

WORKING PAPER: III

SHARED RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

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1. Introduction

In this Working Paper, I address the theme of cultural integration through the institution of the religious shrine or Hindu temple, especially with reference to those located on or near the coasts both in India and in Southeast Asia. A discussion on the coastal shrine is critical for this paper to dispel the myth that due to restrictions stipulated in the Law Books or the *Dharmasastras* on maritime travel, the Hindu population turned to agrarian pursuits and production, away from trade and maritime transport.

It is significant that while the origin myths of most of the temples associate their founding with a royal patron, yet there is little historical evidence for this during most of their existence. An analysis of the data from inscriptions establishes that temples and monasteries were not merely centres of devotion and worship but were also principal institutions in the period from 9th to 13th century for establishing laws and enforcing them on their members. Several inscriptions document complex arrangements for the use of temple resources, whether these were lands or else revenues from shops and markets. In the larger temples, we find mention of several classes of temple employees such as administrators, treasurers, accountants, temple women, cooks, sweepers, artisans, watchmen, etc. Resources for temple rituals, processions and for the large number of employees were generated through surplus agricultural production on temple lands and from donations in

cash and kind from trading groups. The inscriptions also provide a record of legal transactions conducted and in addition to the temple archives on income and expenditure form a valuable source of information on the legal jurisdiction of the temple. A good example of this is the study of the early seventeenth century archives of a temple in Kerala.

The formulation of the role of the religious shrine in the ancient period, as discussed in this paper is different from that which is generally accepted by historians of ancient India. Historians have tended to credit royalty with the establishment of Hindu temples at the instigation of brahmanas who provided legitimisation to their rule in return for generous gifts and land grants. Brahmanas are linked to the spread of Puranic religion and for the dissemination of Puranic ideas, practices and institutions like *vrata*, *puja*, *tirtha* and temple-centred *bhakti*. Three processes have been postulated for historical development in what is termed the early medieval period (6th-7th to 12th-13th): expansion of state society; assimilation and acculturation of tribal peoples; and integration of local religious cults and practices. The temple is seen as having played a major role in this integration of peripheral areas and tribal populations. This neat trajectory of religious expansion and integration is not reflected in the archaeological record, which highlights a complex mosaic of cultures from the first millennium BCE onwards that continued to retain their identity.

In Gujarat coastal temples were dedicated to a variety of deities, ranging from the non-Sanskritic fertility goddess *lajja-gauri* whose shrine dated to 1st century BCE was excavated from the site of Padri in the Talaja tahsil of Bhavnagar district of Gujarat hardly 2 km from the Gulf of Khambat to temples of Surya or Sun and other gods along the Saurashtra coast from the sixth century onwards. From the 10th to 13th century, the primary route was along the coast from Dwarka on the Gulf of Kachchh to Somnath on the Saurashtra coast and Bhavnagar at the head of the Gulf of Khambat. The coastal centres of Somnath and Dwarka were well-known for their magnificent temples, though the beginnings of these sites date to the early centuries of the Common Era. We start with the nature of the early temple in western India and changes in its interactive circuits across the Ocean over time.

2. The Hindu Temple along the Coasts

The first issue that needs to be addressed is: do we know of coastal shrines and how early are they? Gujarat has a coastline of 1600 kms most of which lies in Saurashtra bounded by the Gulf of Kachch in the north and the Gulf of Khambat in the southeast. The region was settled at least from the third millennium BCE onward. A survey of published sources on the archaeology of Gujarat shows at least 683 Harappan sites, both early and late. These are largely located around the Gulf of Kachchh and in Jamnagar district, while Junagadh district is a blank, with the exception of the coastal site of Prabhas Patan, 4 kms south of Veraval at the mouth of the Hiran river. The earliest evidence of a coastal structural shrine comes from Padri in the Talaja tahsil of Bhavnagar district of Gujarat hardly 2 km from the Gulf of Khambat. The site has third millennium BCE beginnings, but was again occupied around the first century BCE. The 7.14 hectare site with a 3.2 m thick habitational deposit has provided data for three cultural periods. Period I is Early Harappan (3000-2600 BCE), Period II is Mature Harappan (2500-1900 BCE) and the third period is Early Historic (1st century BCE to 1st century CE).

