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1

The Fictive and the Factual

In 1623, Tirumalai Nayaka succeeded to the throne in the capital city of Tiruchirappalli. In poor health, the monarch later traveled south to the city of Madurai. Along the way, the god and goddess of Madurai—Shiva and Meenakshi—appeared to Tirumalai in a dream. They advised him that, were he to make his capital at Madurai, they would cure his disease. They gave him sacred ash to eat and to spread over his body. Upon waking, Tirumalai began to feel better, and upon taking residence in Madurai, became cured.

Why begin a book with a story that may or may not be true? The dates are fuzzy, the actions take place in dreams, the results are miraculous.[1] The story may not be strictly factual, but it is commonly repeated—and refuted—in histories, even to the present. Such stories express the attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs of those who tell them. They tell us about the world in which the stories take place, both in the past and in the present. This is a book that explores those worlds.

The reign of Tirumalai (ca. 1623–59) and his family dynasty transformed the city of Madurai. Tirumalai's predecessors built the enclosure walls around Shiva and Meenakshi's temple, which circumscribes approximately 650,573 square feet (as a comparison, the footprint of the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris is a mere 65,000 square feet) (Figure 1.1). New halls and arcades within the temple, and the construction of wide surrounding streets, accommodated new festivals and crowds to witness spectacular rituals and processions.[2] Tirumalai further expanded the temple, building the Putu Mandapa, a springtime festival hall for the gods, replete with a larger-than-life portrait sculpture of himself and the kings and their consorts who preceded him.[3] Today, the walls, passageways, and streets of Madurai emanate from the temple sanctum to the city walls in concentric rings, like the ripples of water in a pool that radiate from a single drop (Figure 1.2). This plan, common to many cities in southeastern India, took shape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[4]

The construction of the city was not merely a matter of architecture, however; it was also one of imagination. The mytho-historic account of the temple and city, its talapuranam, took its modern form from the pen (or rather, stylus, engraved into palm leaves) of Paranjoti (*Parañcōti*) in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Soon thereafter, murals visually depicting the talapuranam were painted around the massive water tank within the temple, known as the Golden Lotus Pond (*poṟṟāmarai kuḷam*), visible in Figure 1.1. The murals coordinated the sacred site history with the architectural form of the enclosing temple wall, which itself echoes the form of the entire city.

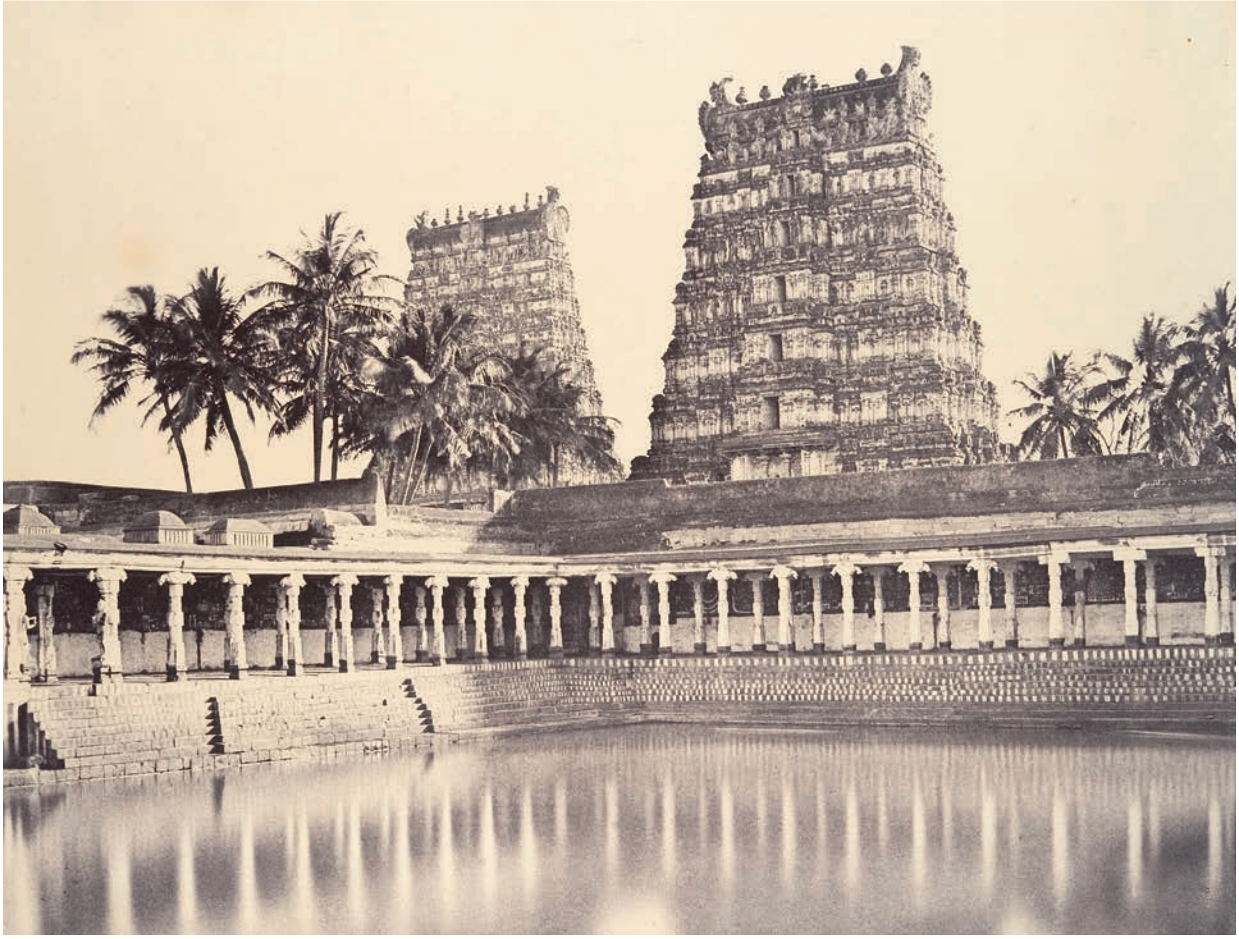


FIGURE 1.1 Linneaus Tripe, *View of the Sacred Tank in the Great Pagoda*, January–March 1858. Albumen silver print from waxed paper negative, 25.8 × 35.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gilman Collection, Purchase, Cynthia Hazen Polsky Gift, 2005. Note the mural paintings visible on the walls of the arcade around the water tank.

The paintings were organized so that as the devotee walked in ritual clockwise circumambulation through the temple, they traversed the history of this sacred site and the stories of the deities, kings, and devotees who are its devotional and political center.[5] The body of the devotee thus traces the metaphoric ripples from the center—of literature, myth, architectural and urban form, and painted adornment. The building program of the Madurai Nayakas coordinated aesthetic, devotional, and corporeal experience in ways that centered the body as the site of aesthetic experience and as a repository for memory. In turn, the transformations of the architecture, art, literature, and music of what has come to be known as the Nayaka period (1500–1800) inform in large measure the ways in which people today remember and relate to the past.

The body was central to Nayaka concerns: from the outset, Tirumalai *consumes* the sacred ash, a substance offered in a dream yet nevertheless efficaciously ingested and spread over his body. Tirumalai then relocates his physical body into proximity of the

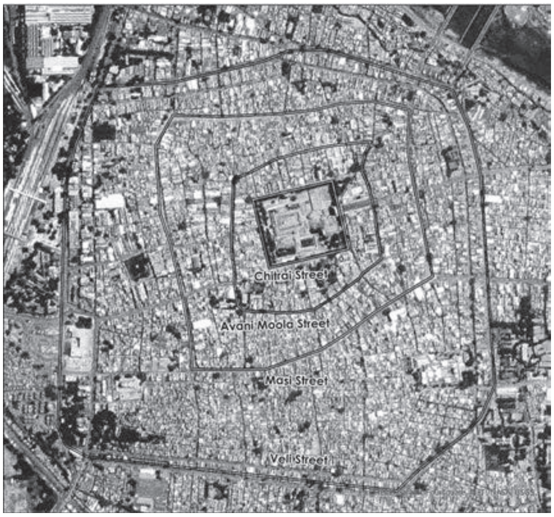


FIGURE 1.2 *Map of Madurai.*

god in Madurai, where he creates his double in portrait effigy to stand in the temple and city that he transforms through construction. His portrait remains devoted in perpetuity, and in full view of all who participate in the rituals of the temples and its living deities who move through the temple and streets, tracing both the devotional and physical structure of the city itself. While paintings of Tirumalai do not appear to survive, portraits of other rulers suggest that paintings, like portrait sculptures, were similarly immediate to the experience of their beholders and often worked in concert with the presence of the body of the king or deity they enframe. This book, a study of murals in southeastern India, argues that to fully understand Nayaka-era painting, one must situate it in relation to these early modern concerns: the body, performance, spectacle, reflection, writing, and history.

