

## Banaras *jyotirlingas*: constitution and transformations of a transposed divine group and its pilgrimage

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Banaras (Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India) is renowned as one of the more notable pilgrimage destinations of India. The ways of approaching and investigating the sacred landscape and the religious practices of this city varied throughout times and are still a matter of discussion among scholars. The author firstly addresses this debate in order to re-conceptualize the need and intents of writing (still) about Banaras and its mainstream religious traditions. The contribution addresses one common pattern of Indian sacred geography, that is the spatial transposition of gods. The article, in fact, goes through the formation path of a transposed group of pan-Indian deities, namely the *jyotirlingas*, in a city which is presented by eulogistic literature as a universal *tīrtha*, where all sacred centres and gods dwell. Through the analysis of textual and visual material the author shows how these divine forms have been produced in the city's territory throughout time and projected spatially in the various shrines and, eventually, in a procession. The pilgrimage circuit connected with the twelve local *jyotirlingas* is investigated as a recent and evolving practice of Banaras religious life and its currently deviating path is shown as something to be constantly rephrased and negotiated. Ritual transformations appear as challenged by the need to adapt and survive in a developing urban context, where sacred space is shared, contested and cyclically re-written.

### Introductory remarks

The city of Varanasi (Banaras, as its people call it) in the North State of Uttar Pradesh is well known as one of the most sacred places of India. It is by now well accepted that the sacred geography and, why not, the religious practices of this renowned city are the products of both the repeated phases of construction and reconstruction of its territory and the constant adaptation of its traditions promoted by different social forces and actors. A critical approach to the city that intended to revise and, in a way, deconstruct its myth, initiated a few decades ago within the theoretical frame of post-colonial studies and should be by now well absorbed. The priority then was that of addressing the city not only as a religious centre, but also as a historical and dynamic urban space produced by different actions, being those identifiable as connected to the settlement and the cataloguing program of the colonial power, or those addressed to react against the new impulses and rephrase somehow the so-called *ancient* traditions. Much work has been done also to disclose the various dynamics of power, knowledge and the process of shaping and reviving traditions anew in this city, which was crucially significant for the British Rāj<sup>1</sup>. At that time this new fresh and critical approach led somehow to set aside or, at least, not to enhance the study of the city's religious traditions: the related topics were probably considered as something pertaining to the previous criticized scholarship. This tendency

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Bayly (1992 [1983]); Cohn (1987); Kumār (1988); Freitag (1992 [1989]); Pandey (1994 [1990]); Dalmia (1997).

was part of the need to regain historicity and settle a critical view on a city, whose mythic aura often acted as a distorting filter.

The sacred territory and the religious practices of Banaras, however, kept being investigated through different perspectives<sup>2</sup>. Recently, a new approach informed both by the achievements of post-colonial theories and by various and multi-disciplinary contributions has been proposed and adopted for the study of the city's layered spatial dimensions<sup>3</sup>. This approach is informed by the phenomenological study of place and questions the construction process and the ways of representation of the city's space<sup>4</sup>, namely the imagined and normative dimension, which is here considered and investigated as a social product. Both the frequent tensions and the mutual influences between ideal spaces and experienced places of the city are enhanced by this contributions whose main goal is that of stressing the need to address this complex city and its traditions as a constant revised product.

The stress on the dynamism and complexity of the city's reality and its traditions make it clear that approaching Banaras as an a-historical, eternal and fixed space, which has *always* been *the* holy centre of the Hindus is today totally inconceivable, even if the "idea of Banaras"<sup>5</sup> has long been pervading even in academic literature. However, this trend of critical thinking and historical approach strongly adopted in one last appreciable recent work<sup>6</sup>, whose intent is to "*produce an alternative series of glimpses of Banaras, as an urban conglomeration and an urban society, grounded firmly in the historical*"<sup>7</sup> seems to be sometimes considered as naturally opposed or at least far from the field of religion. Thus any approach and contribution about the city's religious forms tend to be identified as procrastination of the Banaras image as romanticized, a-historical and just but as sacred centre<sup>8</sup>. Another welcomed tendency toward the study of religious sphere in Banaras is that of enhancing the presence of other religious groups in the city, such as the numerous Muslim community or the Sikhs<sup>9</sup>. Of course the need to collect and question the many hidden identities and voices is crucial for our understanding of this city, however, what has long been considered as the *essential* character of the city, namely its *Hinduness*, should not be left behind as something already expected or to be ignored.

On the contrary, the ways used to construct, promote and fix this fictional category and stitch it to this immensely varied city should be, in my view, constantly put under investigation, in order to expose the gears of such a transforming religious flow. I seek to underline that a critical, historical,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the works of Singh and Rana (2002) and Singh (1993, 2002, 2004) especially developed the geographical perspective on the city's cultural landscape and questioned the pilgrimage practice in the city. Parry (1994) instead devoted his researches to the funeral priest spaces and work through the anthropological perspective.

<sup>3</sup> Gutschow (2004 e 2006) and Gaenzle and Gengnagel (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Gaenzle and Gengnagel (2008): 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> The term is introduced by Dodson (2012): 9; the author underlines that: "*Banaras has been persistently romanticized as a city sitting outside of mortal time, and as a seemingly unique urban site with a particular ("Hindu") religious character*", Ibid. 1. The author identifies Diana Eck's famous work on the city, *Banaras, city of light* (1983), as the *Ur* text of this approach.

<sup>6</sup> Dodson (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Dodson affirms: "*[...] the persistent and unproblematized return to the fundamentally religious (and essentially ahistorical) characterization of the city should be perceived as an inherently problematic undertaking*"; ibid. 1. Few lines before the author mentioned Gaenzle and Gengnagel (2008) as example of the criticized approach.

<sup>9</sup> Kumar (1988); Myrvold (2005); Raman (2010) and Lee in Dodson (2012).

multivocal<sup>10</sup> and multilocal<sup>11</sup> approach can and should be used even and especially to investigate the practices and the discourses of the majority religious community of Banaras. Thus the matter should not be what we address as research subject but how we do it. Furthermore, religion and the sacred, especially as far as South Asia is concerned, should be by now accepted as something not excluded nor distant from other human activities, but as something deeply dealing with social roles, questions of power and knowledge and material life. I do agree that to address the Hindū religious traditions and practices in Banaras one needs to reflect and revise his own perceptions of the city, which are even unconsciously influenced by the city's powerful myth<sup>12</sup>. However, the challenge is that of questioning these rituals and religious forms in the city (and anywhere else) not as unchanged facts, which are repeated cyclically in any context and time in accordance with the supposed fixed textual prescriptions, nor as just newly invented traditions simply derived from the colonial encounter, but rather as creative events and projects. These might depend on wider contexts and, even, on pragmatic circumstances and could be identified as part of the struggle to adapt, change and eventually find a place in a modern growing city.

The following pages would like to contribute to this approach by presenting some results of a wider research project on the contemporary ways of spatial transposition in Banaras<sup>13</sup>. As well known, this city is presented by eulogistic literature as a universal *tīrtha*, where all the sacred centres and gods of the subcontinent dwell in local “replicas”<sup>14</sup>. Both shrines and pilgrimages have long been promoted and depicted as some sort of places and practices connected to the city from time immemorial. I will instead show how one of these groups of “duplicated” deities has been produced in the city's territory throughout time and projected in its physical space both as the various shrines and as a procession. I will highlight, in fact, that the pilgrimage circuit connected with the twelve local *vyotirliṅgas* emerged only in recent times and is today a changing path of the religious life and territory of Banaras. The article focuses, indeed, on the constitutive process of the transposed group of *vyotirliṅgas* in the city and the dynamic projection and transformation of its pilgrimage path. The main intents are to show the movements of a local tradition and highlight the various voices and elements involved in the negotiation of a religious practices in a modern urban context.

