

Books

Padma Kaimal

Opening Kailasanatha: The Temple in Kanchipuram Revealed in Time and Space

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021, 288 pp., 4 tables, 19 color and 62 b/w illus. \$65 (cloth), ISBN 9780295747774

The Kailasanatha temple located in Kanchipuram in southeastern India is an outstanding example of early medieval architecture. Built primarily in the eighth century for the worship of the Hindu god Shiva through the patronage of select Pallava rulers, the temple has long been noted for its contributions in shaping architectural and sculptural developments in this region. Close examination of the temple's layout, imagery, and inscriptional evidence reveals sophisticated, yet comprehensible, thematic programs that address the worlds of gods and kings. In *Opening Kailasanatha*, Padma Kaimal leads the reader through this temple complex and uncovers the many patterns and pathways available for experiencing Shiva and Pallava worldviews.

The Kailasanatha temple complex consists of many structures. Kaimal focuses on the earliest: the main temple (*vimāna*) enclosing a shrine to Shiva commissioned by Pallava king Rajasimha, an earlier pillared hall (*mandapam*) likely built in the seventh century, Rajasimha's enclosure wall (*prākāra*) around the complex, a series of medium-size shrines commissioned by

Pallava queens that form the complex's eastern façade, and a *mandapam* and *vimāna* built inside the eastern entrance by Rajasimha's son, Mahendra. All of these structures exhibit extensive sculptural programs that Kaimal examines and documents in extraordinary detail.

One major contribution of this study, and there are many, lies in the new conceptual frameworks it offers for understanding the dynamics between art and its patrons, makers, and users. Kaimal's investigations are governed by principles of complementarity. One pattern that she highlights throughout the book is the consistent display of *maṅgalam* and *amaṅgalam* forms of power. *Maṅgalam* conveys a mode of being that supports or seeks out life-sustaining, procreative, and propitious acts. Its complement, *amaṅgalam*, connotes the desire to transcend that mode of being through acts of asceticism, sexual restraint, and renunciation. Kaimal sees these principles at play in the selection, orientation, and physical carving of the Kailasanatha's numerous sculpted panels. In chapters 1 and 2, for example, she analyzes the programs of Rajasimha's *vimāna* and *prākāra*. Kaimal identifies south-facing imagery on these structures as engaged with *maṅgalam* modes: prosperity, teaching, nurturing, and fecundity. This can be seen in a number of reliefs that present Shiva and his consort Uma enthroned or in tender moments together, Vishnu seated with two wives, Shiva as a great sage in the act of teaching, and Shiva charming the wives of sages. North-facing imagery resonates with *amaṅgalam* modes and includes Shiva and select deities (particularly independent goddesses) in acts of combat or heroism, standing victorious and liberated after battle, and adopting rigorous ascetic practices aimed to control and transcend the self.

Strengthening Kaimal's identification of the many subjects on the temple and their adherence to complementary principles of *maṅgalam/amaṅgalam* is her careful analysis of the way these sculptures are carved. With a specialist's eye, Kaimal notes their compositional arrangements, modes of narrative display, and articulations of figural form. In the north-facing sculptures, limbs or weapons radiate outward, toward corners of the sculpted panels. Figures are presented in dynamic lunges or rigid postures. Panels depicting Shiva in meditation or the goddess in a victory stance present the restraint of bodily exertion as seen through the employment of yogic bands and breastbands worn in battle. The angular, jagged bodies facing north, fraught with tension, are stylistically distinct from those facing south. In south-facing imagery, limbs stay close to the center of the body or wrap in embrace around other figures in the same relief. The depictions of Shiva and other deities present soft, languid bodies expressing grace and slow rhythms.

Importantly, Kaimal does not interpret the subjects and styles of the Kailasanatha's sculpted panels as binaries or opposite polarities. Instead, she argues that they present worldly engagement and spiritual transcendence as complementary categories of thought that are necessarily linked. Through the bodies of deities on the temple walls, these panels simultaneously reflect the ideals of the early Pallava rulers, who sought to be both nurturing and world-dominating kings. Kaimal further addresses how the Kailasanatha's sculpted programs work as addressed imagery and how their presentation invokes notions of a king's spiritual and territorial conquest in all directions (*digvijaya*). She identifies key subjects depicted repeatedly on the monument that therefore face multiple directions

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within the complex. These include Shiva dancing and Shiva catching the river Ganga in his hair. As Kaimal points out, these subjects carried particular resonance for the early Pallava rulers, given that they are associated with the powerful dynastic metaphors of war, triumph, and bringing the divine to earth.