Historical Setting

The Madurai Nayaka court was one of several that were "heirs" to Vijayanagara, the last great empire to rule over most of peninsular India.[6] The Vijayanagara Empire was founded circa 1350, with its capital in what is today central Karnataka, at Hampi. At the height of its power, after 1500, the empire included most of southern India, extending over parts of present-day Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.[7] The Vijayanagara empire fell, first deprived of its capital at Vijayanagara after the disastrous battle of Talikota (ca. 1565), and then losing all but nominal power after the civil war of 1616.[8] Smaller kingdoms controlled by Nayakas (*Nāyaka*), Telugu-speaking warriors from the Andhra region who had served as governors in the empire, increasingly operated as autonomous states; this period is thus known as the *Nayaka period*. Yet, as we shall see, dynastic terms fail to account for the many important groups of people, including merchants, monastics, and minor rulers, that are so conspicuous in the visual and material record. While the term *Nayaka* is useful shorthand for early

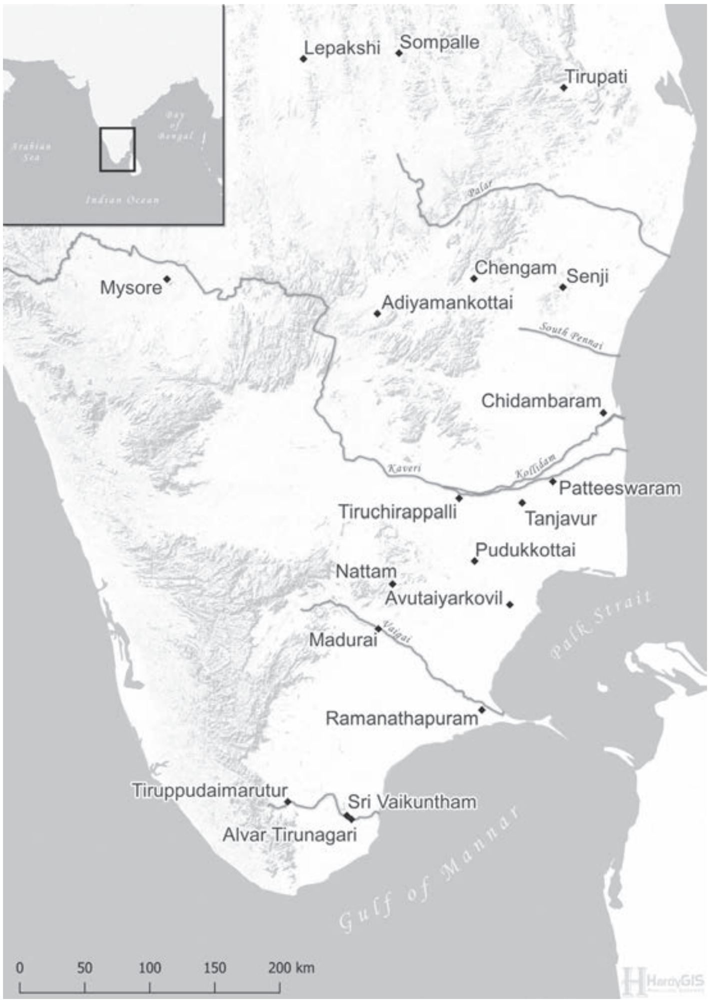

Lepakshi
Sompalle
Tirupati
Arabian Sea
Bay of Bengal
Indian Ocean
Palar
Mysore
Chengam
Senji
Adiyamankottai
South Pennai
Chidambaram
Kaveri
Kollidam
Patteeswaram
Tiruchirappalli
Tanjavur
Pudukkottai
Nattam
Avutaiyarkovil
Palk Strait
Madurai
Vaigai
Ramanathapuram
Tiruppudaimarutur
Sri Vaikuntham
Alvar Tirunagari
Gulf of Mannar
0
50
100
150
200 km
HardyGIS

FIGURE 1.3 Johnathan Hardy, *Map of Southern India*. HardyGIS.org.

modern South India, it is inadequate to describe the diverse actors who made the political and cultural contexts distinctive. Political histories of this period (with notable exceptions) have tended to extrapolate "South Indian" history from southeastern India; this book understands the political and cultural histories of southeastern India, roughly corresponding to present-day Tamil Nadu, to be distinctive in their inflections through painting, sculpture, and architecture.

The language of Vijayanagara courtly literature was Telugu, and Telugu remained a language of prestige in later courts, especially as a language of poetry, drama, and musical composition. The regional languages of areas under Vijayanagara and Nayaka rule nevertheless remained distinct and vibrant; importantly for this study, Tamil continued to be the dominant language spoken by people living in southeastern India and continued to be a language of literary composition and experimentation. Other South Indian languages, Kannada and Malayalam (spoken in what are today the southernmost states on the west coast of India, Karnataka and Kerala), were spoken by transregional elites and administrators. So, too, were the transregional languages of Sanskrit, Persian, and Marathi, which were all part of the multilingual milieu with which this book is concerned.

While colonial scholarship portrayed early modern South India as a site of political disarray, cultural decadence, and civilizational decay, in fact, artistic patronage remained both generous and vigorous within a political situation that was equally so. The period of Nayaka ascendence saw the reorganization of social, political, and economic relationships, as well as a cultural efflorescence that reverberated through southern India and far beyond the courts of the eponymous rulers. However, the customs and etiquette of the Vijayanagara court continued to be important signs of legitimate and cosmopolitan kingship. Vijayanagara courtly dress and Telugu language remained conspicuous through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. Nayakas became patrons of temples and monasteries, supported literature and the plastic and performing arts, were heavily involved in the growth and establishment of revenue farmers, and with merchants trading both inland and on the coast—and connected to Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.[9] The cosmopolitanism of the moment is attested by Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, French, and English travelers, adventurers, merchants, and missionaries. All of this made for a culturally, socially, and politically dynamic world.

Since the landmark publication of *Symbols of Substance* in 1992, scholars have argued that material symbols of kingship and their public transaction were essential components of a dynamic political system in which relations of hierarchy between rulers great and small, landowners, traders, and monastics were organized as a shifting constellation of relationships. This book complements studies of South Indian history, literature, and religion that have emerged since the 1990s by arguing that paintings were one way that kings, merchants, and monastics could position themselves in relation to both time and place; show both tangible and intangible symbols of power; and articulate and consolidate political, linguistic, and sectarian identities. Demonstrating that mural paintings are meritorious, public, and eminently legible statements from their patrons, this book specifically addresses a lacuna within the field of South Indian art history, which has lavished attention on South Indian architecture and sculpture while giving comparatively little attention to the subject of painting. This book interprets the significance of murals in relationship to the momentous transformations brought about by increasing circulation of knowledge, goods, and people across the early modern world. Of distinctive significance in early modern southern India was the importance of textuality—evident in the power accrued by professional scribes, the prominence given to authorship and textual transmission in the religious literature, and in representations of the written word within paintings. We will see that paintings illuminate the ways in which people negotiated ideas of the local within a translocal context, as demonstrated through various kinds of spatial mapping, place-based myths, supralocal economic and political networks, and polyglot cultures.

The centuries roughly extending across 1500–1800 have long been a subject of scholarly interest in South Asia. In recent years, scholarship across the disciplines of religion, history, anthropology, literature, and art history have offered new paradigms for understanding this time of unprecedented travel, exchange, and cultural transformation.[10] While this work has given historiographic shape to globally interconnected histories of early modern South Asia, art historical studies, particularly of painting, have remained centered in northern India. An exception is the exciting and growing body of scholarship since the 2010s that has focused on the painting of the Deccan, the high plateau that separates the peninsular south from northern India.[11] North Indian and Deccani paintings on paper are brightly colored, exquisitely ornamented, and highly mobile; they were collected and displayed more extensively and earlier than almost any other art from the Indian subcontinent (even Rembrandt famously copied Mughal paintings). Recent work on portable South Indian paintings has opened new avenues for exploration, especially Anna Dallapiccola's pathbreaking publications, including a catalogue of South Indian paintings in the British Museum; South Indian paintings on cloth, *kalamkari*; and the distinctive "Tanjavur" paintings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[12] No recent monographic book, however, has been devoted to the distinctive medium of murals in this region. South Indian murals cannot be moved; they age in place, wearing away from devotional use and from the sun, rain, humidity, insects, bats, monkeys, and graffiti that deface them (as keen viewers of this book's images will spy). Murals' inseparability from their contextual matrices—both formally and notionally—render them unique among painted media.

Take, for instance, the vivid image of Vishnu at Tiruvittuvakodu (Figure 1.4), painted in the temple of Sri Vaikuntham. Behind many years of dust and flaking paint, the intensely red background sets off the deep blue body of the god, his golden clothing and pearl-tasseled turban, and shawls so finely woven and that they are transparent, save for their pleats and borders. He is framed by a golden arch set with jewels and draped with flower garlands; the image is framed within a golden border, from the top of which hang chains of jasmine, lotus, and champak flowers. Above is a line of inscription, on the left Tamil and on the right Telugu, that gives the name of the deity as the name of the place where he resides: Lord of Tiruvittuvakodu (*tiruvittuvakkoṭṭappaṉ* [Ta.], *tiruvittuvakkoṭṭappaṇḍu* [Te.])—a temple in the present-day state of Kerala. At the bottom left of the image is a smaller figure, a king in a golden crown, hands pressed together in worship of the lord. This is the king Ambarisha (Ambarīṣa), a figure well-known in pan-Indian legends whose stories appear in the *Ramayana* (*Balakanda*) and *Bhagavata Purana* (chapter 9). He is a king of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Rama, and a sincere devotee of Vishnu. He eventually gives up his kingdom to worship Vishnu full time, and for most stories, that is the end of it. His story is taken up in the talapuranam of this temple, however, where he is said to have attained *moksha*, release from the cycle of rebirth, by worshipping Vishnu there. The name of Vishnu at that temple is Uyyavanda Perumal, but in the label inscriptions he is identified as Lord of Tiruvittuvakodu, the god *of the place*. This painting is paradigmatic of early modern images in its primary idenfication of god with place, the localization of transregional mythologies, the inclusion of references to the talapuranam in the iconic image, and the use of both Tamil and Telugu language inscriptions. It is striking in its colors and fine detail, beautiful in its proportions and symmetry. And it appears, in Figure 1.4, as singular: a painting.

But it is a mural. As we see in Figure 1.5, it is part of the wall and adorns a space of worship; it depicts one among all of the 108 sites sacred to Vishnu rendered here as a series, and organized by region, so that devotees traverse the sacred landscape as they circumambulate the *sanniti* (shrine, temple) of Vishnu. It is not an image that one encounters singly, or as an object of aesthetic or even devotional contemplation. It is perceived in motion, as part of a continuum of devotional and aesthetic experience twined together in Hindu worship.

