

Introduction: Towards an Archaeology of Bhakti

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*tā vāryamānāḥ pitṛbhir bhrātṛbhir mātṛbbis tathā |
kṛṣṇam gopāṅganā rātrau mṛgayanti ratipriyāḥ ||
tās tu pañktīkṛtāḥ sarvā ramayanti manoramam |
gāyantyaḥ kṛṣṇacaritam dvamdvaśo gopakanyakāḥ ||*

(*Harivaṃśa* 63.24–25)

Though prevented by their fathers, brothers
or mothers

The women among the cowherds, aroused
by pleasure, seek Kṛṣṇa at night.

All of these young cowherdesses, then forming
groups, take delight

In singing in pairs the charming deeds of Kṛṣṇa.

*mulavuraḷ taṭakkaiyi niyala vēnti
menrōṭ palpiṇai talīit talaittantu
kunrutō rāṭalu ninratani paṇpē*

(*Tirumurukārruppaṭai* 215–217)

Raising appropriately his hands
large as drums

Embracing those with many
garlands on their soft shoul-
ders (i.e. his female devotees),
taking the lead,

His (i.e. Murukan's) habit is to
dance on every mountain.

Both the Kṛṣṇa of the *Harivaṃśa*—a Sanskrit text dated between the 1st and 3rd century CE—and the Murukan of the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*—a Tamil poem perhaps of the 7th century—are handsome young gods bringing joy to

the women who are drawn to them.¹ The city of Maturai, where both Kṛṣṇa and Skanda/Murukaṅ were worshipped from an early period, illustrates by its name—a Tamil adaptation of Mathurā, the home of Kṛṣṇa in North India—the exchanges between the north and the south of the Indian subcontinent.

Immersed in adoration, which is explicitly compared with the love addressed to a sweetheart or a child, both the *gopīs* of Kṛṣṇa lore and the maidens of the mountains devoted to Murukaṅ are incarnations of ideal devotees (*bhaktas*). They represent what Friedhelm Hardy (1983: 9–10; 36–43) called emotional Bhakti in contrast with intellectual Bhakti, of which the most famous early exposition is found in the *Bhagavadgītā* (first centuries BCE). On the eve of the final battle, in chapter 12 of the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa describes to Arjuna the nature of *karma-yoga* (“effort through acts,” i.e. sacrifice in the Vedic tradition), *jñāna-yoga* (“effort through knowledge,” i.e. philosophy or mysticism in the Upaniṣadic tradition), and finally *bhakti-yoga*, “effort by devotion”—a new way to liberation (*mokṣa*). As Kṛṣṇa explains at length, the use of *yoga* implies that Bhakti is not primarily an emotional attitude. It involves the restraining of the senses: “basically the ideal of the ‘indifferent sage’ is maintained” (Hardy 1983: 295).

Still, the final verse of the chapter points to a more emotional expression of the relationship between god and devotees. Says Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna:

*ye tu dharmyāmṛtam idaṃ yathoktaṃ paryupāsate |
śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktās te 'tīva me priyāḥ ||*

(*Bhagavadgītā* 12.20 = *Mahābhārata* 6.34.20)

But those who share in that righteous nectar (i.e. the teaching on Bhakti) as (I) said,

Filled with faith, devotees having me as their utmost object, they are exceedingly dear to me!

If the *Bhagavadgītā*, the “Song of the Lord” belongs to the Vaiṣṇava corpus, its implications are shared far beyond the devotion to Viṣṇu. The term Bhakti is also used in the final verse of the theistic *Śvetāśvatara*

¹ More than fifty years ago, Jean Filliozat ([1954] 1974b: 357; 378–379) already suggested that the figures of Kṛṣṇa and Skanda/Murukaṅ (as well as that of Śiva) were aggregated in South India into the cult of a young god.

Upaniṣad dated to the last few centuries BCE and composed in honour of Rudra:²

*yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau |
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanah ||*

(*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.23)

As the two translations reproduced below illustrate, the precise meaning of the term *Bhakti* is not obvious here:³

Only in a man who has the deepest love [*parā bhaktir*] for God, and who shows the same love toward his teacher as toward God, do these points declared by the Noble One shine forth. (Olivelle transl., 1998: 433)

The topics explained here become visible to a great soul who has the highest *bhakti* for god and who reveres his *guru* like his god.

(Lorenzen transl., 2004: 188)

David N. Lorenzen chooses simply not to translate the term *Bhakti*. In either *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* or *Bhagavadgītā* the devotion directed towards the Lord largely lacks the emotional texture common in the later *Bhakti* poetry, be it in Sanskrit, Tamil, Braj, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Oriya, etc., as the list of the Indian languages, “classical” and “vernacular,” in which *Bhakti* was expressed is an extensive one. The emotional aspect of early *Bhakti* is limited to a feeling of wonder and fear,⁴ whereas in later *Bhakti* poetry devotion is expressed through the vocabulary of love, complex and deeply felt. It is a passion.⁵ And yet the passage from the *Bhagavadgītā* quoted above shows that the distinction between emotional and intellectual is not so clear-cut. As Karen Pechilis Prentiss (1999: 20) puts it, there is in *Bhakti* a tension “between emotion and intellection;” on the one hand,

² On the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, see Flood (1998: 153–154), Lorenzen (2004: 187–188); on its date, see Olivelle (1998: 13). The relative dating of *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and *Bhagavadgītā* remains however a matter of debate, see Oberlies (1988: 59). For a “summary comparison” between these two texts, see Gonda (1970: 21ff.).

³ The same problem is encountered with the meaning of the term *bhakti* in Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.3.95. See Schmid (2010: 42–45).

⁴ It is “a mood of supplication, awe and deep reverence” according to Sutton (2005: 156), who finds other possibly early expressions of emotional devotion in Hindu literature.

⁵ See Narayanan (1994: 137, 143; 2010: 716).