The twelve *vyotirliṅgas* constitute one notable pan-Indian circuit in the pilgrimage industry of contemporary India. The myth of the *liṅgodbhavamūrti*, which is related to the cult of the *liṅga* of light, has been often addressed as a central episode in the mythology of Śiva that might explain the origin

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<sup>10</sup> Appadurai (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Rodman (1992).

<sup>12</sup> Dodson (2012): 9. To have pointed at the researcher's own expectations and attitude toward the “idea of Banaras” as something to be self-aware of, and something to be questioned is, in my view, the more important merit of this contribution.

<sup>13</sup> This is the subject of the author's unpublished PhD thesis “Quando la copia offusca il modello. Studi sulla trasposizione spaziale e Banaras: il caso dei *vyotirliṅga*” (“When the copy darkens the model. Study on spatial transposition and Banaras: the case of *vyotirliṅgas*”), defended at the Euro-Asian Studies PhD School of the Università degli Studi di Torino in May 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout the article, I choose to put the terms “replicas” and “originals” in inverted commas (quotation marks), as these objects can be identified as such only in the scholar view. In fact, in Hindī these kinds of transposed deities are sometimes referred to as *pratirūpa*. More often, however, they are identified with the gods' names. The idea of transposition and divine transfer is much more present in the myths about the origins of these “replicated” forms, than in the language used to define them.

of the aniconic worship of the god<sup>15</sup>. However, the history of the single destinations and the development of the *yātrā* have received poor attention. Recently, Fleming<sup>16</sup> has explored the dynamics connected with the emergence of the group in a crucial period to the formation of the *śaiva* religion. The twelve places, in fact, even if they presumably existed well before the group, as important regional centres, came to be forged as a pan-Indian list during a period that goes from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries. As we cannot go through the steps of this formation herein, I just would like to mention that, even if some of their names appear in different Puranic or epic sources as notable deities included in other lists of gods<sup>17</sup>, it is only the *Śivapurāṇa* tradition that defines the *jyotirlingas* as such and indicates them as part of a structured group. The *Jyotirlingastotra*, which has different regional variations, is another textual evidence about the group<sup>18</sup>. It is, however, the *Jñānasamhitā* of the *Śivapurāṇa*, which is dated after 950 C.E.<sup>19</sup>, to firstly collect the mythological material about the twelve sites of the country<sup>20</sup>. At this dawning stage of the formation of the group, the stories collected are well various and do not constitute a structured section about an established tradition. The process of development of the pan-Indian group emerges if we look at the changes introduced by the *Kotirudrasamhitā*, a later section of the *Śivapurāṇa*. The chapters 14-33 of this new collection, dated around the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, represent a following reworked version of the previous material<sup>21</sup>. Here the stories, even if they keep their individual character, have acquired more elements to suggest that the places involved share now a common reality and form a group. For example, the term *jyotirlinga* appears more frequently and a sort of narrative frame is added to introduce every section and to recall the entire collections of stories<sup>22</sup>.

The evolution of the material connected with the twelve *lingas* of light shows the dynamics of the projection of a sacred and trans-regional geography related to Śiva during the 10<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The construction of the group of the twelve *jyotirlingas* is part of this project and reflects the will to filter the multiple and local traditions into a global Indian geography dedicated to the god: the identification and recognition of these places, which presumably had a previous regional importance, and their connection with a pan-Indian group of deities and subsequently with a pilgrimage path, represent the effort of the compilers to form an “imagined landscape”<sup>23</sup>, totally related to Śiva.

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<sup>15</sup> Another group of myths connected with the origin of the *linga* cult is Śiva in the Forest of Pines; for example, Doniger (1997 [1973]): 169, 264 and Shulman (1986). On the origin of the *linga* form: Srinivasan (1997).

<sup>16</sup> Fleming (2006).

<sup>17</sup> For example, the *Skandapurāṇa* (*Kedārakhaṇḍa* 7.28-35) lists twenty-seven *lingas* of the whole subcontinent; between them Oṃkāreśvara, Mahākāla, Viśveśara, Tryambakeśvara, Someśvara e Kedāra are mentioned, as analyzed by Fleming (2006): 48.

<sup>18</sup> The *Jyotirlingastotra* is attributed to Śaṅkarācārya without consistent evidence. The most popular version of the *stotra* is a brief one, which lists the name of the twelve *lingas* and their locations:

“*saurāṣṭre somanāthaṃ ca śrīśaile mallikārjunam/ujjayinyāṃ mahākālam oṃkāre paramēśvaraṃ//kedāraṃ himavatprṣṭhe dākinyāṃ bhīmaśamkaraṃ/vārāṇasyāṃ ca viśveśaṃ tryambakaṃ gautamītaṭe//vaidyanāthaṃ citābhūmau nāgeśaṃ dārūkāvane/setubandhe ca rāmeśaṃ ghuśmeśaṃ tu śivālaye//dvādaśaitāni nāmāni prātar utthāya yaḥ paṭhet/sarvapāpair vinirmuktaḥ sarvasiddhiphalaṃ labhet//*” (version reported in Fleming (2006): 28 with amendments).

<sup>19</sup> Hazra (1975): 92-96.

<sup>20</sup> Chapters 45-58 of the *Jñānasamhitā* are dedicated to the stories of the twelve *lingas*. In Fleming (2006): 13-17, we find information about the editions of the *Śivapurāṇa* and the inclusion of the *Jñānasamhitā*.

<sup>21</sup> Fleming (2006): 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive analysis on the mythological material and on the differences between the two collections we refer to Fleming (2006): 51-136.

<sup>23</sup> Eck (1998): 169.

Between these places, one is the *līṅga* of Viśveśvara, in Banaras, whose complex and contested history and role cannot be treated in this context. However, we can note that the city was part of the project of a pan-Indian geography as many other sites of the country. The city is in this period, and by this tradition, identified as the abode of one of the preeminent places, where the Lord manifested himself in its very form, as light. Until this period we have no traces about the presence, or even the idea, of the “replicas” of the other *jyotirlingas* of the country into the city’s territory. These will emerge much later, even if the names of some of them seem to have been connected to the city’s geography before and irrespective of the existence of the pan-Indian group.

#### Presence and absence of the *jyotirlingas* in Banaras: sources and territory

The narrative material connected with the single places, which we cannot analyze herein, shows that the pan-Indian temples where the *jyotirlingas* dwell were sacred centres well before the existence of the group that identifies them as such. The label of *jyotirlinga* is a sort of supplement that makes these places and names much more special and powerful to the people addressing them for worship. However, the traditions of the sites today known as *jyotirlingas* and their cult might have well predated the projection of the group and the existence of the *jyotirlinga* itself as an idea and as a form of Śiva.

