

Stūpa as Tīrtha: Jaina Monastic Funerary Monuments

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The Jains are widely recognised as the Indian pilgrims *par excellence*. A plethora of recent studies has therefore investigated Jaina pilgrimage circuits and pilgrimage manuals. So far, research has concentrated almost exclusively either on the annual *vihāra* of the itinerant Jaina mendicants or on the occasional individual or communal pilgrimages (*yātrā*) to Jaina sacred places. In most textbooks Jaina sacred places (*tīrtha-kṣetra*) are depicted as sites marked by temples or shrines housing anthropomorphic images and/or footprint images of Jinas or renowned Jaina saints. Only recently, attention was drawn to the flourishing cult of relic *stūpas* in medieval and contemporary Jainism. One of the principal findings of recent research at SOAS on Jaina rituals of death is that these *stūpas* serve as alternative destinations for pilgrimage across almost the entire Jaina sectarian spectrum.¹ This report will point out some of the characteristics of these pilgrimages.

From the point of view of Jaina soteriology, attachment to material objects is a form of delusion (*mithyātva*), and the concept of sacred place, an absurdity.² Hence, the Vedic Sanskrit term *tīrtha* (Pkt. *tīttha*) crossing or ford, originally a designation for bathing places and places of pilgrimage where crossing the ocean of existence (*saṃsāra*) is deemed possible, was reinterpreted by classical Jainism and given the dual sense of Jaina 'doctrine' and 'fourfold ascetic community' (*cāturvarṇya śramaṇasaṅgha*), that is, monks, nuns, and male and female laity. (Viyāhapannatti 20.8.72-74) Doctrine and community, the two principal components of the religion, are created by the omniscient *tīrtha(ñ)kara*, who is the main object of veneration. Accordingly, the paradigmatic *tīrtha* in early Jaina literature was the temporary assembly of the fourfold community at the time of the sermon

1 *Jaina Studies. Newsletter of the SOAS Centre of Jaina Studies*, 6 (2011) 26f. Research was supported by Fellowship AH/I002405/1 of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

2 'Jainas have decried all forms of respect shown to inanimate objects such as fields, stones, mounds or mountains'. (P.S. Jaini, 'The Pure and the Auspicious in the Jaina Tradition'. *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society*. Ed. J. B. Carman & F. A. Marglin. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985, p. 89.)



Sallekhanā of a *muni* under a tree. 10th-century stone relief in the Candragupta Basti in Śravaṇabelagoḷa.