Bhakti is *kāma*, the selfish desire rejected by asceticism, on the other hand this desire is transfigured into devotion to the ultimate truth that the supreme god embodies?⁶

DEFINING BHAKTI

Scholars have been increasingly aware of the variety of situations in which the elusive concept of Bhakti operates. Bhakti is indeed plural, multi-faceted, attested throughout a very long period in various religious and geographical contexts, and beyond the limits of India and Hinduism. Even the usual translation, “devotion,” has been criticized. Whatever the shortcomings of this translation, we have adopted it for the sake of convenience. Bhakti, in a general sense, denotes devotion in a variety of contexts, and designates the religious attitude of devotion, be it intellectual and/or emotional, towards a divine Lord.⁷ We posit the term here on an individual soteriological level. But Bhakti goes beyond the individual and, as a sociological category, designates a socio-religious movement of which the main characteristic is the attitude of devotees, “*bhaktas*,” who, as a community, worship (*bhaja*-, literally “to divide, to share”) their Lord.⁸ Etymologically in the relation of devotion (*bhakti*) the devotee (*bhakta*) is the one who is “shared” and the Lord (*bhagavant*) the “one who gets a share.”⁹ One sees here a conceptual continuity with Vedic sacrifice, where the offering represents the donor and has gods as recipients.

John E. Cort (2002a: 61), however, points out the limitations of a narrow etymological approach. Words indeed come to mean different things than their etymology suggests. Quoting J.A.B. van Buitenen (1981: 24) about

⁶ See also Biardeau (1989: 87ff.).

⁷ On Bhakti directed towards gods, parents, kings, see Hara (1964). On Bhakti as religious devotion, see Prentiss (1999: 17–24). On devotionalism in Hinduism see Fuller (1992: chapters 7 and 8). For a bibliography about Bhakti, see Coleman (2011).

⁸ On Bhakti as movement, social and geographical, see Prentiss (1999: 25–41); issue 11(3) (December 2007) of the *International Journal of Hindu Studies* and its introduction by Hawley (2007); Hawley (2010).

⁹ For Basham (1989: 91), the term *bhagavant* “may have originated with the feudal chieftains who shared the spoils of their successful campaigns with their followers.” See also Jaiswal (1967: 37–39).

the meaning “choosing for,” which “governs later uses of the word *bhakti*,” J.E. Cort maintains that Bhakti is “differently understood and practiced in different times, places, and sects” (2002a: 62). Considering the contrast between “an ontological interaction and even interpenetration with the divine” involved, for instance, in forms of Hindu Bhakti and Jain Bhakti’s “denial of any ‘real presence’” or “any direct ontological connection between the individual human and the divine,” one has to concede that, depending on context, Bhakti displays different shades of meaning. It lies “along a continuum from sober veneration to frenzied possession” (p. 85), in which one can distinguish between “emotional bhakti” and “venerational bhakti” (p. 86).

J.E. Cort (2002a: 66) insists that Bhakti “is also a style in which one performs many practices,” among which, one has to include asceticism.¹⁰ K.P. Prentiss (1999: 24) sees an advantage in translating Bhakti as “participation” rather than “devotion,” whose meanings in English are historically derived from Christian usage (p. 23).¹¹ The title of her book (“The Embodiment of Bhakti”) highlights the fact that Bhakti is embodied in texts, in saint-poets, and in the hearts of the devotees (p. 153). K.P. Prentiss (p. 23) also considers Bhakti to be a “strategy.”¹²

How to define Bhakti then? A starting point might be to state what it is not. Bhakti is neither the way of sacrifice (*karman*) nor that of knowledge (*jñāna*). This does not mean that Bhakti rejects ritual or lacks any intellectual approach to god. If one cannot equate Bhakti with Hinduism, since it is found outside Hinduism and since some Hindu schools of thought and practice regard Bhakti and devotional ritual as inferior or surrogate modes of religion,¹³ Bhakti can be understood as a synthesis between two opposing

¹⁰ Bhakti is also accepted in orthodox systems as, for instance, in the Vaikhānasa school (see Colas 1996: 26), which claims to be Vedic.

¹¹ See also Cort on the limitations of “devotion” as a comparative category (2002a: 63 n. 8; 2002b).

¹² On Bhakti as embodiment, possession, partaking, see the earlier work of Ramanujan (1981: 115ff.).

¹³ For instance, the Tantrika Rāmakaṇṭha, as Dominic Goodall pointed out to us, considers Bhakti as a practice suited for initiated sick or aged people as well as women, who cannot follow regular post-initiation practices (see *Kiraṇavṛtti* ad *Kiraṇatantra* 6.11–12). On the Mīmāṃsāka Śabara’s position about cult (*pūjā*), see Colas (2012: 121). See also Ramanujan (1981: 136).

approaches to the divine: ritualism and contemplation. As far as Hinduism is concerned, Bhakti seems to be the practical aspect of what theism, on a speculative level, implies, i.e. that the goal is God. Emphasizing the here-and-now preoccupations of the devotee and setting *mokṣa* apart as a distant goal, Bhakti parallels Tantric schools, which reconcile, through rituals, mundane and ultra-mundane aims. This might explain the incorporation of Tantric ritual into Bhakti. However, whereas Tantric schools are characterised by initiation—that is they are esoteric—Bhakti offers a universalization of salvation, making it available to anyone, regardless of caste, gender, or degree of spiritual attainment.¹⁴

Tantric ritual has nevertheless invaded temples, while the Jñāna tradition—Vedānta, notably in its Viśiṣṭādvaita variant—has come to terms with Bhakti in South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇavism. It is clear that Bhakti does not discard ritual activities: *pūjā* (“worship, adoration”) and its synonyms/metonyms *sevā* (“service”), *arcanā* (“homage”), *vandana* (“veneration”) have replaced *yajña*, even though there might be a partial conceptual continuity between *yajña* and *pūjā*.¹⁵ In fact, Bhakti does not imply that the lord responds to his devotee. The Tamil Ālvārs complain about the absent god, even scolding him.¹⁶

What then does mark Bhakti as distinctive within Hinduism? In contrast to the religion of sacrifice, in which gods are passive recipients of gifts and have, according to some, “a purely verbal existence,”¹⁷ the *bhakta* intends to enter into a personal relationship/communication with the divine, his supreme God, whomever he or she might be.¹⁸ In most cases this deity

¹⁴ See Davis (1991: 135–136), about the difference between Śaiva Siddhānta and Bhakti. On universalization in Bhakti, see Biardeau (1989: 104ff.), Narayanan (2010: 713–714). At the same time, *dikṣā*, which goes back to Vedic sacrifice, is also retained in Bhakti: a Tantric influence and/or a Vedic heritage?