A similar situation can be observed and compared with that of Banaras. As I will show, in fact, the eulogistic literature about the city mentions some of the names of the *jyotirlingas* as forms which dwell in the city, without identifying them with transpositions of the members of the pan-Indian group. Some of the namesakes of the *jyotirlingas* represent dominant realities in the city’s geography traced by the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (KKh), the main Puranic glorification of the city, dated around the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The text, which is a monumental and poetic composition, only partially based on the previous digests and collections about Banaras<sup>24</sup>, identifies, for example, Kedāreśvara and Oṃkāreśvara as main deities of Kāśī<sup>25</sup>, the Luminous, as the city is often called in the glorifications. Both deities give the name to the namesake sections of the city: its territory is, in fact, traditionally divided in three *khaṇḍas*, namely from north to south, Oṃkāra, Viśveśa and Kedāra. The three divine forms are described in the text as part of a sequence of fourteen *līṅgas*, which constitute the *muktikṣetra*, the field of liberation of the sacred city<sup>26</sup>. The three are surprisingly also names of *jyotirlingas*. Two of them, Kedāra and Oṃkāra will be identified in the form of light elsewhere in the country, while Viśveśa is the local “original” *jyotirlinga*.

Kāśī Kedāreśvara is the only one in the group whose mythological tradition is explicitly based on the transposition of the deity from its “original” Himalayan form to the city. The myth narrated in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, in fact, tells how Śiva decided to move and dwell in Kāśī, in order to please his devotees. It is, however, a later tradition, collected in the *Kāśīkedāramāhātmya*, to further develop the transposition theme by telling the myth of Māndhātā and the appearance of Lord Śiva in a plate of

<sup>24</sup> For a comprehensive survey about the early history of Banaras, with an investigation on the first textual collections and the archaeological findings we refer to Bakker and Isaacson (2004): 19-82.

<sup>25</sup> KKh 73.70-74.122 is entirely dedicated to the glorification of Oṃkāreśvara, while KKh 77 describes the glory of Kedāreśvara.

<sup>26</sup> KKh 73.32-36.

*khicṛī*<sup>27</sup>. The case of Oṃkāreśvara is totally different from the previous one: even if its name is appeared since the first collections on the city's sacred geography<sup>28</sup>, its link with the “original” site are never mentioned, but rather the form seems to have developed with the traits of an independent and local tradition<sup>29</sup>. Despite of its textual prominence, however, the temple of Oṃkāreśvara is a small and almost unknown shrine today. The present situation can be a sign of the discrepancy of the textual imagined space of the city and its territorial reality more than a crucial proof of the temple's decline in recent times, as it has been suggested<sup>30</sup>.

Apart from Kedāreśvara and Oṃkāreśvara, whose importance in the textual tradition is evident, the KKh mentions the great majority of the other names, which will be later famous as *jyotirlingas*. The period of composition of the KKh can correspond to that one of the formation of the group in the Śivapurāṇa textual tradition, or it might just follow the collection of the stories. It seems that a sort of radiation of the names and forms of Śiva, presumably in many places of the country, had forerun the choice of the members for the pan-Indian group.

Some of the twelve namesakes are mentioned in the KKh as sacred centres that, being situated far away from the city, came to dwell here; for example, Mahākāla is referred to many times: it is mentioned firstly in the context of the description of the *saptapurī*, the seven sacred cities, where Ujjain is glorified as the place that can save the whole universe from the sins, and the *liṅga* itself is said to be able to free every men from death<sup>31</sup>. Mahākāla is here inserted in its “original” context and it seems that the divine form has no links with Banaras; the same name appears further in the text, in the context of king Divodāsa's myth. The episode of the king of Kāśī and the exile of Śiva from the city fills a remarkable part of the text as a sort of narrative frame, which describes and justifies the arrival of all the deities in town<sup>32</sup>. Mahākāla is sent by Śiva to look for the other messengers who, being dazzled by the beauty and power of the city, did not return to the god to inform him about Divodāsa's

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<sup>27</sup> The *Kāśīkedāramāhātmya*, dated around the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries, is entirely dedicated to the description of the southern area of the city, and especially to the glorification of Kedāreśvara. Its 31 chapters contain many myths related to this very place and its power. The text introduces its own version about the origin of the Himalayan Kedāra (KKm 1.60-103) and, in the central episode of the narration, tells the transposition myth (KKm 19-21) which explains the move of the god to Kāśī and its appearance in a plate of *khicṛī*. This is a plate made of lentils, vegetables and rice, often consumed by poor people and ascetics.

<sup>28</sup> For example, it appears in Lakṣmīdhara (TVK p. 57).

<sup>29</sup> The myth of Oṃkāreśvara is told in KKh 73 and explains the origin of the form as the manifestation of the primordial syllable to Brahmā. The “original” position of Oṃkāreśvara on the Narmadā river and its *jyotirlinga* status are not mentioned in this description of the local form. However, a new narrative device is introduced (KKh 74.1-122) to highlight the glory of the local form: the Brahman Damana, searching for liberation, meets a group of Pāśūpata ascetics on the bank of the Narmadā. These describe him the power of Avimukta (one ancient name of Banaras) and suggest him to go and worship the Oṃkāreśvara *liṅga* there. This second episode seems to have been introduced later in the KKh, in order to adhere to the universal logic of the glorification that promotes the city as a perfect *tīrtha*, where every sacred centres of the country dwell. The previous myth, on the contrary, might testify the existence of an independent tradition of the local deity.

<sup>30</sup> Eck (1983): 112-113 has speculated about the existence of a prominent shrine on the lake Matsyodarī, which was drained by the colonial administration. However, there are no archaeological proofs of the existence of such a great sanctuary as it is described by the textual sources (apart from the KKh, Vyās (2011[1987]): 112-117 lists the sites of the Oṃkāra *khaṇḍa* in great number).

<sup>31</sup> KKh 7.97.

<sup>32</sup> KKh 39-64.



kingdom. Mahākāla himself, being enchanted by Kāśī, decides to install here a *liṅga* and to dwell in the city<sup>33</sup>.

The text mentions Someśvara a few times as part of series of *liṅgas*<sup>34</sup> but it does not give any references about the “original” site and the possible arrival of the form from outside the city. A Somanātha is also cited as one destination of the Antargṛhayātrā<sup>35</sup>, one of the most notable circuits in the city’s territory. Tryambaka e Rāmeśvara are inserted in the group of deities who came to Kāśī from elsewhere, which are listed by Skanda in the number of sixty-four<sup>36</sup>. Vaidhyanātha is said to have been installed by Dhruva under Viṣṇu’s suggestion<sup>37</sup>, and later its collocation is explained<sup>38</sup>. This it is also indicated as part of the Antargṛhayātrā<sup>39</sup>, as well as Nāgeśa<sup>40</sup>.

Bhīmaśaṅkara, Mallikāṛjuna and Ghuśmeśvara do not appear in the KKh. However, we find the name of Bhīmeśa and Bhīmeśvara as connected with Bhīmacaṇḍī<sup>41</sup>, the village which is the namesake of the goddess who resides there and one of the destination of the Pañcakrośyātrā: it seems that these forms have not any relations with the *jyotirlinga* Bhīmaśaṅkara. On the other hand, even if the name of Mallikāṛjuna is not mentioned, its abode is frequently named in the text: Śāileśa, or Śrīśaila, is described as a wonderful mountain site inhabited by Śiva himself<sup>42</sup>. A Śrīśaileśvara *liṅga* is then installed in the city by Himālaya<sup>43</sup>, as Lord of the Mountains. Mallikāṛjuna, moreover, is identified with Tripurāntakeśvara, as this is described as the divine manifestation coming from Śrīśaila<sup>44</sup>. The text here clearly expresses the sense of substitution and transposition of the divine form: it is said that the merit one can obtain by climbing the top of Śrīśaila is available in Kāśī by visiting and worshipping Tripurāntakeśvara. The local deity is situated on a small hilltop and demarcates the Avimuktakṣetra’s perimeter to the west of Viśveśvara<sup>45</sup>. It is also part of a list of sacred abodes in the city, the eleven *āyatana*<sup>46</sup>.