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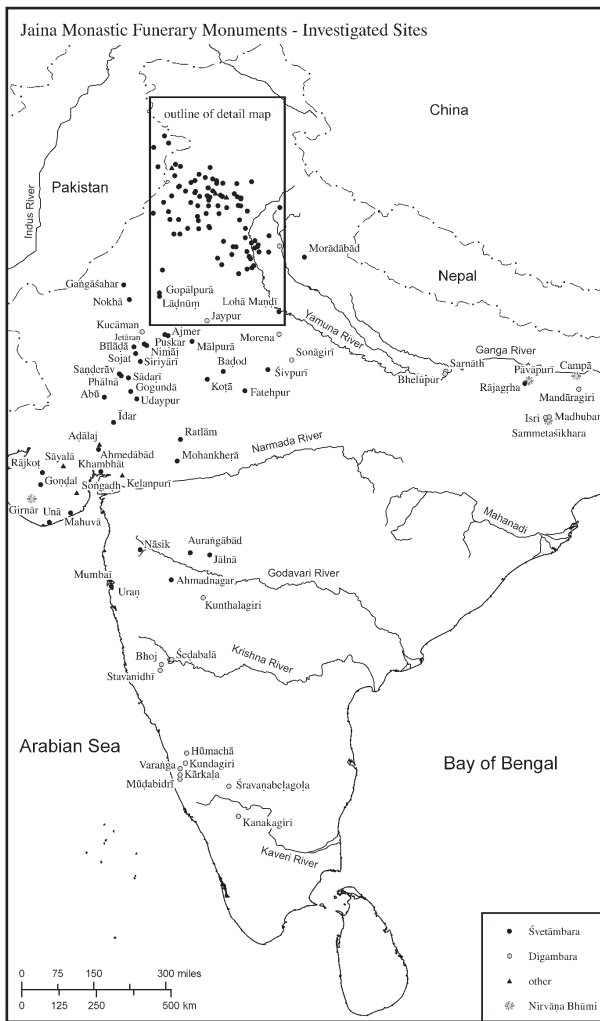
of the Jina, the *samavasaraṇa*. Later, the semantic range of the Jaina term *tīrtha* was extended to permanent Jaina pilgrimage places and shrines, possibly following the example of the pilgrimage places mentioned in the Hindu epics.³ The association of certain places with the legendary five auspicious events, or *pañca-kalyāṇakas*, in the exemplary lives of the twenty-four Jinas, vividly depicted in the Jinacaritra section of the *Kalpasūtra* and later in the Jain-*Purāṇas*, furnished the foundation for the present network of pilgrimage sites. The five auspicious events, including death, are: descent into the womb (*garbhāvataraṇa*), birth (*janma*), renunciation (*niṣkramaṇa*), enlightenment (*kevala-jñāna*) and salvation (*nirvāṇa*). Two types of Jaina pilgrimage places were constructed from early medieval times onwards: *nirvāṇa-bhūmis*, or places of death of the twenty-four Jinas, and *kalyāṇa-bhūmis*, places associated with the remainder of the five auspicious moments. The locations of some of the named sites, such as the birthplace of Mahāvīra, are disputed between Digambaras and Śvetāmbaras, which developed slightly different overlapping networks of pilgrimage centres and sacred geographies. There is agreement, however, that the places of death of the Jinas are the prime Jaina *tīrthas*. The places of conception, where the souls of the Jinas descended from heaven into their mothers' wombs, are rarely marked or targeted by pilgrims.

Following Loṅkā, the aniconic Jaina traditions reject as a matter of principle the sacredness of such, rather arbitrarily identified, sites and similar locations connected with the lives of important *ācāryas* or gods.⁴ In their view, only the scriptural understanding of *tīrtha* as doctrine and community is valid. However, even in the aniconic traditions, at least most of them, it is now customary after cremation of a renowned monk or nun to collect and bury the remaining ashes and charred bones at the cremation site. Usually these *samādhi* places are only marked by a small *cabūtarā*, or funeral platform. But increasingly, not with an elaborate *samādhi*, constructions emerge with *chatrīs* or *sikharas*. Whatever its architectural form, any marked site which harbours bone relics of Jaina mendicants can be characterised as a Jaina *stūpa*.

Numerous Jaina monastic funerary monuments dot the modern landscape of South Asia. Many of them date

3 Non-Jaina or jainised pilgrimage places are mentioned already in the Jaina scriptures. But they are not associated with lives of Jaina saints. The eternal (*anādī*), made by the gods, and man-made (*sādī*) sacred places (*tīrtha*) of Jambūdvīpa, pointed out in *Thāna* 3.105-108, are abodes of guardian deities vanquished by Jaina *cakravartins*.

4 P. Flügel, 'The Unknown Loṅkā: Tradition and the Cultural Unconscious'. In: Caillat, Colette and Balbir, Nalini, (eds.), *Jaina Studies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2008 (Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference Vol. 9), p. 240, n. 234.



to the 11th century CE, or in some cases possibly to the 5th century CE. Significantly, there is no archaeological evidence at all on Jain funeral culture earlier than the famous remnants of the Jain *stūpa* at Mathurā, which may or may not have been a funerary monument. It was dated by G. Bühler, on the basis of an optimistic inference, “several centuries before” an excavated inscription of 156/7 CE.⁵ No indication for a relic cult of the Jinās exists. The mythical *nirvāṇa-bhūmis* of the 24 Jinās have only relatively recently been identified and marked with commemorative shrines. The oldest extant Jain funerary shrines are probably the *niṣidhis*, seats or resting or cremation places, of a Jain ascetic, especially one who performs the death-fast. These are in Southern India. Whether the *niṣidhis* marking the site of the death or cremation of a renowned monk or nun are relic shrines is disputed in the literature. Though in recent years concrete evidence for contemporary Jain relic practices at the location of specific *niṣidhis* or *samādhis* has been published,⁶ archaeological research at sacred sites is not possible, and usually there are no inscriptions or signposts indicating the presence of relics at a particular location. Written sources sometimes point to the collection and burial of relics of well-known ascetics at one or another