¹⁵ See Colas (2006), on the erosion of the concept of *yajña* and its porosity with *pūjā*, and Lidova (2010), on commonalities and specificities of *yajña* and *pūjā*. See also Fuller (1992: chapter 3 “Worship”).

¹⁶ See Narayanan (2010: 717).

¹⁷ See Verpoorten (1987: 20, n. 101), describing thus the position of Mīmāṃsā. See also Biardeau (1976: 19–21) on gods as recipients of sacrifice, which, nevertheless subsumes them.

¹⁸ See the Sanskrit references to *bhakti* collected by Hara (1964: 124–132), which show that it has personal, emotional, reverential or religious connotations. Ramanujan (1981: 139)

of Bhakti is conceptualised as a person. Such personalisation is associated with the occupation of the devotee through possession and with the cult of images, imbued with the divine presence—with major exceptions, such as the *nirguṇa* traditions of North India, for which worship mainly consists in repeating God's name.¹⁹ Bhakti also implies the development of cultic places, with enduring shrines, where devotees come for the vision (*darśana*) of god, to see him and be seen by him.²⁰ Divine power and presence are attached to specific sacred spaces: correlative to the cult of images and gods are pilgrimages and processions.²¹ Manifestations of Bhakti mark the entire Indian space and display a characteristic tension between a localized focus of devotion and pan-Indian personal deities, particularly in evidence in the Tamil country where innumerable Śivas and Viṣṇus are worshipped. Says Ramanujan (1981: 124–125), god is “local, yet translocal.”

As such Bhakti is the “great, many-sided shift” in Hindu/Indian religion, described by Ramanujan (1981: 103ff.). For the author of devotional literature, it is a shift of attention from the object to the subject as the poet is not an observer but a participant. It is a shift from passive modes of reception (*śruti*, *smṛti*) to active modes of proclamation (*moli*, *vacana*); “from hearing to speaking, from watching to dancing (...); from a religion and a poetry of the esoteric few to a religion and a poetry of anyone who can speak (...); from the noniconic to the iconic;” from *yajña* to *pūjā*, from temporary sacrificial plots to built temples; and, eventually, “from the absolute godhead, the non-personal Brahman of the Upaniṣads, to the gods of the mythologies, with faces, complexions, families, feelings, personalities, characters.” (p. 135). It is also a shift from seeing and hearing to touching (p. 146ff.).

speaks of “dyadic relationships” between god and devotee, in which “the two terms are defined by each other” and states that “in bhakti, the relationship is everything.”

¹⁹ On the concept of icon, see Colas (2012). On the embodiment of divinity in stone (images) and flesh (possession) see Waghorne et al. (eds. 2004). On the link between Bhakti, stone images and narrative, see Schmid (2010: 139).

²⁰ On the paucity of mentions of temple in brahmanical sources, see Olivelle (2010) and his conclusion (p. 202) that it is due to the “interests and biases of those responsible for their production [i.e. that of Dharmasāstras and *Arthasāstra*].” See also Granoff (1998). On *darśana*, see Eck (1985).

²¹ On pilgrimage, see Fuller (1992: chapter 4). On processions, see Davis (2002), Orr (2004).

The personal aspect in Bhakti has, however, been questioned. K. Sharma (1978) speaks of “devotion” rather than “devotion to a personal deity” in order to take into account the fact that the God of Bhakti may be viewed as *saguna* or *nirguna* in North Indian Vaiṣṇavism.²² A.K. Ramanujan (1984: 212) has, however, criticized the relevance of such *saguna/nirguna* dichotomy, as a god can be both for the same devotee. His view indeed makes sense in the South Indian context: the 8th-century Pallava temples dedicated to Śiva offered two cult-images in the cella, i.e. the *linga* (the stylised phallus, more precisely *niṣkalalinga*) at the centre and the anthropomorphic Somāskandamūrti (which is a *sakalalinga*) on the back wall.

Beyond the attributes of the supreme god, a focus on the devotee is a way to uncover the specifics of Bhakti.²³ As Bhakti is an individual religious experience, we hear the personal voice of devotees. This is especially the case in Bhakti poetry, a lyrical genre where the poet most often speaks in the first person in a “vernacular” language or at least a language identifiable with a specific place. By speaking the language of the place, Bhakti challenges the brahmanical orthodoxy and the hegemony of Sanskrit as language of the gods. God is approached through a literary language, but one that is familiar. At the same time the devotion and the supreme god are localized.²⁴ Bhakti maps a sacred geography for each region of India and creates a community of devotion.²⁵ As such it is linked to the process of regionalisation of India.

If, in Bhakti, the god is not always a person, the devotee is an individual, at least from a religious point of view, who seeks refuge in a specific Lord not so much by social obligation (because this god is his lineage or caste god) but by what he perceives and claims as his choice. This choice is sometimes irrepressibly made: the devotee cannot help adoring his lord, as in romantic love.

As for the (ultimate) goal of Bhakti it is theoretically liberation (*mokṣa*)—an ultra-mundane goal as in the ways of sacrifice and knowledge, even though sacrifice also aims at mundane benefits—but, in actual fact,

²² On the *saguna/nirguna* distinction, see Prentiss (1999: 21–22), Lorenzen (ed. 1995).

²³ See, for instance, Novetzke (2007), on reception and audience in Bhakti.

²⁴ See Narayanan (2010: 714).

