

Description for the general public

The main purpose of the present project is creating a thorough study of the concept of so-called “Pāṇḍyaness”, which could be intended as “belonging/related to the Pāṇḍya dynasty”, a Tamil dynasty which dominated major portions of the South of the Indian sub-continent from the 4th to the 17th century CE.

The author of the project aims to investigate the Pāṇḍya phenomenon and to create an interpretation of it based on the study of most relevant examples from the available sources, which range through the mythological, historical, epigraphical and literary texts. The study of this variegated documentation will allow to examine the process of formation and development of Pāṇḍya identity and dynastic auto-perception, which seem to be conceptualised by two different auto-perceptive dynamics: 1) the “Tamilness”, intended as belonging to the Southern indigenous characteristics of the Pāṇḍya dynasty; 2) the “Pan-Indianness”, as conceived as sanctioned by the employment of the Sanskrit language, and then belonging to the so called “Sanskrit cosmopolis”. Considering the present status of the knowledge about the kingdom’s history, which lacks in systematization in the scope of available historical sources, the study of the Pāṇḍya identity and auto-perception is fundamental for the development of the research on the period in question and for a better understanding of it.

The analysis will be conducted based on a survey of the most relevant documents from different periods of the Pāṇḍya history. The project will start from an overall view on the texts belonging to the Caṅkam age (5th century BCE-3rd century CE), most of them connected to the so-called “Tamil heroic poetry”. The study will allow to formulate a descriptive catalogue of the most recurrent ways of the portraiture of kingship at an early stage of dynasty’s development and to observe the mechanisms of the so-called “Tamilness”. The analysis will be implemented by the study of the most representative examples from Tamil and Sanskrit inscriptions of the Early Pāṇḍyas, especially of the genealogical sections, in order to underline the auto-perceptive dynamics of the dynasty and the simultaneous presence of regional and cosmopolitan elements. This step of the research will also permit to observe the evolution of the Pāṇḍya monarchy’s inclination from archaic (or “heroic”) to more developed (“incorporative”) patterns.

After the study on the medieval epigraphical documentation, which will supply further data about the development of the Pāṇḍyan kings’ identity, the following part of the project will be centred on the study of a Tamil textual corpus devoted to the famous cycle of the “Sacred games of Śiva in Madurai” and on observation how Pāṇḍyan kings are there portrayed. The step will be closely linked to the analysis of a little-known Sanskrit *mahākāvya* (“poem”), the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* by Maṇḍalakavi (ca. 16th century CE). The first part of this work, devoted to the celebration of the dynasty, is modelled upon Tamil material, excluding several modifications which were intended to create a new identity of the Pāṇḍya kingdom within the Sanskrit cosmopolis, through the first and genuine divinisation of the sovereign in South India. The last step of the research will be devoted to the analysis of the little studied Later Pāṇḍya inscriptions, in order to trace the last phase of the development of the monarchs’ identity and how the Tamil monarchs perceived their dynastic past.

The Pāṇḍya kingdom showed indeed a surprising continuity, despite the familial changes and incorporation of other Tamil and foreign dynasties’ members. In fact, the available documentation covers a chronological arch of almost fifteen centuries, showing a persistence and development of certain dynastic auto-perceptive motives across times, which clearly denote a strong and conscious relation with the Pāṇḍya past itself. The several scientific publications about this South-Indian dynasty led the author of the project to approach the subject and develop a study which has never been undertaken before.

The general frame and outline of the research on the concept of “Pāṇḍyaness”, apart from creating a new dimension of research, will add a fundamental contribution to the study of the royal ideology in India and, more specifically, in South India, ranking the Pāṇḍyas at the same level of the other more studied Dravidian dynasties.