lute and sing before audiences of every class of society, from kings on down. Palaniappan suggests that the life-style of this community may have formed the model for the peripatetic Bhakti poet-saints of early medieval Tamil Nadu, who traveled from shrine to shrine singing devotional songs of praise to the gods at each one. By Cōḻa times, the Pāṇars had been incorporated into the institutions of devotional culture. They performed important roles in temples: singing before the gods, training the temple dancers in music, and even performing Sanskrit dramas. But hagiographical literary works of the same period, such as Cēkkiḻār's

Periyapurāṇam, portray the Pāṇars as untouchables excluded from temple participation. The fictitious untouchability of the Pāṇar community here, suggests Palaniappan, served a thematic purpose for the hagiographers. The life-stories of Pāṇar saints are used to illustrate the great salvific power of Bhakti, to emancipate even members of the lowest rungs of society. Many later scholars have mistakenly generalized from the hagiographical accounts of "untouchable Pāṇar saints." Palaniappan intends his archeological study to clear away "the dirt of misunderstanding and misinformation" (*supra*, p. 303) attached to the history of the Pāṇars.

<div align="center">Continuity and Change in Devotional Religion</div>

The archeology method of careful excavation, yielding strata of material evidence deposited at a single site over time, allows the archeologist to identify both cultural continuities and changes. As the philosopher R.G. Collingwood (1939: 79) long ago observed, these material findings often disrupt the received historical narrative, based on literary sources and assembled by what he dismissively called the "scissors-and-paste" method of history. Archeological evidence may demonstrate continuities in material culture where the account leads one to expect dramatic changes, and reciprocally excavations may identify material disruptions where the standard narrative suggests continuity. Several essays in this volume adapt a stratigraphic method to particular aspects of devotional culture, including social groups, temple sites, and textual manuscripts. Two of particular interest center around the important divine figure of Murukaṉ.

Scholars of devotional religion often overlook Murukaṉ. In emphasizing the innovations and institutions established in South India during the early medieval period of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava devotional ascendancy, they tend to occlude the role of Murukaṉ Bhakti. Murukaṉ has a dual identity: both as a highly regional deity of the Tamil-speaking area, and as a deity with clear north Indian roots as Skanda, offspring of Śiva and Pārvatī. (For the northern side of Murukaṉ/Skanda, see the essay by Cédric Ferrier in the first volume.) Murukaṉ is devotional subject of one of the earliest vernacular Bhakti poems, the Tamil-language *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* of the sixth century, and he remains today the central figure in a vital South Indian

devotional cult especially found in his six holy abodes. Many in Tamil Nadu view his south Indian religious culture as the most ancient and continuous Tamil form of Bhakti. Valérie Gillet and Emmanuel Francis both address the issue of long-term continuity and change in the devotional tradition of Murukan̲, and both challenge this projection of continuity.

Temple complexes can be studied like excavated archeological sites, for they also are the fossilized remains of past human behavior. One can examine the impact that different periods of activities have left behind in the material fabric of the place, in the form of building structures, renovations, imagery, and inscriptional writing. Some temples appear as relatively undisturbed sites. The Pallava-period Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñcīpuram is one good example. Such temples are valued by historians of art and religion for providing a relatively direct, synchronic reflection of their time of construction and initial efflorescence. We hope to gain an insight into the intentions and religious premises of the agents responsible for the construction. Of course, even the best-preserved ancient temple also shows the signs of subsequent human activity, in the form of archeological preservation and rehabilitation (by the Archaeological Survey of India, in the case of the Kailāsanātha temple). Other south Indian temple complexes, such as the Tiruttaṇi site sacred to Murukan̲, contain evidence of repeated religious activity over centuries. In such cases it may be possible to separate out distinct historical strata of the complex, a diachronic account of the site, as Gillet seeks to do here.