²⁵ On the sacred mapping and the congregational aspect of Bhakti, see Ramanujan (1981: ix–x, 143–146).

liberation is, in the more emotional Bhakti, a remote matter for most worshippers. The devotee seeks the protection and the grace (Sanskrit *prasāda*, Tamil *aruḷ*) of the Lord. He surrenders to his Lord, satisfied to adore him. In that sense, Bhakti is the means and the end.²⁶ The recitation of Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi*²⁷—the vernacular Veda—in praise of Viṣṇu is the end in itself and is already salvation: Bhakti is the way and the goal.²⁸ Here lies a contrast between different conceptions of Bhakti: the emotional one of vernacular poet-pilgrims and the intellectual one of theologians.

Such a conception of a relationship between a Lord and his devotee is not in itself specific to Indian or Hindu religion. Specificity lies in the identity of the object of devotion: Śiva, Viṣṇu (or one among his Avatāras), the Goddess, a Jina, (a) Buddha or the God of the Sikhs.²⁹ Bhakti also found its way into the Islamic religion of South Asia and, in North India, has been influenced by the Sufi tradition.³⁰ In that sense Bhakti is trans-sectarian. It proves to be an attitude, a strategy, a style, which can impregnate different schools and sects. The religious phenomenon and attitude that is Bhakti is found, in our view, in the shared traits of devotees (*bhaktas*) who participate in, experience, adore, long for a personal god or the divine. If Bhakti has received various more precise definitions, corresponding to the textual corpus where the term appears, it has, in the course of time, retained an emotional element, noticeable in the two epigraphs to this introduction and central to several papers of this volume.

How is it that this turn was taken, to devotion from the ritualistic religion, that is Vedic religion or Brahmanism? A commonly held view, which goes back very early in the historiography of Hinduism,³¹ is that the devotional approach has its roots in lay or popular—that is non-Vedic, even Dravidian—trends of religiosity, whose only remaining traces are found in

²⁶ See Sutton (2005: 156).

²⁷ The *Tiruvāymoḷi* is part of *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam*, the corpus of Tamil poems by the twelve Ālvārs, i.e. Vaiṣṇava saint-poets who lived between the 6th and 9th century.

²⁸ See Narayanan (1987; 1994: 141).

²⁹ About Bhakti in Jainism, see Cort (2002a, 2002b, 2005), Kelting (2001, 2007); in Buddhism, see Gokhale (1981), Hallisey (1988).

³⁰ See Entwistle & Mallison (ed. 1994: 301–370). On Bhakti and Sufism, see for instance Esnoul (1956: 183–184).

³¹ See, for instance, Monier-Williams (1878: 11–12, 115ff.).

cults to local deities such as *yakṣas* and *nāgas*. Bhakti continues to be viewed as “a path of devotion, especially developed and eminently suited for practice by the lower classes: *śudras* and women.”³² A more recent formulation is to associate emotional Bhakti with the Little Tradition, in contradistinction to a Great Tradition which would favour intellectual Bhakti.³³ Other views place the development of Bhakti in elite circles, according to two different schemes. On the one hand, Madeleine Biardeau (1976: 80ff.; 1989; 1994: 1ff.) does not dissociate the development of Bhakti from Brahmanism. On the other hand, Bhakti has been considered as contesting brahmanical ritualism, as Buddhism and Jainism did. R.G. Bhandarkar (1913: 5) hypothesized a Kṣatriya origin for Vaiṣṇava Bhakti as Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva was a Vṛṣṇi.

Was Bhakti a development specific to Hinduism originally, to be later borrowed by Jains and Buddhists? Examining this issue, J.E. Cort (2002a: 60–61) argues that Bhakti, might have another source “within the context of the mendicant-based traditions as a natural growth from *guru-vandana*, or veneration of the living mendicant gurus” (p. 82). Far from being incompatible with asceticism, Bhakti was one of the common mendicant practices of the early Jain tradition. Ascetic practices included worship as mendicants have been proved to be responsible for the carvings or the installation of many images (p. 67–81). On the Buddhist side of the picture, if Gokhale (1981: 23) has stressed the influence of lay people on what he characterizes as Bhakti (and finds in Theravāda as well as in Mahāyāna, under the form of a devotional worship directed towards the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas), the study of inscriptions by Schopen (1997: 238ff.) has convincingly shown that most of the first Buddhist stone images were gifts by monks and nuns, not by lay people.

Developments in the “heterodox” religions from a Hindu point of view, i.e. Jainism and Buddhism, have thus to be taken into account in writing the history of Bhakti, which, from its beginning, is an Indian fact rather than a Hindu fact.³⁴ Buddhism instituted places of worship, developed the cult of

³² Lele (1981: 2).

³³ See Lele (1981: 15); *contra* Hardy (1983: 11ff.). On the opposition of Little Tradition and Great Tradition, see McKim Marriott (1955) and his critics (Stewart 2002).

³⁴ See Orr (2005) on commonalities in iconography and ritual for images of different creeds in medieval Tamil Nadu.

relics and personalised Buddha as owner of gifts.³⁵ But Buddhists were not the only ones to call their deity *bhagavant*; *yakṣas* were also designated as such and the early iconography of Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu is imbued with the model of the *yakṣas*.³⁶

In the available documents for the early forms of Bhakti, until the middle of the first millennium, the intellectual and the emotional aspects are not easy to discriminate, whichever deity is considered. Did a shift take place from intellectual to emotional Bhakti? And if so, how and why? Even if the transition from the *Bhagavadgītā* to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is far from being clear, the latter text, where devotion towards Kṛṣṇa is expressed in very emotional terms, is at the heart of the controversy. In his *opus magnum*, *Viraha-Bhakti* (1983), F. Hardy has argued that the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and more particularly its tenth book in which the love of the *gopīs* is extensively presented, has been elaborated in the Tamil land under the strong literary influence of the Ālvārs' *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam* (6th–9th centuries). This Tamil devotional Vaiṣṇava anthology itself drew on the tradition of love poetry or Akam attested in the earliest Tamil literature known as the Caṅkam corpus. The earlier Caṅkam poems are generally dated to the first centuries of CE,³⁷ while F. Hardy dates the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* to the 9th or early 10th century.³⁸ From the Caṅkam literature to the poems of the Ālvārs, F. Hardy has charted a typical South Indian contribution to the Bhakti movement, i.e. a very specific expression of emotional devotion towards Kṛṣṇa. He called it *viraha-bhakti*, or “devotion in which the sentiment of ‘separation’ is cultivated” (1983: 9). *Viraha-bhakti* originated in the longing of separation from the hero-lover that the heroine experiences in Akam poetry. In the *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam*, Kṛṣṇa plays the role of the hero of the earlier Caṅkam poems. He continues with this part in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.³⁹

³⁵ See Coleman (this volume), for the argument that Buddhism was a major influence in the development of Bhakti. See Colas (2012: chapitre III).

