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Malini Ambach

Multifarious Sacred Geographies

Kanchipuram Through Its
Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas



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**Multifarious Sacred
Geographies**

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Abbreviations

KV	<i>Kāmākṣīvilāsa</i>
KM(Ś)	<i>Kāñcīmāhātmya</i> (Śaiva)
KM(V)	<i>Kāñcīmāhātmya</i> (Vaiṣṇava)
MW	Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Monier-Williams 1899)
PW	Sanskrit-Wörterbuch (Böhtlingk 1855–1875)
TL	Tamil Lexicon (University of Madras 1924–1936)

Remarks on Transliteration and Translation

Transliteration

Sanskrit words are transliterated according to the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliterations (IAST) and comply with standard academic conventions. Words in Tamil are transliterated following the Tamil Lexicon (TL; 1924–1936). For a precise reading of the transliterated words, the following table indicates instances in which the same diacritic mark signifies different consonants in the Tamil and in the Sanskrit—Devanagari and Telugu scripts—transliteration conventions:

	Sanskrit in Devanagari	Sanskrit in Telugu script	Tamil
ḷ	vocalic consonant ऌ	retroflex lateral approximant ఌ	retroflex lateral approximant ள
ḷ	retroflex lateral approximant ळ		retroflex approximant ள

Names of deities are written in scholarly transcription (Viṣṇu, Yathoktakārī). For languages, scripts, historical persons, and dynasties, as well as toponyms (cities, states, rivers, mountains) the modern names in non-scholarly transcription are used (Kanchipuram, Ramanuja).

The Sanskrit primary sources mention various sacred places. Many of these sites may be identified with historical places, often still in existence.¹ For immediate distinction and reading ease, the very spelling of the toponym signals whether the particular name refers to a place mentioned in the source text or to an actual historical, that is, historically documented, place. Hence, the names of places found in the texts are reproduced the way they appear in the primary sources, that is, in transcription from Sanskrit (or rarely Tamil) with diacritic marks (Pāṇḍavadūta, Kāñcī). For the nowadays

1 The phrasing *historical* is borrowed from Melanie Conroy’s distinction of literary places (2021, 6). She uses the term “historical” for those places from the literary sources whose existence can also be proven in historical documents, while those for which this is not possible are “nonhistorical.” For details, see subsection 1.3.2.

existing sites, the modern Tamil names are given in scholarly transcription, corresponding to the spelling in Tamil script as found on temple signboards (Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ, Kaccapēsvarar; see the appendix and the index of this book).

Use of the terms *Sthalamāhātmya* and *Māhātmya*

The glorifying texts on Kanchipuram dealt with in this book belong to the broader genre of *Māhātmyas* (glorifications), an integral part of the Purāṇic literature. More specifically, they belong to the subcategory of *Sthalamāhātmyas*, glorification (*māhātmya*) of a place (*sthala*). The texts on Kanchipuram are less specific and call themselves only *Māhātmya* and not *Sthalamāhātmya*. For better readability and in recognition of the texts' own terminology, I follow a two-part use of the two terms. In the general chapters 1, 2, parts of chapters 3 (up to and including section 3.2), and chapter 7, I use the designation *Sthalamāhātmya* / *Sthalamāhātmyas* to denote texts from the subcategory of *Sthalamāhātmyas*; in those chapters and sections that specifically and exclusively deal with the glorifying texts on Kanchipuram, chapters 3 (from section 3.3), 4, 5, and 6, I use *Māhātmya* / *Māhātmyas* as designation for the (*Sthalamāhātmya*) texts.

Translation

Unless otherwise stated, translations from the primary sources are my own. Narratives summarised from these texts are in a synoptic present tense.

1 Introduction

When walking through the streets of Kanchipuram, every few metres one almost inevitably comes across a shrine, a temple, or a temple tank. With the exterior walls of these sites often painted in red-and-white vertical stripes, as is typical in South India, they constitute physical representations of places that are accorded particular significance in Hindu India. In Kanchipuram, or Kanchi, a temple city in the northern part of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, one may thus find many Hindu religious sites: over four hundred smaller and larger temples and shrines as well as several dozen temple tanks, all of which, when taken together, form a particularly pluralistic religious landscape. Such a dense and extensive arrangement of the temples is not merely a characteristic of Kanchi but is indeed considered unique among other South Indian temple cities (Stein 2021, 106). The local temples and shrines are places of worship and several of them constitute pilgrimage sites of pan-regional renown.

Notions about Kanchipuram and its sacred sites are presented in the glorifying Sanskrit texts called Sthalamāhātmyas, meaning glorification (*māhātmya*) of a place (*sthala*). These texts are important sources for the understanding of historical developments and the formation of the Hindu traditions (Bakker 1990b, 2–3), and there are several such glorifying texts on Kanchi. They recount etiological myths about the origin of specific places in the city, places that are considered sacred, they justify their sacredness, and praise the powers attributed to them. Myths have served and continue to serve as a means of relating to and understanding the world, in particular as the interpretations, explanations and the creation of meaning of relationships that cannot be grasped entirely by conceptual abstraction or predictability (Jamme and Matuschek 2014, 13). In the Sthalamāhātmyas, myths provide the local places and their particularities with a history, meaning, and significance (Hüsken 2017, 68).

When pertaining to sites of religious significance, a world where mythology and geography meet may be termed “sacred geography” (Eck 1998). As Diana Eck states in her work on the Hindu landscape constituted of pilgrimage places, “[b]oth mythology and topography provide for people and cultures the ‘maps’ of the world” (1998, 186). In these maps, the physically

tangible world is given a sacred meaning. The Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi provide such an orientation to the city by describing its sacred geography. The texts clearly refer to the historical city and its religious sites, temples and sacred water bodies, and interpret the religious landscape. Their built structures, such as temples, are, though, of subordinate relevance in the Sthalamāhātmyas; the places are acknowledged because of a significance that is considered to be inherent to the places themselves. By mapping selected places to which the text attaches particular significance, the perspective of a certain religious tradition unfolds.

From the larger corpus of Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, three are discussed in this book (see subsection 1.3.1). The three texts are exemplars of the three major Hindu traditions—Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava. These are represented by the three temples in the city that have emerged through the centuries as the largest and the most prominent in the city (Hudson 1993, 20). The largest Śaiva temple is the Ēkāmparanātar temple and the Śaiva *Kāñcimāhātmya* highlights the significance of Ekāmranātha, the principal deity of this temple. The Kāmākṣi Amman temple is the largest Śākta temple and the Śākta-framed *Kāmākṣivilāsa* pays most attention to the goddess Kāmākṣi, the main deity residing in that temple. In the Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, Varadarāja is the main deity and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcimāhātmya* focuses on him. The coexisting traditions of Śaivas, Śāktas, and Vaiṣṇavas have shaped and negotiated Kanchi's religious landscape over centuries (Hüsken 2017; Srinivasan 1979, 231–279; Seshadri 2003, 29–39). Each of them is characterised by a rich yet distinct tradition of textual transmission. The Sthalamāhātmyas are thus a textual reflection of the city's religiously pluralistic environment, constituting moreover “important sources for the diverse sectarian interpretations of Kāñcipuram as sacred space” (Hüsken 2017, 68).

Each Sthalamāhātmya presents a unique perspective on Kanchi, which results in the presence of three parallel interpretations drawn from the three texts. Discussing them side by side allows to explore the shared and the divergent notions of the same sacred space. This approach can be seen in the light of glorifying texts being “highlighted as means to implement and adapt previous material and knowledge about sacred places in new social, political and historical contexts” (Lazzaretti 2016, 122, in reference to Smith 2007, 2 and Pinkney and Acri 2014). Studying Sthalamāhātmyas thus enables an in-depth analysis of the dynamic dimensions and the composite character of the local sacred space Kanchi.

Sthalamāhātmyas as a genre may be categorised as an integral part of the Purāṇic literature. They are local texts that reflect a local perspective on a

particular sacred place or places, and local ritual practices. At the same time, they maintain a trans-local reference by presenting localised renditions of the well-known Purāṇic mythological motifs and referring to a larger sacred geography, with preference for the local over the supra-regional (Hüsken 2017, 67–68). Like the Purāṇas in general, the Sthalamāhātmyas reflect a religiosity that differs from the earlier one—Vedic, orthodox, Brahminical. The Vedic tradition “involved worship of gods without places and was a religion of placelessness,” while the Purāṇic Hindu traditions constitute a “religion of sacred places, places associated with particular manifestations of divine power” (Jacobsen 2013, 70). In the Purāṇic Hindu traditions, the deities were thought to permanently reside at particular sites and be accessible there for worship in visible form (Jacobsen 2013, 57). Building on this idea, pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) had become equal to a sacrifice as a meritorious religious practice and a means to salvation (Ensink 1979, 106).² Some Sthalamāhātmyas seem to be commenting on this development, as can be seen in the texts on Kanchi. The frame-stories in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcī-māhātmya* and the Śaiva *Kāñcī-māhātmya* tell how the sages discuss which means are best suited to attain liberation by seeing Viṣṇu respectively Śiva, and the conclusion is to visit sacred places dear to Viṣṇu or Śiva. With pilgrimage, salvation was no longer considered the privilege of the brahmins but was in principle attainable to everyone, regardless of gender and class, by visiting sacred places (Jacobsen 2013, 23). At these sites, the link to the divine was (and still is) thought to be stronger (Eck 2012, 7). Sthalamāhātmyas emerged as an expression of these transformed circumstances and

their importance lies in the fact that they represent the more accessible level of textual material for devotees and sacred specialists, who can easily use them as they select, filter and retell mythological narrations to convey new meanings. (Lazzaretti 2016, 122)

The myths were important means to transfer the notion about the efficacious powers of the sacred places, which are said to be affected by religious practices such as taking a ritual bath—or hearing about the greatness (*māhātmya*) of the site (Nath 2009, 171, 174). By emphasising the religious significance of a particular site and extolling it through various

2 Attested by passages on pilgrimage found in the *Mahābhārata*, the practice of pilgrimage was adopted in Brahminical, orthodox traditions from the first centuries CE (Ensink 1976, 72 and 1979, 110–111). The Purāṇas date a little later, from the early fourth to the early sixth century, with modifications being made until the early medieval times (Flood 1997, 110).

myths, Sthalamāhātmyas generally aim to attract pilgrims and patronage that would also result in economic profits for the (temple) priests and functionaries at the site in question (Dutta 2010, 31–32, 36; Ambach et al. 2022b, 3). Each text is thus a representative of a particular site, be it a single place such as a temple, or a larger area, such as a city housing several sites. In their local anchoring, Sthalamāhātmyas are prime representatives of the religion of place of the Purāṇic Hindu traditions.

The Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi as a whole may be dated to the pre-modern times. A historical categorisation of Sthalamāhātmyas remains in most cases an unresolved issue as the Purāṇic texts are usually de-temporalised. They make a timeless claim to truth (Bisschop 2011, 3), with the authorship being attributed to divine characters and the stories about the origin of sacred places set in a mythic past. In the case of the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, Ute Hüsken's assessment "that most were composed after the fourteenth century" (2017, 67) offers an initial orientation, with recent research by Jonas Buchholz (2022, 2025) as well as this book discussing details that substantiate this.

While dealing with the past, the Sthalamāhātmyas are still of relevance today. There is continuity in several aspects, in particular in reference to geography and mythology. The temples in contemporary Kanchi are often still known under the names given to the places in the texts and are found at the same location as indicated by the Sthalamāhātmyas. Additionally, the stories about the origin of a temple told by the priests when visiting the *sacrum sanctorum* and/or the place myth found on stone slabs in the temple today often seem to draw on the myth(s) of origin of the particular site found in one or even several Sthalamāhātmya texts. Similarly, conceptions about the relationships between the local deities are expressed and mediated in the texts and events from the mythological stories are re-enacted and interpreted in the contemporary ritual practice (Hüsken 2017, 69; Schier 2018). Sthalamāhātmyas thus enable a very specific approach to different nuances of preserving and transmitting collective memory over long periods of time. They represent and also shape the local religious landscape of Kanchi.

The core of the glorifying texts constitutes the interpretative exposition of the local sacred geography. For a study of sacred geography, Kanchipuram is particularly useful for a variety of reasons: with a continuous settlement since ca. 300 BCE, the city has one of the longest uninterrupted histories of any city in South India (Raman 1987, 67–68; Heitzman and Rajagopal 2004, 239) during which a multifocal religious space emerged simultaneously with the growth of the city; the city's temples are set in a unique urban layout, with the three largest dominating the scene (Stein 2021, 106–108). Moreover,

Kanchi houses a decidedly pluralistic religious landscape, a vibrant ritual and festival scene with over four hundred temples and other places of worship shaped by the Hindu traditions of Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and Śāktas, as well as Jains and, in early times, Buddhists (Hüsken 2017; Srinivasan 1979, 231–279; Seshadri 2003, 29–39; Schier 2018, 10). Together, these elements make Kanchipuram “probably the most complex of Tamil temple towns” (Schier 2018, 10). As reflection of the rich religious landscape, there is not only one but several Sthalamāhātmya texts that describe, interpret, and shape the sacred space of the city. Approaching the three of them in a comparative manner allows for comprehensive, multi-perspective insights into this multifarious universe.

1.1 State of Research

For a long time, the study of the Purāṇas—and with it, of the Sthalamāhātmyas—has received limited attention in scholarship, although the corpus of the relevant texts is extensive. Main reasons for this state of affairs could be the almost exclusively local distribution and the prevailing view among Sanskrit philologists that the texts of the entire genre of the Māhātmyas are of a supposedly little literary merit (Wiig 1981, 1–2; Rocher 1986, 5–13). The most detailed study of the Māhātmyas has been undertaken by Linda Wiig (1981); a few sections on the Māhātmyas, providing a general overview, can be further found in publications on Indian literature (Gonda 1977, 277–283; Rocher 1986, 70–72); in addition, selected Sthalamāhātmya texts have been studied individually, mostly dealing with places in North and East India (Bakker 1990a, 1996; Bisschop 2016, 2021; Jacques 1962; Lochtefeld 2010; Malik 1993; Smith 2007; Littunen 2022). Sthalamāhātmyas about South Indian sites, however, have received even less attention so far (Kulke 1969, 1970; Czerniak-Drożdżowicz and Sathyanarayanan 2022; Dębicka-Borek 2019, 2022, 2023), which leaves much potential for future research.

Moreover, texts in the style of Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas also exist in other (South) Indian languages. The largest number constitute a body of texts composed in Tamil and called Talapurāṇams (stories of places).³ The

3 Talapurāṇams are often intimately connected to Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas, claiming to have a Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya as their source (Buchholz 2022, 13). However, as Jonas Buchholz notes (2023a, 388), this close connection between Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas and their Tamil counterparts, is—with few exceptions—often not taken into account in scholarly studies. This means that

glorifying texts on Kanchipuram exist both in Sanskrit and Tamil. With seven texts available in printed editions and even more in the manuscript form, their number is comparatively large, considering that they all deal with a single place (Buchholz 2022, 11). This textual situation is exceptional and therefore offers a particularly promising starting point for comparative research. It is precisely this approach that is taken in this book when comparing the concepts of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the three Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas.

In recent years, the Sanskrit and Tamil glorifying texts have increasingly become the focus of scholarship on Kanchipuram. For a long time, research on the city addressed itself to its history as the capital of the Pallava kings and an important centre during the following dynasties ruling in the region (Foulkes 1889; Gopalan 1928; Mahalingam 1969; Srinivasan 1979), and the city's temples in the light of their art history and architecture (Minakshi 1954; contributions in Krishna 1992; Seshadri 2003; Nagaswamy 2011). Individual temples, in particular those with an exceptional architecture and iconography and/or of major religious significance (Venkataraman 1973; Raman 1975; Varadatatacharya 1978; Wilke 1996; Hudson 2008a, 2008b; Kaimal 2005, 2020; Krishna 2014; Rajarajan 2015–2016), as well as archeological studies and inscriptions (Rao 1915; Jouveau-Debreuil 1919; Raman 1987; Pisipaty 2011) were the topic of several publications. Of particular relevance for the analysis of Kāñcī's sacred geography from the Sthalamāhātmyas are the available publications on the development of the cityscape and urban geography (Hudson 1993; Heitzman 2001; Heitzman and Rajagopal 2004; Stein 2015, 2021, 2022), since the texts refer to the spatiality of the city.

In the last two decades, there has been increased research on the ritual and festival traditions of Kanchipuram and their performative aspects (Hüsken 2007, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2022, 2023, 2025; Ilkama 2018, 2021, 2022, 2023; Schier 2013, 2018, 2021, 2022).⁴ Besides, some motifs and narratives from the texts have been dealt with in individual studies

there is a considerable scope for further research in the combined consideration of texts in Sanskrit and local languages.

4 Research carried out within the framework of the subproject "Initiation, Priesterweihe, Tempelfest—Ritualtraditionen in der südindischen Tempelstadt Kanchipuram" (Initiation, Ordination to Priesthood, Temple Festivals—Ritual Traditions in the South Indian Temple City of Kanchipuram) of the Collaborative Research Project (Sonderforschungsbereich) "Ritual Dynamics" at Heidelberg University, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) from 2002 to 2013 and headed by Ute Hüsken, marked the beginning.

(Porcher 1985; Moßner 2008; Schier 2018; Dębicka-Borek 2019; lkama 2012, 2023).⁵

Research on Kanchipuram's glorifying texts under multifaceted perspectives was further intensified with the launch of the project Temple Networks in Early Modern South India: Narratives, Rituals, and Material Culture at Heidelberg University⁶ and is continued in the ongoing long-term research unit Hindu Temple Legends in South India at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (since 2022; headed by Ute Hüsken). Among recent publications resulting from research conducted within these frameworks is an edited volume on South Indian sacred sites in their capacity as connected places (Ambach et al. 2022a), an examination of the particular links of the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* to its source, the Sanskrit Śaiva *Kāñcī-māhātmya*, in context of the general relationship of Tamil Talapurāṇams to Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas (Buchholz 2023a), and a study of the Āti Atti Varatar Vaipavam festival, which is celebrated once every forty years at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple in Kanchipuram (Hüsken 2023). As preliminary work on my doctoral dissertation, I looked into the mythological stories about the sacred water body Sarvatīrtha / Carvatīrttam in Kanchi from three Sthalamāhātmyas to explore their spatial layout of Kāñcī (Ambach 2022).

1.2 Research Questions

Although there are individual publications on selected aspects—mainly myths—that are dealt with in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchipuram, there has not yet been any significant research into the sacred geographies laid out in the texts, be it for a single text or for several texts in a comparative perspective. The present study addresses this gap and undertakes an in-depth analysis of the sacred geography of Kāñcī on the basis of three glorifying Sanskrit texts about the city. As a comparative perspective, such as the one adopted in this book, highlights, they all refer to the same spatially

5 Moreover, some publications have looked at selected motifs from the local narratives based on the Tamil texts (Dessigane et al. 1964; Shulman 1980; Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1987).

6 This project was funded by the German Research Foundation, 2019–2022. The principal investigators were Ute Hüsken and Jonas Buchholz.

delimited area and the same conceptual construct, Kanchi, but show considerable differences depending on sectarian orientation, context and focus.⁷

Fundamentally, this book explores the relationship between the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi and the religious landscape of the South Indian temple city. Looking at each of the three texts individually, I examine: i) how the sacred landscape of Kāñcī is imagined and constructed, which places are named and given significance, and what structural and characteristic elements define its spatial concept; ii) how and to what extent the physical geography, spatial particularities of the religious landscape and the urban space, and related spatial conceptions of the historical city are integrated into the perspectives on Kāñcī; and, iii) expanding on the previous aspect, how the depiction of Kāñcī from the Sthalamāhātmya reflects its sectarian orientation and a possible spatial agenda, and how it engages with the pluralistic religious landscape of the city, particularly sites associated with other religious traditions. Furthermore, a comparative perspective on the designs of Kāñcī's sacred landscape in all three Sthalamāhātmyas is introduced to contextualise them within the local religious landscape, history, and geography.

Discussing the above-mentioned aspects gives first of all insights into the rich Kanchipuram Sthalamāhātmyas tradition. By approaching the texts from the angle of spatiality—a perspective that is often still neglected in studies of literature (Piatti 2008, 21)—the book sheds light on the concept of Kanchi as sacred space through the lens of three Sthalamāhātmya texts. While set in mythical, ahistorical times, Sthalamāhātmyas are assumed to be shaped by the geo-temporal context to which their composers referred (Dutta 2010, 32; Gonda 1977, 278). The texts on Kanchi thus allude not only to the historical city Kanchi in general but also to specific historical settings and developments. With their compositions presumably dating to different centuries, they relate to different phases in the life of the historical place and thus attest to historical developments within the city's diverse religious landscape. As I show in chapters 4, 5, and 6, the Sthalamāhātmyas thus present parallel but not necessarily temporally concurrent conceptions and interpretations of the city and its unique religious landscape, referring to and representing the diachronic aspect of the historical place and space. Furthermore, each text stands for one of the different religious traditions

7 Throughout this book, I use *sectarian (traditions)* to refer to the various Hindu religious traditions, in the most general sense to the major strands of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Śāktism, as part of “a synthesis of originally discrete religions that gradually came to be situated under the umbrella of a unified Hindu religion in the early second millennium” (Fisher 2017, 31).

that share Kanchipuram's space, as well for its own distinct tradition of textual transmission. Looking at their Śaiva, Śākta, or Vaiṣṇava perspectives as testimonies of Kanchi's pluralistic religious landscape and viewing them in parallel allows for a comprehensive exploration of the conception, construction, and consolidation of Kanchi as the multifarious sacred place it became and still is.

1.3 Methodology and Textual Sources

This book is primarily a textual study of the Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya texts on Kanchipuram. It discusses the sacred geography of Kāñcī expressed in these texts through both inner-textual and comparative approaches. A cross-textual perspective is enabled by the existence of more than one Sthalamāhātmya on Kanchipuram, three of which are analysed here. Their portrayals construct literary geographies of the city with its numerous sacred places. Accordingly, the analysis of the places and spatial concepts mentioned in the texts is the core element. To this end, extracting the geography-related data from the Sthalamāhātmyas, mapping and visualising it, and lastly interpreting the cartographic representations are the required steps, as Barbara Piatti has pointed out in reference to the discussion of literary geographies (2008, 52, in reference to Moretti 1999, 25). The resulting literary-geographical maps allow not only to illustrate what is described in the texts and discern patterns of the geographies emerging from them, but also to explore what is left out (Moretti 1999, 31). Their aim is to add value to the textual analysis (Piatti 2008, 50), and cartographic representations are included in this book for this purpose (for details on the maps, see subsection 1.3.3). For comprehensive reference, the appendix gives details about the places mentioned in the three Sthalamāhātmyas and the historical sites with which they can be identified (for details, see subsection 1.3.2).

In light of the Sthalamāhātmyas evidently referring to the regional geography and the urban and religious landscape of Kanchi, I attempt to examine allusions to historical developments. This contextualisation builds on extant scholarly work in the form of secondary literature, with the first-hand consideration of historical (primary) sources such as inscriptions being beyond the scope of this work. Two excursions with subsequent shorter field-visits to Kanchipuram in January 2020 and March 2023 round off my

text-based approach.⁸ These on-site stays allowed me to familiarise myself with Kanchipuram and develop a sense for its spatiality, to visit temples and shrines, and search for sites that I could not locate with the help of maps, secondary sources, and online research.

1.3.1 Primary Sources and Translations

There exist several glorifying Sanskrit texts on Kanchipuram in Sanskrit.⁹ Three larger Sthalamāhātmya texts form the basis for my work (see below and chapter 3). They all deal with Kanchi's sacred geography in a broader perspective and are available in printed editions. A fourth and rather popular Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya, available in many manuscripts and editions (Buchholz 2022, 18–19) and called *Hastigirimāhātmya*, has a more limited focus on the myth of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāḷ) in Kanchi and is therefore not considered.¹⁰ Likewise, two texts entitled *Kāñcīsthānamāhātmya*, which are available only in manuscript form, are not taken into account.¹¹

The three Sthalamāhātmyas dealt with in this study are: i) a Śaiva text titled *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)), in fifty chapters containing a total of 4700 verses, that attributes itself to the *Skandapurāṇa*; ii) a text with the title *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (KV) with 1400 verses in fourteen chapters, which reflects a Śākta point of view and states to be a part of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*; iii) and a Vaiṣṇava text also titled *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)) that claims to belong

8 The excursions were part of the workshop “Networks of Temples and Networks of Texts in South India,” organised by the project Temple Networks in Early Modern South India: Narratives, Rituals, and Material Culture (German Research Foundation) in January 2020, in Pondicherry and Kanchipuram, India, and the workshop “Narratives on the Yathoktakāri Perumāḷ Temple” in February/March 2023, conducted by the Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences) in Pondicherry and Kanchipuram.

9 For an overview of the available editions and manuscripts of the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi as well as the Tamil Talapurāṇams, see Buchholz 2022.

10 In his brief analysis of the *Hastigirimāhātmya*, Jonas Buchholz notes that this Māhātmya is of a Vaiṣṇava nature and largely corresponds to the other Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya on Kanchi, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, in its telling of Varadarāja's myth of origin; it is a very popular text with many available printed editions and manuscripts in different scripts and commentaries in different languages (2022, 18–19).

11 On the *Kāñcīsthānamāhātmyas*, see Buchholz 2022, 20–21 and Buchholz and Raghavan (forthcoming).

to the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* and contains 2300 verses arranged in thirty-two chapters.

For the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the printed edition from 1889 in Telugu script has been the main source, with additional consultation of the edition from 1867 in Telugu script when needed; for the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, the Devanagari edition from 1968 was the basis, with consideration of the edition from 1889 in Telugu script for variants; and for the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the printed edition from 1907 in Devanagari script has been used, considering a handwritten paper manuscript for variant readings.¹² During my research, the texts became gradually available also in preliminary digital versions and thus in searchable Roman transcriptions.¹³ The possibility to search the texts digitally proved to be an important tool, allowing me to look for specific place names, terms and place references in order to analyse and, importantly, compare the occurrence and structural use of these elements in the texts.¹⁴

The basis for my analysis of Kāñcī's sacred geography are translations of several chapters of the primary sources and the reading of several more passages whenever I came across an aspect that I wanted to explore in more detail. Generally, I have focused on the chapters and passages that present the designs of Kāñcī's sacred space. Overall, I have translated ten out of fourteen chapters of the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, fifteen out of thirty-two of the Vaiṣṇava

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- 12 The manuscript is titled *Kāñcīkṣetramāhātmya* and is held by the French Institute of Pondicherry (transcript T. no. 1083). It is a copy of the manuscript D. 15705 of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library in Chennai.
- 13 The passages in Roman transcription from these three texts reproduced in this publication are based on a transcript of the 1889 edition of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, produced by Meera Shridhar, Jonas Buchholz, and myself; a transcript of the 1907 edition of the Vaiṣṇava text, prepared by Marija Grujovska and myself; and a transcript of the 1968 Devanagari edition of the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, done by myself. No editorial intervention (such as normalisations of and notes on spelling, reading suggestions, corrections of errors) was carried out in the transcriptions of the Sanskrit prints, apart from the insertion of *avagrahas* wherever these were missing. When citing text passages in the present book, I have added text abbreviations for clarity (for example, KV for the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*; see list of abbreviations on p. xi).
- 14 As of 2025, digital facsimiles of the three Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* have been produced by the Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences). They can be found at <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.72555> (Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, 1889 edition), <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.72557> (*Kāmākṣivilāsa*, 1889 edition), and <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.72556> (Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, 1907 edition).

Kāñcīmāhātmya, individual passages of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Besides, I could rely on summaries of several chapters of the latter text prepared by Jonas Buchholz. Regardless of whether there was another translation available which I could consult in the initial stages of my work, all translations from these texts given in this book are my own.

1.3.2 Identification of Sacred Places

As I demonstrate in this book, the sacred geographies from the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi are grounded in the real-world city, its layout and religious landscape at a certain point of time in history. Terminologically, I differentiate between the notion of the sacred places from the Sthalamāhātmyas and the existing sites. Following Melanie Conroy's distinction of literary places in her study of literary geographies in the works of Honoré de Balzac and Marcel Proust, the existing sites are termed "historical" as their existence is attested in historical documents (2021, 6). Most of the sacred places mentioned in the three Sthalamāhātmyas can be identified with historical sites, temples, shrines, and temple tanks. The majority of these sites still exist in contemporary Kanchi. Establishing correlations is fundamental to find out how the descriptions from the texts refer to the spatiality of the real-world geography and which places of the more than four hundred sites found in the city are taken into account in the texts.

The localising of sacred places from the texts and their identification with historical sites is a core aspect in the discussion of Kāñcī's sacred geographies (see above). It has been done using a range of sources: I consulted maps available online (primarily GoogleMaps and GoogleEarth) and secondary sources about the sites in Kanchipuram, searched the internet for comments and even maps created by people writing online about their visits to these sites, and expanded my knowledge through discussions with scholars working on the same subject, especially Ute Hüsken and Jonas Buchholz. While I had to start from scratch regarding the identification of most places for the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, I was able to draw on a list compiled by Jonas Buchholz (2025) for the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* where the sacred places from the text have been located and identified with contemporary sites.

In many cases, the names from the texts are similar to the Sanskrit, Tamil, or Tamilised contemporary names, thus allowing a comparatively straightforward identification. For example, the goddess Kāmākṣī is still known under this Sanskrit name, alternatively under the similar Tamil name Kāmāṭṭī,

or Kamakshi in anglicised spelling. The identification of the site of Kāmākṣī mentioned in the Sthalamāhātmyas with the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple can therefore easily be made by the name alone. In other cases, a translation of the Sanskrit name from the Sthalamāhātmya into Tamil provides the hint. For example, the name of ŚyāmaViṣṇu indicates that this Viṣṇu is (called) green-coloured (*śyāma*), which is reflected in his Tamil name Paccaivaṅṅa Perumāḷ, the green-coloured one (*paccai* means green in Tamil, *vaṅṅam* colour; TL s.v. *paccai*, *vaṅṅam*). However, when the Tamil and contemporary anglicised name of the shrine, temple, or water body bear little likeness to the name mentioned in the text, the identification depends to a great extent on the location given in the Sthalamāhātmyas and the mythological story of origin linked to the site.¹⁵

1.3.3 Spatial Dimensions and Visualisations on Maps

Understanding the pre-modern units of measurement given in the Sthalamāhātmyas is essential for the analysis of the location details. The texts on Kanchi use the units *yojana*, *gavyūti*, and *krośa*, which are all ancient Indian temporal length units. This means that they initially denote a distance covered in a certain time span; the individual distance actually covered can thus vary depending on the course of the route and the specific topographical conditions (curvy/straight, hilly/flat). A *yojana*, for example, is understood as a distance travelled without unharnessing the draught animal (PW, s.v. *yojana*). A distance in such a temporal length unit can therefore not be converted into a constant distance in contemporary standard length units like kilometres or miles, and a wide range of conversion values have been proposed over time (Danino 2015, 134). This ambiguity therefore requires estimates when searching for places according to the distances mentioned in the Sthalamāhātmya texts and further contextualising details like the name and the mythological story linked to the place in the text.¹⁶

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- 15 In some instances places from the texts could not (yet) be identified with historical places. This may be because the information from the texts is not conclusive enough or the historical place no longer exists in the area indicated by the text. Further research is needed in these cases, possibly on site, to explore the city on the ground and learn about the oral narratives and compare those to the mythological stories linked to the places in the texts.
- 16 For a purely text-internal spatial understanding, it is sufficient to consider the temporal distance units in relation to each other. The unit *yojana* is the longest; 1 *krośa* is 1/4 of a *yojana* or half of a *gavyūti* (PW, s.v. *krośa*); 1 *gavyūti* is 2 *krośas* (PW, s.v. *gavyūti*). Besides these, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* uses the unit *aṃśa* (lit. share

Yet, for the purpose of spatial visualisations on a geographical map employing contemporary units of length—as included in this book—a conversion value is required. To facilitate this, such a value for the *yojana*, the longest measurement unit used in the texts, will be derived below using two calculations. The first follows Michel Danino’s (2015) survey of several of ancient Indian length units based on different Sanskrit texts, according to which a *yojana* would correspond to around 14.6 kilometres.¹⁷ The second calculation is based on Otto Böhtlingk’s *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, which states that a *yojana* corresponds 4 *krośas*, where each *krośa* corresponds to 2 geographical miles (PW s.v. *yojana*; s.v. *krośa*). The distance of a geographical mile is derived from the circumference of the earth at the equator and is commonly defined as around 6080 feet, or around 1.8 kilometres (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency 2024, 357). Accordingly, a *yojana* would correspond to 14.4 kilometres.¹⁸ While both conversions provide concrete figures, they nonetheless leave a degree of imprecision in translating the distance of a *yojana* into contemporary units of measurement. Consequently, any value can only be regarded as approximate. For the sake of consistency in visualising spatial dimensions derived from the Sthalamāhātmyas in geographical maps, this study adopts the conversion value of 1 *yojana* as equal to 14.5 kilometres, averaged from the two calculations discussed above for the sake of simplicity.

The numerous maps included in this book serve to illustrate and better understand the spatial concepts and their internal structures that are found in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchipuram (see section 1.3). In all maps that represent places from the Sthalamāhātmyas, sites that could not yet be clearly identified with historical places are evidently missing. The maps included in this book are created with the free online map creator uMap in accordance with its terms of use (FOSSGIS e.V. n.d.). uMap allows

or part; PW, s.v. *aṃśa*). As it is not a common unit, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* defines its own usage: 1 *yojana* is 160 *aṃśas*, hence 1 *aṃśa* is a 1/160 of a *yojana* (*yojanaṃ paṇḍitaiḥ proktaṃ śaṣṭyuttaraśatāṃśakam* || KV 1.51cd).

- 17 The calculation based on Michel Danino’s study (2015, 125–134) is as follows: 1 *yojana* equals 8000 *daṇḍas*, where each *daṇḍa* is equivalent to 96 *aṅgulas*. Using the commonly accepted value of 19 millimetres per *aṅgula* that he identifies, 1 *daṇḍa* measures 96×19 millimetres, or 1.824 metres. Accordingly, 1 *yojana* equals 8000×1.824 metres, resulting in a total length of approximately 14.59 kilometres.
- 18 1 *yojana* equals 4 *krośas*. Given that 1 *krośa* corresponds to 2 geographical miles—approximately 1.8 kilometres—each *krośa* measures around 3.6 kilometres. Consequently, 1 *yojana* equates to 4×3.6 kilometres, yielding a total of approximately 14.4 kilometres.

creating maps with the map layers by OpenStreetMap (OSM), a free, open map database, licensed under an Open Data Commons Open Database License (ODbL). This means OSM data can be copied, shared, and modified freely—as long as OSM and its contributors are credited; if one builds on OSM data or adapts it, the result can only be distributed under the same license (OpenStreetMap Foundation n.d.). Accordingly, all maps created by me are licensed under the ODbL license. This applies to i) the maps included in this book, which have been created adding markers and forms to OSM map layers, some of which are further annotated using third-party software as permitted by the license of OSM; and ii) an online map created with uMap that shows the places mapped in the three Sthalamāhātmyas. It can be viewed at https://umap.openstreetmap.de/de/map/ma-2024_68868.

1.4 Approaching Sacred Geography

As they occur in works of literature, the descriptions of Kāñcī in the Sthalamāhātmyas are first of all and generally speaking literary landscapes. A literary account of places, or a literary geography can take different forms; one of its fundamental aspects is the extent to which the place(s) described, the imagined place(s), refer to the real-world geography (Piatti 2008, 23–32).¹⁹ In any case, the subsequent discussion of the landscape is subject to the fundamental premise in the consideration of literary geography that Barbara Piatti (2008, 25) points out in her work on the geography of literature: “Es gibt Berührungspunkte zwischen fiktionaler und realer Geographie” (there are points of contact between the fictional and the real geography).

19 The term *literary geography* is used ambiguously. As a discipline and situated at the junction of human geography and literary studies, an interdisciplinary subject area, the conceptual understanding of “literary geography” is controversially discussed and there have been different uses of this phrase over time (Alexander 2015). Sheila Hones (2018) argues for a distinction in the humanities between literary geography as an academic subdiscipline using approaches of geography and social sciences in literature, and the study of geography in literature. Robert Tally (2020, 2021), in turn, sees less clear-cut lines in the studies of space and literary geography “as the terrain examined through various types of spatially oriented critical practices” (2020, 3). In that, it is similar to literary cartography, imaginative geography, or geohumanities (Alexander 2015, 5). I use it in the sense of a literary account of geography in literary works and treat it as a topic (Piatti 2008) rather than addressing theoretical issues.

When the fictional world largely overlaps with the geographical, Melanie Conroy speaks of a “realist geography” (2021, 8). In her study of the literary geographies in the works of Honoré de Balzac and Marcel Proust, she explains such a geography as “a fictional world in which most locations correspond roughly to historical locations with the same names and other shared characteristics such as country, language, population, topography, or landmarks” (2021, 8). Following this framing, all three of the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi do present such a realist geography of the city, with two of the three texts, namely the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, in particular following a geography-based approach.

To make use of Edward Soja’s (1996) terminology, the places referred to in the Sthalamāhātmyas can further be characterised as “real-and-imagined” places: conceptually, such places or spaces are a blending of physically tangible sites and mental conceptions about them (Soja 1996). While their material aspect is secondary, the Sthalamāhātmyas provide notions about their origin, meaning, and significance that is attached to divine presence and/or mythical events that are said to have happened there (for details, see pp. 18–20).

When adopting a text-immanent perspective, the Sthalamāhātmyas can be considered to depict a sacred geography of Kanchi.²⁰ The texts describe spaces and places to which particular significance is attributed and tell about their origin and rewarding powers. These places are either associated with a resident deities or are bodies of water. The plots of the stories, through which a geography of Kāñcī is laid out in the Sthalamāhātmyas, evolve in an imagined landscape, in a fictional, mythical world.²¹ As Robert

20 For reasons of simplicity, I use *sacred geography* to denote the literary landscapes / geographies presented in the Sthalamāhātmya texts. Furthermore, I use *sacred geography*, *sacred landscape*, and *sacred space* with only slight differences in meaning; *sacred geography* tends to be more general and spatially encompassing, for example the region of Kanchipuram or the Indian subcontinent in its entirety, while *sacred landscape* underlines the composite structure to contain individual places in an area, and *sacred space* would refer to a spatially more confined area and emphasises the dimensional aspect, such as the city of Kanchi or even parts of it.

21 I use the term *imagined landscape* in a sense narrower than Diana Eck does in her article on the patterns of a Hindu sacred geography (1998), in which she uses the term as an equivalent of “sacred landscape”. In her later work on the same topic (2012), Diana Eck speaks of “sacred landscape”, with “imagined” as a qualifier. When using *imagined* or *mythical* landscape, I intend to stress the notions (of Kāñcī) on the narrative level in the myths, which are, of course, part of the more encompassing concept of sacred landscape. Furthermore, I would like to emphasise that while I refer to this nuance of the literary landscape(s) as

Tally states in the introduction to an edited volume on spatiality and narratives, “narratives are in some ways devices or methods used to map the real-and-imagined spaces of human experience” (2014, 3). The Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi use myths as the central means for various purposes: they inform about the origin of sacred places in the (mythological) stories by providing local(-ised) versions of the well-known Purāṇic motifs and plots. They thus create a local grounding. Their arrangement into a sequence conveys a particular interpretation of Kanchi’s spatiality, more so as they express the sectarian orientation of the individual text, reflected in the selection of places and the interpretative perspective of the stories. Moreover, the texts contain prescriptions about rituals to be performed at the places, thus uniting descriptive (myths) and prescriptive (specifications for rituals) elements.

The descriptions of Kāñcī are based on the geo-spatiality and religious landscape of the historically grown city Kanchi. The latter is tangible and part of the real-world geography, the physical geography or space—that we can still see and experience on site. The Sthalamāhātmyas refer to the religious landscape of the city at a certain point of time in history. Assumptions about the period to which the texts might refer can only be based on information internal to the text or clear references, such as citations, found in other, datable, texts, since we lack information about the historical compilers (for details, see chapter 3). As the urban spatial layout, the cityscape, and the existence of religious sites evolve(d) through time, the referenced religious landscape may overlap with today’s, but can also differ from it. At the same time, the Sthalamāhātmyas attest to the diachronic aspect of Kanchi and its religious landscape.

Geography and mythology are woven together in a sacred geography. In the view of Diana Eck, India’s sacred geography is a “living, storied, and intricately connected landscape” consisting of “a great network of pilgrimage places—referential, inter-referential, ancient and modern, complex and ever-changing” (2012, 2).²² Typical for Purāṇic literature, in the Sthala-

mythical and *imagined*, this wording does not and should not deny the perceived reality of these conceptions for many practising Hindu devotees. The distinction is chosen in order to refer to its occurrence in mythological narratives and to differentiate this layer of sacred landscape terminologically from the physically tangible one of the historically grown city of Kanchi.

- 22 For Diana Eck (1998, 2012), the contemporary angle, the multiplication of sites as reflection of relations in a polycentric landscape, and the aspect of pilgrims bringing to life this geography by travelling the land to visit places of extraordinary (sacred) nature are integral parts of the concept.

māhātmyas on Kanchipuram as well, the aspect of pilgrimage as movement through the landscape is non-determining, although the texts conceptually refer to the (physical) goals of pilgrimage, the sacred places (Jacobsen 2013, 22, 89).

The individual sacred place, often considered a pilgrimage place, is in Sanskrit denoted by the term *tīrtha*. Its nature is aptly described by Knut Jacobsen (2013, 22) who states that a “[t]īrtha in the geographical sense is a place of divine or extraordinary power that is believed to have a particular ability to fulfil wishes and grant salvation, which is a goal for pilgrimage travel (*tīrthayātrā*).” In a broader sense, sacred places of various kinds can be labelled as *tīrtha*—a hill, a forest, a pond, a city, or a temple (Jacobsen 2013, 22).

In a narrow sense, *tīrtha* denotes sacred places connected with water. This understanding reflects the early meaning of the word as it is found in the pre-Purāṇic literature. Literally meaning ford or crossing, it was used for ritual bathing and in the sense of threshold for a transition between this world and another (Eck 1981, 326–329). In the Purāṇic literature, the word *tīrtha* retains its meaning of a crossing and comes to mean a place of spiritual transition, where rituals are more potent and the presence of deities can be felt more intensely than elsewhere (Eck 2012, 7). Also, in the Purāṇas, there is a significant expansion of the concept of *tīrtha* and the form that a *tīrtha* could now take: from places sanctified by sages and gods or where a venerable person lived, to water, the human body or time whereby the number of *tīrthas* increased immensely (Nath 2009, 168).

Notably, there is a different use of the word *tīrtha* in the north and the south of India. As Diana Eck writes, “[s]o closely associated is the *tīrtha* with pure, running river waters that in South India the word *tīrtha* has come to mean sacred waters” (1981, 335). In precisely this way the word *tīrtha* is used in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi. Accordingly, I use *tīrtha* to denote a (sacred) water body with sacred properties, which is associated with the divine and attributed salvific powers.

Characteristics of Sacred Places

The Hindu sacred landscape of India is vast and densely dotted by the individual, often connected, places.²³ These are so numerous that Diana Eck wonders whether “the whole notion of ‘sacred space’ as somehow set apart

23 On the interconnectivity of places, see Eck 1998 and 2012.

from the profane is cast into question,” since “sacred space is so vastly multiplied that there is little left untouched by the presence of the sacred” (2012, 76). This accumulation, the “richness of pilgrimage places in Hinduism is due not least to the richness of the divine world—that is, the number of gods and goddesses and sacred narratives are mirrored in the sacred geography” (Jacobsen 2013, 7).

A conceptual opposition between the sacred and the profane is a part of many theoretical approaches to “the sacred.” Knut Jacobsen (2013, 8) proposes an interpretative translation of *tīrtha* as “sacred space,” thus emphasising the spatial property of a *tīrtha* that sets it apart from its (profane) surroundings, for example expressed through ritual processions or a certain behaviour required therein.²⁴ Such a notion of a sacred place that addresses the physicality of a built environment of, for example, a temple at that location is not expressed in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi. Accordingly, the extent of individual sacred sites is not assessed, as the physical appearance of a place is of secondary importance. Only the city Kāñcī and the region are spatially demarcated by indicating their extents in all the three texts. Similar to sacred places, these spaces are considered sacred (*puṇya*) and of particular significance. However, they seem to be treated as specific formations, which is reflected in the relevance of their spatial aspect and in their usual general designation as *kṣetra* (area; for details, see pp. 21–22).

The concept of “sacred place” in the Sthalamāhātmyas instead emphasises two other qualities: the divine presence at a sacred place and its ascribed powers; Knut Jacobsen terms these as “divine space” and “salvific space” in his book on the conceptual development of Hindu pilgrimage (2013, 7–8). In the Purāṇic context—and accordingly in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi—the salvific power of a sacred place is thought to result from the deity or mythological character who once sanctified the place (Jacobsen 2013, 4–8).²⁵ These aspects are addressed in the myths from the Sthalamāhātmyas; they explain how a place originated, became sacred, and

24 My use of *sacred space* as equivalent to *sacred geography* differs from Knut Jacobsen’s (2013) use of “sacred space” by which he points to the quality of a place as sacred as opposed to profane (cf. n. 20). His term of “salvific space”, which emphasises the capacity of places/spaces to confer beneficial powers, corresponds most closely to the conception of significant places in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi and which I call *sacred* places.

25 Nevertheless, it is the natural surroundings that are more likely to be considered sacred: water, mountains, caves, or trees (Gupta 2011, 4–5). For details on the notion of sacred sites in the Purāṇic literature, see Eck 1981, Jacobsen 2013, and Nath 2009.

justify its sacredness and salvific power. An important element to the latter are “the declaration and quantification of merit that can be attained by either visiting these places [...] or by performing specific rituals—mainly ritual baths [...] [and] worship of the resident deities” (Gengnagel 2011, 23). These statements usually occur in specific sections and are denoted as *phalaśruti* (that which has been heard about the rewards) of a site.

The affiliation with the divine and the rewarding powers ascribed to a place are thought to be inherent in a place and thus independent of the built environment of the historical site, shrine, temple or water body in the physical landscape with which it can be identified. The background to this is that the sacredness is considered to be everlasting whereas the tangible appearance is subject to change. These parallel but separable features are the fundamental aspects of sacred places, as Diana Eck elaborates in her book on India’s sacred geography:

Among the most important developments over the thousand years during which the *māhātmyas* of the *tīrthas* [sacred places] came to prominence was the emergence of the constructed *tīrtha*—the temple, built with the durability of stone. In most *tīrthas*, the temple itself is not what is important; it is the place, the power, the manifestation of the divine. The great *tīrthas* were there long before elaborate temples were constructed [...]. A *tīrtha* does not need to have a temple, and when temples are destroyed or fall into ruin, the *tīrtha* remains. (2012, 76–77)

The permanence built on an attributed origin in mythical times is a core characteristic of sacred places. Their physical appearance is usually not taken into account in most *Sthalamāhātmyas*. The texts on Kanchi include only a few references to physical features of sacred sites. Their origin myths instead focus on the emerging divine presence at a place. In essence it is said that after a deity has manifested itself it remains at a place in its particular local form with its local name. The outward form of the residing deity may be described; for example, an anthropomorphic form in the case of Viṣṇu, the establishing of an aniconic *śivaliṅga* in the case of Śaiva sacred sites. Similarly, the water of a sacred body of water can be mentioned as an elemental characteristic of such a place. None of these features, however, indicate a built structure as we might imagine it when we think of a sacred site as temple tank or temple.

Terminology

In the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi different types of sacred places are terminologically differentiated. There are areas, bodies of water, and all other sacred places. An area is commonly denoted by the term *kṣetra*, which can be understood as (sacred) region, landed property, or pilgrimage place / area (MW, s.v. *kṣetra*). As a sacred territory, a *kṣetra* can generally house several individual sacred places and further sacred spaces. The definition of a *kṣetra* creates boundaries and a sense of property in the Sthalamāhātmyas. For example, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* delineates an extended region around Kāñcī and calls it Kāñcikṣetra, the area of Kāñcī. It thus refers to the spatial dimension of what is considered to belong to Kāñcī, which in turn is associated with a certain idea of Kāñcī. At the same time, the texts also construct spaces as arenas for events of particular plots. For example, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* defines sacrificial halls as venue for the myths set in Kāñcī. These illustrate the spatiality of the mythical landscape.

Bodies of water are generally denoted by the term *tīrtha*, reflecting the narrow understanding of the word in the usage of the term in South India (Eck 1981, 335; see section 1.4). Most often, the word *tīrtha* is an integral part of the specific name of a water body, for example Sarvatīrtha. As for denoting a sacred place that is not a *tīrtha*, the texts employ varying strategies. For the most part, only the specific name of the resident deity of a place is mentioned, such as Anekapeśvara (Śiva), Yathoktakārī (Viṣṇu), or Praḷaya-bandhinī (Devī). The place name is thus identical with that of the resident deity.

Besides, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* frequently and consistently uses the general designation *sthāna* (place) for sacred places of Śiva (*śivaliṅgas*) and Viṣṇu. This wording emphasises the relevance of the location of the places and reveals a retrospective understanding of them as conceptually already existing—at a spatially stable location—when referring to them.²⁶ In the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, in turn, the emergence of sacred places in Kāñcī only comes about in the context of the myths that describe their origin, and they are conceptually not considered to exist before (see section 6.3). This prospective approach reduces the relevance of a place and its specific location in terms of spatial orientation and thus also the need for a linguistic la-

26 A typical first line of an episode about a *śivaliṅga* in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* would read as follows: *athānyad api vakṣyāmi sthānaṃ sambhor mahattaram | KM(Ś) 31.1ab*. In this case, the narrator Kauśika begins the story on the *liṅga* Virāṭṭahāseśvara.

bellings. A general term for place is not employed in the Vaiṣṇava text. Only once, in a summarising and retrospective statement at the end of the text's main part (KM(V) 30.73cd), *sthāna* is used in context of Viṣṇu's places.²⁷ Instead, these are—if at all—termed *āyatana* (seat, abode), with Varadarāja's abode once described with the similar term *ālaya* (dwelling [place]). Accordingly, this Sthalamāhātmya lays less emphasis than the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* on a place as such and rather stresses its nature as abode of the deity residing at the very place.

Similarly, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* does not use a general term for a sacred place. The main exception is the seat (*pīṭha*) of the goddess Kāmākṣī and by extension from it the area of Kāñcī. Kāmākṣī's site is repeatedly referred to as *nābhisthāna* (place at the navel of the earth; KV 1.56cd, 11.6ab, 1.29c–32, 13.73, 13.77). This might refer to the name Kāñcī, which is homonymous with the word for girdle. In addition, Kāmākṣī's place is also the only one that is referred to by another general term. In a passage describing certain built structures of the site, that is the temple (KV 12.52–73), *āyatana* is used. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* thus shows a strong sense of place in relation to the site to which the greatest significance is attached. This cursory analysis of the terminology of spatial concepts in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi indicates that the use of labels is apparently adapted to and supports the conceived designs of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the texts to produce a coherent overall concept.

1.5 Outline of the Book

The first two chapters following this Introduction (**Chapter 1**) provide the framing for the study of Kāñcī's sacred geographies by introducing the place Kanchi and its Sthalamāhātmya texts. **Chapter 2** approaches Kanchipuram by looking at the key elements characterising Kanchi's urban and religious history; it focuses on the spatial structures to give insights into the historical city which is the local setting that the Sthalamāhātmyas refer to and interpret. **Chapter 3** introduces the genre of Sthalamāhātmyas, common characteristics of these texts, and the understanding of sacred places that is

27 [...] *aṣṭādaśasthānamāhātmyaṃ śārṅgadhanvanaḥ* | KM(V) 30.73cd.

Apart from that, *sthāna* is occasionally used in the context of Kāmakoṣṭha, the cave situated in Kāñcī's centre, where the myth centring around Viṣṇu's manifestation Vāmana is spatially set in the text (see section 6.3).

expressed in them. It discusses the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, their structure and core myths, and considers their Śaiva, Śākta, or Vaiṣṇava outlook as consistently determining element.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 deal with the concepts of Kāñcī's sacred geography from the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. For each text separately, they explore the spatial designs that situate Kāñcī in a broader sacred geography and present its sacred space. They discuss the elements that structure the presentations of the city's sacred geography, such as the selection and arrangement of the sacred places. Furthermore, references to the multifocal layout, the religiously pluralistic landscape, and physical geography of the historical city as locally grounding and interpretative features that shape the spatial conceptions of Kāñcī are examined.

The concluding **Chapter 7** reverses the perspective and starts out from the historical city to link the main conclusions, drawn from the study of the Sthalamāhātmyas and presented in the previous three chapters, with the geo-spatiality, urban history, and religious landscape of the historical city. In this setting, comparative reflections are undertaken to explore common grounds and significant differences between sacred geographies presented in the three Sthalamāhātmyas.

The **Appendix** lists the sacred places mentioned in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. This directory contains the modern Tamil name of the historical site with which the place from the text is identified as well as its coordinates and the name of the place as it appears in the respective text. For the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the details are based on a list prepared by Jonas Buchholz (2025), for the other two Sthalamāhātmyas I gathered the details in the course of my research.

2 The Space: Kanchipuram

Kanchipuram, in short Kanchi, is a South Indian city²⁸ situated some 70 kilometres southwest of Tamil Nadu's state capital Chennai. Its popular epithets City of a Thousand Temples and Silk City highlight two main hallmarks of the place. While the latter epithet refers to the city's trademark, the local silk weaving industry that produces the famous Kanchipuram saris, the first plays on the city's significance as a pilgrimage centre with more than four hundred larger and smaller temples, shrines, and dozens of temple tanks dotting the city. The many temples densely spread over the entire city are a unique characteristic of Kanchi (Stein 2021, 106).

In contrast to many other temple towns and cities in the south of the Indian subcontinent, Kanchipuram's urban layout is not arranged around one predominant temple acting as a single religious, ritual, and social centre. While examples of Tamil Nadu's temple cities and towns characterised by a monocentric spatial arrangement around one temple include, among others, cities such as Srirangam with the Vaiṣṇava Araṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple; Chidambaram with the Śaiva Naṭarācar temple; Madurai with the Mīnāṭci Cuntarēcuvavar temple dedicated to the Goddess and Śiva,²⁹ Kanchi does not fall in their category. Instead, there are three large temples in Kanchipuram: the Śaiva Ēkāmparanātar, the Śākta Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ, and the Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ temples (see figures 2.5, 2.6, and 2.4). These three most renowned religious sites bear witness to Kanchi's particularly pluralistic religious landscape and determine the interpretation of urban spatiality. The cityscape of Kanchi further reflects a cluster-like development of the city in which villages and urban settlements, each with residential areas around one or more centrally placed temples, gradually grew together over the centuries (Raman 1987, 67; Srivatsan 1992, 103; Stein 2022, 297). Flourishing side by side, the Hindu traditions of Śaivism, Śāktism, and Vaiṣṇavism shaped the city over the past two millennia, only to be joined by Buddhism and Jainism in the early centuries CE (Srinivasan 1979, 231–279).

28 According to the most recently available Indian Census (2011), Kanchipuram has around 164 000 inhabitants with an estimated population of around 237 000 in 2025 (Census Organization of India, 2025).