From these brief hints on the presence and absence of the *jyotirlingas* in the KKh, one can presume that the great majority of the twelve *liṅgas* of light might have been thought by the compilers of the text as divine forms dwelling in Banaras sacred geography of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries, despite their belonging to the pan-Indian group. Few of these forms represent important shrines of the city, as suggested by their rich descriptions. Many of them, on the contrary, are mentioned as part of other groups or lists of deities of Kāśī, which have been installed by devotees or gods

<sup>33</sup> KKh 53.26: 29. His arrival from Ujjain to Kāśī is also remembered in KKh 69.18-20. In KKh 97.131-132 his position in Kāśī is mentioned.

<sup>34</sup> KKh 10.95; 83.95; 97.197.

<sup>35</sup> KKh 100.81.

<sup>36</sup> KKh 69.78 and KKh 69.79.

<sup>37</sup> KKh 21.126-127.

<sup>38</sup> KKh 97.235-236.

<sup>39</sup> KKh 100.82.

<sup>40</sup> KKh 100.83-86.

<sup>41</sup> KKh 70.72-73.

<sup>42</sup> For example KKh 6.11, 18; in this chapter a series of notable *tīrthas* are described and compared to Kāśī. Śrīśaila is also mentioned as a the sacred mountain, together with Himālaya in KKh 25.36.

<sup>43</sup> KKh 66 tells about the visit of Himālaya to Kāśī, with the description of the *liṅga* and other abodes.

<sup>44</sup> KKh 69.73-76.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. and Gutschow (2006): 274.

<sup>46</sup> KKh 100.63-66.

(Vaidhyanātha, Śrīśaileśvara, Mahākāla), during a visit to the city. Some others appear as manifestations of divine forms that come from elsewhere willing to reside here (Tryambaka, Rāmeśvara and Tripurāntakeśvara/Mallikārjuna/Śrīśaileśvara), and some are considered stop-over of famous local pilgrimages (Somanātha, Nāgeśa, Vaidhyanātha, Oṃkāreśvara e Kedāreśvara). It is evident, however, that the KKh does not consider these forms and names as part of a group. They are not listed as a sequence and they are not considered as steps of a local circuit, which could substitute the pan-Indian one. None of them is, moreover, called with the term *jyotirlinga*, except Mahākāla<sup>47</sup>. They even do not seem to be known as such, or as transpositions of the “original” sites. The names and forms of the *jyotirlingas* seem rather to reveal the multiple logic of germination, which directed the emergence of sacred places in Indian sacred geography<sup>48</sup>. In fact, they seem to be independent divine forms addressed with the same names, who, almost in the same period, emerged in different regions, in a sort references play and echo of names. Banaras *jyotirlingas*’ namesakes seem to be but a series of local deities at this stage. Some of them might recall explicitly the elsewhere gods, but some others are just said to dwell here from the beginning and belong to the city’s sacred geography.

A later source, the *Kāśīrahasya* (KR), composed two Centuries after the KKh, mentions some of the names of the *jyotirlingas*<sup>49</sup>. Someśvara, Somanātheśvara, Rāmeśvara, Kedāreśvara and Nāganātha are inserted in the Pañcakrośīyātrā, which is described in the chapters 9-11 of the KR. In this way, some of these names are anchored to the city’s territory through their presence in Banaras’ most famous circuit, whose fame, moreover, is linked to the city’s quality of universality<sup>50</sup>. The KR is dedicated to the description of the city in general and contains few geographical details about specific *lingas* and *tīrthas*; the text, however, concerns our topic because it describes the city as the cosmic *jyotirlinga*: the *lingodbhavamūrti* is said to have appeared in the city and this very form, which is the form of Kāśī, is considered to be the only thing surviving the cosmic dissolution of the universe<sup>51</sup>. The KKh had introduced before the relation between the city and the *jyotirlinga* form; in fact, Avimukta, one of the ancient names of the city, is said to extend for five *krośa*, and it is identified with the *jyotirlinga* Viśveśvara, whose light is compared with the sun<sup>52</sup>. The identification of the city with the light form is enriched by the KR and, as I’m going to show, will further develop in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries visual images of Banaras. These visual sources will then promote and strengthen the idea of the group presence, and not only of the city’s affinity to the cosmic form.

The architectural evidence of the temples where the *jyotirlingas* “replicas” today reside does not help much in our understanding about the effective presence of the divine forms in the past

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<sup>47</sup> KKh 7.95.

<sup>48</sup> Eck (1998): 174.

<sup>49</sup> Somanātha (KR 10.22, 30, 43, 48), Rāmeśvara (KR 9.71,122; 10.47-8, 50, 83; 13.32), Oṃkāreśvara (KR 13.72), Nāganātha (KR 10.33), Kedāreśvara (KR 10.23; 13.66).

<sup>50</sup> The Pañcakrośīyātrā, the pilgrimage of the length of five *krośas*, is the most famous circuit of Banaras. The circuit encircles the perimeter of the Kāśīkṣetra and the number of deities included has been fixed by the textual tradition in the symbolic number of 108, that, however must be taken as an ideal reference. The correctness of the route and the position of some of the most important deities included in the procession have been the focus of an intense debate in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Pañcakrośīyātrā, its meanings and related topics, have been extensively analyzed in Singh (2002); Gutschow (2006): 113-204; Gengnagel in Gaenzle and Gengnagel (2008): 145-164. The most recent contribution about the modern debate on the route is Gengnagel (2011): 55-72.

<sup>51</sup> KR 7.65; and chapter 17.

<sup>52</sup> KKh 26.131-132.



territory. Actually, the buildings, which belong for the majority to the modern period, inform us about the recent projection of the transposed shrines in the city. The temples might have been reconstructed during the modern period, however any evidence to clearly affirm the presence of some previous existing structures is lacking. On the contrary, it is precisely in the modern period that crucial phases of adaptation and resettlement of the territory to the textual reality were promoted by different factors and patrons. As well known, the great majority of the city's sacred landscape was, in fact, constructed during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the following one by the efforts of different regional patrons, who wanted to have a sort of representation of their power in such a great city, and with the contribution of the new established local royal dynasty<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, the late emergence of the Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā circuit in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's pilgrims guides, which I will go through further on, is again a sign of the dynamicity and modernity of the factors that brought to the crystallization of the group in a period of revaluation of places and ritual practices, such as pilgrimages, sacred sites and cultural actions, to promote and reinforce the rising national identity, as a Hindu one<sup>54</sup>.

The numerous pictorial and religious maps of Banaras produced in the last two Centuries are crucial sources for the understanding of the process of transfer of the city's textual imagined space in such a visual and popular objects. Furthermore, they are useful witnesses to hypothesize on the emergence of the *jyotirlingas* "replicas" in the territory during, or just after, the mentioned period of reconstruction and settlement of the city's landscape. The pilgrims maps do not represent, of course, a faithful picture of the real territory of the city. However, they represent the process of material reproduction of the objects and places described in the eulogistic literature, which was being undertaken during the modern phases of constitution of the city's sacred geography.

