

The Secret Map of Varanasi by Adam Chalupski and Pilgrims Book House.

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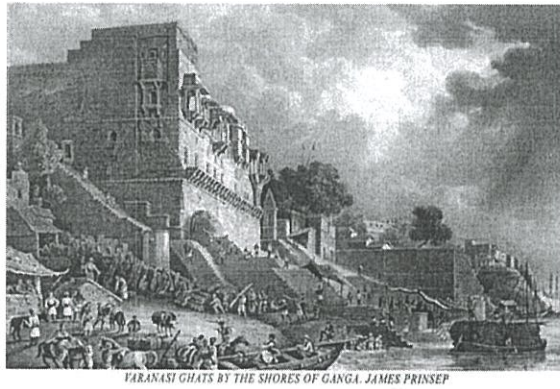
Almost 200 years ago when India was dominated by The British Empire, a young British scholar trained as an architect, named James Prinsep, traveled to India where he took a position as an assay master in the local mint. According to the records, in his short but extremely busy life, he has achieved a great success contributing to many unknown aspects of Indian history and culture. Today, he is commemorated with great respect by "the children of Shiva" - as they call the citizens of holy city of Varanasi by the Ganga river.



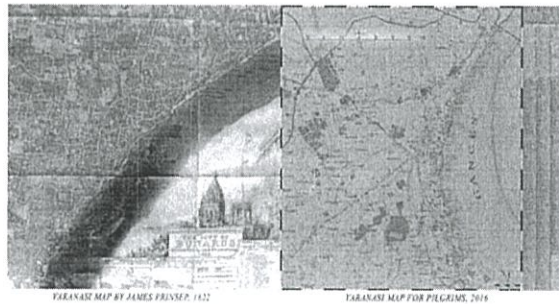
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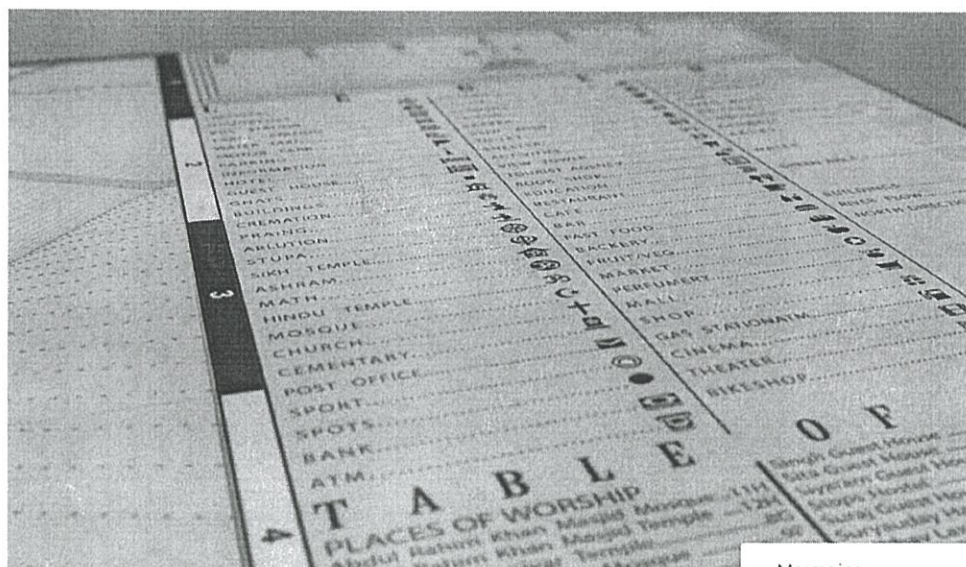
According to the legends Varanasi was founded by the most powerful deity - Lord Shiva, moreover, Buddha gave his first sermon and founded Buddhism here. The earliest settlements date to 2000 B.C, however even today its narrow and chaotic alleys full of people and animals moving through the smoky breeze of immolated bodies keep me thinking that this city belongs more to the legends rather than to the real world. Here, in a search for profound spiritual experience, thousands of domestic and foreign pilgrims are coming every year. But most of them follow the main commercial paths, trying not to get lost... and this however, condemn the true city to oblivion.



