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Conquering the World, Subduing the Minds: Śaṅkara's *digvijaya* in the Local Context

Circumambulating the land, he was extending his blessing to the land
with every step of his lotus feet. Seeing, in due course on the roads,
the various false signs [of religious life], Śaṅkara proceeded,
with a desire to conquer the quarters
Cidvilāsa, *Śaṅkaravijaya-vilāsa*, 31.1–2[1,2]

SUMMARY: Most of Śaṅkara's hagiographies feature his conquer of the quarters (*digvijaya*) as their dominant topos. During his all-India conquest, Śaṅkara was said to have traveled along with his disciples to the four corners of the Indian Peninsula. He is supposed to have established four *vidyāpīṭha*s (seats of learning). However, alternation to this popular account remains in circulation in Kerala. According to the local hagiographic tradition, Śaṅkara founded four Advaita Vedānta *maṭha*s in the city of Trichur only. These were Vadakke Maṭham ("Northern Maṭha"), Naduvil Maṭham ("Middle Maṭha"), Edayil Maṭham ("Maṭha In-between") and Thekke Maṭham ("Southern Maṭha"). Subsequently, he attained *samādhi* in the Vadakkunnathan Temple situated nearby. Three of the above mentioned monasteries have survived until today. All those institutions were built in one city, next to each other, just a few hundred meters away from the Vadakkunnathan Temple. The physical space of Trichur

[1] *tataḥ śrīśaṅkara…paśyan krameṇa mārgeṣu liṅgāni vividhāny api || bhuvaṃ pradakṣiṇī-kurvan pratasthe digjayecchayā | pāda-paṅkaja-vinyāsair dhanyāṃ tanvan bhuvasthalīm* || Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijayavilāsa*, W. R. Antarkar (ed.), *Bharatiya Vidya* (Journal of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, India), Vol. XXXIII, nos. 1–4, 1973: 1–92.

[2] Trans. Jonathan Bader (Bader 2000: 113).

was rearranged in order to actualize the ideological concept which gave it a symbolic meaning. Thus, the legendary map of Śaṅkara's life became recreated and inscribed in the geographic location of Trichur.

KEYWORDS: Kerala, Trichur, Nambudiri Brahmins, Śaṅkara, Advaita Vedānta, monastic institution, monastic order, hagiography, *digvijaya*, *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*.

Most of Śaṅkara's hagiographies feature his conquest of the quarters (Skr. *digvijaya*) as their dominant topos. According to the popular accounts of the philosopher's life, during his all-India journey, Śaṅkara was said to have traveled along with his disciples to the four corners of the Indian Peninsula and to have defeated doctrinal opponents representing other schools of thought in the philosophical disputes (Antarkar 2003b: 103). During his triumphant tour he is supposed to have established four *vidyāpīṭha*s (seats of learning), meant for the propagation of the Advaita Vedānta doctrine, each affiliated with one of the four *dhāma*s (sacred places of pilgrimage) (Sax 2000: 47). These institutions were situated at the farthest spots of the sub-continent: in Badrināth in the North, in Śr̥ṅgeri in the South, in Dvārakā in the West and in Purī in the East. The headship of each of those *maṭha*s was said to be entrusted subsequently to Śaṅkara's principal disciples: Toṭaka, Sureśvara, Hastmālaka and Padmapāda respectively. As featured in *Śaṅkaravijaya* by Vyāsācala:

> The unique tree, whose flowers are knowledge and which yields the fruit of liberation, is named Śaṅkara. Together with his disciples who are the great trunks, and whose branches are their disciples, he served the fourfold realm for the alleviation of mens' misfortune.[3,4]

While we have a number of studies concerning Govardhana, Śārada, Dvāraka, Jyotirmaṭha and Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha, and the relationship between Śaṅkara's hagiographies and the status of *vidyāpīṭha*s, there is hardly

[3] *ekaś śākhī śaṅkarākhyaś caturdhā sthānaṃ bheje pāpa-śāntyai janānām | śiṣyaiḥ skandhaiś śiṣya-śākhair mahadbhir jñānaṃ puṣpaṃ yatra mokṣa-prasūtiḥ || Śaṅkaravijaya* by Vyāsācala [12.83.], T. Chandrasekharan (ed.), Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Series 24, Madras 1954.

[4] Trans. Jonathan Bader (Bader 2000: 120).

any study concerned with a lesser-known place like that of Trichur in central Kerala, which I am going to discuss later on. There is a legend of four disciples of Śaṅkara founding four *maṭha*s there, three of which have survived. The legend takes form *inter alia* in a Śaṅkara hagiography named *Śaṅkarācāryacarita*—a local Keralan variant of the account of the philosopher's life.