In chapter 3, Kaimal discusses another subject that appears with great frequency at the temple: a four-armed Shiva seated with Uma and their son Skanda, who sits between his parents. Known as Shiva Somaskanda images, these are carved on Rajasimha's *vimāna* and *prākāra*. As the complex developed and more structures were added, such images proliferated, particularly along the east-west axis. Significantly, Shiva Somaskanda images alternate with depictions of a crowned couple, a two-armed male and two-armed female, without a child. The repeated alternation between a divine family group and a childless royal couple prompts Kaimal to explore another pattern at play in the temple: a concern for the continuity of lineage. This concern is echoed not only in the imagery and inscriptions at the site but also in the evolving layout of the complex itself. With the subsequent addition of the queens' shrines at the eastern façade and Mahendra's temple preceding Rajasimha's *vimāna*, the siting of buildings and their patrons within the complex came to mirror the figural sequence of Shiva Somaskanda images. In other words, the son's temple was built between his father's monument and the façade commissioned by select Pallava queens.

In chapters 4 and 5, Kaimal explores what propels visitors to move throughout the complex. Movement is encouraged by many things, such as the positioning of the temple within the larger landscape, the multiple points of entrance, directional cues from the internal dynamics and/or sequencing of sculpted panels, the play of light and shadow (dependent on the time of day and season), and the orientation of inscriptions that read from left to right. A consideration of all these factors leads Kaimal to propose both clockwise and counterclockwise circumambulation—*pradakṣiṇā* and *apradakṣiṇā*—as supported and possible. These observations upend scholarly tendencies to privilege clockwise movement around Hindu temples. In these chapters,

Kaimal convincingly argues that those who experience the Kailasanatha through clockwise movement engage in exoteric practices that highlight desires or prayers for prosperity, knowledge, and continuities of lineage. Counterclockwise movement around Rajasimha's *vimāna* addresses the desire for power, victory, and control, which Kaimal identifies as being necessarily esoteric. Importantly, counterclockwise movement also provides access to Rajasimha's panegyric inscribed on the *vimāna*. This Sanskrit poem narrates his descent from gods to sages to the Pallava line. In this way, text and image transcend time and space—both historic and mythic.

Along with numerous plates, plans, and diagrams illustrating the temple's patterns, pathways, and principles of complementarity, Kaimal includes as appendixes some recent translations of the Kailasanatha's inscriptions. While these are important contributions, it is her treatment of the materiality of the inscriptions that is especially compelling. She notes their locations within the complex relative to the viewer and that they require the viewer to move in order to read them. Cut into granite courses layered between sandstone basement moldings, the inscriptions are both highly visible and extremely durable. They do not function as labels for the sculpted panels above, nor do the images illustrate the texts. Kaimal reads the inscriptions and the images as independent types of visual evidence that, when examined together, open up metaphoric possibilities.

Because her access to the main sanctum (*garbhagrha*) of Rajasimha's *vimāna* was limited, Kaimal is able to address the shrine images only briefly. She describes a large Shiva Somaskanda panel behind the sanctum's Shiva *linga* and the important visual dialogue these manifestations of Shiva once shared with a sculpted panel of a childless royal couple on the western wall of Mahendra's *vimāna* (20–21). How did such prominent visual statements—literally connecting fathers and sons—contribute to the shaping of worship practices at the complex? Our desire to know more about worship within the *garbhagrha* is also acutely felt in chapter 5 when we perform *apradakṣiṇā* along with the king but then unfortunately have to stop at the shrine doors. To remedy this interruption, perhaps Kaimal could have introduced aspects

of *linga* worship in Shaiva Siddhanta devotional contexts in this chapter rather than reserving such discussion for her conclusion. Alternatively, in keeping with the complexities of movement deciphered by Kaimal, perhaps the open-ended journey simply underscores that our experience of this temple—both in the eighth century and today—need not culminate in its interior.

Opening Kailasanatha is the result of years of rigorous fieldwork. By focusing on principles of complementarity, Kaimal convincingly demonstrates how historic kings conceptualized and articulated their deeds and actions with those performed by gods in mythic time. By opening the Kailasanatha to us through time and space, she enables us to better understand Pallava worldviews. In fact, Kaimal's examinations help us to make sense of the complexities of such views as well as the meaningful ways in which they intersect with our own.

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Nicola Camerlenghi

St. Paul's outside the Walls: A Roman Basilica, from Antiquity to the Modern Era

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The Basilica of St. Paul's outside the Walls is probably best known today for its spectacular incineration in 1823. Its picturesque and melancholy ruins were powerfully described by Stendhal (246) and other writers, and they were memorialized in evocative views by leading engravers and painters. To many readers of this journal, those views may be more familiar than the basilica's extant replacement, widely regarded as a cold and lifeless counterfeit.

In his commendable book *St. Paul's outside the Walls*, Nicola Camerlenghi brings the lost basilica back to life through a combination of traditional print-based research and digital visualization. Conceived as a contribution to the burgeoning genre of lives or "biographies" of buildings, the book traces the basilica's evolution through six stages: its imperial founding (386–410), early transformations (410–700), liturgical changes and fortification (700–1050), monastic reform and a golden age (1050–1423), rebirth and