A distinctive feature of the Gujarat seaboard is the series of temples located along the coast, which

provide insights into the communities who inhabited the space between the ocean and the hinterland; their histories and attempt at constructing their cultural environment. How does archaeology help provide insights into the religious life of the communities? It is here that archaeological data on settlement sites helps identify the support base of religious sites. For example, while sites along the coastline of Saurashtra with temples, such as Kadvar, Mangrol and Porbandar served as intermediate ports and also subsisted on fishing, at Dwarka and Valabhi agriculture and bead manufacturing formed the backbone of economic activities, and at the sites of Roda, Akota and Broach agricultural activities were of prime importance. Another source of information is the finds of sculptures of deities often without any architectural associations, which need to be factored into any discussion of the early religious landscape in the subcontinent.

In secondary writings these coastal temples have been attributed to the Maitraka dynasty who ruled Gujarat from 475 to 776 CE with their capital at Valabhi situated at the head of the Gulf of Khambat. It is generally assumed that the patrons of the temples were the kings. But was that the case and if so, why did the kings build temples along the coast far away from their capital at Valabhi. Here we examine the issue through a discussion of the inscriptions of the Maitraka dynasty. More than one hundred and twenty copper-plate charters of the Maitraka dynasty written in Sanskrit are preserved in museums, especially in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai. Nearly half of these records list the town of Valabhi as the location of Maitraka rule and it was at this site in Bhavnagar district that most of the copper-plates were found. In the early charters of the sixth century, the place of issue is generally given as Valabhi, though from the seventh century onward, these seem to have been issued from victory camps by the kings. The epigraphs mention date of issue, but identifying the era used in the records has been a problem for historians. The charters comprise of two plates held together by rings, one of the rings bearing a Maitraka seal showing a bull and the legend *śrībhaṭakkaḥ*, the founder of the dynasty.

The purpose of issuing the charters was to record land donations to religious establishments. They start with a eulogy of the king and list officials involved in the writing of the charter and authorization of the grant. Of the nineteen kings described in the charters, sixteen are labelled as devotees of Shiva; though there are also references to rulers devoted to Vishnu, the Sun-god, the Buddha and occasionally to goddesses. A majority of the donations are to individual brahmanas and only a few mention Hindu temples. Jain institutions are completely missing, though Buddhist monasteries do find mention as recipient of grants.

The records however, celebrate Vedic learning and mention the Vedic Sakha affiliation of the brahmanas to whom land was donated. Fifty per cent of the brahmana recipients of the grants were Yajurvedins, almost 30 per cent were Sāmavedins, some 20 per cent Ṛgvedins, and only six of the recipients were Atharvavedins. Most of the brahman donees lived in and around Valabhi and the endowments had to be used for the practice of daily rituals.

Another early centre of religious architecture on the west coast is the site of Cotta Chandor in Chandor district in south Goa on the banks of the river Paroda leading to the sea, which was subjected to excavation for two field seasons in 2002-2004. The complete plan of a brick temple complex datable from third to eleventh century CE was unearthed and five phases of structural activity were identified. Though three phases of construction were identified, these were marked by continuity of religious beliefs and in the last phase the sculpture of Nandi was added to the temple complex. Politically, the Kanara coast was controlled by the Kadambas from CE 350 to 550 and several families are known who ruled from centres further inland, such as at Banavasi and Halsi. The Silaharas followed the Kadambas in Goa from 750 to 1020 CE, but the Kadambas re-emerged in the tenth century. The Panjim plates refer to king Guhallā Deva of the Goa Kadambas undertaking a pilgrimage to the temple of Somnath on the Saurashtra coast, but hardly had he reached halfway, when the mast of his ship broke and he was forced to take shelter with a ruler friendly to him. This was the port of Goa where

a rich Muslim merchant by the name of Madumod of Taji origin and the wealthiest of all the seafaring traders, came to the help of the king. In return the king gave him much wealth. This record tells us for the first time of Arab traders settled on the Goa coast in 11th century CE.

