A Shatrunjaya ‘Tirtha Pata’: a Monumental Jain Pilgrimage Painting in the Ethnographic Museum, Antwerp, Belgium

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ABSTRACT: This ‘tirtha pata’ or pilgrimage painting depicts in bird’s-eye view the most sacred of all Jain pilgrimage sites, the holy mountain of Shatrunjaya, near Palitana in Gujarat, India. Once a year this kind of topographical painting is displayed at a temple or other suitable location for devotees to worship. This serves as a surrogate for those unable to make the pilgrimage to the site itself. It is evident from the damage it has suffered that this ‘pata’ has a history of intensive use. Dismantling the ‘pata’ revealed fragments of earlier borders and lining, as well as parts of the painting that had been sewn into the binding of the left and right edges. This binding was reconstructed in such a way as to make the entire painting visible once more. The badly deformed cloth was relaxed with cold steam. Abrasion to the surface paint layer gave the ‘pata’ more the feel of a textile than a painted canvas. Therefore it was decided to consolidate the holes by a sewing technique, rather than the more traditional Indian method of backing them with canvas applied with starch adhesive.

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