Religious and Philosophical Contexts

The two most vigorous religious movements in the Tamil region during this period gave shape to the intellectual and aesthetic worlds we explore in this book. Both of the major theological schools we consider, Sri Vaishnavism (Śrīvaiṣṇavism) and Shaiva Siddhanta (Śaiva Siddhānta), express uniquely Tamil formulations of transregional theological systems. They produced distinctive literatures, understandings of god and gods' manifestations in the world, and conceptualizations of the sanctified landscape.

Sri Vaishnavism began to take shape textually, geographically, and ritually during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, and grew out of the theological and devotional matrix provided in the poetry of the Alvars (Āḻvār; sixth to ninth centuries). The "territorial theology" evident in the Alvars' poems puts significant emphasis on the particularity of place and of god in the place.[13] In the fourteenth century, differences of interpretation, particularly with regard to the authority of texts and the nature of man's relationship to god, resulted in a schism that produced two different sects within Sri Vaishnavism: Tenkalai and Vatakalai (Teṅkalai and Vaṭakalai).[14] Their differences gave rise to distinctive theological positions and intellectual trajectories that motivated the production not only of theological texts and commentaries, but also *talapuranams* (site histories), *guruparamparas* (lineages of teachers), and hagiographies from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Texts that praise sacred sites, as well as those that trace the histories and life stories of teachers and saints, came to be especially meaningful for the promotion of particular sites and distinct communities, and it is these that are depicted in paintings.[15] It is in Tenkalai temples that we find paintings of the Sri Vaishnava sacred landscape.[16]

The other main religious force at this time was the expansion and expression of Tamil Shaiva Siddhanta. The transformation of pan-Indian Sanskrit texts and Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy, substantially developed in the Himalayan north of Kashmir, into one expressly local to the Tamil region of the south was performed through the collection and re-presentation of Tamil *bhakti* texts and the production of new texts, resulting in the creation of uniquely Tamil Shaiva Siddhanta texts in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.[17] These developments are analogous to the process of localization observed among Sri Vaishnavas. For example, Umapati Shivacharya (Umāpati

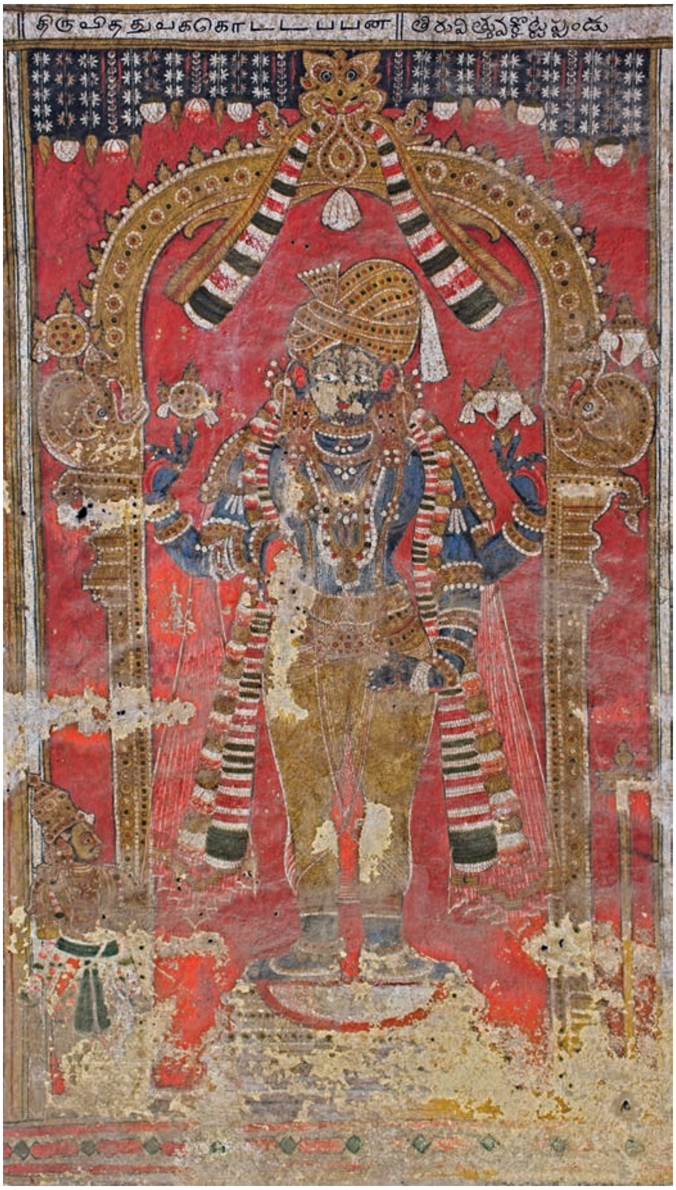


FIGURE 1.4 Lord of Tiruvittuvakodu, ca. early to mid-eighteenth century. Kallapiran Temple, Sri Vaikuntham, Tamil Nadu.

Civarācārya), the influential proponent and teacher of Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy in the thirteenth to fourteenth century who composed the Tamil-language site history for Chidambaram discussed in chapter 4, incorporated Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy with *bhakti* texts in order to enhance the former's appeal. The talapuranam written by Umapati differs from its Sanskrit predecessor in that it downplays the authority of the temple and its priests, who disagreed with Umapati on matters of theological and social philosophy and practice.[18] Umapati's site history, though laudatory of the temple,

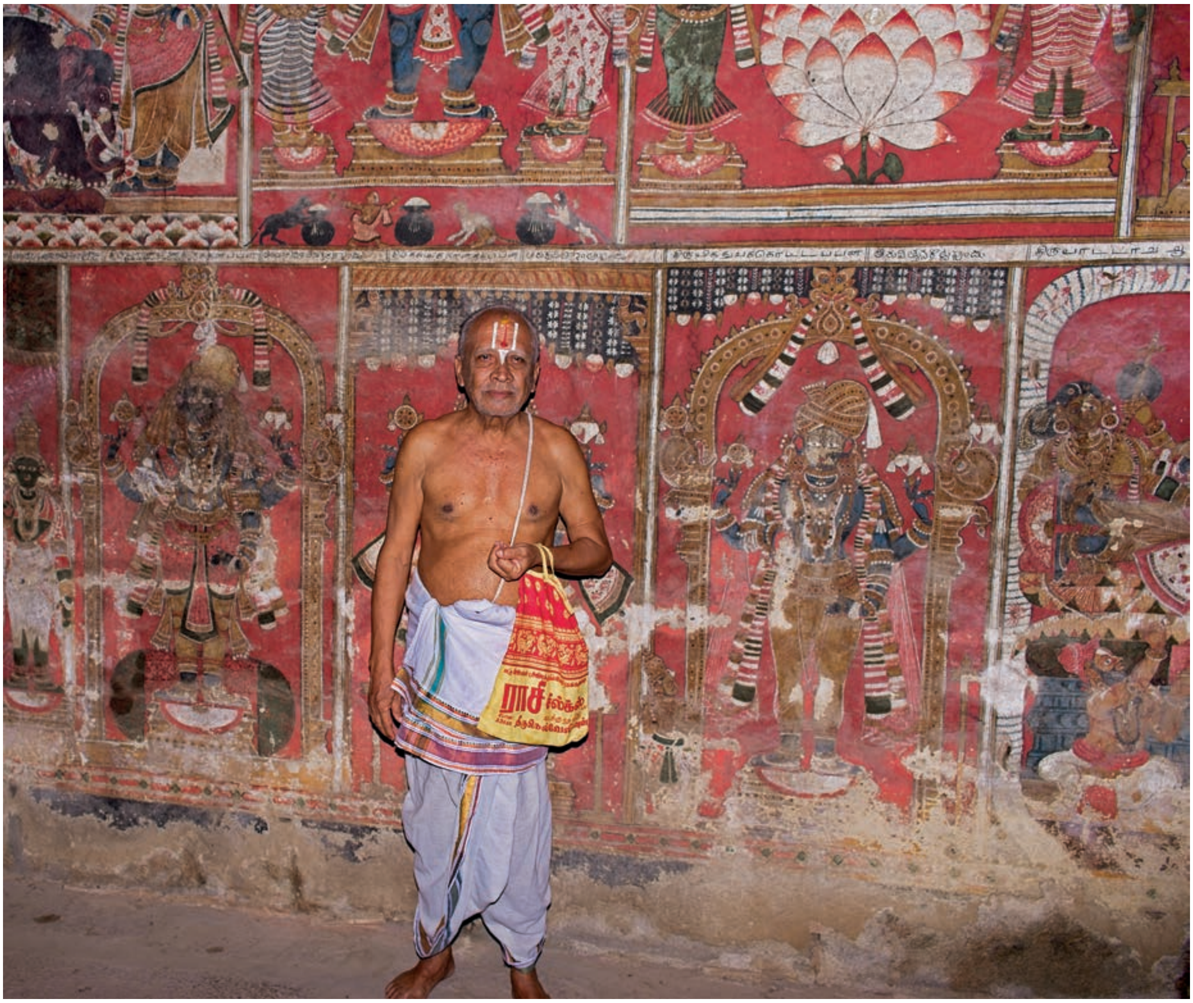


FIGURE 1.5 Devotee among the murals, with the Lord of Tiruvittuvakodu on his left, August 18, 2017. Kallapiran Temple, Sri Vaikuntham, Tamil Nadu.

served as a platform from which to articulate a specific theological approach to the place of which it speaks while promoting a set of religious and social positions.