Another important coastal site is that of Mahabalipuram on the Tamil coast 60 kilometres south of the present city of Chennai. Mahabalipuram is located on the River Palar, which joins the sea at Sadras, about 50 kms to its north and is known for the almost four hundred caves and temples most of them built in the seventh and eighth century, which now form a part of the World Heritage site. The site comprises of rock-cut cave temples, nine monolithic shrines known locally as rathas, three structural temples referred to as Shore temples and several rock-cut images that dot the area along the coast. A fascinating representation on the rock face is that of the descent of the river Ganga on earth.

Human activity in the area started in the Iron Age and continued well into the present. There is also evidence for a lighthouse on the rocks behind the temples and caves. Archaeological work in and around Mahabalipuram has helped unearth the long prehistory of the site, starting from the second and first millennium BCE Iron Age Megalithic period. Burials, cairn circles, jars with burials were found on the western side of Mahabalipuram at the site of Punjeri about 1.5km away. The Tsunami of 2004 brought to light another temple in the area. Recently, remains of two temples were excavated, one to the south of Shore temple and another massive brick temple of Subrahmanya near the Tiger Cave at Saluvankuppam, near Mahabalipuram.

Seventh-century inscriptions refer to it as ‘Mamallapuram’ or close variants; ‘Mahabalipuram’ appears only after the 16th century, and (with Seven Pagodas) was used in literature written in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The site is also known for some important inscriptions. The early seventh century Mandagapattu inscription of the Pallava king Mahendravarman I reads that he ‘brought into existence a temple without utilizing either timber or lime (mortar) or brick or metal’, and

the temple was dedicated to 'Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva'. One of the earliest inscriptions that refers to the ten incarnations of Vishnu including the Buddha was inscribed at the entrance to the sanctum of the Adi Varaha cave. In his *Avantisundari Katha*, the Sanskrit scholar Daṇḍin who is said to have lived in Tamil Nadu and was associated with the Pallava court praised artists for their repair of a Vishnu sculpture at Mahabalipuram. However, Daṇḍin's authorship of this text is disputed.

These references can be added to and are important not only as indicators for the presence of religious shrines in coastal areas of India and donations of land to the temples, but more importantly of travel and pilgrimage by the coastal route that provided inter-connectedness to the shrines. These records also underscore the vibrant coastal network in the ancient period. Another aspect that appears constantly in the copper-plate grants is the incorporation of merchant guilds in administration of the shrine and the city by the king.

3. The King, the Merchant and the Temple

"The king must protect the conventions of heretics, corporate bodies, guilds, councils, troops, groups and the like in towns and in the countryside. Whatever their laws, duties, rules for worship or mode of livelihood, he must permit them" (*Nārada Smṛti* 10.2-3).

The *Nārada Smṛti* places the onus of protecting customary rights of corporate bodies on the king, the one institutional figure that was likely to be the cause of their erosion and thus attempts to minimize the possibility of confrontation between the two. The legal system on the ground in the early medieval period was graded into several levels of law from the rules of the *Dharmasastras* to the regional and community-based conventions to localized standards. Several medieval texts on judicial procedure contain discussion on the conventions and legislation by corporate bodies and how these should be handled by the ruler. Writers of the *Dharmasastras*, such as Katyayana, Brhaspati and Manu state that the king was obliged to sanction and enforce those regional

conventions that had the consensus of local leaders. This means that local consensus was the real source of *dharma*, as it applied to corporate bodies.

Relevant to this paper is the copper-plate charter of Visnusena in Sanskrit, issued from Lohata in the Kathiawar region. D. C. Sircar, the editor of the inscription has identified Lohata with the town of Rohar on the Gulf of Kachchh. The find-spot of the copper-plates is unknown, but on palaeographic grounds it is dated to 6th-7th century CE. The inscription states that the king Visnusena was approached by the community of merchants from Lohata to endorse customary laws prevalent in the community and which had been continuing for several generations. The king assures protection to the community of merchants established in the region and endorses their continued functioning. The inscription then provides a detailed list of seventy-two trade regulations or customary laws to be followed by the merchant community.

