

Archana Venkatesan, Crispin Branfoot (text), Clare Arni (photography), *In Andal's Garden. Art, Ornament and Devotion in Srivilliputtur*. pp. 144, illustrations 160. Mumbai: Marg Publications. 2015.—Reviewed by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (Jagiellonian University, Krakow).

The book by Archana Venkatesan and Crispin Branfoot, with photographs by Clare Arni (but also other authors, who are acknowledged in the individual photo descriptions), is dedicated to the one of the most important centers of the Vaiṣṇava tradition in South India, which is Srivilliputtur with its double-shrine temple of Āṇḍāl and Viṣṇu Vaṭapattraśāyi. The centre of Teṅkalais, belonging to the group of 108 Vaiṣṇava *divyadeśas*, is meticulously studied and presented in the photographic documentation by the team of experienced researchers on the South Indian temple culture. In the Preface and Acknowledgements we learn about the authors' leading ideas about the ambience and context in which the temple was established and developed. In Acknowledgments we also learn that the authors consulted many other leading specialists in the field. The authors also utilized the knowledge of the followers of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, temple priests and inhabitants of Srivilliputtur. Through this approach the authors managed to build a broad panorama of the subject. They wrote: “Drawing together the political, religious, literary and artistic history of this one temple-town and its resident goddess lays bare the intertwining nature of ritual, architecture, poetry, history and epigraphy. Such a capacious approach, made possible

through the collaborative process, expands this small temple-town well beyond its boundaries, and affirms the truth of Andal's name: "She Who Rules" (p. 2 of the Preface). The authors also mention their wish to create a book which would be a scholarly work, but at the same time remains accessible to a broader audience. This task is fulfilled by presenting the material in a reader-friendly way, including traditional stories about Āṇḍāl and the temple, and providing rich visual material.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 (p. 21) is entitled "Andal Stories". We learn about the life of Āṇḍāl and her works, namely the *Tiruppāvai* and the *Nācciyār Tirumōli*. The traditional stories of Āṇḍāl's life, based on *sthalapurāṇas*, for example the *Srivilliputtur Sthala Purana* (original transcription used in the book), are recalled. As the authors write, the only historical information about Āṇḍāl appears in the *phalaśruti* part of the *Tiruppāvai* and the *Nācciyār Tirumōli*. Here we read that the poetess named Kotai lived in the town called Putuvai or Villi's Putuvai and that she was related to Viṣṇucitta. Though Śrīvaiṣṇavas treat Āṇḍāl/Kotai as the daughter of Viṣṇucitta, she herself did not make it explicit. On the basis of this information and due to the fact that later sources connect Viṣṇucitta and Āṇḍāl with some Pandya rulers, the authors suppose that their lives could be dated to the second half of the 9th century AD. The two above mentioned works of Āṇḍāl are included in Book 1 of the First Thousand (*mutal ayiram*) of the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. In the first chapter the authors address also the issue of the iconography of the images.

In Chapter 2 (p. 41) entitled "Patronage in Pandyanadu" the authors consider the role of the royal patronage in the development and growth of the Srivilliputtur temple. The general opinion which is also shared by the authors (p. 59), supposes that the oldest shrine in this place was the Vaṭapattiraśāyi temple of the 10th century AD, whilst the famous *rājagopura*, which is the symbol of the Tamil Nadu State Government, was built in the 17th century. The still used temple car—*ter* (*ratha*) was consecrated in 1849. A careful study on the development of the temple architecture with regard to dynasties, especially the Pandyas, compares the Srivilliputtur temple with such other Vaiṣṇava

sacred places as Alagar Koil (Alagar Koil village near Madurai) and Kudal Alagar (Madurai).

Chapter 3 (p. 62), entitled “Approaching Andal” describes, among other things, the way in which the temple functions and how the specific features of the worship are connected with the fact that the shrine of Vaṭapattiraśāyi is situated on the upper level, and thus it is relevant to other multi-floored Viṣṇu temples. The authors refer also to other characteristic features of the temple architecture and sculptures, for example they note that the Gopala Vilasa mandapa is provided with wooden panels and the Kalyanamandapa’s walls with murals of the 18th century AD representing the *Rāmāyaṇa* story; as specific to the temple they mention the Nayaka sculptures depicting battle scenes, for instance representing Lakṣmaṇa cutting Śūrpaṇakhā’s breast.

Chapter 4 (p. 85), “Adornment and Adoration in Srivilliputtur” refers to the two types of worship of Āṇḍāl: inside and outside the temple. In these contexts the authors describe the specific features of the Brahmotsava festival, which in this temple takes place in August. One of the peculiarities of the temple is the role and performance of the Araiyaṛs, a Brahmin group entitled to the recitation of the Āṇḍāl’s *Tiruppāvai*, while wearing a special cap, during Margali/Tailotsava Festival of Ceremonial Bath/Festival of Oil Anointing.

In Chapter 5 (p. 109), “Landscapes of Devotion”, the authors touch on the issue of sacred geography, building the net of holy places; they speak also about the portrait sculptures of the Nayakas and their patronage of the Āṇḍāl cult.

Chapter 6 (p. 127) entitled “Andal of a Thousand Names” refers to the contemporary (20th- and 21st-century) specifics of the Āṇḍāl cult and her important role for the South Indian culture. She exists both in high culture and performative arts as well as in the popular culture, especially of Tamilnadu.

The book is supplemented with the Glossary (p. 138), Bibliography (p. 140) and Index (p. 142).

Venkatesan and Branfoot’s book, being the result of the collaborative work of the two authors, who also consulted other specialists in the field

and engaged a professional photographer, brings a lot of meticulously collected, presented and interpreted material, which refers to the one of the most interesting personages of the Vaiṣṇava tradition as well as to the one of the most important places of Vaiṣṇava worship in the South of India. The Vaiṣṇava religious centres of the South, unlike many of the Śaiva ones, still await a deeper consideration, especially from the interdisciplinary point of view. Thus I perceive the present publication as one of most valuable and very much needed works on the South Indian Vaiṣṇava tradition.

In conclusion, I would like to mention one slightly annoying, especially for an Indologist, feature of this valuable work, that is the controversial transcription of Sanskrit and Tamil words, titles and names, which are not provided in a scientific way. In my review I left some of the versions from the book to present how they could cause ambiguity.