site, and this is standard practice today. The resulting uncertainty as to whether a particular funerary monument is a mere commemorative or a relic shrine is not unintentional. Monastic funerary monuments cannot and should not be venerated with confidence for the presumed power of their relics. At the same time the perception is nurtured that the shrines built over the sites of cremation of Jain monks and nuns, in a quasi-vedic manner, are miracle shrines (*camatkāra-smāraka*) worth visiting.

The recent AHRC funded project *Jaina Rituals of Death* produced for the first time a comprehensive survey of Jain *stūpas* in India, that is, *niṣidhis* and *samādhis* constructed at the cremation sites of Jain mendicants. Many of the more recent sites were investigated in detail to confirm the presence or absence of relics, but this was not possible in all cases. Significant is the overall pattern, namely, the existence and current rapid expansion of a third type of multipurpose pilgrimage site with a focus on the sacred remains of deceased Jain monks or nuns, supplementary or alternative to the existing *tīrthas* of the image-worshipping Jain traditions.⁷ These remains are either body relics or contact relics, in particular at the site of cremation itself. Most of the kept pilgrimage circuits are regional and not well organised. Most pilgrims come

5 G. Bühler. ‘New Excavations in Mathurā’. *Vienna Oriental Journal*, 5 (1891) 59-63 (p. 61.f.).

6 P. Flügel. ‘Jaina Relic Stūpas’. *Jaina Studies. Newsletter of the SOAS Centre of Jaina Studies*, 3 (2008) pp. 18-23; P. Flügel. ‘The Jain Cult of Relic Stūpas’. *Numen* 57, 3-4 (2010) 389-504.

7 Cf. G. Schopen. ‘*Stūpa and Tīrtha*: Tibetan Mortuary Practices and an Unrecognized Form of Burial Ad Sanctos at Buddhist Sites in India’. *The Buddhist Forum* 3 (1994) 273-293; P. Flügel. ‘Burial Ad Sanctos at Jain Sites in India’. *International Journal of Jaina Studies (Online)* 7, 4 (2011) 1-37.

individually or accompanied by their immediate family to venerate the *stūpa* for its empowering and wish-fulfilling properties. Only on the day of death of the particular monk or nun collective vigils are held at the more popular sites. These pilgrimage circuits both reflect and bolster the predominance of specific monastic orders in a particular socio-geographical field of activity (*kārya-kṣetra*). Only the presumed sites of death of the Jinas have a global and by definition trans-sectarian reach.

The first of two forthcoming books ensuing from this project focuses on the history, doctrines and organisation of the Sthānakavāsī traditions in Northwest India, and maps, as far as possible, the sectarian, biographical and geographical distribution of their funerary monuments in the Panjab, Hariyana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.⁸ The second volume gives a comprehensive overview of Jain rituals of death and the relic cult in contemporary Jainism.⁹ The first book comprises a complete documentation of the geographic distribution and sectarian affiliation of the monastic funerary monuments of the Loṅkāgaccha and Sthānakavāsī traditions in Northern India. As such it represents a continuation of earlier publications on the history and organisation of the monastic orders of the aniconic Loṅkāgaccha and Sthānakavāsī traditions, published under the designation “protestant and post-protestant Jain reform-movements”. The work focusses on six Sthānakavāsī traditions (*sampradāya*) and their regional links to the Uttarārdha Loṅkāgaccha, the Kharataragaccha, and the Tapāgaccha which was revived by the ex-Sthānakavāsī Pañjāb Sampradāya monk Ācārya Buddhivijaya (Buṭerāy) (1806-1882) and the ex-Sthānakavāsī Gaṅgarām Jīvarāja Sampradāya monk Ācārya Vijayānandasūri (Ātmārām) (1836-1896). It also comprises an almost complete documentation of the biodata of the monks and nuns and the locations of the *samādhis* constructed by these Sthānakavāsī traditions.