This same Umapati was also the author of a Tamil-language text that describes the writing and canonization of the most important hagiographic text in the Tamil Shaiva tradition, the *Periya Puranam*, written by Cekkilar (Cēkkiḷār) in the twelfth century. In it, Umapati constructs a history for the origin and reception of the text that emphasizes its divine inspiration as well as its firm location in Tamil literary, religious, and social cultures. Its presentation to the Chola king at the Shiva temple in Chidambaram was a momentous occasion:

> For a whole year Cēkkiḷār expounded his completed hagiography to the king and to thousands of devotees gathered at the Siva temple in Chidambaram.

> Anapāya [the Chola king] was deeply moved, both by the saints' lives and by Cēkkiḷār's magnificent poem, in which the literary beauties of the classical epic genre (*kāppiyam*, Sanskrit *kāvya*) blended with the edifying content and style of a purāṇam, a religio-historical narrative of great compass. He worshipped the author and the work, taking them in procession on an elephant around the streets of the shrine-centre. The *PP* [*Periya Purāṇam*] was hailed as the fifth Veda, pronounced the twelfth book of the Tamil Śaiva canon, engraved on copper plates, and placed before Siva in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram temple.[19]

Umapati's account of the literary debut of Ceikkliar's *Periya Puranam* describes how both the poet and his work were lauded. More interestingly for our purposes, Ceikkliar's text blends different narrative modes, combining hagiographies of Tamil Shaiva saints with their *bhakti* poems and descriptions of the sites those poems praise. The *Periya Puranam* anticipates many of the developments in literature of the early modern period, namely in works that praise saints and teachers (hagiographies or *gurupāramparās*), as well as place, through the redeployment of classical modes of literary composition. However, it was only in the early modern and modern periods that the idea a "canon" of Saiva Siddhanta literature developed, anticipating and alongside the eventual emergence of print culture.[20]

The Tamil-speaking region of southeastern India is today famous as a place of ancient traditions, its language one the very few classical languages still spoken in the modern world. Its impressive granite temples encourage imagination of a seamless passage from antiquity to the present. Yet much of what appears ancient is no older than a few hundred years. Although Vijayanagara rulers are popularly credited with reestablishing norms of Hindu kingship in the Tamil area after a period of Muslim suzerainty, the greatest period of temple construction in Tamil Nadu after the famed "Chola" temples of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries is the period from circa 1550 to 1700.[21] Nayaka rulers, merchants, and monastics expended vast resources enlarging and decorating Hindu temples, as well as founding new ones. One of the reasons that donors great and small were avid patrons of temples is that their patronage offered prodigious returns—both tangible and intangible.

The temple as the preeminent site for apportioning both material and immaterial goods has been the focus of numerous influential studies.[22] Foundational studies of the South Indian temple argued that the distribution of honor and redistribution of goods were some of the most important functions of the temple. *Honor* is more accurately described as an exchange that occurs between deity and devotee: that which is first publicly and ritually donated to the deity is transformed through its association with the deity into *mariyātai* (honor, respect, reverence) and returned to the donor. Thus, donation tended to be perspicuous, enacted publicly, and commemorated in inscription, sculpture, or painting. Gifts of food, flowers, gold, ghee, or even performance are most often described in the historiography, but paintings, too, are gifts that accrued honor to their donors and that were transformed through their donation, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Gifts to temples were also part of a system that produced political and economic advantage. Nayakas and other land-holding elites leased temple land, which increased both their own holdings and their strength in a particular locality.[23] In the sixteenth century, artisan and merchant communities also proliferate in inscriptions; the eminent epigraphist and historian Noboru Karashima writes that trade was encouraged by Nayakas because it increased their own revenue through the rights to the temple they possessed, as well as the taxes they levied on goods and their sale. For elites, royal and not, the increase in private landholding, the cultivation of artisans, and the enforced production of goods and crops for trade were all part of an economy possessed of skilled laborers, farmers, and merchants. The establishment of European power in the Indian subcontinent at the same time benefitted from an established cash economy and robust trade networks.

At the same time, donations to temples were surely motivated by sincere belief and dedication to serving God. The growth of both Brahmin and non-Brahmin monastic institutions (Tamil *maṭam*, Sanskrit *maṭha*) attached to particular temples is an extremely important but understudied development of this period, particularly in the Tamil region.[24] Maṭams (sectarian confraternities) were not only influential religious and economic institutions but were a primary site of patronage and production for texts. As we shall see in the coming pages, the representation of scribal activity is a distinctive feature of the early modern period.[25] Even in inscriptions written about the activities of maṭams, the shift from an emphasis on orality to the written word is apparent: Karashima et al. note that whereas recitation of canonical texts is recorded in the early period they study (900–1300), one of the primary activities of maṭams in the post-1300 era is the composition of *purāṇams* (epic stories), and especially *talapuranams* (epic stories related to a specific place), which began to be composed in greatest number beginning in the fourteenth century but reached their apex in the following centuries.[26] One of the determining factors for the popularity of this new literary genre was the growth and promotion of new sectarian formations.[27] The seventeenth century witnessed a concomitant intensification of sectarian debate and rivalry, resulting in the production of widely distributed texts intended to aid their readers in inter-sectarian religious debate. Even literary texts display a new preoccupation with devotion to the writer's sectarian lineage and teacher (*guru*).[28] These institutional, religious, and literary developments are significant because Nayaka-period murals overwhelmingly portray the *talapuranam* of a sacred site, narrate the hagiographies of saints and teachers, and depict the writing and transmission of texts. Murals, in their inscriptions, narratives, and portraits, show the active involvement of *maṭam* members in temples' mural paintings, and the importance of the art of writing and literary transmission.

The "Nayaka" Temple: Space, Place, and Practice

Built structures that accommodate worship through ritual circumambulation, or *pradaksina*, are as ancient as the first remaining sacred structures in South Asia. As we saw at the outset of this chapter, in Nayaka-period South India, rituals of circumambulation combined with new architectural forms to produce an innovative temple structure that both accommodated and directed movement through the temple. The so-called "expanded temple" or "mega-temple" is constructed in a striking set of concentric passages and walls that converge on the focal points of worship, facilitating a mode of worship in which circumambulation is fundamental. Major cities in which such temples are located were likewise often constructed in concentric rings.[29] This, too, is a distinctive feature of the early modern period, and the concentric construction of the city coincides with the ritual development of circumambulation within and outside of the temple by the deity in procession.[30]

Attendant to the development of processional festivals and worship within the temple is a sculptural program that responds to the presence and movement of deities and devotees in these expanded spaces. Crispin Branfoot has shown that new kinds of portrait sculpture of elite and royal donors were in fact intended not only to represent the person indexed by the portrait, but to allow the person-made-present in the portrait sculpture to interact with both deity and devotee as they processed through the temple—thereby exchanging honor, *mariyātai*, with the deity in procession for all present to observe. In the spectacle of festival procession, there is a clear link between god and patron, as well as the expectation that a mobile, viewing, and worshipping public will see it. In other instances, where donor portraits are not situated along the deities' processional route, Branfoot suggests they are placed to "greet" devotees in their circumambulation.[31] The portraits, in this context, are enlivened, making the person indexed by the figural sculpture actually present in the temple. This constitutes a significant break with previous portrait sculptures, which were executed in low relief, with little to no physiognomic specificity, and directed exclusively toward the sacred image of devotion in the temple sanctum.[32] In pre-Nayaka temples, donation was acknowledged and recorded through inscription. Branfoot suggests, however, that since there are fewer inscriptions on stone and on copper plates in the Nayaka period, portrait sculpture replaced inscriptions, both standing in for the public proclamation of the donor's gift and maintaining the eternal presence of the donor. Branfoot's interpretation of the sculpture that decorates the circumambulatory architectural spaces of the temple may be fruitfully applied to murals. Like sculpture, murals decorate the sacred space through which the deity processes in festivals. The narrative, iconic, and geographic content of the paintings is activated by the presence of the deity, to whom the paintings refer. At the same time, the paintings are directed toward the devotee, who encounters them while worshipping the deity who resides, unmoving, in the central shrine of the temple, around which the devotee circumambulates.[33] Importantly, the sculptures that Branfoot discusses mainly date to the late sixteenth through seventeenth centuries; the portrait murals surveyed in this book cluster in the eighteenth century. This reflects, perhaps, the increasing perspicuity of temple patronage by other elites, merchants, and monastics.

Movement is central to ritual practice and worship within the temple; it defines the worshipper's experience of the site. The form of the temple itself requires and facilitates this experience of sacred space and connects notions of form to conceptions of space. The context of viewing the paintings is thus not one that encourages silent meditation of the image. Rather, those who beheld paintings within the ritual space of the temple experienced them while in motion. This book argues that the somatic experience of the paintings is central to their concept, design, and function. Ultimately, paintings manifest sacred presence through the beholder's noetic and kinetic experience of their iconic images and visual narratives.

Written Word, Painted Image

One of the most striking but least documented aspects of early modern South Indian painting is the presence of inscriptions and labels in both Tamil and Telugu languages.[34] While sixteenth-century murals contain very few inscriptions, writing is an essential feature of murals by the eighteenth century. In early modern peninsular India, writing itself became an instrument of power, and scribal culture deeply entwined with both political and religious centers. More broadly, the rise of the scribal class across the subcontinent is intimately connected to the ways in which historians have understood the era to be *early modern*, perhaps most specifically with regard to the ways in which representations of historical awareness emerged in this moment through creative works.[35] One of the hallmarks of literature in the Nayaka period is its interest in history, including not only puranic histories, which mix lived histories with mythic histories, but also new genres of historiography, such as *aitihya* (*itihāsa*).[36] The group of people who emerge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as most closely associated with this distinctive culture around writing are known as *karaṇams*. While Daud Ali and Leslie Orr have dated the emergence of scribal power as early as the middle of the first millennium and discussed the long history of accountants and record-keepers that may be traced even to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, writing produced by early modern karaṇams is distinguished both by its attentiveness to facts and to writing that was itself reflexive.[37] The early modern writers privilege prose over poetry and compose "factual" texts of records, as well as the "true" texts of literature and *caritram* and *aitihya* that Narayana Rao et al. have identified as a distinctive mode of discourse and a new form of history.[38] As Narayana Rao et al. put it, "These texts reflect a culture of writing, in prose, intended for communication rather than mere recording. There is an interest in numbers, proper names, and other devices that permit the authors a precise factual anchorage. Factuality has become a value in itself."[39] The present study expands on these observations to consider how a culture that values scribal activity, and its attendant interests in reflexivity and factuality, relates to the production of mural paintings, which in both form and content are *textual*. This point will be taken up in chapter 2; first, let us turn to the question of "factuality" in painting.