Nowadays Tiruttaṇi is unambiguously identified as one of the six abodes sacred to Murukan̲ in the Tamil region. (See Gillet's essay on another of the six abodes, Tiruccentūr, in the earlier volume.) Often this enumeration of holy places is projected back in time to the earliest Tamil poetry referring to the god, with the implication that Tiruttaṇi is equally venerable. Gillet's close examination of material remains in and around Tiruttaṇi leads to a different picture. The earliest archeological evidence at the site, dating back to the late Pallava period, is found in a small temple to Śiva, apparently donated by local elites. However, one royal Pallava copper-plate inscription from Vēḷañcēri refers to a Murukan̲ temple at Tiruttaṇi, indicating the worship of this god also prevailed there by the ninth century. In later centuries, cultic sites dedicated to both Viṣṇu and Murukan̲ grew up at the site, while the old temple to Śiva became inactive. The earliest inscriptional evidence for the worship

of Murukaṉ found at Tiruttaṇi dates only from the thirteenth century. In late medieval times, dominance of the site may have been up for grabs. Gillet suggests it may have served as a "multi-religious hub" along a main pilgrimage route, able to serve devotees of various persuasions. However, one key lacuna remains in the history of Tiruttaṇi. The largest temple at the present-day complex, the hilltop Subrahmaṇya Svāmi temple, has been so completely expanded and renovated over the centuries that it is impossible to discern its earliest material remnants. Was this the temple that the Vēḷañcēri inscription mentioned? This is likely, but no clear archeological remains at the site can verify this reference. Ongoing devotional activity can be the enemy of the archeologist seeking origins.

Emmanuel Francis takes up the question of Murukaṉ's six abodes as well. As he points out, the sites themselves constitute a network of Murukaṉ pilgrimage that extends throughout the Tamil region, and this network is often viewed today as an "identity marker of Tamilness." (*supra*, p. 497) In other words, in modern times Bhakti to Murukaṉ may be overlaid with Bhakti to Tamil—the language, the cultural region, and the putative nation. But when exactly does Murukaṉ's six-fold devotional landscape get established?

Often Murukaṉ's enthusiasts project this network back in time to the early devotional poem, the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, which portrays the god prevailing in six different landscapes. Are these the same six sites, or simply generic settings? Francis employs an archeology of textual sources, specifically manuscripts of the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, to track the historicity of the identification. Even in manuscripts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the direct correlation between Murukaṉ's landscapes in the poem and his six modern pilgrimage centers does not seem to have been a priority. Lack of manuscript evidence does not amount to proof that such a connection did not exist then, but it is a valuable cautionary finding against the anachronistic extension of these sites back to a sixth century poem.

An Archeology of Bhakti: Outcomes and Challenges

One of the pleasures of archeological method, as applied to the study of Bhakti, is that it requires field work. During the 2011 and 2013 workshops, lectures presented in the comfort of the classroom of the EFEO Pondicherry

Centre, alternated with bus-trips to important historical sites throughout Tamil Nadu. These remnants of past devotional actions—still existing in the present and often still devotional centers—provide a powerful visual and tactile dimension to any scholar wishing to comprehend Bhakti.

An archeological approach undoubtedly contributes to our understanding of Bhakti as a multifaceted, changing, and contested modality of Indian religiosity. We gain a greater sense of its historical varieties that would be possible from a text-centered approach. We become sensitive to its institutional dimensions, and its links to political authorities at both local and imperial levels. We become more aware of the multiple persons and social groups who act in the creating of a living culture of Bhakti. Often these insights lead us to qualify or overturn the definitions and characterizations of Bhakti based primarily on textual materials.

But an archeological method also poses challenges that we need always to keep in mind. One of the basic maxims insisted upon by Collingwood, a practicing archeologist as well as philosopher of history, is that "all objects must be interpreted in terms of purposes" (1939: 128). When one finds something, one must ask, "What is it for?" and further, "Did it serve that purpose well or poorly?" To foreground this inquiry into intention prevents one from becoming simply an antiquarian, an accumulator of ancient artifacts, as so many of the earliest archeological excavators were. Collingwood also insisted that archeological practice must be guided by purposeful intellectual inquiry. "The person responsible for any piece of digging, however small and however large, should know exactly what he wants to find out, and then decide what kind of digging will show it to him" (1939: 122). Even where the disruption of digging is not involved, the application of the "logic of question-and-answer" is salutary. As we explore the archeological remnants of Bhakti's past, what exactly do we hope to learn? How does this contribute to our understanding of the history of religion and society in India?

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