Some of the regulations include the following: that merchants staying away for a year were not required to pay an entrance fee on their return. Other clauses specify duties that were to be paid. A boat full of containers was charged twelve silver coins, but if the containers were for religious purposes, they were charged only one and a quarter silver coin. In the case of a boat carrying paddy it was half this amount. The exception to this was a boat carrying buffaloes and camels, where no reduction is allowed. Other items, which were frequently transported by boat included dried ginger sticks, bamboo, wine, leather, and bulls. The variety of taxable objects mentioned in the inscription is an indication of the diverse nature of trade in the region. These included oil mills, sugarcane fields, wine, cumin seed, black mustard and coriander. The inscription also refers to a tax on dyers of cloth, weavers, shoemakers and retailers hawking goods on foot. Others such as blacksmiths, carpenters, barbers, potters, etc. could be recruited for forced labour under the supervision of officers. Thus the record makes a distinction between commodities meant for religious purposes and the temple, as opposed to those to be sold in the market and underscores a differential in taxation.

This leads to the question of the role of merchants as local administrators and especially their involvement in temple administration. Important evidence for this comes from copper-plate inscriptions, such as the first set of three copper plates from Anjaneri, near Nasik 168 kms inland from Mumbai on the west coast, which confirms this position of merchants and entrusts the *nagara* with the administration of the temple estate, including disposal and investment of the revenues. The record refers to Bhogashakti granting eight villages for providing materials for worship of the god Narayana, for repairs to the temple and for the maintenance of a *sattra* or procession in the town of Jayapura. The merchants are asked to select five or ten of their number to supervise the great annual festival of the god, which would be attended by many pilgrims from afar and last a whole fortnight in the month of Margasirsa (December). The merchants were in turn exempted from payment of octroi duties and the obligation to pay for the boarding of royal officers. A postscript to the plates records endowments by Tejavarmaraja who donated pasture land in a village to the south of Jayapura. He also deposited a hundred rūpakas with the guild of merchants. The interest on this amount was to be used for providing bdellium or *guggulu* for worship of the deity.

Also relevant for this discussion is the Anavada inscription of 1291 CE found near Patan, an ancient city in north Gujarat said to have been founded in 745 CE. The inscription records gifts to a temple dedicated to Krishna by *vanjārās* or itinerant merchants, *nau-vittakas* (knowledgeable about ships) and *mahajanas*, which according to the inscription included *sādhu* or *sāhukāra*, *śresthi*, *soni* (goldsmith), *thakkura* or *thākura* and *kamsara* or brazier. These sub-categories of trading groups no doubt also reflected their economic status and growing clout. These and other records confirm the role of merchants and trading groups not only as patrons of temples, but also involved as administrators both of religious shrines, as also towns and cities.

This is further confirmed by 9th to 14th century inscriptions of three families of the Silahara dynasty, one of whom ruled north Konkan comprising of

about 1400 villages with their capital at Sthanaka or present Thana on the west coast. The second family ruled over south Konkan and had 900 villages under its dominion. This family rose to power in the modern state of Goa and had their seat at Chandrapura or the present Chandor. A third family ruled in the interior over the present districts of Kolhapur, Satara, Sangli and Belgaum. Most of the inscriptions of this branch have been found at Kolhapur, which perhaps represented their capital.

The form of government was monarchical and the Silaharas assumed long titles indicative of their lineage, power, learning, liberality, wisdom and so on. Most of their inscriptions are in Sanskrit and they called themselves *pāścima-samudrādhipati* or 'lords of the western sea-board' and Konkana Cakravarti or masters of Konkan. In theory the king had absolute power, though in practice there were several checks and balances in place. The administrative structure included the counsellor or *mantrin* and the minister or *mahāmātya* who are mentioned in several records along with the heads of different administrative units, such as *rāṣṭrapati*, *viṣayapati* and *grāmapati* or village headman. Committees comprising of merchants, artisans and trade-guilds and referred to as *mahājanas* are mentioned with regard to the administration of towns and villages. Local religious institutions were also represented in these committees and are termed *pañcamāṭha-mahāsthāna* or the five religious groupings of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Buddha and Jina.