If one were to focus on the question of "factuality" from the perspective of the history of art, one might think first of *naturalism*—the representation of an object as it appears in nature, an artistic value closely associated with the achievements of (Western) Ancient and Renaissance art, and distinctly not associated with the arts of Asia. This judgement is, of course, related to a legacy of colonial historiography that denigrated Asian and specifically Indian art for its supposed failure to represent the world as it is.[40] Indeed, the most collected and highly valued Indian arts, such as Mughal painting, are those that take an interest in European conventions of mimetic representation—however limited or partial, and ultimately to serve their own ends.[41] The "factuality" that early modern South Indian artists took an interest in, however, was not the world as it appeared, but the world as it was represented, particularly in written and oral literature, dance, and drama. Portraits and maps are important and novel subjects of painting, as are the depiction of narrative site histories—but these, too, are reflections of ideas or literary tropes more than they are replications of the physical world. At the same time, labels inscribed into paintings not only provide information the viewer might not possess—the personal name of a portrait, for instance—but insist upon the factuality of the representation. This is one reason, I surmise, that labels appear on the most mundane of objects that any South Indian would recognize—a banana, a grinding stone, a heap of rice, a pond. In many narrative murals, each visual phrase is accompanied by a textual caption that concludes with the word *iviṭam*, "this place," as if to say that *this* is the place in which some action occurred, both within the painting itself and at the site to which the painting refers. This is the double entendre that makes "factual" painting so intriguing and that makes portraiture so powerful: it both *is* and *represents* its subject. As we shall see in the coming chapters, Nayaka-era painting exploits this feature.

The primacy of writing in the early modern period is reflected in paintings and sculptures that are full of depictions of manuscripts, reading, and writing. This is striking in a culture that had long prioritized orality and memorization of texts as the primary means of transmission, a mark of intellectual excellence, and even divine inspiration.[42] The rise of scribal culture in the second millennium may have spurred iconographic changes, such as the goddess of speech and learning, Saraswati, acquiring a manuscript, according to Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam. It is also when Yama, the lord of death, acquires Chitragupta as his bookkeeping assistant.[43] In the Tamil traditions of the mid–second millennium, the Vaishnava saint Matura Kavi—whose iconography in bronze had typically shown him with hands pressed together in *anjali mudra* (*añjali mudrā*)—is depicted in paintings and stone sculptures with a writing stylus and palm leaf in hand.[44] Indeed, it is noteworthy that both the hagiography and iconography of the Tamil saints transform in the early modern period to align with what we identify as new cultural values placed on textual, rather than oral, transmission.

And yet, it would be a mistake to think that southeast Indian arts are interested in the literal at the expense of the imagined.[45] Indeed, in his work on imagination in early modern South India, David Shulman argues that imagination, *bhāvanā*, is central to the reception of art, and that imagination brings into being that which is considered real. Shulman writes of the word's origin,

> *Bhāvanā* is derived from the root √*bhū*, "to come into being," or its causative derivative √*bhāvaya*, "to bring something into being." *Bhāvanā* is, at its most literal, a causing something to be: generation, often in the sense of manifestation or bringing to the surface or configuring (reconfiguring) a form.[46]

Bhāvanā, as developed in early modern South India, invites us to understand artistic works as deeply interwoven with memory and the world of experience.[47] The elaboration of this set of ideas was, according to Shulman, a unique development in South India, one that is part of a larger "civilization shift" that he observes at its height in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

South Indian literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is strikingly attentive to the power of *bhāvanā* as it relates to the world of experience. For example, the sixteenth-century *Prabhāvatī-pradyumnamu* revolves around the relationship between lovers nurtured through paintings. The story opens with the dream-presentation of the male protagonist to the princess who is to become his beloved. The princess tells her friend that the Goddess came to her in a dream and,

> She produced, just by thinking, a flat board and proceeded to paint on it the image of a young man of striking beauty, dignity, energy, and other surpassing qualities.
>
> 'Here's your husband,' she said, 'a prince. His name is Pradyumna. A son born to the two of you will rule this city.'
>
> That's what she said. The elders who were there told me to bow to her, so I did, and sent her off. That was the dream, but the real part of it is this picture, right here.[48]

Though the goddess came in a dream and painted the portrait for the princess, the board and image of the prince remain with the princess even in waking. For the princess, as well as her friend and the spy who overhears the tale, the painting is evidence that the dream is true. Having awoken, the princess stares at the painting, longing to know her lover, yet feels "too shy to look straight at it" because "that picture the goddess painted was so alive." The painting is a powerful, real presence, tangible, and agentive. The painting is caressed by the princess's sight, and touches her by sight in return:

> After all, it's only a picture—so she lifts her head to take a look. But no, it's real—so at once she turns aside. Battling shyness, she wants another look. Then she feels her husband touching her with his eyes, so she forces her eyes away.[49]

The portrait seems alive, so real that it serves as evidence of the reality of its subject, so real that through sight its subject touches its viewer. In texts such as this, we find a way to sharpen a theory of images that doesn't rely on criticism, connoisseurship, or theories of visual art—literature largely absent from premodern South Asian contexts. This is not to diminish the highly developed domain of aesthetic theory in South Asia known as *rasa*.[50] But narrative literature offers an emic perspective on how images and texts functioned in the world, and one closer to the historical context of our inquiry than to aesthetic philosophical literature.

While portraits have a long history in South Asian literature as vehicles for recognizing the beloved,[51] it is the play between the imagined and its sensuous reality that seems to be of particular interest to early modern South Indian artists and writers. A poem from the mid-seventeenth-century South Indian court of Tanjavur (Tañcavūr) recounts how a woman fell madly in love with the king when she saw him in procession (*ulā*). She contrives to win the king as her lover by performing a ritual in which she draws pictures of the god and goddess of Love, of Spring, and of the Moon, as well as pictures of the breeze and birds. To these, she gives offerings of flowers, water, sandal-paste, and cloth.[52] The passage that follows, describing the king's waking hour, indicates the painting's success. The passage is explicitly concerned with visual signs:

> Holding her hand tightly in his, he climbed slowly out of bed and, still filled with desire, set out through the royal street (*rajavithi*). Fragrance filled the air—from the cracked, dry sandal on the lovers' cheeks, the betel still held in their mouths, the cooling musk. Their lips were scarred red from love-bites, their eyes heavy from lack of sleep, their pearl necklaces awry, intertangled, flowers falling in confusion from their hair, the *tilaka* mark on their foreheads smudged with sweat; the king's upper cloth bore the fragrant traces of their love-making. Revealing all these signs of passion (*suratantacihnamulu*), the king, as if the god of desire had taken physical form, entered his palace just before dawn.[53]

Here, paintings are agents of fulfilled desire, "real" in the sense that they receive offerings, and real enough to produce profound effects in the world—a world in which they appear to be active participants. The evidence of their efficacy is the visual signs on the body, which are the primary concern of the author of the text. In the compound word for "signs of passion," the word for sign (*cihnamu*) has a semantic field that includes sign, attribute, mark, symbol, and representation. The king himself is an image—"as if" he were the god of desire incarnate—brought forth through the efficacy of the images made by his lover. Here we find an aesthetic theory at work in which to *experience* or *participate* in a work of art is to experience its contents as real.[54] Methodologies developed especially (but not only) in the study of Byzantine and Gothic art similarly emphasize the *experience* and *participation* by the beholder of a work that is analyzed in light of its inscriptions, disposition, style, and placement. These have been influential to the ways in which paintings are understood in this book.[55]

Murals are typically sequential narratives or images of landscapes, they both invite and compel movement through a space and their content unfolds over time in ways that engage the body. The experience of a mural is different than the experience of a text or even a painting, as we have seen. Murals are experienced in motion; they "take place" over the extent of a whole ceiling or wall; duration is necessarily built into the medium. In this, they are not dissimilar from graphic narratives that are so popular in our own era. As Scott McCloud wrote in his pioneering book, *Understanding Comics*, "In learning to read comics we all learned to perceive time **spatially**, for in the world of comics, **time and space** are **one and the same**."[56] While South Indian murals are not divided into the panels of today's comics, the use of framing to indicate time and place, the duration of the eye across the page (or wall), and the coextensive perception of time and space are common to both media. To "read" a mural, the entire body moves across a room or passageway to follow the narrative as it unfolds across time and space.

Plan of the Work

The following chapters pursue the claim that paintings record, express, and enact the intellectual, cultural, and religious ideas that shaped them. Across the arts of early modern southeastern India, ideals are manifest in objects and rituals; classical norms are embodied; space is made tangible in particular places. This all appears as a strongly mimetic urge, though one firmly based in literary conventions: portraiture becomes a major art form in sculpture and painting; new genres of literature produce textual portraits of their human subjects; similarly, biographies of sacred sites create portraits of place, and of interconnected networks further reflected in various genres like "folk" and courtly literature that dwell on real places and people. Each of these are major themes of mural painting and are taken up in turn in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 lays the ground for the interpretive chapters that follow by explicating the major subjects, themes, and formal attributes of mural painting. Methodologically, this book insists on the distinction of murals from paintings, although both terms are used: while a mural is a painting, a painting is not necessarily a mural. Murals are observed by a viewer in motion; they are intrinsic to architecture, and therefore are the visual substrate for anything that happens within the architectural space they adorn. They amplify the character of that space, as well as the rituals, music, or dramas of which they become a part. However, published in books or in digital form, they are excised from their architectural and performative matrices. But seen embedded in their material and aesthetic contexts, early modern murals reflect the turn toward writing, documentation, and textuality that other domains of scholarship have observed for this period.

