

The Death of a Friend:
Companionship, Loyalty and Affiliation in Chola South India

Daud Ali

This paper argues that the languages of loyalty and affiliation that marked public and formal relations of service and hierarchy in medieval India, though traditionally understood as thinly veiled pretexts for class exploitation or self-aggrandizement, may instead be interpreted, when combined with other sorts of sources, as elements within a larger ethical landscape where men of rank shared varieties of companionship and intimacy with one another. The paper will enter this realm of intimacy through an exploration of the emotions of grief and loss in two strangely parallel Chola-period friendships: one epigraphically documented to the tenth century, and the other recounted in an important contemporary hagiographical tradition. The paper argues not only for the importance of male friendship and intimacy in the political and religious life of elites in medieval south India, it also suggests that fragmented memories of particular lived experiences between individuals may have been embedded in or triggered by more idealized representations. I hope to suggest that there were not only structures of affect at work in the constitution of male intimacy, but models and paradigms as well.