29 On these cities, see contributions in Michell 1993.

Among the population today, there is a Hindu majority of over ninety per cent.³⁰

The glorifying Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas dealing with Kanchi allude to the historical changes in spatial and religious conditions. In their interpretations of Kāñcī's sacred landscape, they blend an imagined, mythical concept of Kāñcī with the historical and physical place. It is, therefore, essential to first take a look at the geographical, historical, and spatial setting of the city to understand references made to these aspects in the texts.

2.1 Geography

Kanchi is situated in an open, largely flat terrain with fertile soils (Seshadri 2003, 7; Raman 1975, 2–3), with two rivers, the Palar and the Vegavathi, marking the area (see figure 2.1). The larger Palar, one of the major eastwards flowing rivers that spring from the Eastern Ghats (Resmi et al. 2021, 360), originates in the Nandi Hills (Karnataka) and makes its way through the lowlands of Tamil Nadu towards the Bay of Bengal. On its east- / south-eastwards course, the Palar runs past Kanchi a few kilometres south of the city.³¹ As a northern sidearm of the Palar, the Vegavathi traverses Kanchi in its southern part, around 2 to 3 kilometres north of the Palar. The Vegavathi is a seasonal river which tends to be largely dry even in the rainy season; only a small stream forms in parts of the riverbed, as observed in the first decade of the twenty-first century by Ute Hüsken (pers. comm., November 2021).³²

30 The latest data is available from the Indian Census 2011 (Census Organization of India, 2025).

31 The Palar is essentially a seasonal river. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the river was completely dry most of the year. During heavy monsoon rains it could, however, turn into a torrential river (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., October 2021). A colonial source from the last quarter of nineteenth century indicates a similarly contrasting nature of the Palar. In some years, the river is described as having no water at all, while in other years it flows continuously for several months, with a strong current at that (Crole 1879, 1–2).

32 According to Ute Hüsken, however, people in Kanchi recount memories passed on from earlier generations regarding floods of the Vegavathi (pers. comm., November 2021). In fact, the Vegavathi is a larger paleo-channel of the Palar river, meaning that the Palar once flowed in the riverbed of the present Vegavathi and then changed its course to the present—in comparison more southern—in the Holocene (Resmi et al. 2017). In more recent times, water

2.2 A Centre of Religious Diversity and Learning

Situated in the historical region known as Tondaimandalam,³³ Kanchipuram has one of the longest uninterrupted histories of any city in South India, with a continuous settlement since ca. 300 BCE (Raman 1987, 67–68; Heitzman and Rajagopal 2004, 239).³⁴ As early as the first century CE, Kanchi is documented as an urban economic centre with mercantile activities; over the following centuries, it developed into an important supra-regional commercial centre with (maritime) trade links to Southeast Asia (Shanmugan 1992, 77; Champakalakshmi 1996, 390). By the first half of the seventh century, it had become a vibrant religious centre and a place of learning, as described by the Chinese Buddhist monk Hsuan Tsang in the account of his travels in India (Hsuan Tsang 1884, 228–230). Hsuan Tsang writes of the learnedness of Kanchi's inhabitants, of a few hundred Buddhist communities and several thousand monks, a large Buddhist monastery in the southern part where the most learned scholars met, and a *stūpa* (a Buddhist monument commemorating Buddha) erected by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (third/second cent. BCE). He also mentions a great number of Jain monks living in the city, and around eighty *deva* temples.³⁵

Thus, besides harbouring Buddhist activities described by Hsuan Tsang, Kanchi had developed into an educational hub of Jainism as well and was considered one of four *vidyasthānas* (centres of learning) by the Digambara Jains (Ekambaranathan 1992, 36). Several renowned Jain scholars visited the city in the first six centuries CE and the early Pallava rulers of Kanchipuram were followers of Jainism (Srinivasan 1979, 239–242). The subsequent period, however, saw a decline in the importance of both Buddhism and Jainism in the city due to dwindling or complete withdrawal of royal patronage (Minakshi 1954, 5–6; Srinivasan 1979, 240). In contemporary Kanchi there are only a few Buddhist remains in the form of statues and

works and sand mining further impacted the riverbed of the Vegavathi (Pisipaty 2011, 45).

- 33 Tondaimandalam is the Tamil name for the country ruled by the Pallava kings and comprised the northeastern districts of the modern state of Tamil Nadu and the southern-eastern edge of Andhra Pradesh (Mahalingam 1969, 2–3; Schier 2018, 25, n. 20). For a visualisation, see figure 7.1.
- 34 For comprehensive historical studies, see Srinivasan 1979 and Mahalingam 1969. On excavations carried out in the area of Kanchi, see Pisipaty 2011 and Raman 1987.
- 35 According to Kerstin Schier (2018, 15), the term *deva* temples refers to the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and presumably also the Jain temples.

relief carvings. Jainism, however, is still a living tradition: its base has been and still is the suburb of Tirupparuttikkunram located south of the Vegavathi river, now popularly called Jina-Kanchi (see figure 2.2).³⁶ In addition, Kanchi was the location of a Brahminical educational institution (*ghaṭika*), as evidenced by inscriptions from the fourth century CE (Champakalakshmi 1996, 391).³⁷

The kings of the Pallava dynasty, who ruled the area between the third and the ninth century CE, shaped Kanchi's political fate.³⁸ They made the city their capital, expanded it and changed its urban outline (see details in section 2.3). From the seventh and eighth centuries onwards, the royal patrons were increasingly influenced by Tamil poets, the Śaiva Nāyanmār and the Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs, exponents of the Bhakti movement of the Hindu traditions. The poets composed devotional poems about Śiva and Viṣṇu said to reside at a particular place, propagating worship of these two gods through devotion and thereby opposing the asceticism-based teachings of the Buddhists and the Jains.³⁹ In the wake of the new movement, the building of temples dedicated to Śiva or Viṣṇu through the agency of the ruling kings increased, also in Kanchi. One of the most monumental physical testimonies of the Pallava temple architecture in Kanchi is the Kailācanātar temple, dedicated to Śiva and commissioned by the Pallava King Narasimharvarman II (reigned 690–728), which event “marks a turning-point away from what was earlier a religious centre dominated by Buddhists” (Thapar 2003, 331).⁴⁰

36 On Buddhism in Kanchi, see Srinivasan 1979, 231–238 and Seshadri 2003, 163–164; on the Jain tradition, see Srinivasan 1979, 239–242 and Ekambarathan 1992; on the Buddhist and the Jain relics and temples in the city, see Minakshi 1954, 26–30 and Stein 2021, 182–193. Noteworthy is the discovery of Buddhist architectural relics and Buddha statues at the site and in the vicinity of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, suggesting that there was once a Buddhist (and Jain) site at this location, which was gradually transformed (Rao 1915; Venkataraman 1973, 19–20).

37 Its members were also politically involved, for example in the selection of the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II in the eighth century (Srinivasan 1979, 25, 55).

38 On the Pallavas, see Mahalingam 1969, Srinivasan 1979, 15–68, Seshadri 2003, 13–21, and Gopalan 1928.

39 For an overview on the Bhakti movement, see Narayanan 2018; for the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions, see Prentiss 1999, Champakalakshmi 2004, McGlashan 2006, Peterson 1982, and Jagannathan 2015.

40 Another example is the Vaiṣṇava Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ temple built in the eighth century. See Hudson 2008a for a detailed study of the Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ, and Kaimal 2005 and 2020 on the Kailācanātar temple. On the Pallava temples in Kanchi, see Minakshi 1954, 11–18 and Stein 2021, 43–102.

As the ruling dynasty of Kanchipuram, the Pallavas were eventually superseded by the Chola kings (tenth–thirteenth century). Kanchi became the regional seat of the northern part of their empire and the cityscape again underwent a structural reorientation: considering economic, political, and socio-religious aspects, the Cholas established a new south-north thoroughfare which connected Kanchi to important places in the region and key sites within the city itself. The new road served also as the focal line for the orientation of shrines and temples within the city (Stein 2021, 103–152). During the time of the Cholas, the existing temples were renovated and expanded, and the new ones built, increasingly sponsored and maintained by local communities rather than the royal patrons (Stein 2021, 143–144).⁴¹ With the rise of the Vijayanagara empire which covered most of South India (fourteenth–seventeenth century), Kanchi came under the rule of its sovereigns (Srinivasan 1979, 197–213). The most famous Vijayanagara king, Krishnadevaraya, gifted villages and other financial resources to the Ēkāmparanātar temple in Kanchi and gilded the tower superstructure (*vimāna*) above the sanctum sanctorum of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (Srinivasan 1979, 200–201).

In the politically turbulent times that followed the collapse of the Vijayanagara empire, Kanchi became, in turn, a part of various Muslim empires and lost its political importance (seventeenth–eighteenth century; Raman 1975, 36–38).⁴² In the eighteenth century, following the Carnatic wars, the British East India Company assumed control in the region (Raman 1975, 38–39); a century later the British Crown took over from The Company whose former territories became part of the British Raj and remained so until India's independence in 1947 (Kulke and Rothermund 1998, 315–319, 391).

During the rule of various dynasties over the centuries, Kanchi was not only a supra-regional political centre, but also attracted well-known philosophical and religious scholars of pan-Indian significance. Most notable were Shankara, Ramanuja, and Venkatanatha. Shankara, an eighth-century Advaitavedānta scholar, is traditionally considered by the monastic institution Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham to be its founder (Wilke 1996, 135). According to the available sources, the Peetham has been associated with the

41 On the political-economic structure in Kanchi during the Cholas, see Heitzman 2001 and Srinivasan 1979, 94–121; see Shanmughan 1992 for a perspective on the economy with a broader historical timeframe.

42 On the impact of the aftereffects of the Mughal invasion on the religious practices of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ, Ēkāmparanātar, and Varatarāja Perumāḷ temples, see Raman 1975, 37–38, Hüsken 2017, and Schier 2018, 138–149.

Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple since the fourteenth century and direct management of the temple since 1842 (Venkataraman 1992, 70; Schier 2018, 125, n. 27).⁴³ The head of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham is one of the most influential religious leaders not only in Tamil Nadu but also the whole of India, with close ties to the political and business elites (Hüsken 2021a, 518–520).

For Ramanuja (eleventh/twelfth century), founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and one of the most prominent Śrīvaiṣṇava teachers, Kanchi and particularly the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple was a central place of his activities. Ramanuja's association with the temple significantly increased its standing (Raman 1975, 62–66).⁴⁴ Venkatanatha (thirteenth/fourteenth century) was a native of the Kanchi region and principal preceptor in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. Better known as Vedanta Desika, he was one of the eminent spiritual teachers (*ācāryas*) at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple. His most significant works emphasise the orthodox Sanskrit perspective on the Śrīvaiṣṇava and Viśiṣṭādvaita teachings, reflecting the Sanskrit-oriented, traditional settings in the scholastic and religious communities of the cosmopolitan and religiously pluralistic city of Kanchi during his lifetime (Hopkins 2002, 35–37).⁴⁵

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- 43 However, there is no clear epigraphic evidence to support the claim that Shankara himself founded the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham (Wilke 1996, 135). The (perceived) link to the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, though, is close. In the first enclosure there is a shrine dedicated to Shankara, and several other images of him can be found inside the temple as well. Moreover, Shankara is said to have defeated Buddhists in Kanchi and might have transformed a former Buddhist shrine into the temple for the goddess Kāmākṣī located at the same site (Minakshi 1954, 25). A local legend further narrates how he tamed the previously ferocious goddess Kāmākṣī into a gentle goddess firmly rooted in the Śākta Śrīvidyā tradition (Wilke 1996).
- 44 Kanchi's development into a major site of South Indian Vaiṣṇavism already began before Ramanuja's time (Srinivasan 1979, 257), but it was particularly the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple that gained importance through his influence. In the fourth enclosure of the temple there is a shrine dedicated to him.
- 45 As a polymath and a cosmopolitan, Venkatanatha linked transregional and local identities and values, Sanskrit and Tamil literary traditions. He was also an author of devotional poetry and among others composed the *Meyviratamāṇmīyam*, a Talapurāṇam-style Tamil work that narrates the origin of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja and is part of Venkatanatha's prose *Attikirimāhātmyam* in Mani-pravalam about Varadarāja, and the *Varadarājapañcāśat*, a devotional praise of Varadarāja in Sanskrit that is read to the god on selected occasions at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (Hopkins 2002, 79–114, 169–198; Raman 1975, 70–72, 99–100; Buchholz 2022, 31–32). There is a shrine dedicated to Vedanta Desika in the gardens (fourth enclosure) of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple.

The religious landscape of the city still bears witness to the influence of these three scholars. The Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham is one of Kanchi's most influential religious institutions with close links to the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple and actively contributes to religious, social, and educational activities of the city, while the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple is an important centre of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition from approximately the eleventh century onwards (Venkataraman 1992, 73–75; Raman 1975, 88).

The cityscape thus testifies to Kanchi's eventful history, most visibly in the form of temples which reflect different architectural styles developed under the rule of various dynasties.⁴⁶ Less obvious at first glance is how the spatial layout of the city also maps the eras of its political history, reflecting the manifestation of policymaking over the centuries, including the development of religious landscapes.

2.3 Spatial Cityscape

Contemporary Kanchi displays a conceptual division into three spatial zones, of which two are clearly predominant: Vishnu-Kanchi and Shiva-Kanchi (see figure 2.2). These are not just names of certain local neighbourhoods but rather prevalent bynames denoting two divisions of the city. One covers the southeastern part around the Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ as the centre point and the other covers the northwestern part with the Śaiva Ēkāmparanātar and the Śākta Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temples as the most monumental sites.

Slightly less prominent—probably due to its more remote location on the outskirts of the city—is Jina-Kanchi. The name seems to indicate a religious affiliation, in this case to Jainism and its sacred places and followers. Jina-Kanchi comprises the suburb of Tirupparuttikkunram in the southwestern part of Kanchi, south of the river Vegavathi. The two major Jain temples of the city are located here and this area is historically associated with Jain activities (see section 2.2).

According to K. V. Raman (1975, 3), “[t]he name *Vishnu-Kāñchi* is today applied to the immediate vicinity of this [(the Varatarāja Perumāḷ)] temple and upto the Thēraḍi, where the temple car [of said temple] is stationed.” This huge temple chariot (*ratha*; Tamil *tēr*) of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple is

46 On the architectural history and Kanchi's temples, see Ayyar 1993, Minakshi 1954, Stein 2021, and Seshadri 2003.

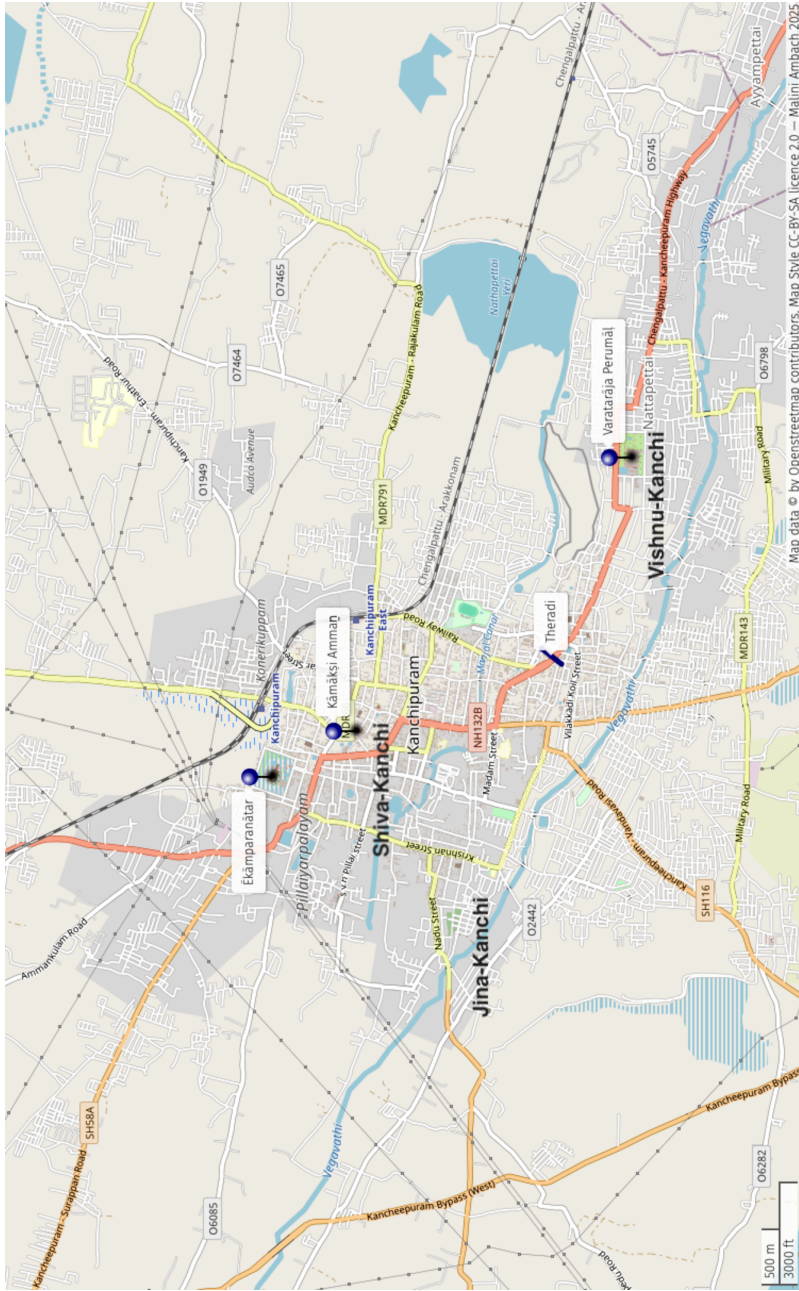


Fig. 2.2 Contemporary spatial divisions in Kanchi, approximate visualisation (based on Schier 2018, 16, fig. 1.1).



Fig. 2.3 Map of Conjeeveram by John Gould. 23 April 1816 (© British Library Board, WD 2701).

kept on Gandhi Road, the main street leading to the southeast of Kanchi (see marker in figure 2.2).⁴⁷ It stands next to two fragmentary pillars from the sixteenth century that “likely once supported an arched gateway that marked the passage between the two city zones” (Stein 2021, 133), that is, Vishnu-Kanchi and Shiva-Kanchi. The location of this crossing is probably a testimony to urban development: until the thirteenth century, the area around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple was an independent village called Attiyur, which gradually expanded to also include other Viṣṇu temples further west (Raman 1975, 3; Stein 2021, 67; 2022, 297), while the urban core of Kanchi found around the Vaiṣṇava Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ further northwest gradually expanded towards the east, towards Attiyur (Raman 1987, 66–67; Stein 2021, 63–68).

On the *Map of Conjeeveram* by John Gould (see figure 2.3), an early map of Kanchi from 1816, a gap in the urban development is visible in the area of Theradi, where the Yatōktakāri and Aṣṭapuḷa Perumāḷ temples are located in the immediate vicinity, visually separating the southeastern part from the rest of the city. Based on this representation, it appears that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the spatial boundaries of the former Attiyur and Kanchi were still evident. As we shall see, one of the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, seems to take this “boundary” into account and situates a territory assigned to Viṣṇu east of it (see subsection 5.3.1).

The origin of the designations Vishnu- and Shiva-Kanchi (and Jina-Kanchi) is unclear. K. V. Raman (1975, 3) suggests that the notion of Vishnu-Kanchi might have come about in the sixteenth century when the Vijayanagara King Krishnadevaraya is documented to have established processional routes to be taken by the temple chariots of the Ēkāmparanātar and the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temples, whose routings had led to a dispute between the officials of both temples before. Emma Stein (2021, 36–37), however, proposes that the names became current only in the second half of the nineteenth century. As the major Viṣṇu temples are more or less evenly distributed throughout the city, it is not far-fetched to conclude that the designation Vishnu-Kanchi takes into account the position of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple as a centre of the religious landscape. Based on this, such a designation would not have arisen before the eleventh century, as the temple’s importance only increased from the eleventh century onwards, following its

47 What is not clear from this spatial marker mentioned by K. V. Raman, however, is where the boundaries of Vishnu-Kanchi are drawn in the wider geography of the city. A practical and precise spatial delimitation probably does not exist, even though the inhabitants of Kanchi seem to have a distinct idea of whereto Vishnu-Kanchi extends.

expansion under the rule of the Chola King Kulottunga I, its association with Ramanuja (eleventh/twelfth century), and a shift of attention to the temple in the local Vaiṣṇava community in the fourteenth century (Raman 1975, 60, 88; Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34).

While these designations, Vishnu- and Shiva-Kanchi, seem to indicate a sectarian affiliation of each area, their Tamil monikers *Ciṅṅa*-(Little) and *Periya*-(Big) Kanchi point merely to their unequal size. The smaller *Ciṅṅa*-Kanchi in the southeast, though, is as important in the religious landscape as *Periya*-Kanchi. Besides, the name *Ciṅṅa*-Kanchi may also contain a reference to the history of urban development: the area around the *Varatarāja Perumāḷ* temple—the former *Attiyur*—, now in *Ciṅṅa*-Kanchi, may have been classified as an important but proportionally smaller addition to the older and then bigger urban core further northwest—hence Little Kanchi.⁴⁸

The *Varatarāja Perumāḷ*, an important centre for the Śrīvaiṣṇavas in South India (Raman 1975, 60), is the best known, monumental site in Vishnu-Kanchi and the largest Vaiṣṇava temple in Kanchi (see figure 2.4). While Vishnu-Kanchi includes some other major Vaiṣṇava sites, the *Yatōktakāri*, *Aṣṭapuja*, *Vilakkoḷi*, and *Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ* temples, just as many of the city's Viṣṇu temples are found in Shiva-Kanchi, such as the *Pāṅṭavatūta*, *Ulakalānta*, and *Vaikuṅṭa Perumāḷ* temples (see figure 2.7).⁴⁹ One of better known Śiva temples in Vishnu-Kanchi is the *Puṅṅiyakōṭṭisvarar*, situated near the *Varatarāja Perumāḷ* temple.

Shiva-Kanchi, in turn, is marked by the *Ēkāmparanātar* temple, the largest and predominant Kanchi temple dedicated to Śiva (see figure 2.5). Besides the Śākta *Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ*, which is located nearby, it is the most important temple in the northwestern part of the city. In Kanchi, *Kāmākṣi* signifies *Devī* and her temple is by far the largest *Devī* temple in the city and

48 It is, however, not documented when and how the names *Ciṅṅa*- and *Periya*-Kanchi originated. By the mid-nineteenth century, both names were in use and the *Ēkāmparanātar* and *Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ* temples spatially associated with Big Kanchi and the *Varatarāja Perumāḷ* temple with Little Kanchi (Graul 1856, 183–190). Even earlier colonial sources from around the year 1800 specifically mention Little Kanchi as a separate division and the *Varatarāja Perumāḷ* temple to be located there but they do not associate the area with a particular sectarian terminology (Clive 2009, 109–110). In his *Map of Conjeeveram* from 1816 (see figure 2.3), John Gould uses the label “Great Conjeeveram” for the northwestern part of the city and “Little Conjeeveram” for the southeastern part.

49 In addition, there are several more shrines dedicated to Viṣṇu that are located within larger temples, such as *Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ*, situated at the *Saiva Ēkāmparanātar* temple, and *Kaḷva Perumāḷ* and *Pūtanikraha Perumāḷ* at the Śākta *Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ* temple.



Fig. 2.4 Varatarāja Perumāl temple, the western gateway tower, viewed from within the fourth enclosure, 2023 (© Malini Ambach).

of pan-regional significance as the centre for the worship of the Goddess in Tamil Nadu (see figure 2.6). Apart from these, there are several other larger temples of a distinct renown in Shiva-Kanchi, such as the Kumarakōṭṭam temple dedicated to the god Skanda;⁵⁰ the Śaiva Kaccapēsvarar, located at the spatially exposed southwestern corner of the streets enclosing the elevated area around the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple; and the Vaiṣṇava Ulakaḷanta Perumāl and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāl temples. Slightly closer to the eastern and western peripheries of Periya-Kanchi are the Pallava-era Kailācanātar and Vaikuṇṭa Perumāl temples (see figure 2.7).

Besides the major temples, there are many smaller temples, shrines, and sacred sites, with several being less well accessible and visible as such. Some are hidden by residential buildings or located in open-field areas. All in all, there are at least four hundred shrines and temples spread over the city. Among them, the Citrakupta Cuvāmi temple is of some rarity, as there are

50 As Dennis Hudson (1993, 30) points out, the Ēkāmparanātar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples (see figure 2.7), though independent, “are popularly thought of as forming a ‘Somaskanda’ cluster,” that represents the pan-Indian Śaiva divine family consisting of Śiva, Pārvatī—where Kāmākṣi is understood to stand-in for Śiva’s consort—and Skanda, their son.



Fig. 2.5 Ēkāmparanātar temple, the Rājagopura, the main and the largest gateway tower, viewed from the Ekambaranathar Sannathi Street leading to the temple, 2020 (© Malini Ambach).

only a few temples in the whole of India, and only this one in the South, dedicated to Citragupta, an assistant of the God of Death, Yama (Seshadri 2003, 159).⁵¹

The urban character of Kanchi has been acknowledged since the first centuries CE, as indicated by the Tamil poem *Perumpānārruppaṭai*, which praises the then ruler of Kanchi (ca. second to fourth century; Zvelebil 1974, 23; Wilden 2014, 8). In the Tamil epic *Maṇimēkalai* (ca. 500 CE; Zvelebil 1995, 409), Kanchi is likewise described as a city (*nagara*), indicating its status as an urban settlement with a corresponding administration and commercial activities (Shanmugan 1992, 77). As city, it underwent several stages of

⁵¹ In addition, there are in Kanchi a few Jain temples (in Jina-Kanchi), churches and mosques, as well as monastic institutions, *maṭhas*. The most influential among the latter is the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, which has close ties to the Kāmākṣi Amman temple (see section 2.2).



Fig. 2.6 Kāmākṣi Amman temple, tank and central building with the sanctum sanctorum inside, viewed from within the outer enclosure, 2020 (© Malini Ambach).

urban development that was also linked to the development of the agrarian hinterland (Champakalakshmi 1996, 389–395). The earliest core probably consisted of the area around the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple, which is a little elevated and now lies in the northwestern part of the city (Raman 1987, 66). The area, called Kacci or Kaccipeṭu in inscriptions (Nagaswamy 2011, 2–3), forms roughly a square, framed by the four Rājavīthis, the king’s streets. Along these lead the processional routes of all three major temples—including the Varatarāja Perumāl, which lies on the other side of the city (Hüsken 2017, 69; see figure 2.8).⁵² This urban core was then connected to the surrounding independent settlements (Heitzman 2001, 128).

In the further urban development of Kanchi, temples became important spatial markers, reflecting the new centres of religious activities brought about by the Bhakti movement (Srivatsan 1992, 103; Veluthat 1979). The kings of the Pallava dynasty (third–ninth century) expanded the city to the west (Kailācanātar temple) and later to the east (Vaikuṇṭa Perumāl temple), as evidenced by the construction and expansion of temples in the

⁵² Additionally, Emma Stein (2021, 112–113; 2022, 302–306) suggests that this was the place where the royal palace of the Cholas stood.

area (Raman 1987, 66; Stein 2021, 63–68).⁵³ The pattern of streets in the newly developed urban space follows the orthogonal system with an east-west orientation—as also found in the area around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (Srivatsan 1992, 102–103; Raman 1987, 67). For the northwestern part of today’s city and the former urban core, the Pallava period was formative regarding the spatial layout as seen even today (Raman 1987, 68).

The next radical change in the urban configuration occurred during the Chola period (tenth–thirteenth century): a new major road—today called Kamarajar Salai—was constructed as the central pilgrimage and processional route aligned in the north-south direction so as to connect Kanchipuram with significant sites in the region (Stein 2021, 103–109, 122, fig. 39, 120–126).⁵⁴ As Emma Stein elaborates, Kamarajar Salai serves as the central line of orientation to which the sanctum sanctorum, with the main image of every temple, open: “[t]his centralized orientation is consistent in all temples built within the boundaries of the city during the last twelve hundred years, regardless of religious dedication, builder, date, or material” (2021, 103). Throughout the city, the temples west of the road face east, those east of the road open to the west.⁵⁵

At the same time, Kanchipuram grew (mainly to the east), gradually incorporating within the city individual surrounding settlements that centred around individual temples or other religious institutions (Raman 1987, 67;

53 Emma Stein (2021, 101) elaborates: “in the beginning of the eighth century, the construction or expansion of the Kailāsanātha, Ekāmbaranātha, Airāvateśvara, and Kacchapeśvara temples established the borders of the city. Less than a century later, the east-west extent of the city had nearly doubled. By the end of the eighth century, Kanchi stretched from the hilltop Candraprabhā Jīṅālāya to the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple, which towered on the city’s new eastern frontier. The fragments in the two Karukkiṅṅil Amaranṭavaḷ Ammaṅ temples and the Rudraakoṭīśvara temple, as well as at Cevilimēṭu farther south, show that Kanchi also extended significantly in the direction of the Palar River. As more temples were established in the urban landscape, the city continued to grow.” For a visualisation of that area developed by the Pallavas, see Stein 2021, 121, fig. 38.

54 To the north, the road leads to Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh). The Veṅkaṭeśvara Swāmi temple located there is one of the most popular Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage site in South India. The road supports processional ties between Kanchi and Tirupati even today (Stein 2021, 126–133). To the south, the road leads to Uthiramerur, a former Brahmin settlement of particular relevance in the power transition from the Pallavas to the Cholas (Stein 2021, 92–126).

55 There are only few exceptions to this pattern, for example the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple, which is located in the diagonally arranged street network and whose sanctum sanctorum opens to the southeast. For details on this and other exceptions to the east-west arrangement, see Stein 2021, 107–108.

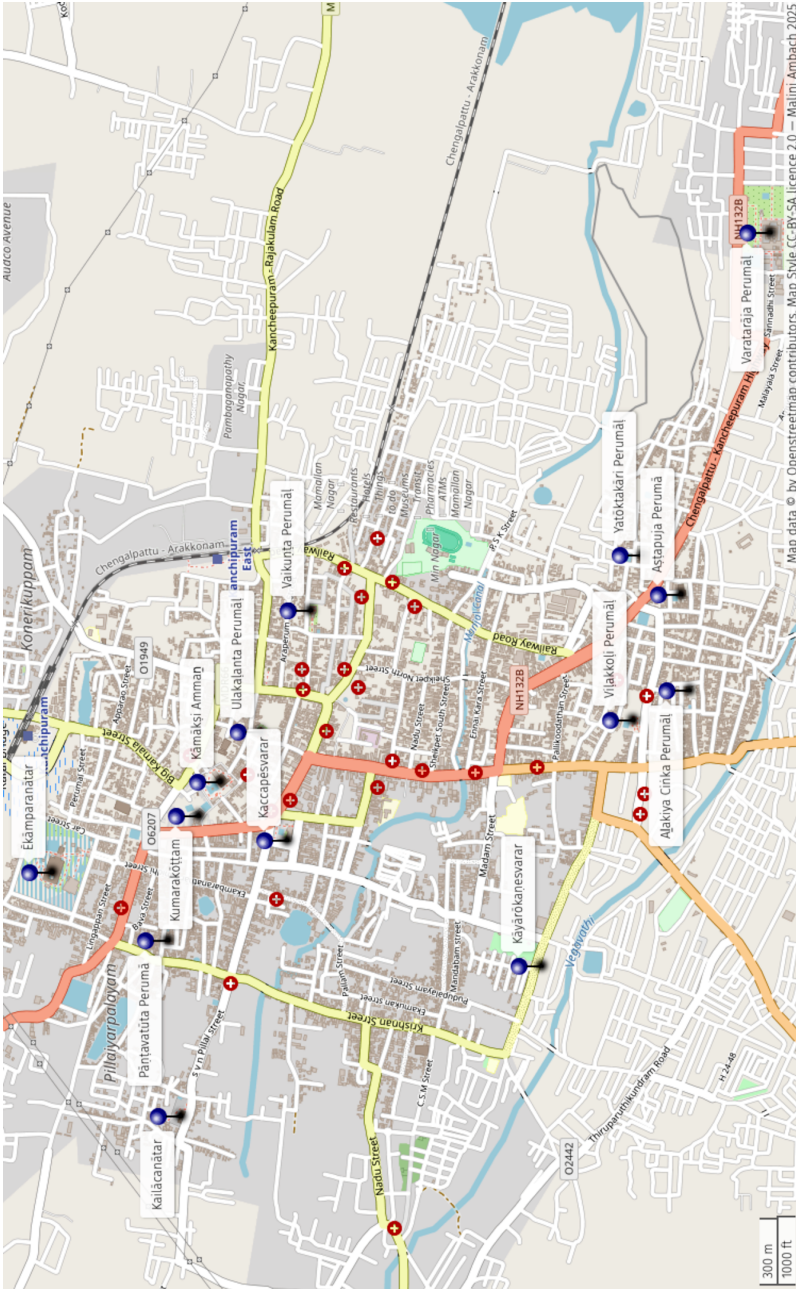


Fig. 2.7 Selection of major temples in Kanchi.

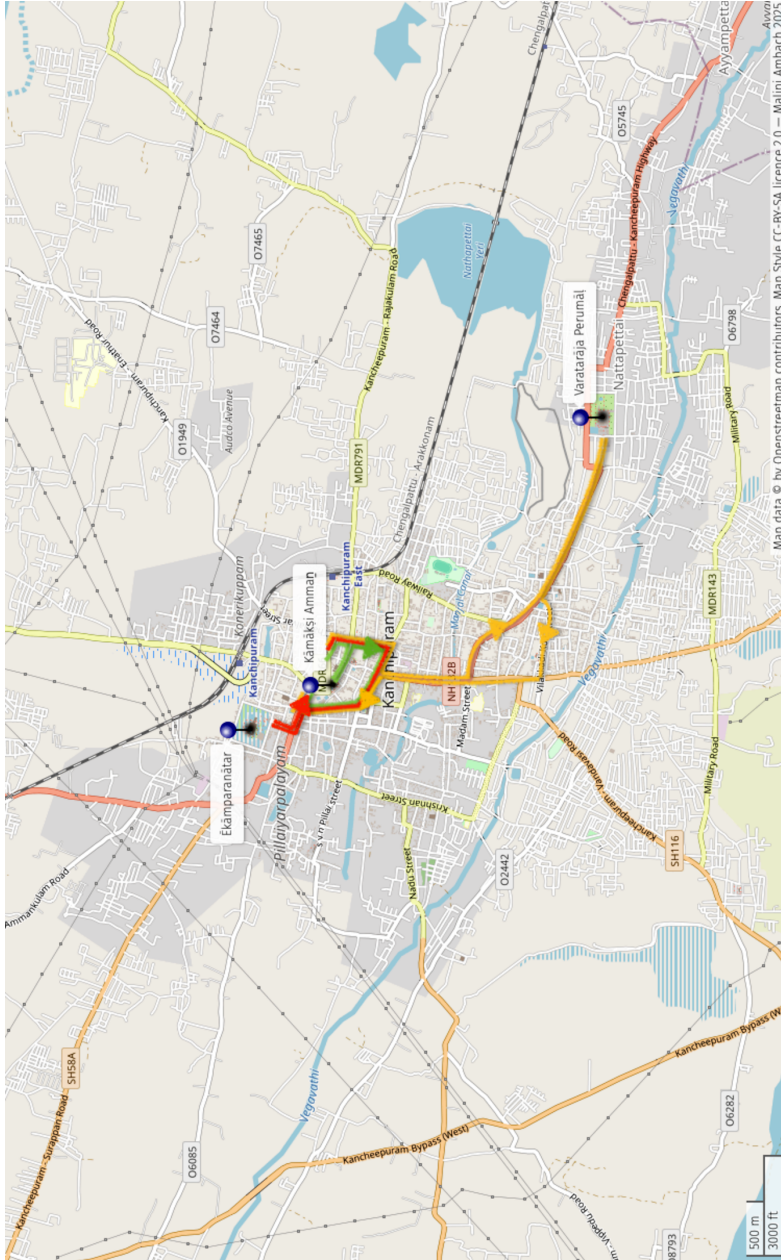


Fig. 2.8 Processional routes of the Ekāmparanātar (red), the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ (green), and the Varatarāja Perumāi (yellow) temples along the Rājāvīthis (based on Schier 2018, 63, fig. 2.20 and unpublished maps by Ute Hüsken).

Stein 2022, 297, 301). The extended urban space of Kanchi, though, was not completely covered by built-up areas, but had a built-up urban nucleus and open fields and gardens scattered between the clustered settlements as typical for urban settlements in the Chola area between the ninth and thirteenth century (Heitzman 2001, 126–128).⁵⁶ One of the most significant change to urban geography to date was the incorporation of the formerly independent villages such as Attiyur in Chola times (Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 301).⁵⁷

The urban history, which is defined by the merging of the formerly separate temple-centred settlements, still characterises the cityscape today, although open and green spaces have largely given way to denser development. Building on this, Kanchi displays two unique features of a temple city, “a dense and wide distribution of temples [that] defines the urban space, which is organized around the city’s central avenue” (Stein 2021, 106) along with a multifocal arrangement of the religious landscape. A testimony to the first aspect are the more than four hundred temples and shrines spread over the city. The polycentric spatial arrangement is most visible in the location of the three largest temples in contemporary Kanchi, the Varatarāja Perumāl temple at the southeastern end of the city away from the other two major temples, Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ. Their prominence is not a coincidence as these temples in particular received generous patronage throughout the tenth to seventeenth century (Hudson 1993, 20). They are the most distinct markers of the city’s polycentric structure, which is also referred to in the common names of the spatial subdivisions of Vishnu- and Shiva-Kanchi (see figure 2.2).

2.4 Kanchi as Part of Religious Networks

The sacred sites of Kanchi’s diverse religious landscape—physically represented in the form of temples—do not exist in isolation but are linked with each other. This is reflected by shared ritual traditions, shared mythology,

56 James Heitzman (2001, 128) further elaborates: “[a] relatively small urban core was in close contact, through commercial, administrative and ritual ties, with a series of satellite settlements grouped around temples or monasteries in a thick network of discrete nodes. It was the density of these nodes and the pattern of interactions among them and with the urban core that created a capital city.”

57 On the impacts of Kanchi’s urbanisation on the region and the ties of the city with its hinterlands, see Heitzman 2001 and Stein 2021, 147–172.

and connecting elements in architecture and iconography. It lies outside the scope of this book to examine the aspect of networks within the religious landscape of the city beyond the context of the glorifying texts about Kanchi which will be discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 6.⁵⁸ Just as sites in Kanchi can be linked with each other in the sacred landscape of the city, individual local sites and their deities are also part of regional or pan-Indian devotional landscapes and conceptualised networks. A cursory consideration of this aspect allows us to situate the city within the context of broader religious networks that serve to shape the perception of the city as a sacred place and pilgrimage destination.

Two prime examples of such networks are the two devotional landscapes that span the Tamil-speaking region in South India. They are formed through the poems of the Tamil Śaiva Nāyanmār and the Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs who composed songs in praise of Śiva or Viṣṇu said to reside at some particular places. The Śaiva sites extolled by the first three and most influential Nāyanmār Sambandar and Appar (both seventh century), and Sundarar (eighth century; Ayyar 1993, 85–86) are listed in the *Tēvāram*, a part of the Tamil Śaiva literary canon. By the tenth century the sites are collectively referred to as Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams and together represent a devotional landscape relevant to the Tamil Śaiva tradition (Ramesh 2020, 34–47; Peterson 1982 and 1989; Spencer 1970).⁵⁹ Of the Vaiṣṇava sites praised by the Ālvārs poets—contemporaries of the Śaiva Nāyanmār—108 were collected in the *Divya Prabandham*; they form the Vaiṣṇava devotional landscape and are of particular significance to parts of the Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition (Young 2014; Dutta 2010; Rajarajan 2013).

Five sites in Kanchipuram are counted among the Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams and are thus representations of the larger Śaiva devotional landscape laid out in the *Tēvāram*.⁶⁰ As for the Vaiṣṇava counterpart, all of the major Viṣṇu temples in the city are thought to have been praised by the Ālvārs and

58 On relations between sites within Kanchi, expressed in the ritual context, see Schier 2018, 2021, 2022, and Hüsken 2025.

59 The Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams number 274 or 276 depending on the count. For details, see Chevillard and Sarma 2007.

60 These are Kacci Ekāmbam (Ēkāmparanātar; praised by Sambandar, Appar, and Sundarar), Ōṇakāntaṇ Taḷi (Ōṇakāṇṭaḷisvarar; Sundarar), Kacci Mēṛraḷi (Tirumēṛraḷisvarar; Appar, Sundarar), Kacci Anēkātāṅkāvatam (Anēkātāṅkāvatēsvarar; Sundarar), and Kaccineṛik Kāraikkāṭu (Satyanātasvāmi; Sambandar). For details, see Buchholz (forthcoming-b); for indications of the individual poems of the three Nāyanmār, see Chevillard and Sarma 2007.

counted among the Divyadeśams.⁶¹ The classification as Pāṭal Per̥ra Stalam or Divyadeśam is still of importance for the local temples and in the lived religiosity: for example, the addition *divyadeśam* is explicitly included on the name plate of one of the subsidiary shrines of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple to make this affiliation clear and there are privately produced maps which indicate the positions of the Pāṭal Per̥ra Stalams.⁶²

Another conceptualised network of sacred sites which includes Kanchi is that of the Five-Element Liṅgas (Pañcabhūtaṅgas). These five Śaiva sites in South India are thought to represent five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether) and the Ekāmrānātha *liṅga* in Kanchi is identified as the *liṅga* of the earth (*pr̥thivi*).⁶³ The Pañcabhūtaṅgas nowadays form a popular series of pilgrimage sites, while the concept is already mentioned in the *Kuñci-tāṅghristava* by the fourteenth-century author Umapati Shivacharya (Kulke 1970, 140, 140, n. 354; Buchholz 2025, 109, n. 26).

In a broader geo-religious context, the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple is counted among the Śaktipīṭhas, the seats of the Goddess. These sites are considered powerful places of the great Goddess (Mahādevī) and her worship on the Indian subcontinent is believed to have been sanctified through parts of the goddess Sātī which are said to have fallen on earth while Śiva carried his

61 The identification of a Vaiṣṇava site in Kanchi as Divyadeśam is ambiguous, different sources list between fourteen (Rajaraman 2018, 17–21; Young 2014, 356), fifteen (Ramesh 2000, 33–114) to eighteen (Seshadri 2003, 46–48) Divyadeśams in Kanchi. The list in Rajaraman 2018 mentions alphabetically the places of Attikiri (also Attiyūr; Varatarāja Perumāl), Aṭṭapuyakaram (Aṣṭapuja Perumāl), Kaḷvaṅūr (Kaḷva Perumāl; first enclosure of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple), Kārakam (Kārakattu Perumāl; outer enclosure of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple), Kārvāṅam (Kārvāṅa Perumāl; outer enclosure of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple), Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṅam (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṅa Perumāl; first enclosure of the Ēkāmparanātar temple), Nīrakam (Nīrakkattu Perumāl; outer enclosure of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple), Paramēccuraviṅṅakaram (Vaikuṅṅa Perumāl), Pāṭakam (Pāṅṅavatūta Perumāl), Pavaḷavaṅṅam (Pavaḷavaṅṅa Perumāl), Taṅkā (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāl), Perakam (Ulakaḷanta Perumāl; in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple), Veḷkā (Yatōktakāri Perumāl), and Vēḷukkai (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāl). On the historical evolution of the Divyadeśams, see Rajaraman 2013; on the process of the canonisation, see Young 2014.

62 See, for example, the map by Kamesh Kumar (2020). At the times of the Āḷvārs, however, the places mentioned in their songs did probably not (yet) form a fixed network of sites that was travelled by pilgrims (Young 2014, 345–346). It was only with the advent of modern means of transport and printing that the Divyadeśams became an interconnected structure that can be travelled, albeit mostly in sections and without a set order based on the poems of the Āḷvārs (Young 2014, 361).

63 On the concept of the Pañcabhūtaṅgas, see Eck 2012, 253–256 and Fleming 2009.

wife's dead body around. Lists of these sites in varying numbers, of divergent names and localisations are found in Purāṇic and particularly tantric texts.⁶⁴ While Kanchi is mentioned in some older texts among the seats of the Goddess, Kerstin Schier (2018, 134–137) notes that the linking of Kanchi with the concept of the Śaktipīṭhas is a more recent development and not very strong, with the identification of Kāmākṣī as the goddess of the *pīṭha* found only in publications from the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Regardless of when and how the connection of Kāmākṣī with the network of the seats of the Goddess was established, it can be assumed that this helped to increase the significance of the local temple as a part of a larger sacred geography.⁶⁶ The Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple has trans-regional renown as one of the most significant places for the worship of Devī in South India, reflecting the great popularity that the Śaktipīṭhas enjoy in the contemporary Hindu religiosity in general.

In its entirety, Kanchi is further counted among the seven sacred cities that bestow liberation (Saptapurīs / Saptamokṣapurīs).⁶⁷ Kanchi is the only

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- 64 The number of the Śaktipīṭhas varies across the source texts, it is commonly either fifty-one, sixty-four, or 108. See Eck 2012, 267–270, 289–299 and Sircar 1973 for an analysis of the concept, its understanding as a sacred geography of the earth as goddess, and the evolution of the myth. Basically, the existence of these places in mythology is generally linked to a narrative about Dakṣa's sacrifice. Dakṣa is the father of Sātī, who is understood as Śiva's wife. Dakṣa insults Śiva by not inviting him to his great sacrifice and Sātī kills herself, not able to endure the humiliation. In his grief, Śiva wanders the world with Sātī's dead body. This action disturbs the order of the world, wherefore Viṣṇu uses his discus to cut Sātī's corpse and wherever a part of Devī's body falls to earth, a *pīṭha* is created and becomes a sacred site of the Goddess (for example *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VII, chapter 30).
- 65 Kerstin Schier links the attempt to establish the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple within the pan-Indian concept of the Śaktipīṭhas to the increasing renown of Kāmākṣī, propagated by the late Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (d. 1994), the former head of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. She further observes that neither the ritual practice at the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple nor at any other Goddess temple in Kanchi emphasises the worship of body parts of the Goddess (2018, 134–137).
- 66 In examining how local elements relate to the overarching framework, Diana Eck (2012, 294) states: “the myth of Shakti's dismemberment becomes what I have called a ‘subscription myth,’ a story to which local *devī* shrines have subscribed as a way of articulating the particular sanctity of their own place and connecting it with the larger systemic reality. Our place is distinctive, they seem to say, yet our place is also related to the great, cosmic events displaying the power and presence of the Goddess.”
- 67 The seven cities are Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Kanchipuram, Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), and Dwarka (Gujarat). A particular verse commonly introduces them in

one of the seven cities located in the south of the Indian subcontinent. The earliest datable historical record that I know of which mentions the concept of Saptapurīs dates from the end of the sixteenth century. Completed in 1598, the *Āīn-i-Akbarī*, an encyclopaedic account of the affairs of the Mughal Empire authored by the court scholar Abu 'l-Fazl for the emperor Akbar, briefly describes the seven locations and notes that they constitute the seven sacred Hindu cities (Abu-'l-Fazl 1894, 305–306).

Just as the other examples mentioned above, the idea of the Saptapurīs serves to situate Kanchi within the sacred geographies of the Indian subcontinent and documents a specific significance that was and still is, attributed to it. In particular the association of individual sites in the city into regional and pan-Indian networks shapes the supra-regional perception of Kanchi and thus also its significance as a place of pilgrimage. The city is considered to be an important site for the worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Devī, reflecting a cluster-combination of similarly important religious traditions existing side-by-side at one place. Kanchi's pluralistic and polycentric religious landscape thus allows the city to be contextualised through a diverse spectrum of regional and pan-Indian networks.

As I discuss in more detail in chapters 4, 5, and 6, the glorifying texts on Kanchi also address the diverse religious landscape of the city. They create links to other places in the region and beyond to emphasise the importance and significance of Kanchi. The above-mentioned devotional networks partly find their way into the Sthalamāhātmya texts, while these additionally construct their own sets of contextualising places in accordance with the particular conception of Kanchi they present.

the Purāṇas. One version of this verse reads: *ayodhyā mathurā māyā kāśī kāñcī avantikā* || *purī dvāravatī jñeyā saptaitā mokṣadāyikāḥ* | [Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Māyā, Kāśī, Kāñcī, Avantikā, and the city Dvāravatī are known as the seven [cities] bestowing liberation] *Garuḍapurāṇa*, *Pretakāṇḍa* 38.5c–6b (cf. also *Nārada-purāṇa*, *Pūrvabhāga* 27.35). The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcimāhātmya* includes the same verse (KM(V) 1.59; see n. 214), as does the *Hastigirimāhātmya* (1.7c–1.8b), a Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya glorifying Varadarāja.

3 Textual Fundamentals: Kanchipuram's Glorifying Texts

Elements of geography, history, religion, and sometimes architecture merge in descriptions of sacred places found in Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya texts. The local and generally glorifying character with a view to praise the local object(s) of interest unites works of this genre, while the design and emphasis of individual Sthalamāhātmyas vary greatly. This chapter first discusses specifics of Sthalamāhātmyas as a genre and then presents the three Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas that deal with Kanchi. The analysis at this point focuses on their structure of the content, the myths and writing style of the texts while the following chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine their designs of Kāñcī's sacred landscape.

3.1 Māhātmyas as Genre

Sthalamāhātmyas form a subcategory of the genre of Māhātmyas, which in turn is considered part of the Purāṇic literary corpus. The works counted as Purāṇas are not a homogenous group: displaying an encyclopaedic character, they cover a wide range of topics, from secular subjects such as architecture, geography, or astronomy to philosophy, rules of conduct, religious concepts such as pilgrimage, festivals, rites of passage, and related matters such as cosmogony.⁶⁸ Purāṇas may generally be described as theistic literature, in that one or another deity is understood as the personified representation of the supreme. Moreover, they are sectarian in that they favour one deity of the Hindu pantheon over others and their mythological narratives may focus on one deity. However, as Ludo Rocher (1986, 23) states, “even though the purāṇas contain sectarian materials [...] their sectarianism should not be interpreted as exclusivism in favor of one god to the detriment of all others.” Rather, the texts tend to show a comprehensive approach and one and

68 On the nature, content, transmission history, and dates of the Purāṇas, see the studies by Ludo Rocher (1986) and Rajendra Hazra (1940 and 1958–1963).

the same text may contain glorifications of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā or the Goddess (Devī) in different passages.

Many of the extant Purāṇic compilation contain one or more Māhātmyas. In addition, there are Māhātmyas that exist as separate texts and claim affiliation with a particular Purāṇa, in particular with one of the Mahāpurāṇas, the major Purāṇic works.⁶⁹ However, the printed editions of these texts usually do not contain the Māhātmyas that associate themselves with the work. This discrepancy arises from the various recensions and composite character of the Purāṇas as well as their transmission; the texts that are available to us today represent only parts of what constituted a work with the same title in the course of its compilation (Rocher 1986, 59–67). Moreover, as Jonas Buchholz points out,

it can therefore not be ruled out that a *māhātmya* that claims to form part of a particular *purāṇa* was indeed included in a recension of that *purāṇa* that is different from the printed version. However, given the large number of *sthalamāhātmyas* and their largely local relevance, it seems likely that most of them were transmitted as independent texts. (2022, 13)

In some cases, though, a similarity in content can be found between the Māhātmya and the Purāṇa of which the Māhātmya claims to be a part. The *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, for example, presents Kāñcī's sacred geography from an initially Śākta perspective and states to belong to the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. The latter work contains the *Devīmāhātmya*, one of the central texts for the worship of the Goddess. There is thus a noteworthy consistency in terms of the sectarian orientation of both texts, which is reflected in the self-acclamation to the Mahāpurāṇa by the Māhātmya (Ilkama 2023, 45). At the same time, the statements claiming that a Māhātmya is part of a Purāṇa could be understood as an attempt to reinforce the affiliation with the larger pan-Indian textual tradition (Dutta 2010, 32). Moreover, the self-affirmation of a Māhātmya derived from its connection to the larger textual tradition becomes particularly important when there are several texts from the same or different sectarian traditions about the same sacred place. In such a comparative and

⁶⁹ More than half of the 712 Māhātmya texts discussed by Linda Wiig in her analysis of the Māhātmya genre based on Theodor Aufrecht's *Catalogus Catalogorum* affiliate themselves with a Purāṇa or other text (1981, 8). As Linda Wiig acknowledges in this context, the percentage of Māhātmyas claiming affiliation to a Purāṇa could be even higher, as Aufrecht's catalogue may simply have omitted the relevant information.

possibly competitive local setting, the association with a particular Purāṇa can strengthen the interpretative authority of a particular text.

As with works of Purāṇic literature in general, Māhātmyas claim to be a product of a divine revelation. Within the text itself, a Māhātmya is most often attributed to divine characters who are said to have narrated the content of a text in a distant, mythical past. From them, the Māhātmya is said to have been passed on through a succession of mythological characters such as sages. The aspect of transfer is even extended to the textual structure, in which often several sets of conversation are nested and the listener of the first frame-narrative is the narrator of the embedded story. In their reference to an origin in mythical times, Māhātmyas make a timeless claim of truth and their distance regarding human authors contributes to their authority (Bisschop 2011, 3). The historical authors or compilers of Māhātmyas are therefore usually not identifiable; the texts typically contain no information that allows us to determine the place or time of compilation or writing with certainty.

In the case of the glorifying texts written in Sanskrit, the compilers can presumably be found among members of the brahmin class and temple priests and functionaries in particular; their own geographic and contemporary context is reflected in elements such as the promotion of the worship of a particular deity at a specific place (Dutta 2010, 32; Bisschop 2011, 3-4; Gonda 1977, 278). The intentions of the compilers seem to be clear: they hoped to attract attention and patronage and thus also make economic profits from the visiting pilgrims (Dutta 2010, 26, 31-32; Ambach et al. 2022b, 3). Even more so, the subjective agenda of the compilers, focusing on the local micro-level, could also be integrated to use the Māhātmya as an argumentative medium in a rival environment competing for temple resources, as Jan Gonda reflects:⁷⁰

There are sound reasons for assuming that *māhātmyas* often served to formulate the aims or to establish the claims of the temple priests and to refute their opponents, among them not only exponents of other religions but also rival priestly groups

70 Hermann Kulke (1970, 224-225), in his study of the *Cidambaramāhātmya*, reaches a similar conclusion when he writes: “[t]he Māhātmya may be said to be the ‘official’ medium by means of which the tensions between the priests of the various temples were fought out. The Māhātmya is of extreme importance because the text which finally was incorporated into it sooner or later became part of the official dogma of the temple tradition, so long as no internal contraction arose.”

of their own temple city—the presence of various cults did not fail to evoke tensions—and the political powers of their region. In course of time their views and claims, once they were included in the “official” *māhātmya* of their temple, could easily acquire the reputation of authority. (1977, 278)

Testimonies of such negotiating processes are found in the *Māhātmya* texts themselves. Using the example of the Śaiva *Cidambaramāhātmya*, a text on the South Indian city of Chidambaram, Hermann Kulke (1970) analyses how—to offer an example—the older concept of worshipping Śiva through worship of the *śivaliṅga* is gradually superimposed in layered myths by that of worship of the anthropomorphic Naṭarāja, the dancing Śiva, and how the Śaiva relation to the role of the Goddess and Śākta worship changes.⁷¹ Reworkings of the texts, textual layering, interpolations, and additions thus attest to socio-cultural and religious developments and their evolving interpretations. As Ranjeeta Dutta (2010, 32) further notes, after the decline of the Vijayanagara Empire (first half of the seventeenth century), groups other than the (royal) rulers became part of the power structure, also including those in the temples; hence, the content composition of the *Sthalamāhātmyas* became oriented towards more local material—for example, about the Āḷvārs and Śrīvaiṣṇava preceptors in the case of the Vaiṣṇava texts—in order to better address the local communities.