As scholars<sup>55</sup> have shown, the city has gone through repeated phases of construction and reconstruction. The main building activities are, however, accounted starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, with the reconstruction of Viśvanātha during Akbar reign, and further they intensified from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and for the whole 18<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>56</sup>. During the peak of the construction period some old buildings or preexisting temples were renewed<sup>57</sup>. Other shrines were constructed *ex novo*, such as Annapūrṇā<sup>58</sup> and Tārakeśvara<sup>59</sup> and the last version of Viśvanātha, sponsored by Ahilyabai (Ahilyābāī) Holkar of Indore, whose funding activities in the city is well accounted<sup>60</sup>. Moreover, it has been recently underlined that religious maps not only aim at depicting the omnilocality and transcendence of a sacred place at a glance by using different representative typologies<sup>61</sup>, but they also speak of the

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<sup>53</sup> On the establishment of the Kāśī Nareś, the local dynasty, and their role as sponsors of the *Hinduness* of the city we refer to Cohn (1987): 346-355, and particularly Dalmia (1997): 64-94.

<sup>54</sup> Jaffrelot (1996): 39-40.

<sup>55</sup> Bakker (1996), Bakker and Isaacson (2004): 19-82 and Gutschow (2006): 32-36.

<sup>56</sup> For a deep overview on the modern period's reconstructions we refer to Gutschow (2006): 32-36.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Madhyameśvara, Kṛttivāseśvara, Trilocaneśvara, Kala Bhairava were rebuilt in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; Gutschow (2006): 34.

<sup>58</sup> Sherring (1868): 58.

<sup>59</sup> Prinsep (2009 [1833]): 106-107

<sup>60</sup> The sovereign of Malwa was one of the most active patron in the city; many important temples and ritual and public spaces, such as Daśāśvamedh Ghāṭ, and its residencies for Brahmans, were constructed by her, as testified by inscriptions *in loco*. She is even today reputed a sort of goddess, as her name is mainly associated to the glory of Viśvanātha.

<sup>61</sup> Gaenszle and Gengnagel (2008): 11-13; Michaels in Gaenszle and Gengnagel (2008): 131-132, 140-141.

surrounding reality. In this sense, Gutschow has adopted the term “picture maps”<sup>62</sup> to stress the influence that the historical and geographical context have on the visual devices’ authors. Consequently, we can speculate that the objects represented in these maps have a specific meaning and role. The inclusion of specific shrines might be, then, a sign of the real existence of those places in the geographic reality of modern Banaras or, at least, even if not present physically, the inclusion of specific sites might suggest their happened connection with the geographical territory. Thus, if we cannot affirm surely that the places represented were physically there when the maps were depicted, at least we can say that they were imagined to be there, in specific places, which then sometimes correspond to their contemporary locations.

If we look at the most famous and rich example of the great production of pictorial and printed maps of Banaras during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, we can have an idea of what was the situation about the presence and absence of the *jyotirlingas* “replicas” at that time. The *Kāśīdarpaṇa* depicted by Kailāsanāth Sukul in 1876 by combining textual references and his personal spatial knowledge of the territory, has been defined as a “spatial text” or as “word picture”<sup>63</sup>. In fact, apart from representing a big amount of places with different icons, it also surveys many shrines by including the inscriptions with their names<sup>64</sup>. As the great majority of construction activities reduced after 1850, and because of the author’s evident interest and attention for the geographic reality, it can be said that the places included in this great work might have existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Banaras.

As far as the *jyotirlingas* “replicas” are concerned, the map includes the majority of them. In some cases the temples’ locations displayed by the map seem to be at that time well acquainted in the city’s geography. The *jyotirlinga* Mallikārijuna has here more than one reproduction: the names of Tripurāntaka/Tripurāntakeśa/Tripurāntakeśvara appear in two different locations, not far one from the other. The very name of Mallikārijuna, which was not named in the KKh, appears as well, and is located on the Pañcakrośī road, together with Śaileśa and Śaileśvarīdevī. None of these locations coincide with the contemporary shrine of Tripurāntakeśvara-Mallikārijuna, which was, on the other hand, represented with topographical details in a previous map<sup>65</sup>. Vaidhyanātha appears twice in Sukul’s work: one of its locations coincides with the one near Baṭuka Bhairava and Kāmākṣādevī, where today the Baijnātha temple, the shrine inserted in the twelve *jyotirlingas* pilgrimage, dwells. Tryambakeśvara, as well, has two identifications, one of which seems to correspond with the present shrine near the Guptagodāvarī<sup>66</sup>. Someśa has four representatives, one of which corresponds to the shrine located at Rāma *kuṇḍa*, where the circuit passes through. Two Bhīmeśa appear and seem to

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<sup>62</sup> Gutschow (2006): 18.

<sup>63</sup> Gengnagel (2011): 162.

<sup>64</sup> The *Mirror of Kāśī* was printed by the Vidyodaya Press; its dimensions are 79 x 92 cm and its reproductions are conserved at the Bharat Kalā Bhavan of Vārāṇasī, at the British Library (Cat.no. 53345.2) and in private collections. For a complete bibliography on the *Kāśīdarpaṇa* see Gutschow (2006): 483, with reference 29 and Gengnagel (2011): 162, with reference 73. From 2002 the map has a web version at <http://www.benares.uni-hd.de/>, which was projected by Gengnagel and Michaels as a result of the *Vārāṇasī Research Project : Visualized Space - Constructions of Locality and Cartographic Representation in Banaras* of the South Asian Institute of Heidelberg. The most recent description of the work is in Gengnagel (2011): 162-185.

<sup>65</sup> This is the “*Pilgrims in Banaras*” dated around 1830 and conserved at the Delhi National Museum (Cat.no.63.935); it is described and reproduced in Gengnagel (2011): 106-148.

<sup>66</sup> The Guptagodāvarī is today a round well; it indicates the previous presence of a wider water flow. Both the water sites recall the geography of the “original” place; in fact, Tryambakeśvara dwells at the Godāvarī fountainhead, near Nasik, in Maharashtra.

reflect the locations mentioned in the KKh, which, as I said before, do not correspond to the different contested places associated to the *jyotirlinga* of Pune<sup>67</sup>. Nāgeśvara is identifiable in its present location to the north of Bhomsalā Ghāt, together with the Nāgeśavinayāka, which in the map is depicted not far from the temple's name and is today located inside the small shrine. Oṃkāreśvara and Kedāreśvara are, of course, present; the first is mentioned just by inscription in a list of deities, which also comprises Mahākāla, while the second is depicted as a building on the river in its well-known position in the southern section of the city. Mahākāleśa is also represented near Vṛddhakkāleśa, where it dwells today. Ghuśmeśvara and Bhīmaśaṅkara are not represented in Sukul map. They are the missing objects of the group, whose absence will be filled in creative ways.