The strategy of *digvijaya*, described above, may be considered as the process of symbolic taking possession of the outlined territory—the successful conquest of the world. The purpose of the ritual combat, which is a *digvijaya*, intends to be the movement towards unity either at the political and metaphysical level under the guidance of the leader who is distinguished by his superior authority. Hereby, as noticed by Bader in his book on the traditional accounts of the life of Śaṅkara, the white umbrella attributed to the Śaṅkarācārya represents the harmony and guardianship, which he will manage to provide as the world conqueror. This makes Śaṅkara a person of a dual nature—not only is he portrayed in his hagiographies as a founder of Hindu renunciant tradition but the royal dimension of his personality is also clearly highlighted (Bader 2000: 116).

It is adopted by convention that the most of Śaṅkara's hagiographies include the term *vijaya* in their titles. According to Antarkar's in-depth study, twelve of the twenty accounts on the philosopher's life examined by him feature this very title (Antarkar 2003). This fact clearly reveals the specific structure of the story intended to be focused, in the broader perspective, on the geographical movement, which was to be spatial expansion. The aim of the conquest supposed to be the establishment of Śaṅkara's presence throughout the entire subcontinent and the restoration of his authority based on the correct understanding of the orthodox sacred texts (Bader 2000: 118). Thereby the hagiographers draw the image of the world conqueror who gains control over the chaos instigated by his doctrinal rivals by taking into full possession the space in its physical dimension. As a result, he consolidates the land in a Vedic *dharma*. As Bader states:

> metaphysically, he becomes the sacred centre, the hub of the wheel, and restores the original unity which was lost in the demarcation of space. This is accomplished by establishing his presence in the four quarters of the land and yet at the same time remaining at the centre. (Bader 2000: 116)

The validation of his world conquest and the following foundation of "the kingdom" appears to be the coronation, i.e. ascending the throne of omniscience (Skr. *sarvajña-pīṭha*),[5] and establishing monastic centres referred to as the four seats of knowledge (Skr. *vidyāpīṭha*) in the four corners of India, where his principal disciples were subsequently installed as heads of those institutions. The episode of Śaṅkara's story referred to evokes the motif of the royal consecration (Skr. *rājasūya*) used in the narrative. He is depicted as the ruler situated in the centre of the world, representing *axis mundi*, who radiates into four cardinal directions (Bader 2000: 119–120). This background concept of all Śaṅkara's hagiographies can be referred to as the doctrine of *exemplary centre*, defined by Geertz, which is primarily the general conception of the nature and foundation of the sovereignty. Originally, the principal aim of the *digvijaya* strategy was obviously the conquest of the world and the following foundation of the capital city in the very heart of the empire. The exemplary centre conception mentioned above refers to the theory that the court and the capital (with a king and his tutelary deity) supposed to be the microcosmic version of the supernatural order—that is of the whole kingdom and the entire world at once. That was the exact projection executed in a smaller scale, which was designed to embody the religio-political order (Geertz 1980: 13). As Geertz states:

> It was not just the nucleus, the engine, or the pivot of the state, it was the state. The equation of the seat of rule with the dominion of rule, which *the exemplary centre* concept expresses, is more than an accidental metaphor;

[5] Among the major textual traditions we can find two variants of the identification of the place where Śaṅkara allegedly ascended the throne of omniscience. As these were recognized Kāśmīra (*Guruvaṃśa-kāvya*, Mādhava's *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*) and Kāñcīpuram (Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijaya-vilāsa*, Govindanātha's *Śaṅkarācāryacarita*, Rājacūḍāmaṇi-Dīkṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya*, *Gururatnamālā* and *Suṣamā*) (Sundaresan 2000: 151).

> it is a statement of a controlling political idea—namely, that by the mere act of providing the model […] the court shapes the world around. (Geertz 1980: 13)

Thereby, all religious as well as political power was accumulated by a god-king figure only. Behind this concept hides thus the strategy based on the idea that the arrangement of physical space can influence the popular imaginary, which will result in imposing the specific paradigm for social order.