Māhātmyas, as *Purāṇas* in general, represent in the Hindu traditions a religion of place (Jacobsen 2013, 57). While in the earlier Vedic tradition the deities were without permanent places, in the *Purāṇic* Hindu traditions sacred places took centre stage where manifestations of deities are permanently present (Jacobsen 2013, 70). With this transition, pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) achieved status on par with (Vedic) sacrifice (*yajña*) as a means of attaining merit and even salvation (*mokṣa*; Ensink 1979, 106).⁷² The merit (*phala*) of visiting a particular sacred place—the religious journey often

71 Elaine Fisher (2017, 100) points out that in an approach she calls “public philology”, the *Purāṇas* as sectarian texts sacred to Śaivas or Vaiṣṇavas were sources of textual criticism for the purpose of public theology. It stands for one tool in the process of sectarianisation from the seventeenth century onwards in South India, when Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sectarian groups and their theologians resorted to various means to expand and consolidate their influence in the temples and among the devotees.

72 As for chronology, it is assumed that the *Purāṇas* date from the Gupta period (early fourth to early sixth century), although changes were made up to the medieval time (Flood 1997, 110).

combined with performing a certain ritual there—came to be equated to the merit of performing a sacrifice and possibly estimated even higher than that (Ensink 1976, 59).⁷³ Pilgrimage was accessible to a broad audience of people; it was not only the brahmins anymore who were allowed to take part in religious activity. The religious concepts presented in Purāṇic texts were (more) inclusive and accompanied a broadening of the recognised religious praxis to include a variety of local vernacular, non-Brahminical customs and lore, reflected by the scope and diversity of Purāṇic mythologies; the change in ideas was coupled with an agricultural expansion, as formerly peripheral civilisational zones were increasingly developed (Nath 2009, 41–68, 168–201). Sthalamāhātmyas in particular address these new developments as they deal with the geographical goals of pilgrimages and provide descriptions of sacred sites and their merits, glorifying individual locations with the intention of attracting pilgrims and patronage (Dutta 2010, 31–32).

Despite a broad positioning, detailed historical contextualisations of Purāṇic texts remain difficult. According to Hans Bakker, the attribution of a Purāṇic text to divine revelation led the transmitters of a text to feel entitled to “change, delete, or add to given text-material without conceiving of this as a personal contribution, distortion, or fraud” and they made a great effort in “minimalizing the effect of empirical, historical and personal circumstances on the texts” (2019, 177) when copying them. This strategy of recomposition has been followed in a process that Hans Bakker terms “composition-in-transmission” in which changes to a Purāṇic text were made through written transmission (2019, 176–177).⁷⁴ Comparing different versions of a text, with additions, omissions or paraphrases clearly present, reveals this practice. In the case of the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, textual history can best be examined by looking at the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. There are several manuscripts of this text available today, each with different lines of transmission: in two of the manuscripts, entire passages on individual sites seem to be missing; those passages are, in turn, found in another manuscript and in the printed editions (Buchholz 2022, 23–24). Even if one were to consider only the version(s) of the printed editions, there are several inconsistencies

73 Vijay Nath (2009, 170–171) further notes that this idea “appears to mark the culmination of the process by which the Vedic tradition with its narrow caste base and appeal was subsumed by the Purāṇic tradition that was geared to appeal to the masses with its thrust on a strong folk-orientation.”

74 Hans Bakker (2019, 176–178) contrasts the process he calls “composition-in-transmission” with “composition-in-performance” where changes occurred during live performance of the texts in oral form.

in the central narrative that indicate a multilayered composition of the text (Schier 2018, 82).

Due to their changing form, dating Purāṇic texts and thus also the Māhātmyas is an issue that often can be answered only unsatisfactorily. Passages that seem to allude to historical persons, events or datable physical structures are mostly scarce and of limited value. Descriptions of temples, for example, often convey an idealised view that reflects how it was envisioned at the time the text was composed, and not necessarily what the historical temple would have looked like then. Nevertheless, it is possible that such passages actually point to structures of the historical temple to which they refer; the mention of certain architectural features may then allow the date of composition to be narrowed down to a time after these elements had become part of the local temple architecture.⁷⁵

Even if the texts might allude to historical places or events, the temporal setting of the stories remains a mystical past. Conceptually, Māhātmyas and other works of Purāṇic literature deal with stories about the past. Not in the sense of chronicling history but as a form of selective, subjective interpretation of past events with a contemporary reference. Jay Ramesh (2020, 12–13) argues that Purāṇas—and by extension, the Māhātmyas—can most aptly be conceptualised as collective memory instead of history in their relation to the past, since the (mythical) past is used with the intention to impact the lives of devotees in the present. To this end, mythological narratives serve merely as a means of presentation. They are usually set in a mythical past and feature divine and mythological characters. The matters of the world and of life are explained and filled with meaning through mythologies. They thus also refer to rituals and customs. Thus, the myths in the Sthalamāhātmyas are adapted to a local setting to imbue specific features of their spatial and temporal frame of reference with history, meaning and significance.

3.2 Sthalamāhātmyas

The objects of glorification in the Māhātmyas vary greatly. In her study of Māhātmya works, Linda Wiig (1981, 16–18) distinguishes between texts dealing with geographical or fictional places, worship of a particular deity (that is, sectarian affiliation), human and mythological characters, vows,

75 For examples from the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, see pp. 85–89 and Buchholz 2022, 22–23.

time periods, or glorification of names (of epic or Purāṇic texts). Across all those categories, there is a clear emphasis on locality. According to Linda Wiig (1981, 15–16), circa ninety-five percent of the Māhātmyas she has analysed are local in that they are concerned with a place as such, a deity at a particular place, or a ritual practice to be performed at a certain time at a specific location.

More specifically, Sthalamāhātmyas deal with a single local sacred site or a larger sacred landscape encompassing many places. These sites are characterised by a deity said to reside there or a water body (*tīrtha*). Mythological narratives are the means to explain the origin of the sacred place and justify its sacredness. To this end, the texts blend local and pan-Indian elements to construct their own stories. As Ina Ilkama aptly summarises (2023, 44), the “*māhātmyas* share the common Hindu pantheon with the major *purāṇas* and often copy their themes and stories, but elaborate on them and provide them with a local character, so that local myths and motifs are blended in.” This blending forms a link to the pan-Indian Purāṇic mythology, making the local myths recognisable and familiar to people who come to know the place through its mythological story. At the same time, the local sacred landscape extolled through the myths in the Sthalamāhātmyas is associated with the pan-Indian sacred geography.

In addition, the sectarian affiliation of a Sthalamāhātmya influences the shaping of the myths. The partiality is usually reflected in the preference given to one deity over the others. For example, a Śaiva Sthalamāhātmya assigns Śiva a decisive role and would probably present Viṣṇu as worshipping Śiva. When more than one Sthalamāhātmya exists about the same place, such as in the case of Kanchi, the sectarian predisposition of each text can lead to parallel versions of a story about the origin of the same sacred site(s), while often drawing on a common pool of myths.

The stories in the Sthalamāhātmyas are foundation myths of sacred places. This way of describing sites represents a new feature compared to the approach taken in earlier works of the Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs—and the Śaiva Nāyaṇmār—(seventh–ninth century) which also deal with sacred places in their songs (Young 2014, 339). The Sthalamāhātmyas provide a story of origin and attribute significance and salvific power to the places. The sacred and salvific nature is conceptually inherent in a place. It is therefore a site itself that is crucial and attributed a salvific power, and not any physical manifestation of, for example, a temple (Eck 2012, 76–77).⁷⁶ The salvific power is

76 For details on the notion of sacred places, see section 1.4, in particular pp. 18–20, as well as Eck 1981, Jacobsen 2013, and Nath 2009.

thought to result from the deity or mythological figure that once sanctified the site (Jacobsen 2013, 4–8). The physical appearance of sacred sites is often not mentioned and if it is, it seems to conform to an idealised idea of—in most cases—a temple.⁷⁷ With the focus on the permanently ascribed sacred nature of the sacred places, the texts' de-temporalised approach is emphasised, which is also reflected in the self-attribution to non-human authors (see section 3.1). By acknowledging the physicality of a place the imagined sacred landscape is linked with the geographical, physical one.

It is evident that Sthalamāhātmyas refer to historical and mostly still existing sites of a religious and geographical landscape. The mention of a sacred place in a Sthalamāhātmya is fundamentally grounded in its existence in the real-world in, for example, Kanchi. At the same time, the texts link an event in a mythical past to the origin of the sacred place, whose character and significance are then derived from mythology. In their blending of an imagined mythical world with a physically tangible, the texts use the former to give meaning to the latter. By drawing on the characteristics of the real-world geography to describe a sacred landscape, natural sites such as rivers and other water bodies can also appear as part of an imagined landscape in a Sthalamāhātmya. These sites are provided with a significance, sense, and a story of origin as well. In the case of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas, the strategies used by the texts to deal with the parallel concepts of mythology and physical geography differ as does the extent to which they apply mythological concepts to interpret the physical landscape (see chapters 4, 5, and 6). The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, for example, takes the location of the sacred places in the space of Kāñcī as a starting point for the order in which the places are described, whereas references to the physical landscape are much rarer in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

In their core, Sthalamāhātmyas seek to explain why the place they deal with are the most significant one and why it is important to specifically go there and not somewhere else. They thus refer to the practice of pilgrimage and aim to promote the local place—in the interests of the people who represent these sites, and who often are linked to the milieu of local temples (Dutta 2010, 31–32; Hüsken 2017, 68). To this end, a central element is the exposition of the sacredness attributed to the site in question, which is achieved by indicating its meritorious powers that one can benefit

77 The Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi contain only a few passages with specific details that may indicate a temple structure (see pp. 101–106, subsections 5.3.1 and 5.3.3, and pp. 189–190). On the issue of architectural descriptions from the text with regard to their dating, see pp. 85–89 and Buchholz 2022, 22–23.

from when carrying out rituals there or simply visiting the place (Gengnagel 2011, 23). These glorifying statements are denoted as *phalaśruti*, which can be translated as that which has been heard about the rewards of a place. They possibly serve two purposes; they inform visiting pilgrims about the exculpatory profits to be attained at a site which in turn is expressed by those intending to promote the place.

Such sections are a characteristic feature of the Māhātmya genre. In this setting, each sacred place described in a Sthalamāhātmya is conceptually considered to be the most beneficial. If several places are extolled as the most significant in the same text, such claims may initially appear contradictory. However, general ascriptions in the superlative are to be understood as a stylistic element to illustrate the efficacy ascribed to the individual site rather than as indicators of a universal hierarchy of sites (Jacobsen 2013, 26, 123–126).⁷⁸ Claims of superiority that explicitly name another sacred site in comparison, though, serve to establish a hierarchy: thus contextualising a site in a local or trans-regional sacred geography, the promotion and ascribed exceptional importance of the locality in focus is reinforced (Jacobsen 2013, 26). Sravani Kanamarlapudi terms this relational sacredness of a site, which results from the comparison with the attributed powers of other sacred sites, as *intersacrality* (2025, 12–13).

Although they may refer to other places in a regional or pan-Indian sacred landscape, Sthalamāhātmyas are usually less concerned with extolling pilgrimage as a journey from afar; rather, they focus on a place as the destination of a pilgrimage. Throughout the Purāṇic literature we find this approach to sacred places as the most dominant (Jacobsen 2013, 22, 89).⁷⁹ In keeping with their primarily local character, Sthalamāhātmya texts appeal to worshippers and also indicate ritual practices at the local place. So,

[w]hat does the pilgrim need to know? Above all, he is concerned with the specific powers and individual features that have given the site its sacred character. The [glorifying] purāṇa composed at

78 In this context, Knut Jacobsen points to “an element of henotheism in the presentation of the Hindu sacred places in the *Purāṇas* and the *Māhātmyas*,” whereby “each site which is in focus is treated as the foremost site, while also accepting the existence of salvific power at the other sites” (2013, 126).

79 Yet, as Sravani Kanamarlapudi in her study of two vernacular Sthalapurāṇas on Srikalahasti (Andhra Pradesh) shows, journey motifs, which describe how a mythological character visits several sacred places before arriving at the place that the text extols, are found in glorification texts and serve various purposes: they transport a character to the sacred place in question, emphasise its sacredness and enable pilgrims to retrace this mythological journey (2025, 21–22).

this spot will therefore provide him with the traditional history of the shrine, including its (usually miraculous) discovery and the adventures of those important exemplars (such as gods, demons, serpents, and men) who were freed from sorrow of one kind or another by worshipping there. Basic elements of the sacred topography will be identified, and subsidiary shrines may be brought into relation with the main deity of the site. Any local idiosyncrasies in ritual or in the structure of the cult (for example, [...] the exact plan of festivals in many shrines) will be explained by a myth. The purāṇa will also offer lists of the ritual benefits to be gained from worship at the shrine. (Shulman 1980, 17)

These features and functions identified by David Shulman for Tamil Talapurāṇams, the counterparts of Sthalamāhātmyas, also apply to the Sanskrit texts.⁸⁰ The latter unite descriptive and prescriptive elements, a story of origin, and the rituals that are to be performed in order to benefit from the salvific powers of a site. Their authority in both matters rests on their claim to be a product of a divine revelation that is passed on through a series of divine and/or mythic interlocutors (Ramesh 2020, 111–156). Sthalamāhātmyas are essentially manuals for pilgrims, as Travis LaMar Smith notes; they “contain details of specific places—shrines, bathing tanks, and so on—and frequently even provide geographical data so that one might navigate the sacred complex more easily” (2017, 2). While the aforementioned features are characteristics common to Sthalamāhātmya texts and largely determined by the genre, the individual perspective of a text on a specific sacred place is still unique; it depends on the local sacred geography, the geo-temporal context referred to by the composers, and the local religious landscape that is commonly shaped by several religious traditions.

80 There are undeniable differences between Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas and Tamil Talapurāṇams, first of all in the literary style. Apart from that, Jay Ramesh (2020) shows that Talapurāṇams follow Tamil devotional (*bhakti*) poetry in their approach to religious experience and space, and are thus affective and more emotional in their dealing with the mythical past as collective memory compared to the more prescriptive Sthalamāhātmyas. For details on differences between Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas and Tamil Talapurāṇam, see Ramesh 2020, Shulman 1980, and Buchholz 2023a.

3.3 Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi

There are several Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas that deal with Kanchi and exhibit different approaches to the sacred geography of the city. This study focuses on those three texts that deal with Kāñcī's sacred geography in a broader perspective, and are available in printed editions. These are a Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, a Śākta text titled *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and a Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. The *Hastigirimāhātmya*, a Vaiṣṇava text with a more limited focus on Varadarāja, as well as to texts titled *Kāñcīsthānamāhātmya*, which are only available in manuscript form, are therefore not included (see subsection 1.3.1). Based on myths, the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas* and the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* texts present their interpretations of Kāñcī's sacred space and accounts about the origin of the many different sacred sites in the city and their rewarding qualities. The unique perspective of each text is expressed through the text's sectarian framework, structural layout, and spatial conception. Across the Māhātmyas⁸¹ on Kanchi, the stories associated with the same individual sacred place are often similar. This indicates a shared local corpus of mythological stories related to the sacred places of the city. Sometimes, two of the texts closely correspond in the content of a narrative and in some rare cases, text passages from two texts even agree with each other in wording (see subsection 3.3.4). Both correspondences and differences between the texts and the individual framing of the mythological narratives about a sacred place reflect a dynamic process of negotiation between the religious traditions in Kanchi that relate to the interpretation of the local religious landscape and sacred space.

Among the many sacred sites they name and myth they tell, the texts devote the most attention to Śiva as Ekāmranātha, Viṣṇu as Varadarāja, and Devī as Kāmākṣī. The three largest temples in Kanchi are dedicated to these three deities. It can thus be assumed that the texts originated in the spheres of the Ēkāmparanātar, Varatarāja Perumāḷ, and Kāmākṣi Amman temples. Each of the three Māhātmyas places its emphasis around their main deities: the Śaiva text highlights Ekāmranātha, the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya Varadarāja, and the Śākta text deals with Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja, and Kāmākṣī in equal parts, but adds a structural setting that accentuates the goddess. In

81 The texts on Kanchi discussed in the following call themselves only *Māhātmya* and not *Sthalamāhātmya*. In recognition of the texts' own terminology and for better readability, I use the designations *Māhātmya* / *Māhātmyas* for these texts from here on and until the end of chapter 6 (see also remark on p. xiv).

these arrangements, the texts reflect the heightened significance that came to be attached to the sites of these three deities in the cityscape and in the religious landscape of Kanchi, which crystallised into a polycentric layout (see section 2.2).

While Varadarāja's myth of origin does not involve the other two deities in any of the three texts, the myths of Ekāmrānātha and Kāmākṣī are partly interwoven with each other. Only the Śākta Māhātmya presents an additional, distinctly disentangled myth about Kāmākṣī's origin. Given their centrality among all the narratives in the Māhātmyas, the renditions of Ekāmrānātha's, Varadarāja's, and Kāmākṣī's myths will briefly be summarised in this chapter. The sites associated with these deities are also central to the texts' spatial design of Kāñcī, as will be discussed from a geo-spatial perspective in the following chapters.

3.3.1 The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*

The text titled *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, available in editions from 1899 and 1967 in Telugu script, is the most comprehensive text (4700 verses) of the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi. It claims to belong to the *Skandapurāṇa* but is not found in the printed version of the latter text. This Māhātmya has a Śaiva perspective on Kāñcī and is therefore labelled as the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)) to distinguish it from the other text also called *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

Structurally, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* can be divided into three parts: an introduction containing the frame story and a general glorification of Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 1.1–4.34); a main part locating around one hundred *śivaliṅgas* and further sacred places in Kāñcī and narrating their origins in mythological stories (KM(Ś) 4.35–45.end); and a section mainly dedicated to rewards that may be obtained by performing various religious deeds in Kāñcī (KM(Ś) chs. 46–50). The narrator of the Māhātmya is the sage Sūta, the narrator of the Purāṇas, and his audience are the sages assembled in the Naimiśāraṇya, the forest that is often mentioned in Purāṇic stories as a place where sages gather. The sages discuss which of the means is best suited to attain the vision of Śiva and on their request Sūta first retells a narrative referring to a dialogue between Śiva and Pārvatī that praises Kāñcī as Śiva's city on the one hand (introductory part) and then a Māhātmya of Kāñcī that the sage Kauśika once told the brahmins of Kāñcī on the other hand (main part).

The introductory section sets the Śaiva framework that permeates the entire text by glorifying Śiva as the highest deity, his splendour, and Kāñcī as the dearest place of Śiva. It is mainly Śiva's presence as Ekāmrānātha

(Ēkāmparanātar) under the single mango tree that is said to bestow its magnificence on the city. The main part of the Māhātmya about Kāñcī's sacred landscape comprises separate myths of varying lengths that tell of the origin of the sacred sites and usually include statements on the efficacy of the place. The narratives focus on the origins of the sacred sites of Śiva, which are considered the most important. The origin of other sacred places—of Viṣṇu, the Goddess, or sacred water bodies—is a sub-element of the stories detailing the origin of the *śivaliṅgas*.

All the narratives have the same basic structure and the descriptions are partly formulaic: a mythological character, such as a sage or deity, installs a *liṅga* in Kāñcī to worship Śiva. The god manifests himself there, grants rewards to the worshipper or relieves him of afflictions. Afterwards, Śiva remains in the *liṅga* as the lord (*iśvara*) of that place, endowed with the powers he has shown his worshipper there. The *liṅga* is either called after the worshipping character, a prominent element of the narrative, or the specific power ascribed to the *liṅga*. For example, the *śivaliṅga* Iṣṭasiddhīśvara (Iṣṭasittisvarar, within the compound of the Kaccapēsvarar temple; KM(Ś) 13.103c–148b) is said to grant fulfilment of what is desired (*iṣṭasiddhi*) and Matsyeśvara (Maccēca; KM(Ś) 32.62c–71) is worshipped by Viṣṇu in his incarnation as fish (*matsya*). In this basic pattern, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* reflects both the approach to the power of sacred places common to Māhātmyas and the structures of displaying the sectarian bias of Śaiva texts; a place is sanctified because a deity was worshipped there and showed its grace there in favour of its worshipper(s) (Wiig 1981, 29).

The narratives in the KM(Ś) are usually versions of pan-Indian myths and/or include motifs and characters from the epics and the Purāṇas. In order to establish a local reference in the stories, the spatial frame is set in Kāñcī where the plot evolves. As it includes a large number of separate stories about a large number of individual places, the KM(Ś) refers to many characters and narrative motifs from the Purāṇas. In the inclusion of general Purāṇic material, it is thus more extensive than the other two Māhātmyas. Moreover, the text corresponds to the general display of sectarian affiliation characteristic for Śaiva Māhātmyas (not only Sthalamāhātmyas in particular) as Linda Wiig expounds:

In the case of Śaiva motifs, the focus is on Śiva's ability to remove sins and confer benefits when he is supplicated by a devotee. The event of his doing so is often marked by the installation of a *liṅga* (called 'iśvara') on the site. (1981, 27)

Exactly these very elements shape the narratives in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* as well.

As indicated above, the KM(Ś) constructs Śiva as the decisive agency and the divine hierarchy is clearly oriented towards him. Other deities are also part of the Śaiva narratives. Several manifestations of Viṣṇu and different goddesses appear among the characters installing a *liṅga* in Kāñcī. By styling them as Śiva's worshipers, the supreme position of Śiva is firmly established, but without creating an opposition between the deities (cf. the approach in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, see subsection 3.3.3). The bias towards Śaiva myths and sites is also the apparent interpretative element for the comprehensive description of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the KM(Ś).

The emphasis of the narratives and the *Māhātmya*'s spatial concept is Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmparanātar). His myth—interspersed with shorter stories on *śivaliṅgas* and other sacred places located in the surroundings—is elaborately told in a larger portion of the text, covering chapters 39–45 of the KM(Ś). As Jay Ramesh states, *Māhātmyas* often place the site they consider most important at the end of a pilgrimage route that is constructed by their arrangement of the sacred sites they deal with (2020, 7, 118). This pattern is also adopted in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which narrates the myth of Ekāmranātha's at the end of the main section, while the introductory section of the *Māhātmya* has already established the significance of Ekāmranātha. However, contrary to Jay Ramesh's general interpretation, I do not understand the arrangement of the sacred sites in the KM(Ś) as an actual route map meant to be followed (for details, see section 4.3). If the same were to be constructed as a template for a pilgrimage route, one would expect a cohesive narrative that creates a pilgrimage circuit based on the sites, as well as some more specific details regarding the distance of one site from another or the travel timeframe. Nor am I aware of a predetermined or recommended pilgrimage itinerary to visit Kanchi's sacred sites according to the order suggested in the KM(Ś). The conceptual structuring towards Ekāmranātha, though, is apparent and reflects the observation made by Jay Ramesh.

Ekāmranātha's Myth

The central myth of the Śaiva *Māhātmya*, the narrative of Ekāmranātha's origin, can be summarised as follows (KM(Ś) ch. 39–45): it happens that the goddess Pārvatī, Śiva's wife, once playfully covers Śiva's eyes and this plunges the universe into darkness. To atone for her fault, Śiva first sends her to Kāśī (Varanasi) and afterwards to Kāñcī. Pārvatī circumambulates

the city, installs various goddesses, and worships all of Śiva's places. Eventually she reaches the dwelling place of Śiva who is residing at the foot of the single mango tree on the banks of the river Kampā, where she sees Śiva in the form of a Jyotirlinga, a *liṅga* of light. The goddess wishes to worship it but is unsure about how to do it and therefore decides to build a *liṅga* out of sand on top of the light rays. Pārvatī performs austerities next to the single mango tree until Śiva manifests himself to give her permission to construct the *liṅga*. The goddess follows his instructions, builds the *liṅga* and worships it. In an attempt to test Pārvatī's devotion, Śiva causes the primordial flood of destruction (*praḷaya*) to arise in the river Kampā. The approaching flood lets Pārvatī embrace the sand-*liṅga* to protect it, which from then on bears the imprints of her breasts and bangles. The waters of the flood are contained in a skull-bowl by one of Pārvatī's female companions and later on released to form the sacred water body Sarvatīrtha. The Jyotirlinga is transformed into a *liṅga* of sand and Śiva manifests himself out of it. He grants Pārvatī her wish, which is that he should with her in Kāñcī and their wedding is celebrated.⁸² The single mango tree, the specific tree of the site (*sthalavṛkṣa*), the divine symbol and object of worship at the Ēkāmparanātar temple, and the Kampā river as site of Pārvatī's worship are provided with separate stories (KM(Ś) 36.9–88, in particular 36.77c–88 and 37.1–21b).

The understanding of the goddess as Śiva's consort in the KM(Ś) is worth a note. For the most part of Ekāmranātha's myth, she referred to by one of the widely attested names Pārvatī, Devī, or Gaurī. The story mentions that the goddess stays together with Ekāmranātha in Kāñcī, but no specific location is assigned to her in this context. Accordingly, she is not given a specific local name, as would be customary for the local deities of the sacred places mentioned in the text (for example Ekāmranātha, for this local form of Śiva). This non-placement may be due to the fact that, as in other Śaiva temples in Kanchi, there is no separate shrine with a *mūlamūrti*, a central, stationary image, of the god's consort in the Ēkāmparanātar temple. Consequently, there is no historical site of the goddess in the temple with which Śiva's consort from the text could be associated. At the same time, however, Pārvatī is said to stay in Kāñcī alongside Ekāmranātha, suggesting a site where the resident goddess is identified as Ekāmranātha's consort. Yet the text remains

82 For a comparative analysis of different versions of Ekāmranātha's myth in both Sanskrit and Tamil sources, see Schier 2018, 73-96, 199.

rather vague in that respect, as it only indirectly identifies Pārvatī with the local goddess Kāmākṣī.⁸³

The connection of Kāmākṣī with Pārvatī as local form of Ekāmranātha's consort reflects the primary notion of the goddess Kāmākṣī in the KM(Ś). However, Kāmākṣī is specifically and separately dealt with in the text and located at the cave called Kāmakoṭi (or Kāmakoṣṭha; KM(Ś) 31.69–104b; see also pp. 137–140).⁸⁴ This location points to the Kāmākṣī Amman temple, which is situated around 1 kilometre away from the Ēkāmparanātar temple (see figure 2.2).⁸⁵ The text passage does not provide a separate myth about the origin of the goddess there and instead characterises the cave where Kāmākṣī is said to reside. It is composed in a praising style similar to the passages about other significant features related to Ekāmranātha's myth, such as the single mango tree or the Kampā river, thus structurally linking Kāmākṣī as the goddess of Kāmakoṭi to Ekāmranātha. Kāmakoṭi is said to consist of the highest ether; it is the designation of the power of the seat of the Goddess (*pīṭhasakti*) existing there, which refers to the Śākta concept of the *pīṭhas*, the seats of the Goddess. The goddess abides at the cave, she is identified with the supreme power present in the cave and is known in her form as Kāmākṣī.⁸⁶ This characterisation suggests that Kāmākṣī is conceived as stand-alone and separate from Ekāmranātha; she is closely connected to her own site Kāmakoṭi, thus emphasising a distance to Ekāmranātha on the spatial level. The close link of Kāmākṣī to the locale Kāmakoṭi is a central

83 In Ekāmranātha's myth, Pārvatī is sporadically also called Kāmākṣī (KM(Ś) 42.15cd and a few times in the description of the wedding ceremony of Ekāmranātha and Pārvatī / Kāmākṣī starting from verse 45.169).

84 Kāmakoṣṭha, or Kāmakoṭṭam in Tamil, is the designation for the separate shrine for the Goddess as Śiva's consort within Śaiva temples; such a shrine gradually became a fixed element in the South Indian temple architecture from the early Chola period (eleventh century) and was prominent from the thirteenth century onwards (Srinivasan 1951). K. R. Srinivasan suggests that the designation Kāmakoṣṭha is derived from Kāmākṣī as the famous goddess at Kanchipuram (1951; 1960, 32–35). For a hypothesis of the religious-historical developments that led to the inclusion of separate Goddess's shrines in Śiva temples in South India, see Stein 1973. On the topic of Kāmakoṭṭam as designation for the goddess Kāmākṣī, see Schier 2018, 122–123 and Wilke 1996, 160.

85 On site, the cave is considered to be below the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa housing the sanctum sanctorum of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple (see n. 206); thanks go to Ute Hüsken for pointing out this understanding. For details on Kāmākṣī's (spatial) position in the Śaiva Māhātmya, see pp. 137–140. On the concept of the cave as part of Kāmākṣī's character and site, see Annette Wilke's study (1996).

86 In full, the Sanskrit(-ised) name of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple is Kāmakoṭi Kāmākṣī Amman, combining the name of the goddess with the site.

aspect in this context and found as well in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. Yet while Kāmākṣī is introduced separately in the text passage on Kāmakoṭi, she is repeatedly called Ekāmranātha's consort (*ekāmranāyikā*; for example, KM(Ś) 31.97) in this context and throughout the text, just as Ekāmranātha is labelled as Kāmākṣī's lord.

The association of Kāmākṣī with Ekāmranātha is also prevalent in the contemporary ritual re-enactment of Ekāmranātha's wedding during the annual Paṅkuṇi Uttiram festival at the Ēkāmparanātar temple. While the announcements refer to Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī as divine couple, the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali actually nowadays represent the bride—but is identified with Kāmākṣī,—with Kāmākṣī's festival statue (*utsavamūrti*) taking part in the festivities as the bride's female friend (Schier 2018, 119–152, 175–190, 192–193).⁸⁷ The goddess Ēlavārkuḷali takes the role of Ekāmranātha's consort in this context, but she does not seem to be permanently placed in this role at the Ēkāmparanātar temple. The shrine of the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali in the second enclosure (*prākāra*) of the temple houses only her festival image; a stationary image (*mūlamūrti*), which one might expect to find, is missing.⁸⁸ This setup is in line with the overall popular understanding that there is no separate shrine—with a *mūlamūrti*—of the Goddess as the god's consort found in the Śaiva temples in Kanchi.⁸⁹

The reason for the lack of a separate myth of Kāmākṣī in the KM(Ś) is, in my view, grounded in her connection with Ekāmranātha. Even if only subliminally conveyed, her role and origin is sufficiently disclosed through Ekāmranātha's myth. The multilayered characterisation of Kāmākṣī can be seen as an expression of a balancing act in which the ideas of Kāmākṣī as independent, stand-alone goddess in her own place or as married to Śiva are acknowledged in parallel. The separate description of Kāmākṣī's site may well be grounded in the geo-spatial arrangement of the sacred sites and their stories in the text that is based on the location—or rather the proximity—of the places introduced one after another (see subsection 4.3.3). The myth

87 Until the end of the seventeenth century, it seems, the festival image of Kāmākṣī of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, served as Ekāmranātha's bride during Paṅkuṇi Uttiram (Schier 2018, 138–152). As Kerstin Schier (2018) shows, the question whether Kāmākṣī is to be considered Ekāmranātha's consort or is an independent goddess is a debated topic in the different religious traditions in Kanchi as well as in the myths found in Māhātmyas, oral traditions, and ritual practice.

88 Thanks go to N. Subramaniam for clarifying the question of Ēlavārkuḷali's images at the Ēkāmparanātar temple.

89 A myth in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (ch. 14) explains why there are no separate shrines for the Goddess as Śiva's consort in the city's Śaiva places.

of Ekāmrānātha integrates Kāmākṣī to indicate the text's primary understanding of her as Ekāmrānātha's consort and local form of Pārvatī while the text passage separately dealing with Kāmakoṭi reflects the spatial distance between the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ and Ēkāmparanātar temples.

The idea of Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāḷ), in turn, is straightforward in the Śaiva text. As with all of Viṣṇu's sites, the myth of origin of this manifestation of Viṣṇu is interwoven into the story about the one of the *śivaliṅgas* located close by. Varadarāja's narrative is linked to Puṇyakoṭīśvara (Puṇṇiyakoṭṭīśvarar; KM(Ś) 5.1–70). Varadarāja's myth in the Śaiva text differs from the versions found in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, with the latter apparently corresponding to the plot from the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (cf. subsection 3.3.3).⁹⁰ The focus in the story from the KM(Ś) is the origin of the *liṅga* Puṇyakoṭīśvara—in accordance with the structural outline of the text. As mentioned above, the interpretation of Viṣṇu and Vaiṣṇava sites in the KM(Ś) is undisputed: Viṣṇu is presented as worshiping Śiva and the narratives on Viṣṇu's manifestations in Kāñcī are add-ons to the stories about the *liṅgas*. This setting attributes to Śiva a superordinated position over Viṣṇu and, consequently, clearly settles the relation between the associated traditions in the interpretation of the KM(Ś).

As is typical for Māhātmyas, the element of glorification in the KM(Ś) is expressed mainly in the form of statements about the special power of a place. These *phalaśruti* phrases are found at the end of almost all stories in the Māhātmya and detail the efficacy of the *śivaliṅgas*. In the case of sacred water bodies, their power is thought to be linked to a worship of a *liṅga* with Śiva eventually effecting the desired rewards. In addition to the praising remarks found at the end of the stories about the sacred sites, the KM(Ś) includes longer praise sections on the single mango tree, the Kampā river, and the cave Kāmakoṭi where Kāmākṣī resides. It further repeatedly and extensively glorifies Śiva's particular representation of Ekāmrānātha, both in the chapters covering his myth and throughout the text.

90 The story in the KM(Ś) tells about Viṣṇu who wants to create the world alongside Brahmā and is advised by Śiva to worship him in Kāñcī, which he does with the help of the king of elephants, Gajendra. Linking to the latter character, the story features the known Purāṇic Vaiṣṇava motif of Gajendra being attacked by a sea monster and seeking refuge with Viṣṇu for help (cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VIII, 2–4; see also footnote 221). Śiva eventually manifests himself and grants Viṣṇu the boon to create the world. Because Viṣṇu calls Śiva *varada* (granter of wishes), he himself receives the name Varadarāja. Viṣṇu further requests that the mountain on which he resides as Varadarāja be called Hastigiri (Elephant-Hill) after the elephant that helped him worship Śiva.

Building on a general Śaiva orientation, the link of Kāñcī with Śiva as Ekāmranātha is one of the prominent features of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Ekāmranātha is clearly the focus of the text, which leads to the assumption that the text originated in the context of the Ēkāmparanātar temple. The emphasis on Ekāmranātha is also reflected in the spatial design of Kāñcī's sacred landscape in the text, which constructs this local manifestation of Śiva at the centre of the city (see chapter 4).

3.3.2 The *Kāmākṣivilāsa*

The *Kāmākṣivilāsa* (KV) is the shortest text among the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi (1400 verses). It is available in two printed editions, one from 1889 in Telugu script and the other from 1968 in Devanagari. The text attributes itself to the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* but is not found in the latter's standard printed editions. However, as Ina Ilkama (2023, 45; also Schier 2018, 85) points out, this self-acclamation to a Mahāpurāṇa is noteworthy and consistent in terms of sectarian orientation. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* contains one of the central texts for the worship of the Goddess, the *Devīmāhātmya*. In its myth about the goddess Kāmākṣī, the KV presents a localised rendition of the central Goddess myth from the *Devīmāhātmya*.

Judging by its title, it would be assumed that the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* deals with Kāmākṣī and her myth. The Śākta orientation holds true for the overall framing: in the introduction (KV ch. 1), Kāñcī is presented as a Śaktipīṭha, a seat of the Goddess, and Kāmākṣī as a local form of the great Goddess (Mahādevī). This identification indicates the text's affiliation with the pan-Indian tantric Śākta Śrīvidyā tradition, which centres around the Goddess as Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī and further reflects the tradition followed in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple in Kanchi.⁹¹ The local anchoring is unmistakable and the KV itself variously mentions the identification of Kāmākṣī with Mahātripurasundarī (KV 1.78, 11.26, ch. 12).

The Śākta framing is most evident in the introductory (and the concluding) chapter. The divine power of the Goddess (*śakti*) of illusion (*mahā-māyā*), the primordial nature, is presented as the original cause that brings about the goddess Kāmākṣī (Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ) in Kāñcī and also, through

91 On the Śrīvidyā tradition, see Gavin Flood's introduction (1997, 187–189) and the study by Douglas Brooks (1992) for details of the South Indian Śrīvidyā form. On the local Śrīvidyā form of worship followed in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, see Ina Ilkama's study (2023, 25–34).

her, Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmparanātar) and Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāḷ). As she fights off an angry Brahmā, the goddess creates Śiva and Viṣṇu in an imperceptible form as her emanations, from which Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja later manifest themselves (KV 1.94–125b).⁹² The divine Śākta principle is accordingly manifest threefold in Kāñcī as Devī (Kāmākṣī), Viṣṇu (Varadarāja), and Śiva (Ekāmranātha). Kāñcī is therefore said to be Viṣṇu's realm, to grant closeness to Śiva, and to be endowed with the power of Devī because of her predominance. Twice the divine power of the Goddess (*śakti*) is visible in the *saguṇa* (with qualities) form, namely as Kāmākṣī and Varadarāja, and once, as Ekāmranātha, it exists in the *nirguṇa* (without qualities) form (KV 1.50c–68b).⁹³ The classification refers to the deities' physical representation in the sanctum sanctorum of their temples: Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī are depicted in anthropomorphic form, Ekāmranātha as aniconic *śivaliṅga*.

Within this fundamental Śākta framing, the local deities Kāmākṣī, Varadarāja, and Ekāmranātha are placed seemingly on an equal level. Accordingly, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* presents itself as a Māhātmya on Kanchi with a broader perspective.⁹⁴ Framed as a conversation between the sage Mārkaṇḍeya as narrator and a king named Suratha⁹⁵ listening to him, it demonstrates an inclusive approach with an distinctly schematic and

92 This narrative processes one of the central Śākta myths, in which the Goddess kills the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha (cf. for example *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* I, 6–9).

93 In reference to the myth told in the first chapter of the KV, the understanding of Kāmākṣī, Ekāmranātha, and Varadarāja as emanations of the Goddess's nature is taken up again in the last chapter of the text. Here, Kāmākṣī is said to be sixfold present in Kāñcī, thrice as goddess, twice as Śiva and once as Viṣṇu, all through divine play. The six forms are the golden Kāmākṣī (the festival image of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple; see n. 101), the cave (considered to be the space below the sanctum sanctorum of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple but physically imperceptible), Kāmākṣī in the sanctum sanctorum, the single mango tree (at the Ēkāmparanātar temple), Ekāmranātha, and Varadarāja (KV 14.123–132b). This list expands the arrangement found in the first chapter of the Māhātmya. On the concept of *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* in divine manifestations, see Agrawal 2018.

94 At the end of chapter 1, the KV itself states to be a *Kāñcīmāhātmya*: *kāmākṣyās tu vilāso* [’*lyam kāñcīmāhātmyam uttamam* || KV 1.127; for *māhātmyam* (1968 edition) read *māhātmyam* (1889 edition).

95 Several kings with this name appear in the epics and the Purāṇas (Mani 1975, 768–769) and that is why the identification of this character is ambiguous. In his English compilation of the KV, V. D. N. Rao (n.d.), however, apparently identifies king Suratha with a particular character from the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, where Suratha loses his kingdom after being defeated by his enemies, goes to the hermitage of the sage Sumedha where he is taught a Śākta *mantra* (sacred formula),

uniform structure. The result is a rough tripartite division in a Vaiṣṇava (KV chs. 2–5), a Śaiva (chs. 6–9), and a Śākta part (chs. 10–13), centring around Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. Each part is structured identically: i) the first chapter outlines the territory (*kṣetra*) assigned to the main deity in Kāñcī and introduces a selection of sacred sites located in that area (see section 5.3). Viṣṇu, *śivaliṅgas*, goddesses, and *tīrthas* in almost equal number each are located and their myths of origin are hinted at. The thus defined area forms the spatial frame for the subsequent mythological narratives; ii) the next chapter of each part tells the story of one divine symbol that is strongly associated with both the myth of the main deity and its worship or abode. For Varadarāja this is the hill Hastiśaila, on which he manifests himself and stays, for Ekāmranātha it is the single mango tree, under which the goddess Pārvatī builds a *liṅga* of sand to worship Śiva, and for Kāmākṣī it is a manifestation of ether as a cave, where the goddess resides. Following the narrative about the symbol, the central myth of the main deity is introduced; and, iii) the respective third chapter of each part continues the core narrative aiming at the manifestation of the deity in Kāñcī; iv) the conclusion of each part is formed by an episode about a sacred water body that plays an important role in the main myth and is located in the deity's *kṣetra*.

Through the consistent structure of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta parts, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* presents local Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta mythologies each in their own right and as existing in parallel. It is noteworthy that the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva parts do not show any Śākta influence anywhere. Instead, the rendition of Varadarāja's narrative seems to correspond to the version from the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya on Kanchi. Likewise, the rendition of Ekāmranātha's myth largely agrees with the version from the Śaiva text. The myths in the KV are, however, much condensed and deviations in detail do occur.⁹⁶ Compared to the other two Māhātmyas, the narrative renditions from the KV appear to be told as if in a fast-forward. Although this

and eventually regains his kingdom. Since the KV itself does not provide any details on the character of Suratha, I cannot verify this particular identification.

96 For example, the version of Ekāmranātha's myth in the KV includes the motif of Viṣṇu (understood as Pārvatī's brother) helping Pārvatī in protecting her and the sand-*liṅga* when Śiva attempts to test the goddess's devotion. This element is also found in the version of the narrative from the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which generally assigns Viṣṇu the superordinate position and powers. However, Viṣṇu's involvement is not included in Ekāmranātha's myth in the Śaiva text, while the story lines in the Śaiva part of the KV are otherwise congruent with the versions found in the KM(Ś).

stylistic approach leads to a comprehensible and logical presentation of the plot with an explanation of the central motifs, it seems simplistic in comparison. In addition, structurally recurring sections, for example, the introductory verses of the chapters, the introductions to the longer narratives, the passages describing the manifestation of Varadarāja, Ekāmrānātha, and Kāmākṣī, as well as verse sections praising the realms of the three gods, are similar in their structure and even almost identical in the wording in each of the three parts of the KV.⁹⁷ Thus, the KV is decidedly uniform, but also monotonous from a linguistic-stylistic perspective.

Instead of elaborate myths, core elements are glorifying and often extensive *phalaśruti* passages. These are frequently added at the end of the stories about the sacred places and in itself may be specific illustrative stories that exemplify the power of the sites. The *phalaśruti* passages directly appeal to the listeners—or readers—of the Māhātmya and underline the impression of the entire text as a pilgrim-friendly synoptic introduction to Kanchi.

In the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, we find the only case in Kanchi's Māhātmyas in which the myth of Kāmākṣī is untangled from Ekāmrānātha's. In the Śākta part of the text, the goddess is provided with a separate myth on her origin and considered an independent goddess, a form of Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī, with her own Śākta tradition.⁹⁸ In this regard, the KV does live up to its title as account of the Goddess manifested as Kāmākṣī. At the same time, the rendering of Ekāmrānātha's myth in the KV understands the goddess with the name Kāmākṣī to be a form of Śiva's wife Pārvatī. Kāmākṣī is thought to be married to Ekāmrānātha, as is also found in the narrative of the Śaiva text and the version of Ekāmrānātha's and Kāmākṣī's myth in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. There are thus two different, but parallel interpretations of Kāmākṣī expressed in the KV: the goddess appears as Ekāmrānātha's consort in the Śaiva part, while Kāmākṣī is presented as a stand-alone goddess in the Śākta part. This incongruence results from the structural division within the text, in which each part stands on its own in terms of content.

97 Compare, for example, *yaḥ paṭhec chṛṇuyān nityam imam adhyāyam ādarāt | hariḥsetranivāsena yatphalaṃ tatphalaṃ labhet || KV 2.73 to yaḥ paṭhec chṛṇuyān nityam imam adhyāyam ādarāt | rudraśālānivāsena yatphalaṃ tatphalaṃ labhet || KV 6.72 and to etad adhyāyamātram vā yaḥ paṭhec chruṇuyān naraḥ | kāmakoṣṭhanivāsena yatphalaṃ tatphalaṃ labhet || KV 10.79.*

98 According to Douglas Brooks (1992, 71), Kāmākṣī's iconography stresses her stand-alone status.

Kāmākṣī's Myth

Kāmākṣī's Śākta myth of origin from the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* reflects the core storyline of Purāṇic Goddess mythology. It can be summarised as follows (KV 11.19–25, 12.16–114):⁹⁹ A demon called Bandhaka torments the world and its beings, including deities and sages. Frightened, the gods enter Kāñcī through the cave (*bila*) Kāmakoṣṭha and see Mahātripurasundarī who resides there. In the form of parrots, they stay outside the cave and contemplate on the Goddess. She manifests herself and in the form of fire burns the world which is thus destroyed. Out of the void space, the Goddess creates Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva (the Trimūrti) who then carry out their tasks of creation, preservation and destruction. The new world, however, still includes Bandhaka. The Goddess again fights and eventually kills him and all other demons. In the form of a five-year-old girl, she drags the dead Bandhaka to Kāmakoṣṭha in Kāñcī. The gods—still present as parrots—recognise the girl as the Goddess, assume their own forms and praise her. As instructed by the girl, the gods bury Bandhaka, build a temple (called Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa) for her at the cave, and worship her all night. The next morning, Mahātripurasundarī shows them her own divine form and declares that she will reside at Kāmakoṣṭha as Kāmākṣī from now on.¹⁰⁰

Like an appendix to the Śākta part, the last chapter of the KV (ch. 14)—with 247 verses, it is the longest of all chapters—presents miscellaneous topics and narratives related to Kāmākṣī. One myth, for example, explains why there are no separate shrines for the Goddess in Śiva's places in Kāñcī as well as the origin of the golden Kāmākṣī.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, philo-

99 For a more detailed summary and comparison of the local Goddess myth with the archetypal Śākta mythology about the goddess fighting and killing a demon, see Ilkama 2023, 41–61. In her study of the Navarātri festival in Kanchi, Ina Ilkama analyses the myths from different sources—among them the KV.

100 The description of how Kāmākṣī is celebrated by the gods recounts how Śiva appears in the form of the sage Dūrvāsa, who presents the *Cintāmaṇītantra* containing the rules for the worship of Kāmākṣī. According to Anne Moßner, this passage probably refers to the *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇī*, the normative ritual handbook used as the manual for worship in the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple (2008, 77, n. 371).

101 The golden Kāmākṣī is known as Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī (*baṅgāru* means gold in Telugu) and is the former festival image of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple. In the seventeenth century, the statue left Kanchi to be hidden in politically unstable times and has been eventually installed in a temple in Thanjavur where it still is found (Hüsken 2017). For the role of Kāmākṣī in the contemporary celebration of the annual Paṅkuṇi Uttiram temple festival at the Ekāmparanātar temple and the legendary accounts about Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī from Kanchi and

sophical expositions are given on the nature of the various forms of the Goddess present at the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, as well as instructions on the worship of the Śricakra, the representation of the Goddess in form of a *yantra* (a mythical diagram) in the Śrīvidyā tradition, and a brief account of a Chola king who once worshipped Kāmākṣi.¹⁰² The various episodes in the last chapter of the KV express the local anchoring and the Māhātmya's embedding in the religious tradition of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple.

On the one hand, the decidedly uniform and schematic structure of the KV links the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta parts into a coherent concept. On the other hand, the framing of the Māhātmya is less consistently discernible due to the equal inclusion of Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta material. The general outlook in form of the introductory and concluding chapters is clearly Śākta. The idea of Kāñcī as a place of the Goddess is emphasised, Devī is placed on top of the divine hierarchy, Viṣṇu and Śiva presented as manifestations of the power of the Goddess principle, and elements of the ritual traditions of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple are featured. At the same time, the forms of divine (Śākta) power locally present in Kāñcī as Kāmākṣī, Varadarāja and Ekāmrānātha, seem to be regarded as on a par with each other. Nearly half of the chapters, the Vaiṣṇava and the Śaiva part, present either Viṣṇu or Śiva as supreme deity and focus on one of the two gods. In these sections of the text, there is no suggestion of a deeply ingrained Śākta angle. The crucial element that brings together the Śākta framing with the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva material into a unified whole is the myth in the introductory chapter (KV 1.94–125b), which presents Viṣṇu and Śiva alongside the Goddess as emanations from the Goddess principle. Still, if the text were to present a Śākta perspective on Kanchi and/or a praise of Kāmākṣi alone, the myths of the Vaiṣṇava and the Śaiva part could have been omitted or re-interpreted to include the Goddess in a prominent position.

In view of the tripartite division of the KV and an equally tripartite spatial layout of Kanchi (see section 5.3 and figure 5.11), I therefore consider the KV more likely an attempt to claim territory for Kāmākṣī in Kanchi's religious landscape and to promote the city as an important place of the Goddess worship, with the local Śākta tradition as equal to the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva traditions. In contrast to both the Vaiṣṇava and the Śaiva *Kāñcī-māhātmya* with their one-sided orientation, however, an inclusive approach

Thanjavur; see Schier 2018, 138–152. On the iconography of the golden Kāmākṣī compared to Buddhist goddesses, see Venkataraman 1973, 45–47.

102 On the ritual tradition of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, Kāmākṣī's worship, and the role of the Śricakra, see Ilkama 2023, 25–34. For an assumption on the historical identity of the king, see Moßner 2008, 97, n. 407.

has been chosen. This acknowledges the other religious traditions and their narratives rather than juxtaposing them with Śākta interpretations of the same sacred places. Importantly, though, it establishes an autonomous narrative of Kāmākṣī as an independent goddess, framed in the South Indian Śrīvidyā religious tradition that is followed in the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple. Particularly noteworthy are the various references to details in the ritual practices observed in the temple that unmistakably link the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* to the local Śākta tradition of Kāmākṣī in Kanchi. In this respect, the KV is an explicitly locally grounded text whose probable origin or commissioning is therefore to be surmised in the communities associated with the temple, be they hereditary priests or members of the monastic institution of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, whose former head Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (1894–1994) very actively propagated the renown of Kāmākṣī and her temple (Wilke 1996, 149).

3.3.3 The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*

The second text titled *Kāñcīmāhātmya* has a distinctly Vaiṣṇava orientation and is therefore referred to as the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)). It is available in an edition from 1907 in Devanagari script and claims to belong to the *Brahmaṇḍapurāṇa*. In terms of length (2300 verses), the KM(V) is about half the size of the KM(Ś) and twice the size of the KV.

Like the Śaiva Māhātmya, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* is framed as a narration presented by the Purāṇic narrator Sūta to the sages gathered in the Naimiṣāraṇya. The sages first discuss what act one needs to perform for Viṣṇu to grant them liberation (*mokṣa*). They eventually single out Kāñcī as the place on earth where Viṣṇu bestows liberation. Upon his arrival at the assembly of the sages, Sūta agrees to tell the Māhātmya on Kanchi which he has once heard the sage Nārada narrate to the king Ambarīṣa. This introduction (KM(V) 1.1–2.14) sets the Vaiṣṇava framework for the entire text, which further contains various self-contained narrative cycles (chs. 2–3, 9–30), a chapter more generally glorifying Kāñcī (ch. 4), and a part introducing several sacred water bodies in Kāñcī and the surrounding area (chs. 5–8). The last two chapters give the origin of a pair of lizards, a popular object of worship at the Varatarāja Perumāl temple (Taṅkapalli; ch. 31), and introduce three *śivaliṅgas* (ch. 32). Both seem to be additions to the text, since the Māhātmya is structurally concluded in the third last chapter (ch. 30) of the Māhātmya text (Hüsken 2022, 167–168).

The main structural elements of the KM(V) are narrative cycles, which each aim at the manifestation of a particular form of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī. Further manifestations of Viṣṇu may additionally appear in the course of these myths and one in an additional narrative. In her in-depth analysis of the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, Marie-Claude Porcher (1985) points out the arrangement of four narrative cycles along a spatial and temporal axis. The spatial shift is reflected by a change of venue from the southeast to the northwest in Kanchi in the transition from one narrative cycle to the next. The temporal axis is based on successive manifestations of Viṣṇu (*avatāras*), which preside over the larger narratives with one exception. Varāha, Viṣṇu's manifestation as boar, is leading in the first narrative cycle, (KM(V) ch. 2); the man-lion, Narasiṃha, in the second (KM(V) chs. 3, 9–17), Viṣṇu as dwarf Vāmana presides over the third cycle (KM(V) chs. 18–28); and Kṛṣṇa over the fourth (KM(V) ch. 29). The assignment of the *avatāras* with their temporal allocation reflects a progressive structure of the KM(V). In accordance with the manifestations of the *avatāras* linked to successive world ages (*yugas*), the narrative cycles are set in consecutive *yugas*.¹⁰³ The first three evolve in the Kṛta- or Satyayuga and the fourth in the later Dvāparayuga. Outside the framework of a narrative cycle, the last narrative detailing the origin of a local form of Viṣṇu (KM(V) ch. 30) is set in the Kaliyuga, the present world age, without the assignment of an *avatāra*.

Overall, the narratives in the KM(V) are distinctly confined to the sphere of mythical conceptions. The *Māhātmya* is first and foremost concerned with telling mythological stories about Viṣṇu that illustrate his supreme power and glory. These often process known Purāṇic motifs or present localised renditions of Purāṇic Vaiṣṇava narratives. The narratives follow a structural outline typical for Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmyas*, which Linda Wiig identifies as follows: “[i]n the Vaiṣṇava context, Viṣṇu manifests and displays

103 The sequence of the *avatāras* in the KM(V) reflects the arrangement found in *daśavatāra*-lists of the ten principal incarnations of Viṣṇu. Such lists of Viṣṇu's manifestations, which are believed to appear for the welfare of the world in a certain order in successive world ages, are found in various Purāṇas. Varāha is usually listed as the third incarnation, Narasiṃha as the fourth, Vāmana as the fifth, and Kṛṣṇa is either on position eight or nine. The sequence and inclusion of particular incarnations vary in the epic, Purāṇic and other textual sources. Varāha and Narasiṃha are said to manifest in the Kṛtayuga (also called Satyayuga), the first and best world age in a cycle of four. Vāmana is considered to have appeared in the Tretāyuga (second era) and Kṛṣṇa at the end of the third yuga, the Dvāparayuga (Couture 2018). In the KM(V) we find a slight deviation from this allocation of the *avatāra* to an era, with the myths led by Vāmana set in the Kṛtayuga and not in the Tretāyuga.

his power on behalf of a devotee and then agrees to reside permanently (in iconic form) at a place” (1981, 27). It is precisely these elements that structure the myths in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya as well: Viṣṇu is asked for help by a devotee, the god appears in a local form, and ultimately stays in a particular place in Kāñcī.