### Steps in the construction of a “traditional” religious practice: the emergence of a local *jyotirlingas yātrā*

Through the questioning of different sources and from architectural evidence I have tried to highlight that the majority of the *jyotirlingas* local forms had been transposed in Banaras by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Some of these divine forms were related to the city's territory since the past. However, the eulogistic literature is far from identifying them as local representatives of pan-Indian deities. Moreover, almost none of them was called a *jyotirlinga* and, of course, they did not constitute a fixed group. The *Kāśīdarpaṇa*, as well, almost depicts the totality of them, but does not seem to visualize the shrines as a group and even less as a circuit. Scholars have noticed that in some cases Sukul's map has helped in transforming series of gods, already listed in the KKh without constituting pilgrimage circuits, into ordered clusters of deities, which then consequently were converted into a local *yātrās*<sup>68</sup>. Even if sometimes the entirety of these gods is not present in the map, they seem to be displayed by the author as groups, because of their specific locations or their appellations, which recall the entire divine cluster.

The case of *jyotirlingas*, on the contrary, seem to be different from those of other groups of gods. In fact, even in the map they are not referred to as *lingas* of light, a term which could have suggested their belonging to the formal list of transposed sites. The shrines of the local *jyotirlingas*, which sometimes, as I mentioned, have different representatives, were presumably constructed in modern times. Excluding a few of them, such as the Kedāreśvara temple erected in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and maybe the Tripurāntakeśvara-Mallikārjuna shrine, which is depicted on the hill where it dwells today in a previous map, as I mentioned, we can affirm that they were built in their present locations only little before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The temples, moreover, are not listed as part of a formal circuit in the

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<sup>67</sup> Today Bhīmaśaṅkara is considered to be located in the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple and the pilgrimage circuit passes from here; however, this location is criticized by Kedārṇāth Vyās, a great authority of Banaras sacred geography, whose work I will refer to later on. According to him the *jyotirlinga* is an ancillary deity in the complex of Kāśī Viśvanāth and in the Tilbaṇḍeśvar shrine and he considers the Kāśī Karvaṭa one as an *invention* of Kubernāth Sukul, author of a renowned pilgrims guide (Sukul 1977); personal communication with Vyās jī, April 2012.

<sup>68</sup> The example of the *śaktis*, is analyzed by Gengnagel (2011): 171-173; the author shows how Sukul's depiction clarifies the list of the 96 goddesses as 8 different groups of 12 *śaktis* each, which are situated in the cardinal directions, by showing them in his work. The case of *vināyakas* is analyzed by Gutschow (2006): 64-66.

first pilgrimage guides of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>69</sup>, but only appear as belonging to the group of *jyotirlingas* in the second half of the last Century.

It is Kuberñāth Sukul's *Vārāñasī vaibhav* (1977) to firstly collect and list the deities into a group. We cannot affirm whether the author had a previous source, which we do not know today, or if he introduced himself the list after verifying and filling the real presence/absence of the shrines in Banaras geography. Kuberñāth, nephew of the *Kāśīdarpaṇa*'s author, might have continued his family tradition in the search for the city's sacred geography, by surveying and fixing "missing" groups of deities of the territory.

Another source of the same period, which includes the group in the city's circuits, is *Pañcakrośātmak jyotirlinga kāśīmāhātmya evaṃ kāśī kā prācīn itihās* (1987) by Kedārñāth Vyās. This work seems to be the result of an independent and different research, conducted by the author with the help of his textual knowledge and an immense spatial training. Vyās jī, in fact, belongs to a traditional Brahman family who is in charge of the Vyās Pīṭh. This is the place where all pilgrimage routes should commence, however, this tradition is a matter of dispute in the city, as I will mention.

Vyās jī mentions the *Śivarahasya* as his source for the *jyotirlingas* list, while Sukul does not give any reference. The two lists, however, are different as I show in the table below, and clearly show that they had been compiled separately. Moreover, personal conversations with Vyās jī during my fieldwork suggested me that the author of the later publication openly dissents with Sukul's choices.

	SUKUL (1977)	VYĀS (1987)
1	Somnāth	Someśvar
2	Mallikārjun	Śaileśvar
3	Mahākāl	Mahākāleśvar
4	Oṃkāreśvar	Oṃkāreśvar
5	Vaidhyanāth	Kedāreśvar
6	Bhīmaśaṅkar	Bhīmaśaṅkareśvar
7	Rāmeśvar	Viśveśvar
8	Nāgeśvar	Tryambakeśvar
9	Tryambakeśvar	Vaidhyanātheśvar
10	Kedār	Nāgeśvar
11	Ghuṣṇeśvar	Rāmeśvar
12	Viśveśvar	Ghuṣṇīś

For example, Vyās jī criticizes Sukul's location of Bhīmaśaṅkara in the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple, which he considers as a fake one, invented by the author: the temple was, in fact, known before as Jaṭāśaṅkara<sup>70</sup>.

Both the lists do not seem to correspond at first to a pilgrimage circuit, as they are far from tracing a geographically organized path in the city's territory. Moreover, the list compiled by Vyās jī

<sup>69</sup> The *Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā* does not appear, for example, in the manuscripts analyzed by Gengnagel (2011): 44-49, and neither in the material I went through during fieldwork.

<sup>70</sup> Actually this is confirmed by Varma (1925), where the temple is mentioned with this name. The *Jaipur Survey Map*, of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, also depicts the Jaṭāśaṅkara temple in this location; Bahura and Singh (1990): 105-106, map number 191, fig. 55-56.

follows one of the more current version of the *Jyotirlingastotra*: this suggests that the author noted down the list following a sequence, which was well validated by the tradition, rather than looking at a real practice in the city's space. As I mentioned, we have no evidence on Sukul's sources. However, rather than being a collection of a really practiced circuit in the city at that time, it seems that these first surveys of the twelve *liṅgas* of light were compiled to count and identify the gods and their shrines in the territory. We can speculate that the constitution of the circuit might have been a consequence of the textual list, or that both the list and the practice might have emerged at the same time as mutual counterparts. We cannot affirm whether the formation path of this divine cluster is common to the other circuits registered in the two publications: it might be possible that some of the pilgrimages were firstly practiced in the territory and later fixed in a written list. This could be the case of those routes explicitly mentioned in the KKh<sup>71</sup> plus the Pañcakrośī, which is, according to Vyās jī, the most popular ever.

On the other hand, other circuits, such as our case, have presumably emerged at the same time of their first textual survey. The search and collection of the pilgrimages' stops was not only a crucial step in locating shrines, but also an impulse for the temples' realities to promote, re-invent and name themselves, in order to participate in the authoritative tradition of Banaras circuits, which was being forged anew. There are, for example, a few cases of re-nomination of temples deities after the *jyotirlingas*' names. I have already mentioned the case of Kāśī Karvaṭ temple, which was known before as being the house of Jaṭāśaṅkara, and later, started to promote itself as the "replica" of the *jyotirlinga* Bhīmaśaṅkara, probably to release its fame and to regain authority<sup>72</sup>. This re-naming is already registered by Sukul, who, as I said, inserts the new Bhīmaśaṅkara in his list.