³⁶ On early attestations of the word *bhagavant*, see Jaiswal (1981: 38ff.). On the iconography of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu, see Schmid (2010: 112–118; 133–139).

³⁷ *Contra*, see Tieken (2001).

³⁸ On the date and provenance of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, see Filliozat (1974a), Hardy (1983: 486–488, 525–526), Rocher (1986: 144–148), Bryant (2002).

³⁹ According to Hardy (1983: 45), the Tamil Śaiva devotional anthology known as *Tēvāram* would have been “imitative or derivative” of the *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam* as far as emotional Bhakti is concerned.

Whereas the work of F. Hardy remains very influential today, it has not been unchallenged. The debate remains open and archaeology can play a major role here. Dennis Hudson (1995, 2008, 2009a, 2009b), for instance, identified the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as the source for the iconography of the Vaikuṅṭhaperumāḷ, a temple founded by a Pallava king in the second half of the 8th century CE in his capital Kāñcīpuram. This hypothesis contradicts Hardy's argument by situating the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* earlier than most—if not all—of the Ālvārs' poems. We do not agree with most of Hudson's conclusions.⁴⁰ Still, his approach and the responses it has received underscore the importance of what we call the "Archaeology of Bhakti" and the dynamics of the movement of Bhakti inside the Indian peninsula, from north to south, back and forth.⁴¹

ARCHAEOLOGY OF BHAKTI

The "Archaeology of Bhakti," is an integrated and multi-layered approach to Bhakti. As a study of artefacts of the past (architecture, images, coins) complemented by art history and enlightened by philology, archaeology can be, in a restricted manner, contrasted with history, whose focus is mostly on written texts (literary or archival) and which also relies on philology. Philology thus stands as a necessary tool both for archaeology, insofar as texts make artefacts speak, and for history, insofar as philology establishes the interpretation of texts. But the study of texts cannot be the only approach, since "[b]hakti has been the inspiration for expressive and visual arts, architecture, poetry, theology, and written materials in every genre possible" and, as "literature itself, be it Sanskrit or vernacular, may be derived from visual or expressive arts."⁴²

Accounting for material artefacts on the basis of texts is sometimes impossible—the texts are missing—and at other times misleading. For instance, the *dvārapālas* at the entrance of Śaiva shrines are sometimes represented with extensions on either side of their heads; consulting the

⁴⁰ See Francis, Gillet & Schmid (2005: 601–606).

⁴¹ On the reception of Hudson's work, see *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 11(1) (Fall 2002), Hawley (2010: 249–250), Champakalakshmi (2011).

⁴² Narayanan (2010: 710; 711).

Āgamas would lead one to regard these as the horns of the bull which is Śiva's mount, whereas the examination of the sculpted images suggests that they are instead the two lateral blades of the trident.⁴³ Artefacts have a life and authority of their own and may have different messages for us. Texts and images are two spheres of representation. Whereas it is legitimate to correlate one with another, they do not always speak the same language.

It appears all the more necessary to make use of all available documents, without overlooking any, when we acknowledge the poverty of our knowledge. In undertaking the archaeology of Bhakti, we must be attentive to material testimonies of the past. They represent what one could call visible Bhakti: traces of people who made in some way a physical record of their Bhakti and who had the means to do so. In other words, whereas there is no possibility of grasping Bhakti in all its manifestations, non-textual evidence helps to fill the gaps.

Thus, to practise the archaeology of Bhakti is to study it through texts (the means of conventional history) *and* through artefacts. In this approach, the focus is on sources, agencies, and layers.

Sources. As far as the study of Bhakti is concerned, the material evidence has been underestimated or examined separately from the textual evidence. The special issue 36(3) of *World Archaeology* entitled *The Archaeology of Hinduism* edited by Lahiri & Bacus (2004) and a volume recently edited by Ray (2010) are welcome exceptions to this trend. The prestige of texts—as various as they can be, i.e. devotional poems, ritual treatises, theological speculations, hagiographies—remains. As John Stratton Hawley (2010: 254) says in the volume edited by Ray: “In the long history of Hindu cave and temple sculpture, the *Gītā* is invisible to the point of vanishing.” Going back to his initial question, “Can we see the bhakti movement in the history of the Hindu temple?” (p. 233)—that is, is there a correspondence between what one hears of god [*nāma*] and what he sees [*rūpa*]—Hawley (p. 261) concludes that “[i]f there is any direct analogue between ‘the bhakti movement’ and the cumulative history of Hindu temples, I have yet to discover it.”⁴⁴

⁴³ See Lockwood et al. (2001); Francis, Gillet & Schmid (2007: 299–301).

⁴⁴ For one iconographic instance of the movement of Bhakti south to north, see below about the imagery of Kṛṣṇa as flautist.

A confrontation of textual with material evidences can be fruitful when correspondence can be convincingly drawn: for instance between the depiction of a god in a text and as a sculpture, between the normative description of the temple of particular god as laid down in Āgamic literature and architectural evidence. But we must be wary of considering artefacts as “translations” of texts. Both artefacts and texts are translations in their own right of the Bhakti that animated a *bhakta's* life.

On the other hand, material evidence leads the researcher on other trails than do texts. In Tamil Nadu, there are extremely few representations of Buddhas, Jinas, or any Hindu gods that can safely be dated earlier than the 6th century. Furthermore, most of the early images betray the domestication/accommodation in South India of an iconography for which the earliest known starting point has to be located in North India. Whereas the study of texts would point to a specific South Indian, Tamil, tradition, the artefacts show us a world enlivened by North Indian inspiration. The process of localization, central to Bhakti, becomes discernible. In this context, stone temples and their iconography provide important evidence that allows us to trace a continuous process of exchange, within the movement of Bhakti, in specific fixed places.