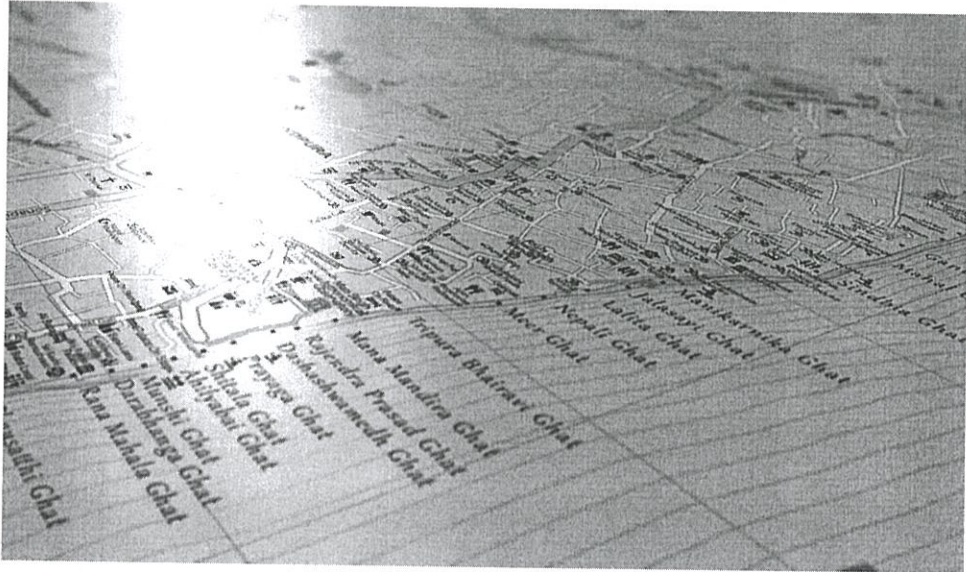
It was Prinsep who, thanks to his great talent, captured dreamlike city in his drawings, later preserved as a lithographs. His curiosity and eye for detail helped to create one of the best cartographic documentation of the *Benares* from his times. Obviously, since British Colonies presence, city have grown outwards covering suburbs with concrete and slums but - what I found amazing - the core remained almost intact; as complex and mysterious as it use to be. You could walk through this urban labyrinth for a days but sooner you'd step on the holy cow dung rather then find your street on the google maps.



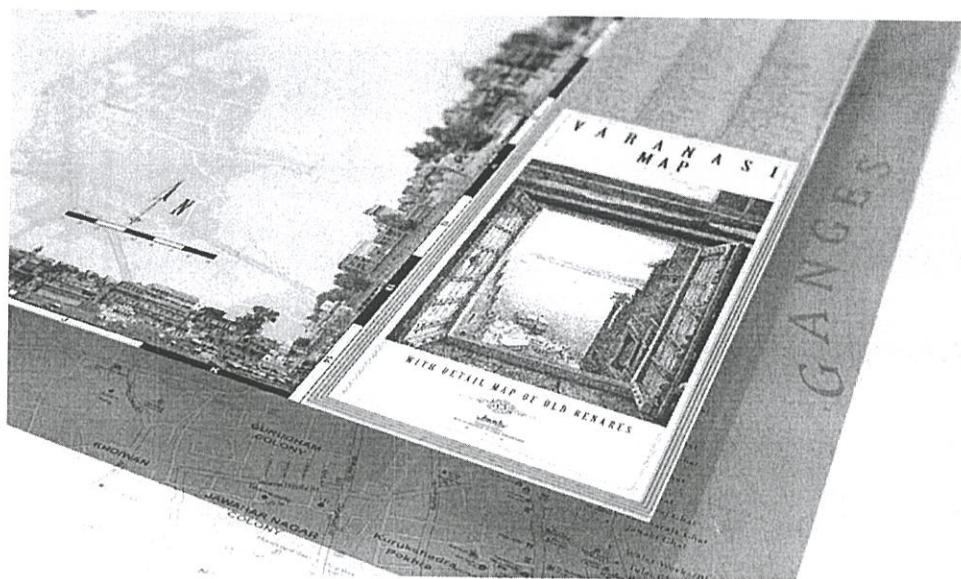
Undoubtedly, Google will eventually complete the blank spots on the maps (or Users will do it for Google instead) but even so, as a commercial open system it will remain overloaded with commercial garbage. Nonetheless, in India, where poverty haunts a large part of society, smartphones are not so common among the pilgrims looking for small temples, street markets, cheap food and reasonable accommodation. There isn't any paper map either, anything that would highlight places other than pricey hotels, shopping malls and other "big guys" which you don't need a map to know they're there.



It was an owner of the local publishing book shop who brought an idea to create the map that will cast the new light onto the unknown aspects of *Benares*; a local filantrop, someone with great love to the city - the man named Ramanand Tiwari. The person responsible for consultation was Ajay Pandey - the local academic researcher specializing in history and culture of Varanasi who collaborates with Harvard University researchers, and runs numerous of lectures in European and Asian universities. Our principle was to redirect local economy towards small, non-commercial business and to highlight forgotten places.



I begun to collect data and resources, photograph the city, experiment with layouts and scale but the most challenging part was related with spatial measurements; the use of GPS system in *urban canyons* brings a lot of difficulties. Working whole days outdoor, in narrow, airless alleys, during one of the hottest months, makes you feel like boiling from the inside, nevertheless, I was able to spiral down into the kernel of the holy city and see unforgettable views. Sometimes alleys were so narrow that I could hardly drag myself to the other side, but at the end, I was discovering another lively square, full of pigs and oxen wallowing on the wet dirt - all in the downtown area.



All collected data had to be scrupulously processed, repeatedly converted between the formats and finally allocated onto the appropriate layers. As an effect, we have the map

which is roughly 20% more accurate compared to digital map systems like Open Street Maps or Google Maps. It contains few hundreds of unique places and objects. The map is currently being checked by local specialist and finalize with help of graphic designers. In the near future we can expect the first edition of the Secret Map of Varanasi.