The selection of sacred sites presented in the text is largely limited to manifestations of Viṣṇu and *tīrthas* in Kanchi (see section 6.4). The number of individual stories is less extensive compared to the other two Māhātmyas, as it mentions fewer sacred places. In turn, the structure in the narrative cycles allows for extensive narrations, partly interspersed with further episodes that introduce a new motif or character. The first narrative cycle is a local version about Varāha, Viṣṇu’s manifestation as boar that rescues the earth (the goddess Bhū) by lifting her up with his tusks (KM(V) ch. 2; cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* III and *Matsyapurāṇa*, 247–248).¹⁰⁴ The second cycle, divided into two self-contained myths, presents a local interpretation of the Hiraṇyakaśipu myth, in which Viṣṇu incarnates as a man-lion to fight the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu (KM(V) ch. 3; cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VII) while larger portion forms Varadarāja’s myth (chs. 9–17).

In the third cycle, the frame-story tells of the sage Bhṛgu who, in search of the highest truth, disturbs Viṣṇu and is cursed by Viṣṇu’s wife Lakṣmī (KM(V) chs. 18, 21–22; cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* X). Embedded into that narrative is a local version of the story about Bali’s sacrifice which forms the core myth of the Vāmana *avatāra* (KM(V) chs. 19–20; cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VIII, 15–22). The same cycle contains the Māhātmya’s rendition of Ekāmranātha’s and Kāmākṣī’s myths of origin (chs. 23–25). The fourth and last narrative cycle refers to the universe of the epic *Mahābhārata* with king Janamejaya, the great-grandson of the Pāṇḍava brother Arjuna, as the main character and Viṣṇu’s incarnation Kṛṣṇa (ch. 29).

Varadarāja’s Myth

The core narrative of the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya aims to explain the origin of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāḷ) and is detailed at great length (KM(V) chs. 9–17). It can be summarised as follows: The god Brahmā wishes to see Viṣṇu and is told to perform thousand horse sacrifices (*aśvamedha*) to this end. As he is unable to carry out that many sacrifices, Brahmā even-

104 For a detailed summary and analysis of the myths in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya, see Porcher 1985.

tually arrives in Kāñcī where only one *aśvamedha* yields the results of a thousand sacrifices elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ Brahmā finds Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha dwelling at the foot of the hill Hastiśaila (lit. Elephant-Hill; Hastigiri) in Kāñcī and instructs the divine constructor Viśvakarman to build the city Kāñcī, the sacrificial arena, and altars around the hill. Divine beings, heavenly beings, and sages are invited to attend the sacrifice. Only Brahmā's first wife Sarasvatī who is angry with Brahmā due to a previous incident, refuses to come. Demons, too, learn about the *aśvamedha* and decide to hinder its successful completion. In total, they carry out three attacks: first, they intend to burn the city and second, they have Śiva create the eight-legged half-lion half-bird Śarabha to fight Narasiṃha who is watching the sacrifice. After both these attempts fail, the demons eventually entice Brahmā's wife Sarasvatī to flood the site in the form of a destructive river. In all these episodes, Brahmā pleads with Viṣṇu to protect the sacrifice whereupon Viṣṇu manifests himself in various forms at different places in Kāñcī. When the demons are eventually defeated by Viṣṇu's manifestations, the *aśvamedha* continues with Sarasvatī on Brahmā's side. It is successfully brought to an end with Viṣṇu manifesting himself out of the sacrificial fire. Brahmā is thus granted his wish and Viṣṇu agrees to permanently stay at Hastiśaila as Varadarāja.

The narrative cycle oriented towards Varadarāja is clearly the central part of the text and Varadarāja at his abode Hastiśaila is considered the overall focal reference point in the Māhātmya's design of Kāñcī's sacred space. Moreover, not only the venue where Varadarāja's myth evolves refers to Varadarāja, but also the other narratives set in different spaces in Kāñcī (see section 6.3). This emphasis reflects a strong position of Varadarāja in relation to other Vaiṣṇava sites in Kanchi, which the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple obtained from the eleventh century onwards (Raman 1975, 88; Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6). Before, in the time of the Āḷvārs, Varadarāja was one among others, with the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, Yatōktakāri, and Pāṅṅavatūta Perumāḷ temples being more prominent (Nagaswamy 2011, 8–11). This shift within the local Vaiṣṇava religious landscape seems to be addressed in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* by the spatial conception of Kāñcī (see sections 6.3 and 6.5).

In the Vaiṣṇava text, Viṣṇu's and Śiva's relation is generally illustrated as an active opposition. The KM(V) introduces only few manifestations of Śiva in Kāñcī and each of the related episodes has a unique setting. In most cases the relation between Viṣṇu and Śiva is portrayed as antagonistic. The

105 The motif of a deity performing a sacrifice at a particular sacred site is commonly found in the myths of Purāṇas and Māhātmyas, with which pilgrimage is correlated with (Vedic) sacrifices (Ensink 1979, 109–110).

opposition can either be indirect by associating Viṣṇu's opponents with Śiva, or Śiva himself is manifested in some form as an obstruction. For example, in Varadarāja's myth, the demons worship Śiva to enlist his help to obstruct Brahmā's sacrifice and he both advises them to plunge Kāñcī into darkness and himself manifests as Śarabha (KM(V) chs. 12–13). Both settings ultimately lead to Viṣṇu defeating Śiva and claiming victory over the influence emanating from him. A clear representation of a Viṣṇu-oriented hierarchy is reflected in this approach as well as a concept that considers Śaiva-actions as opposition to be fought against.

In a slightly attenuated form of opposition, the Māhātmya's version of Ekāmranātha's myth clearly acknowledges Ekāmranātha as a part of Kāñcī's sacred geography. Embedded in the narrative cycle presided over by Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Vāmana, Ekāmranātha's myth is closely intertwined with the story of Kāmākṣī's origin (KM(V) chs. 23–25). The Vaiṣṇava text attributes greater importance to forms of Viṣṇu in the course of the story than the other two Māhātmyas display in their versions of the deities' myths. It is Viṣṇu who is indispensable to bring about both Kāmākṣī's and Ekāmranātha's presence in Kāñcī. Nevertheless, the version of Ekāmranātha's myth of origin in the KM(V) is told rather extensively and includes the goddess Pārvatī who is later called Kāmākṣī in her local form. The Goddess does not have a separate myth in the Vaiṣṇava text. Ekāmranātha's myth starts with Śiva's wife Pārvatī, who is cursed by an offended Śiva to have a dark-coloured body. To atone for it, she is advised by her husband to go to Kāñcī and worship Viṣṇu as Vāmana, who is understood as her brother.¹⁰⁶ Viṣṇu eventually releases her from her curse and the dark skin, and names her Kāmākṣī. The goddess then desires the presence of her husband Śiva in Kāñcī and Vāmana tells her to build a *liṅga* of sand and worship it. Repeatedly worshipped by Pārvatī to this end, Viṣṇu also rescues her from various effects of natural forces (heat, flood) emanating from Śiva, who tries to break Pārvatī's worship of the *liṅga*. Śiva's final test comes in the form of the waters of the Gaṅgā. Pārvatī curses the other goddess to become ugly before embracing the sand-*liṅga* to protect it. Delighted, Śiva appears and takes his abode as Ekāmranātha in the *liṅga* of sand under the single mango tree.

The narrative element of Gaṅgā, who is cursed by Pārvatī, is uniquely found in the Vaiṣṇava text and forms the starting point for another narrative. This story serves to illustrate Varadarāja's greatness in general and explains the god's procession mounted on his vehicle (*vāhana*) Garuḍa

106 The idea that Viṣṇu is the brother of Śiva's wife is widespread in Tamil Nadu (Fuller 2004, 43).

during the Brahmotsava festival celebrations in particular (KM(V) chs. 26–27).¹⁰⁷ It is again a distinctly Vaiṣṇava narrative and serves as a transition from the preceding Vaiṣṇava-framed but essentially Śaiva narrative about Ekāmraṇātha—and Kāmākṣī—back to a pure focus on Viṣṇu. Continuing with the ritual aspects, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* further narrates (ch. 28) how Brahmā has built the dwelling place (*ālaya*) of Varadarāja and three images (*pratimās*) of the god with different characteristics for different purposes, and how the celebrations during Brahmotsava are to be carried out. These descriptions correspond to the architectural and iconographic particularities found at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple and the ritual practices followed still today. It would be worthwhile to further evaluate to what extent the details about the festival given in the *Māhātmya* refer to and agree with the specific ritual tradition adhered to in the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple which is based on two particular Pāñcarātrāgama texts as normative ritual handbook.¹⁰⁸

The Vaiṣṇava perspective in the KM(V) is very pronounced. Primarily, it is expressed in a focus on Viṣṇu-centric myths. Illustrating Viṣṇu's greatness is the clear purpose of the mythological stories, the central and structuring elements of the text. Short glorifying *phalaśruti* statements are found throughout the text and refer to the power of Viṣṇu's manifestations and sacred water bodies that are introduced in the *Māhātmya*. In particular, the text highlights Viṣṇu as Varadarāja among the manifestations of the god located in Kāñcī. His mythology takes up most space and further episodes deal with elements of Varadarāja's ritual practices. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* thereby establishes an explicit reference to the most prominent local Vaiṣṇava temple in Kanchi and its ritual tradition. Although referring to Kanchi and Viṣṇu's various manifestations found across the city, the KM(V) generally moves in an imagined mythical landscape. The latter appears like a parallel layer with only few intersections with the geographical elements of Kanchi's religious landscape. As chapter 6 will show, the KM(V) is less focused on Kanchi's geographical specificities than the KM(Ś) and the KV, but instead refers to spatial and religious aspects of the city's historical urban transformation in order to establish a local anchoring.

107 Garuḍasevā, the procession of Varadarāja on his mount Garuḍa described in this narrative, takes place in the morning of the third day of Brahmotsava, the largest annual festival at the Varadarāja temple. See Raman 1975, 102–104 and Hüsken 2013 on the Brahmotsava celebrations, and Ambach 2022 on the Gaṅgā motif in the KM(V).

108 On the normative texts of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, see Hüsken 2013, 104–105 and Raman 1975, 95.

3.3.4 Comparative Reflections

Episodes from different texts about one and the same sacred place are a suitable starting point for a comparative perspective on the relations between the texts. While the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* all place their focus around Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja, there are several other sacred places whose narratives are recounted in the three Māhātmyas. The inclusion and appropriation of deities belonging to a religious tradition other than one's own and their sites is a common feature of the Māhātmya texts. The difference then lies in the interpretative framing. As indicated above through the summaries of the myths of Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja, the versions from the three texts resemble each other in the basic storyline and motifs. At the same time, the significance attributed to one and the same sacred place varies between the texts, as does the length and level of detail of the narratives about its origin, resulting from both the style and the sectarian orientation of each Māhātmya. The same holds true for episodes about several other sacred places whose myths are recounted in the texts. One Māhātmya may thus devote an entire chapter with more than forty or fifty verses to one place while there is only a single verse indicating the myth of origin regarding the same place in the other text. Nevertheless, there is a certain correspondence between the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi in terms of both the choice of sacred sites and the myths associated with them.

Most of these stories are local versions of the well-known Purāṇic narratives or narrative strands. An attributed character trait or the name of the resident deity at the local place in Kāñcī is often taken as a connecting element to such a narrative venture. The similarities between the Māhātmyas on Kanchi point to a common local corpus of mythological narratives linked to the sacred places in the city. On this common body of narratives, the texts seem to build their respective stories about the emergence of a sacred place. Each of the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi presents a customised form that reflects the agenda and general concept of the text. As a result, the core of a narrative is often similar in all three Māhātmyas but their contextualisation differs. Usually, the same narrative motif is associated with the same place in the KM(V), the KM(Ś), and the KV. There are, however, exceptions in which one text may attach its adaptations of a particular narrative to another site than the other two Māhātmyas. The shaping of myths in the texts is thus both a means of conveying one's own perspective on a sacred place and, building on this, the intention to gain interpretive sovereignty over the same. In this respect, the three Māhātmyas also reflect a dynamic process

of negotiation between the religious traditions that exist side by side in the city: even more than similarities in the texts, competing differences in the narratives about one and the same site as well as its precise contextualisation reveal both direct and indirect negotiations in respect to interpretive and spatial supremacy.

The different ways in which the same narrative (motif) is processed in the texts on Kanchi will be illustrated by the following example. The myth about Viṣṇu's half-lion-half-man *avatāra* Narasiṃha killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu¹⁰⁹ is referred to in all three Māhātmyas. In the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcimāhātmya*, a locally adapted version is linked to Narasiṃha residing in the cave below the hill Hastiśaila (Yōka Naracimma Perumāḷ; second enclosure of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple). It covers one entire chapter of ninety-one verses (KM(V) ch. 3), thus giving ample space to this elementary Vaiṣṇava myth in the text. The *avatāra* Narasiṃha further presides over Varadarāja's myth in that text (KM(V) chs. 9–17) and his local form (Yōka Naracimma Perumāḷ) is one of the key characters in the same myth. However, though the KV also connects the story to Yōka Naracimma Perumāḷ, it devotes only one verse to him (KV 2.19c–20b). This verse is kept rather general with only a hint to the Hiraṇyakaśipu motif and without local contextualisation apart from the name Guhā(nara)siṃha.¹¹⁰ The KM(Ś) (12.19–22), in turn, frames the narrative in a story about a *liṅga* called Nārasimheśvara (identification uncertain), which Narasiṃha worships to atone for killing Hiraṇyakaśipu. The local form of Narasiṃha—simply called Narasiṃha—refers to another site of Narasiṃha in Kanchi, namely Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ.

Thus, in all three Māhātmya texts, the well-known Vaiṣṇava narrative can be found in clearly differing forms. The differences can mostly be attributed to the sectarian orientation of the individual texts and their general structure such as the condensed style of the KV. Beyond that, however, there is a variation of the spatial localisation: the KM(Ś) connects the same narrative motif with Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ and not with Yōka Naracimma Perumāḷ

109 Cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VII. On the different version of the Narasiṃha myth from the Purāṇas, see Soifer 1991.

110 The only brief notes pointing at a story line in the KV make the recognition of popular narratives rather difficult and require an extended background knowledge to understand which narrative and which of its variants are being referred to. In some cases, the reference is still clear and points to more general features of a known myth. When the link is less clear, comparing a condensed description or cryptic detail with the text passage about the same place from one of the other two Māhātmyas may contribute to understanding, provided the second source presents the same narrative version.

as found in the KM(V) and KV; moreover, it does not mention the site of Yōka Naracimma Perumāl at all. Perhaps it is precisely because of this disregard for Yōka Naracimma Perumāl that the Śaiva text links its story to another sacred site of Narasiṃha in Kanchi. The reference to Viṣṇu's *avatāra* seems intentional here and consistent with the KM(Ś) overall programme which relates all manifestations of Viṣṇu to Śaiva places in Kanchi—as if to further emphasise Śiva's supremacy by framing all of them individually as worshippers of local forms of Śiva.

The most notable exception to the presumed common corpus of local narratives across the three Māhātmya texts is the Goddess myth about Kāmākṣī in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. Only in this text the goddess is not associated with Ekāmranātha and framed as his consort. Instead, the text's Śākta part describes her as an independent deity with a separate myth of origin. In fact, Kāmākṣī's myth is a localised version of the central Purāṇic Goddess myth (see subsection 3.3.2). Besides, goddesses are mentioned more often in the KV than in the two *Kāñcimāhātmyas*. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcimāhātmya* largely disregards female deities and even Viṣṇu's consorts Bhū and Lakṣmī residing at Varadarāja's side are only mentioned as site notes. The KM(V) seems to reflect the elite, pan-Indian, Sanskritic, Brahminical-orthodox forms of the Hindu traditions, in which in which deities associated with vernacular traditions—like most of the independent goddesses of Kanchi—are left out.¹¹¹ As representative of the Sanskritic, Brahminical-orthodox traditions, Kāmākṣī is accordingly mentioned in the text. The KM(V) does not refer to her own Śākta tradition,¹¹² but this contextualisation of Kāmākṣī's nature certainly facilitates the inclusion of the goddess within the theological framing of the Vaiṣṇava text. Kāmākṣī is presented as an embodiment of Śiva's wife and Ekāmranātha's consort, which agrees with the notion found in the myth of Ekāmranātha from the Śaiva text. In the KM(Ś), only a few goddesses are mentioned, each of whom has a unique character (see pp. 137–140). Among them, of course, is Kāmākṣī. The text refers ambiguously

111 For an overview of the nature of the Brahminical and the local, vernacular traditions, their deities and their understanding of the latter, see Flood 1997, 16–19, 103–197.

112 It is evident that the ritual tradition followed in the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple today is a form of the South Indian Śākta Śrīvidyā tradition which is Sanskritic, has originated in Brahminical circles and still is kept by orthodox, Vedic brahmin communities (*smārta* brahmins; Brooks 1992). Moreover, the normative ritual text for Kāmākṣī's worship is a Sanskrit text called *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇī* and the hereditary priests responsible for the rituals at the temple belong to the caste of brahmins (Ilkama 2023, 32).

to her in that the goddess is portrayed primarily as a form of Pārvatī and Ekāmrānātha's consort, but also as inextricably linked to her locality in the form of the cave Kāmakoṣṭha (see pp. 63–66). The latter setting undoubtedly evokes the notion of Kāmākṣī as a stand-alone goddess and the Śākta tradition to which she belongs. Other goddesses mentioned in the KM(Ś) are local forms of Kālī. Representing the ferocious and malevolent qualities of the Goddess, Kālī stands in opposition to the married and benevolent type of goddesses, which appear as consorts of a god. In the orthodox pan-Indian Śaiva conception, it is typically Pārvatī who takes on this role, with a local representation of her associated with a local manifestations of Śiva.

Cross-textual similarities or even literal correspondences may indicate a deeper relationship between the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi. They do not, though, lend themselves easily to establishing a relative chronology of the texts in their entirety. In their written form, the Māhātmyas have presumably undergone additions and revisions during transmission and as multi-layered works they often contain passages that were inserted over time.¹¹³ This being so, there may have been a reciprocal influence of the texts on each other as well as from yet another source through contemporary debates and historical developments over time.

It is, nevertheless, worth taking a closer look at possible textual similarities between the three texts on Kanchi. Even a cursory analysis allowed me to find isolated word-for-word correspondences. These are asymmetrically distributed and exist between the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, but not between the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and any of the other two Māhātmyas. Interestingly, the corresponding passages all seem to deal with basically one topic: Kāmākṣī's role or characterisations of her site, sometimes linked to Ekāmrānātha.¹¹⁴ Since I have not conducted a comprehensive analysis with regard to other literal correspondences as of now, I cannot

113 Narrative inconsistencies within one text bear witness to this process, leading Kerstin Schier (2018, 82) to assume that more than one author contributed to writing the KM(Ś). Moreover, editions and manuscripts of the same text may present different recensions with variant readings and omission or additions of entire passages, depending on which edition/manuscript of the work is taken as source for comparison. For example, the comparison of the two printed editions of the KM(Ś) (which differ only insignificantly) with the available three manuscripts of the text shows that one manuscript is rather close to the printed versions while the two other manuscripts seem to contain a variant recension (Buchholz 2022, 23).

114 KM(Ś) 45.166–213a on Ekāmrānātha's and Kāmākṣī's wedding corresponds to KV 8.92b–137b (Schier 2018, 86), KM(Ś) 31.69c–70 on the cave below where Kāmākṣī resides matches KV 11.5c–6, and KM(Ś) 31.72cd on Kāmākṣī being the

determine whether the thematic similarity of these passages is coincidental or whether these examples are a reflection of an endeavour to propagate a particular view about the goddess. The understanding of Kāmākṣī's role as Ekāmrānātha's consort or independent goddess is indeed a contested topic. The conceptual tension becomes apparent from the study of the deities' myths from the Māhātmya texts (see pp. 63–66 and subsection 3.3.2) and also in the oral traditions and contemporary ritual practices (Schier 2018). Besides, the longer literal correspondences, in particular indicate that the passages either have a common source and were added to both the KM(Ś) and KV at one point or were copied from one text into the other. However, since we have little evidence for the exact date of the texts and their textual history so far, the questions of which text may have served as the source and whether the corresponding sections are later insertions into the KM(Ś) and/or KV must remain open at this point.

The structural layout of the Māhātmya narratives in their entirety also reflects a particular consideration of the sacred space shared by different religious traditions in Kanchi. In this context, the plot of a narrative can be considered the illustrative wrapping and the sacred place whose origins it describes is the relevant core. By looking at the selection and sequence of places mentioned in the texts, the possible connections and hierarchies between them, the conception of Kāñcī as a space, and the possible focal points constructed within it, we can identify fundamentally different interpretations of Kāñcī's sacred space (see chapters 4, 5, and 6). Each text shapes and creates a particular notion of Kāñcī as a sacred place with elements overlapping and/or competing with the conceptions of the other Māhātmyas, thus presenting varied ideas of the city.

The incorporation of praising statements (*phalaśruti*) into the Māhātmyas is yet another important element. These verses or sections most generally praise the efficacy ascribed to a site as a result of performing a particular ritual there, by visually perceiving (*darśana*) the residing deity, or simply visiting the site. Typical for Purāṇic literature on sacred places, the *phalaśruti* linked to a site specifically reports that place to be the best and most rewarding of all and its redemptive powers to be the most powerful (Jacobson 2013, 126). However, the attributed qualities can also be more specific such as, for example, wiping the slate clean after a murder.¹¹⁵ Statements

original form of the goddess agrees with KV 13.72ab. A more comprehensive search might reveal more instances.

115 For example, a bath in the waters of the *tīrtha* Sarvatīrtha in Kāñcī and the visual perception of Śiva as Tīrtheśa on its shores is said to bring redemption for a murder (KM(Ś) 29.21–30b).

of praise thus aim to impart knowledge about specific benefits of the sacred site which is both relevant for individuals—presumably priests—intending to promote the place and those visiting the site for exculpatory profits to be gained there. In that, the Māhātmyas are connected to the practice of pilgrimage and directly appeal to those listening to a recital (of a part) of the text or reading statements about the benefits of the sacred site. Compared to the descriptive myths about a sacred site, *phalaśruti* statements constitute the prescriptive part of a Māhātmya. Still, the tendency of each and every *phalaśruti* to view the sacred site in focus as the foremost in efficaciousness needs be considered merely as a subjective and not universal statement (Jacobsen 2013, 126).

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* includes the most and most extensive *phalaśruti* passages, in particular about *tīrthas*. The praising statements are an important feature of the text and suggest that the KV is conceptualised as a text for worshippers and pilgrims. The text's style of presenting quintessential details of selected sacred places and its spatial layout (see chapter 5) support the perception of the KV as a pilgrims' guidebook. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, in turn, contains fewer *phalaśruti* verses. Instead, eulogies directed to Viṣṇu are woven into the myths, some of which are structurally set apart by a change of metre. The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* adds *phalaśruti* statements at the end of most of its narratives and generally attributes the superordinate beneficial powers to the *śivaliṅgas*. Each Māhātmya thus uses literary means by way of praising statements to underline its sectarian and spatial approach to Kāñcī's sacred space.

Moreover, the element of *phalaśruti* contributes to the local character of the Māhātmyas and the presentation of such passages reflects the individual hierarchy of deities, their sites and the spatial understanding of the text. Praising statements linked to a specific site serve to situate it among other sites of the local sacred space as constructed in the respective text. In placing the ascribed benefits of the local sacred site above those of another, distant, often famous site, these passages create a hierarchy of sacred sites in which the local site is favoured over a distant one. The praising statements are therefore an elementary feature of the Māhātmyas as local texts, providing specific information about salvific power of the sacred places they extol and thus endowing them with significance.

Dating of the Texts and Renditions in Tamil

While correspondences between the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi on the level of content and narratives suggest a common ground, their historical dating, even a relative chronology, is more challenging. The nature of the Sanskrit Māhātmyas with the mythical past as time reference for the stories and the absence of information about historical authors or compilers leaves only few possible leads. One option are text-immanent indications such as the mention of datable temple structures at sacred sites. In the conception of the Māhātmyas, however, the sacredness and salvific power of a sacred place is inherent in the site itself wherefore any physical structures are less relevant (see pp. 18–20 and section 3.2). There are only few passages describing the architecture of a sacred place.

Furthermore, the attempt to date the Māhātmyas through descriptions of architectural elements is strongly limited, as Jonas Buchholz notes:

Firstly, even if a temple that is mentioned in a particular text can be dated to a particular century, this does not necessarily mean that the text was composed after this date, for it is always possible that the present temple was preceded by another structure, of which no traces remain. Secondly, since the texts are concerned with the mythical, rather than with the worldly realm, they rarely describe architectural details of the sites with which they are concerned, and if they do, they do it in a highly idealized way that does not allow any conclusions to dateable architectural features. (2022, 22)

A description of the physical features of a sacred place from the Māhātmyas may thus not be indicative of the architecture at a specific site—at a particular point in time—but it may nevertheless refer to a particular temple style. The most detailed description of architectural features from the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi—to which Jonas Buchholz (2022, 22–23) refers—is a passage about Ekāmranātha’s abode in the Śaiva *Kāñcī-māhātmya* (42.19–27b; see also pp. 101–106). As another example, a similar passage is found in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* describing the abode of Varadarāja (KM(V) 28.1–8). Leaving aside the glorifying attributes, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* names three walled enclosures (*prākāra*), entrances with gateway towers (*gopuras*), tower superstructures above the shrines (*vimānas*) and pavilions (*maṇḍapas*) as characteristics. These architectural components became part of South Indian temple architecture

in the twelfth/thirteenth century (Branfoot 2017, 195). Consequently, this section of the KM(V) must have been composed sometime after that, even if a more precise dating cannot be derived from this contextualisation. As Jonas Buchholz (2022, 23) states with regard to the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and its passage on Ekāmranātha's abode, the mention of certain architectural features such as *gopuras* (gateway towers) does not mean that the appearance of the historical temple included them when corresponding passage of the text was composed. The same conclusion applies to the passage on Varadarāja's abode from the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which equally mentions *gopuras*. Rather, such passages seem to convey the idea of how a temple was imagined at the time of the compilers and their conception of a temple was presumably based on the common architecture of their time.

In a broader perspective, the existence of renditions of Sanskrit Māhātmyas in local languages may provide some indications for dating the Sanskrit texts as well as citations of the Māhātmyas in other textual sources. In the case of the texts on Kanchi, the local language is Tamil and the equivalent to Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas are texts called Talapurāṇams, which form a part of Tamil Purāṇic literature.¹¹⁶ They are often based on a Sanskrit source, which they also name, while their style in dealing with the (same) myths differs decisively.¹¹⁷ Importantly, the names of the authors of many Tamil Talapurāṇams are known and if information on the author of the Tamil text can be found, it gives a terminus ante quem for the composition of its Sanskrit source. Of course, this relative chronology can only give a rough idea and has no predictive value with regard to a more exact or earliest possible date of composition of the Sanskrit work.

The Tamil Talapurāṇam based on the KM(Ś) is the first book of the work titled *Kāñcippurāṇam*. In one of the first chapters, the author Civanana Munivar states that the KM(Ś) is the source for his work (Dessigane et al. 1964, vii in reference to *Kāñcippurāṇam* 5.26). The Tamil work closely follows its Sanskrit source content-wise, while its style conforms to the Tamil poetic conventions (Buchholz 2023a).¹¹⁸ Civanana Munivar composed his

116 The production of Talapurāṇams started flourishing in the sixteenth century and continued until the end of the nineteenth century, when Tamil literary culture underwent fundamental changes in the wake of colonialism (Shulman 1980, 32; Ebeling 2010).

117 On Tamil Purāṇic literature and Talapurāṇams in particular, see Shulman 1980, Ramesh 2020, and Nachimuthu 2022.

118 It is a rather popular text, of which several editions have been published since the first printed edition of 1878 and which it is considered as the authoritative work by the Śaiva traditions in Kanchi (Buchholz 2022, 24–25). For details on the *Kāñcippurāṇam* and the relation of Śaiva Tamil Talapurāṇams on Kanchi to

work in the eighteenth century (d. 1785; Zvelebil 1975, 248), consequently the date of composition of the KM(Ś) has to be prior to that. If they were the only available pointers, the dates of Civanana Munivar would provide a timeframe for the latest possible origin of the KM(Ś)—as the Tamil author had it at his disposal. However, on the basis of a quotation from the text in a roughly datable work, allows to place the composition of the text “before the first half of the sixteenth century” (Goodall, cited in Buchholz 2025, 95). As this example shows, such references through quotations can provide valuable contextualisations and are worth looking out for with regard to the dating of the other Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi.

The Tamil rendering of the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* is titled *Kāmākṣī Līlā Pīrapāvam*. This latter text has been first published in 1907 and several times since, both on its own and as part of a book called *Śrī Kāñcī Mahimai*, first published in 1927 (Buchholz 2022, 33–34). In this case, the first printed edition of the Sanskrit *Kāmākṣivilāsa* from 1889 is older wherefore the Tamil adaptations cannot provide further information on the date of the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*. In secondary literature, there are different views on the date of this text. David Shulman (1980, 392, n. 28) and Annette Wilke (1996, 157) consider the KV to be of an uncertain date. Anne Moßner (2008, 7) cautiously places its latest possible date of origin at the end of the seventeenth century, when the former festival image of Kāmākṣī, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī—which is dealt with in the last chapter of the text—was brought to Thanjavur to hide it from the troops of the Moghul emperor Aurangzeb.¹¹⁹ The mention of the golden Kāmākṣī, however, also offers little definite orientation: the text may have been composed when the goddess was still in her shrine in Kanchi or referring retrospectively to her presence at a time when the goddess was already in Thanjavur. Today, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is still worshipped in the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple in her original shrine which, though, does not house an image anymore (Schier 2018, 138).

R. Nagaswamy (1982, 207–208) suggests that the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* was possibly composed at the date of the first printed edition since it mentions more recent structures of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple in Kanchi. However, as he neither indicates the relevant text passages nor which architectural elements he is referring to, it is difficult to evaluate the strength of his argumentation. As will be discussed in chapter 5 (see particularly section 5.4),

their Sanskrit sources, see Dessigane et al. 1964, Buchholz 2022, 24–31, 2023a, 2023b, and the literature cited in the last two contributions.

119 On the removal of the festival images of Kāmākṣī, Ekāmranātha, and Varadarāja in the seventeenth century, their return, and the reviewing of these events in narratives and ritual performances, see Hüsken 2017.

there are nevertheless elements of the sacred geography laid out in the text which could speak in favour of a composition of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* in the nineteenth century.¹²⁰

The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* has not been adapted in the local language in any form, which means that an indirect chronological placement is not possible.¹²¹ Text-internal elements, however, may offer some orientation. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* seems to address developments in Kanchi's urban and religious history from the sixth to fourteenth century (see section 6.5) and it can be assumed that the text postdates these events. This estimation could be supported by a reference to Poṛṛāmarai Kuḷam, the eastern temple tank at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (KM(V) 5.11c–12, ch. 22; called Hemāmbhojatīrtha). Its construction around the year 1500 can be deduced from inscriptions (Raman 1975, 52). According to my cursory analysis of the physical features of places from the KM(V), it would be the most recent architectural element to be described in the text, assuming that the place Hemāmbhojatīrtha from the text is actually supposed to describe Poṛṛāmarai Kuḷam and, moreover, no other structures with this name existed there before. This would at least limit the earliest date of composition of these passages of the Vaiṣṇava text to after the year 1500.

The dating proves to be one of the more challenging elements when dealing with the anonymous Māhātmyas in general. A temporal reference frame to mythical times, a focus on the non-architectural character of the sacred places as well as a layered structure and possibly different recensions make a temporal-historical placing—even a relative chronology—difficult. The three texts on Kanchi are no exception to the general nature of the Māhātmya genre. Neither text-internal nor contextualising elements provide sufficient information for establishing a precise date of origin. On the basis of

120 Moreover, only one manuscript of the KV has been found so far (Buchholz 2022, 19). The lack of a more expanded manuscript corpus of the text may indicate that the time span between the origin of the only “original” manuscript and the first printed edition from 1889 was not too long, wherefore manuscript copies were not made. This circumstance may thus give an additional argument in support of a late origin of the text (Buchholz 2022, 20). Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to explore whether the—presumable—mention of the *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇi*, the ritual handbook used as the manual for worship in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, in the KV (ch. 14) as well as the study of the text passages describing architectural details in reference to the temple's architectural history could provide further indications as to the dating of the Māhātmya.

121 As a rule, Vaiṣṇava Sanskrit Māhātmyas do not seem to be rendered in a local language (Matavan 1995, 88–90) and we can see this confirmed in the example of Kanchi's Māhātmyas.

the above, I would place the texts roughly between the early sixteenth century and the time of their first printed editions, that is, the late nineteenth (KM(Ś) and KV editions from 1889) and early twentieth (KM(V) edition from 1907) centuries. This assessment is broadly in line with that of Ute Hüsken (2017, 67), who estimates that most of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas were produced after the fourteenth century.

In view of dating the texts, the textual history of the Māhātmyas is also of relevance. While the topic demands fuller treatment elsewhere, a brief excursus on the first printed editions of the texts should nonetheless be made here. The first editions of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, on the one hand, were both printed in Karvetinagaram (Andhra Pradesh) in 1889 in Telugu script. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, on the other, was printed in 1907 in Kanchipuram in Devanagari script. While the use of the regional Telugu seems plausible, as many people in South India would have been able to read it, one might wonder why a Māhātmya on Kanchi and printed in Kanchi was edited in Devanagari. The decisive factor for this may have been the editor himself, P. B. Ananthacharya (1874–1936); he had set himself the task of publishing Sanskrit texts previously written in Telugu or Grantha script in Devanagari (Shree Balaji Mandir, n.d.).¹²² Accordingly, as Ute Hüsken (forthcoming) notes, sponsorship seems to have been a key factor in the transition of the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to a printed text. It can be assumed that this assessment holds true for the other two Māhātmya on Kanchi as well. Further research on the entirety of the Sthalamāhātmyas (and Talapurāṇams) on Kanchi is required and may provide new insights.

Kanchi's Māhātmyas in the Contemporary Religious Landscape

In contrast to the context and date of composition of the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi, the question on their representation in the contemporary religious landscape and cityscape is easier to approach. Like other aspects regarding the Māhātmyas, the visibility of the texts need further research to gain a better understanding of their significance up to the present day. An in-depth analysis lies beyond the current scope, so I would like to give a few examples that show how differently the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* are represented in contemporary Kanchi.

122 Besides the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, many of P. B. Ananthacharya's other works were also published by the Sudarshana Press in Kanchi (Freschi 2014).

As Jonas Buchholz (2025) shows, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* itself does not seem to be commonly used, but one repeatedly encounters its Tamil rendering, the first book of the *Kāñcippurāṇam*. In many of the Śaiva temples in the city, there are stone slabs presenting the myth about the origin of the *śivaliṅga* found in the temple. The *Kāñcippurāṇam* is usually indicated as the source of these stories. Through this change to the local language, the Śaiva text is thus visually present in Kanchi. The use of the Tamil text suggests that the version has attained authoritative status, resulting in a significant role of the *Kāñcippurāṇam* in shaping Kanchi's Śaiva religious landscape (Buchholz 2025).

For the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, the link to the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple and with it to the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham seems to be of essential relevance. The printed Devanagari edition of the text from 1968 prominently includes a reverent dedication to Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, the contemporary head and spiritual preceptor (*ācārya*) of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, and his designated successor Jayendra Saraswati (1935–2018). Chandrasekharendra Saraswati actively promoted the goddess Kāmākṣī and the temple as Śaktipīṭha, a seat of the Goddess (Wilke 1996, 149). Apparently, the Peetham also took and still takes interest in promulgating the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*: a reprint of the *Śrī Kāñci Mahimai*, which contains the *Kāmākṣi Lilā Pirapāvam*, the Tamil rendering of the KV, refers to Vijayendra Saraswati as the head of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham (in office since 2018; Buchholz 2022, 34, 34, n. 44). The website maintained by the Peetham further presents a condensed English rendering of the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* (Rao n.d.) and an English adaptation of the *Śrī Kāñci Mahimai* (Kannan n.d.).

Additionally, narratives sourced from the KV are found in other literary works, on signboards at the temples, and in oral narratives. A noteworthy case is the representation of two lizards, called *Taṅkapalli* in Tamil, at the Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple. The “golden lizards” are prominently advertised at the temple and are a popular object of worship. A myth about their origin is found both in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* (ch. 3) and in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (ch. 31). As Ute Hüsken (2022, 185–186) demonstrates, the signboard, in Tamil and Telugu, with the story about the lizards features elements from the version of the myth from the KV rather than the KM(V). She further notes that, when asked in an interview, priests of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple retold the narrative as known from the KV, even though it is the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* that is considered authoritative in the temple (2022, 186, n. 46). Similarly, narrative elements from both *Māhātmyas* are presented in lizards' myth in the *Taṅkapallikaḷ Māhātmyam*. This Tamil work published in 1937 is a glorification of the lizards and claims to be based

solely on the KM(V) (Hüsken 2022, 177–179). As this example illustrates, the rendition of Sanskrit myths into Tamil seems to influence the prominence of a particular version of the narrative. Although there are pamphlets summarising the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* in Tamil, the text has not been rendered in full in the local language. The Tamil adaptations derived from the KV, however, seem to have become popular and found their way onto the temple signboards and into the oral history.

The Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya is not an active part of the ritual practices of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple with its orthodox Vaiṣṇava tradition either. During the annual Pallavotsava festival, it is the *Hastigirimāhātmya* that is recited in front of the god's festival image (Hüsken, forthcoming). The Vaiṣṇava *Hastigirimāhātmya* is also written in Sanskrit and deals with the myth of Varadarāja, which largely corresponds to the narrative found in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. In view of the popularity of this text in contrast to the KM(V), a decisive factor seems to be the reading of a summary in Mani-pravalam alongside the recitation of the *Hastigirimāhātmya* in Sanskrit; Mani-pravalam is apparently understood fairly well by the Vaiṣṇava audience, even without a Sanskrit background (Hüsken, forthcoming; Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., December 2024). In addition, there exist a variety of manuscripts as well as several printed editions in different South Indian scripts of the *Hastigirimāhātmya*, which may also result from the relevance of the text in the performance of the Pallavotsava festival (Buchholz 2022, 19).

Altogether, the availability of an adaptation in Tamil seems to be a crucial factor for the visibility and use of all three Sanskrit Māhātmyas on Kanchi in the city's religious landscape. Through the rendition in the local language, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and *Kāmākṣivilāsa* became more accessible and popular with a broader audience which does not understand Sanskrit, whereas the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* on its own did not achieve the same reach.

4 Śiva's Places Introduce the City: the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*

The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)) is by far the longest of the three Māhātmyas on Kanchi and also introduces the largest number of sacred places. With regard to the concept of sacred geography, its Śaiva orientation manifests itself in the understanding of Śaiva sacred places, the *śivaliṅgas*, as the main sites of worship. Moreover, Kāñcī and its surroundings are referred to as belonging to Śiva from the very beginning. In particular, it is Śiva's presence as Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmparanātar) in the centre of Kāñcī under the mango tree that is said to give Kāñcī its splendour. The layout of Kāñcī's sacred landscape in the KM(Ś) presents a very consistent and coherent concept. Its most salient characteristics are the geo-spatiality-based approach, which translates into an arrangement of places according to the spatial distribution of the historical sites they can be identified with and a consistent pattern of locating them. Besides, the origins of the places are recounted in shorter and longer mythological narratives.

4.1 Situating Kāñcī

In its introductory part (KM(Ś) 1.1–4.34), the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* introduces Kāñcī through a pan-Indian classification of places associated with Śiva. This broader contextualisation serves to explain why this particular Māhātmya deals with Kanchi. The relevant passage is included in a longer conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī and starts with a question by the latter about the most outstanding and rewarding among the *kṣetras* (lit. field; here rather area or place) linked to Śiva.¹²³ In response, Śiva names an array of twenty-six sites, of which twenty-five are located on earth and one in the mythical world. The list is ordered geographically, starting with Setu (Rameswaram) on the southern edge of the Indian subcontinent. It then

123 [Pārvatī asks Śiva:] *kāni te kṣetravaryāṇi devadeva jagatpate | yeṣu vā mama deveṣa sātṣātkāras sadā prabho* || KM(Ś) 3.55.

moves northwards and ends with Mount Kailāsa, known as the abode of Śiva (KM(Ś) 3.56–62b).¹²⁴ The common characteristic of all places is clearly their association with Śiva as already suggested by Pārvatī's introductory inquiry. The inclusion of Kāñcī thus unequivocally reflects the understanding of the city as a significant Śaiva site.

A closer look reveals that among the twenty-six places, the five sites of the Pañcabhūtaṅgas, or the Five-Element Liṅgas of South India, as well as seven sites of traditional twelve with Jyotirliṅgas (*liṅgas* of light) are included.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the first fifteen of the Śaiva places in the list are situated in the historical Tamilakam region (Tamil culture region, modern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh; Stein 1977) which shows a clear preference for this area. Finally, in partial agreement with this geographical emphasis is the categorisation of these places in terms of the Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams, the Śaiva sites lauded by the three most prominent Tamil Śaiva Nāyaṅmār poets. As most of the Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams are situated in the Tamil region, it is not surprising that out of the list's fifteen sites situated in this area, thirteen at least are Pāṭal Peṛra Stalam sites. Altogether, sixteen of the twenty-six places listed in the KM(Ś) have at least one Pāṭal Peṛra Stalam each.¹²⁶ Considered as a whole, the cluster of Śaiva places given

124 [Śiva explains:] *setur hālāsyam aparaṃ triśiro mahitaṃ punaḥ | gajāraṇyaṃ pañcanadaṃ madhyārjunam anuttamam || KM(Ś) 3.56 tataś cidambarasabhā yatra nṛttāmi saṃtatam | vṛddhācalākhyam aparaṃ vedādhyāpakam adbhutam || KM(Ś) 3.57 aruṇādrir ataḥ paścād viriñcipuram adbhutam | kāñcī puṇyātmā loke kāmākṣivratapālītā || KM(Ś) 3.58 vaṭāraṇyam api śrīmatkālahastimahāpurī | śrīparvataṃ siddhavaṭaṃ virūpākṣeśvarālayam || KM(Ś) 3.59 gokarṇaṃ trijagatpuṇyaṃ triyambakam anuttamam | ujjayinyāṃ mahākāḷaṃ kāśī kedāram adbhutam || KM(Ś) 3.60 prabhāsaḥsetram amalāṃ himālayamahācalam | mandaraḥ paramaś śailaś śrīmatkailāsaparvataḥ || KM(Ś) 3.61 evam ādīni puṇyāni sthānāni subahūni me | KM(Ś) 3.62ab.*

125 The sites of the Pañcabhūtaṅgas are Triśira (Tiruchirappalli), Cidambara (Chidambaram), Aruṇādrī (Tiruvannamalai), Kāñcī (Kanchipuram) and Kālahasti (Srikalahasti). The selection of the Jyotirliṅga places in the KM(Ś) includes Setu (Rameswaram), Śrīparvata (Srisailam), Triyambaka (Trimbak), Mahākāḷa in Ujjainī (Ujjain), Kāśī (Varanasi), Kedāra (Kedarnath) and Prabhāsa (Somnath). On the Pañcabhūtaṅgas, see Eck 2012, 253–256 and Fleming 2009; on the Jyotirliṅgas, see Eck 2012, 189–256. Thanks go to Jonas Buchholz for sharing with me his mapping of the sacred places in this list from his work on the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

126 Since the KM(Ś) in this context indicates place names and not the names of specific representations of Śiva in specific places—as is also the case in the poems of Nāyaṅmār (Peterson 1982, 72)—one or more Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams may be found in a place that is mentioned in the Śaiva Māhātmya. On the Pāṭal Peṛra Stalams at these places, see Chevillard and Sarma 2007.

here includes many sites that form a part of one or more conceptualised sets of Śaiva sacred places. A single, overall convincing pattern, however, cannot be discerned. A preference for South Indian places and even more so towards those situated in the Tamil region is the most evident emphasis, which suggests a strong geographical sense of the region.

Among this selection of Śaiva places, Kāñcī is characterised as the most meritorious place on earth and protected by Kāmākṣī's vow, supposedly hinting at the myth of Ekāmranātha's origin. In that narrative, the goddess Pārvatī—later identified with the local goddess Kāmākṣī—steadfastly protects the *liṅga* of sand from floodwaters sent by Śiva to test her devotion (KM(Ś) ch. 45; see pp. 62–63).¹²⁷ A few verses later, Śiva—again on the request of Pārvatī—names Kāñcī as the best of all his sites, where he happily lives together with Pārvatī (KM(Ś) 3.62c–65). This preference is exemplified by an explicit comparison with the North Indian site Avimukta / Kāśī (Varanasi) that lets Śiva state his preference for Kāñcī, the site where he manifested himself as Ekāmranātha under the single mango tree (KM(Ś) 3.66–69).

A similar classification is found at the beginning of Ekāmranātha's myth: Pārvatī inquires as how to atone for her misdeed of playfully covering Śiva's eyes, which plunged the entire universe into darkness. Here, Kāñcī is situated among Śiva's places in the land Bhārata within a broader outline of the mythical world.¹²⁸ Among the countless sites, sixty-four excel, and among these, Kāśī and Kāñcī are dearest to Śiva. In the end, however, Kāñcī is Śiva's most beloved site (KM(Ś) 40.35–38). In the continuation of Ekāmranātha's myth, Pārvatī is further instructed by Śiva to first go to Kāśī (where Śiva resides as Viśveśvara), before continuing to Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 41.44–68). Kāñcī is thus constructed as the final destination, where the goddess is ultimately granted redemption for her earlier misbehaviour.

Statements regarding the hierarchy of sacred places are found throughout the Purāṇic literature and pertain to a wide range of sites considered most significant (Bhardwaj 1973). Especially in Māhātmyas, these assertions are a common feature as these texts tend to exhibit partiality towards the site they glorify and consequently elevate the place in focus over others. Hence, the variety of these comparisons and hierarchisations does not construct a uniform and widely valid hierarchy of all sacred sites of the Indian subcontinent (Bhardwaj 1973; Jacobsen 2013, 122–145). The selection

127 [Śiva notes:] *kāñcī puṇyatamā loke kāmākṣīvratapālītā* || KM(Ś) 3.58cd.

128 The mythical Bhārata, one of the lands of the lotus-shaped island Jambudvīpa at the centre of the universe, is described as Karmabhūmi, the land of action, where the beings can influence their fate through their actions. See Eck 2012, 107–129 on the cosmology in epic and Purāṇic literature.

of places chosen for a comparison reflects rather the (self-)perception of the central site of a particular Māhātmya in relation to others. In the two examples given above, the KM(Ś) initially contextualises Kanchi in a Śaiva framework to eventually compare it only to Varanasi as the next best place and the second dearest to Śiva. This last comparison is repeatedly presented in the main body of the text; no other site is used to single out Kāñcī from the only two shortlisted places.¹²⁹

As Knut Jacobsen shows (2013, 127, 130–134), both the Purāṇic literature and the encyclopaedic works of the Dharmanibandhas include lengthy passages promoting Varanasi as the most sacred place, a meritorious pilgrimage destination, and an important Śaiva site.¹³⁰ Those claims do not mean that Varanasi was considered to be *the* most sacred place in all of the multidimensional Hindu traditions and *the* site of Śiva, but Knut Jacobsen argues for several factors that facilitated Varanasi to be perceived as such (2013, 129–138). Giving credit to the pan-Indian renown of Varanasi, the comparison of Kāñcī to the well-known North Indian Śaiva site in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* can therefore be interpreted as an attempt to highlight Kāñcī's ascribed exceptional importance and effective powers, as “sacredness of one place is used to elevate the value of another place” (Jacobsen 2013, 26).¹³¹ The place chosen in the KM(Ś) to assert Kāñcī's superiority thus

129 See KM(Ś) 3.66–69, 11.17–18, 17.61c–68, 34.30–31b, 37.19c–21, 40.35–38, and 43.27–43. Furthermore, the notion of Kāñcī's superiority over Kāśī is also reflected in different settings in the mythological stories (KM(Ś) ch. 10, 12.23–47, 29.34–38b).

130 Among others, the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* (around the fourteenth century CE; Adriaensen et al. 1998) as the longest Māhātmya on Varanasi, the *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* by Lakshmidhara (early twelfth century) and the *Triśthalīsetu* of Narayana Bhatta (mid-sixteenth century), the last two both written by residents of Varanasi, highlight Varanasi's exceptional position (Jacobsen 2013, 127, 130–134; Salomon 1985, xiii, xvii; Eck 1982, 82–85).

131 In Kerstin Schier's interpretation, the specific element of Pārvatī's intermediate stop at Kāśī as narrated in Ekāmranātha's myth in the KM(Ś) serves a particular aim in this comparative context. She writes (2018, 82–83): “[f]irst, a connection to the pan-Indian tradition is established and acknowledged by, for example, honoring a renowned pilgrimage site such as Kāśī. As the story progresses, the local site is, in comparison to the renowned site, depicted as superior. In this case, however, Kanchipuram is itself a renowned pilgrimage site on a pan-Indian level. Thus, it is likely that the goddess's stopover in Kāśī is meant to establish a connection between the North and South Indian tradition.” As Kerstin Schier points out, the motif of Pārvatī's intermediate stop in Varanasi is not found in all versions of Ekāmranātha's myth from different Tamil and Sanskrit sources (2018, 73–96, 199).

seems to be carefully selected. The tendency to compare the place in focus of the text to sites in North India in comparative statements in Māhātmya texts about sacred sites not located in the north is also observed by Anne Feldhaus (2003, chap. 5). She analyses various rhetoric means found, for example, in Māhātmyas that link sacred places and rivers in Maharashtra and in the Deccan especially to those in North India.¹³² With its repeated references to Kāśī, the KM(Ś) is thus an exemplary of this concept. At the same time, the text-internal consistency in naming the city is noteworthy. No other sacred site is referred to as much in comparative settings throughout the text and even the introductory part takes up this particular reference that is narratively processed in Ekāmranātha's myth.

4.2 The *Kṣetra* and the City

After the extraordinary significance of Kāñcī among other Śaiva sites is established, the KM(Ś) turns to characterising the place in greater detail. The first aspect is the spatial definition. With only two clearly marked spaces, the KM(Ś) has a considerably less complex spatial structure compared to the other two Māhātmyas. A passage in the text's introductory part (KM(Ś) 4.6–9a) outlines the two spaces that are distinguished terminologically and spatially: Kāñcīkṣetra, the larger area, and Kāñcī, the city (*purī*). The *kṣetra* is said to extend five *yojanas* to the east, west, north and south, thus covering an extended regional area.¹³³ The city is situated in the centre of Kāñcīkṣetra and stretches one and a half *yojanas* in all directions.¹³⁴ A fixed centre point is neither set for the *kṣetra* nor for Kāñcī, but from the overall context of the text it can be inferred that Ekāmranātha is the centre. The dimensions of Kāñcīkṣetra do by no means seem arbitrary; across the three Māhātmya on Kanchi, the region of Kāñcī is given similar dimensions and further corres-

132 The categories differentiated by Anne Feldhaus are claims of similarity, comparison, containing other places, and other references (2003, 158–178) and can also be applied to the analysis of Māhātmya texts on other places.

133 On the conversion of the temporal length units into contemporary length units, see subsection 1.3.3.

134 [Pārvatī asks:] *kāñcīkṣetrapramāṇaṃ ca tatra sthānāni te prabho* || KM(Ś) 4.6cd *kati viṣṇumukhādīnāṃ sthānaṃ brūhi dayānidhe* | KM(Ś) 4.7ab [...] [Śiva says:] *prācyāṃ pratīcyāṃ codīcyāṃ dakṣiṇe cāpi sundari* | *pañcayojanamātreṇa pramāṇena pariṣkṛtā* || KM(Ś) 4.8 *tatrottamottamā kāñcī sārdayojanamātrataḥ* | KM(Ś) 4.9ab.

ponds to the spatial reach of the historical region of Tondaimandalam, the region ruled by the Pallava kings (see sections 5.2 and 6.2, chapter 7 and figure 7.1). Although no explicit reference to the historical region is included in the KM(Ś), the spatial modelling of Kāñcīkṣetra reiterates a close link of Kanchi with Tondaimandalam, which seems to have been thus alluded to in the text (see chapter 7 and figure 7.1).

The *kṣetra* is the overall frame of reference and represents the spatial extent of the region associated with Kāñcī. Besides a general association with Śiva, this area is not further characterised. The spatial focus instead lies on the inner space, the city of Kāñcī. This is described in greater detail and it is the city's space that constitutes the spatial framework for the sacred places and their myths of origin described in the text. On a geographical level, the city is said to be surrounded by seven rivers (KM(Ś) 3.78c–80b). These are listed according to their location from north to south; as far as an identification is possible, the *Māhātmya* situates Kāñcī roughly between the Pampā river (identification uncertain; presumably north of Kanchi; see n. 135) in the north and the Palar in the south.¹³⁵ Among the seven rivers, the *Vegavatī* (Vegavathi; KM(Ś) 7.1–78), *Niśā* (Manjalneer Kalvai; KM(Ś) 13.34c–39b) and *Kampā* (Kampā; KM(Ś) chs. 36/39–45, especially 45.66–92 and praised in 37.1–21b), a now dried-up river, nowadays represented by *Kampaitīrttam* at the *Ēkāmparanātar* temple as a remainder (Schier 2018, 106), feature again in the text's myths. When assuming that a more detailed consideration of

135 [Śiva elaborates on the city Kāñcī:] *kampayā kampayā puṇyajalayā niśayāvṛtā* || KM(Ś) 3.78cd *vegavatīyā viśeṣeṇa puṇyakoṭīśamānyayā* | *kṣīranadyā mahatyā ca skandanadyā ca saṃyutā* || KM(Ś) 3.79 *mālābhir abhita svacchasumābhir iva mānini* | KM(Ś) 3.80ab.

The number of the rivers is not explicitly mentioned, but seems to be seven: there is one *Kampā* (probably supposed to read *pampā*, see below; identification uncertain), another *Kampā* (*Kampā*, a now dried-up river; see pp. 240–241), *Puṇyajalā* (identification uncertain), *Niśā* (Manjalneer Kalvai), *Vegavatī* (Vegavathi, a northern sidearm of the Palar), *Kṣīranadī* (Palar), and *Skandanadī* (Cheyyar, a southern sidearm of the Palar) (Buchholz 2023a, 393–395). In view of the geographical arrangement from north to south, the first three rivers are or were located north of the Manjalneer Kalvai. With regard to the two *Kampā* rivers, Jonas Buchholz (2023a, 393–395) shows that the text's Tamil counterpart, the *Kāñcīppurāṇam*, helps with the understanding of the Sanskrit *Māhātmya*. The respective verse in the *Kāñcīppurāṇam* notes a *Pampā* (identification uncertain) first and then a *Kampā*, and it furthermore specifically mentions the rivers to be seven. Similarly, the *Hastigirimāhātmya* (4.64c–65b) indicates seven rivers in Kāñcī and mentions both a *Kampā* and a *Pampā*. This example indicates the value of parallel reading of several *Sthalamāhātmyas* and *Talapurāṇams* on Kanchi for understanding possible obscure passages.