On the walls at many of these temples, in between texts and artefacts, are the inscriptions which partake of the character of both. They might evince the emotional Bhakti of a *bhakta*, who, as donor, had his name permanently placed close to that of this Lord.⁴⁵ They also illustrate the political aspect of Bhakti, in the sense that a privileged relationship with the lord was made public and proclaimed. Kings and local rulers used epigraphy to record their fame as patrons, not only through the content of the inscriptions, but also by their location on the temple and, sometimes, their refined or ornate script.

Inscriptions, in Sanskrit as well as in “vernacular” languages such as Tamil, reveal much about Bhakti in practice, at least the Bhakti of those who had the means to record their acts of devotion, as several contributions to this volume illustrate. With epigraphical material, we shift from the question of sources to that of agencies.

⁴⁵ See Orr (2006: XVI).

Agencies. By including material evidence in the picture, one also includes other agencies than the literati and poets, whatever their status. Material culture is testimony to the Bhakti of people who might not be represented in texts.

Temples commissioned by dynasties are evidence of the Bhakti of rulers, whereas many other temples are more local, attesting the devotion of members of the royal court, local individuals of high status, and local/village communities. In Tamil Nadu from the 6th century to well into the 8th century religious architecture is, almost exclusively, royal. This period corresponds to part of the rule of the Pallavas, whose contribution is investigated in several papers of this volume. These kings were the first to leave durable testimonies of their Bhakti in Tamil Nadu, as a specific organization and a certain level of resources were necessary to do so. This exclusively royal demonstration of Bhakti stands as an extreme instance and has no real equivalent elsewhere in India except perhaps under the contemporary Western Cālukyas in Karnataka. In the North Indian realm of the Guptas (4th to mid-6th century), the most visible Bhakti is that of a larger elite, while kings in Tamil Nadu appear as providing the impulse for durable image and architecture. Kings were subsequently emulated by other segments of the society: under the Cōlas (10th to mid-13th century), successors of the Pallavas in the Tamil country, numerous temples were commissioned locally and are often associated with specific hymns of the Tamil Bhakti anthologies. The shaping of the religious landscape can be grasped through inscriptions, which record the voices of a larger part of the society in a sizeable territory: as much as architecture and images, inscriptions are voices of ruling dynasties but also of more local/localized *bhaktas*. It may be beneficial to distinguish between what can be called “royal Bhakti” and what is not “royal Bhakti”—that is “local Bhakti.” From royal to local, the devotional thread can be followed when taking into account the whole range of material evidence along with texts that accompany or echo it.

Layers. Archaeologists dig the soil and excavate layer after layer, identifying different strata in the concrete world of excavations. When it enters a text-oriented universe, the archaeology of Bhakti can be practised this way in a broad sense: identifying in a text or an iconography the different layers or influences—literary conventions and concepts—that have been incorporated. This is what F. Hardy (1983) did for the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. This is what

Tracy Coleman does again in this volume, digging deeper, while Alexander Dubyanskiy argues that one can distinguish in texts “certain ‘archaeological’ layers which can be singled out and analysed from cultural, mythological, linguistic or other points of view” (*infra*, p. 225).

FROM NORTH TO SOUTH, BACK AND FORTH

According to a popular and oft-quoted late Purāṇic passage,⁴⁶ Bhakti, personified as a woman, tells her story:

*utpannā drāviḍe sāhaṃ vṛddhiṃ karṇātake gatā |
kvacit kvacin mahārāṣṭre gurjare jīrṇatām gatā || ...*

*vṛndāvanam punaḥ prāpya navīneva surūpiṇī |
jātāhām yuvatī samyakpreṣṭharūpā tu sāmpratam ||*

(*Bhāgavatamāhātmya* I.47 and 49)

I was born in Dravida,
grew mature in Karnataka,
Went here and there in Maharashtra,
then in Gujarat became old and worn. (...)

But on reaching Brindavan I was renewed,
I became lovely once again,
So that now I go about as I ought:
a young woman of superb appearance.”

(J.S. Hawley transl., 2007: 211–212 and 2010: 234)

Such a narrative agrees with the perspective of F. Hardy, who, relying on textual sources, identifies Tamil Nadu as the place of origin of *viraha-bhakti* (“devotion in separation,” i.e. emotional Bhakti). K.P. Prentiss (1999: 31–35) argues that Bhakti denotes here the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a specific text associated with a specific religious trend, and that this passage has as

⁴⁶ This passage is found in the *Bhāgavatamāhātmya* and also in the *Uttarakhaṇḍa* of the *Padmapurāṇa*, as well as in editions of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. For its interpretation, see, for instance Esnoul (1956: 155–156), Filliozat (1974b), Narayanan (2010: 712–713), and Hawley (2010: 236–249), who dates the *Bhāgavatamāhātmya* to the beginning of the 18th century (p. 233–234).

its aim the praise of the special sanctity of Brindavan.⁴⁷ In any case, what is at stake here is Vaiṣṇava Bhakti.

The South Indian origin of the shift from the intellectual Bhakti of early Sanskrit literature to the emotional Bhakti of Tamil poetry and of the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is widely accepted.⁴⁸ It has much to recommend it, since the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is a South Indian text. The rather emotionally stirring figure of Kṛṣṇa as a flautist featured in this text originated in Tamil Nadu and then spread all over India (Schmid, forthcoming). However one cannot overlook the North Indian origin of the great gods of Bhakti and of the early devotional texts, even when displaying “only” intellectual Bhakti. Nor can we ignore the fact that influences were exerted in both directions. It was our ambition during this workshop-cum-conference to follow the early Bhakti threads that have linked North to South India, to and fro, in a continuous movement of exchange. For this reason the contributions to this volume are presented according to a geographical logic which, more or less, corresponds to chronology since the most ancient sources brought into discussion are from North India.