A more recent case of re-nomination of a deity is that one of Ghuśmeśvara. This *jyotirlinga*, which was the big absent both in the textual tradition and in the visual representations of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century city, is identified by the last Century guides as an ancillary *liṅga* in the courtyard of the renowned Kāmācchādevī temple<sup>73</sup>. From my fieldwork, however, it emerged that only recently a new temple of Ghuśmeśvara came to light as part of the pilgrimage practice: the temple, which is located on Śivālā Ghāṭ, acquired the name of Ghuśmeśvara only around a decade ago, under the suggestion of the religious leader of the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti (KPDYS). As I will explain further on, this is the main local association which organizes a number of twenty circuits per year in the city's territory. The temple, as Supratam Brahmācārī, known as Baṅgālī Bābā and priest in charge of the small shrine tells, was before called Paśupatinātha, a name which was chosen by the *sādhu* himself, when he was appointed by a local priest to take care of the forgotten building<sup>74</sup>. Only later the temple was re-named after the pan-Indian deity. This was suggested to the *sādhu* by the pilgrimages organization, most probably in order to fill the absence of the *jyotirlinga*. Also this circuit's stop seem

<sup>71</sup> KKh 100 explicitly identifies these *yātrās*: *Pañcatīrthiyātrā*, *Vaiśveśvariyātrā*, *Aṣṭāyatanayātrā*, *Śubhayātrā*, *Caturdaśaliṅgayātrā*, *Ekadaśaliṅgayātrā*, *Gauriyātrā*, *Vighneśayātrā*, *Bairavayātrā*, *Raviyātrā*, *Caṇḍiyātrā*, *Antargrhayātrā*, *Viṣṇuyātrā*.

<sup>72</sup> The temple was, in fact, sadly known as an abode of cheating *paṇḍas*, who used to swindle the pilgrims, and also a place where ritual suicides were practiced by devotees in order to obtain *mokṣa*; Mehrotra in Singh (1993): 201 e Parry (1994): 23.

<sup>73</sup> Sukul simply indicates as location: "Baṭuk bhairav ke samīp", near Baṭuka Bhairava (1977: 173); Vyās specifies that the *liṅga* is in the courtyard of the Kāmācchādevī temple (2011[1987]: 136); Sarasvatī mentioned both Baṭuka Bhairava and Kāmācchādevī (1993: 251).

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Supratam Brahmācārī, April 2012.

to need now a complete shrine as representative, and not only a secondary form in a different temple, as it was before.

The recent re-nomination event informs us about the cyclic influence of both the textual tradition of the list and the real practice of moving pilgrims in the territory. As I noticed, it is highly possible that the first lists of local *vyotirliṅgas* compiled by Sukul and Vyās were formulated as a sort of cross check of both the divine forms mentioned by texts and the effective presence of places in the real geography of the city. The twelve deities were firstly *discovered*<sup>75</sup> and their addresses noted down by following the reciting canonic order and not a spatial logic to collect a circuit's stops. This collection might have been the consequence of a personal will of elitist local Brahmans, or the result of the need of pilgrims to find the physical proofs of the city's universality. Only later, the existence of the list might have promoted the formal pilgrimage practice. This developed as a creative and living circuit, which, subsequently, started to influence, in turn, the tradition of the written list. The latter, in fact, started to change and adapt to the impulses of the real practice, as the re-nomination example suggests.

#### Notes on deviations of the pilgrimage route

The Dvādaśavyotirliṅgayātrā is today organized by the KPDYS, together with other twenty circuits. Umā Śaṅkar Gupta jī, who is the *sūcanā mantrī*, the main organizer of the group, remembers that the Samiti has been active since 1997<sup>76</sup> and was registered as an association in 1999<sup>77</sup>. Their activity follows the local tradition of pilgrimage promoters and priests, of which Gupta jī mentions Vyās jī, and Sukul and their families as the greatest authorities. The religious leader of the association is Daṇḍi Svāmī Śivānanda Sarasvatī, disciple of the famous Karpātrī jī (1907-82), who was a great ascetic and founder of the Dharma Saṅgh of Varanasi (1940), and who acted against the reformist Hinduism movements. The Dharma Saṅgh activities also aimed at revitalizing ancient rituals, such as *yajña*, and promoting the practice of pilgrimage in the city. According to Śivānanda Sarasvatī the birth of the Samiti derived directly from Karpātrī jī teachings and the will of diffusing the *yātrā* tradition.

An initial period of collaboration between the association and the previous independent pilgrimage organizers is mentioned both by the association's leaders and organizers and by the former traditional performers, such as Vyās jī. Gupta jī, in fact, states Vyās name as the undisputed authority, as far as the practice is concerned. However, since a few years the situation has changed and the Samiti's activities are criticized by the old priest, who considers the circuits performed by them as incorrect (he uses the terms *ṭūṭā*, broken and *ulṭā*, overturned). The circuits, in fact, have been adapted to the territory and to the participants: they rather follow a logic of convenience and,

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<sup>75</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when numerous pictorial and printed maps were projected, local Brahmans started producing printed pilgrims guides as well, where they listed and organized the various, sometimes pre-existing local shrines into circuits. Sherring described this kind of re-discovering activity: "Gor ji is a remarkable man, and has done more to revive Hinduism, in this city, of late years, than perhaps any other person. Having diligently read the Kasi-khand, he has searched about for the temples and idols referred to in the book; and wherever he has found old temples in decay, or abandoned, or has discovered sacred sites now neglected and generally unknown, he has endeavored to restore them to honor and popularity" Sherring (1868): 105-106.

<sup>76</sup> Gupta jī told me that the performance of pilgrimages was commenced that time by his father Śrī Kanhaiya Lāl Gupta with some of Aśī ghāṭ *purohit*, the local sacred specialists, and with Svāmī Śivānanda Sarasvatī, indicated as the organization leader; interview with Umā Śaṅkar Gupta, July 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Sarasvatī (2001): 249.



frequently, do not respect the initial ritual of the *saṅkalpa*<sup>78</sup>. Gengnagel has reported some dialogues based on his fieldwork during 2000-2002, when Vyās jī was already upset about the KPDYS activities<sup>79</sup>. We can affirm that the debate on the correctness of the routes, which continued since the past ten years, results today in the breach of the relations between the family priest and the organization, as my dialogues with Vyās jī and the observed practice of pilgrimage have confirmed. As I could observe during the circuit of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā I performed (24/07/2011), the path usually begins in the first temple of the procession, where a local priest pronounces the intention *formula* for the pilgrims. In this way, the Vyās family, which feels traditionally responsible for this ritual, is excluded from officiating the *saṅkalpa*. Furthermore, the Vyās Pīṭh, where every circuits should start and end, is omitted by the processions acted by the association. According to Vyās jī, in this way, the pilgrimages have no value nor success, because they are not *authentic* and do not follow the tradition.

Apart from the initial step of the circuit, which is modified in order to privilege the practical convenience of the procession, other deviations from the textual list are introduced. For example, as I could observe, the *darśana* of Kāla Bhairava, a notable deity of the city situated not far from Oṃkāreśvara temple, was introduced as part of the procession. That day was Sunday, when the great majority of pilgrimages are performed, again a peculiar choice of the association, and Sunday is the god auspicious day, when a visit to him is particularly fruitful. A more outlandish choice is the substitution of the visit to Kāśī Viśvanātha, the only “original” *jyotirliṅga* of the city, with one of its three main substitutes. The procession, being it performed during the crowded month of Śrāvaṇa, in fact, avoids to include the deities situated in the Kāśī Viśvanātha fenced area, which are packed with pilgrims and almost unfeasible for groups of devotees without the government police permission. The Vyās Pīṭh itself, just in front of the Jñānavāpī, is enclosed in this security controlled area.