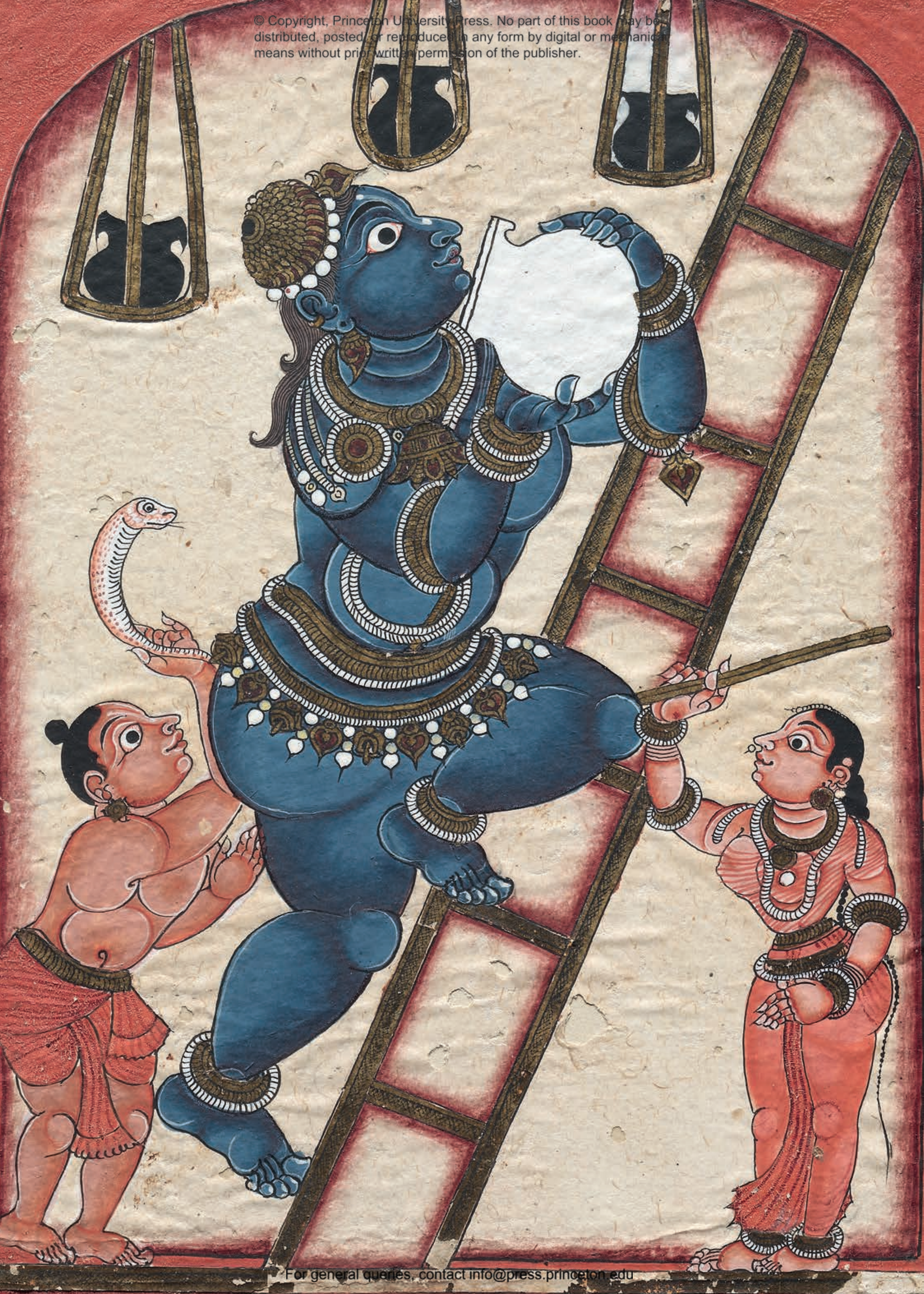
Chapter 3 explores further the ways in which murals serve as settings for the drama of human action. This chapter follows the single image of Rama's coronation across sites associated with royal benefaction, in both palaces and temples. It explores how paintings "stage" kingship—both as the subject of the paintings, as well as the background for the performance of kingship by human subjects. Murals, from this perspective, are the mise-en-scène for the performance of kingship by its human actors. This is not to say that early modern kingship was merely "theater"; rather, it illuminates how "practices" of public inscription, as Daud Ali has argued in a different context, constitute the state.[57] Murals frame their subjects, both visually and notionally, both within and outside of the picture plane. But in the early modern moment, the frame breaks, as the ontology of the picture oscillates between the subject and its mimetic double, between the time and space of myth, and the moment of lived experience.

The shifting ontology of murals is explored further in chapter 4, which inverts the previous chapter's idea that the physical body of the person represented is framed, both notionally and physically, through its mimetic double. Through four case studies, we observe the ways in which paintings draw their portrait subjects into the time and action of the narratives they depict. We see in these paintings the tension between efforts to universalize specific histories and places while at the same time localizing myth and imperial imaginaries. Portraits in palace and temples—of kings, merchants, and monks—reflect the social dynamism of the period, in which so-called "little kings" vied for regional power; merchants' donations helped cultivate new markets; and the institution of the *maṭam*, monastery, became increasingly powerful. While previous scholarship has demonstrated the importance of maṭams as centers of learning, landholding, and temple administration, this is the first study to observe the ways in which their members quite literally wrote themselves into the history of the sacred sites they administrated through pictorial renderings of site histories, *talapuranams*. Here, again, portraits oscillate between mythic and historical time, embedding historical figures newly come to power into the timeless past of the sacred sites.

Chapter 5 brings together the subjects and interpretive approaches of the previous chapters to consider the development of sacred landscapes and the question of mobile spectatorship. Both Shaiva and Vaishnava temples depict sites praised in poetry of *bhakti* saints of the mid-to-late first millennium. In the early modern period, these sites became more closely networked, interconnected as pilgrimage destinations one might actually visit. The paintings of these sites still partake of a *bhakti* aesthetic in which the devotee is encouraged to visit the site in the heart and mind. But the individual sites, individual paintings, are brought together as landscape through their incorporation in mural form. The beholder's experience of the mural landscape mimics the action of pilgrimage, wherein the sites are organized according to their position in the physical landscape, and labels direct the pilgrim who might move from one region to another or cross a particular river. These paintings suggest an isomorphism between movement coordinated with the circumscribed space of the mural's architecture and that of pilgrimage to the physical sites.

The final chapter turns exclusively to the genre of *talapuranam*. The genre flourished at the same time as did monumental construction and renovation of temples and the cities that encircle them. The transformation of cities and great temples were commemorated in paintings of their site histories. Focusing on the single site of Tiruppudaimarutur, we explore the ways in which the visual site history is distinct from its textual cousin. The visual *talapuranam* asks that we recognize how the movement of the viewer physically instantiates devotional and literary connections across space and narrative within this already decidedly intertextual genre.

Across all of the sites and subjects in this study, we find a highly complex layering of mythic and historical time, of literature and ritual, of real places and imagined landscape, of ideals and their embodiments. The paintings are intellectually sophisticated, intermedial, and intertextual. They reflect the dynamic social, political, and aesthetic transformations of early modern southern India. Murals provoke and invite their viewers into devotional, somatic, and intellectual participation. This book accepts that invitation.



2

Described and Inscribed: Image, Text, Form, and Genre

One of the challenges of studying South Indian paintings is that scholarly estimations of style, date, and location do not agree—and sometimes disagree spectacularly. The Chennaraya Perumal temple at Adiyamankottai (Aṭiyamāṉkōṭṭai), for instance, possesses paintings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* as well as an image of the cosmic form of Vishnu, Vishvarupa, which is wholly unique to this temple. The murals are captivating; but despite the singularity of their subject, distinctive visual style, and protection by the Archaeological Survey of India, they languish in obscurity.[1] Scholarly assessments of their style vary from courtly to "folk," opinions on date range from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, and the presence of inscriptions is barely noted.[2] These contradictions and absences are characteristic of the field: apart from a few spectacular sites, South Indian murals of the early modern period have largely remained beyond the purview of documentation, translation, or protection. As such, there is little reliable information on which to base judgements of style, date, region, and interpretation. These elements are worth considering because discerning change over time makes certain features of early modern murals more legible, and their distinct historical and artistic contexts more discernible.

Three key changes occurred in paintings from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. First, while throughout the early modern period visual narrative form is sequential, there was a marked shift toward the use of framing to make explicit both the pace and content toward the end of the period. That is, from a fairly open form, they move toward a delineated sequence not unlike the squares of a comic strip. Second, iconic images became increasingly standard and legible, often appearing in series of like subjects. Third, narrative and label inscriptions were irregularly deployed in the sixteenth century but became a standard component of mural painting by the eighteenth century, so that the denomination of the subject through inscription produced a single "correct" identification for the image. In general, the scope of interpretive variation narrowed over time as the subjects and narratives became increasingly delineated through pictorial composition, style, and the inclusion of text. And not only does text appear in painting, but images of writing, reading, recitation, teaching, and manuscripts proliferate. Never before had writing played such an important and conspicuous role in sculptures and paintings that adorn both palaces and temples. Labels for portraits, deities, and even the most mundane objects—rice, bananas, ponds—were emphatic reminders of the reality of their imagistic double. This chapter takes up a diachronic study of murals to show the ways in which written text became, in many ways, a guiding principle for the form and content of murals.