As already mentioned, *digvijaya* was originally a royal, imperial expansion. As Sax argues, *digvijaya* represents both the metaphor and the strategy. According to the paradigm, a *digvijayī* is supposed to start his conquest of the four quarters with a fire sacrifice, which seems to be a reference to the Vedic *aśvamedha* (a horse sacrifice), thus making the conquest itself of a ritualistic nature. Next, the world conqueror should move in the most auspicious direction, that is in the sunwise direction, starting from the east. During the triumphant journey a *digvijayī* would defeat all his rivals who yielded to his superior force and supreme authority. After the successful tour the conqueror was supposed to go back to his point of origin, which in consequence was turned into the capital of a new empire, and thus a new centre of the world (Sax 2000: 42). Hereby, "the circumambulation of a particular geographical space was followed by the ceremonial elevation of the leader to a position of moral and political authority" (Sax 2000: 48). As Sircar states, the *digvijaya* topos "permeates the entire body of epic and puranic literature" (Sircar 1960: 6). The oldest and most famous literary account of a *digvijaya* is considered to be the *Yudhiṣṭhiravijaya* from *Mahābhārata*'s *Digvijaya-parvan* (2.23–29), where the five Pāṇḍava brothers proceed in the full-size subjugation of the earth's four quarters. After obtaining permission from Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna conquers the north, Bhīma subdues the east, Sahadeva sets off to the south, and Nakula journeys triumphantly to the west. The eldest among the five Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira, stays in the very centre, at the zenith, constituting the *axis mundi* and founding the capital of their great kingdom, which features the perfect instance of the exemplary centre doctrine described by Geertz (Gawroński 1915: 56–57).

Among other works, presenting great royal *digvijaya*, we can find also the widely known Kālidāsa's epic poem—*Raghuvaṃśa*. The major theme of the fourth canto of *Raghuvaṃśa* appears to be the Raghu's great conquest of the four quarters:

> *sa guptamūlapratyantaḥ śuddhapārṣṇir ayānvitaḥ |*
> *ṣaḍvidhaṃ balam ādāya pratasthe digjigīṣayā || Ragh*. 4.26 ||
>
> Thus attended with good luck he, having his metropolis and the frontier fortresses guarded and having taken with him forces of six kinds, with the rear cleared of his foes, set out with intent to conquer the quarters. (*Ragh*. 4.26), trans. Gopal Raghunath Nandargikar (Nandargikar 1897: 101)

Only in late medieval India did the term *digvijaya* start to be used also to describe the proselytizing missions of the founders of major Hindu renunciant traditions such as those of Śaṅkara, Madhva, Vallabha and Caitanya. According to Sax, this practice became prevalent only after the disappearance of the erstwhile great Hindu empires. Then, the most famous world conquerors turned out to be renouncers who during the proselytic missions, featured as *digvijaya*s, and subdued the most difficult of enemies—their own senses (Sax 2000: 39, 45). Nevertheless, as William S. Sax stresses, both the *digvijaya*s of kings and those of renouncers were at the same time religious and political in character. The two aspects permeated each other and were inscribed in the notion of the *digvijaya*, just as rulers and ascetics appear to be the *alter-ego*s of each other (Sax 2000: 39, 54). This is as well the case of the Śaṅkara's famous *digvijaya* featured in his hagiographies. It is hard to be classified in only one of those categories. Therefore, the authors of his life accounts depict it as military and theological at the same time (Sax 2000: 47).

However, what needs to be outlined is the fact that in practice we are lacking in any veritable historical data confirming Śaṅkara's *digvijaya* to be performed at all. In fact, all his hagiographies are most likely based on dubious, popular legends only. What is more, Potter notices that the philosopher's works are actually "profoundly antithetical to the assumptions and practices of the order he is supposed to have founded" (Potter 1982: 113). Most importantly, probably none of Śaṅkara's hagiographies had been written before the 14th century;

the earliest being most likely Anantānandagiri's and Vyāsācala's works (Clark 2006: 149–150). Composed several hundred years after Śaṅkara's death, these sources surely could not be regarded as historical records. Instead, as Bader states, "they seek to glorify Bhagavatpāda by recounting numerous miraculous phenomena, and deify him as an *avatāra* of Śiva" (Bader 2000: 14). That is the reason why while referring to the literary genre they are considered to be hagiographic texts instead of biographies. Although hagiography is almost a universal phenomenon among various cultures, it is actually worth asking what circumstances led to its emergence within the specific religious tradition (Lorenzen 1976: 88). Therefore, proper inquiry considers their existence in a particular historical, cultural, political and religious context.

Hence, I would argue that it seems especially important to pay particular attention to the landscape described in Śaṅkara's hagiographies during the protagonist's wanderings. They were surely not ordinary journeys but rather edeavour to expand influences in order to strengthen the authority and establish one's own tradition as paramount. It shows clearly the mutual association between specific places and a person. "At stake was nothing less than the authority to define and thereby control space" (Sax 2000: 51).