The question of the *saṅkalpa* is presumably the crucial point of the dispute between the orthodox vision, where the pilgrim’s action must be ritually sanctioned, and a more pragmatic and practical perspective, which in this case is asserted by the association. Gupta jī points out the will to keep alive the pilgrimage tradition as the main aim of the KPDYS activities. The attention is focused on the practice vitality, which was probably going to fade or disappear, due to the lack of families’ heirs and to the scarce activities of other successors, and because of the lack of interest of the local population in the performance of processions<sup>80</sup>. Deviations and mistakes in rituals have previously been highlighted as means to challenge prevailing power and discuss who has the right to define what is right or wrong<sup>81</sup>. Furthermore, it has been underlined how both performers and sacred specialists start knowing and shaping the correctness of rituals from the mistakes introduced by the performers<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Personal communications with Vyās jī, March and April 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Gengnagel (2005): 78-79.

<sup>80</sup> Gupta jī ironically says that the people of Banaras only visit Viśvanāth and do not know any other shrines of their own city: “*yahāṃ ke log khālī viśvanāth kā darśan karte haiṃ*”. On the contrary, the great majority of pilgrims performing the *yātrā* come from the South, being them *kāśivāsi* who decide to dwell forever in the city, or occasional devotees, they are the most informed and curious about the local sacred territory; interview with Umā Śaṅkar Gupta, July 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Hüskén (2007): 268.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 337.

However, our case highlights one more element involved in rituals transformation. This is the will to survive in a changing reality, that needs adaptation and deviation. The argument to perform pilgrimages even without a strict adhesion to the ritual rules, rather than allowing the disappearance of such a tradition is of course not a new theme in the debate on the correct rendering of the circuits<sup>83</sup>. It seems that the will to diffuse the tradition should envisage a sort of simplification and adaptation to the practical reality. In this way, the list, which, as I mentioned, was compiled following the ideal order of the recited sequence, have to change and adapt to the lively performance of the circuit and, progressively, will become the new official procession route. Gupta jī prophetically hopes for the compilation of new collections and books on the pilgrimages of the city. These new texts and lists will fix the processions, as they are performed today, after the re-nominations, the re-integrations and the deviations we have seen, and will make them the new textual and so *traditional* practices of the *eternal* city.

This transformative movement of the practice of pilgrimages seems to be the on-going adaptation of the process started during the revitalizing atmosphere and the dynamic enrichment of the sacred geography in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, when many deities mentioned in the KKh were transformed into formal groups, with their own circuits. The KKh served and today, as well, does represent a sort of ideal and authoritative frame to which refer in order to individuate and legitimate the newly projected circuits. Only mentioning the text, even without having a real connections with the specific shrines, seem to be a sort of pass key in the hands of the temples' priests to fit into the official tradition.

Apart from the need to adapt to the pilgrim footprints, there are more general causes related to the physical reality which affects the change of the circuits path. As I said before, in fact, the Vyās Pīṭh, where the circuits should start, is in the middle of the restricted area between the Kāśī Viśvanātha and the Gyān Vāpī *masjid*. During the centuries and through different discourses, which we cannot go through deeply in this article, this very place has been constructed as the symbolic centre of the dispute between Muslims and Hindus in the city and it is today a contested place. From 1983 the temple has been run by the Kashi Viśvanāth Trust, a governmental institution, who removed from the task the previous *mahant* and the local families involved in the management of the compound, claiming the public status of the religious complex and inaugurating a “secular” experiment with the sacred place. After the demolition of the Ayodhyā Babri *masjid* in 1992 and the following campaign launched by the Hindutva forces to “free” Kashi Viśvanātha and the Kṛṣṇa Temple in Mathurā the whole area was put under strict security control, and the Gyān Vāpī *masjid* was caged, apparently to be prevented from being the next scene of massacre. In 1995 part of the geographical claim of the “freedom” movement was accomplished, despite the protective system; in

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<sup>83</sup> The previous cited debate on the Pañcakrośī had raised the same arguments from the pilgrims side: they, in fact, replied with the intention of keeping the practice alive, by performing the circuit in a “wrong” way rather than following the new established “correct” path, which was ignored by pilgrims footprints. In favor of the textually correct route the notable writer and intellectual Bhāratendu Hariścandra also wrote a *pamphlet*, sign that the debate of how and where to perform the pilgrimage was really heart-felt by both the élite and the pilgrims; about the writer contribution see Gengnagel (2011): 63-64.

fact, the cult of Śṛṅgār Gaurī was theatrically intensified behind the mosque, where historical demands identify the focus of spatial fight<sup>84</sup>.

The area is today under security control and the access is quite difficult for groups of pilgrims performing the city processions. Gupta jī explains that to enter the compound whether to have the *darśan* of some of the gods residing in the secondary shrines, or to worship Viśvanātha himself, or more precisely to start the ritual in the very point of the Vyās Pīṭh, the association should formally ask for a written permission to the government authorities. In some cases, the procedure has been followed, for example to enter the compound, where a stop of the processions was situated<sup>85</sup>. On the contrary, they decided not to ask habitually the permission to pronounce there the *sankalpa* and they solve the problem by simplifying the circuits path: as I said, the processions pragmatically use to begin in the first stop of the circuit, with the favor of the local officiators. The communal constructions and claims enter the sacred geography of the city and act inside it and provoke the modifications of the circuits traditions. The paths, in order to survive, should adapt to the territorial context, with its contested sites, the vitality of some new founded shrines and the loom of the tradition. However, through the *classicization* process<sup>86</sup>, the recently born tradition of some circuits, such as our case, which has emerged from an intricate formation path, is transformed into the *official* and *ancient* tradition; the discourses promoting the city as an ideal *tīrtha* will draw on it as if this tradition was a formal and eternal truth.

Through the investigation on the case of the twelve “replicated” *vyotirliṅgas* of Banaras, I hope to have highlighted the ways in which a transposed group, whose presence is usually perceived and transmitted as a given fact, has been historically constituted and how it constantly reframes itself, according to the local impulses and with the intent of surviving.

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<sup>84</sup> Assayag (1997).

<sup>85</sup> Gupta jī has shown me the records about the circuit of *Durgā va nav gaurī* performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011; in this case the permission was asked to have the *darśan* of Śṛṅgār Gaurī.

<sup>86</sup> Chatterjee (1993): 76-77 use the term “*classicization of tradition*” as a fundamental moment in the Nationalist process and to identify, especially the construction of an objective and historical past for the dawning Nation. The term is particularly useful for us to indicate the process thought which a recently born practice, such as that of our case-study, is transformed into something transmitted and perceived as official, ancient and traditional of the city.

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Vera Lazzaretti (1982) svolge ricerche sulle pratiche religiose di Varanasi dal 2009, prima come titolare di una borsa di ricerca dell'Università degli Studi di Milano e della Fondazione Cariplo, poi come dottoranda di ricerca presso la Scuola di dottorato in studi euro-asiatici, indirizzo indologico e tibetologico, dell'Università degli Studi di Torino. Nel maggio 2013 discute la sua tesi di dottorato che verte sull'analisi delle dinamiche di costruzione della tradizione all'interno dei santuari che ospitano le repliche di *jyotirlinga* a Varanasi. Attualmente sta sviluppando alcuni dei risultati della sua ricerca, in particolare, quelli relativi al mutamento dei circuiti di pellegrinaggio nella città contemporanea e la gestione dell'eredità culturale, religiosa e spaziale all'interno di complessi templari contesi. Nel I semestre dell' a. a. 2013-2014 è docente del laboratorio "Percorsi di geografia sacra indiana: luoghi e tradizioni" presso l'Università degli Studi di Milano.