

Proposal for a paper in section 12, History of Religion, or section 3, Epics and Purāṇas, by

István Keul (Institute for the Study of Religions, Berlin Freie Universität, Germany)

*The Yoginīs in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa of the Skandapurāṇa and in Present-day Vārāṇasī*

Embedded in a long and elaborate narrative cycle dedicated to the rule of the mythical king Divodāsa, the 13th-century Purāṇic story about the arrival of the 64 *yoginīs* in Kāśī is more than a mere mythological backdrop for the presence of these goddesses in the sacred landscape of the city. This sequence of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, which I would like to discuss in detail, not only depicts but decisively contributes to the integration of a wild flock of unorthodox female deities into the stronghold of brahmanic erudition. While the reciprocal inclusion and modification of influential cults is one of the commonplaces in the history of religions, the exact sequences in the development of such processes are not (always) readily perceptible. In this case, however, evidence for a decisive stage in the transformation of a cult has been preserved in a religious text. As Hans Bakker has shown, the intention of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*'s compilers was – following the destruction of Kāśī by the troupes of general Qutb-ud-dīn Aibak at the end of the 12th century and the following “dark 13th century” – the poetic (re)construction of a sacred Hindu space, a place of pilgrimage, a place of deliverance and, at the same time, the abode of all the deities of the pantheon, dominated by the complex figure of Śiva as Viśvanātha, the Lord of the Universe. In my paper, I will argue that – in the process – the *yoginīs* and their cult were integrated into preconceived ritual and spatio-temporal patterns and became divine protectresses of the sacred territory reconstrued in the text. The *yoginī* cult appears to have been tamed, the tradition – at least when seen from the outside – modified and adapted. The analysis of the textual sequence will be followed by a succinct discussion of selected places of *yoginī* worship in present-day Vārāṇasī. The topic of the paper proposed for the conference is part of an ongoing research project on *yoginī* worship (in past and present), as well as on the polysemy of the term “*yoginī*” and its contexts.