This association of merchants and trade-guilds in administration occurs widely in many of the texts of the period as well and has been a feature of early administrative structures in India. Some of the merchant guilds such as the Ayyavole known as the Vira Bananjas in Karnataka had linkages with other regions. In their inscriptions, they refer to themselves as being resident in thirty-two coastal towns, eighteen *pattanas* or market towns, and sixty-four *ghaṭikā-sthānas* or establishments for learned men. They had their own banner with a hill symbol and usually met in different places on weekdays and made donations to temples from the cess on commodities sold in the market.

Several inscriptions from early medieval India document complex arrangements for the use of temple resources, whether these were lands or else revenues from shops and markets. In the larger temples, we find mention of several classes of temple employees such as administrators, treasurers, accountants, temple women, cooks, sweepers, artisans, watchmen, etc. Resources for temple rituals and for the large number of employees were generated through surplus agricultural production on temple lands and from donations in cash and kind from trading groups. The inscriptions also provide a record of legal transactions conducted and in addition to the temple archives on income and expenditure form a valuable source of information on the legal jurisdiction of the temple.

Further south on the Malabar coast, many settlements as also temples appear from the ninth century onwards, such as the coastal centre of Kollam or Quilon facing the Arabian Sea. The ninth century copper plate inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi found near Quilon record a contract between the local authority and a group of resident Christians from the Persian Gulf allowing them access, free of certain taxes, to the fort which protected the port market and was maintained by the merchant groups *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam*. The Quilon copper plates are significant in connection with trading rights granted to the Christian church and twenty-five persons from West Asia are signatories as witnesses. The market was located within the precincts of the fortified settlement, while the church was situated outside the fortification wall. Through these grants the *Anjuvannam* and the *Manigrammam* guilds became the rightful occupants of the coastal centre or *nagaram* and were responsible for collection and remission of customs duty and for fixing the sale prices of merchandise transacted in the coastal town of Kollam. They were also granted the customary seventy-two rights by the rulers.

The early eleventh century Kochi plates of Bhaskara Ravivarman record the grant of the title *Anjuvannam* and privileges in trade to Joseph Rabban, a Jew in Muiyirikkodu or Mujiri, now identified with Pattanam. The third set of inscriptions, the thirteenth

century Kottayam plates of Vira-Raghava records the grant of the title *Manigrammam* and privileges to Ravikkoran, a merchant in Kodangalur.

Different views have been expressed about the identity of *Anjuvannam* found only in coastal towns both on the Malabar and Tamil coasts. After a careful analysis of the inscriptions, Subbarayalu equates them with the Hanjamana found on the Konkan coast in Marathi-Sanskrit and Kannada inscriptions. It denoted a trading body composed of West Asian sea-going merchants traversing the Ocean as far east as Java and occurs in inscriptions from the ninth century onwards. By the eleventh century it largely comprised of Muslim traders and became a permanent part of the local community in coastal villages. Its presence as a trade guild continues until the thirteenth century after which there no further references to it.

This brief survey of copper-plate grants shows the presence of a population with multiple religious affiliations and included in addition to Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. The shrine was an important locale in the cultural landscape; it not only brought diverse groups together, but more importantly placed merchant groups in a special position as administrators as also as adjudicators of customary law and traditional practices. At this stage it is necessary to bring in the evidence of the early Hindu temple in Southeast Asia and at sites defining the sailing world.

4. Coastal Temples and the Sailing World

It is important that these sites be viewed not as a monument or a group of monuments, but located within their wider context, which also included other sites in their vicinity. For instance, My Son and the port of Hoi An – both World Heritage sites in Vietnam; the numerous rock cut structures found at Mahabalipuram on the Tamil coast and slightly further inland; and the archaeological and structural remains of the pre-Portuguese period in Goa. Archaeology shows that many of these coastal sites existed as important landing places prior to the construction of grand religious edifices,

which may have stemmed from a need by the sailing world to provide anchorage – both physical and cultural on sailing routes. We start this paper with Mahabalipuram, 55 kms south off Chennai on the east coast of India and then move on to the Sun Temple at Konarak; Elephanta island and the churches at Goa, before discussing My Son temple and the port of Hoi An in Vietnam and the churches in the Philippines.

