



Depiction of the central scene of the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* on a pillar relief in the Kachapeswarar temple in Kanchipuram (photo: HAdW / Ute Hüsken)

ACADEMIES PROGRAMME

The Academies Programme is a programme jointly funded since 1979/80 by the German federal and state governments to support long-term research projects in the humanities and social sciences. Through the Academies Programme, which is coordinated by the Union of German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, the Academies carry out Germany's largest research programme in the humanities, which serves to explore, preserve and interpret global cultural heritage.

The research project "Hindu Temple Legends in South India" is funded through the Academies Programme.

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Cover illustration: The Gods approach Shiva. Illustration from a printed edition of the

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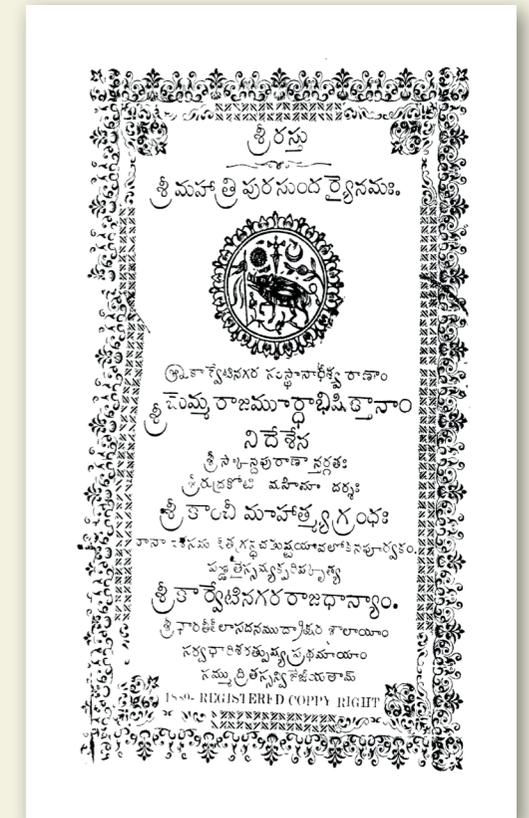
Hindu Temple Legends in South India



HEIDELBERGER AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

Akademie der Wissenschaften des Landes Baden-Württemberg

The project "Hindu Temple Legends in South India" explores the **temple legends of the South Indian city of Kanchipuram** in their different forms of transmission and makes them accessible in a digital environment. To this end, it produces **digital editions** of the Sanskrit and Tamil texts and brings them together with a documentation of the respective **temple architecture** and **iconography** as well as the related **rituals** and **oral traditions**, thus creating a new understanding of this important cultural heritage both in its historical significance and as living practice.



Title page of an old printed edition of the *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, a Sanskrit temple legend of Kanchipuram (1889)

“Ever since Shiva dwells there in Kanchi as Kachapeswarar without ever leaving. Whoever worships him, sees him, or thinks about him, will be freed of sins and obtains liberation.”

The *Kāñcippurāṇam*, an 18th-century Tamil temple legend, explains the sanctity of the Kachapeswarar temple, dedicated to the deity Shiva, in Kanchipuram.



The Kamakshi Amman temple in Kanchipuram (photo: HAdW / Jonas Buchholz)

The South Indian temple town of **Kanchipuram** has for centuries been considered one of the most sacred sites in Hinduism. Its significance for Hindu religiosity is substantiated by a large number of mythological narratives, which have been transmitted in written form as **temple legends** (Sanskrit *māhātmya* oder *sthalapurāṇa*). A large number of such texts was composed during the medieval and early modern periods in the transregional language of Sanskrit, but also in regional Indian languages. At the same time, temple legends do not only exist as texts, but also in oral, performative, and material form. They are told from mouth to mouth, they are ritually enacted, they are painted on temple walls and fashioned into sculptures. Their narratives are also of central importance for contemporary lived Hindu traditions.



The above-cited stanza from the *Kāñcippurāṇam* is presented to temple visitors in the Kachapeswarar temple (photo: HAdW / Jonas Buchholz)

The goal of the project is the production of **digital editions** with annotated translations of the entire corpus of Kanchipuram’s temple legends. This corpus comprises eight sizeable texts in Sanskrit and the local language Tamil. Apart from editing the texts, the project documents the **temples** that are described in the texts as well as **material, oral, and performative** versions of the temple legends. These data are linked with the text editions, creating a consolidated corpus that allows accessing all versions of Kanchipuram’s temple legends irrespective of their format in a digital environment.

The project was initiated in 2022 and is scheduled to run for sixteen years. Its main base is in **Heidelberg**, with a branch office functioning in **Pondicherry**, India, in cooperation with the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO).



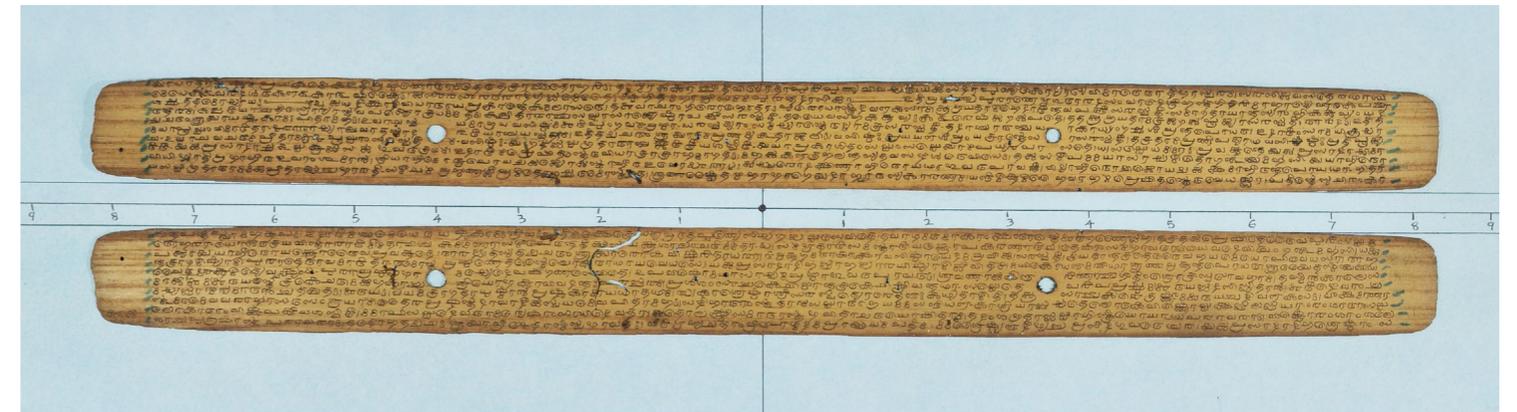
Ritual enactment of Shiva’s wedding (photo: HAdW / Ute Hüsken)



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Palm-leaf manuscript of the *Hastigirimāhātmya*, a Sanskrit temple legend of Kanchipuram (© EFEO)