

GREAT TEMPLE TO VISHNU ON THE SRIRANGAM ISLAND, NEAR TRICHINOPOLY.

The earliest known examples of Dravidian architecture are at Mahavallipur (Seven Pagodas), which with one exception (the Alaiva or Shore Temple) date from A.D. 650 to 700, and are cut out of the solid rock, being isolated structures with no enclosures. Mr. Fergusson calls these Rathas "the petrifications of the last forms of Buddhist architecture and of the first forms of that of the Dravidians." The oblong Rathas became Gopurams or Gates, the square Rathas Vimanahs or Sanctuaries, and both continued to be copied, together with their details, to a late period. The rock-cut caves, with their monolithic pillars, appear to have been the precursors of the many-pillared halls, or mandapas, of Southern India, and are curiously like the rock-cut tombs and temples of Egypt and Nubia. The Alaiva Temple at Mahavallipur illustrates the growth of the style and is a structural temple probably dating A.D. 800 to 900, the sanctuary being surrounded by an outer wall, whilst an enclosure buried in the sand has recently been discovered to the west of the building.

Mr. Fergusson has touched on the similarities between the Egyptian and Dravidian Temples. He says—"It may be mentioned that the Gopuras, both in form and purpose, resemble the pylons of the Egyptian temples. The courts, with pillars and cloisters, are common to both and very similar in arrangement and extent. The Great Mandapas and Halls of 1,000 columns reproduce the Hypostyle Halls, both in purpose and effect, with almost minute accuracy. The absence of any central tower, or Vimanah, over the sanctuary in Egypt is only conspicuously violated in one instance in India (Tanjore). Their mode of aggregation and the amount of labour bestowed upon them for labour's sake is only too characteristic of both styles." Whilst questioning the accident of this resemblance, Mr. Fergusson considers the interval of time so great as to negative the idea that the features of Dravidian temples were imported from Egypt; but, looking to the intercourse between the two countries certainly existing in remote ages, he allows that seed may have been sown which fructified long afterwards.

Beyond mere name, is there any origin common to the Egyptian king and conqueror Rhamses and to the Indian god and hero Rama? We know that the temple of the former—the Ramesseion at Thebes—was laid out on principles followed at Rameshvaram, the temple of Rama in the extreme south of Madras. Again, the resemblance between the eagle-headed Garuda, or vehicle and companion of Vishnu, and the bird-headed figures of Egypt, Horus and Thot, also between the grotesque winged lions of Nimroud in Assyria and the monster Yalis or griffins of the Madras Porches, seems to indicate the origin of some of the features of the Vishnu faith. The designs of the temple jewels at Rameshvaram and Madura suggest antique origin, particularly pendants of single and double-headed Garudas or birds with outstretched wings, in solid gold, studded with precious stones. These resemble some beautiful Egyptian jewels of gold, incrusting with enamel and stones, which represent birds with outspread wings holding in their talons the emblems of eternity.

The great temple on the Srirangam Island, formed by the Kaveri and Kolerún rivers, is over 4 miles north of the Trichinopoly civil station. A plan (A.D. 1688) shows a pagoda on the present site, but nothing to indicate the disposition of the buildings, or whether the present enclosure walls then existed. Mr. Fergusson states that all the main parts of the temple belong to the first half of the 18th century, and this is probably correct in respect of the superstructures of the Pyramid Gates, which are of brick, plastered in a very florid style. But some of the stone basements of these huge structures have a more ancient look. The rampant horses in Plates 55 and 56 bear a resemblance to those in the Vellore Temple (A.D. 1350), and to those at the entrance to Trimal Nayakkan's Choultry at Madura (A.D. 1645). A comparison of some of the details in the third and fourth enclosures (see Plate 59, Column H, and Plate 62, Column F) with those in the rock-cut temples and caves at Mahavallipur (650—700 A.D.) show how ancient forms were reproduced in later and more elaborate buildings.

Viswanatha Nayakkan, one of the kings of Madura, took possession of Trichinopoly about A.D. 1559 and built part of the Srirangam temple, but Mr. Lewis Moore tells us in his Trichinopoly Manual that he certainly did not build the oldest portions. The Tamil manuscripts state that Trimal Nayakkan (A.D. 1623—1659) constructed 96 Rayar Gopurams, of which some were in Srirangam. Vijaya Ranga Choka (A.D. 1705—1731), the last of the Nayakkans, appears to have largely endowed the temple, but shortly after both the pagodas of Srirangam and Jambuishwar were occupied by the troops of Chanda Sahib and the French, until the English and their Mahratta allies under Lawrence, Clive, and Monakji obliged them to capitulate. Both temples continued to be used as encampments during the wars between the English and French up to the end of the 18th century, when Trichinopoly was transferred to the British Government.

The late Dr. Burnell held the opinion that all the great Madras temples to Vishnu were erected in the 12th and 13th centuries, and that Krishnaraya (1509—1530 A.D.) built the great Gopurams at Conjeveram, Chillambaram, and Srirangam to form fortifications to protect the shrines from foreign invaders.