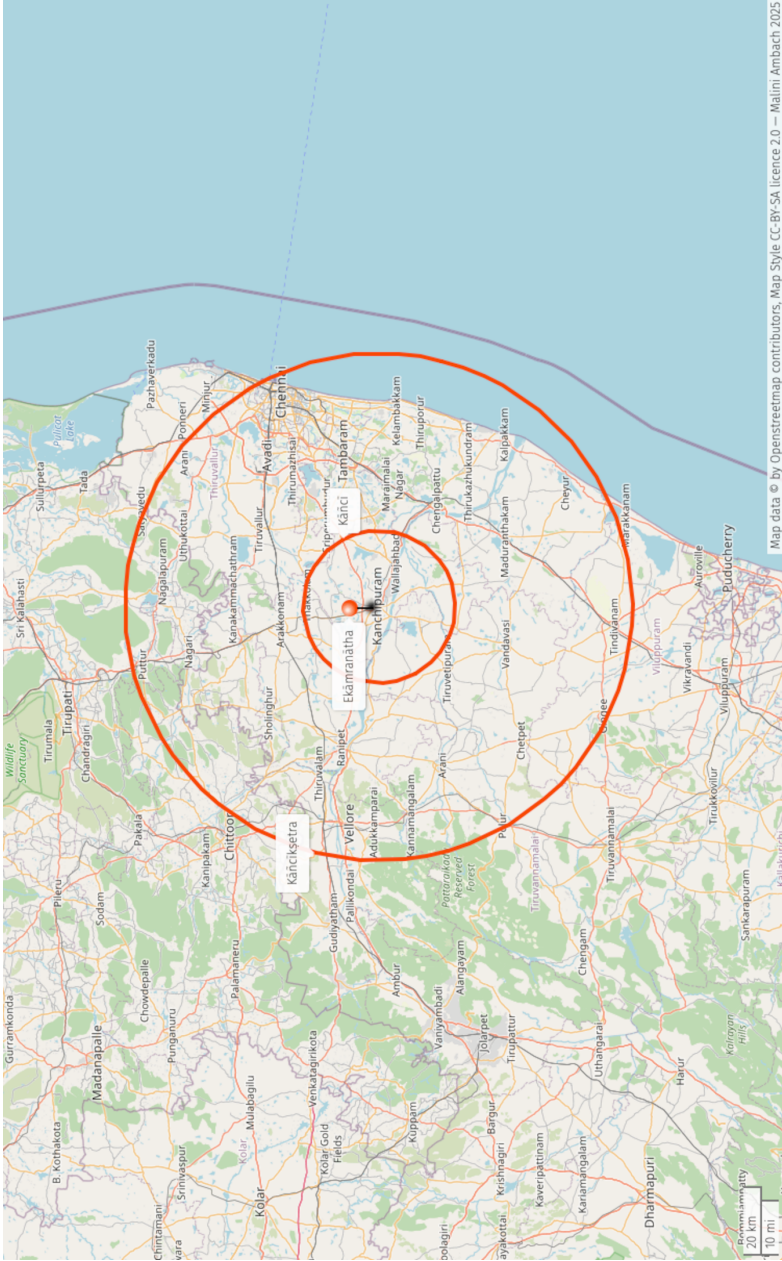


Fig. 4.1 Kāñcīkṣetra and the city Kāñcī (both approximations, see subsection 1.3.3) according to the KM(ś), with Ekāmanātha as centre.

a place indicates a greater attributed significance, it is these three water bodies that are emphasised in the text's layout of Kāñcī. The reasons for this seem to be evident with regards to the Māhātmya's outlook on Kāñcī's space; the Kampā is an integral element of the Ekāmranātha myth and thus intimately linked to the central site and its myth in the KM(Ś). The Vegavathi and the Manjalneer Kalvai, in turn, flow straight through Kanchi, from west towards the east and almost in parallel, the Manjalneer Kalvai to the north of the Vegavathi. They characterise the geographical landscape of the city and are visible markers structuring its space.

Kāñcī is both understood as an urban space (*purī*) and as an existing city. The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* does not include a myth of origin for the city but still presents an imagined notion of Kāñcī. These descriptions are set in a mythical context and paint an idealised picture of the city. In the introductory part of the Māhātmya, the city is described in poetic words: it is a beautiful place, adorned with finely ornamented houses, pavilions, gardens and ponds, resounding with auspicious sounds and inhabited by various birds and other animals and people carrying out their duties. In the centre of the city is the abode of Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmpanātar), where Śiva resides in the form of a *liṅga* of light (Jyotirliṅga; KM(Ś) 3.64–110, 42.19–27b). As will become apparent below (see section 4.3), the position of Ekāmranātha within the space of the city has to be understood here in a figurative sense, as his temple is actually located in the northwestern part of the historically expanding city. The positioning of the Ekāmranātha representation thus intends to symbolise its central significance in the perception of Kāñcī whereas the Māhātmya later on specifies its position when dealing with Ekāmranātha's myth (cf. KM(Ś) 42.27ab).

The city of Kāñcī is known as Brahmā's city (KM(Ś) 3.103ab, 43.40), an association that can also be found in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)).¹³⁶ The justification of the name *Kāñcī* is derived from Brahmā's designation *ka* and *Kāñcī* is interpreted as the city revered (*añcita*) by Brahmā—another parallel to the KM(V) (4.33cd–34ab). In the Śaiva Māhātmya, however, this is only one of several—partly philosophical and partly mysterious—interpretations of the name Kāñcī and the link to Brahmā is also attributed to the notion of Kāñcī as possessing the nature of Brahmā's world (*brahmaloka*; KM(Ś) 36.55–77b). While Kāñcī is fundamentally understood as Śaiva, the KM(Ś) nevertheless broadens its characterisation at times. In individual passages, Kāñcī is additionally characterised as *pīṭha*, a seat of the Goddess,

136 The Śaiva text explicitly considers the abode of Ekāmranātha to be constructed by the divine constructor Viśvakarman on the order of Śiva (KM(Ś) 42.19cd).

and Viṣṇu's city (KM(Ś) 37.23, 38.27¹³⁷). These ascriptions are not further specified—for example, in terms of space—but emphasise Kāñcī's distinct significance. Moreover, these notes pay tribute to the city's diverse religious landscape, which is characterised by the presence of Vaiṣṇava and Śākta sites and traditions alongside the Śaiva.

The Māhātmya not only connects a mythical past with historical sites, but also reflects idealised notions of the city and temples in the mythical context. This applies primarily to the descriptions of the character of the city, the few passages about the cityscape and the structures of temples. The descriptions of urban infrastructures like streets, houses and palaces, walls enclosing the city and gardens refer to the idealised ideas of a city that need not corresponded to a historical reality at any point of time in the past. Nonetheless, it is worth investigating the correspondences between the idealised characterisations derived from the texts and the phases of historical urban development or architectural history in case of temples. The notions of city and temple in the Māhātmyas must inevitably be based on ideas which the authors or compilers of the texts were acquainted with from their own observation or which they considered typical or ideal. Insights from such a consideration could contribute to the interpretation of the texts. It would be a stretch at this point to attempt such an analysis for the more general conceptions of the cityscape found in the KM(Ś)—and other texts on Kanchipuram.¹³⁸ Instead, the description of Ekāmrānātha's abode from the Śaiva text is given below as a specific example of how conceptions of architecture are processed in the Māhātmya.

The Dwelling Place of Ekāmrānātha

The idea of Kāñcī as an illustrious city is echoed in the central myth of the text regarding Ekāmrānātha. In the relevant text passage, it is mentioned that Pārvaṭī circumambulates (*pradakṣiṇa*) Kāñcī after being sent there to atone for covering, to a disastrous end, Śiva's eyes earlier. The city is said to be decorated with banners, its gateways adorned with gems and the air

137 [Kauśika tells:] *jaḡatsāro brahmapurī viṣṇupūś śivapur api | kanyāarakṣeti viditā pīṭhanāmnī priyā mama* || KM(Ś) 37.23.

138 Similarly, it would be worthwhile to analyse the descriptions of Kanchi's historically grown cityscape in terms of the specifications proposed within works of Vāstuśāstra, the science of architecture, and Śilpaśāstra, the ancient Indian science of crafts and arts, and relate these to the notions of the city found in the Māhātmya texts.

reverberating with the sound of drums and flutes (KM(Ś) 42.9–15b). With regard to the imaginary view of Kāñcī's urban space, we are already familiar with similarly designed ideas. Beyond that, the narrative contains one of the few passages in all three Māhātmyas on Kanchi that mentions a built environment at a sacred place is mentioned. After Pārvatī has circumambulated the city clockwise, she goes on to install various goddesses. She worships all of Śiva's places and eventually reaches the dwelling place of Śiva residing at the foot of the single mango tree in the centre of the city (KM(Ś) 42.15c–18).¹³⁹ Among others, the Māhātmya mentions five enclosures (*prākāras*) with pavilions (*maṇḍapas*) of thousand columns and gems, towered gateways (*gopuras*) competing (in eminence) with the mountains Kailāsa and Mandara, and the deities Sūrya, Kālarudra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, a female companion of the goddess, Skanda, and five Brahmāṅgas in different enclosures, and Śiva himself abiding at the foot the single mango tree (KM(Ś) 42.19–27b¹⁴⁰). The ornate descriptive element of the verses needs certainly to be considered in the light of an idealised imaginative view of Kāñcī, while details on the location of the deities and architecture point to particular physical features of a temple and are thus worth comparing with the characteristics of the Ēkāmparanātar temple.

Like many other in Tamil Nadu, the Ēkāmparanātar temple was extensively remodelled around 1900 under the patronage of the Chettiyars; this

139 This wording refers to Śiva in the form of a *liṅga* of light, since Pārvatī only afterwards installs a *liṅga* of sand on top of the *liṅga* of light (cf. KM(Ś) 45.11–65). However, the idea of Ekāmranātha in the KM(Ś) is connected to both these forms and most precisely points to Śiva residing at the foot of the single mango tree, where both *liṅgas* are said to be located. Interestingly, the text does not employ the designation *sthāna*, the otherwise used term for place, but *nilaya* (abode or dwelling place), to designate this site of Śiva.

140 [Kauśika describes Ekāmranātha's dwelling place to the brahmins of Kāñcī:] *nānāmaṇigaṇākīrṇahemaprākārasaṃvṛtam | nirmitaṃ manasā sambhor ājñayā viśvakarmaṇā || KM(Ś) 42.19 devīpriyacikīrṣos tadbhavasya parameṣṭhinaḥ | kailāsamandaraspardhigopurair upaśobhitam || KM(Ś) 42.20 maṇistambasahasrādhyamaṇṭapais sarvato vṛtam | pañcamāvaraṇe sarvaprapañcabhavanojjvalam || KM(Ś) 42.21 dīptaṃ hetigrhānīkaiḥ turīye prāvṛte śubhaiḥ | dīneśakālarudrābjabhavaviṣṇvālayair api || KM(Ś) 42.22 tṛtīye gaṇapaśreṣṭhadevisakhijānālayaiḥ | divyāśmanīkarākṣiptair dīptaṃ dṛṣṭivimohanaiḥ || KM(Ś) 42.23 dvitīye viḡṇapaskandapañcabrahmāṅgasaiṅkulam | prathame puṇḍārīkābhaṃ daharaṃ veśma nirmitam || KM(Ś) 42.24 śivenaiva svam āvāsam ekāmradrumamūlagam | vipāpaṃ puramadhyasthaṃ yad upāśyaṃ vimuktaye || KM(Ś) 42.25 dahre [']sminn antarākāśas tasmīn yajjyotir antarā | tad eva khalu yogīndrair anveṣṭavyaṃ vimuktaye || KM(Ś) 42.26 tadbrahmapuramadhyastham ālayaṃ prāpa sā tadā | KM(Ś) 42.27ab.*

resulted in changes to the architecture, even if the new structures often simply replaced earlier ones on the same spot (Branfoot 2022b). Given that the first printed edition of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* from 1889 contains the relevant text passage—with the text’s composition presumably dating significantly earlier (see pp. 85–89)—, it can be assumed that the *Māhātmya* describes a layout of the temple predating the mentioned reconstruction. A comparison of the textual description with the present-day temple therefore remains flawed but is nevertheless the best possible approximation. The text passage on Ekāmranātha’s abode mentions several architectural components that correspond to common forms of South Indian temple architecture of a certain period. Relevant elements are the arrangement of the space in concentric, most often walled enclosures with several subsidiary shrines and pavilions and entrances towered with gateway towers. These features became part of the temple architecture in the twelfth/thirteenth century (Branfoot 2017, 195).¹⁴¹ So while the historical temple in Kanchi may have never looked as glorious as the KM(Ś) describes it, the text still seems to refer to a typical post-twelfth/-thirteenth century South Indian temple. In addition to the architectural basics, the KM(Ś) specifies further characteristics of the enclosures, gateways and pavilions. The *prākāras* are said to be five in number, the *gopuras* huge and the *maṇḍapas* to be set out with gems and have thousand columns. In comparison, today’s Ēkāmparanātar temple indeed has five enclosures (the third and the second not separated by a wall but through an elevation of the latter), a nine-storied Rājagopura as the tallest in Kanchi and a pavilion called Thousand-Pillar Hall in the fifth and outermost *prākāra* as suggested by the text.¹⁴² These are surely not exclusive features, for there is, for example, also a Thousand-Pillar Hall at the Miṇāṭci Cuntarēcuvarar temple in Madurai or at the Araṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple in Srirangam, but they aptly describe individual architectural specifics of the Ēkāmparanātar temple.

Additionally, the KM(Ś) mentions several deities to be present there, some of which can clearly be linked to images of the deities found at the temple. One of them is Viṣṇu, which the *Māhātmya* locates in the fourth enclosure in

141 Accordingly, the corresponding passage of the KM(Ś) must be composed sometime after that—a more precise dating, though, cannot be inferred from this deduction (Buchholz 2022, 22–23; see also pp. 85–89).

142 For the outline of the Ēkāmparanātar temple and a summary of its history, I rely on Schier 2018, 17–24, 17, fig. 1.2, 29–38, Seshadri 2003, 121–124, a map with legend in Boulanger 1992, 96–98, an unpublished hand-drawn map by N. Subramaniam, and my own notes taken on site during field-visits in January 2020 and March 2023 as further references.

this text passage.¹⁴³ On site today, there is no Viṣṇu in the fourth but Viṣṇu called Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ in the first *prākāra*. In the fourth enclosure there is instead the *liṅga* Viṣṇuvēcvarar. Called Viṣṇuvīśvara in the KM(Ś), the separate story of its origins narrates that Viṣṇu has installed this *liṅga* and explicitly mentions this site to be both south of Ekāmranātha and in the fourth enclosure (KM(Ś) 42.29–67). The *liṅga* Viṣṇuvīśvara / Viṣṇuvēcvarar is thus linked to Viṣṇu but an image of Viṣṇu is not found at that spot on site. Since the enumeration of the deities found in the *prākāras* as given in the Māhātmya is rather condensed, it is difficult to ascertain whether the text refers to Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ or to the *liṅga* Viṣṇu is said to have installed. Furthermore, it could be that the shrine of Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ was not always in the first enclosure where it is now but in the fourth where the Māhātmya locates it. However, I have not yet been able to find information regarding this.

The case of the female companion of the goddess, who the Śaiva text mention to be present at the abode of Ekāmranātha, is largely similar. The reference here seems to point clearly to the goddess Praḷayamandā (Piraḷayakāḷi Ammaṅ), Pārvatī's helper with a crucial role in the Ekāmranātha myth.¹⁴⁴ According to Kerstin Schier's information (2018, 21, n. 15), the former shrines of Piraḷayakāḷi Ammaṅ was situated in the garden area opening from the third enclosure to the north, and in the third *prākāra* is where the Māhātmya locates the goddess. Her present shrine, though, is found in the second *prākāra*.

The Māhātmya further states that Gaṇeśa is to be found both in the third and second enclosures. On site, there is Aincamuka Vināyakar in the third *prākāra*, Tappaṭṭai Vināyakar and Vikaṭacakkara Vināyakar in the fourth, as well as several images of Gaṇeśa in the first enclosure. In the second *prākāra*, there does not seem to be another Gaṇeśa, but a shrine of Skanda (Māvatī Kantar) is found there, just as indicated by the text.¹⁴⁵ The identification of the other deities (Sūrya, Kālarudra, Brahmā, five Brahmāṅgas)

143 In the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) this Viṣṇu is called Candrakhaṇḍa and in the KV Candrakaṇṭha (see subsection 6.4.1). On the names, see Shulman 1980, 172–173.

144 The goddess called Bhadrakāḷi / Praḷayamandā is asked by Ekāmranātha to stay in front of him in the Ekāmranātha myth (KM(Ś) ch. 45). In the KV, she is called Praḷayabandhinī and mentioned as a goddess residing in Ekāmranātha's territory in Kāñcī (KV 6.11c–12b). She further appears in the Māhātmya's version of Ekāmranātha's myth of origin, in which she contains in her skull-bowl the waters threatening to drown Pārvatī's sand-*liṅga* (KV 8.67–74).

145 In Ekāmranātha's myth, a Gaṇeśa and Skanda are also mentioned to be in the second enclosure of Ekāmranātha's abode (KM(Ś) 45.30c–31b).

the distinction between the sanctum sanctorum and the first enclosure nor the separation of the first *prākāra* from the inner courtyard.

The conception in the *Māhātmya* could well relate to the minor and major demolitions and subsequent reconstructions and renovations that the *Ēkāmparanātar* temple underwent since the Pallava times, with the latest large renovation at the end of the nineteenth century creating the shape of the present-day temple with—among others—the architecturally distinct enclosures (Schier 2018, 29–38). With the Śaiva *Māhātmya* referring to the layout predating the remodelling around 1900, it might reflect a more open structure of the temple wherefore no (spatial) separation between the central *liṅga* and the tree was perceived.¹⁴⁸ Besides, the focus on *Ēkāmrānātha*'s close conceptual (and spatial) connection to the single mango tree and the perception of *Ēkāmrānātha* as the central site of its layout of *Ēkāmrānātha*'s abode—and the entire sacred landscape—is much more pronounced than any accurate description of a built temple environment.

The above discussion shows that the Śaiva *Māhātmya* has a clear idea of both the architecture of *Ēkāmrānātha*'s abode and the spatial arrangement of the places occupied by individual deities within it. The description in the text apparently depicts a temple with architectural elements that became an integral part of temple architecture in South India in the twelfth/thirteenth century. Even if most certainly it adds glorifying attributes to any form of temple that existed when the text was composed, it is still rather precise with regard to the specific characteristics of the site—as they were at a particular point in time and as many of them are still found there today.

4.3 Mapping the Sacred Places

The area of the city of *Kāñcī* is the primary spatial frame in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to name and describe its sacred places. The choice of sites included in the *Māhātmya* is mentioned in the introductory part of the text. There, the sages in the *Naimiśāraṇya* (a forest often mentioned in Purāṇic stories as a place for sages to gather) ask the bard *Sūta* how many places of

148 In this context, an oral narrative is worth mentioning, which recounts that the *liṅga* of sand has been moved to its present location in the sanctum sanctorum and away from its original spot under the single mango tree (Boulanger 1992, 95). It is, indeed, possible that it had been situated under the tree at a certain point of time, but either the *liṅga* or the tree have been since relocated.

Śiva and Viṣṇu, Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa), Viśākha (Skanda) and others there are in Kāñcī.¹⁴⁹ In response, Sūta introduces the Māhātmya of Śiva's capital, that is Kāñcī, as he had once heard the sage Kauśika narrate it to the brahmins of Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 4.5–19b). Before he starts the retelling of the Māhātmya, which forms the main part of the KM(Ś) (ch. 4.21–45.end), the sages remind him that they especially want to hear about the numerous sacred places and *tīrthas*.¹⁵⁰ This clear indication of what is to follow in the text could not be more accurate. The KM(Ś) describes and locates around hundred *śivaliṅgas*, around a dozen Vaiṣṇava sites, sacred water bodies, one site each of Gaṇeśa and Skanda and a few of the Goddess in various forms.¹⁵¹ As I show in the detailed analysis below, the places are spread all over Kāñcī. Taking into account the slight imprecision regarding the exact placement of the city's area due to the missing indication of its centre point (see section 4.2), figure 4.2 suggests that the places described in the text are located within the space that the KM(Ś) understands as the city's space. Or the other way around, the extension of the area seems to be defined in such a way that (almost) all places lie within it. This clearly shows an intentional conception to spatially correlate the extent of the city's space and the placement of sacred places described in the Māhātmya, emphasising the focus on Kāñcī and not the *kṣetra*.

Simply judging by the numerical distribution of sacred places in the KM(Ś), the focus on Śaiva places becomes apparent. The preference con-
fers with the overall Śaiva character of the Māhātmya, which considers Śiva as the superior deity (see subsection 3.3.1 on the myths). A prioritising of Śaiva sites is further reflected in the arrangement of the entirety of sites and their stories of origin. The numerous *śivaliṅgas* are evidently understood as the main sites and narrating the origin of a *liṅga* is typically the key objective of a story. The latter can then present the narrational frame for

149 [The sages ask:] *kiyat pramāṇaṃ kṣetraṃ syāt kāñcīpurā mahāmate | kati śambhoḥ sthālāny atra kati viṣṇoḥ sthālāni ca || KM(Ś) 4.3 vināyakaviśākhādīsthanam anyac ca yac ca tat | 4.4ab.*

150 [The sages ask:] *kathaṃ tena samākhyātaṃ kāñcīmāhātmyam uttamam || KM(Ś) 4.19cd sthānāni tatra tīrthāni puṇyāni sumahanti ca | santi tad vistarāt sarvaṃ sūta vaktum ihārhasi || KM(Ś) 4.20.*

151 The counting is not entirely clear, since the *liṅgas* are not always structurally separated from each other and the text itself does not specify their number. In his recent study of Kanchi's Śaiva landscape, Jonas Buchholz (2025) lists 106 *śivaliṅgas* in the order in which they are mentioned in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. For the clusters of *śivaliṅgas* that I have identified personally (see subsection 4.3.1), the numbers are based on this list. See the appendix for the sites mentioned in the KM(Ś).

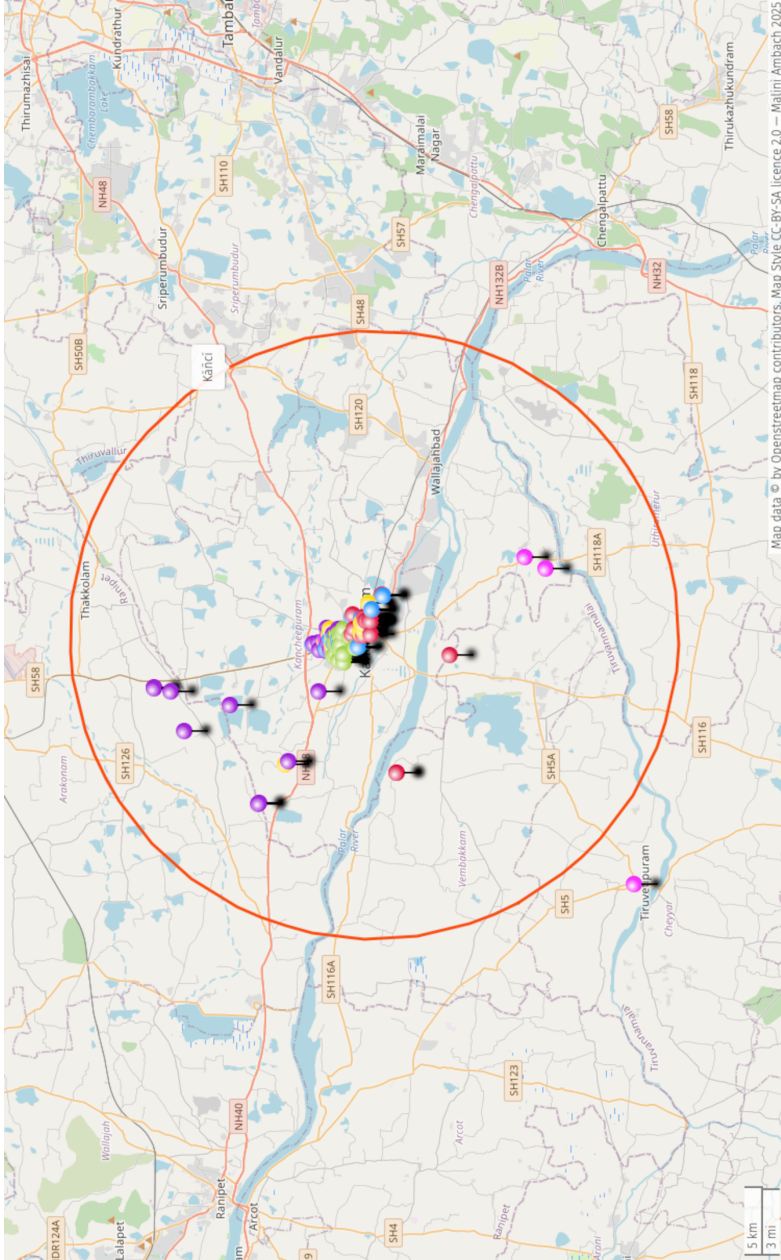


Fig. 4.2 Locations of the sacred places within the space Kāñcī (orange outline; approximation, see subsection 1.3.3) in the KM(S). Vaiṣṇava places are marked in yellow, *tīrthas*—blue, all other coloured pins point out *śivaliṅgas*.

myths about *tīrthas* and places of the Goddess or Viṣṇu that are linked to the respective *liṅga*. Furthermore, it is mainly the *śivaliṅgas* that serve as reference points for locating further sacred sites. Only the sites of Gaṇeśa Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka (Valampuri Vināyakar; second *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple; KM(Ś) ch. 6) and Skanda Kumārakoṣṭha (Kumarakōṭṭam; KM(Ś) 33.23–83) escape from this structural template in that their narratives merely establish a loose link to a *śivaliṅga* and instead focus on the origin of this Gaṇeśa and this Skanda.

Despite the sectarian partiality of the text in the interpretation of Kāñcī and the myths, the outline of the sacred landscape essentially reflects the historically grown religious landscape and its geo-spatial conditions. There are indeed many more Śiva sites to be presented, for the number of Śaiva temples and shrines (around hundred and sixty) far exceeds that of Vaiṣṇava sites (around thirty-five) and those dedicated to other deities in Kanchi. Of course, the KM(Ś) is neither complete in its representation of the temples that constitute Kanchi's religious landscape as some sites are not mentioned; also, some of these are located directly next to one that is included.¹⁵² The focus on *śivaliṅgas* defines the interpretive approach of the text, which at the same time reflects the actual proportions of all the existing sacred sites in the city.

The view on Kāñcī's sacred places is reflected in the hierarchical arrangement of the narratives. The nesting of the stories about places of Viṣṇu and the Goddess as well as *tīrthas* under a superordinate narrative about a *liṅga* emphasises the understanding of a superior position of Śiva on a structural level. For example, the longer narrative in KM(Ś) 9.69–116 centres on the origin of Phaṇāmaṇīśvara (Paṇāmaṇīśvarar). This *śivaliṅga* is located in reference (northwest) to Maṇikaṇṭheśvara (Maṇikaṇṭīśvarar), whose story precedes that of Phaṇāmaṇīśvara in the KM(Ś). Phaṇāmaṇīśvara's myth further introduces a *tīrtha* called Anantasaras (Aṇantatīrttam; east of Paṇāmaṇīśvarar) and a site of the Goddess as Kālī called Bhinnodarī (Mākāliyamman; adjacent to Paṇāmaṇīśvarar in the north). Both sites are clearly elements of the superordinate story on Phaṇāmaṇīśvara. The narrative arrangement is also reflected with regard to the meritorious powers ascribed

152 It is not within the scope of this study to individually assess whether these sacred places came into being in more recent times, that is after the composition of the *Māhātmya*, but this might be a reason why some shrines found in contemporary Kanchi are omitted in the *Māhātmya*. However, a more recent origin cannot always be the reason, since, for example, the Vaiṣṇava Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ temple, a monumental heritage from the Pallava era (eighth century), is not mentioned either.

to the sites, as the efficacy of the *tīrtha* is linked to worshipping the *liṅga* (see subsection 4.3.2), whereas Phaṇāmaṇīśvara itself is ascribed separate and independent powers (KM(Ś) 9.113–116).

4.3.1 Arrangement of the *Śivaliṅgas*

Besides the emphasis on Śaiva places, some further structural elements mark the design of the sacred landscape in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*: the sequential arrangement of the *śivaliṅgas*, the pattern that indicates the location of a site, and the understanding of the sites as existing before the myths speak about their origin. These features reflect an orientation towards the geo-spatiality and a precise knowledge of the position of the historical sites. The result is a descriptive map of Kāñcī and the area that catalogues the sacred sites it deems relevant.

First, the description of Kāñcī's sacred space in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* clearly acknowledges the spatiality of the historically grown cityscape and takes it as its starting point. As a rule, the name and location of a site are indicated at the very beginning of the text passage that will tell the story of origin of the place. This approach reflects a conceptional understanding of the sacred sites as existing in the temporal setting of the text's frame story. This retrospective perspective is based on the existing historical places to which the myths about the individual places set in a mythical past are subsequently attached. All the stories are thus located in the same, stable, and coherent sacred geography consisting of all the places mentioned in the text, even if their story of origin has not yet been told. Thus, places that have not yet been dealt with can be referred to right from the beginning. For example, in the story about Vīrarāgheśvara (Vīrarākavēsvarar) found in chapter 17 of the KM(Ś) (17.1–52), it is said how the main character Rāma comes to Kāñcī, takes a bath in the water of Śivagaṅgātīrtha (Civakaṅkaiṭīrttam) and worships Ekāmranātha, although the myth about the origin of Ekāmranātha is narrated only towards the end of the *Māhātmya* (KM(Ś) chs. 39–45).

The second structuring element in the *Māhātmya* is the sequence of the Śaiva sites. Based on indications of the locations of the *śivaliṅgas* in the KM(Ś) and the apparent consideration of spatial characteristics of the historically grown city in the text, I identify clusters of *śivaliṅgas* that are situated close to each other in different parts of Kanchi and are described one after another. The *Māhātmya* first describes the *liṅgas* in the southeast, then in the centre and west, in the northwestern part, and finally those found within the compound of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (see figures 4.3 and 4.4).

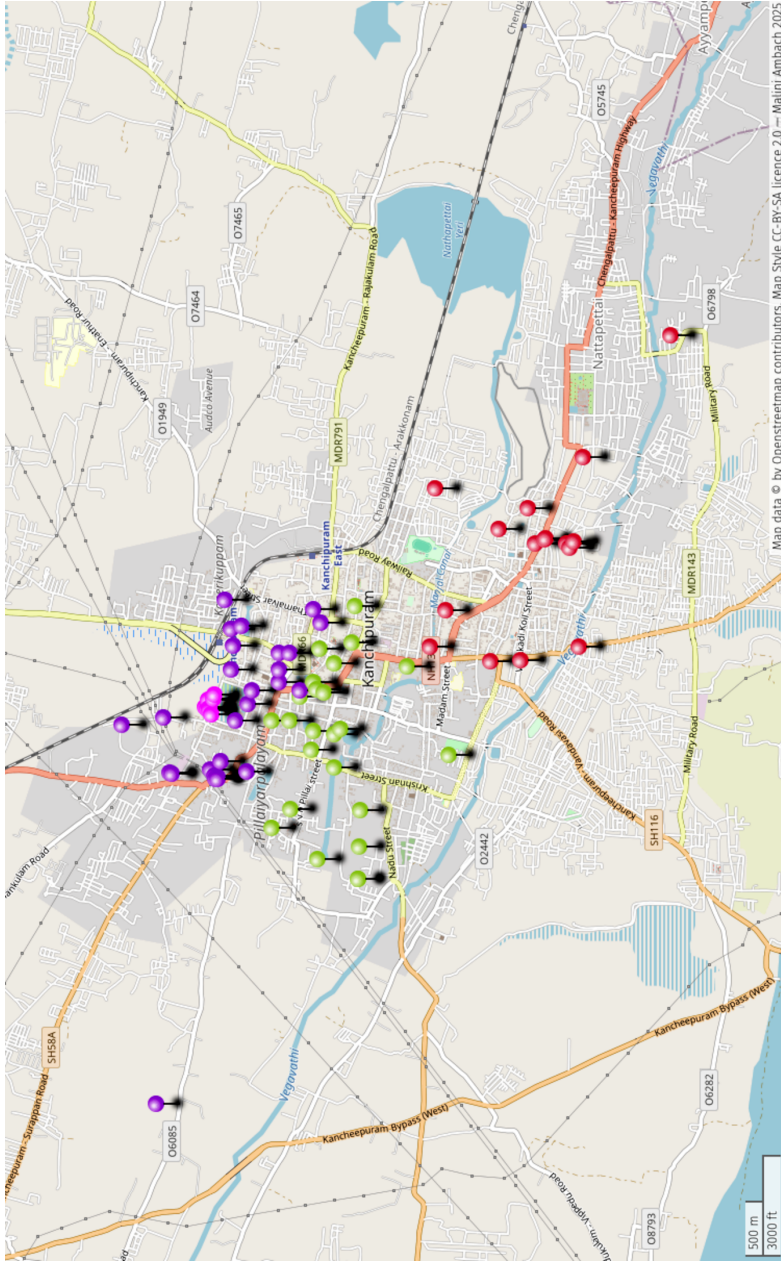


Fig. 4.3 Arrangement of the *sivalingas* in clusters in the KM(S), section on Kanchi. *Sivalingas* in cluster 1 are marked in red, cluster 2—green, cluster 3—purple, cluster 4—pink.

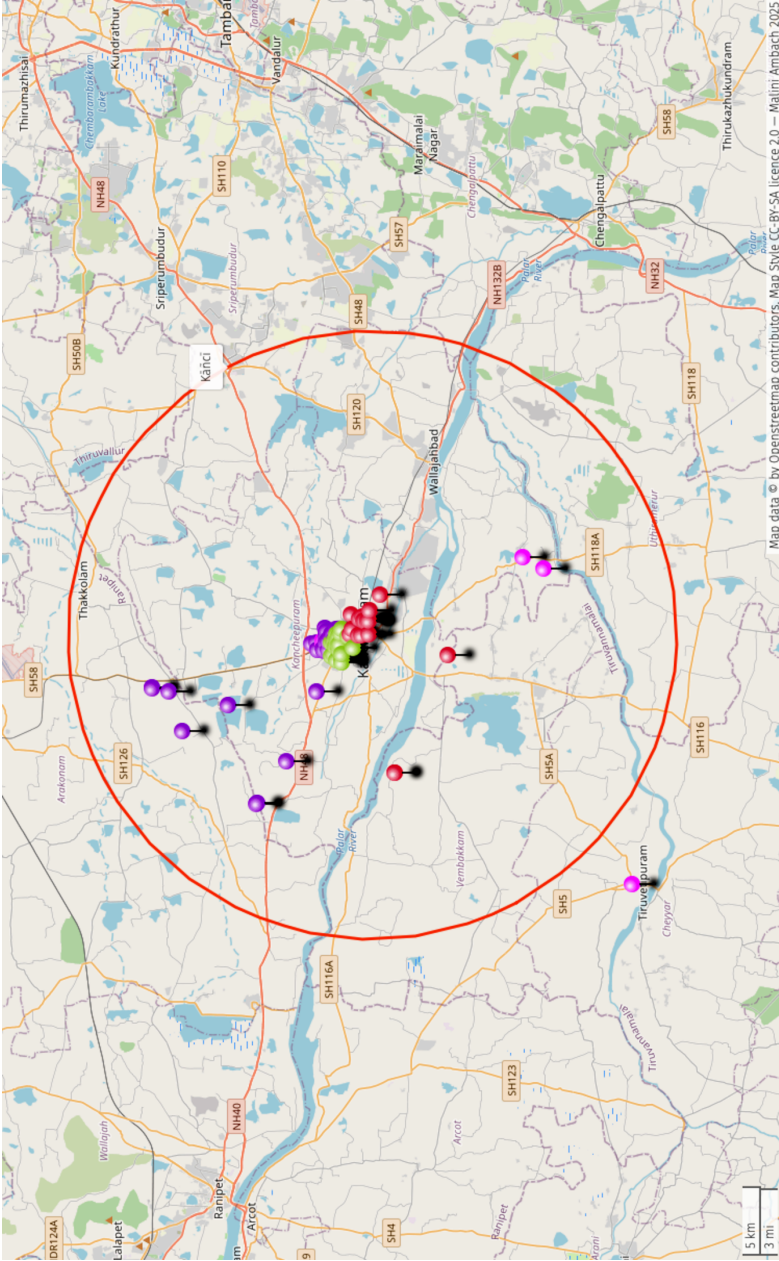


Fig. 4.4 Arrangement of the śivaliṅgas in clusters in the KM(Ś), overall view of the space Kāñcī (orange; approximation, see subsection 1.3.3). Śivaliṅgas in cluster 1 are marked in red, cluster 2—green, cluster 3—purple, cluster 4—pink.

This arrangement illustrates a shift of the spatial focus from the southeast to the northwest in the course of the text. Within each of the clusters, the *liṅgas*—and consequently their stories of origin—are arranged in consideration of their proximity to each other or rather from a previous one to the next in the sequence.

Connected to the sequence of the *śivaliṅgas* is the third characteristic of the design of the sacred landscape in the KM(Ś). This is an often continuous, standardised referencing pattern that indicates the location of the sacred sites mentioned in the text. It is a distinct marker because each narrative about a *śivaliṅga* usually starts with an indication of its position in reference to the *liṅga* whose story immediately precedes in the text. The preceding site is usually situated in the proximity. For example, the three *liṅgas* Abhirāmeśvara (Apirāmīsvavarar), Airāvateśvara (Airāvatisvavarar), and Iṣṭasiddhīśvara (Iṣṭasittisvavarar; within the Kaccapēsvarar temple compound) are situated close to each other and their stories follow one another (KM(Ś) 13.92–96, 13.97–103b, 13.103c–147). Conforming to the standard pattern, Airāvateśvara is located relative and west to Abhirāmeśvara and the location of Iṣṭasiddhīśvara is indicated to be south of Airāvateśvara (see figure 4.5).¹⁵³ The place that is described immediately before thus serves at the reference site for indicating the location of the next described place. This is the standard followed in the text, though exceptions do exist. The directions of all the sites in the KM(Ś) are consistently precise in comparison with their position in the historically grown city, as far as the location of the temples can be determined so far. Indications of distances are the exception rather than the rule and are mentioned only when the distance to the reference site is of a considerable length.

For the most part, the KM(Ś) follows the referencing pattern indicated above, thus creating a clearly recognisable uniform structure based on the spatiality of Kanchi. Within the clusters of Śaiva sites, the continuous string of referring to a site near a *liṅga* may be interrupted from time to time because the sequence reaches a dead end on the geo-spatial level. This, for example, occurs when the edge of a cluster is reached in one direction and/or a closer situated site would offer a better orientation. In such case, the next *śivaliṅga* is not located with reference to the previous site (that is farther away) but in relation to a more centrally, or closer, situated

153 [Kauśika tells:] *anyac ca sthānam abhramvāḥ kamitrārādhitam mahat | airāvateśvarākhyam tad abhirāmeśapaścime | | KM(Ś) 13.97 [...] asya dakṣiṇadighbhāge sthānam anyat suśobhanam | | KM(Ś) 13.103cd iṣṭasiddhīśvarākhyam tadiṣṭasiddhipradam nṛṇām | KM(Ś) 13.104ab.*



Fig. 4.5 Directional referencing pattern that locates the śivaliṅgas in the KM(Ś), example.

liṅga—or *tīrtha*—that has already been mentioned before in the text or is positioned at a distinct location.¹⁵⁴ For example, the *liṅga* Maṅikaṅṭheśvara (Maṅikaṅṭisvarar; KM(Ś) 8.1–9.69b) is said to be situated west of Puṇyakoṭīśvara (Puṇṇiyakoṭṭisvarar), which is introduced a few chapters before in the text (KM(Ś) 5.1–70). Both *liṅgas* lie around 900 metres away from each other in Kanchi's southeast. The preceding *liṅga* in the sequence from the Śaiva text, though, is Jīvatpākeśvara. Its exact location could not be identified yet, but is south of the Palar river as can be inferred from its own directional self-reference that mentions Jīvatpākeśvara to be south of Tālavaneśa (Tālapurīśvarar) and Kṛpānātha (Kirupānāta Svāmi) which are found around 7 kilometres to the southwest of Kanchi at Thiruppanangadu (Kanchipuram district), south of the Palar river. For actually finding Maṅikaṅṭisvarar on the ground, the spatial contextualisation in reference to Puṇyakoṭīśvara in the text is more helpful than a reference to the more distant Jīvatpākeśvara. It seems that the option chosen is the one that offers better orientation to navigate Kanchi's sacred sites on the ground. The consideration of distances thus overrules the basic structure of the referencing pattern in individual cases.¹⁵⁵ It seems to indicate that the reachability of the *śivaliṅgas* according to the location information given in the text could be a factor for their arrangement. However, I could not find out if there was or is indeed a pilgrimage practice that traces Kanchi's sacred places as per the KM(Ś).

Cluster 1 is formed essentially by sites located in the eastern and southeastern area of Kanchi. The limit to the west is Kamarajar Salai and Valla Pacchayappan Street (southern part), the major north-south throughfare since the Chola times that leads to Tirupati in the north and Uthiramerur to the south (Stein 2021, 92–126, 122, fig. 39; see section 2.3), with the *liṅgas* directly adjacent to the road in the west also included in this cluster (see figure 4.6).¹⁵⁶ In addition, the group includes some sites further away to the south (see figure 4.7). The first *liṅga* described in this group and the

154 Besides, no historical site is presented more than once with its own myth (with the exception of Apirāmīśvarar). Since there are several sites that have the same name in the KM(Ś), this may seem otherwise at first glance.

155 Apart from that, if the directions to individual places as indicated in the Māhātmya were traced, this would result in a back-and-forth movement within the clusters. This pattern evidently does not conform with the overall spatial shift from the southeast to the northwest that can be detected in the transition from one set of *śivaliṅgas* to the next.

156 The number of *śivaliṅgas* in the clusters that I give corresponds to the number mentioned in the KM(Ś) and can be higher than the number of sites marked in the figures in this chapter because not all places from the text could be identified with historical places so far (see also subsections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3).

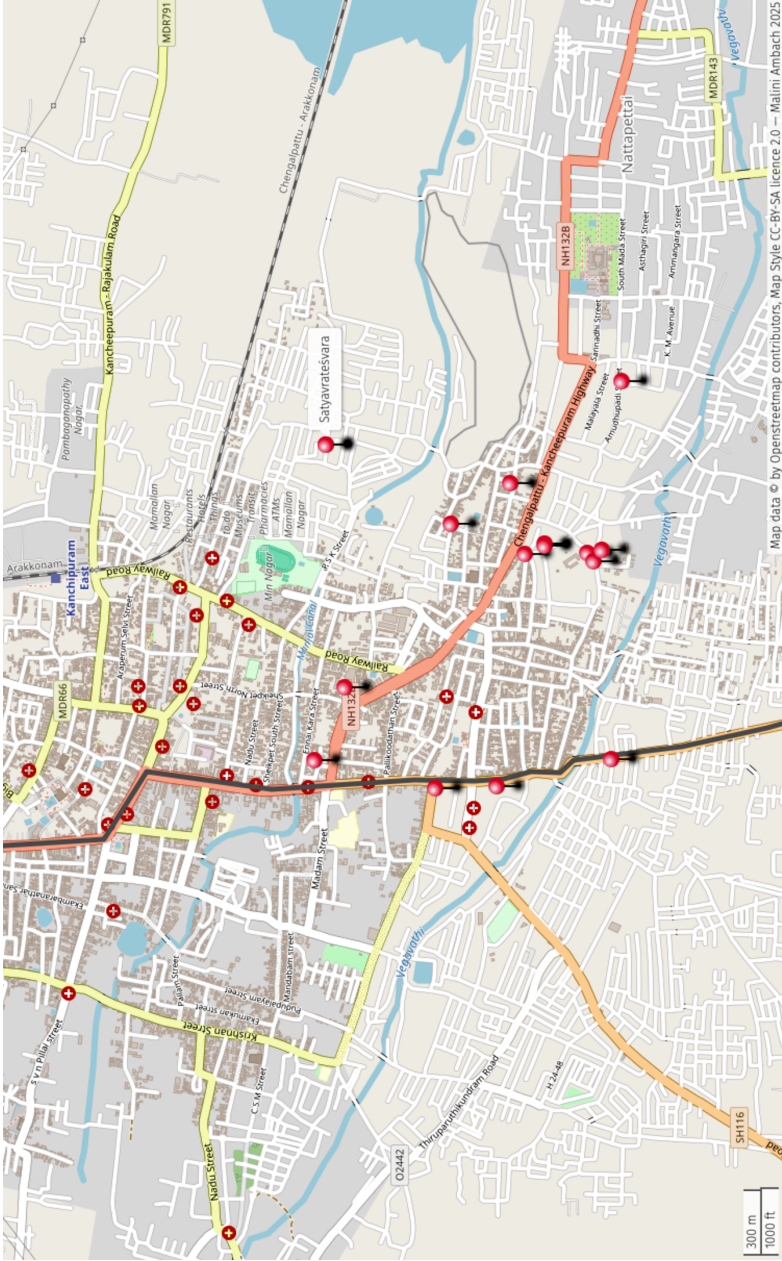


Fig. 4.6 Locations of the śivaliṅgas in cluster 1 in the KM(Ś), section on Kanchi. The conceptual spatial demarcation to cluster 2 is marked in grey (visualisation).

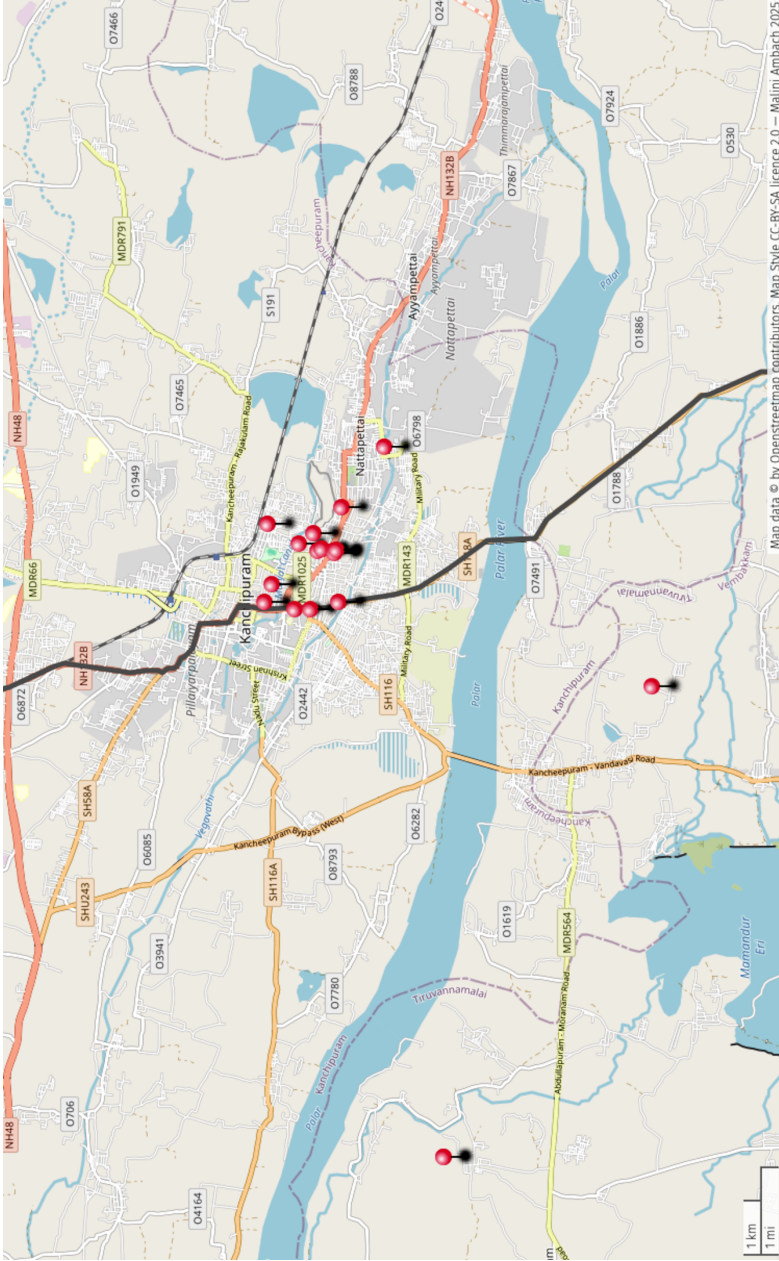


Fig. 4.7 Locations of the *śivalingas* in cluster 1 in the KM(S), overall view. The conceptual spatial demarcation to cluster 2 is marked in grey (visualisation).



Fig. 4.8 Locations of the śivalingas in cluster 2 in the KM(ś). The conceptual spatial demarcation to cluster 1 is marked in grey (visualisation).

Māhātmya in general is Satyavrateśvara (Satyanātasvāmi). The locations references are not entirely continuous since after a first part (four *liṅgas*; KM(Ś) 4.35–7.78), some places further south of Kanchi and south of the river Palar are described (three *liṅgas*; KM(Ś) 7.79–95; see figure 4.7). Following this detour in terms of spatial proximity, the focus returns to the southeastern area of Kanchi (further seventeen sites; KM(Ś) 8.1–12.83).

The demarcation of cluster 1 to 2 results from the shift of the geo-spatial focus to the centre of Kanchi. Most of the places in this group are located in the area that lies west of the aforementioned Kamarajar Salai and is roughly bounded in the north by the Annai Indira Gandhi Salai, the West Raja Street and its extension to the northeast. The Annai Indira Gandhi Salai demarcates the oldest urban core to the south, the West Raja Street to the west (see figure 4.8). Cluster 2 (twenty-six *liṅgas*; KM(Ś) 13.1–20.127) begins with Kāyārōkaṇeśvara (Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar) and an interruption in the referencing pattern. The *liṅga* is simply located *in Kāñcī* (*kāñcyām*; KM(Ś) 13.1). Similarly, the standard references are missing for Paścimasthāna (Tirumēṙṙaḷiśvarar), Anekapeśvara (Anēkataṅkāvatēśvarar), Kailāsanātha (Kailācanātar), and Kaccchapeśvara (Kaccapēśvarar). It is my impression with regard to this cluster that places with a distinctive renown or a more exposed spatial position are exempted from the referencing pattern as their location is considered to be known. Tirumēṙṙaḷiśvarar and Anēkataṅkāvatēśvarar are counted among the Pāṭal Peṙṙa Stalams; Kailācanātar is a monumental Pallava temple built in the eighth-century at the major trans-regional route through Kanchi at this time (Stein 2021, 120–126); Kaccapēśvarar is one of the larger temples in Kanchi, located rather centrally at the southwestern corner of the Rājavīthis (streets framing the area around the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple) and in the eighth century it marked the border of the city (Stein 2021, 101; Seshadri 2003, 135–137); and Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar, one of the more well-known temples in the city, is associated with the Śaiva Pāśupata ascetics and might have been a place of worship from the ninth century onwards (Stein 2021, 57–58).¹⁵⁷

The sites of cluster 3 map the northwestern part of Kanchi—with the exception of the places within the Ēkāmparanātar temple—and include some *liṅgas* further away to the northwest of the city (see figures 4.9 and 4.10). Again, a greater spatial distance from the last location of the previous group

157 For an overview of the Pāṭal Peṙṙa Stalams, see Chevillard and Sarma 2007. For details about the Kailācanātar temple, see Kaimal 2005, 2020, and Rajarajan 2015–2016. Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar is closely related to the Kaccapēśvarar temple and both temples are considered among the nine places in Kanchi where Viṣṇu worshipped Śiva (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., February 2021).

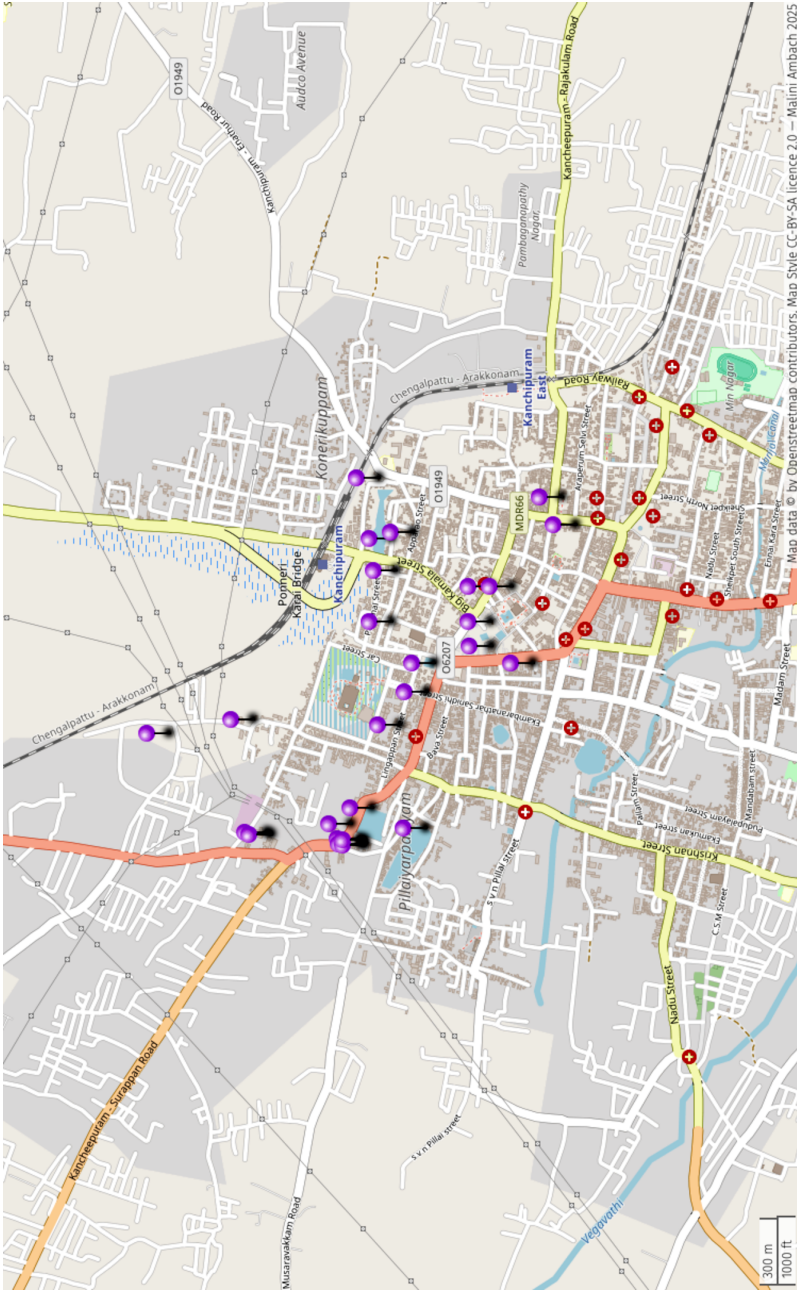


Fig. 4.9 Locations of the śivalingas in cluster 3 in the KM(Ś), section on Kanchi.