There is ample evidence to support the view that the emergence and dissemination of Śaṅkara's hagiographies tended to be strictly correlated with the growth of Śaṅkaric institutions. In the course of history, hagiographies were written, reworked and served as important sources of authority for future status claims on the part of individual *maṭha*s. Hagiographers, who were usually associated with a particular *maṭha*, mentioned specific places in their works intentionally, to strengthen the influences of the institution. Basic arguments in support of a *maṭha*'s claim for prestige mainly involved a new identification of the place of ascending the throne of omniscience, the location of Śaṅkara's final mortal abode and his personal involvement in the foundation of the *maṭha* in question. The figure of the deified philosopher must have served well the interest of

the *maṭha*s and their appetite for religious splendor and political power (Sundaresan 2000: 112–113).

Most of the ten principal Sanskrit sources[6] for the Śaṅkara story feature the establishing of *maṭha*s in various places in India as the most important of his acts during his famous *digvijaya* (Antarkar 2003a: 218). The majority of hagiographers, in their works, indeed mention the aforesaid institutions by name. However, some of the authors enumerate only one of them, usually the Śārāda Pīṭha in Śr̥ṅgeri,[7] while the others feature all four of the above-mentioned *vidyāpīṭha*s.[8] Finally, elsewhere the fifth *maṭha* also appears, which arouses most controversies concerning its authenticity, namely, Kāñcī Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha.[9] Nevertheless, three hagiographies stay silent in this matter and say nothing about establishing of any *maṭha* at all[10] (Sundaresan 2000: 151). One of them is the *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* of Govindanātha, which seems to be a very unique text among the other accounts of Śaṅkara's life due to its considerable differences in plot in relation to other popular Sanskrit hagiographies. I argue that this significant silence about the establishing of the *maṭha*s in the Govindanātha's poem is to be likewise taken into consideration and should prompt a further investigation regarding its possible motive, which could appear important during the text analysis.

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[6] Appearing to be the major Sanskrit texts hitherto examined by the scholars, Anantānandagiri's *Śaṅkaravijaya*, Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijaya-vilāsa*, Vyāsācala's *Śaṅkaravijaya*, Rājacūḍāmaṇi-Dīkṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya*, Tirumala-Dīkṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya*, Lakṣmaṇa-Śāstrī's *Guruvaṃśa-kāvya* (Śr̥ṅgeri text), Mādhava's *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*, *Gururatnamālā*, *Suṣamā* (the two latter ones are the Kāñcī texts) and Govindanātha's *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* (Bader 2000: 17, Sundaresan 2000: 151) are subsequently discussed.

[7] Mādhava's *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*, Anantānandagiri's *Śaṅkaravijaya* (Sundaresan 2000: 151).

[8] Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijaya-vilāsa*, Lakṣmaṇa-Śāstrī's *Guruvaṃśa-kāvya* (*ibidem*).

[9] *Gururatnamālā*, *Suṣamā* (*ibidem*).

[10] Rājacūḍāmaṇi-Dīkṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya*, Govindanātha's *Śaṅkarācārya-carita*, Puruṣottama Bharati's *Kūṣmāṇḍa-Śaṅkaravijaya* (Antarkar 2003b: 129).

According to Skinner's methodology based on the contextualist criticism of textualism, the recovery of context is essential to understanding the text (Skinner 2002: 143). Thus, the objective in the above-mentioned method is to situate the text in the context by taking into account its biographical, social, political and literary background. Only then is it possible to draw an inference about the nature of illocutionary intervention, which comprises the text (Skinner 2002: 158–174). This strategy permits one to examine the relationship between the social and rhetorical change, especially in descriptive and evaluative terms used to induce changes in social perceptions (Ganeri 2008: 553). The possible weakness of applying this methodological approach in the Indian context is the frequent uncertainty about the basic information concerning the authorship, geography, dating etc. On the other hand, the abundance of literary sources in India creates the intertextual context (Ganeri 2008: 553). Thus, in pursuit to grasp the illocutionary force of the document it is equally important to notice the subtleties of dialogues between the texts, as well as the meaningful silence, which is likewise a part of a full act of speech (Ganeri 2008: 554).

An application of the above-mentioned methodological approach in the study of the textual traditions in question seems to be crucial for geographical contextualizing and mapping of the various hagiographic traditions.

