



Seeing Double: The *Tantrāloka*, the Bṛhadīśvara Temple and the History of Medieval Śaivism

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The crowning finial of the Rājarājeśvara Temple in Tanjavur was set in place in 1010 CE; Abhinavagupta completed his *Tantrāloka* while residing on an estate outside of Srinagar about a decade earlier. It goes without saying that these two central monuments of the noontide of what Alexis Sanderson has called the “Śaiva Age” differed radically in their medium, scale, and guiding intentions. Nevertheless, I argue that the realization of these two projects can be usefully understood as complementary, and as one of a series of parallel processes that unfolded in Kashmir and the far South in the medieval period. Both represented major attempts to argue for a totalizing Śaiva vision of the world: social, liturgical, and theological in Abhinava's case; statist, fiscal, and visual-cultural in the case of the great Coḷa temple. In this presentation, I will outline the theoretical orientation of this comparison, suggesting that both projects depended on the transformation of human and nonhuman resources—variously textual, material, and social—and sought to consequentially reshape a pre-existing Śaiva habitus (here following Bourdieu following Panofsky). As an initial comparative exercise, I will focus my attention on the ways in which both monuments sought to regiment both geographical and liturgical space, on the one hand, and how, on the other, they sought to identify and regiment different types of Śaiva persons. The two projects' intended ends differed considerably: Abhinava sought at once to reorient the diversity of Śaiva cults of the Kashmir of his time and to reconceptualize the subjectivity of the individual practitioner; while the society surrounding Rājarāja wished to rearticulate the Tamil country's Śaiva religion in the service of an unprecedented effort at state-making. Yet, seeing them together and relationally can tell us significant things and help us to raise new questions for the study of India's premodern worlds.