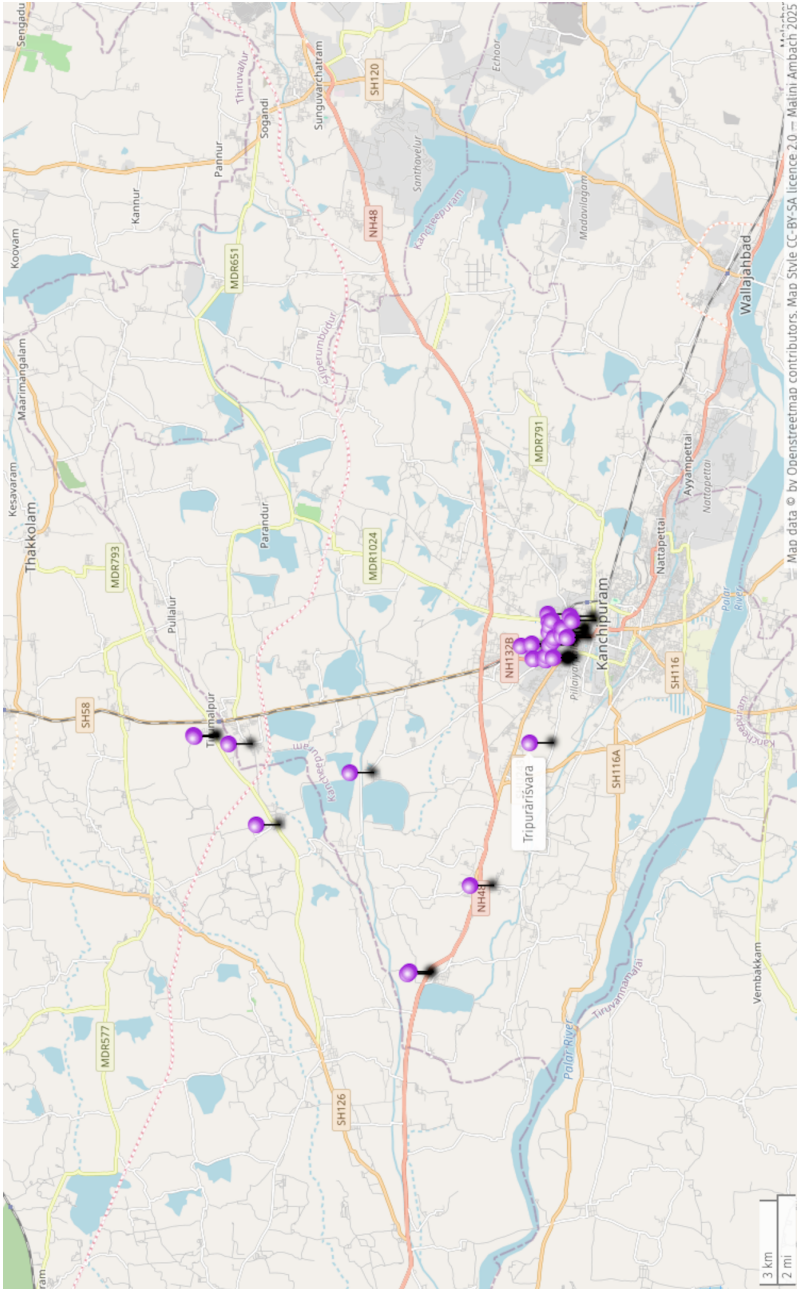


Fig. 4.10 Locations of the sivalingas in cluster 3 in the KM(S), overall view.

and a break in the reference pattern marks the transition to this set. It starts with Tripurārīśvara (Muppurārīśvarar; at Sirukaveripakkam village, a few kilometres west of Kanchi), which is said to be located west of the tank called Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam). This sacred water body in the northwestern outskirts of Kanchi forms the central point of orientation and is repeatedly used to situate *śivaliṅgas* in this group. Deviating from the text's standard, it is not a *liṅga* that assumes this function, but a *tīrtha*. Carvatīrttam is one of the largest water bodies in Kanchi, it is part of the festival rituals of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (Schier 2018, 55) and an element of Ekāmranātha in Kanchi's Māhātmyas (Ambach 2022). In the third group of *liṅgas* in the Śaiva text (forty-one *liṅgas*; KM(Ś) 21.1–35.44b), the referencing pattern is often interrupted and starts anew to include all sites. They are spread over a large area and several of them are located at comparatively greater distances (up to circa 15 kilometres) from Kanchi to the west and northwest (see figure 4.10).

The fourth and last cluster of *liṅgas* essentially covers the sites within the compound of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (see figure 4.11). Their location in Ekāmranātha's immediate surroundings is their common characteristic. The first *liṅga* in this set is Śmaśāneśvara (Kaccimāyānam), which was presumably once a shrine separate from the building of the Ēkāmparanātar temple, but is now part of the latter (Stein 2021, 52–53; Schier 2018, 31). While the *liṅga* in question is not specifically located, it clearly starts the sequence of the *liṅgas* found inside the temple compound. The extent of the latter represents the spatial demarcation of cluster 4 to the other clusters. For the *liṅgas* in this set, the referencing pattern is systematically adjusted to construct the central place—Ekāmranātha—as the reference point. A total of ten *liṅgas* are located around Ekāmranātha, making this area the most densely mapped part of all of Kāñcī in the Śaiva text (KM(Ś) 35.44c–44.56; plus further descriptions of Ekāmranātha in ch. 45). In addition, the text mentions two *liṅga* nearby but outside the compound of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (KM(Ś) 42.1–4) and another three *śivaliṅgas* further south of Kanchi (KM(Ś) 37.54–62). The latter places are linked to Ekāmranātha by a story and thus fit into cluster 4 (see figure 4.12).¹⁵⁸

158 These three *liṅgas* are situated at the banks of the Cheyyar river (called Skanda in the text), which runs south of Kanchi at a distance of around 15 to 20 kilometres. A story about the Kampā links them to the other *liṅgas* in cluster 4. The reference place for the first *liṅga* in this group of three is Puṇyakoṭīśvara (Puṇṇiyakoṭṭīśvarar; KM(Ś) 37.54–55; cluster 1), situated in Kanchi's southeast and thus closer to the three sites further south. Puṇyakoṭīśvara is possibly chosen as reference because it is a larger temple located not far from the major road

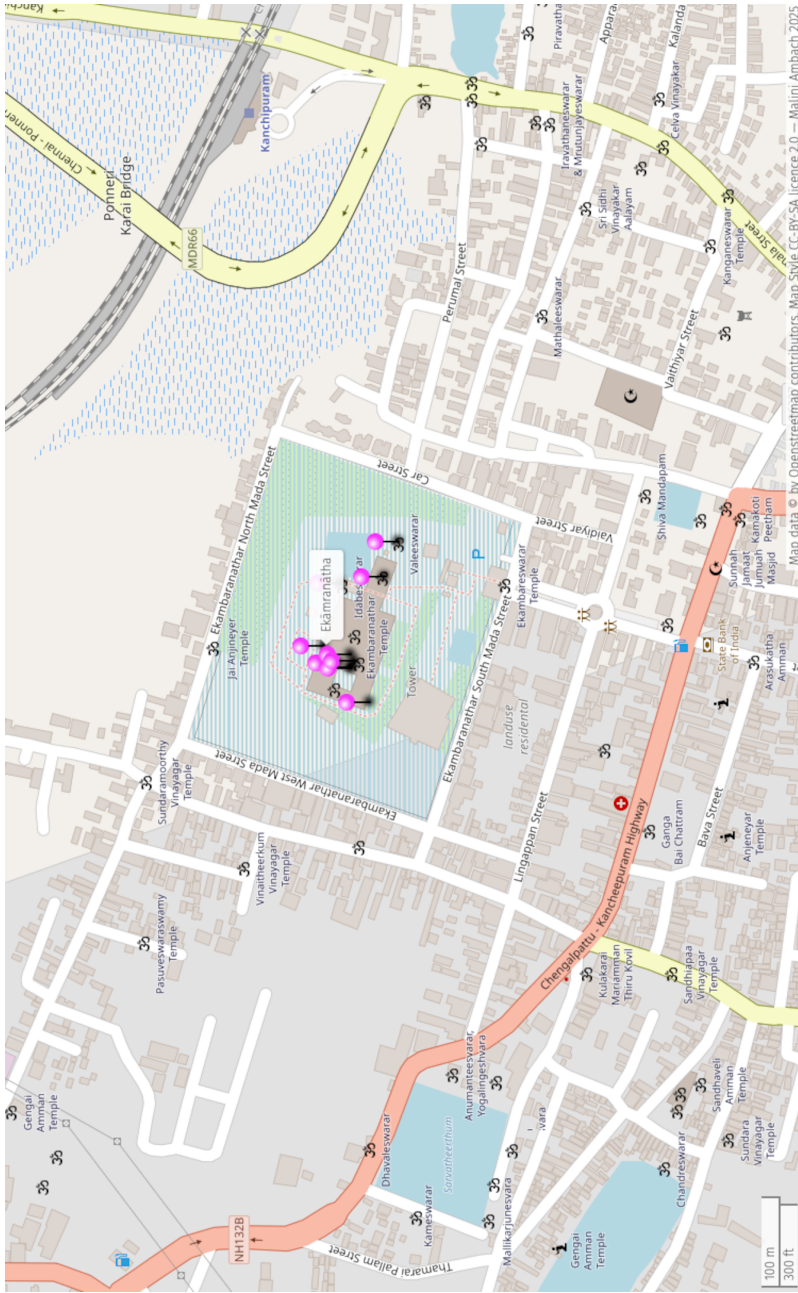


Fig. 4.11 Locations of the sivalingas in cluster 4 in the KM(S), section on Kanchi.

The site of Ekāmrānātha is the undisputed focal point in the Māhātmya's design of Kāñcī's sacred geography and its centrality is reflected on several levels. As analysed above (see section 4.2), the text's spatial outline constructs its site as the central focus and Kāñcī is primarily characterised by Ekāmrānātha's presence there. Moreover, as one of the few cases in all three Māhātmyas, architectural aspects of Ekāmrānātha's place are described in the Śaiva text (see pp. 101–106). Structurally, the particular importance of Ekāmrānātha's site among Kāñcī's sacred places is reflected in the elaborateness of its narrative. Similarly, the position of Ekāmrānātha's myth at the end of the Māhātmya is worth a note. As Jay Ramesh (2020, 7, 118) analyses using the example of the Sanskrit *Kumbakoṇamāhātmya*, Sthalamāhātmyas often position the site they consider most important at the end of a pilgrimage—a route that can be traced by following the sequence of the sites in a sacred landscape described in a Māhātmya.

The assessment by Jay Ramesh that the last place is the most important could also be applied to Ekāmrānātha in the KM(Ś). However, I do not see the arrangement of sacred sites in the Śaiva Māhātmya as an outline of a pilgrimage route that is actually to be followed and I am unaware of such a practice.¹⁵⁹ Compared to the other two Māhātmyas on Kanchi and their arrangement of the sacred sites, though, the spatial outlay of Kāñcī gleaned from the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* does correspond much more to an outline of a pilgrimage route than those of the other two texts: the description starts out from the spatial structures of the historically grown city and groups together places that are close to each other and usually indicates the directions from one site to the next. It could well be read as a descriptive map of Kanchipuram's religious landscape—with a focus on *śivaliṅgas*. All in all, it appears as if the arrangement constructs a geo-spatially most convenient—namely, shortest—route without any doubling back. At the same time, it remains clearly aware of all salient orientation points in the vicinity, that is, places already discussed, which serve as location references (see subsection 4.3.1). Beyond that and like any pilgrimage, the text's basic layout has a focus, a goal that is to be reached at the end—Ekāmrānātha.

Nevertheless, several features are missing in the text to view it as an interpretation of a pilgrimage route. First of all, the text itself does not indicate such a notion, neither terminologically nor conceptually. Second, the

leading south out of the city (a continuation of Kamarajar Salai) and to the first of the *liṅgas* at the Cheyyar.

159 As a genre, Sthalamāhātmyas exhibit characteristics suggesting that these texts were composed with pilgrims in mind (see section 3.1).

narrational style of the *Māhātmya* does not overtly describe or construct a pilgrimage route and there is no overarching narrative that would connect the sacred sites in such a perspective. The episodes telling the myths of the *śivaliṅgas* are self-contained and present separate stories, introduced within one and the same myth. Ultimately, the KM(Ś) presents a rather comprehensive outline of the city's religious landscape. This is aligned with the spatially structuring elements of the urban layout or distinctive locations in the city, such as the major north-south road dating to the Chola times (cluster 1 and 2), the large water body of Carvatīrttam (cluster 3), or the compound of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (cluster 4).

4.3.2 Sacred Water Bodies

While the *śivaliṅgas* are clearly understood as the main sites in the KM(Ś) and Ekāmranātha's as the most significant among them, other sacred places are less relevant to the spatial layout. After Śaiva places, *tīrthas* are the most frequently mentioned sites (around twenty, compared to around hundred *liṅgas*). They are mostly linked to a *śivaliṅga*, both spatially and narratively. According to my analysis, the selection of the *tīrthas* mentioned in the text does not follow an explicit pattern (see figure 4.13).

Among the sacred water bodies, Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam; KM(Ś) 29.19–30b), at the northwestern end of Kanchi, the Kampā river (a now dried-up river; see pp. 240–241; KM(Ś) 37.1–25b), and Śivagaṅgātīrtha (Civakaṅkaiīrttam; KM(Ś) 35.87–97), the main *tīrtha* at the Ēkāmparanātar temple, are highlighted. All three *tīrthas* are part of the Ekāmranātha myth and particularly glorified. It is probably this connection with Ekāmranātha that engenders the particular attention given to them.¹⁶⁰

In accordance with the geography-oriented sequence of places in the *Māhātmya*, sacred water bodies are mentioned according to their location in Kanchi. In general, they are arranged within the cluster-design indicated above and their stories are presented right before or after the narrative of a *liṅga* to which they are narratively linked. The narratives of the *liṅga* and the associated *tīrtha* are often interwoven in as far as the same plot continues further or the same characters are involved if the *tīrtha* is provided with

¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, Śivagaṅgātīrtha is repeatedly mentioned in narratives of other *liṅgas* in the KM(Ś) when characters from outside come to Kāñcī. These characters are described to take a bath (*snāna*) in it before they worship Ekāmranātha and then install their own *liṅga* (for example KM(Ś) 10.69 on Siddheśvara or KM(Ś) 17.5 on Vīrarāghaveśvara).

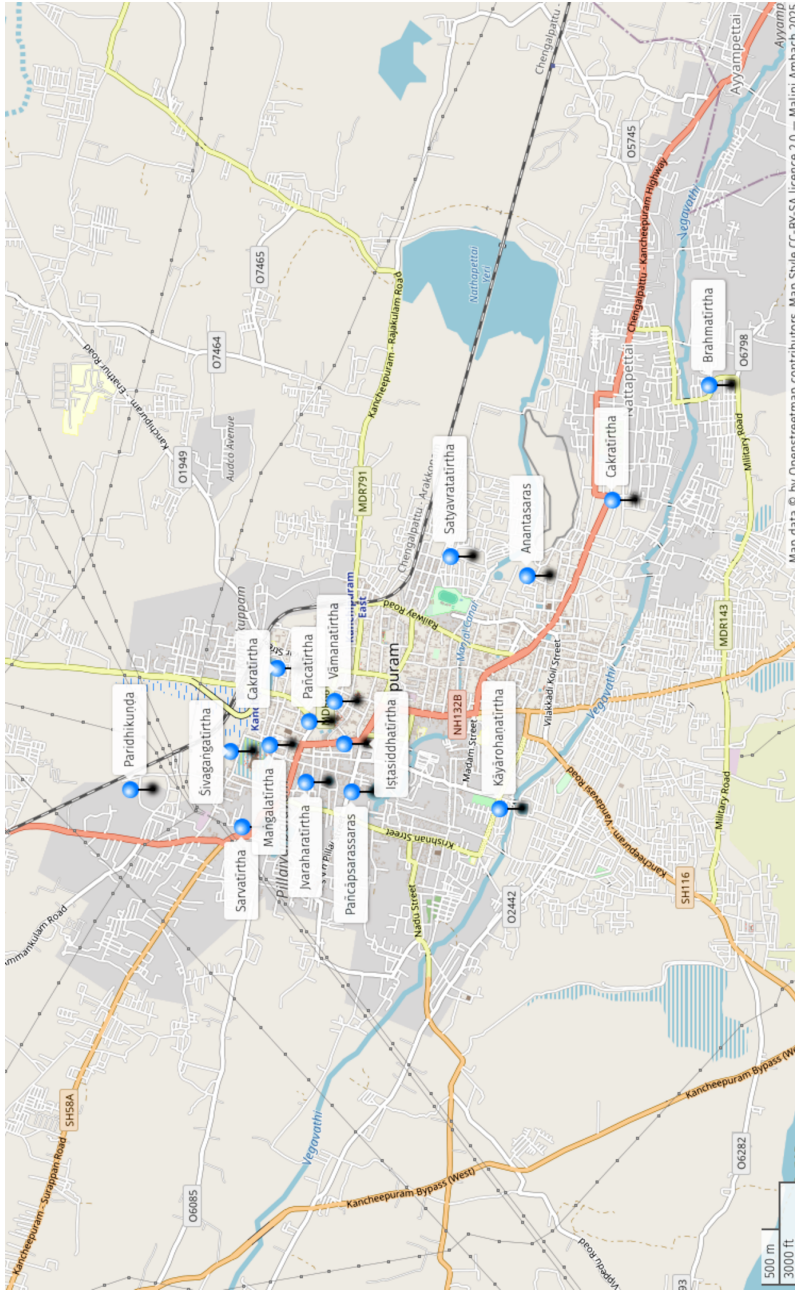


Fig. 4.13 Tirrthas in Kanchi as mapped in the KM(S).

a separate myth. For example, a story about Brahmā (KM(Ś) 7.1–78) narrates both the origin of the *liṅga* Śivāsthāneśvara (Pirammapurīśvarar) and the *tīrtha* Brahmātīrtha (Pirammātīrttam). The *tīrtha* belongs to the Pirammapurīśvarar temple and is adjacent to it on site. The connection of a *tīrtha* to a *liṅga* is thus generally based on the spatial proximity and a linking story in the Śaiva Māhātmya.

In principle, sacred water bodies are said to have a power of their own, which is realised either by bathing, visually perceiving or touching their waters. Each *tīrtha* is said to have an individual effect, with purifying properties—especially regarding offences or lapses—and the granting of liberation being described as inherent in each of these places. A ritual act at the sacred water body, however, is not regarded as sufficient for the attainment of benefits or the fulfilment of desires, but considered only as a component of a series of acts in which the worship of a *liṅga* brings about the desired aim. Accordingly, *tīrthas* are separate places in the Māhātmya's interpretation of Kāñcī's sacred landscape but are subordinate to and dependent on a *śivaliṅga* and thus Śiva's power in their own efficacy.

In the mapping of the *śivaliṅgas*, *tīrthas* sometimes also assume the function of reference points in the localisation statements which, as described above, otherwise falls to *liṅgas*. Among the few examples of this setting, Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam) stands out. It is constructed like a central point in order to locate *śivaliṅgas* in cluster 3 (see section 4.3) and especially those located on its shores, Kāmeśvara (Kāmēsvarar), Tīrtheśvara (Tīrttīśvarar), Gaṅgāvareśvara (Kaṅkāvarēsvarar) and Viśvanātheśvara (Kāci Viśvanātar; KM(Ś) 29.1–38b).

However, such a focus on a sacred water body in the spatial arrangement is the exception. As a category, *tīrthas* are basically subordinated to Śaiva places in the text-internal hierarchy of sacred sites. Structurally, this is reflected in their stories of origin usually being part of a narrative about a *liṅga* to which they are consequently linked and occupying a less significant role. On the level of efficacy, their subordinated status translates into their attributed powers to be understood as a sub-element in a series of rituals that ends with worshipping Śiva as the decisive component for the attainment of benefits.

4.3.3 Sites of Śiva's Sons, Viṣṇu, and the Goddess

In addition to *tīrthas*, a few other non-Śaiva sacred sites are mentioned in the text, albeit in smaller numbers. The Śaiva Māhātmya itself indicates

in its introductory part which places are meant to be foregrounded when the sages ask the bard Sūta how many places are there of Śiva and Viṣṇu, which places are devoted to Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa), Viśākha (Skanda / Murukan), and which other are there in Kāñcī. Accordingly, the KM(Ś) introduces several sites of Viṣṇu and a few of Gaṇeśa, the Goddess in different forms, and Skanda. Just as in the case of *tīrthas*, these sites are associated with a *śivaliṅga* both on the narrative and spatial level. As a rule, the story about a *śivaliṅga* presents the deity worshipping or installing a particular *liṅga* in Kāñcī, whereupon the deity also takes its abode in the vicinity of this Śiva. Accordingly, these associated places are also included in the sequence of sites in the Māhātmya and can be mapped within the clusters of *liṅgas*.

Structurally, the stories about places of non-Śaiva deities correspond to the usual narrative layout in the KM(Ś) according to which divine beings, deities or sages worship a certain *liṅga* in Kāñcī, whose origin and name (*-īśvara*) is thus explained (see subsection 3.3.1). They differ, however, in that the worshipping deity is also assigned a place near that *liṅga* where it has been present in Kāñcī ever since. The site of that deity is thus also considered to be part of the sacred landscape.

Gaṇeśa and Skanda

Greater attention is paid in the KM(Ś) to Dakṣiṇāvartaviḅhneśa, Gaṇeśa with the right-wound trunk (Valampuri Vināyakar; second *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple; KM(Ś) ch. 6) and Kumārakoṣṭha, the place of Skanda (Kumarakoṭṭam; KM(Ś) 33.23–83). In contrast to all other non-Śaiva sites mentioned in the Śaiva Māhātmya, Dakṣiṇāvartaviḅhneśa and Kumārakoṣṭha are structurally less closely connected to a *śivaliṅga* and its story. Said to be situated at Hastiśaila (Hastigiri), Varadarāja's abode, Dakṣiṇāvartaviḅhneśa is associated with the *liṅga* Puṇyakoṭṭīśvara (Puṇyakoṭṭīśvarar), which is located nearby and to which the Māhātmya also connects its version of Varadarāja's story of origin. While reflecting this spatial link, Dakṣiṇāvartaviḅhneśa is introduced in a separate narrative about Viṣṇu installing him there to get back his right-wound conch on Śiva's advice.¹⁶¹ Similarly, the myth of Kumārakoṣṭha concentrates on the origin

¹⁶¹ More incidentally, the KM(Ś) mentions four more Gaṇeśas: one at Śiva Aneka-peśvara (Vināyakar; outer enclosure of the Anēkatankāvatēśvarar temple; KM(Ś) 16.1–18), Satyavāḅvighnarāj, said to be west of Kacchapeśvara (Poyyamoli Vināyakar; outer *prākāra* of the Kaccapēśvarar temple; KM(Ś) 14.26a), and two more at Ekāmranātha's abode (see pp. 101–106).

of Skanda, while the associated *liṅga* Devasenādīpatīśvara (Tevaceṇāpatīcivarar; first *prākāra* of the Kumarakōṭṭam temple), which is worshipped by Skanda, is of secondary importance.¹⁶² While Kumarakōṭṭam is the largest temple dedicated to Skanda in Kanchi, which makes its mention in the KM(Ś) easy to comprehend, the situation with Valampuri Vināyakar is less clear. I can only surmise that its location within a Vaiṣṇava temple sets it apart from other Gaṇeśas and provides a way to connect this site with Śiva through a myth that tells of Viṣṇu worshipping both Gaṇeśa and Śiva.

The rare mention of Gaṇeśa's places in the *Māhātmya* is out of proportion to the around seventy shrines dedicated to this deity in Kanchi's religious landscape. In addition, there are subsidiary shrines to Gaṇeśa usually found in the compounds of Śaiva temples. Besides, the myths of both Dakṣiṇāvartavighneśa and Kumārakoṣṭha are less specifically local and distinctly pan-Indian, largely including episodes that are not set in Kāñcī. Such a framing gives the impression that both have been primarily chosen to include Śiva's two sons in the *Māhātmya*, thus fully depicting the divine nuclear family consisting of Śiva, Pārvatī, and their offspring. By the structural framing of the stories about Śiva's two sons, their places are set apart from other non-Śaiva sites in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Instead of being rather distinctly constructed as secondary in the story about a *liṅga* they are associated with, the origin of Skanda or Gaṇeśa is the main objective in their myths.

Viṣṇus

The KM(Ś) further introduces several manifestations of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī. In line with the text's Śaiva outlook, the textual structure considers the Vaiṣṇava sites as secondary and links a Viṣṇu to a *śivaliṅga*. The association is primarily based on spatial closeness and each mention of a Viṣṇu is therefore generally also subject to the overarching arrangement of the *liṅgas* based on geo-spatial aspects. Secondarily, but ultimately decisively, the plot of the story decides on the respective association, since the origins of both places are to be narratively interwoven. For example, Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāl) is linked to Puṇyakoṭīśvara (Puṇṇiyakōṭṭīśvarar), which is the closest of the *liṅgas* around, whereas Candrakhaṇḍa (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāl), situated in the first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple, is connected to Kṛṣṇeśvara (Kaṇṇēśvarar) that lies around 800

162 Besides Kumārakoṣṭha, further places of Skanda are only mentioned in passing in Ekāmranātha's myth and the description of his abode (see pp. 101–106).

metres away, with around forty *śivaliṅgas* also mentioned in the text located closer to that form of Viṣṇu. In the latter case, the storyline eventually justifies the association: Viṣṇu, who has become black (*kṛṣṇa*) from the poison that originated from the churning of the milk ocean,¹⁶³ comes to Kāñcī to worship Śiva, and is told to stay in front of Ekāmranātha (KM(Ś) 33.1–14b), precisely where he is found on site. Common to all stories is the portrayal of Viṣṇu in his respective manifestation as a worshipper of Śiva, thus illustrating the hierarchy aligned with Śiva. In contrast to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcī-māhātmya*, however, the relation of the two deities is not per se marked by an opposition in the myths.

With the exception of Vaikuṅṭa Perumāḷ temple, all major Vaiṣṇava places in Kanchi, that is, where Viṣṇu is the main deity of the temple, are mentioned in the KM(Ś).¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the text introduces several Viṣṇus that are found in temples where the main deity is not Viṣṇu. In these cases, the Viṣṇus are located in a subsidiary shrine of the temples.

Following the text's geo-spatiality-based structure, the KM(Ś) describes five sites of Viṣṇu that are linked to *liṅgas* from cluster 1 and located in the southeastern part of Kanchi (see figure 4.14). Viṣṇu as Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāḷ; KM(Ś) 5.1–70) is linked to Puṇyakoṭīśvara (Puṇṇiyakōṭṭīśvarar), the *liṅga* that lies the closest. In addition, there is reference within names since Varadarāja's heavenly chariot (*vimāna*), which is considered to be represented by the tower superstructure above the *garbhagrha* (sanctum sanctorum) at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, is called Puṇyakoṭīvimāna. Yathoktakārī (Yatōktakārī Perumāḷ) and Dīpaprakāśa (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ) appear in the story about Śivāsthāneśvara (Pirammapurīśvarar; KM(Ś) 7.1–78), in which Brahmā installs the *liṅga* named after him. The god further carries out a sacrifice in order to see Viṣṇu and in the process Yathoktakārī and Dīpaprakāśa appear. Śivāsthāneśvara is situated at some

163 On the known Purāṇic episode on the churning of the milk ocean, cf. *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, *Aṃśa* I, chapter 9. Besides, the reference to *kṛṣṇa* in the KM(Ś) might also refer to Viṣṇu's *avatāra* of homonymous name.

164 In terms of spatiality, there is no reason why Vaikuṅṭa Perumāḷ should not be included in the KM(Ś). Aneesh Raghavan (pers. comm., October 2025) suspects that its character as royal Pallava monument with secular origins—it was commissioned by King Narasimhavarman II—plays a role in its omission. He refers to the apparently contrived story of origin in the case of the other royal monument in Kanchi, the Kailācanātar temple, and argues that a link to a myth of origin may not be readily apparent for both sites. While the Kailācanātar temple, as Śaiva site, was certainly essential to include in the Śaiva *Māhātmya*, the compilers might not have deemed the Vaiṣṇava Vaikuṅṭa Perumāḷ to be equally relevant and thus did not prioritise the inclusion a myth about its origin.



Fig. 4.14 Viṣṇus (yellow) in Kanchi's southeast in the KM(Ś), in relation to the śivaliṅgas (red) with which their stories are connected.

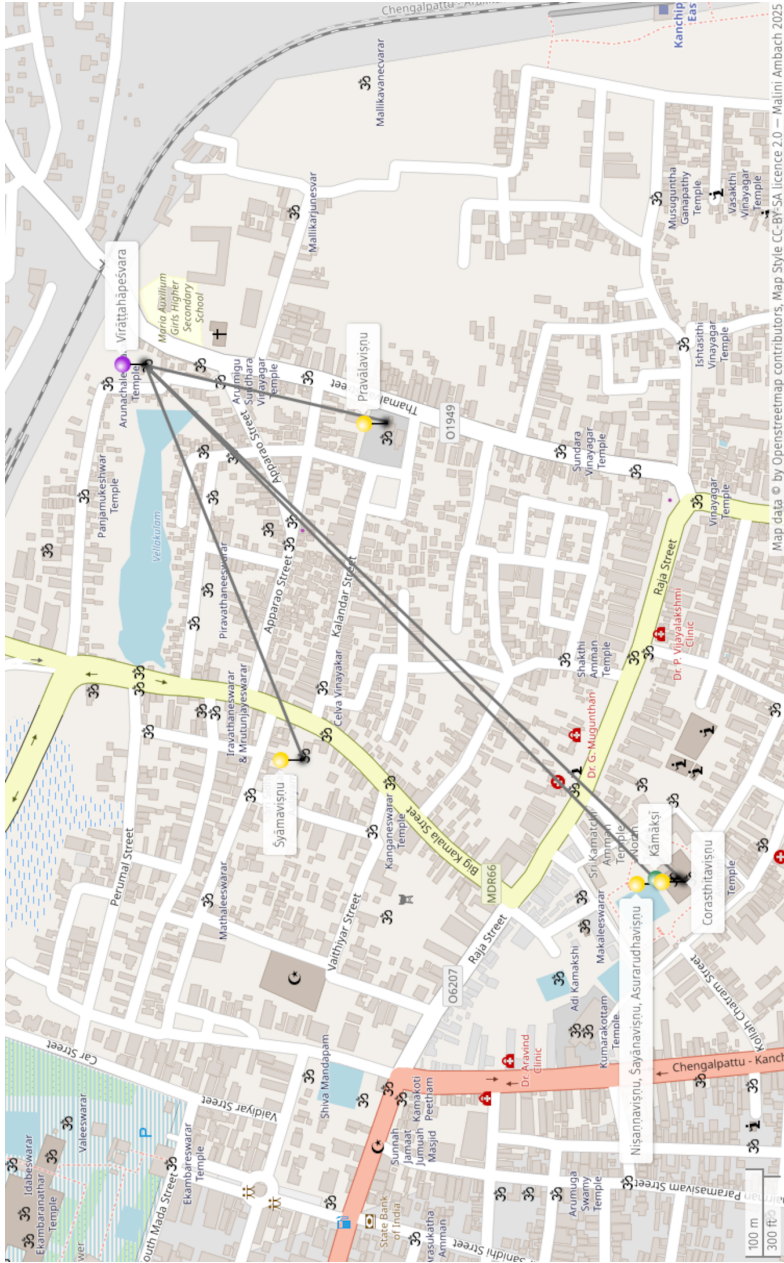


Fig. 4.15 Viṣṇu (yellow) around Kāmākṣī's site (green) in the KM(Ś), in relation to the liṅga Viṛāṭṭahāseśvara (purple) with which their stories are connected.

Map data © by OpenStreetMap contributors, Map Style CC-BY-SA, licence 2.0 — Malini Ambach 2025

distance to these two Viṣṇus but the link in terms of content—Brahmā as the main character—is essential in this case.¹⁶⁵ A similar structural connection by a combination of spatial proximity and name reference also seems to apply in the case of Aṣṭabhuja (Aṣṭapuḥa Perumāl; KM(Ś) 12.1–7b), linked to the *liṅga* Aṣṭabhujeśvara (identification uncertain), Dīpaprakāśa (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāl; KM(Ś) 12.7c–18), which is introduced once more and connected to Ādipiteśvara (Ātipatisvarar), and Narasiṃha (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāl; KM(Ś) 12.19–22, 22.1–20b), which is said to be located at the site of Nārasimheśvara (identification uncertain).

Shifting to the cluster 2 and to the west of Kanchi, there is Viṣṇu Pāṇḍavadūta (Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāl; KM(Ś) 15.16–19b), connected to the *liṅga* Pāṇḍavadūteśvara (identification uncertain), said to be west of Pāṇḍavadūta. Again, there is a connection embedded in the name and supposedly also in spatial closeness between the Vaiṣṇava site and the *liṅga* as its reference place. In cluster 3, further six Viṣṇus are introduced in a multilayered narrative starting from the story of origin of Virāṭṭahāseśvara (Virāṭṭāṇēsvavarar; KM(Ś) ch. 31). Chapter 31, still embedded in a story about the *liṅga* and containing the expected element of Viṣṇu's worship of Śiva, has a different character due to the foregrounding of Vaiṣṇava sites and the prominent role of the multiple forms of Viṣṇu in the myths. It further characterises the site of Kāmākṣi and it is the goddess instead of Śiva that instructs the other characters on how to attain their desired aim (see pp. 137–140).¹⁶⁶ All of the six Viṣṇus whose origin is told in the continuous narrative are located in the surroundings of Kāmākṣi's site, Kāmakoṭi (see figure 4.15). They are Śyāmaṅviṣṇu (Paccaivaṅṅa Perumāl) and Pravaḷaviṣṇu (Pavaḷavaṅṅa

165 In the KV and the KM(V), the motif of Brahmā's sacrifice is mainly linked to another site, namely Varadarāja. Both Yathoktakārī and Dīpaprakāśa are part of his myth of origin in both these texts, whereas the KM(Ś) seems to separate their origin from the Varadarāja myth (Buchholz, forthcoming-a). Furthermore, the episode in the KM(Ś) briefly hints at two more Viṣṇus in passing that are also part of the myth about Varadarāja from the KV and particularly the KM(V) (see subsection 6.4.3). These are the Viṣṇus at the Raṅkanāta Svāmi temple in Thiruparkadal and the Uttira Raṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple in Pallikonda.

166 Also noteworthy, KM(Ś) chapter 31 ends with a Vaiṣṇava *phalaśruti* section promising union with Viṣṇu after hearing or telling this story about Viṣṇu (KM(Ś) 31.130c–f). As if to avoid a discrepancy with the rest of the Śaiva text praising Śiva, there follows a last verse in which the story of Viṣṇu is framed in the opening story on the *liṅga* Virāṭṭahāseśvara. It would be certainly worthwhile to have a closer look at this chapter from a text-historical angle and compare both the existing manuscripts of the KM(Ś) and its Tamil rendering, the *Kāñcippurāṅgam*, as Kāmākṣi's site is also described in the same chapter.

Perumāḷ; KM(Ś) 31.18–60), Corasthitaviṣṇu (Kaḷva Perumāḷ; first *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple) as well as Niṣaṇṇa-, Śayāna-, and Asura-druhaviṣṇu (collectively referred to as Pūtanikraha Perumāḷ; outer *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple; KM(Ś) 31.61–131).¹⁶⁷ Virāṭṭāṇēsvarar is not the closest *liṅga*, but again the myth forms the link. In the first of the interwoven stories of the chapter, Viṣṇu worships the *liṅga* and the other episodes continue with the focus on Viṣṇu without revisiting the connection to Virāṭṭahāseśvara.

Located not far away from Kāmākṣī's site but linked to other *liṅgas* of cluster 3 there are further Vaiṣṇava sites which are mentioned in the KM(Ś) (see figure 4.16). These are Trivikrama (Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ; KM(Ś) 32.72–83), associated with the nearby *liṅga* Abhirāmeśvara (Apirāmīsvarar), Dravaccittaviṣṇu (Urukumulla Perumāḷ; KM(Ś) 34.1–52), connected to the *liṅga* Devasenādipatīśvara (Tevaceṇāpatīcvarar) that is located merely a few metres away in the same—the first—enclosure of the Kumarakōṭṭam temple, and Candrakhaṇḍa (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ; first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple; KM(Ś) 33.1–14b), whose story tells of Viṣṇu who is black (*kṛṣṇa*) and worships a *śivaliṅga* in Kāñcī that is accordingly called Kṛṣṇeśvara (Kaṇṇēsvarar).¹⁶⁸ The KM(Ś) does not hierarchise the Vaiṣṇava sites among themselves but subordinates them as a category to the places of Śiva. Based on spatial proximity between a Vaiṣṇava site and its Śaiva reference site, the narrative ultimately determines to which *śivaliṅga* the story about a particular Viṣṇu is attached.

167 Stories about the origin of Pūtanikraha Perumāḷ are found in the KV (13.1–58) and KM(Ś) (31.106–131) but not in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. In the myths, Viṣṇu defeats one (KM(Ś)) or two (KV) spirits (*bhūtas*) on the orders of the goddess Kāmākṣī. As he defeated the spirit(s) in a standing, sitting and lying position, he is said to abide there in three forms. Accordingly, Pūtanikraha Perumāḷ is depicted in three forms in three shrines, arranged one above the other on site. The episode in the KM(Ś), though, starts with detailing the presence of Kaḷva Perumāḷ there. Viṣṇu is said to eavesdropped on a conversation between his wife Lakṣmī and Kāmākṣī, hiding like a thief before he was discovered by the goddesses. Hence, the Śaiva text refers to him as Corasthita (the one who stood like a thief). This association is reflected in the Tamil designation of the place (not the deity) as Kaḷvaṇūr, for *kaḷvaṇ* in Tamil means thief (TL, s.v. *kaḷvaṇ*).

168 The last Vaiṣṇava site, Virarāghava (identification uncertain; KM(Ś) 17.1–52), is linked to the *liṅga* Virarāgheśvara (Virarākavēsvarar; cluster 3).

Goddesses

Apart from places of Viṣṇu, sites of Devī (the Goddess) are mentioned in the KM(Ś) as another category of non-Śaiva sacred places. Several goddesses appear as characters in the narratives about the *śivaliṅgas*, but only very few are specifically located in Kāñcī by the Śaiva text. The characters and framing of these goddesses are very different and so far I have not been able to identify a consistent pattern—neither spatial nor textual—that explains why one goddess is located and another is not. In the KM(Ś), two goddesses represent the ferocious character of Devī, two the gentle form. As a fierce local form, Bhinnodarī (Mākāliyamman) appears in the story about the *liṅga* Phaṇāmaṇīsvara (Paṇāmaṇīsvarar; KM(Ś) 9.113–116). Both shrines are adjacent to each other on site—Mākāliyamman to the north of Paṇāmaṇīsvarar—reflecting the text’s usual pattern of linking a subordinate site to a *liṅga* nearby in one story. Bhinnodarī represents an independent, that is, unmarried, form of the goddess Kālī, who often functions as regional or village goddess.¹⁶⁹ Smaller shrines of the Goddess in her fierce form are found in various places in Kanchi, often in less exposed locations in residential areas and around larger temples where they are considered as guardian goddesses. Most probably, greater significance was attached to Mākāliyamman either because of her attributed powers, the history of the site, or her location in the urban evolution of Kanchi, which, however, are not clear in the Māhātmya.¹⁷⁰ The second form of the ferocious Kālī appears in Ekāmranātha’s myth. The goddess Bhadrakālī / Praḷayamandā (Piraḷaya-kālī Amman; second *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple) is a companion of Pārvatī when the latter worships Śiva as sand-*liṅga* in Kāñcī and is asked by Ekāmranātha to stay in front of him (KM(Ś) 45.108–113).¹⁷¹ Her ferocious

169 For a case study with a focus on Kanchipuram, see Ilkama 2012 on the goddess Reṇukā-Māriyamman, a regional goddess commonly known to cure pox and very popular in Tamil Nadu.

170 Jonas Buchholz (pers. comm., January 2022) suspects an early origin of this place of Goddess worship since the street leading up to the temples of Mākāliyamman and Paṇāmaṇīsvarar is named after the goddess—not the Śiva—and called Mahaliamman Koil Street. Naming the street after the temple is frequently found in Kanchi and Emma Stein observes that this system usually applies to ancient sites in the city (2021, 60–61).

171 Bhadrakālī holds up the waters sent by Śiva to test Pārvatī’s devotion to the sand-*liṅga*. From her bowl, the waters are eventually released to form Sarva-tīrtha (Carvatīrttam). The connection of this *tīrtha* at the western end of Kanchi with Ekāmranātha implied by this motif is still reflected today in the ritual

nature, though, is not specifically emphasised, it is rather her name that indicates her character.

As for the gentle type of goddesses who often appear as consorts of a god, there is, on the one hand, Viṣṇu's wife Lakṣmī (Saundaryalakshmi; in the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple¹⁷²), who is said to stay south of the door of the cave Kāmakoṭi (Kāmākṣī's site), left of the goddess there (= Kāmākṣī) and together with Viṣṇu (Kaḷva Perumāḷ; KM(Ś) 31.69–130). On the other hand and with a far more central significance, there is Kāmākṣī (Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ) herself. In a multilayered narrative that also introduces six of Viṣṇu's manifestations in Kāñci in the same area (see pp. 130–136), Kāmākṣī is characterised through a description of her abode Kāmakoṭi (KM(Ś) 31.61–104b). While Kāmakoṭi is clearly understood as a sacred place in the KM(Ś), this text passage does not contain a separate myth about the origin of the goddess residing at that place (see also pp. 63–66). This approach stands in contrast to the other episodes on sacred sites of deities in the Māhātmya. Moreover, the description of Kāmakoṭi is composed in a praising style similar to the passages about other significant features related to Ekāmranātha's myth, such as the single mango tree or the Kampā river. Thus, Kāmākṣī is conceptualised differently from other places and additionally closely linked to Ekāmranātha.

The KM(Ś) seems rather vaguely to identify the goddess Pārvatī as the central character in Ekāmranātha's myth with Kāmākṣī (KM(Ś) chs. 39–45). In this context, however, she is not assigned a separate site in Kāñci nor given a specific local name.¹⁷³ The fact that Pārvatī is not explicitly located, could reflect the lack of a separate shrine with a *mūlamūrti*, a stationary

tradition of the Ēkāmparanātar temple when the concluding bath of the annual temple festival is carried out there (Schier 2018, 34, 65; also Seshadri 2003, 144).

172 The Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa is the specific designation of the sanctum sanctorum of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple (see n. 206). Among Kāmākṣī's accompanying deities therein are two forms of Lakṣmī. One is Arupalakshmi (represented by a mirror; Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., August 2023) and the other is Saundāryalakṣmī. The latter is found next to Viṣṇu called Kaḷva Perumāḷ (also known as Ādivarāha) at a right angle and considered his consort. It is thus clear that the Māhātmya refers to the goddess Saundāryalakṣmī.

173 In fact, presenting a local deity as a representation or manifestation of a pan-Indian deity at a specific place is essentially the basic motif in the Māhātmyas when telling of the origin of a specific deity with a particular local name found at a local place. For example, Ekāmranātha in Kanchi is a local form of Śiva, who reflects certain notions of pan-Indian Hindu mythologies and religious concepts.

image, for Ekāmranātha's consort at the Ēkāmparanātar temple.¹⁷⁴ However, the Māhātmya mentions that Pārvatī stays in Kāñcī after marrying Ekāmranātha, which indicates a place where the residing goddess is understood to be Ekāmranātha's consort (see also pp. 63–66). Given the designation as Ekāmranātha's consort is repeatedly used for Kāmākṣī throughout the Māhātmya, it is this goddess that appears to be identified with Pārvatī in her role as Ekāmranātha's wife. Following this understanding, Kāmākṣī's origin could be considered to be adequately described within Ekāmranātha's myth as a local representation of Pārvatī so that there is no need to revisit the topic in the characterisation of Kāmakoṭi.

Within the spatial layout of the KM(Ś), the arrangement of the sacred sites likely accounts for the separate framing of Kāmākṣī's site in relation to Ekāmranātha's. Since the Kāmākṣī Amman temple is situated around 1 kilometre away from the Ēkāmparanātar temple, the sections on Kāmākṣī and Ekāmranātha are separate from each other and not intertwined either. The spatial separation can again be seen as an allusion to Kāmākṣī's independent character, which is not explicitly questioned in the text despite her subordinate connection to Ekāmranātha. In my view, the seemingly intentional indistinct and unique presentation of Kāmākṣī is again an attempt to follow the general spatial concept of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*: on the one hand, it acknowledges the famous local goddess of Kanchi and the importance of her place independent of Ekāmranātha; on the other, the goddess is integrated into the text's underlying Śaiva-centric approach, interpreted as a part of the Śaiva tradition in general and linked to Ekāmranātha in particular. Such appropriation of deities is a common element in the often sectarian Māhātmya literature, which serves to accentuate one's own perspective, presumably aiming at interpretive sovereignty.¹⁷⁵

Altogether, the KM(Ś) includes a limited but diverse selection of sites of the Goddess, although no recognisable pattern is evident. Kāmākṣī and her place seem to be treated from an ambiguous perspective, both reflecting the

174 At times, the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali is presented as Ekāmranātha's consort. She has a shrine with only a festival image in the second enclosure of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (see pp. 63–66). In the ritual re-enactment of Ekāmranātha's divine marriage during the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram festival at the Ēkāmparanātar temple—according to textual sources, with Kāmākṣī—the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali represents Ekāmranātha's bride and is associated with Kāmākṣī in different ways (Schier 2018, 175–190, 187). She is then regarded as Ekāmranātha's consort (Schier 2018, 138–152).

175 Further analysis of the different perspectives on Kāmākṣī would be desirable, since the majority of the overlapping passages from the KM(Ś) and the KV also revolve around Kāmākṣī's role (see subsection 3.3.4).

significance of Kāmākṣī with her own Śākta tradition and her identification with Ekāmranātha's consort. Just like Viṣṇus, sites of other non-Śaiva deities, and *tīrthas*, places of the Goddess are linked to *śivaliṅgas* within their sequential arrangement according to the locations of the historical sites in Kanchi's religious landscape. In addition to the relevance of spatial proximity of the non-Śaiva site to the reference site, the linking narrative about the origin of both places determines to which *liṅga* in the close surroundings the story about the non-Śaiva is connected.

4.4 In a Nutshell

In its outline of the sacred geography of Kāñcī, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* starts from the geo-spatial aspect of the city and its surroundings. It builds on the layout of the religious landscape in the historically grown city with its many temples and refrains from adding a detailed interpretative layer to the geo-religious space of Kanchi. The understanding of Kāñcī as a city of Śiva and Ekāmranātha's site as its centre reflects its basic interpretative perspective. The space defined as the city Kāñcī is the primary frame of reference and nearly all sites mentioned in the text are found within it, indicating an intentional alignment of the dimensions of Kāñcī with the locations of the sites referenced in the *Māhātmya* (see figure 4.2). The *śivaliṅgas* are considered the main sites and this concept is expressed on the structural and narrative level. On the whole, all such components represent the partiality of the *Māhātmya* towards Śiva rather than merely a simple choice of sacred places introduced in the text. The concept of the Pāṭal Perṛa Stalams, though, does not seem to be a factor in the selection of sites in the KM(Ś), although the *Māhātmya* mentions all five places in Kanchi lauded by the Nāyaṅmār (see their names in n. 60). Besides, many places from the text that are located in the larger region with a view to contextualise Kāñcī are counted among those canonised in the *Tēvāram*.

Places of Śiva are used as reference sites to locate other sacred sites in the text in an arrangement that appears to be constructed (almost) as a continuous route through Kanchi where non-Śaiva places are considered as secondary. Due to its orientation towards the geo-spatial conditions of Kanchipuram, the *Māhātmya* arranges the sites along these aspects and forms clusters of *śivaliṅgas* through which the spatial focus is gradually shifted from the southeast to the northwest in Kanchi. The result is a coherent,

consistent descriptive account of Kāñcī that catalogues sacred places while prioritising the geographical dimension over the mythical.

In fact, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* could well be used as a guide to the shrines and temples of contemporary Kanchi. Most of the sacred sites mentioned in the *Māhātmya* may be identified with historical sites that still exist; they may be found on contemporary maps and on sites where the *Māhātmya* locates them. One reason for the high degree of correspondence of the sacred sites from the text with the existence of historical sites and the geospatiality of the historically grown cityscape may be grounded in the narrative perspective of the text. The KM(Ś) understands the places—as well as the city of Kāñcī—as already in existence and tells of their origin in retrospect. Thus, it clearly references the city's religious landscape at a particular point in history, and places the stories in a mythical past in order to establish the origin of the places in that very past.

5 A Territory for the Goddess: the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (KV) presents the most uniform and balanced approach to Kāñcī's sacred geography as far as the three Māhātmyas in focus are concerned. In its description of Kāñcī, the KV precisely reflects the geo-spatial dimensions of Kanchi and at the same time interprets them to define various spaces around and within the city and to introduce selected sacred sites. The aspect of spatiality is central to the text and provides a conceptual representation of the sacred landscape that prioritises structure over style and narrative. Inscribed within a Śākta framework, the textual structure and the design of the sacred geography in the KV equally consider the Śākta, Śaiva, and Vaiṣṇava traditions and their sites. In particular, the three deities Varadarāja, Ekāmrānātha, and Kāmākṣī and the locations of their sites in Kanchi are structuring elements. The text itself can indeed be considered a literary account of Kanchi, one that selectively describes the sacred geography of Kanchi, highlighting Ekāmrānātha, Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī. A further characteristic element are glorifying *phalaśruti* statements that tell about the benefits of the sacred places—especially the *tīrthas*. In that, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* appears to be a text addressed to pilgrims visiting the sites, who are thus informed about salvific powers of the same.

5.1 Situating Kāñcī

The spatial design of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is characterised by a clear-cut approach and an apparently carefully considered construction. It is downright schematic, supported by a uniform text structure, and an often simplistic-recurring wording. After an opening chapter in which Kāñcī is introduced and located (KV ch. 1), the text is divided into three parts: a Vaiṣṇava part focusing on Varadarāja (chs. 2–5), a Śaiva part on Ekāmrānātha (chs. 6–9), and a Śākta part on Kāmākṣī (chs. 10–13). Each of these parts is equally structured in four chapters: the first chapter contains an outline of a territory in Kāñcī assigned to one of the three deities

mentioned above and introduces the sacred places within that area; the second chapter gives the myth of the divine symbol that is conceived as the characteristic element of the site respectively associated with Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, or Kāmākṣī; the myth of the main deity is dealt with in the third chapter; and the origin of a sacred body of water important to the myth and space of the deity is recounted in the fourth chapter (see subsection 3.3.2 for details). Of particular interest for the analysis of the sacred geography are the introduction (KV ch. 1), which characterises Kāñcī as place of the Goddess, and the respective first chapter of each part (KV chs. 2, 6 and 10), which I collectively call “geography-chapters”. In these three chapters, sacred places in the spaces of Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī are mapped; the other chapters mention only a few of these sacred places, according to their mention in the myths. The geography-chapters present the text’s concept of Kāñcī and display an orientation towards geo-spatial aspects rather than mythological interpretations. The sites of Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja, and Kāmākṣī are considered the most significant and as such are not introduced in the geography-chapters. Their location is specified in the description of Kāñcīkṣetra in the first chapter of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (see pp. 150–151) and their myths are detailed in separate chapters (KV chs. 4, 8, and 13).

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* begins with the introduction of Kāñcī’s character and place, establishing the perspective on the city and the geo-spatial framework (KV 1.1–93). First and foremost, Kāñcī is characterised with the help of the concept of (Śakti-)pīṭhas (seats), the sacred places of the Goddess. Lists of such sites in varying numbers and in diverse localisations are found in Purāṇic and particularly tantric texts but are not canonised.¹⁷⁶ The KV, while suggesting several sets of *pīṭhas* in certain numerical configurations, explicitly names three sites as the most important on earth (KV 1.6c–9). These are Kāmarāja, Jālandhra in the Jvālāmukhī region, and Oḍyāṇa in the Kāmarūpa region. The three so named sites may be identified with Kanchipuram, Jawalamukhi (Himachal Pradesh), and supposedly a site in the former Kamarupa region (modern Assam).¹⁷⁷ The triad of *pīṭhas* named in the KV is reminiscent of a tradition of a set of four Goddess sites corres-

176 For details in the context of Kanchi, see Schier 2018, 134–137 and section 2.4. See Eck 2012, 267–270, 289–299 for an introduction to the concept of the *pīṭhas*, and the study by D. C. Sircar (1973) for a detailed analysis.

177 As the texts on the *pīṭhas* themselves differ in the naming and identifications of the site and the residing goddess, the above correspondence indicates a very likely interpretation in this context (for a discussion on this topic, see Sircar 1973, 11–17). T. V. R. Chari (1987, 61) offers an alternative interpretation

ponding roughly to the four cardinal regions of India, which is found in different constellations of sites in tantric text sections about the *pīṭhas* (Sircar 1973, 11–17).

In these sets of traditionally four *pīṭhas*, Kāmarāja is frequently named as one site, although it is usually identified not with Kanchi but with the former region of Kamarupa in the present Northeast India (Sircar 1973, 13, 13 n. 1). Kerstin Schier (2018, 134–137) notes that while some tantric texts also mention Kanchi as *pīṭha*, the association of Kanchipuram with the Śakti-*pīṭhas* is more recent and the identification of Kāmākṣī as *pīṭha* begins to appear in publications only from the second half of the twentieth century. The reason for this may partly be the growing renown of the goddess Kāmākṣī as propagated by the late Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (d. 1994), former head of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, the monastic institution managing the temple since 1842 (Venkataraman 1992, 70; Schier 2018, 125, n. 27). As Kerstin Schier further states, the conceptual link of Kanchi with the Śakti-*pīṭhas* seems to be stronger than the religious practices at the Kāmākṣī Amman or any other Goddess temple in Kanchi would suggest. The mention of the *pīṭhas* in the KV may well be a reflection of the primarily literary promulgation of Kanchi as *pīṭha*. The KV as a text is older than the publications mentioning Kāmākṣī as a *pīṭha* to which Kerstin Schier refers, the earliest available edition was published in 1889. However, there are indications that the Māhātmya is not much older than its first print edition (Buchholz 2022, 20; see also pp. 85–89). It therefore stands to reason to see the contextualisation of Kanchi as *pīṭha* in the Māhātmya in light of a process shaping the notion of Kanchi as sacred site and of Kāmākṣī as seat of the Goddess (Devī), which seem to have intensified in the second half of the last century.