In fact, apart from the life accounts of Śaṅkara widely known at the pan-Indian level and approved within the Daśanāmī monastic order,[11] there exists also a lesser-known, regional hagiographic tradition originating in Kerala, which remains largely unrepresented in

[11] The most widespread occurs to be the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* of Mādhava, featuring the pivotal episodes of Śaṅkara's life, such as birth, ascending to the throne of omniscience (Skr. *sarvajña-pīṭha*) and the attaining of the *videha-mukti*, which took place in Kālaṭi, Kāśmīra and the Himalayas respectively. Mādhava-Vidyāraṇya. 1996. *Śaṅkaradigvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*. Swami Tapasyananda (trans.), Sri Ramakrishna Math.

the contemporary scholarship. The Śaṅkaric hagiographic tradition of Kerala seems to be independent to some degree. Its unique feature is a close association of Śaṅkara and his four disciples particularly with the city of Trichur, and to Kerala region in general. As the philosopher is traditionally believed to have been born in Kerala, in Kalady, it could motivate the peculiar reception of this personage in his native place. To the best of my knowledge, at least four different hagiographic texts that represent this peculiar tradition remain extant. These are three Sanskrit texts: *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* by Govindanātha from ca. 17th century,[12] Puruṣottama Bhāratī's undated *Kūṣmāṇḍa-Śaṅkaravijaya*,[13,14] another undated and anonymous work entitled *Padmapādācāryacarita* (Narayanan 2013: 385) and one Malayalam text from the beginning of

[12] The date of the composition of this text estimated to be in the 17th century is merely a proposition given by the previous generation of scholars. The poem itself gives no clue about when it was composed, because, except for Śaṅkara and his disciples, it does not refer to any historical personalities or events from which a date could be deduced (the information obtained from Vidyasankar Sundaresan in a private conversation).

[13] The text seems to be unique as it describes Śaṅkara and his four pupils as incarnations of the five Pāṇḍavas, who are in turn featured as partial incarnations of Śiva. It also relates the foundation of the Śāradā Temple in the site named Pammapura. Unfortunately, still not much is known about the author of this work. The Śaṅkaravijaya Literature, http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/sankara-vijayam.html (last accesssed: 7 April 2016).

[14] The common feature of the two Sanskrit hagiographies—*Śaṅkarācāryacarita* and *Kūṣmāṇḍa-Śaṅkaravijaya*—is the recognition of the abode of Śaṅkara's final disappearance, the Keralan Vṛṣācala Temple located in Trichur. However, they slightly differ in religious orientation while describing that episode. The first one appears to be more Vaiṣṇava in character as it depicts Śaṅkara praising Viṣṇu and afterwards becoming one in Viṣṇu's bliss, and the second one looks to be more inclined towards Śaiva as it features him composing *Haristuti* and then uniting with Śiva in his abode (Antarkar 2003b: 129).

the 20th century called *Śaṅkarabrahmānandavilāsam*[15] composed by Alathur Anujan Nambuthirippad.[16]

The peculiar, distinctive feature of this local hagiographic tradition is the strong association of the protagonist with the specific region, particularly in the case of Kerala. The events of the concluding part of Keralite stories of Śaṅkara's life inevitably take the readers/listeners to the city of Trichur. According to those accounts, the great saint achieves *samādhi* there, in the Śaiva Vatakkunnathan Temple, but prior to attaining the *videha-mukti*, he establishes in this very city all four *vidyāpīṭha*s, placed one next to another, just a few hundred metres away from the Vatakkunnathan Temple (Menon 1970: 146).

To be more precise, there are two slightly different variants regarding the origin of the Trichur *vidyāpīṭha*s, which are widely known across the state of Kerala. According to the first version of the story, after coming back from Kāñcī, where he had ascended the throne of omniscience, Śaṅkara founded four *maṭha*s in Trichur and entrusted their headship respectively to his four main disciples. According to the other variant, Śaṅkara's disciples established the referred *maṭha*s after their *ācārya*'s *samādhi*.

Hereby, the first Swamiyar (that is the pontiff) of the Vadakke Maṭham (from Malayalam: 'Northern Maṭha') was said to have been Toṭaka, of the Naduvil Maṭham ('Middle Maṭha') Sureśvara, of the Thekke Maṭham ('Southern Maṭha') Padmapāda and of the Edayil Maṭham ('In-between Maṭha') Hastāmalaka. Nevertheless, in both versions of the Śaṅkara's story, afterwards his disciples appointed Nambudiri *saṃnyāsin*s as their successors being in charge of those institutions (Menon 1970: 146).

We can observe thus how the conception of pan-Indian Śaṅkara's *digvijaya* was precisely projected in the local micro-space. The physical

[15] I owe the information about existence of this text, and the copy of the poem, to dr hab. Cezary Galewicz.

[16] As Professor Chettiarthodi Rajendran informed me, although it is stated in the poem that it is written in Manipravalam, in fact the language in which the text is composed seems to be early 20th century Malayalam.

territory of Trichur was rearranged in order to actualize the ideological concept, which gave it a symbolic meaning. The legendary map of Śaṅkara's life was recreated and inscribed in the geographic location of one Keralan city only.