The temples at Mahabalipuram and Konarak were often referred to as pagodas by European travellers. While Mahabalipuram was known as Seven Pagodas by seamen, the Sun temple at Konarak was termed as the Black Pagoda. Interestingly another temple site, not inscribed in World Heritage list, yet referred to in sailors' accounts is the White Pagoda or the temple of Jagannatha in Puri, Odisha and the Chinese pagoda at Nagapattinam on the Tamil coast.

Recent underwater archaeological explorations have brought to light remains that may have belonged to other shrines at the site. The underwater structures, especially the long walls having 2 to 3 courses, scattered dressed stone blocks of various sizes and stones having projections are considered to be man-made in nature. What is important is the continued habitation at the site and its links with other centres along the east coast of India, as also across the seas. The thirteenth century Sun Temple at Konarak in Odisha was known as the Black Pagoda to European sailors and served as a navigational point for sailors in the Bay of Bengal. The site seemed to have been an important port from early times. The name Konarak is in most likelihood derived from the name of the presiding deity Konarak, which means the Arka (sun) of Kona (corner). Recent archaeological excavations at Kuruma brought to light a ruined Buddhist monastery, 8 kms north-east of Konarak and at Khalkatapatna, an ancient sea-port, 11 km south-east of Konarak on the left bank of the river Kushabhadra substantially attested the maritime importance of Konarak.

In 1983–84, soil was brought from Khalkatapatna for construction of the Marine Drive road between Konarak and Puri. While digging for soil, archaeological remains were noticed. The excavation

brought to light a brick jelly floor which could have served as a loading and unloading platform. Other findings included Chinese ware, Celadon ware, egg-white glazed and glazed chocolate wares of Arabian origin and local wheel-turned dark grey pottery. No structural remains were found during excavation. Oven and hearth were noticed, including numerous ring wells connected with houses. Khalkatapatna port extended from Tikina, Ashram and Garudeshwar and beyond. According to the local people, Tikina was a boatbuilding centre. The findings suggest that maritime trade contacts of Khalkatapatna existed with the Persian Gulf countries, China and other Southeast Asian countries. This could be corroborated with the findings of stamped ware sherds of Kottapatnam and Motupalli on the Andhra coast and comparable with Kota China of North Sumatra and Bagan of Burma, which are datable from 12th to 13th century CE.

The rock-cut caves on the island presently known as Elephanta on the west coast are located about 10 kilometers off Mumbai, the financial capital of India and have been dated to between the fifth and eighth centuries. Landing quays sit near three small hamlets known as Set Bunder in the north-west, Mora Bunder in the northeast, and Gharapuri or Raj Bunder in the south. The island has a long history and continued in the possession of the political dynasties who ruled the mainland. There are seven cave excavations on the island and the primary cave, numbered as Cave 1, is about 1.5 km (0.93 mi) up a hillside, facing the ocean. The temple complex is dedicated primarily to Shiva and depicts him in various forms and also shows mythological events associated with him. The gigantic images of the deity show him in a variety of forms, both benign and meditative. The eastern part of the island has Buddhist monuments in the form of a few caves, of which two are complete and one contains a stupa. The current name of the site is attributed to the Portuguese who named it Elephanta after a colossal stone statue of an elephant found near the landing place.

Archaeological excavations at Rajbandar brought to light brick ruins of ancient port town extending to the hill on which Cave 2 is located. The ancient jetty

was known as Rajghat. Also noticed were a Buddhist brick built ruined building, silver Kshatrapa and Roman coins (1st to 4th century CE), small copper Karshapanas (1st century BCE/CE) and a 15 meter long brick jetty cum wharf. The height of the wall was raised over a period of 700 years. Also recovered from the site were Roman Amphorae, Red Polished ware and a structure dating to 1st century BCE to 7th century CE.