To make the distinctiveness of the mural tradition clearer, let us turn for a moment to the much more well-known corpus of manuscript painting from northern India. In early modern South Asia, perhaps no center of painting is better studied with regard to the relationships between text and images than the kingdom of Mewar in the northwestern region of India, now in the state of Rajasthan. Poetry and painting thrived in this early modern kingdom, and Mewari painters produced images to illustrate poetic, devotional, and epic texts written in both Sanskrit and local vernacular languages. Scholarship has taken a particular interest in the ways in which text and image relate to one another through interpretation, play, puzzle, and improvisation.[3] Illustrated devotional texts such as the *Gita Govinda* and *Bhagavata Purana*, and refined poetic works such as *Rasikapriya* and *Rasmanjari*, "emphasized the distance of the text's narrative world from the world of its listeners while urging their listeners to overcome that distance," as Molly Aitken has argued.[4] The task of rendering the twinned themes of distance and intimacy visible was accomplished through the use of internal frames delineated by foliage, trees, and changes in background color (Figure 2.1). In this illustration from the *Gita Govinda*, trees and architecture divide the page into four quadrants beneath the bright turmeric-yellow panel of text at the top of the page that guides the reader of this twelfth-century text on the relationship between the god Krishna, a form of Vishnu, and Radha, his beloved and archetypal devotee, through themes of love and separation. In this image, Radha, in the upper left, is comforted by her friend as she longs for Krishna, who sits in the lower right, his face turned away. Radha sits alone in her room, where only the hem of the skirt and fingers of her friend break across her lonely frame. Krishna's solitude, similarly, is emphasized by the paired trees and mated birds that intervene in the space that separates him from his beloved and box him into the lower right corner, where he turns his face away. The motif of the forest bower, in the lower left quadrant, serves as another kind of framing device, this one indicating the "different ontological plane" from whence the goddess of love (or is it the beloved Radha herself?), highlighted against a butter-yellow glow, shoots a lotus-flower arrow toward the god and absent lover, Krishna.[5] The division of the page into discrete cells of space, the actions of the figures whose gestures suture together the spaces, and the literal and metaphorical meanings of the text work together, Aitken argues, "so that the underlying geometry articulates the drama of division and reunion."[6] Composition, color, framing, and gesture express the sentiment of longing using the grammar particular to picturing. Manuscript paintings, like murals, ask their viewers to respond to the interplay of text and image, but manuscripts' visual simultaneity distinguishes the viewer's encounter with them: the divisions of the pictorial space guide the viewer narratologically through what is otherwise a synchronous presentation of the manuscript page to the eye. Murals in southern India, on the other hand, insist upon their sequential unfolding over a large space, unscrolling themselves over surfaces that reach

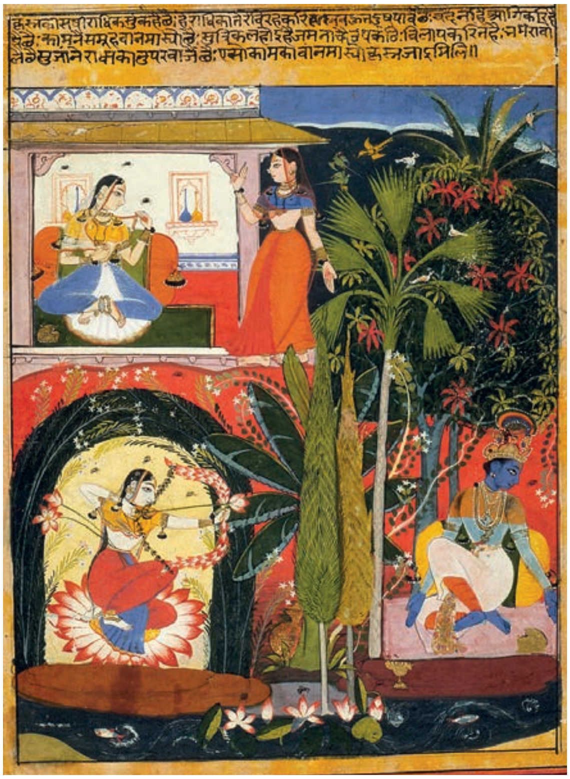


FIGURE 2.1 Sahibdin, *Gītagovinda*, *folio 10*, 1635. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 8.5 × 6.7 in (21.5 × 17.1 cm) (without text). Gopi Krishna Kanoria Collection, Patna, India, GKK 187.

as much as sixty meters in length. A mural requires that one's entire body—rather than just the eye—move across the space of its composition.

Murals, like text, are ordered, sequential. Their grammar demands that one thing come after another; *pictures*, by contrast, need not be so ordered—they can present themselves all at once, inviting their viewers to make sense of them according to different rules and conventions. The formal attributes of mural painting—its styles, narratological types, figural forms, and subjects—are closely related to the distinctive features of early modern texts: interest in "factuality," writing, and textual transmission. This chapter focuses on the formal features of murals in order to establish a common vocabulary of description, delineate the geographic and chronological territories of style, and highlight the ways in which formal attributes are linked to shifting cultural and aesthetic values.

The Textuality of Murals

Narratives are by far the most popular subject of mural painting. They are typically painted in horizontal bands than run the length and width of a section of the ceiling or wall, organized into bands, or *registers*, stacked one on top of the other, like a paragraph composed of lines of text. The narrative always reads right to left or left to right, with all action usually occurring in a single plane within the visual space of the painting. This organization of the picture plane makes possible only a restricted set of visual narrative structures arranged either as a continuous narrative or enframed into a linear narrative. Broadly, the formal language of narrative changes between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries from open and unmarked in its tempo to highly regular sequences of images set off in orderly frames. Textual supplements are rare in the sixteenth century, but became a consistent and regular feature of the eighteenth century. Formally, the use of text, frames, and linear narrative structures gives a palpable sense of the regular passage of time, of a structured container in which events take place in space and time, recalling the ways in which historical writing is marked by new kinds of specificity in this period.

Artists of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries primarily constructed narratives in a continuous mode, making little attempt to frame the narrative between successive scenes. In instances where linear narrative is preferred, features of the setting provide the framing devices. A tree, rock, river, or even the final pillar of a building can indicate a break in the narrative. The background color of all the scenes tends to be the same, save for instances when color is used to highlight an important figure or action. Thus, viewers who are not sensitive to subtle clues may not recognize the divisions within the narratives' progress. Inscriptions, rarely present in sixteenth century painting, are integrated into the visual field in highly idiosyncratic ways, or are occasionally inscribed into the borders between horizontal registers of paintings. These formal characteristics allow viewers considerable freedom in determining the pace of the narrative, while at the same time requiring that they possess substantial prior knowledge of the story in order to discern all of the characters and various situations within the images.

The murals of the Narumpunathaswamy (Nāṟumpūnātacuvāmi) Temple in Tiruppudaimarutur (Tirupputaimārutūr) in the far south of Tamil Nadu are composed almost exclusively of narrative in continuous form. The well-known story of the Tamil saint Manikkavacakar (Māṇikkavācakar) is told in five registers, each fourteen inches tall, on the south panel of the west wall. Although there are short label and narrative phrase inscriptions on some of the paintings at the site, the Manikkavacakar paintings are devoid of inscription of any kind. The narrative is structured only by "soft" frames, as well as the direction in which the figures face and interact with one another. This kind of framing results in a fairly elastic sense of narrative time in which the figures' overlapping bodies may belong to separate spatial or chronological moments in the narrative.

Let us take just a single register as exemplary of this narrative type and its implications. The second register reads from left to right. The scene begins with a scribe holding a stylus and a palm leaf prepared for writing (Figure 2.2). An attendant stands before him, gesturing to Manikkavacakar, anticipating the arriving palanquin. The rightmost palanquin-bearer overlaps the figure of the next scene, who carries a box

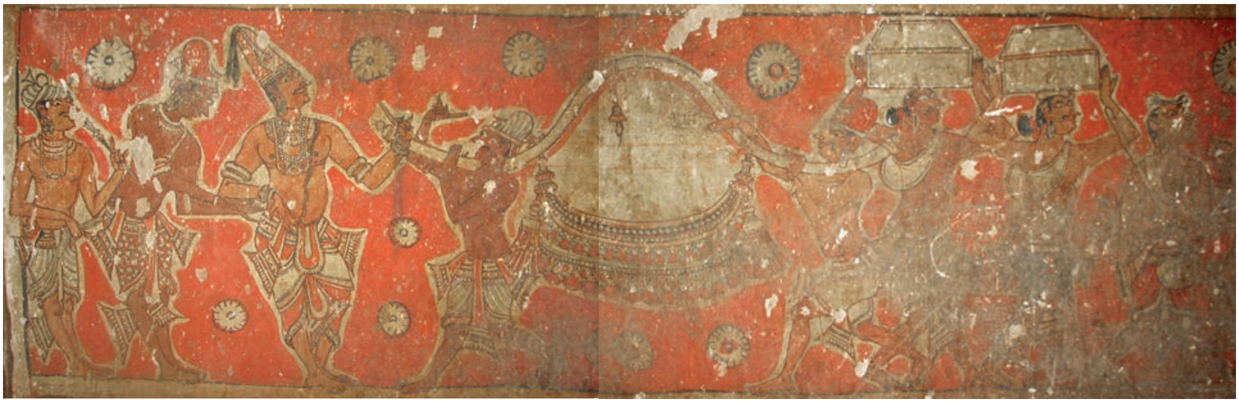
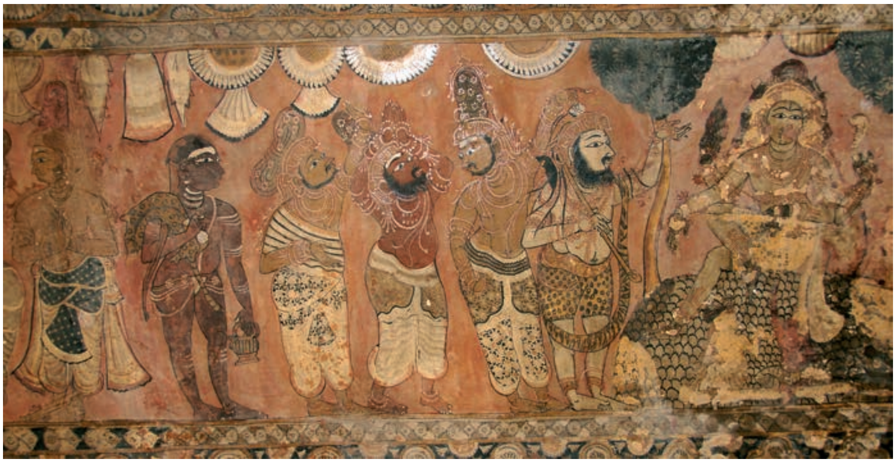