Nowadays, two of the *maṭha*s—Naduvil and Thekke—are still active religious institutions. The third one—Vadakke Maṭha—was transformed into a *vedapāṭhaśālā* called Brahmaswam Madham around 400 years ago. As claimed by the Nambudiris who are in charge of that school, the then Swamiyar did not nominate his successor. The issue of the fourth *maṭha* is however particularly interesting because this institution is actually missing. Although local accounts say that originally four *maṭha*s were established, currently in Trichur there are only three of them. Some Nambudiris claim that the fourth one was relocated outside the city. Indeed, there is one Nambudiri Advaita Vedānta *maṭha* outside Trichur. It is in Palakkad (70 km away from Trichur), but it is known as Tirukkekkat Maṭham and it seems to be rather a branch of Naduvil Maṭham.

It is noteworthy that probably not all Nambudiris could accept *saṃnyāsa* from the referred institutions. For instance, it seems that only the Nambudiris from Śukapuram, Peruvanam and Irinjālakuda *grāma*s having *Bhaṭṭavṛtti* (lands given on service tenure by king to Bhaṭṭa—usually a Mīmāṃsā or Vyākaraṇa teacher with high social status) and the right to perform *agnihotra*, could accept *saṃnyāsa* from the Naduvil Maṭha (Veluthat 2013a: 156). It is possible that a similar restriction concerned also the other *maṭha*s. What is more, designated Nambudiri *grāma*s belong to lineages who are said to keep Vedic sacrificial tradition (Govindan Namboodiri 2002: 57). It seems that access to Trichur Śaṅkaric institutions could be restricted only for the most privileged members of the Nambudiri community—the Nambudiri aristocracy.

Therefore, it seems probable that Śaṅkara's hagiographic tradition in Kerala could primarily have provided an elucidation for the origin of the Advaita Vedānta *maṭha*s in Trichur, as well as also determining the community in charge of them. Perhaps, it was through

an appropriation of Śaṅkara's legend and an incorporation of the Advaita Vedānta doctrine into Nambudiri ideology that the Trichur *maṭha*s became influential institutions wielding religious and political power in medieval Kerala.

Only one of the above-mentioned four hagiographies belonging to the Keralite tradition has been translated. This was the translation of *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* into Italian by Mario Piantelli—*Il poema di Śaṅkara (Śrīśaṅkarācāryacarita)*, Torino 1994. Moreover, a few critical editions of *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* have been prepared. The poem was published in Trichur by Kerala Publishing House in 1914 and 1926, in Kumbakonam by Sri Komalamba Mudranalaye in 1926, in Puna by Citrasala Mudranalaye in 1931, whereas the critical edition of 1966 by K. N. M. Divakaran Namputiri was recently reissued in Calicut Sanskrit Series 50, 2013: *Vedāṅgadīpti. Collected works of K. N. M. Divakaran Namputiri*.[17] Not long ago, a critical edition of the text was prepared also by W. R. Antarkar. It was published in 1992, in vol. 52 of *Bhāratīya Vidyā*.

The other three texts remain unstudied and unedited. The manuscript copy of an anonymous Sanskrit work named *Padmapādācāryacarita*, the hagiography of Śaṅkara's direct disciple Padmapāda, who is considered to be the founder of Thekke Maṭha in Trichur, allegedly is still kept in this Advaita Vedānta institution (Narayanan 2013: 385). It can be assumed that more texts of this tradition remain unstudied, covered with dust, in the archives of the Nambudiri monastic institutions of Kerala.

As regards the work of Govindanātha, the text is known under two, or sometimes even three titles, which are *Śaṅkarācāryacarita*, *Śaṅkaraswāmicaritam* and *Keralīya-Śaṅkara-vijaya.* According to all known manuscripts, it is attributed to Govindanātha, who was most likely an ascetic of the Śaṅkara paradigm from Kerala, since he introduces himself in the poem as a *yati*. Probably he was affiliated to one

[17] I owe this information to Dr. Christophe Vielle from l'Université Catholique de Louvain.

of the Advaita Vedānta *maṭha*s in Trichur. The text is roughly dated to the first half of the 17th century, but as mentioned before, this dating is still merely a proposition. However, the text follows that of Vyāsācala, whom Govindanātha mentions by name (using double-entendre) in the first chapter (Antarkar 1992: 59–60).

