Performing Imagined Spaces
The River Temple Culture of Central Kerala

Gastvortrag von
Dr. habil. Cezary Galewicz, Jagiellonian University, Krakow

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A centuries old Viṣṇu temple located by the green river Pampa in the southern part of central Kerala boasts two equally famous names: The Pārthasārathi Perumāḷ Kōil in Tiruvāranvilai or the Pārthasārathikṣētram of Āṟanmuḷa. The same divine location happens to have been entangled not only in two but in a number of contradicting narratives expressing and articulating several alternative concepts of sacred space order. When taken together, they make the location of Āṟanmuḷa a nodal point for several spatial imagination networks of places of special status. All of them articulate, support and amplify historical and present relations of power and authority of local, regional, transregional and pan-Indian character. They also record stories and galvanize cyclically recreated performances that for centuries used to furnish different communities with distinct identities and gave sense to the lives of their members. Some of these recurring stories and performances focus on the river and water adding a specific flavour to the temple life and temple culture of the place and the region.