Two lead coins with three peaked hill on the obverse and a wheel on the reverse were recovered from Morandar. One of the coin had the character 'ye' in Brahmi. At Rajbandar were found carnelian bead, rolled and unrolled pottery few Chinese ware and a brick wharf of the 6th century CE Large bricks were found lying scattered around the Shetbandar village, along with RPW, and below a wall miniature bowls, spouts and jars were recovered. The brick size at Shetbandar suggests habitation in Gupta period. Coins belonging to the Kalachuris of 6th – 7th century CE are found in abundance. Thus, the island provides evidence for settlement contemporary to the rock-cut sculpture, which was an important landmark on that part of the coast and was probably, linked to the archaeological site at Chandor further south on the coast near Goa and already discussed above. Though a nationally protected site, Chandor has not so far been inscribed and this credit goes to the somewhat later Portuguese architecture. In the next section of this paper, I discuss one of the prominent coastal sites of Southeast Asia.

5. My Son Sanctuary, Vietnam

The site of My son in Vietnam is located in a valley surrounded by mountains. The Thu Bon river connects the upland and the lowland with an estuary in Hoi An. Under the kingdom of Champa (9-10th century), the city possessed the largest harbour in Southeast Asia. My Son's wonderful natural environment was the reason Cham rulers chose the My Son Valley for their sanctuary. The monumental area of My Son Sanctuary lies 300 meters above sea level and is surrounded by a row of high hills and is accessible only through a narrow gorge. Cham kings believed My Son was the residence of the god Shiva whose presence helped protect the empire.

My Son Sanctuary monuments are set in a beautiful verdant valley shadowed by Cat's Tooth Mountain (Hon Quap).

Originally, the My Son Sanctuary had only a wooden temple, which burned down in the sixth century. In the early seventh century, King Sambhuvarman (Reign from 577 to 629) built the first temple in brick that still exists. Then, other dynasties continued to restore it by building more temples in brick to worship the Gods of Hinduism, but especially Shiva. This area was discovered in 1885 by a group of French soldiers. Ten years later (1895), archaeologist Camille Paris made the first exploration. Since then until 1904, many researchers and archaeologists have visited here to reveal the secrets, including Louis Finot, Henri Parmentier and others.

My Son, popularly known in ancient times as "Srisana Bhadresvara" was the royal sanctuary, while Hoi An, an ancient town sometimes called the "Port of Great Champa" was the centre of maritime trade. Sinhapura Tra Kieu was known as the "City of Lion" or the "Lion Citadel" and was the centre of royal power.

While excavating and restoring the tower Groups of K and H at the My Son Sanctuary (Duy Phu commune, Duy Xuyen district, Quang Nam province), the group of Indian archaeological experts and their Vietnamese partners have unexpectedly discovered an ancient road and walls underground. Besides, these experts have found several valuable objects at the foot of the ancient towers such as two stone lion-man statues and terracotta items dating back to the 11th-12th centuries. The road is 8 metres in width and between two parallel walls built with terra-cotta bricks. Initially, the ancient road is believed to lead to the ceremony sphere at the

The site has 70 tower temples dating from the fourth to thirteenth century CE with different architectural patterns. The temple towers are constructed in groups and each group is surrounded by a thick all of bricks. These have been classified using letters- A,B,C D E based on the classification carried out by Henri Parmentier (1904: 805-96). The A group has 13 temples of which the main temple of

the site is A 1 dated to the tenth century CE dedicated to Shiva. It is 24 meters high and is the tallest one of the site. Temple A 10 was built before 875 CE but is currently in a severely damaged condition.

This brief overview of some of the coastal religious architecture in the ASEAN – India region shows a close relationship between landing places, ports and religious architecture. In secondary writings, researchers have tended to privilege commercial interactions rather than ritual connections in trans-oceanic contacts, though rigorous documentation and analysis of find-spots and spaces within which coins and commodities have been found conforms closely to ritual. Similarly, the functioning of the medieval merchant guilds from peninsular India show their close association with temples. For example, the inscriptions of the corporate body termed *Ainurruvar* indicate that they transacted business in eighteen *pattanam* or market towns, often coastal, thirty-two *velapuram* or harbour areas of ports and sixty-four *ghatikasthanas* or centres of learning generally associated with temples (Karashima, 2009: 143). This is further supported by the Barus inscription from north-west Sumatra. The inclusion of centres of learning as spaces for conducting activities of the merchant guilds underscores the role of religious shrines in social and cultural integration rather than merely being places of worship.

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