The volume thus opens with a comparison of the South Indian *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* with the North Indian Buddhist tradition, as embodied in Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* (1st to 2nd century CE). This textual study is followed by an analysis of the deity Skanda in the coinage issued in the 4th–5th century CE by the North Indian dynasty of the Guptas. The attention shifts thereafter, with three successive papers, to the South Indian dynasty of the Pallavas and their monuments dated to 7th and 8th centuries at Kāñcīpuram and Mahābalipuram, in the north of present-day Tamil Nadu. The next two papers are concerned with the poetry of two Ālvārs, i.e. Vaiṣṇava Tamil Saints (6th–9th century), whose centres of devotion were mostly located in the Kāvēri delta and further south in Tamil Nadu. Focusing on Tiruccentūr, one of the six sacred sites of Murugaṅ in Tamil Nadu, the following paper transports us to the south of Kāvēri, in the Pāṇḍya country. With the last paper, we move to the western coast, in Kerala, to investigate the Bhakti rituals established at Guruvāyūr, most probably in the 17th century.

⁴⁷ *Contra* Prentiss, see Hawley (2010: 247).

⁴⁸ See Cort (2002a: 82).

Dwelling among the people, proclaiming his birth by Devakī, driving out *adharmā* with his own arms in the company of eminent Yadus, destroying evil among (beings) mobile and immobile, (and) exciting the passion of the women in Vraja and Dvārakā with his radiant face and beautiful smile—he is victorious!

(*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.90.48, Tracy Coleman transl., *infra*, p. 47)

Where did the feeling of devotion, in its emotional version, originate? Tracy Coleman addresses this fundamental issue from a new perspective. In her paper “Dharma, Yoga, and Viraha-Bhakti in Buddhacarita and Kṛṣṇacarita,” she argues that the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is very much inspired by the figure of the Buddha, notably as depicted by Aśvaghoṣa in his *Buddhacarita*. T. Coleman criticizes F. Hardy’s theory for overlooking a major source at the origin of the feelings of *viraha* and *viraha-bhakti*: Sanskrit and Pāli literature much earlier than the Tamil corpus of the Ālvārs. In the “heterodox” tradition of Buddhism, the departure or the death of the beloved saviour led to the devotees’ suffering and longing for his return. Devotees thus devised several means to remember him, including composing a biography of the original *guru*, whose life-story then becomes central to various cults of devotion and provides a model which seems to be employed in the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Central to the argument of T. Coleman is the description of Buddha as an example of *dharma* and as a *yogī*, both features that are highlighted in the case of Kṛṣṇa in *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

The next two papers deal with the use of the Skanda figure in royal ideology, one in North India under Gupta kings in the 4th and 5th centuries CE, the other slightly later in South India under the Pallavas in the 8th century CE.

Of Kumāra the divine lord Brahmanyadeva.
(Brāhmī legend of the obverse of a variety of Gupta coins,
infra, p. 67)

Mainly based on archaeology, Cédric Ferrier’s paper, “Skanda/Kārttikeya and the Imperial Guptas: Coinage, Religion and Political Ideology (4th–5th century CE),” calls upon numismatic and sculptural evidence towards

understanding the extent and purport of the depiction of Skanda on Gupta coins. Looking for the origin and the symbolism attached to a specific goddess who appeared in the gold coinage of Kumāragupta I (c. 415–447), C. Ferrier considers the issue of Śaivism *versus* Vaiṣṇavism during the Gupta period and of the hierarchy established between a supreme god and his son, that is Śiva and Skanda. He contends that the child aspect of Skanda played a key role in both cases and is the reason for the representation of a mysterious goddess associated with a peacock on Gupta coins. He suggests that the transformation of Skanda from a “Grasper” (Graha) to a martial god could, by limiting his devotional base, explain why his appeal as a god faded for royal ideology.

Araṇ whom the Jains and Buddhists do not know
the mountain’s son-in-law
the Lord of whom the banner is a walking bull,—this is his place,
where innocent girls having tresses
of increasing darkness, full of flowers, sing along the Kuṛiñci mode
to declare the greatness of Murukaṇ. Let us reach Mutukuṇru.

(*Tēvāram* 1.12.10, C. Schmid transl.,
infra, p. 126)

In “Bhakti in its Infancy: Genealogy Matters in the Kailāsanātha of Kāñcīpuram,” Charlotte Schmid explores the ways the Pallava kings have encapsulated the father/son relationship in their royal discourse. From a study of the iconography and epigraphy of a well-known Pallava royal foundation of the beginning of the 8th century, the author investigates the first iconography of Skanda in North India and of Skanda/Murukaṇ in the Tamil country, as well as data from the Tamil *Tirumurukāṛruppaṭai* and the Sanskrit early *Skandapurāṇa*, to raise issues pertaining to localization. She examines how the ancient link of Skanda with groups of female deities was replaced by a tie between a son and a father, who is the supreme god of Śaivism, to resonate with the ideology of the royal dynasty of the Pallavas.

Looking closely at the 7th-century sculptural and epigraphical vestiges of the Pallava dynasty at or near Mahābalipuram (alias Māmallapuram), the papers by Padma Kaimal and Emmanuel Francis contribute to a more complete vision of the royal Bhakti of Pallava times.

There is almost always more information to discover than
initial glances will reveal.

(P. Kaimal, *infra*, p. 172)

Padma Kaimal proposes several insights in her “Lakṣmī and the Tigers: A Goddess in the Shadows.” This paper is designed as a reflection on the representations of the Goddess in Mahābalipuram, and more broadly in Indian iconography. If Lakṣmī, the goddess of Prosperity, is commonly associated with elephants, whereas the fierce aspect of the goddess, often called Durgā, is accompanied by a lion or leonine figures, an unfinished image in the “Tiger Cave” at Cāluvaṇ Kuppam, just a few miles north of Mahābalipuram, may challenge such a dichotomy. There, according to P. Kaimal, the goddess Lakṣmī has been depicted in the company of fantastic lion-like figures. Devotion towards the goddess seems to have produced an unexpected form. With her enquiry, P. Kaimal illustrates how one is well advised to remain alert to material evidence in order to gain as broad an understanding as possible. As the author invites us: “Just keep looking!”