Aufrecht's *Catalogus Catalogorum* features five different manuscripts of *Śaṅkarācāryacarita*. Two of them are dated to ca. the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th century. They are recorded in the *Catalogue of South Indian Sanskrit Manuscripts* from 1902, belonging to the Royal Asiatic Society. The catalogue was compiled by Winternitz with an appendix by Thomas. The manuscripts are a part of the Whish collection. Whish explored selected areas of Kerala and Karnataka in the first half of the 19th century. Three remaining manuscripts are mentioned in the following works:

A Report on a search for Sanskrit and Tamil manuscripts for the year 1896–97 by Seshagiri Sastri, which was prepared under the orders of the government of Madras;

In the *List of Sanskrit manuscripts in Private Libraries of Southern India* by Gustav Oppert (for years 1880–1885, published in Madras);

In *A classified Index to the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Palace at Tanjore* from 1880, compiled by Burnell.

According to Antarkar, one more manuscript is kept in the Mysore Palace library (Antarkar 1992: 57). Furthermore *Manuscripts Collection of the Deśamaṅgalam Vāriyam (Kerala): An Annotated Catalogue* compiled by K. V. Sarma, the chairman of Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, features two other manuscripts of the work composed by Govindanātha.[18]

Thus, the extant manuscripts testify that *Śaṅkarācāryacarita*, representing the regional hagiographic tradition in question, must have been read or at least copied not only in Kerala but also in south

[18] I owe this information to Giovanni Ciotti from the University of Hamburg.

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It seems that the story could have been current in this area especially around the turn of the 19th century.

Although the two Sanskrit hagiographies of *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* and *Kūṣmāṇḍa-Śaṅkaravijaya* do not refer to the issue of the establishing of the four *maṭha*s at all, still their silence in this matter could be perceived as significant. However, most importantly, they do provide a crucial association of the protagonist with the city of Trichur by featuring Śaṅkara's final mortal abode to be the Vadakkunnathan Temple. In the texts the temple appears under its Sanskrit designation Vṛ̥ṣācala ('the mountain of Śiva's bull'), which evokes the legendary origin of the site.[19] Moreover, the hill where the Vadakkunnathan Temple is situated, is described as the *Dakṣiṇa-Kailāsa*—Southern Kailāsa—in the hagiography by Govindanātha.[20]

The inclusion of this episode in the ending of the poem seems to constitute an explicit link to the locally popular Śaṅkara's legend, which remains in circulation in the region of Kerala and regards the foundation of all four seats of knowledge (*vidyāpīṭha*s) by Śaṅkara in the city of Trichur only.

In turn, the remaining recognized Malayalam text belonging to the local hagiographic tradition—*Śaṅkarabrahmānandavilāsam*—indeed mentions by name the Nambudiri *maṭha*s of Śaṅkara's order established in Trichur.

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[19] *tataḥ kṣetrāṇi puṇyāni tīrthāni ca niṣevya saḥ |*
krameṇa śiṣyasaṃyukto vṛ̥ṣācalam avāptavān ||ŚC 9.18||

Then, after having visited [many] sacred places and auspicious *tīrtha*s, He, together with [his] disciples, reached finally the Vṛ̥ṣācala Temple. (Trans. Olga Nowicka)

[20] *kṣetraṃ dakṣiṇa-kailāsa-nāmadheyaṃ suviśrutam |*
yatra rājaty umāśaṅkarāspadaṃ bhuktimuktidam || ŚC 2.7||

The celebrated sacred place named Southern Kailāsa,
Where shines the abode of Umā and Śaṅkara (Śiva),
[which] bestows an enjoyment and a liberation.
(Trans. Olga Nowicka)

Thus, what needs to be stressed is the fact that among textual sources at our disposal only the Malayalam hagiography mentions the establishing of the four *maṭha*s in Trichur, while the remaining Sanskrit sources stay silent in this particular matter.

What seems to be striking about the issue of the four Trichur *maṭha*s is the fact that the legend about their origin, persistently repeated, forcibly obscured history. Due to the absence of veritable historic data we can hardly find out what actually happened. Even the date of establishing of those institutions, estimated for the 9th century A. D., is legendary.

It is noteworthy that the Advaita Vedānta doctrine was not a current concept among Nambudiri Brahmins (Govindan Namboodiri 2002: 74). The nature of the power-structure created by them was a sort of network woven with interconnections based on the idea of an exclusive ritualism. In fact, the Brahmanic chronicle *Kēraḷōlpatti* depicts Kerala as a *karmabhūmi*, certainly not without an intended purpose (Veluthat 2013a: 134). Presumably, in the medieval period it was the Mīmāṃsā school of Bhāṭṭa and Prābhākara which were favored among Nambudiris (Govindan Namboodiri 2002: 74). However, the appropriation of the Śaṅkaric model of monasticism somehow seemed to be an alluring *modus operandi* for gaining considerable power by the aristocracy of the Nambudiri community. Trichur *maṭha*s were deriving numerous benefits, including royal land donations, grants, privileges and ordinances, which enabled the establishment of the other affiliated *maṭha*s. They created a network of complex interrelations. Thereby Trichur institutions possessed paddy fields all over Kerala in the past and managed (and actually some of them still manage) a number of temples in the Malabar region (Bayi 1998: 118–132).

