

Since the beginning of the second millennium CE, Hindu temples and shrines have been of great importance to South Indian religious, social and political life. They were places of worship, but also centers of learning, political hotspots, and foci of economic activities. Within these holy sites human and divine interacted, they were meeting places of different members of the communities, they attracted pilgrims and travelers, whose journeys connect multiple sacred spots, and along with whom ideas, beliefs, texts, skills, material objects and practices circulated.

The proposed, collaborative project conceptualizes the temples as *nodal points* within webs of various connections, thus perceives temples as participating in differentiated nets of relationships and not just as stand-alone monuments. Drawing on the literary cartography theory (e.g. Tally 2014), the project's hypothesis is that both the spaces in which the temples are situated, and the connections between temples, are *mapped by narratives*, which can be *told* and *written* (as in literary texts), *sung* and *heard* in oral transmission, *seen* (as in architecture and iconography), *embodied* and *performed* (in ritual and theatrical performances), and *walked*, when pilgrims follow the routes that sages or gods are believed to have used before them. Often, these are the pilgrims' movements which ensure and make 'alive' connections between the temples.

Through five different case studies on specific temple networks in South India, which overlap, but are different in their setup and hence require individual research approach and focus, this collaborative project aims to look into the ways in which connections between temples are established, authorized, challenged and changed. Beginning with the narratives in the textual genre of *māhātmyas/sthalapurānas* (both in Sanskrit and in local South Indian languages), the subprojects will, individually and in collaboration, also include the analysis of the narratives' ritual performances and material artistic expressions, such as murals in temples and reliefs or statues.

All subprojects look at three different dimensions of their respective temple networks: the transregional, the regional, and the local one. Since the subprojects' networks in many points intersect with each other, the project teams will be able to view them from different perspectives referring to the regions of Tamilnadu, Andhra, but also Kerala. This, in turn, will provide the team with the possibility to redirect and – possibly – correct their gaze.

Main questions to be answered are: Do the networks laid out in the texts inform pilgrimage practice? Are observable pilgrimage circuits, which connect temples, authorized by textual sources? What is the relationship between temples at the center, and temples at the periphery within such networks? What are the strategies of establishing links, how are these links articulated in various media (texts, iconography, rituals), how do these aspects differ from region to region in South India and how are these strategies differently articulated in various languages (Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu)? Why and when do networks of temples appear, or disappear? Who are the agents behind such processes?

By focusing on the dynamics between temples, the project concentrates on connections and flows of ideas and material objects between Hindu holy sites. Such an approach will facilitate a new understanding of the 'work' of mythological narratives beyond their religious messages, of the interconnection of texts, art, and ritual in this context, and of the interconnectedness of religion, economics, and politics 'on the ground' – an aspect that for the lack of sources often escapes scholarly attention.