Woe to Them! Woe to them! Again woe woe woe woe be
to them (...)

(Śaiva curse inscription in Mahābalipuram,
E. Francis transl., *infra*, p. 177)

Emmanuel Francis follows Padma Kaimal’s advice in “‘Woe to Them!’: The Śaiva Curse Inscription at Mahābalipuram (7th century CE).” Engraved in no less than four places at Mahābalipuram, a Śaiva curse shows that sectarian rivalries between Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas animated this royal centre in the 7th century. After presenting a sketch of the “religious policy” of the Pallavas from the 4th to 9th century, the author puts this curse in context. He argues that in the middle of the 7th century, the Pallava kings shifted from being religiously open-minded to being oriented towards Śaivism. He further speculates that, in one of its appearances, the curse responded directly to an act of vandalism by Vaiṣṇavas: the desecration—generally dated to a much later period—of the Rāmānujamaṇḍapa.

The preceding four papers, in which royal agents play a major role, are mostly concerned with “royal Bhakti.” With the next two papers we turn

from “political” Bhakti to a more personal expression of Bhakti in the works of two early medieval Tamil poets.

All young girls are going and entering the space of the rite (...)
(*Tiruppāvai* 13.3, A. Dubyanskiy transl., *infra*, p. 239)

In “A Medieval Tamil Poem on Bhakti: *Tiruppāvai* by Āṇṭāl,” Alexander Dubyanskiy focuses on one of the poet-saints of the Vaiṣṇava corpus. Āṇṭāl voiced her Bhakti in Tamil, which can be considered at the same time a classical and a vernacular language. A. Dubyanskiy demonstrates that she also locates herself between a public and a personal devotion. He expounds the concept of interiorisation of myth by Āṇṭāl as he discusses the different layers or levels of representation that can be seen in the *Tiruppāvai*, one of the major works of this medieval devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Most of these layers can be linked to previous Tamil religious and poetic traditions. The author uncovers the ritual elements in the Tamil poems in order to demonstrate that the structure of *Tiruppāvai* is informed by a rite in honour of the goddess.⁴⁹ If an approach centred on one particular Bhakti poet gives access to the feelings and, in the final instance, to the individual perception of a personal deity, Bhakti poets are never to be separated from a community of worshippers, which can be perceived, in particular, in the ritual structure recognizable in some of the literary pieces.

When is the day to see, for the eyes to be refreshed, our Lord, our
sole first Cause inside Tiruccitrakūṭam [in] the town of Tillai?

(Kulacēkara Ālvār 10.1, S. Anandakichenin transl.,
infra, p. 278)

The paper of Suganya Anandakichenin, “On the Non-Vālmīkian Sources of Kulacēkara Ālvār’s Mini-*Rāmāyaṇa*,” revolves around the tenth and last decade of the *Perumāḷ Tirumōḷi* composed by Kulacēkara Ālvār, also one of the twelve Ālvārs. This decade puts the story of Rāma in a nutshell. S. Anandakichenin searches for the sources which could have been used by the Tamil saint-poet in the particular case of two episodes where his version differs from that of Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*: the crossing of the

⁴⁹ See also Filliozat (1974b: 376–378), who identifies a nuptial ritual in the *Tiruppāvai*.

Gaṅgā and the cutting of the nose of Śūrpaṅakhā. Many texts other than the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki are investigated, including Tamil ones. The sculptural tradition, which originated in North India before inspiring South Indian creations, is examined in order to highlight the originality of a poet who could well have been inspired by lost local oral/written versions of the story of Rāma.

Is it not the spear in the hand of the deity who does not depart from Centil full of fame, Ceṅkōṭu, Veṅkuṅru and Ērakam? The bright spear resembling a burning leaf.

(*Cilappatikāram* 24.8, V. Gillet transl., *infra*, p. 293)

With the paper of Valérie Gillet “When Tradition Meets Archaeological Reality: The Site of Tiruccentūr,” we go further south, to the site known today as Tiruccentūr, on the east coast, 55 kilometres south-east of Tirunelvēli. We again meet the *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, which is, according to Tamil tradition, at the origin of a sacred geography of Murukaṅ. The poem mentions six sacred locations—the *ārupaṭaiviṭus* or “the six garrisons”—where the god dwells, a deity clearly identified in the poem with Skanda, the son of Śiva. V. Gillet investigates the early inscriptions and sculptures of the site of Tiruccentūr and confronts this archaeological evidence with the literary tradition that has linked the site with Murukaṅ/Skanda. She concludes that this now famous centre of Murukaṅ devotion might not have been dedicated to that god prior to the second half of the 9th century and suggests that other gods were to the forefront until then.

When Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Child, dances in my heart, is there any need to have other children?

(*Jñānappāna* 15.9–10, S.A.S. Sarma transl., *infra*, p. 336)

On the other side of the peninsula, the Guruvāyūr temple in the Thrissur district of Kerala is a centre of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. In “The Infancy of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa,” S.A.S. Sarma explains that if the main idol of the Guruvāyūr temple is that of Viṣṇu, the place is considered by most of the devotees as one of the most prominent among the abodes of the infan

Kṛṣṇa. S.A.S. Sarma deals with the archaeology of the temple (where the first datable record dates to 1637), the rituals conducted today in the Guruvāyūr temple, and the devotional texts composed in honour of the Lord of Guruvāyūr. He examines the major role played by the *Nārāyaṇīya* of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa of Melpattūr, completed in 1587 CE, in the envisioning of the god as Kṛṣṇa.

In Guruvāyūr, close to the flagstaff is a cooking vessel (*carakku* or *uruli*) filled with two kinds of seeds (bright red, known as *mañjāḍikkuru*, and red with a touch of black, known as *kunnikkuru*). It is believed that the child Kṛṣṇa played with such seeds, and that, if a child today scoops up three handfuls, he will become as clever as the god (fig. 1).

May this volume be like these seeds for our readers.



Fig. 1.
Children
scooping up
handfuls of
mañjāḍikkuru
and
kunnikkuru
in the temple
of Guruvāyūr
(Photo
by S.S.R.
Sarma, 2012).

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