FIGURE 2.2 Manikkavacakar narrative, seventeenth century. Narumpunathaswamy Temple, Tiruppudaimarudur, Tamil Nadu.

above his head. The legs of the figure cross so that their legs appear entwined; their hips seem to touch, their garments covering each other's bodies. The head of the left figure crosses over the arm of the box-bearer, sending the latter deeper into space, a move that the flatness of the figure resists. Complicating the image further, the box-bearer participates in the scene in which the palanquin-bearer is shown again, ahead in the procession in which the box-bearer is the final figure. While the box-bearer shares the physical space with the palanquin-bearer of the first scene, his body and clothing entwined with that figure, the narrative space he inhabits is one in which the palanquin-bearer is physically ahead of him. The artist has negated temporal and physical progression by overlapping figures that belong to discrete temporal moments. Indeed, the paintings suggest the penetration of one moment into the next, of layers of action and the unequal passage of time. These complications create substantial cognitive and interpretive interest. They also require that the viewer already know the narrative in order to "read" it.

The paintings at Tiruppudaimarutur, though located near the southernmost point of India, reflect the stylistic influence of Vijayanagara, whose capital was far to the north on the Deccan plateau. The style is found throughout the area at least nominally under Vijayanagara's control in the sixteenth century in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Even after the demise of Vijayanagara political power, it is a style that endures, despite certain stylistic differences—no doubt due to local artisanal practices and preferences—through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century. The style signifies the enduring cultural cachet of the empire and its transregional *imperial style*.[7] It is a style that connotes both power and cosmopolitanism.

Figures of this style are characterized by elongated features, tending to be quite sharp, with pointed fingers, toes, and noses. The legs bend back at the knee, giving a general sense of concavity. The figures are presented in profile or three-quarter profile; deities are usually shown fully frontally, but may be shown in three-quarter profile. Throughout, the far eye extends past the contour of the face, as in earlier western



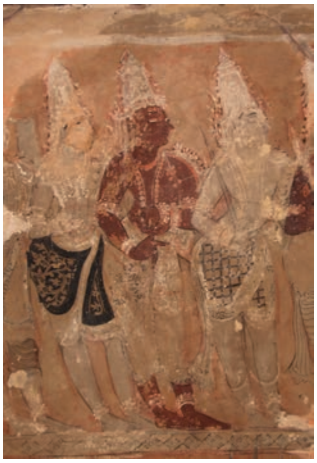


FIGURE 2.3 Devotees of Shiva, sixteenth century. Virabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Andhra Pradesh.

FIGURE 2.4 *Ramayana* narrative figures, sixteenth century. Chennakesava Temple, Sompalle, Andhra Pradesh.

Indian manuscript paintings.[8] A line extends from the outside corner of the closer eye toward the hairline, creating again the impression of elongation. Framing is minimal, with changes in time or place indicated by the direction the figures face or by natural elements of the setting such as trees or architecture. The pictorial ground is decorated with stylized flowers or festooned at the upper frame, denying illusionistic space.

Perhaps the premier site for "Vijayanagara Painting" is the Virabhadra (Vīrabhadra) Temple at Lepakshi (Lēpākṣī) in southern Andhra Pradesh; the temple was constructed in the 1540s, and the paintings likely date to soon thereafter (Figure 2.3).[9] In the paintings that adorn the main halls of the temple, narrative figures are mainly depicted in profile, with the far eye and part of the forehead extending into view; iconic figures are presented frontally, as with Shiva on the right side of Figure 2.3. The eyes of the figures are simply rendered, generally with a straight line at the bottom and an arched line defining the upper lid. They have round, fleshy stomachs that hang over the waist. The arms are long, extending to the knee, with elongated pointed fingers. The legs are similarly long and lean, the knee articulated slightly with a circle, and the feet wedge-shaped from ankle to toe. The frame of the pictorial register doubles as the ground line upon which the figures stand. Changes of scene and narrative moment are signaled through shifts in direction, such as the single figure on the left side of this image who faces the opposite direction from his companions. A hilly mound and trees indicate the outdoor setting, but the pictorial space is decorated with fabric festoons and pendant tassels. Notably, the decoration of the pictorial field is divorced from the natural setting of the painting's narrative.

Close in style and geographic proximity to those at Lepakshi are the murals at the Chennakeshava (Cennakēśava) Temple at Sompalle, about seventy-two kilometers to the east (Figure 2.4). The figures are similar to those at Lepakshi in the shape of the body, including sloping shoulders, pointed fingers, soft bellies, and bowed-back legs with tapering feet. The textiles are rendered with great attention to detail, but are less

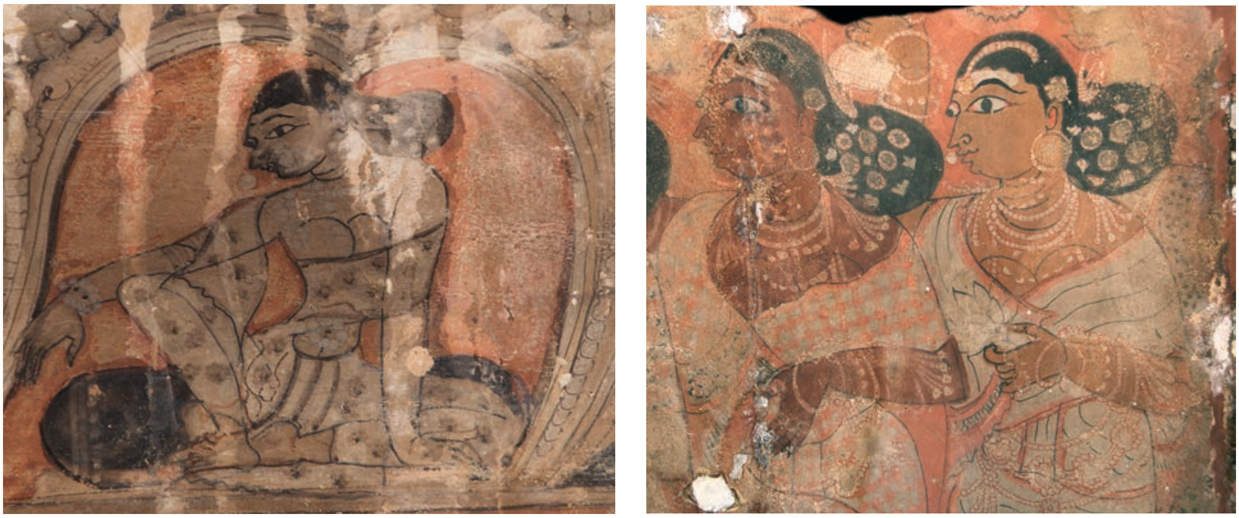
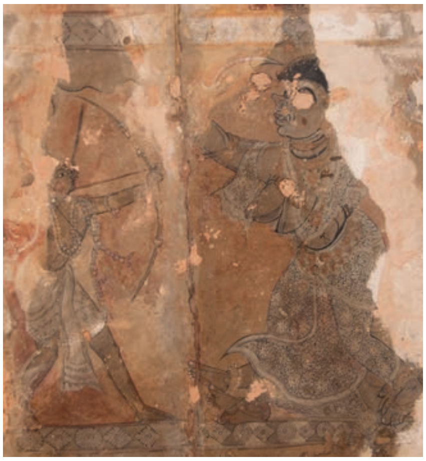


FIGURE 2.5 Female figures. Chennakesava Temple, Sompalle, Andhra Pradesh (left) and Virabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Andhra Pradesh (right).



Left
FIGURE 2.6 Rama takes aim at Tatakai. Chennakesava Temple, Sompalle, Andhra Pradesh.

stiff than those at Lepakshi, allowing them to fall more naturally. The female figures at both sites tie their saris in similar ways, with the end of the sari passed over the shoulder, exposing the top half of the breasts (Figure 2.5). The chignon hairstyles are also distinctive of the women in this style group.[10] Narrative action is highly condensed in a scene of the hero, Rama, facing the demoness, Tatakai (Tāṭakai). Rama draws back an arrow in his bow, taking aim at Tāṭakai, who approaches from the right (Figure 2.6). She is fanged and bug-eyed; her long pointed breasts hang down to her waist and echo the long curve of the dagger held aloft in her right hand. Not two, but six feet are visible below the ankle-length hem of her sari: the action of Tāṭakai running toward Rama has been condensed into the conflated image of her feet three times.

Similar dress, disposition, and economy of narrative space are seen at the mid-sixteenth-century murals at the Tenupurishvara (Tēnupurīśvara) temple in Patteeswaram (Paṭṭīccaram), in central Tamil Nadu (Figure 2.7). Figures at Tiruppudaimarutur, far away in southern Tamil Nadu, share formal and compositional attributes that

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