According to the KV, Kāmarāja is located in Kāñcikṣetra (the region of Kanchi; KV 1.10ab) with the name indicating a link to Kāmākṣī. While the introduction of the KV only implies this specification, later chapters clearly express that it is Kāmākṣī who resides at the *pīṭha* in Kanchi.¹⁷⁸ Through the concept of the seats of the Goddess, the Māhātmya thus firmly constructs the

and identifies Oḍyāṇa with Jagannātha, that is, the Jagannātha temple in Puri, Odisha.

178 [introductory verses] *jagatkāmakalākāraṃ nābhisthānaṃ bhuvah param | padapadmasya kāmākṣyā mahāpīṭham upāsmāhe ||* KV 10.1 *iti stutvā namaskṛtya pīṭhaṃ tat kāmanāmakam |* KV 10.2ab.
[Mārkaṇḍeya tells:] *atha tatra nṛpaśreṣṭha kāmakoṣṭhadharātale | gāyatrīmaṇṭape tatra bilapīṭhāsane śubhe ||* KV 12.3 *gāyatrīyoṃkāraṇe sā kāmākṣī var-tate sadā | ādiśaktis svayaṃ vyaktā sarvaviśvasya kāraṇam ||* KV 12.4 *pad-māsane niṣaṇṇā sā kāmāpīṭhanivāsini |* KV 12.5ab.

idea of the city as a place of Devī and Kāmākṣī as the goddess of the *pīṭha*. This sets the underlying Śākta framework for the rest of the text.

5.2 The City in the Region

Apart from the classification of Kāñcī in the context of the seats of the Goddess, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* situates Kāñcī in a broader geographical context. In contrast to the other two Māhātmyas, the broader localisation does not take place within the framework of an initial mythical conception of the world (cf. sections 4.1 and 6.2), but solely on the geographical level. Besides, the focus is placed on the regional context, for which three spaces are outlined. The pan-Indian localisation is limited to the Gaṅgā (Ganges) as reference site for Pūrvasindhu (Bay of Bengal)—two hundred *yojanas* to the south of the former—with which the geographical contextualisation of Kāñcī begins in the text (KV 1.11). In the first geographical reference, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* corresponds to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)), which similarly locates Kāñcī two hundred *yojanas* south of the Gaṅgā (see section 6.2). Since there is no regional site mentioned yet in the Māhātmya to indicate the location of the ocean, a North Indian sacred river is used as a geographical reference site. The mention of the Gaṅgā as the only non-regional site in this context could be understood as an expression of an all-India sacred geography in which the river is an essential element. After all, the Gaṅgā is one of the most revered rivers in Hindu traditions and a popular pilgrimage destination. The geographical aspect in relation to Kāñcī, though, seems to be just as relevant: The Ganges flows into the Bay of Bengal in the present Indian state of West Bengal and in Bangladesh, which already marks a location of the ocean. Starting from there, the conceptualised position of Pūrvasindhu, the first regional site, can be more precisely recorded and better utilised for the following regional contextualisation.

To this end, three spaces are outlined. They all surround Kāñcī and are of different dimensions, each marked by four border sites. These places are roughly positioned in the four cardinal directions and located clockwise one after another, usually starting in the east. In a centripetal movement, the description begins with the largest space and continues with the next smaller one, with each space seemingly constructed to fit into the next larger one (see figure 5.1). All spaces outlined in the KV appear to be deliberately

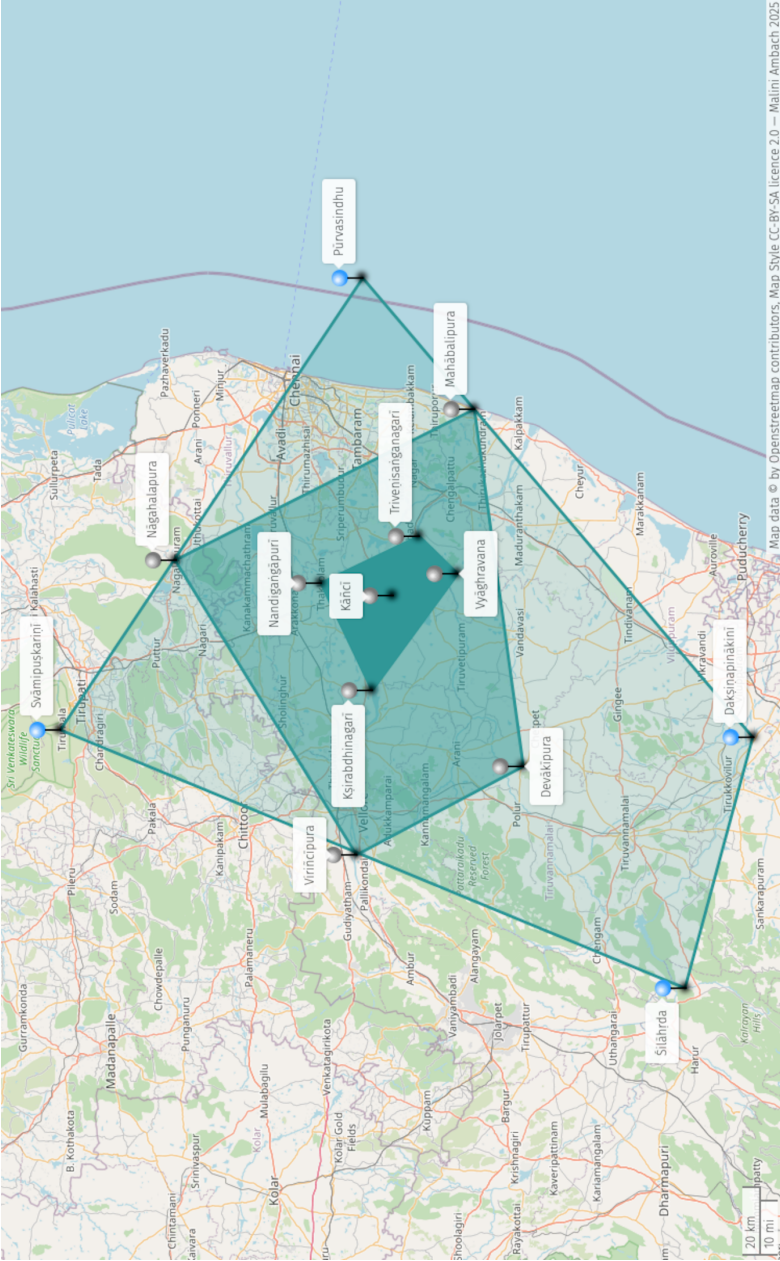


Fig. 5.1 The spaces around Kāñcī according to the KV: Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala (outer; see n. 179), Tapovana (middle), Brahmaśāla (inner; all visualisations, see subsection 1.3.3). Cities as border sites are marked in grey, rivers / tīrtha—blue.

designed in orientation towards the geographical dimensions and the positions of the sites in Kanchi and the surrounding area.

The largest area enclosing Kāñci is called Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala, named after the king Tuṇḍīra, who is said to have once ruled this region (KV 1.11–32). The limits of this area are marked by four sites: Pūrvasindhu, the Eastern Ocean (Bay of Bengal) in the east; Dakṣiṇapinākinī (Southern Pennar, Then Pennai in Tamil) in the south; Śīlāhṛda (Kallar river, Kallaru in Tamil; a tributary of the Southern Pennar), in the west; and Svāmipuṣkariṇī (Svāmi Puṣkariṇī temple tank; at the Veṅkaṭeśvara Swāmi temple in Tirupati) in the north (see figure 5.1).¹⁷⁹ In keeping with the well thought-out concept that characterises Śākta Māhātmya, these four sites share a common feature: they are all bodies of water. As such, they are also part of the natural geographical landscape, the features of which often serve to delineate an area.

The name Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala is the Sanskrit equivalent of Tondaimandalam, the Tamil name of the historical region around Kanchi that was ruled by the Pallava kings (Mahalingam 1969, 2–4; Srinivasan 1979, 7). The spatial reach given by the KV for Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala seems to agree with that of Tondaimandalam. For this historical region, T. V. Mahalingam (1963, 2–3) lists the Bay of Bengal (east), the Pennar river (south), the range of the Eastern Ghats (west), and the Suvarṇamukhī river (north) as the regional borders. A comparison with the border sites of Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala shows close correspondences, with the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* opting for uniformity—a recurrent element throughout the text—and detailing four water bodies. The KV as well as T. V. Mahalingam mention the Bay of Bengal as the eastern limit and the Then Pennai river as the southern.¹⁸⁰ Moving to the west, there is agreement on the same area, with the Kallar river indicated by the Māhātmya originating near the Kalvarayan Hills, a range of the Eastern Ghats. The northern border is a similar case: the Suvarṇamukhī (Swarnamukhi) river mentioned by T. V. Mahalingam flows through the Tirupati hills, again pointing to the same area—Tirupati—as the KV. While similar dimensions for the region of Kāñci are given in the Śaiva *Kāñcimāhātmya* (KM(Ś)) and the

179 Pūrvasindhu / the Bay of Bengal, Dakṣiṇapinākinī / the Southern Pennar river, and Śīlāhṛda / the Kallar river are larger bodies of water. Their markers in figure 5.1 are therefore placed somewhere within their course (river) or areal (ocean). Furthermore, I wish to thank R. Satyanarayanan for his help in identifying the site Śīlāhṛda.

180 Inferred from the indicated direction south of Kanchi, the Pennar river mentioned by T. V. Mahalingam must be the Then Pennai / Southern Pennar river flowing through Tamil Nadu—the same one referred to by the Māhātmya—and not the Northern Pennar River flowing in Andhra Pradesh.

Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, there is no indication of an explicit orientation towards a historical space in these texts (cf. sections 4.2 and 6.2). Such a distinct geographical alignment is singular to the outline of Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala in the KV and echoes the relevance of this regional demarcation in the perception of Kanchi (see chapter 7 and figure 7.1 for details).

Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala is further linked to the goddess Kāmākṣī and her myth in the KV, although not explicitly in the first chapter of the KV.¹⁸¹ An expression of this particular link may also be found on site: in the first *prākāra* (enclosure) of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple there is a shrine of Tuṇḍīra Mahārāja, king Tuṇḍīra, but I am not aware of a specific myth linked to him.

The other two *kṣetras* sketched out as surrounding Kāñcī are more clearly associated with a myth told in the *Māhātmya*. Situated within Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala lies the second most extended space, Tapovana (forest of asceticism). Its name refers to the origin myth of Ekāmranātha as narrated in the KV, in which Pārvatī performs ascetic practices in the forest at Kāñcī to attain Śiva's presence there.¹⁸² The sites marking the extent of Tapovana are all cities: Mahābalipura (Mamallapuram) in the east; Devākīpura (Devikapuram) in the south; Viriñcīpura (Virinchipuram) in the west; and Nāgahalapura (Nagalapuram) in the north (KV 1.33–41; see figure 5.1). In accordance with the Śaiva notion indicated by the name Tapovana and the reference to Ekāmranātha's myth, the myths about the four sites places all refer to manifestations of Śiva there.¹⁸³ A deliberate similarity of these sites could therefore be their common affiliation to Śiva.

Within Tapovana lies Brahmaśālā, the smallest of the three enclosing spaces. Its name alludes to the myth of Varadarāja's origin, in which Brahmā

181 The connection of Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala with Kāmākṣī is not explicit in the first chapter of the KV. It can initially only be deduced from the association of the other two spaces surrounding Kāñcī with Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja. Yet, it is later on confirmed by the concluding *phalaśruti* section of the Śākta part, in which Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala and its delimiting sites are explicitly mentioned to indicate Kāmākṣī's location (KV 13.70–71).

182 Including a list of its border sites, Tapovana is mentioned in the concluding *phalaśruti* section of the Śaiva part to spatially contextualise Ekāmranātha (KV 9.50c–52b). This link of Tapovana with Ekāmranātha mirrors the characterisation of the space given in the first chapter of the KV and is another example of the consistent spatial concept of the text.

183 An attribution of the stories to particular (Śaiva) temples at these locations is beyond the aims of this study. A closer look into the relevant local Sthalamāhātmyas would possibly shed light on this matter.

builds a sacrificial hall for his sacrifice to Viṣṇu in Kāñcī.¹⁸⁴ The limits of this space are marked by the following cities: Triveṇiṣaṅganagarī (Thirumukkudal), Vyāghravana (Thirupulivanam), Kṣīrābdhinagarī (Thiruparkadal), and Nandiḡaṅgāpurī (Thakkolam) are named to mark the limits of this space (KV 1.42–50b; see figure 5.1).¹⁸⁵ Two places are associated with Śiva and two with Viṣṇu in the short stories about their myths. Even from the short accounts, the Vaiṣṇava sites can be identified with certain temples in the region of Kanchi. In Thirumukkudal there is the Appaṅ Veṅkaēca Perumāl and in Thiruparkadal there is the Raṅkanāta Svāmi temple, where the image in the sanctum sanctorum is in reclining form, just like the Māhātmya describes Viṣṇu there. Both temples are located on the banks of the Palar, which—as Sarasvatī’s aquatic form, the Vegavatī (Vegavathi / Palar river)—is a crucial element in the myth of Varadarāja. This detail reflects how the locations and the myths attached to the border sites are carefully considered to create a compelling concept.¹⁸⁶

Kāñcī as City

Similarly, the space of Kāñcī, Kāñcīkṣetra, is carefully designed. Its name corresponds to the designation used in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to label Kāñcī’s territory and the non-specific name given to Kāñcī’s area in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (cf. sections 4.2 and 6.2). Despite the conformity regarding the city’s name, the texts differ considerably in their understanding of both the space’s extent and character. In the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, the area

184 Referring to the same myth, the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya also defines the dimensions of Brahmā’s hall (called *yajñasālā* in that text) but of different size (cf. section 6.3).

185 The identification of the first three sites is based on correspondences in name; that of Nandiḡaṅgāpurī with Thakkolam is derived from the myth about the place about Śiva’s mount Nandī.

186 Even more so, the KV conceives uniform spaces with sides of equal length. For each of the three spaces in the regional localisation of Kāñcī, the distance from one border site to the next in the sequence is said to be the same. For example, the sites delimiting the space Tapovana are each detailed to be at a distance of five *yojanas* to the preceding one (KV 1.34c–40). When visualised on a map, the dimensions of each space are not as symmetrical as indicated by the text (see figure 5.1). However, the units indicating the distance between the locations are temporal length units, so the travel time from one location to the next could actually been the same (for details, see subsection 1.3.3). Therefore, the same distances may not only have been chosen for the sake of uniformity but may have actually corresponded to the conditions of travel.

limited by the border places of Kāñcīkṣetra roughly encloses the historical city of Kanchi and only the city. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* understands Kāñcī as a city—an existing city to be precise. The aspect of Kāñcī's evolution remains unmentioned in the text, no story about its creation is included. Rather, the idea of Kāñcī as a city seems to be taken for granted.

Continuing the movement from the periphery inwards, Kāñcīkṣetra lies within Brahmaśālā. Its extent is said to be marked by Durgā Pañcālikā in the east, Śiva Kanyakeśa in the south, Viṣṇu called Śvetavarṇa in the west, and Durgā Kṣetrāṅgī in the north (KV 1.50c–68b). These sites are again used to sketch the spaces within Kāñcī, which reflects a well thought-out spatial design of the Māhātmya (see section 5.3). While the localisation of any of the border sites of Kāñcīkṣetra has been so far unsuccessful,¹⁸⁷ it can nevertheless be assumed that Kāñcīkṣetra is meant to encompass approximately the extent of the historical city, considering the pronounced orientation towards the geo-spatial dimensions shown in the text. In fact, the dimensions of Kāñcī seem to largely correspond to the outline of the city as given on the *Map of Conjeevaram* by John Gould from 1816, one of the first old maps of Kanchi (Stein 2021, 240; see figure 2.3). Drawing this comparison is indeed well founded: it can be assumed that the conception of Kāñcī in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* refers to the city at the time of its composition and there are arguments speaking in favour of the origin of the text in the nineteenth century (see section 5.4 and pp. 85–89).

While the three enclosing spaces are outlined to locate Kāñcī geographically, Kāñcīkṣetra is the locale for the overarching Śākta myth of the KV. It is said to be first and foremost characterised by the presence of power ((*mahā*-)śakti) of the illusory nature (*mahāmāyā*) that is linked to the Goddess principle (Devī). This power is primarily manifest as the goddess Kāmākṣī, but also as Varadarāja and Ekāmrānātha. A narrative explains Ekāmrānātha's and Varadarāja's emergence from the imperceptible forms of Śiva and Viṣṇu, which have emanated earlier from the goddess (see subsection 3.3.2). Ekāmrānātha and Varadarāja are thus identified with Kāmākṣī and the male gods are located in relation to the goddess's own and original form (KV 1.94–125b).

In the text-internal understanding, the location of the goddess's abode (Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ) seems too obvious to specify it beyond locating her *in*

¹⁸⁷ Śvetavarṇa can probably be identified with a former Viṣṇu shrine near Paruti Kuḷam in the northwest of Kanchi, which is the location indicated by the text (KV 1.53cd). Thanks go to M. Ramesh for identifying this detail. The KM(V) also mentions a white-coloured Viṣṇu (Sudhākāra), but the details given in the Māhātmya are insufficient to identify this place (see subsection 6.4.1).

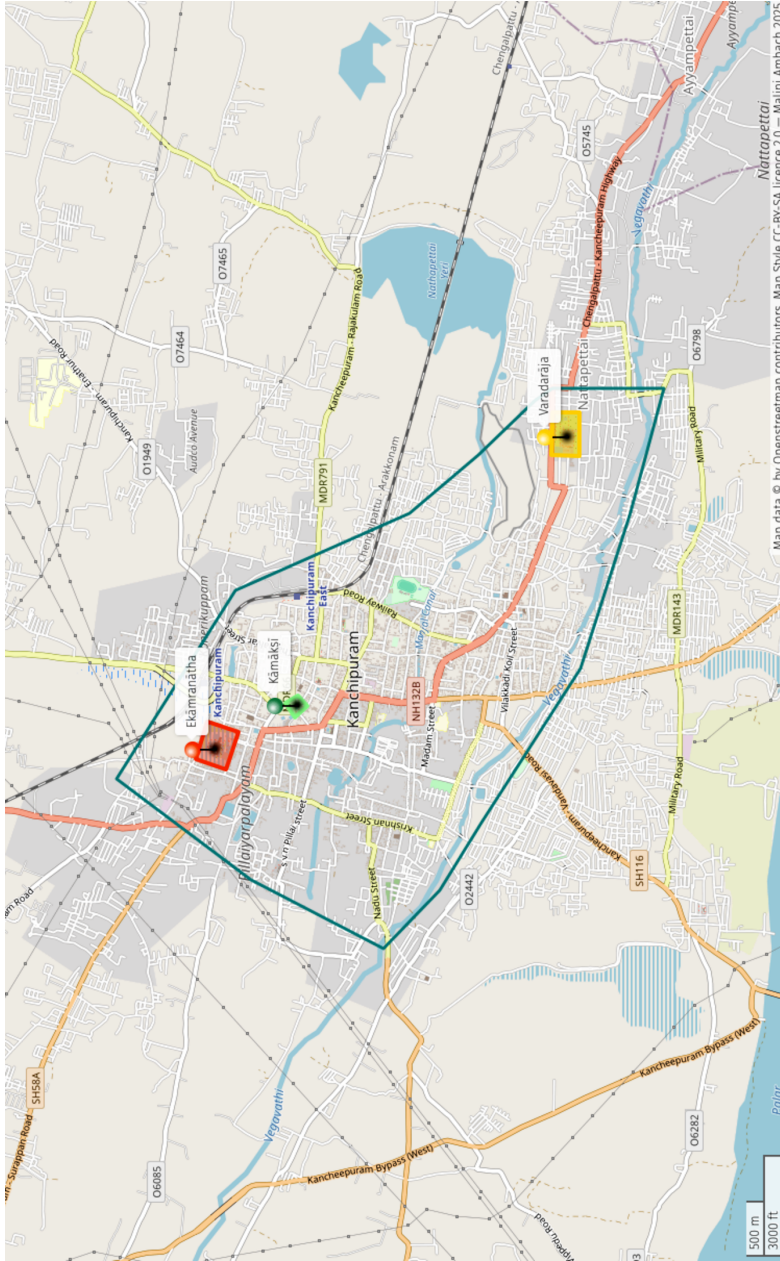


Fig. 5.2 Ekāmanātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja as spatial identifiers of Kāncī's area (estimate; see pp. 150–151) in the KV.

Kāñcīkṣetra (*kāñcīkṣetre* (KV 1.94–102)). Viṣṇu (Varatarāja Perumāḷ) is to the southeast of her abode and Śiva (Ēkāmparanātar) to her northwest, just as the deities' temples are positioned in Kanchi (see figure 5.2). Accordingly, Kāñcīkṣetra is conceived as the realm of all three deities (KV 1.57c–58c). This characterisation and the myth about Kāmākṣī, Varadarāja, and Ekāmranātha give a preview of the design of the space within Kāñcīkṣetra, where a separate area is set aside for each of the three deities (see section 5.3).

The above consideration of the three spaces outlined for the geographical contextualisation of Kāñcī shows how the relevance of location and character of the sacred sites—as a Vaiṣṇava, a Śaiva, a Śākta, or a *tīrtha*—seem to balance each other in the selection of places included in the Māhātmya. Furthermore, precise knowledge of the geographical spatiality becomes apparent and is a key component for the spatial outline of Kāñcī and the region presented in the KV.

5.3 Sacred Spaces and Places Within Kāñcī

Within Kāñcīkṣetra, the spatial segmentation that characterises the design of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* continues. The geography-chapters (KV chs. 2, 6, and 10) outline three *kṣetras* that are styled as the territories of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī and are clearly based on the spatial positions of the three largest temples in the city. Harikṣetra covers the southeast where the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple is located, Rudraśālā is to the west where the Ēkāmparanātar temple is found in the northwestern part, and Kāmakoṣṭha lies between the two in the central area where the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is situated. The spaces represent separate and evenly matched Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta domains in Kāñcī, with equal significance given to the three religious traditions. The different sizes of the spaces, though, do not seem to be of relevance.

Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha are positioned side by side and neatly divide the space of Kāñcī. With this layout, and in particular Kāmakoṣṭha, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is the only Māhātmya that explicitly assigns Devī a territory in Kāñcī. At the same time, a structural balance is maintained by also assigning Śiva and Viṣṇu their own areas in the space of the city. Within each of the three spaces within Kāñcī, there is again a centripetal movement and increasing fragmentation of space. Its depiction in the respective geography-chapter first outlines the outer boundaries of the deity's

realm in a clockwise sequence, then selected sacred sites are mapped, before the spatial focus turns to the immediate surroundings of the deity (the area of its temple) where the deity's myth of origin is primarily set.

The attempted equality is not only reflected in the spatial design but also in the structural layout down to individual phrases. The Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta parts are equally constructed, their geography-chapters include the same textual modules: a set of border sites, groups of different kinds of sacred places in similar numbers, a statement on the number of places, and a *phalaśruti* passage in similar wording.¹⁸⁸ The unified mode of presentation appears to be a carefully conceived account that favours an equal consideration of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta sites and their traditions over a more individually adapted and lively design.

The text's schematic approach is also expressed in a consistent pattern for indicating the locations of the sacred sites mapped in the geography-chapters. Each place is located by a directional statement that indicates both direction and distance in reference to the site that is introduced immediately before in the text. For example, Viṣṇu as Vaikuṅṭha (Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ) is located twenty-one *aṃśas*¹⁸⁹ (parts) north of Viṣṇu called Dīpādhara (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ), who again is said to be seven *aṃśas* north of the preceding site, that is Viṣṇu as Siṃha (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ; KV 2.22c–25b; see figure 5.3). There are only a few exceptions to this pattern, when the place reference is not to the last place mentioned, but to another, already presented, closer place.

The directional referencing pattern is a characteristic feature of the text and similar to the one found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, while the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* additionally specifies the distance to the reference site. As in the KM(Ś), the section about a sacred place usually begins by indicating its location. This framing indicates a retrospective perspective that is adopted in the text and understands the places as already existing. Such an approach conceptually refers to a stable and consistent sacred landscape,

188 The descriptions of Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā and Kāmakoṣṭha are each followed by a longer *phalaśruti* story illustrating the power of the respective space. These end the respective chapters. They are again very uniform in character as they each tell of a wicked twice-born from a place around India, who at death is rescued respectively by Viṣṇu's (Harikṣetra), Śiva's (Rudraśālā), or Devī's (Kāmakoṣṭha) troops from Yama's grip as he once did a good deed to a resident of the respective areas in Kāñcī. Then the respective deity explains why this person is taken to his/her abode despite the deplorable lifestyle he had led in his life. These stories serve to underline the outstanding power ascribed to the respective *kṣetra*.

189 On the length unit *aṃśa*, see n. 16.

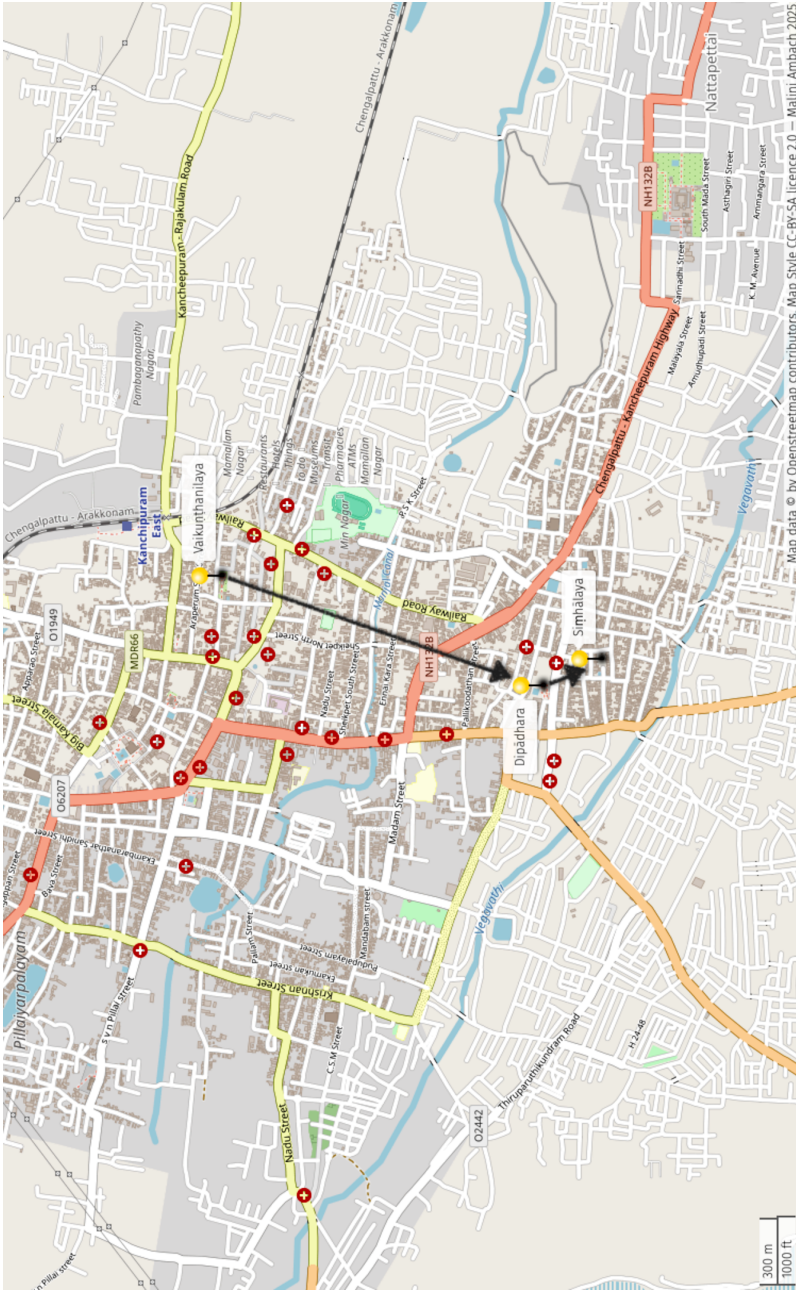


Fig. 5.3 Directional referencing pattern that locates the sacred sites in the KV, example.

Map data © by OpenStreetMap contributors, Map Style CC-BY-SA, Licence 2.0 – Malini Ambach, 2025

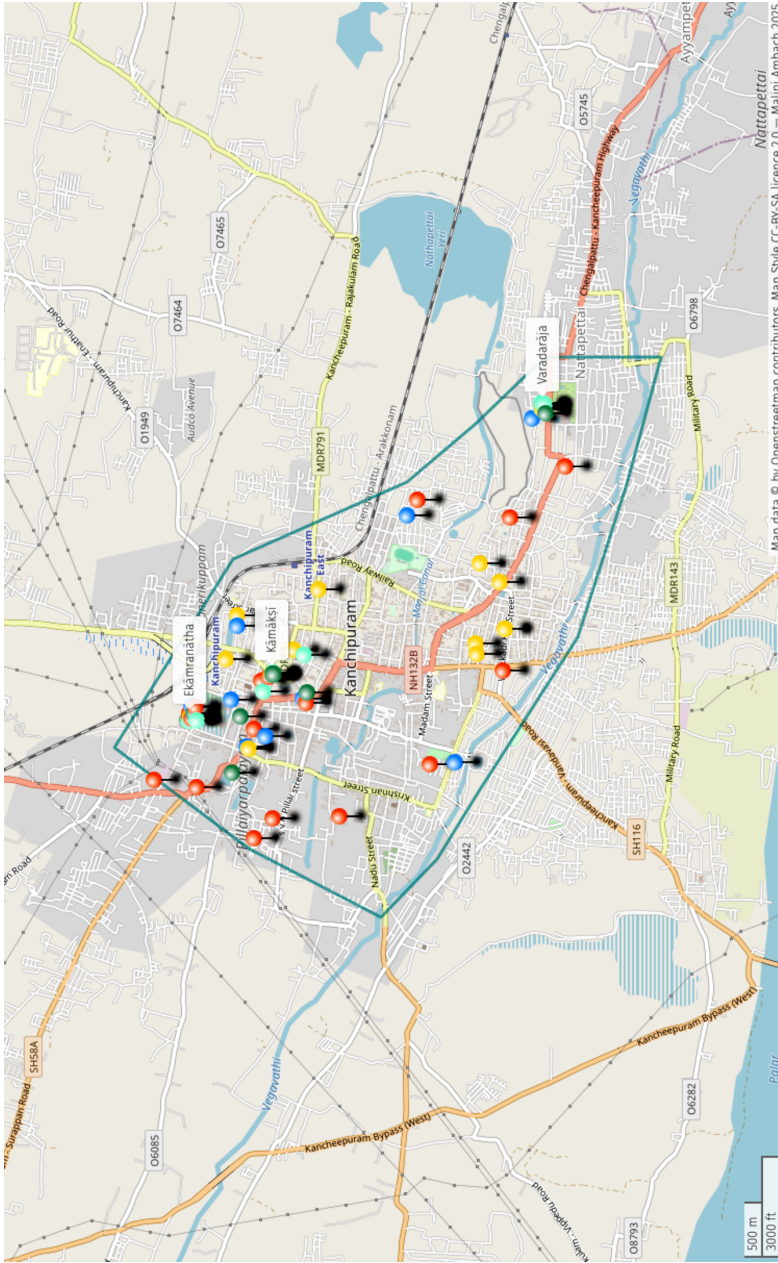


Fig. 5.4 Locations of the sacred places in Kāñcī (turquoise outline; estimate, see pp. 150–151) in the KV. Vaiṣṇava places are marked in yellow, Śaiva places—orange, Goddesses—green, *tīrthas*—blue, all other places in aqua.

which consists of all the places mentioned in the text. It further displays an orientation towards the spatiality of the historically grown cityscape and precise knowledge of the position of the historical sites. In the geography-chapters, the description of an individual site is very condensed, as a rule two half-verses are dedicated to a place. This allows for only a brief remark on the myth of the place or the deity residing there. The alluded stories refer to known narratives from the Purāṇic and epic literatures and are linked to a specific local site in the Māhātmya. In contrast, the myths of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī, as well as the description of the characteristic features of the deities' sites, and the sacred water bodies linked to them are more detailed (KV chs. 3–5, 7–9, 11–13).

With its interpretative arrangement, the KV catalogues selected sacred sites existing in Kanchi (see figure 5.4).¹⁹⁰ In the geography-chapters, sites of the same deity—Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devī—, sacred water bodies, and places called *mudrās* (see below) within one space are given in groups. Each group comprises approximately the same number of places. Thus, there is a balance in terms of religious affiliation or characteristic of a site within the spaces Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha.¹⁹¹ The only noteworthy difference is a slight numerical emphasis on the Vaiṣṇava sites in Harikṣetra, on the *śivaliṅgas* in Rudraśālā, and on the goddesses in Kāmakoṣṭha. Apart from these, individual places of Skanda and Gaṇeśa are mentioned. All sacred places are framed in terms of spatial belonging to one of the three realms. The individual place seems to be chosen both because of its location within one of the spaces and the religious affiliation of its residing deity or its classification as *tīrtha* or *mudrā*.

A number of sites belong to a specific group and are explicitly designated as *mudrās*. In its primary sense, the term *mudrā* means seal (MW, s.v. *mudrā*). Derived from this, it can also mean sign or mark and in this sense *mudrā* is used in the KV. The group of *mudrās* subsumes deities, physical elements, or conceptual entities that are characteristic of the myth or place of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī, and/or are part of the religious practice at their temples. Their location in the immediate vicinity of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, that is, within the precincts of their temples, is the common feature of the *mudrās*. Among others, they include the Tattvasopāna (Tattvasopāna), the staircase leading up to the first enclosure (*prākāra*) within the central building at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple;

190 See the appendix for the sites mentioned in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*.

191 The four border sites of each space are not part of this arrangement and evidently chosen as limiting markers because of their geo-spatial position.

the *śivaliṅga* Dhavaḷaikāmranāyaka (Veḷḷakkampar) in the first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple; and the Santānastambha (Santanastambha), a silver pillar and an object of worship situated in the inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple. Conceptually, the *mudrās* seem to be understood as elementary characteristics of the respective territories of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣi.

In this ascribed quality, the *mudrās* resemble the elements that are said to mark Kāñcikṣetra. Three of these are mentioned in the description of the *kṣetra* in the KV: the cave (*bila*), identified on site as the space below the sanctum sanctorum at the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple, the (single mango) tree ([Ekāmra-]vṛkṣa), the site-tree and an important object of worship at the Ēkāmparanātar temple, and the [Puṇyakoṭi-]vimāna, represented on site as the tower superstructure above the sanctum sanctorum at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple.¹⁹²

The geography-chapters reflect the general centripetal spatial movement that characterises the design of the sacred geography in the KV. This arrangement eventually closes in on the abodes of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣi. Furthermore, considering the order of the descriptions of the three spaces within Kāñcī (first Viṣṇu's, then Śiva's, and finally Devī's) and assuming that the most important subject in a Māhātmya is described at the end (Ramesh 2020, 7, 118), an ultimate focus on Kāmākṣi may emerge: the Śakta part and with it the geography-chapter describing Kāmākṣi's territory come last (KV chs. 10–13).

5.3.1 Viṣṇu in the East

The realm of Varadarāja is called Harikṣetra (the area of Hari (Viṣṇu)). It is comprehensively described in the first chapter of the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava part (KV ch. 2). In this space, the myths that revolve around Varadarāja unfold (KV chs. 3–5). Harikṣetra is variously referred to by this particular name to locate events taking place within the mythological stories of the Vaiṣṇava part. It is further glorified in a specific *phalaśruti* section as Viṣṇu's territory in Kāñcī (KV 5.38–53).

In line with the schematic approach of the text, four locations are given as markers of the boundaries of Harikṣetra (KV 2.3–5a). These are Śiva Paurandareśa (Satyanātasvāmi), the goddess Pāñcālīnī (identification uncertain),

192 [Mārkaṇḍeya tells:] *bilavṛkṣavimānāñkaiḥ kṣetraṃ tajasam ucyate* || KV 1.59cd.

Viṣṇu at Siṃhālaya (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ), and the goddess Kṣetrāṅgikā (identification uncertain). The space in-between the four sites covers the (south-)eastern part of Kanchi where the temple of Varadarāja is also found (see figure 5.5). The location of Varadarāja's abode and thus the temple is the essential factor for the positioning of Harikṣetra. It is not located in the spatial centre of the space but is perceived as the conceptual focal point.

After the border sites are defined, the KV maps twenty-six sacred places in Harikṣetra (KV 2.9–44; see figure 5.5). The four sites designated as border sites (see above) are listed again in this description and are among the twenty-six. In addition, two of the border sites, Pāñcālīnī and Kṣetrāṅgikā, of Harikṣetra are also two of the border places of Kāñcīkṣetra, showing how consciously the three spaces in Kāñcīkṣetra are fitted into the latter.

At the end of the listing, the Māhātmya itself specifies how many and which kind of sacred places it describes in Harikṣetra (KV 2.43–44):

In this sequence there abide in Harikṣetra one Gaṇeśa and likewise one Skanda, four Durgās (goddesses), three Śivas, eight Viṣṇus, five *mudrās*, and four *tīrthas* respectively to this day on Viṣṇu's command, in this ground. (KV 2.43–44)¹⁹³

In exactly this order the KV presents the sacred places, first some individual ones, then in groups of goddesses, *śivaliṅgas*, and so on. There is a slight emphasis on the sites of Viṣṇu in Harikṣetra, of which altogether eight are named. This is a subtle reflection of the association of Harikṣetra with Viṣṇu.

Places of the Goddess as mentioned in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* have proved difficult to identify with sites in Kanchi. This does not only apply to the sites in Harikṣetra, but generally to sites of Devī mentioned in the Māhātmya. The contemporary temples seem to be consistently known under their Tamil(-ised) names, which means that the names from the Māhātmya offer less orientation. It is noteworthy that the differences between the names mentioned in the Māhātmyas and the contemporary names occur in particular with places of the Goddess and only very rarely with the Śaiva or the Vaiṣṇava sites. I attribute this to the fact that goddesses tend to be much more connected to the local, non-Sanskrit, non-Brahminical traditions to which many originally belonged. Accordingly, their Sanskrit names are less

193 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] *evaṃ kramād dharikṣetra eko vighneśvaras tathā | skandas tatra caturdurgās trayo rudrā janārdanāḥ || KV 2.43 aṣṭau mudrās tu tatpañca catustīrthāny anukramāt | adyāpi śāsanād viṣṇor var-tante taddharātale || KV 2.44.*

common.¹⁹⁴ Besides, Kanchi's cityscape is rather densely dotted with Devī shrines. They are often located only tens or hundreds metres away from each other. On such a micro-scale, the location information of a place of the Goddess from the KV is too general. It is therefore often not possible to clearly identify a place from the text with a particular temple of the Goddess. Yet, since the KV is the only text that mentions more than just a few places of the Goddess, these call for more detailed exploration elsewhere that also includes a comparison of their condensed myths of origin from the KV with narratives from other sources, in particular oral myths narrated in the temples of Kanchi.

With the exception of those of the Goddess, almost all of the other sites mentioned in the description of Viṣṇu's realm in Kāñcī can be identified with historical sites corresponding to locations indicated by the text. The design of the sacred geography of Harikṣetra thus shows a close correspondence to the religious landscape in Kanchi's (south-)eastern part. Yet, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* only catalogues selected sites in order to maintain a balance between the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta traditions.

Varadarāja is not included in the list of sacred sites in Harikṣetra. His presence in Kanchi has previously been mentioned in the introductory chapter of the Māhātmya, where he is located in Kāñcī's southeast (see pp. 150–151). Nonetheless, Varadarāja forms the implicit focal point of the area. Several other sacred sites in Harikṣetra are located in his immediate vicinity, that is, within the area corresponding to the complex of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple. This sub-area is thus the best mapped part of Varadarāja's territory in the KV (see figure 5.6¹⁹⁵). It illustrates the prominence of Varadarāja in the spatial design. Primarily the *mudrās*, the characteristic elements connected with Varadarāja, are situated at Varadarāja's abode, the hill Hastiśaila (Hastigiri), which is identified with the central two-storey building at the Varatarāja Perumāl temple that houses the sanctum sanctorum on its first floor. These are: Varadarāja's two consorts Bhū (Bhū; no separate shrine, as festival image in the sanctum sanctorum) and Mahādevī (Tāyār; third enclosure); the Palliyugma (Taṅkapalli, a pair of lizards; on the ceiling at the northeastern corner of the first *prākāra*); the Tattvasopāna (Tattvasopāna; the staircase leading up to the first floor of Hastigiri); and the Puṇyakoṭivimāna (Puṇyakoṭivimāna; the tower superstructure above the sanctum

194 On the type of local goddesses, see Flood 1997, 193–196.

195 The identification of the sites found within the Varatarāja Perumāl temple is based on a map by K. V. Raman (1975, fig. 39) and explanations by Ute Hüsken.

sanctorum; KV 2.26c–31b).¹⁹⁶ Of these, the pair of lizards is dealt with in more detail later in the KV (3.29–45b) and their origin is told as example of the redemptive powers of Harikṣetra.

In addition to the *mudrās* named above, Gaṇeśa called Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka (Valampuri Vināyakar; second *prākāra*), Guhāsiṃha (Yōka Naracimma Perumāl; ground floor of Hastigiri), and the *tīrtha* Anantasaras (Anantacararas; fourth *prākāra*) are also situated within the compound of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple.¹⁹⁷ The condensed summaries about the origins of all these sites emphasize the closeness to Varadarāja by referring to the main myth of the Vaiṣṇava part. For example, Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka is said to have been worshipped by Brahmā for an undisturbed completion of his horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*; KV 2.9–10b). This episode clearly refers to the myth of Varadarāja’s origin, in which Brahmā carries out an *aśvamedha* to see Viṣṇu in Kāñcī (KV chs. 3–4).

Just as carefully as the KV describes the spatial details of Harikṣetra, it also highlights its nature as Viṣṇu’s area. Among other attributive names, the space is designated as *bhūlokavaikuṅṭha* (Vaikuṅṭha on earth). Those beings living there are said to be inhabitants of Viṣṇu’s heavenly abode Vaikuṅṭha itself and attain Viṣṇu world at the end of life (KV 2.45–49b). Designating a place of Viṣṇu as Vaikuṅṭha on earth is not a unique occurrence: in the Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, extraordinary places of Viṣṇu and especially the Araṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple in Srirangam are considered as *bhūlokavaikuṅṭha* to stress their unique standing in resemblance to Viṣṇu’s own heavenly abode (Branfoot 2022a, 267). The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* does not connect this designation to a specific place of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī—not even to Varadarāja—but to Harikṣetra as a whole. The notion of this entire area as sacred is thus emphasised.¹⁹⁸ References to the conception of Harikṣetra

196 The pair of lizards attracts many visitors and is actively promoted. Interestingly, the signboards set up in the Varatarāja Perumāl temple to inform about the story of the lizards retell the narrative of the KV and not the KM(V) as might have been expected of a Vaiṣṇava temple. For a detailed study of the Taṅkapalli, see Hüsken 2022. The Tattvasopāna staircase leading up to the first enclosure where the sanctum sanctorum is has twenty-five steps, as many as there are *tattvas* (principles of reality) according to the Sāṅkhya philosophy.

197 Besides, the Māhātmya also locates Kumāra (Skanda; KV 2.10c–11b) within the precincts. According to Ute Hüsken (pers. comm., February 2021), a local oral tradition remembers a shrine for Skanda at the Varatarāja Perumāl temple. The shrine is still there but the image of the deity has been shifted to a separate temple in the west of Kanchi.

198 The Vaiṣṇava nature attributed to the (south-)eastern part of Kāñcī is further illustrated by an extended *phalaśruti* narrative (KV 2.49c–73).

as Vaiṣṇava are also found in the remaining chapters of the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava part. Therein, Harikṣetra is used as the fixed designation for the area covering Kāñcī's (south-)east.

The geography-chapter of the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava part is the main source for details on sacred sites in Harikṣetra. The further chapters of the Vaiṣṇava part (KV chs. 3–5) primarily cover Varadarāja's myth, interspersed with episodes on the origin of Hastiśaila and the Palliyugma (ch. 3). With the exception of Hastiśaila and the river Vegavatī (Vegavathi; ch. 5), they refer in passing to several of the sacred places already mentioned in the geography-chapter but do not introduce new ones. The Vegavatī appears as a central element in Varadarāja's myth and is furnished a separate myth of origin. It thus becomes clear that the description of Harikṣetra is also conceived with a view to setting the scene for the Vaiṣṇava narratives in the KV before they unfold right there in the further chapters.

5.3.2 Śiva in the West

In the same way that Viṣṇu's territory in Kāñcī is described in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, the area assigned to Śiva is also laid out and called Rudraśālā, the hall of Rudra (Śiva; KV ch. 6). The extent of the *kṣetra* is determined by the three Śivas Kāyādhirohaṇeśvara (Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar), Kanyakeśvara (identification uncertain), and Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar) and Viṣṇu called Śvetavarna (identification uncertain; see n. 187; KV 6.3–5). Accordingly, the area within these limits covers Kāñcī's west and northwest, with Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmpanātar) as central site (see figure 5.7). Rudraśālā shares two border sites, namely Kanyakeśvara and Śvetavarna, with Kāñcikṣetra. It thus extends to an outer (western) boundary of the larger area, reflecting the careful spatial design observed in the KV.

After the border sites are defined, a selection of sacred sites is mapped (KV 6.9–43b). An overview of the places mentioned is given by the KV itself:

In this sequence there abide in Rudraśālā one Vighneśa and likewise one Skanda, four Durgās, eight Śambhus (Śivas) and three Viṣṇus, five *mudrās*, and four *tīrthas* to this day on Śambhu's command, in this ground Rudraśālā. (KV 6.41cd–43ab)¹⁹⁹

199 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to Suratha:] *evaṃ tadrudraśālāyām eko vighneśvaras tathā || KV 6.41cd skandas tatra caturdurgās śambhavo [']ṣṭau janārdanaḥ |*

In addition to the places named in this summary statement, the single mango tree (called *rasāla*) is also mentioned as a sacred place. A closer look further reveals that the border sites of Śiva's realm in Kāñcī—except Kanya-keśvara²⁰⁰—are counted among the places indicated in the listing. Reflecting the Śaiva affiliation of Rudraśālā, *śivaliṅgas* number most among the sacred sites mapped in this space (see figure 5.7). Twelve Śaiva sites are mentioned in Rudraśālā, which is almost half of the twenty-eight sites catalogued in total in the Śaiva geography-chapter.

As in the case of Harikṣetra, the section of Rudraśālā that is most precisely outlined concerns the immediate surroundings of the deity in focus of the area, which here is Ekāmranātha (see figure 5.8). Located within the precincts of the Ēkāmpanātar temple, there are first the five *mudrās* as characteristics of Ekāmranātha and his abode (KV 6.26c–31b).²⁰¹ These are Śiva Corekāmrapati (Kaḷḷakkampar), Mārkaṇḍeya (Mārkaṇṭhesvarar), Dhavaḷaikāmranāyaka (Veḷḷakkampar; all first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmpanātar temple), the goddess Gaṅgācailakā (Ēlavārkuḷali; second *prākāra*), and Virabhairava (identification uncertain). Furthermore, Gaṇeśa as Vikaṭacakravīnāyaka (Vikaṭacakrara Vināyakar; fourth *prākāra*), Rasāla (Ekāmranāyaka, the single mango tree; in the courtyard opening from the third *prākāra*), Skanda called Ṣanmukha (Māvātī Kantar; second *prākāra*), the goddess Praḷayabandhinī (Piraḷayakālī Ammaṅ; second *prākāra*), Śiva as Śmaśāneśvara (Kaccimāyānam; fourth *prākāra*), Viṣṇu called Candragrīva, (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāl; first *prākāra*), and Gaṅgātūrtha (Civakaṅkai-tūrttam; fourth *prākāra*) are also located within the Ēkāmpanātar temple complex. Among all sacred places located in Rudraśālā, the single mango tree occupies a special position. It is the characteristic associated with Ekāmranātha whose story of origin is separately elaborated in the KV (7.1–49b), with a *phalaśruti* story illustrating its powers. The significance of the tree is also reflected on site at the Ēkāmpanātar temple: it is not only the site-tree

trayo mudrās tu tatpaṅca catustūrthāny anukramāt || KV 6.42 *adyāpi śāsanāc chambhor vartate taddharātale* | 6.43ab.

- 200 Kanyakeśvara is mentioned as border site of Kāñcīkṣetra and Rudraśālā, but both the description of Kāñcīkṣetra (KV ch. 1) and the Śaiva geography-chapter (ch. 6) only determine its location without referring to its story of origin. As far as I can see, it is the only place in the passages on sacred geography in the KV for which no myth is presented. I have not yet been able to explain this.
- 201 For the identification of the sites found within the Ēkāmpanātar temple, I rely on a map by Kerstin Schier (2018, 17, fig. 1.2), a description in Seshadri (2003, 121–124), a map with legend from Boulanger (1992, 96–98), a hand-drawn plan of the temple's first enclosure by N. Subramaniam (unpublished), and my own notes taken during field-visits in January 2020 and March 2023.

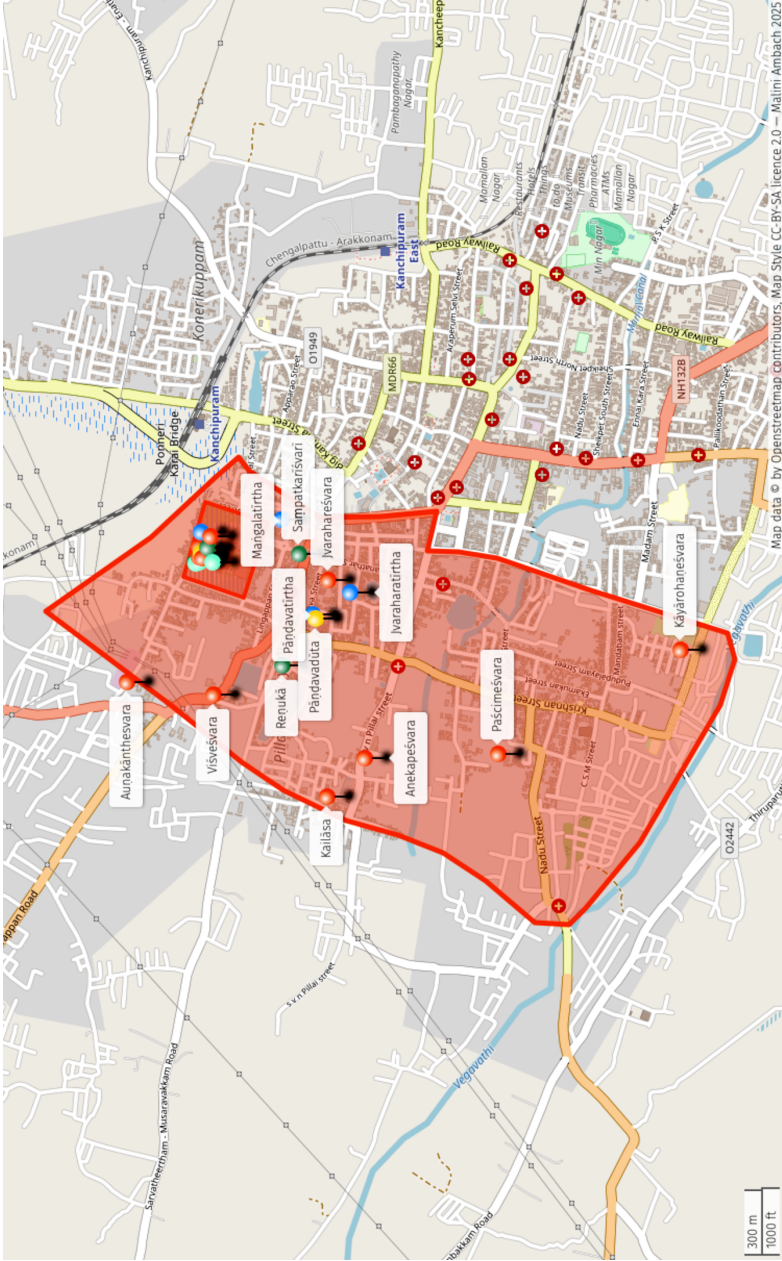


Fig. 5.7 Sacred places in Rudraśālā (visualised in orange) in the KV. Viṣṇus—yellow, śivaliṅgas—orange, Goddesses—green, tīrthas—blue; for the unlabelled pins within the Ēkāmparanātar temple complex (orange outline), see figure 5.8.

(*sthalavṛkṣa*), but also the second most important place of worship after the *liṅga* located in the sanctum sanctorum (see pp. 101–106).

While Ekāmranātha himself is not mentioned in the geography-chapter of the text's Śaiva section, the spatial design of Rudraśālā places his site as the central point. Its position is known from the framing Śākta narrative set in Kāñcīkṣetra (KV ch. 1; see pp. 150–151) and Ekāmranātha is firmly situated in Rudraśālā in the further chapters of the Śaiva part (KV chs. 7–9). Analogous to Harikṣetra and Varadarāja's myth in the KV, Śiva's territory in Kāñcī is the backdrop for the Ekāmranātha myth in the text. The Śaiva character of this *kṣetra* and its ascribed powers are highlighted by comparing it with Śiva's heavenly abode, Kailāsa. In reference to the latter, Rudraśālā is designated as *bhūkailāsa*, Kailāsa on earth. Beings inhabiting this area are considered inhabitants of Kailāsa itself; additionally, living in Rudraśālā even for a moment is said to free one of all sins, grant vision of Śiva in human form and attainment of Śiva's world after death (KV 6.43c–47). Here again a space in Kāñcī is linked to a god's heavenly abode by referencing to its name the same way it is done by styling Harikṣetra as *bhūlokavaikuṅṭha*.

To illustrate the powers ascribed to Rudraśālā in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, there is a *phalaśruti* story about an evil brahmin whose faults are redeemed by offering a brahmin from Rudraśālā something to drink (KV 6.48–72). While explicit glorification of places described in a Māhātmya is a stylistic feature of this text genre, the length and scope of such passages vary across the texts. In the KV, *phalaśruti* statements and passages illustrating the beneficial powers of a site are rather prominent and extended. This approach suggests an intentional style of the text to promote Kanchi to worshippers and pilgrims. The KV as a Sanskrit text does not seem to have achieved a wider circulation, but the Tamil prose rendering, the *Kāmākṣī Līlā Pīrapāvam*, has. The latter was published in several editions during the twentieth century and is still available to a broader audience as part of collected volumes (Buchholz 2022, 33–34; see also pp. 85–89).

The details on the sacred sites in Rudraśālā are primarily found in the geography-chapter of the Śaiva part. Its last chapter (KV ch. 9) introduces the sacred water body that Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam), which is not mentioned in the description of Rudraśālā before. It is located west of Ekāmranātha's abode and its story of origin evolves from a narrative motif found in Ekāmranātha's myth (KV chs. 7–8). The link indicated in the story is mirrored in the festival practice of the Ēkāmpanātar temple, which includes a concluding bath at the tank at the end of the temple's Mahotsava festival (Schier 2018, 55).