The overall geographical distribution of the investigated shrines in Northwest India, most of them confirmed relic *stūpas*, is represented in Figure 1, without details of sectarian affiliation.¹⁰ Figure 2 depicts all Jain monastic funeral monuments in India that were investigated during the course of the almost ten year long project, the last year of which was funded by the AHRC.

Suffice it to say in this brief report that distinct regional pilgrimage circuits, reflecting the main areas of sectarian *vihāras*, are nowadays associated with Jain monastic funerary monuments. Three regions are dominated by Digambara shrines: Bihar and Jharkhand (closely associated with the *nirvāṇa-bhūmis* of most Jinas), coastal and southern Karnataka, and southern Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. The last two regions have the highest concentration of the Digambara population outside the large metropolises. The Mūrtipūjaka *samādhi-mandiras*

are mostly concentrated in Gujarat. As in the case of the Digambara funerary monuments, despite their growing size and opulence, they are still relatively insignificant as pilgrimage sites and remain in the shadow of the temples and temple cities.

The role of the *samādhis* is comparatively greater in the present day Terāpanth and in many, but not all, Loṅkāgaccha and Sthānakavāsī sects, that is, monastic orders and lay following that reject image-worship and temple construction. Next to the fourfold community gathering around the itinerant ascetics, the *samādhis* are here becoming important secondary *tīrthas* in their own right. Some of these networked pilgrimage sites, such as the *samādhis* of the extinct Uttarārdha Loṅkāgaccha in the Panjab, the Terāpanth *samādhis* and those of some of the Sthānakavāsī traditions in Rajasthan, and the highly individualised religious practices associated with them, have been mapped and investigated *in toto*. Though the project covered the area of South Asia as a whole, the same level of detail as in Northwest India concerning in particular the aniconic traditions could not be achieved everywhere. But the survey of the principal sites clearly established that relic *stūpas* have been constructed across the entire spectrum of the principal Jain traditions and function today as secondary *tīrthas* all over India. Instead of the term *tīrtha*, however, most aniconic traditions prefer the designation *aitihāsik sthal*, or historical site.

Acknowledgements

The creation of the unique record of the mortuary cenotaphs in Northwest India was rendered possible through the help of Sādhvī Arcanā and Ācārya Śivmuni and, initially, of Upapravartaka Dineśmuni, all of the Sthānakavāsī Śramaṇasaṅgha. Sādhvī Arcanā on request supplied an almost complete handwritten list of the *stūpas* in Northwest India, to which only a few others were added later. Ācārya Śivmuni gave his blessings for research and furnished further details of lay contacts and information on god/goddess shrines in the region, which are now integrated in the overlapping pilgrimage circuits of the lay followers of the five surviving now interconnected regional monastic traditions of the Śramaṇasaṅgha. Many of the shrines in the area were visited and studied by the author in 2010-2011 with the untiring support of Sohanlāl Sañcetī of Jodhpur and Narendra Sañcetī and Padam Jain of Amritsar. Puruṣottam Jain and Ravīndra Jain of Māler Koṭlā in particular deserve praise for their enthusiastic voluntary work for the project. Through their network of contacts in the region, and journeys personally undertaken, they collected photographs of the shrines and inscriptions as well as supplementary information. Without their help and their freely shared inside knowledge and records of local history the project could not have been accomplished. They effectively co-authored the resulting data set on Jain relic shrines in Northwest India based on the initial list of Sādhvī Arcanā. In the same way, all relic shrines in coastal Karnataka were pointed out by Bhaṭṭāraka Cārukīrti (Mūḍabidī). The project benefitted also from the support of the late Ācārya Mahāprajña of the Terāpanth.

8 P. Flügel, *Die Sthānakavāsī Śvetāmbara Jaina-Orden in Nordindien. Protestantische und Post-Protestantische Jaina-Reformbewegungen. Zur Geschichte und Organisation der Sthānakavāsī VI*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (In Press) (Studies in Oriental Religions 64), ISBN 978-3-447-06714-0.

9 P. Flügel, *Jaina Rituals of Death*. London: Routledge (forthcoming).

10 All maps and tables are by Jan Vietmeier: jan@vietmeier.de, Administrative Boundaries: www.gadm.org. For more detailed maps, see *Jaina Rituals of Death*.