The uniqueness of the local hagiographic tradition in question primarily presents itself in the peculiar act of mapping the widely known Śaṅkara's all-India *digvijaya* in the local space confined to Kerala. It transposes the pan-Indian places associated with the life of Śaṅkara into the local sites of central Kerala, namely, into the space of Trichur city. Thus, the popular Keralite version of Śaṅkara's life features the place of philosopher's final mortal abode

to be the *Dakṣiṇa-Kailāsa*, that is the so important in South India Śaiva Vadakkunathan Temple. Moreover, the great pan-Indian conquest of the four quarters (*digvijaya*), legitimized by the establishment of four *vidyāpīṭha*s in Badrināth in the North, Śr̥ṅgeri in the South, Dvārakā in the West and Purī in the East, is exactly projected on a smaller scale in the space of Trichur. It was in this city, according to the Keralite tradition, where four Advaita Vedānta *maṭha*s were founded by Śaṅkara. These were: Northern Maṭha (Vadakke Maṭham), Middle Maṭha (Naduvil Maṭham), Maṭha In-between (Edayil Maṭham) and Southern Maṭha (Thekke Maṭham), which were subsequently passed to the charge of Nambudiri Brahmins (Bayi 1998: 127–132). The names of those institutions indicate a clear reference to the concept of taking the space into possession, subduing the earth. Indeed the names could be perceived as indexes and symbols at the same time. An act of naming a place appears to be a performative act of creating a new reality, which is nothing other than subjugation of a particular territory. The periphrastic, metaphoric and symbolic site names point to the geography-making processes (Rybicka 2014: 197–198). Thus, by inscription of the *digvijaya* in the city of Trichur, it appears to represent simultaneously the capital and the microcosmic version of a whole kingdom/an entire world. Hereby, because of the particular arrangement of space (which in this case is the spatial transposition phenomenon (Lazzaretti 2010: 2)) Trichur seems to constitute an exemplary centre.

As Granoff emphasizes, places are primarily 'the ideas' more than tangible and sensible entities (Granoff 1998: 99). The authors and transmitters of the Keralite version of Śaṅkara's life account gave the legend significant physicality and substantiality, which was materialized into Śaṅkaric institutions located in Trichur (Granoff 1998: 100). As in Foucault's heterotopias (Foucault 1984), Keralite *maṭha*s encapsulate a few spatio-temporal dimensions. At the same time this phenomenon is about the place and detached from it, as this single place in fact juxtaposes several spaces (Granoff 1998: 100). It is a real site meant to be a local, microcosmic projection, connected with the great pan-Indian Śaṅkaric tradition, which could be also perceived

as 'the geographical equivalent of Sanskritization' (Eck 1981: 336). The propaganda value of mythological paradigm, described by Granoff (Granoff 1984),[21] was also applied in this peculiar case, since in popular Keralan tradition, Śaṅkara was conceived by the god Śiva himself.[22] What is particularly interesting is the unique approach towards the personage of Śaṅkara in Kerala. In fact, most of his hagiographies do not associate him with any single and fixed geographical place. He represents an ideal of *saṃnyāsin* who, as a true renouncer, should cut off all ties with his own community and with his native place, thereby transgressing his regional identity (Bader 2000: 92). However, in Keralite tradition Śaṅkara seems to be particularly connected with this region. As Veluthat notices,

> after he became a celebrity, he was shamelessly appropriated and the origin of anything that needed sanction in the Brāhmaṇa-dominated society of Kerala was attributed to him. Thus, the beginning of the Kollam Era,[23] the introduction of the graduated scale of untouchability for different castes,[24] the peculiar codes of conduct for the Brāhmaṇas of Kerala,[25] etc. were all presented as gifts of the great *Advaita* philosopher! (Veluthat 2013b: 139)

Clearly, it seems to be also the case of the four Nambudiri *maṭha*s in question, established in the very heart of Kerala, namely, in the city of Trichur.

[21] See more about the conception of mythological paradigm in Granoff 1984: 291–303.

[22] As narrated in the Brahmanical Keralite chronicle *Keralolpatti*.

[23] Introduced in 825 CE.

[24] Tīṇṭal (unapproachability).

[25] These are the 64 *anācāra*s intended for Nambudiri Brahmins.

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