5.3.3 Devī at the Centre

With Hariḷḷsetra in the east and Rudraśālā in the west of Kāñcī, the space at the centre is the last to be discussed in the context of being assigned to a deity. Bordering the two aforementioned areas, this space is said to be Kāmākṣī's realm. It is called Kāmakoṣṭha (treasury of love) and considered as Śākta because of its link to the Goddess.²⁰² Its four border places are Viṣṇu at Siṃhālaya (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāl), Kāyādhīrohaṇatīrtha (Tāyār Kuḷam), Śvetavarṇa (identification uncertain; see n. 187), and Durgā Kṣetrāṅgī (identification uncertain; KV 10.3–4b). These four sites are also specified as limiting markers of Kāñcīkṣetra as a whole as well as the areas of Viṣṇu and Śiva within Kāñcīkṣetra.²⁰³ Kāmakoṣṭha is thus positioned between Hariḷḷsetra and Rudraśālā and stretches across Kanchi's centre (see figure 5.9). By using the same border sites as the spaces adjacent to the east and west, Kāmakoṣṭha is clearly conceptualised to fit in between them. Or rather, the three spaces in Kāñcīkṣetra are clearly positioned so that they are adjacent but do not overlap (see figure 5.11).

In the geography-chapter of the Māhātmya's Śākta part, twenty-six sacred sites within Kāmakoṣṭha are mapped (KV 10.9–51; see figure 5.9). In the text, the selection of places is phrased as follows:

King, in this sequence there abide in Kāmakoṣṭha one Viḷḷhneśa and likewise one Skanda, six Durgās and four Viṣṇus, five Rudras (Śivas), and four *tīrthas* respectively to this day on Devī's command, in this ground Kāmakoṣṭha. (KV 10.50–51)²⁰⁴

The *mudrās* are omitted in the summarising statement, but five sites are introduced in this category. Three of them reference goddesses, making a total of eight goddesses located in Kāmakoṣṭha. The numerical emphasis on

²⁰² On the designation Kāmakoṣṭha, see n. 84.

²⁰³ For Rudraśālā, though, the site in the adjacent corner is Kāyārohaṇeśvara (Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar) and not Kāyādhīrohaṇatīrtha (Tāyār Kuḷam). As can already be seen from the similarity in name, the *tīrtha* is linked to the Śaiva site; Tāyār Kuḷam is in fact the *tīrtha* of the Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar temple. Both places are situated close together, only around 180 metres away. The small difference does not affect the overall concept of the KV, both Rudraśālā and Kāmakoṣṭha are clearly designed to have their common corner near these locations.

²⁰⁴ [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] *evaṃ kramāt kāmakoṣṭhe eko viḷḷhneśvaras tathā | skandas tatra tu ṣaḍdurgā caturviṣṇuś ca bhūpate || KV 10.50 pañcarudrās ca vartante catustīrthāny anukramāt | adyāpi śāsanād devyāḷ kāmakoṣṭhatale śubhe || KV 10.51.*

goddesses reflects the idea of Kāmakoṣṭha as a space characterised by the presence of Devī.

Within the precincts of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple are the five *mudrās* that are characteristics of Kāmākṣī's abode and her myth (see figure 5.10).²⁰⁵ These are Mahāgaurī Kāmākṣī (Tapaskāmākṣī; in the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa²⁰⁶), Śivā Annapūrṇeśvarī (Annapoorna), Śāstā (Dharmaśāstā (Ayyappaṇ); both inner *prākāra*), Mahālakṣmī Añjanacchāyakāmākṣī (Saundaryalakṣmī; Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa), and the Santānastambha (Santānastambha; inner *prākāra*; KV 10.29–35b). The silver Santānastambha pillar is the only *mudrā* in Kāmakoṣṭha that is given its separate *phalaśruti* phrase alongside the summarising story of its origin (KV 10.35–38b). A particular significance is thus given to this object of worship.

Not mentioned in the geography-chapter but also located within the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is Viṣṇu called Bhūtabandhaka (Pūtanikraha Perumāl; outer *prākāra*). His story of origin is essentially the myth about Pañcatīrtha (Pañcakaṅkaiṭṭṛttam; outer *prākāra*; KV 13.1–58; see n. 167 for a summary). While Pañcatīrtha is one of the *tīrthas* introduced in the description of Kāmakoṣṭha, it is also the sacred water body that is highlighted in Kāmakoṣṭha—analogue to the Vegavatī in the Vaiṣṇava and Sarvatīrtha in the Śaiva part. Unlike the latter two *tīrthas* and their connection to Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha respectively, Pañcatīrtha is not only linked by myth to the central deity of the area in which it is located but is also spatially close to Kāmākṣī. Apart from the five *mudrās*, it is the only site mentioned in the description of Kāmakoṣṭha that is also located in Kāmākṣī's vicinity.

The immediate surroundings of Kāmākṣī are thus not as densely dotted with sites as those of Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha. The major difference is in the deities Skanda / Murukaṇ and Gaṇeśa / Vināyakar. In the case of Harikṣetra and Rudraśālā, the places of the deities mentioned in the text are located within the compounds of the Varatarāja Perumāl and Ēkāmparanātar temples. For Kāmakoṣṭha, though, the Gaṇeśas and Skandas located in

205 My knowledge on the locations of the sacred sites within the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is based on a hand-drawn map (unpublished) by Ute Hüsken, with some notes taken during my field-visits in January 2020 and March 2023.

206 The innermost part with the sanctum sanctorum of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is a 24-pillared hall called Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa. In addition to Kāmākṣī's main image, the *mūlamūrti*, it houses Kāmākṣī's attendant goddesses and the Śrīcakra *yantra*, a mystical diagram representing the transcendent form of Devī in the pan-Indian Śrīvidyā Śākta tradition (for details, see Ilkama 2023, 26–32). The Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa is enclosed by the inner *prākāra* of the temple, where there are shrines of many other deities. The hall and the enclosure together form the main building of the temple with an outer *prākāra* surrounding it.

the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple are not considered. Instead, Skanda Kumāra-koṣṭha (Kumarakōṭṭam) and Gaṇeśa Śaṅkupāṇi (Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar; at Sangupani Vinayagar Koil Street) are named. Both sites are still found comparatively close by, outside the compound of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple but within the Rājavīthis, the streets that frame the area around the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples (see figures 5.9 and 2.8). The Kumarakōṭṭam is one of the major temples in Kanchi, the largest temple dedicated to Skanda in the city, and conceptually linked to the Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temples (see n. 50), while the Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar is one of the more popular—and probably older—Vināyakar temples in the city.²⁰⁷ A particular ascribed relevance thus seems to be the reason why the two sites have been given preference over a Gaṇeśa and Skanda located in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple.

In reference to Śrīpura, the heavenly abode of Devī, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* declares Kāmakoṣṭha to be Śrīpura on earth (*bhūmau tac chrīpuraṃ*). The inhabitants of this part of Kāñcī are said to live in Śrīpura itself; by the power of the area one is released from all sins and granted vision of the goddess in human form and entry into Devī's world after death (KV 10.52–56b). This equation is also intended to underline the extraordinary power of this space, for there cannot be a more desirable place than that in which the Goddess herself resides. The Śākta affiliation of Kāmakoṣṭha is further illustrated in a *phalaśruti* story (KV 10.56c–79) and repeatedly alluded to in the other chapters of the *Māhātmya*'s Śākta part.

Similar to Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja, Kāmākṣī herself is not mentioned in the chapter describing Kāmakoṣṭha but forms the conceived centre. While the goddess is initially presented in the introductory chapter of the *Māhātmya*, her location is not specified beyond being *in Kāñcīkṣetra* (*kāñcīkṣetre*; KV 1.94–95). The myth of her origin—prefaced by a narrative about the *bila*, the cave, as characteristic of her abode—specifically unfolds in Kāmakoṣṭha and eventually describes her manifestation within that area (KV chs. 11–13). Uniquely for the text, the myth contains a passage referring to the construction and architecture of Kāmākṣī's dwelling place (KV 12.52–73). It narrates how the gods are commanded to build an abode (*āyatana*) for the goddess to manifest herself and reside in. It is located at the *bila* as representation of the highest ether in Kāmakoṣṭha, is situated next

207 The street leading to the Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar temple is called Sangupani Vinayagar Koil Street. That the street is named after the temple at its end is not uncommon in Kanchi and Emma Stein notes that this pattern usually indicates an ancient site (2021, 60–61).

to a Jayastambha (pillar of victory), has the form of a *maṇḍapa*, a pillared hall, which is as large as the cave, has a door and is called Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa. Comparing this description with the layout of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple reflects a focus on the characteristic elements, particularly the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa, the hall in the central building housing Kāmākṣī's main image. The architectural features listed in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* can be identified with: the cave commonly considered to be located below the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa and not physically perceivable on site (see n. 85), the Jayastambha pillar found in the entry hall to the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa, and the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa itself, with the hall forming the sanctum sanctorum (see n. 206). All these elements are characteristic features of the temple as it stands today.²⁰⁸ Compared to the description of Ekāmranātha's abode found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see pp. 101–106), the text passage on Kāmākṣī's abode from the KV is less detailed. Nevertheless, it mentions specific particularities that *are* represented on site, thus embedding the mythical setting into a historical-physical one that can still be seen today.

As the above exploration shows, the same systematic structure is evident in all three geography-chapters of the KV. First, the boundaries of Viṣṇu's, Śiva's, or Devī's realm in Kāñcī are set out, followed by a main section with brief descriptions of the places mapped in that area, and finally there is a *phalaśruti* section praising the salvific powers of the territory. The summarising phrase reviewing the number of places mentioned in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, or Kāmakoṣṭha reinforces the impression of a deliberate conception of the text.

Uniformity and balance unmistakably characterise the spatial design in the Śākta text and create a coherent overall concept. Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī are each given their own sphere in Kāñcī, with their abodes conceptually constructed as the centres. These three spaces are neatly arranged side by side without one being given more prominence than the others. Additionally, they seem to be deliberately constructed to fit into Kāñcīkṣetra, the space of the city, sharing their outer border places with the latter (see visualisation in figure 5.11). The dimensions of Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, or Kāmakoṣṭha result from the alignment to the urban structures of the historically grown city (see pp. 150–151).

208 According to David Shulman, the link of Kāmākṣī with the pillar that is an actively used object of worship is reminiscent of the Orissan cult of pillar deities. Similarly, several *liṅgas* at the Ēkāmparanātar temple and even an interpretation of Ekāmranātha's Tamil designation used in the *Tēvāram* poems of the Nāyaṇmār recall the idea of deities represented as pillars (Shulman 1979, 29, n. 34).

Moreover, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta places, and also *tīrthas* are equally considered, reflecting a deliberate selection of the sites to be mapped in each space to keep an approximately balanced distribution and perspective on the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions. The only differentiation is an increased attention to places in the close proximity to the main deity of a space. This element is part of the general centripetal movement of the spatial design in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, which begins with the outline of the larger region of Kāñcī, moves on to construct successively smaller spatial units, to ultimately zoom in on the abodes of Varadarāja, Ekāmrānātha, and Kāmākṣī as the central sites.

5.3.4 Sacred Water Bodies

The category of *tīrthas* has been largely excluded from the analysis of the KV so far though special attention is given to this type of sacred places in the text. Like all sites, sacred waters are integrated into the overall spatial concept in a pronounced structured and balanced way. For Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha, four *tīrthas* each are mentioned, and their location provided in the geography-chapters. Their description therein is about twice as extensive as that of the other sacred places but equally schematic in style. In addition to the positioning in relation to the place mentioned before and a condensed summary of its myth of origin, an attribution of the specific effective power of a *tīrtha* is given. For example, the description of Maṅgalatīrtha (Mañkaḷatīrttam; next to Mañkaḷeśvarar), one of the four *tīrthas* in Rudraśālā, reads as follows:

In its [Gaṅgā-tīrtha's] southeastern direction is the *tīrtha* named Maṅgala-[tīrtha]. Once it liberated the son of the earth (planet Mars) from being in the form of a fire. “Who takes a bath in it on a Tuesday may receive the reward [similar to that of] a bath in the [river] Bhāratī,” this best of boons Mars once gave to the *tīrtha*. (KV 6.34cd–36ab)²⁰⁹

209 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] *tasya tīrthasya cāgneye tīrthaṃ maṅgaḷanāmakam* || KV 6.34cd *purā tad bhumiputrasya vahnirūpavimocakam | bhaumavāre tu yas snāyād bhāratīsnānaṃ phalam* || KV 6.35 *purā tīrthāya bhaumo [']pi dadau varam anuttamam* | KV 6.36ab.

The passage is exemplary of the episodes on *tīrthas* in the KV. The specific context is less relevant here than the recognisable structure and style.²¹⁰ Characteristic is the attribution of a power that is independent of the worship of a deity, as well as the naming of specific qualities. The benefits attributed to the place are presented as the boon of a mythological character who is said to have once benefited from the power of this place. While the story of origin of the *tīrtha* is not explicitly indicated, the *phalaśruti* element is emphasised. The latter is very specific about the efficacy of the *tīrtha*, mentioning both a specific point in time and the properties attributed to Maṅgalatīrtha, which are compared to those of the river Bhāratī (identification uncertain). The comparison of the powers of the local sacred water body in Kāñcī with those of a distant site reflects a general element of the sections on *tīrthas* in the KV. In the case of Maṅgalatīrtha, the statement aims to stress the importance of the local place by suggesting that one might as well take a bath at Maṅgalatīrtha on Tuesdays as make a pilgrimage to the distant Bhāratī.²¹¹ The reference implicitly classifies the place of reference as sacred, but strongly highlights the efficacy of the local *tīrtha*.

Besides the four *tīrthas* mentioned in each of the geography-chapters, each of the last chapters of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta parts presents a narrative about a sacred water body. These sites are understood as significant characteristics of Varadarāja's, Ekāmranātha's, or Kāmākṣī's territory and feature in the myth of each main deity. The river Vegavatī (Vegavathi; KV ch. 5²¹²) is highlighted in the Vaiṣṇava part, Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam; ch. 9) in the Śaiva part, and Pañcatīrtha (Pañcakankaitīrttam; ch. 13) in the Śākta part. The structural emphasis of these three *tīrthas* is an expression of the significance they are attributed in the text's versions of the myths of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. Accordingly, they are considered as sites of particular importance in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha.

The myths about the tree *tīrthas* present individual story lines—in the case of the Vegavatī and Sarvatīrtha directly continuing from the myths

210 In different settings, Maṅgalatīrtha is also mentioned in the KM(V) (5.40c–42 and chs. 27 and 28) and the KM(Ś) (35.1–11).

211 With regard to sacred places in Maharashtra and in the Deccan, Anne Feldhaus (2003, especially ch. 5) extensively analyses the rhetorical means found, for example, in Māhātmyas to connect a local place with a distant one. Statements about *tīrthas* from the Māhātmyas on Kanchi can also be placed in the categories that Anne Feldhaus distinguishes in her study. For a more detailed look of such a hierarchising example from the KM(Ś), see the analysis on pp. 95–97.

212 Commonly, the *tīrthas* mentioned in Kanchi's Māhātmyas are stable water bodies—natural or constructed. However, the Vegavatī as a river is also classified as such in the KV.

about the origin of Varadarāja and Ekāmrānātha (KV chs. 3–4, 7–8)—that detail how the *tīrthas* came into being precisely in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha, while the *phalaśruti* passages illustrate their powers (KV 5.1–37b, 9.1–46b, 13.1–65b). By underlining their belonging to and location in the territories of the three deities, the beneficial qualities of the Vegavatī, Sarvatīrtha, and Pañcatīrtha are intimately linked with those attributed to Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha. Overall, sacred water bodies are attributed greater significance compared to many of the other sacred sites in this Māhātmya and their power is individually specified and glorified.

5.4 Kāñcī and Kanchi

As the analysis above reveals, the spatial layout of Kāñcī in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is clearly derived from the spatiality of the urban and religious landscapes of Kanchi. It shows a high conformity with the actual geo-spatiality of the city and takes characteristic spatial properties into account. The outlines of Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha are oriented to the positions of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ, Ēkāmparanātar, and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temples in Kanchi and seem to trace main roads of the city as boundaries (see figure 5.11). The Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple is in the southeast, the Ēkāmparanātar temple in the northwest, and the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ is towards the centre of Kanchi, though closer to the Ēkāmparanātar temple. Accordingly, the areas that are assigned to the three deities are constructed as separate Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta domains in Kāñcī. Moreover, among the Māhātmyas on Kanchi, the layout of Kāñcī displayed in the KV best reflects the polycentric structure of city's religious landscape.

The tripartite division within Kāñcī as well as the overall design of the areas in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* indicate a conscious concept. The allocation of different areas for the three deities is reminiscent of the division of the city in Shiva-, Vishnu-, and Jina-Kanchi (see figure 2.2). Shiva-Kanchi covers the western and northwestern part of the city with the Ēkāmparanātar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples; Vishnu-Kanchi centres around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple in the southeast; and Jina-Kanchi spreads in the suburb Tirupparuttikkunram in the southern part of the city, south of the river Vegavathi. These bynames for different parts of the city are in common use in the present-day Kanchi (see section 2.3). It is not entirely certain, though, when these designations were established. Indeed, there is an early

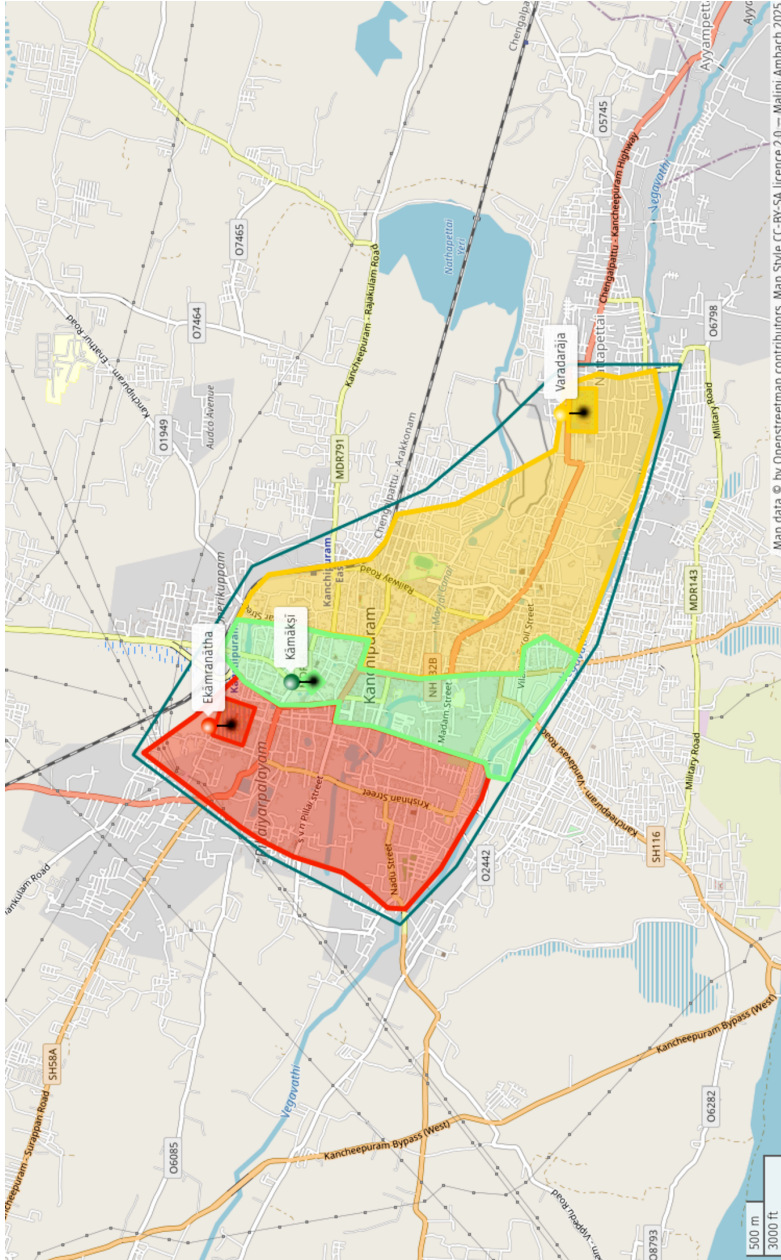


Fig. 5.11 Three spaces within Kāñci in the KV: Rudrasālā with Ekāmanātha (orange), Kāmākṣītha with Kāmākṣī (green), and Harikṣetra with Varadarāja (yellow), fitted within Kāñcīkṣetra (turquoise; estimate, see pp. 150–151).

inscription from the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple dating to 1514 which states that the Vijayanagara King Krishnadevaraya mediated a dispute between the Ēkāmparanātar and Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple officials regarding the routes of their respective temple chariots during processions through the city by settling the processional routes (Raman 1975, 3; Srinivasan 1979, 200). In this context, K. V. Raman (1975, 3) raises the questions whether this incident might have provided the conceptual distinction into a Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi. However, according to Emma Stein, the two designations together with that of Jina-Kanchi came into use only in the second half of the nineteenth century (2021, 36–37).

The arrangement of the Ēkāmparanātar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples in Shiva-Kanchi is said to represent Śiva's divine family, or a Somaskanda layout, with Kāmākṣi understood as his wife and Skanda as his son (Hudson 1993, 30). In light of this notion and the general division of Kanchi, Kerstin Schier aptly notes that Kāmākṣi or her Śākta tradition are not separately considered (2018, 17, n 6). Hence, one is inclined to wonder whether the spatial concept found in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* responds to this disregard for the strong independent Śākta tradition in the allocation of devotional zones of the different religious traditions in the city. In the text's tripartite division, the Goddess is assigned her own specific space of herself, while the idea of a Vaiṣṇava area in the southeast and a Śaiva part in the northwest is kept. It thus adds to a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava notion of the city rather than contradicting one or the other.

Furthermore, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* promotes Kanchi as an important place of Goddess worship as it is today and establishes an autonomous narrative of Kāmākṣi as an independent goddess. All this is embedded in the religious South Indian Śrīvidyā tradition that is followed in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple. The *Māhātmya*, however, equally incorporates Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta material and even appears to keep a balance in the number of sacred places of Devī, Śiva, and Viṣṇu mapped in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha. The approach, then, does not seem to draft a purely Śākta *Māhātmya* on Kanchi, with praise of Kāmākṣi and/or focus on sites of the Goddess in Kanchi alone. Instead, the tripartite division into a Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta part—within a Śākta framework—creates an impression of deliberate balance. The spatial design is therefore, in my view, conceptualised to claim a territory for the Goddess and especially for Kāmākṣi in Kanchi. It seems quite possible that the spatial outline described in the KV is a response to the conceptualised division of Kanchi into a Śaiva and a Vaiṣṇava devotional zone. In fact, if we follow Emma Stein (2021, 36–37) in dating the introduction of the designations Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi to the

second half of nineteenth century and R. Nagaswamy's (1982, 207–208) arguments for a comparatively late composition of the KV sometime around the time of its first printed edition in 1889, the *Māhātmya* and its spatial design could well be placed as addressing the historical establishment of terminologically distinguishing devotional zones in Kanchi in that period.²¹³

5.5 In a Nutshell

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* presents a uniform, consciously constructed design of Kāñcī's sacred space. My discussion of the text above shows that the spatial arrangement of Kanchi's religious landscape of shrines, temples and sacred water bodies as a starting point and presents and interprets them in a selective but distinctly balanced manner. The KV displays pronounced attention to the spatial belonging, frequently and explicitly localising sacred sites within either Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, or Kāmakoṣṭha. Additionally, and similar to the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the geography-chapters of the text map conceptually existing places. In its layout of Kāñcī's sacred geography, the text thus clearly relies on the conditions of the historically grown city with the sacred places existing at a certain point in time.

The overall mythical framing reflects a Śākta view on Kāñcī, but similarly establishes a local setting in which the three deities Kāmākṣī, Varadarāja, and Ekāmranātha are equally important and exist in their own right. An overriding Śākta notion is not reflected in the three equally structured text parts. Here, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* follows an inclusive approach that structurally and spatially represents the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions in Kāñcī side by side without hierarchising them among each other. Each is given the same local value, with Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī each assigned a separate territory and myths disentangled from each other. Each part remains a self-contained unit in itself, exclusively highlighting the supremacy of one deity. This design understands Kāñcī to be a sphere of influence of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Devī at the same time, represented by their local

213 R. Nagaswamy, in his study of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple, argues for a late origin of the KV as the text supposedly describes more recent structures in the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple. As Jonas Buchholz (2022, 20) states, it is difficult to evaluate R. Nagaswamy's arguments as the latter unfortunately does not detail the relevant passages. Jonas Buchholz, though, acknowledges that "the fact that only a single manuscript of the KV can be found might indeed speak in favour of a late date of the text" (2022, 20). For further details, see pp. 85–89.

forms as Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. The Śākta Māhātmya may thus be seen as balanced and non-confrontational on the local level with regard to the different religious traditions, while the general framing of the entire text and Kāñcī is Śākta. The contextualisation of Kanchi in the pan-Indian concept of the seats of the Goddess and Kāmākṣī as the goddess of the Śaktipīṭha is echoed in the same interpretation of Kāmākṣī that was increasingly propagated by the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, the monastic institution administering the Kāmākṣī Amman temple since the 1840s, as evidenced from publications from the second half of the twentieth century (Venkataraman 1992, 70; Schier 2018, 125, n. 27, 134–137). In particular the former head of the Peetham, Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (1894–1994), sought to actively reinforce the renown of Kāmākṣī and her temple (Wilke 1996, 149).

As a result of the balanced approach, the consideration of sites of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Devī is equitable and focuses on equal numbers of each deity's sites. This portrayal of Kāñcī's sacred places does not represent the numerical distribution of sites in the city, but it best reflects its diverse and multifocal religious landscape. In its general layout, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* can easily be considered a pilgrims' guidebook to Kanchi, presenting the quintessential details of selected sacred places and containing extensive *phalaśruti* passages. However, the separate presentation of each *kṣetra* and the sequence of the sacred places as a result of their grouping by category make the descriptions in the KV less suitable as a guide for a pilgrimage through the whole of Kanchi or even one of the deities' realms. Moving from one site to the next in the indicated order would result in a route with a zigzag course within each area, which would not be practical on the ground in Kanchi. In this context, the preference for a conceptualised structure detracts from the suitability of the KV as a literary map of Kanchi's religious landscape, which is otherwise provided by the text's generally inclusive presentation of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions, its concise style, and pronounced attention to the locations of the sites of religious significance in Kanchi. The balanced, yet selective elements that are used to interpret the sacred geography, added by the linking narrative about Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha as created by the Goddess power, are thus best to be understood to refer to a Vaiṣṇava-Śaiva bipartition of Kanchi and the subsequent intention to claim territory for the Goddess in the city. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* does not counter a Śaiva and/or a Vaiṣṇava interpretation; it incorporates them when sketching a carefully constructed concept of Kāñcī as an important place of the Goddess with a distinct narrative of Kāmākṣī as an independent goddess and her very own spatial domain.

6 Through Vaiṣṇava Lens: the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*

The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)) again offers a unique approach to Kāñcī's sacred geography. It displays a Vaiṣṇava outlook on Kāñcī and the myths primarily speak about the appearance of Viṣṇu's manifestations in the city. The focus of the narratives and the spatial design is on Viṣṇu as Varadarāja (Varatarāja Perumāḷ). Apart from that, the KM(V) is highly selective in its inclusion of sacred places and covers almost only abodes of Viṣṇu and sacred water bodies associated with a Vaiṣṇava narrative. In a mythology-based approach, the KM(V) follows a prospective temporal understanding, in which a place does not exist until the events that led to its creation or the appearance of the deity residing there have been narrated in the text. Additionally, the historical development of the city and its religious landscape seems to play a role in the structure and the spatial design of the Vaiṣṇava text with a view of consolidating a Varadarāja-centric interpretation of Kāñcī's sacred landscape.

6.1 Situating Kāñcī

The general orientation of the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* towards Vaiṣṇava mythologies and consequently Vaiṣṇava sacred places is pronounced and stated at the very beginning of the *Māhātmya*. In the text's first-layer frame-story (KM(V) ch. 1), the sages in the Naimiśa forest (*naimiśāraṇya*) wonder what means is best suited to attain Viṣṇu. The sage Vasiṣṭha then lists a number of places (here: *kṣetra*) on earth, which are dear to Viṣṇu. Among them, Kāñcī is said to be the foremost. At this site, Viṣṇu is present in the cave of the elephant-mountain (KM(V) 1.56–61). The list of Vaiṣṇava sites that serve to contextualise Kāñcī in this text passage includes fourteen places from all over the Indian subcontinent given in no particular order.²¹⁴ The

214 [Vasiṣṭha speaks to the sages:] *puṣkaraṃ naimiśāraṇyaṃ siddhāśramam aho-bilam | govardhanaś citrakūṭaḥ kurukṣetraṃ atho gayā || KM(V) 1.56 prayāgaḥ pañcavatyaḥkhyah padmanābhaḥ prakīrtitaḥ | kaurmaṃ kṣetraṃ nārasimhaṃ*

selection of sites does not have a geographical focus, their common feature is an association with one of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* (manifestations) in the local myths. Among them is Govardhana (Govardhan hill near Mathura), where the myths about a young Kṛṣṇa are set; Ahobila (Ahobilam), famous as site of Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha; and Śrīraṅga (Srirangam), which is known for its Araṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple. At many of these sites there is a temple that is counted among the Divyadeśams, places about which the Vaiṣṇava Āḷvārs composed verses of praise.²¹⁵ The classification of a place as Divyadeśam, though, is neither mentioned in the *Māhātmya* itself nor does it seem to be the underlying criterion for the selection of the fourteen Vaiṣṇava sites. Similar to the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see section 4.1), the initial classification of Kāñcī through a selection of sites serves to establish the overall framing of the city. In the KM(V), the contextualisation emphasises Kāñcī's Vaiṣṇava character.

Apart from the classification as a Vaiṣṇava site, the KM(V) introduces Kāñcī as one of the seven cities of liberation by quoting a rather well-known Purāṇic verse (KM(V) 1.59; see nn. 67 and 214). These sites are together termed as the Saptamokṣapuris (or Saptapurīs) and are popular pilgrimage sites (see n. 67). Apart from Kāñcī, the other six sites are located in the northern part of India. They include both sites associated with Śiva such as Avantikā (Ujjain) with its renowned Śaiva Mahākāleśvara temple, as well as with Viṣṇu such as Dvāraka (Dwarka), where Kṛṣṇa is said to have lived for a long time. This reference stresses Kāñcī's pan-regional significance.

The Vaiṣṇava classification of Kāñcī forms the overall framework on which the description of sacred geography in the *Māhātmya* is based. Embedded in this, the KM(V) explicitly frames the sacred places of Kāñcī as its primary focus right at the beginning. It claims to cover the power of Kāñcī's *kṣetra* and its names, and to detail how many places of Viṣṇu and Śiva, *tīrthas*, rivers, and lakes there are (KM(V) 2.12–14b).²¹⁶ Furthermore, the

janārdanam ajāmilam || KM(V) 1.57 *śrīmuṣṇaṃ kumbhaghōṅākhyam śrīraṅgaṃ vṛṣabhācalaḥ* | *pāṭalaḥ pāṇḍuraṅgākhyo jagannāthas tathaiva ca* || KM(V) 1.58 *ayodhyā madhurā māyā kāśī kāñcī hy avantikā* | *purī dvaravatī caiva saptaitā bhuktimuktidāḥ* || KM(V) 1.59 *etāny anyāni puṇyāni kṣetrāṇi vasudhātale* | *teṣu puṇyatamā kāñcī kalikalmaṣanāsinī* || KM(V) 1.60 *smaraṇān muktidā nṛṇāṃ kim u tatra nivāsinām* | *tatra sannihito viṣṇur guhāyāṃ hastibhūhṛtaḥ* || KM(V) 1.61; for *dvaravatī* read *dvāravatī* in 1.59c.

215 On the Divyadeśams, see section 2.4 and the literature referenced therein.

216 [The sages inquire:] *idānūṃ śrotum icchāmaḥ kāñcīkṣetrasya vaibhavam* | *yat tu satyavratam nāma bhāskarākhyam ca muktidam* | | KM(V) 2.12 *kati sthānāni vai viṣṇoḥ kati rudrasya cānagha* | KM(V) 2.13ab [...] *tīrthāni kati vā santi hradaḥ nadyaś ca puṇyadāḥ* | KM(V) 2.14ab.

text indicates a parallel textual structure in the second-layer frame-story: king Ambarīṣa asks the sage Nārada about how Brahmā worshipped Viṣṇu with his horse sacrifice, how the city Kāñcī came into being, why it was called Kāñcī, and how Varadarāja appeared at the hill Hastiśaila (KM(V) 5.1–4; see pp. 75–76 for a summary of the myth). This request points to the text’s focus on Varadarāja’s myth, which is recounted in detail and accounts for about one third of the chapters in the text (KM(V) chs. 9–17). Moreover, Ambarīṣa is curious to know about the sacred water bodies (*tīrthas*) and the abodes of Viṣṇu within the area called Satyavratakṣetra and their names (KM(V) 5.5–7b).²¹⁷ As a response, Nārada agrees to tell the Māhātmya of Satyavratakṣetra, the area associated with Kāñcī.

The myth of Varadarāja, together with the narratives about the origin of further manifestations of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī, forms the core of the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya (KM(V) chs. 2–3, 9–30; see subsection 3.3.3). These twenty-four chapters share a common and continuous temporal and spatial setting. They introduce eighteen of Viṣṇu’s abodes as the text itself states (KM(V) 30.73; see n. 238). The spatial design in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya is displayed in these chapters. Structurally set apart, the text further contains one chapter glorifying Kāñcī in more general terms (KM(V) ch. 4), as well as four chapters with self-contained myths of varying length about different sacred water bodies (KM(V) chs. 5–8). These four “*tīrtha*-chapters” introduce eighteen *tīrthas* in Satyavratakṣetra. Many of the narratives about their origin refer to elements from the myths about Viṣṇu’s manifestations in Kāñcī and are set in the same spatial and temporal setting (see subsection 6.4.2). The number eighteen for both categories of sacred places appears to be deliberately chosen and the number of *tīrthas* matches the number of Viṣṇus. However, the numerical equality does not result in an equal attribution of significance: the focus in the KM(V) is clearly on Viṣṇu’s manifestations that take their abode in Kāñcī with *tīrthas* considered to be an integral element in Kāñcī’s sacred landscape. The primary consideration of Viṣṇus and *tīrthas* is consistent with the introductory framing in the second-layer frame-story in which king Ambarīṣa explicitly asks to learn about the abodes of Viṣṇu and *tīrthas* in Satyavratakṣetra.

217 [Ambarīṣa asks:] *tatra tīrthāni puṇyāni viṣṇor āyatanāni ca | anyāni kati puṇyāni santi satyavrate śubhe | | KM(V) 5.5 śreṣṭhāni kati tīrthāni tathaiṅyatanāni ca | kāni nāmāni tīrthānāṃ rūpānāṃ vā madhudviṣaḥ | | KM(V) 5.6 rūpair vā kīdrśair viṣṇus tatrāste kaiś ca pūjitaḥ | KM(V) 5.7ab.*

6.2 The *Kṣetra* and the City

Like the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)), the Vaiṣṇava text draws on a mythical outline of the world to initially situate Kāñcī spatially. Kāñcī's *kṣetra* (area) is located on Jambudvīpa, in the land Bhārata, two hundred *yojanas* south of the Gaṅgā (Ganges). In this first geographical positioning, the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* agrees with the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* (KV), which similarly locates the eastern boundary of Kāñcī's region, the Eastern Ocean (Bay of Bengal), at the same distance to the Gaṅgā (see section 5.2). The region of Kāñcī is said to stretch 10 *yojanas* east-west, beginning from the Eastern Ocean.²¹⁸ Its extent from north to south measures the same and its centre is Hastīśaila (Hastigiri), the Elephant-Hill and abode of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja (KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5; see figure 6.1). The KM(V) thus reiterates the mythical concept of cosmology often described in Purāṇic literature, which is also referred to in the Śaiva *Māhātmya* (see section 4.1). Moreover, the Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava text agree on the exact dimension of the region of Kāñcī: both texts indicate an area of 10 *yojanas* in diameter or five in radius and set the eastern border at the Bay of Bengal (see section 4.2). Additionally, the area of Satyavrataḥkṣetra corresponds to the historical region of Tondaimandalam, the region ruled by the Pallavas, in extent and position (see chapter 7 and figure 7.1 for details). A reference to the historical region is not mentioned in the text itself, only an intentional comparison shows the correspondence. The idea of Kanchi as linked with the historical region thus immersed into the mythical outlook of the text is one of the instances reflecting the allusions to local history that occur throughout the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* (see section 6.5).

The larger regional area is the most significant spatial frame of reference in the KM(V). It is primarily designated as Satyavrataḥkṣetra. This designation serves as the specific name for Kāñcīkṣetra, the area of Kāñcī, in the KM(V). The name Satyavrataḥkṣetra is explained as pointing to Viṣṇu being true to his vows at this place: in his boar-manifestation, Varāha, he keeps his promise to the earth (as goddess, Bhū) by rescuing her from the clutches of the lord of demons in hell. The place where Viṣṇu afterwards remains with Bhū is called Satyavrataḥkṣetra (KM(V) 2.43–82).²¹⁹ This designation has thus

218 On the conversion of the temporal length units into contemporary length units, see subsection 1.3.3.

219 Satyavrataḥkṣetra is also designated as Bhāskara[-kṣetra] ([the area] belonging to the sun), Vārāha[-kṣetra] ([the area] belonging to Varāha) and Nārasimha[-kṣetra] ([the area] belonging to Nārasimha) (KM(V) 2.42), which all allude

a distinct Vaiṣṇava framing and is almost exclusively used in the KM(V).²²⁰ Illustrative passages in the Māhātmya describe the area as inhabited by divine beings, who worship Viṣṇu; it is dotted with meritorious *tīrthas*, mountains, lakes, beautiful gardens, different kinds of trees, with various animals living there, and is utterly purifying and gives plenty of rewards for good deeds done there (KM(V) 3.80–83, 4.7–13).

The centre site of Satyavratākṣetra the hill Hastiśaila. In the Māhātmya it is understood to be an actual hill, said to have been formed from a heap of earth next to the place where Varāha digs himself out of hell and comes out to the surface of the earth after fighting the demon that tormented the earth (KM(V) ch. 2). This elevated surface resembling an anthill has the shape of a hill (KM(V) 2.50–52b). No name is given to it yet in the Varāha myth; this element is introduced in a different narrative and explained to be derived from flocks of elephants (*hasti*) and Gajendra (the king of elephants) living in the locality (KM(V) 3.54c–57b).²²¹ Narasiṃha takes his abode in a cave at the foot of the hill (KM(V) ch. 3) and Varadarāja is said to reside there on the Puṇya-koṭivimāna (KM(V) 17.79).²²² Hastiśaila is the standard reference point for

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- to myths recounted in the course of the KM(V). Satyavratākṣetra is called Bhāskara[-kṣetra] because it grants highest liberation. For this interpretation, Marie-Claude Porcher refers to notions from the Upaniṣads (1985, 30, 50, n. 8). The name Vārāha[-kṣetra] is derived from the boar residing in Satyavratākṣetra together with the earth as goddess in Kāñcī (KM(V) ch. 2). The designation Nārasimha[-kṣetra] points to Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha residing in Kāñcī (KM(V) ch. 3).
- 220 The KV mentions this designation for Kāñcikṣetra once when it characterises the area as Śākta, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava. The name is derived from the area being free from decay (*vināśarahitaṃ kṣetraṃ tasmāt satyavratāhvayam* || KV 1.58cd). In the KM(Ś), the term appears once (KM(Ś) 4.45) in the context of Satyavratatīrtha (Intiratīrttam) and the nearby located *śivaliṅga* Satyavrateśa (Satyanātasvāmi; KM(Ś) 4.35–153), where the term Satyavratākṣetra is interpreted within a Śaiva context and the area seems to be conceptually confined to the surroundings of the *tīrtha* and the *liṅga* in the eastern part of Kāñcī.
- 221 The elephant Gajendra is known from the Gajendramokṣa-story in which Viṣṇu manifests himself to save the elephant from the grip of the sea monster Makara and enables him to attain liberation (cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VIII, 2–4). In KM(V) 13.29–33, this story is summarised and set at the site of Aṣṭabhuja (Aṣṭapuṇḍra Perumāḷ) in Kanchi. The Śaiva Māhātmya also associates the name of Hastigiri with the Gajendramokṣa story (KM(Ś) 5.1–70; cf. subsection 3.3.1).
- 222 The pair of lizards (Taṅkapalli) is also located at Hastigiri. Their story of origin is told in chapter 31 of the KM(V). Like the Māhātmya's last chapter 32, it has the character of an appendix to the main part of the text (KM(V) chs. 1–30). Located in the first enclosure of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, the Taṅkapalli is one of the most popular sites for pilgrims visiting the temple. See Hüsken 2022 for a study of the lizards.

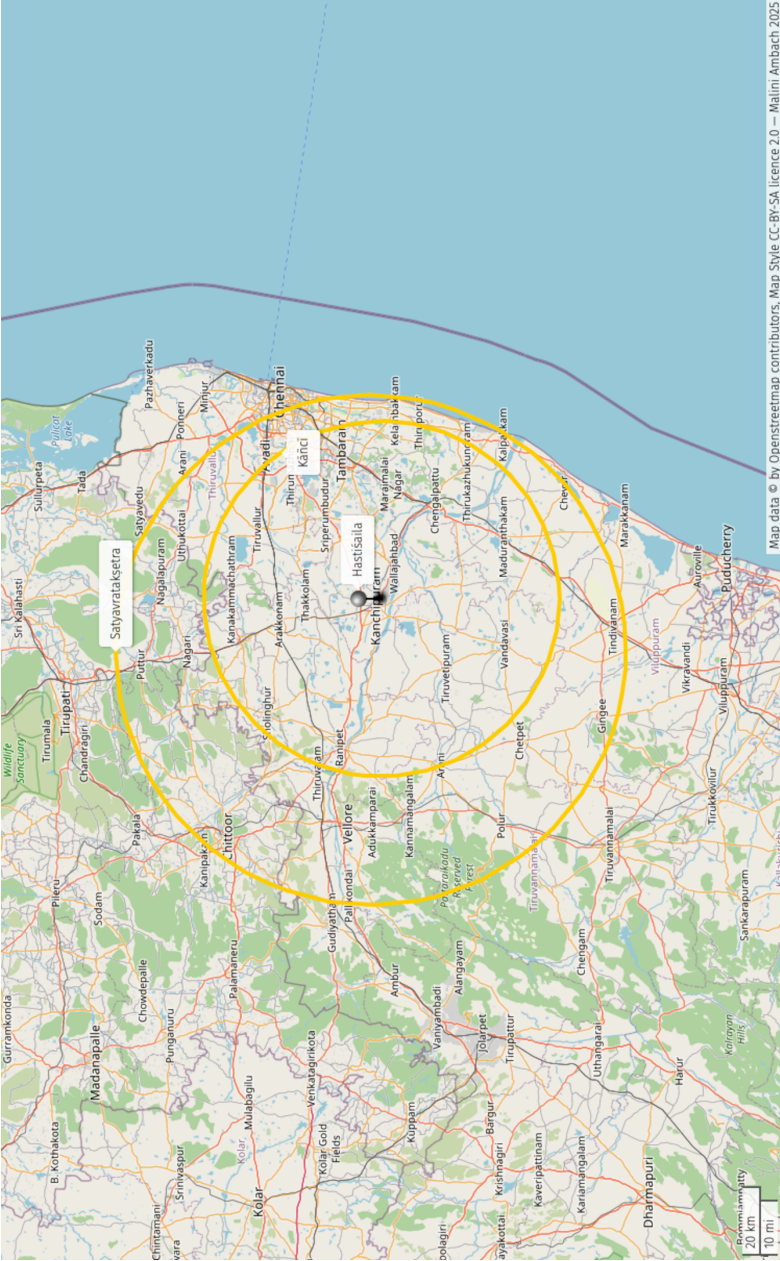


Fig. 6.1 Satyavratakeshtra and the city Kāñcī (both approximations, see subsection 1.3.3) according to the KM(V), with Hastisaila as centre.

localising sacred sites in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya and consequently the spatial focal point in the overall design of Kāñcī's sacred geography. In particular, the Narasiṃha narrative cycle detailing Varadarāja's origin (KM(V) ch. 3, 9–17) is spatially constructed with the hill as its focal point.

Varadarāja's Abode

Hastisāila physically represents Varadarāja's abode, and in this context it is worth exploring the details from the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* in comparison with the historical site with which Varadarāja's abode can be identified, the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple. At the temple, the innermost building with the *garbhagr̥ha* (sanctum sanctorum) housing Varadarāja is called Hastigiri and is actually perceived as a hill (Raman 1975, 44–45, 158–159). The sanctum sanctorum of the temple is elevated and found on the first floor. Below it, there is the shrine of Yōka Naracimma Perumāḷ at the ground floor level, said to be in the cave at the foot of the Elephant-Hill (Hastigiri). The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* details how Narasiṃha takes residence in the cave at the foot of the hill, guarding the entrance to the netherworld that Viṣṇu as boar had dug before (KM(V) 3.86–89b). On top of Hastigiri is the Puṇyakoṭivimāna, which is identified with the tower superstructure above the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. It is Varadarāja's chariot on which the god appears on Hastisāila and where he agrees to stay (KM(V) 4.15ab, 17.44–45b). Next to the hill, there is said to be the *tīrtha* called Anantasaras (Aṇantacaras;; the main temple tank; fourth enclosure). Chapter 28 of the Vaiṣṇava text briefly describes how Brahmā has Varadarāja's abode built by the divine constructor Viśvakarman according to the commands of Viṣṇu (KM(V) 28.1–8). Among others, the abode (*ālaya*) of Varadarāja is described to encompass three enclosures (*prākāras*) around Hastisāila, various brilliant images, gateway towers (*gopuras*), crystalline stairs, pavilions (*maṇḍapas*) adorned with gems and hundred columns, and the Puṇyakoṭivimāna of an unparalleled splendour on top of Hastisāila. This is the only passage in the KM(V), which refers to any particularities of temple architecture.

Compared to the depiction of Ekāmrānātha's abode from the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see pp. 101–106), the passage from the Vaiṣṇava text about Varadarāja's abode is less detailed. Like the KM(Ś), the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya considers only the architecture of the site regarded as most relevant to its design of Kāñcī's sacred landscape. This approach reinforces its connection to precisely this location, to Varadarāja's abode and the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple. Again, like the Śaiva text, the KM(V) illustrates an idealised notion of

a temple while mentioning several architectural elements that correspond to common forms of South Indian temple architecture from the twelfth/thirteenth century onwards, such as the *prākāras* and the *gopuras* (Branfoot 2017, 195).

At the same time, the text refers to some specific features of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple. Just as suggested by the text, there is a particular staircase called Tattvasopāna (Tattvasopāna) leading up to the first floor within Hastigiri.²²³ In addition, three *prākāras* are mentioned in the text, while we find four on site. The number of enclosures has grown over time, the second and third were added to the core complex in the second half of the eleventh century and in the first decade of the twelfth century (Raman 1975, 56). Accordingly, if we were to assume that the *Māhātmya* actually refers to the layout of the temple at a certain point in time—which seems probable—and that the word *prākāra* explicitly means a courtyard enclosed by a wall, we could derive here a reference to the layout of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple between the beginning of the twelfth century and the first half of the fourteenth century when the fourth *prākāra* came to be enclosed by a wall (Raman 1975, 56). During this period, the temple was considerably expanded, especially during the reign of the Chola King Kulottunga I (eleventh century), and it attained greater prominence by its association with the Śrīvaiṣṇava teacher Ramanuja (eleventh/twelfth century; Raman 1975, 60, 88; Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34, 137). A date for the text passage about Varadarāja’s abode cannot be derived from this one example, but it can give an impression as to what stage of development of the temple the authors or compilers of the *Māhātmya* may have had in mind. As we shall see in the analysis of the spatial concept laid out in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see section 6.5), the text indeed seems to trace a number of elements that can be associated with stages in the development of the city Kanchi and its religious landscape.²²⁴

While Satyavrataḥsetra is the primary space and serves as the overall frame of reference, there is also a distinct idea of *Kāñcī* as a city. It is said

223 For details on the interpretation and history of the architecture of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, see Raman 1975, 43–57, 147–161, and Nagaswamy 2011, 137–222.

224 The further narrative in chapter 28 (KM(V) 28.9–end) describes the process of making and consecrating three images (*pratimās*) of Varadarāja and gives details about the annual temple festival in the month of Vaiśākha (April/May) including which vehicle (*vāhana*) to use for Varadarāja’s procession and at what times during the festival. It would be worthwhile to analyse any congruences between the details from the *Māhātmya* and the ritual practices—and the architectural history—of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple elsewhere in more detail to follow up these aspects of the local anchoring of the KM(V).

to extend 7 *yojanas* (in diameter) around Hastiśaila (KM(V) 10.12c–10.13b; visualised in figure 6.1). Its origin is detailed in Varadarāja’s myth of origin (KM(V) chs. 10–11), when Brahmā prepares for an *aśvamedha*, the Vedic royal horse sacrifice, that he commissions in order to see Viṣṇu. Brahmā instructs the divine constructor Viśvakarman to build the city.²²⁵ It is called *Kāñcī*, which is understood as revered by Brahmā (*ka*), as Brahmā worships Viṣṇu here.²²⁶ In the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, we find the same derivation of the city’s name from Brahmā (KM(Ś) 3.95c–96), which agrees with the etymological explanation of the name *Kāñcī* that persists in the local oral traditions (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., February 2021).

Moreover, the Vaiṣṇava text elaborates on the beauty and glory of *Kāñcī* in details similar to those found in the KM(Ś). Both depictions are set in a mythical context and illustrate an idealised notion of the city. In the KM(V), an entire chapter (ch. 4) is dedicated to the glorification of *Kāñcī*. Understood as city, it is described in ornate words as utterly beautiful, with gardens full of different trees, prettified roads, houses with delicate architecture, abodes of deities (*devāyatanas*) with gateway towers (*gopuras*), full of animals and people of learning and good conduct and brimming with the sound of drums, and the recitation of the Vedas (KM(V) 4.20c–28). While the Śaiva *Māhātmya* conceptually considers *Kāñcī* an existing city, leaving out any idea about its origin (cf. section 4.2), the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya*, in contrast, stresses the building of the city. As Marie-Claude Porcher (1985, 34) notes, the narrative about Brahmā’s sacrifice that ends with Viṣṇu’s manifestation as Varadarāja (KM(V) chs. 9–17) forms the foundation myth of *Kāñcī* as the city and develops in parallel with the evolution of the sacrifice.²²⁷ As will

225 [Brahmā directs Viśvakarman:] *viśvakarman kuru kṣipraṃ purīm atra mahāvane* || KM(V) 10.12cd *saptayojanavistārāṃ samantād asya bhūbhṛtaḥ* | KM(V) 10.13ab.

A summary of the storyline from KM(V) chs. 10 and 11 is found in an earlier text segment on *Kāñcī*’s character (KM(V) 4.19–42b), which also refers to the construction of the city: [Nārada tells:] *tatra kāñcī vikhyatā purī puṇyavivardhanī* | *vidhātur aśvamedhārthe nirmītā viśvakarmaṇā* || KM(V) 4.19 *saptayojanavistārāṃ saptayojanam āyatā* | KM(V) 4.20ab.

226 [Nārada tells:] *ka iti brahmaṇo nāma tena tatrāñcīto hariḥ* || KM(V) 4.33cd *hayamedhena rājendra tasmāt kāñcī viśrutā* | KM(V) 4.34ab.

227 In the very last verse of the Varadarāja myth (KM(V) 17.86ab), the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* itself comments on this parallelism and summarises that “best of kings, in this way, the city *Kāñcī* was built by (the divine constructor) Viśvakarman and in this way the god (= Varadarāja) indeed manifested himself there in the middle of Vidhātṛ’s (Brahmā’s) northern altar (*uttaravedī*)” (*evam purī tatra nṛpendra kāñcī vinīrmitābhūt kila viśvakarmaṇā* | *vidhātṛyajñottaravaidimadyād devo* [?] *pi tatrāvīr abhūt kilaivam* || KM(V) 17.86).

be analysed in more details below in section 6.3, the attention to the evolutionary aspect in the interpretation of Kāñcī is exemplary of an underlying constructional characteristic in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

Besides, there is also a note on the geographical features of Kanchi. In the passage illustrating the glory of the city, seven rivers are listed that are said to flow through Kāñcī (KM(V) 4.29–31b): the Aśvā (identification uncertain), Mañjulā (identification uncertain), Kampā (Kampā; a now dried-up river; see pp. 240–241), Haridrā (Manjalneer Kalvai), Virajā (identification uncertain), Kṣīrā (Palar), and Vegavatī (Vegavathi, a northern sidearm of the Palar river).²²⁸ A similar spatial localisation is found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which equally lists seven rivers traversing through Kāñcī's area (cf. section 4.2). In both texts, the rivers as a set seem to be used to frame Kāñcī spatially, but little attention is paid to them in the course of the text. The Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* even explicitly indicates rivers among the sacred sites to be included in the description of Satyavrataḥṣetra (KM(V) 2.12–14b; see above) and yet only narrates the origin of a few. Among the seven above-listed rivers, the Vegavatī, characterised as aquatic form of Brahmā's wife Sarasvatī (KM(V) chs. 14–15), is certainly the most prominent.²²⁹ Its story of origin, linked to the origin of Viṣṇu as Yathoktakārī, forms an integral part in the evolution of Varadarāja's myth. Overall, it seems that rivers are part of the spatial conception of Kāñcī and are therefore considered in a certain number. The Vegavatī, the river that crosses the city in its centre, is the only one to which a specific role and a myth is attributed.

228 [Nārada says:] *nadyaḥ prasannā vimalās svacchodās śubhravālukāḥ | sukhāvagāhās subhagās supuṇyās surasevitāḥ | | KM(V) 4.29 vahanti tatra rājendra majjanān muktidāyakāḥ | aśvā ca vaṃjulā kampā haridrā virajā tathā | | KM(V) 4.30 kṣīrā vegavatīty etās sapta nadyo [']tipuṇyadāḥ | KM(V) 4.31ab.*

The printed edition from 1907 reads *vaṃjulā* in 4.30c, whereas the paper manuscript from the French Institute of Pondicherry reads *mañjulā*. The latter reading agrees with the spelling of presumably the same water body found in KM(V) ch. 30 in the 1907 edition (see n. 229) and is therefore adopted here.

229 Apart from the Vegavatī, the following rivers are featured in the myths of the *Māhātmya*: the Kampā as part of Ekāmranātha's myth (KM(V) ch. 25); the Mañjulā, linked to Śiva Kailāsanāyaka, and the Virajā, connected to Viṣṇu as Vaikuṇṭhanāyaka (both KM(V) ch. 30); as well as the Kṣīrā, introduced in the episode on Śiva Vṛṣabheśa (KM(V) ch. 32).

6.3 A Centralised and Evolutionary Design

As mentioned above, the unfolding of myths sets the course of the text. The *Māhātmya* is mainly arranged in four narrative cycles, presided over by Viṣṇu's manifestations (*avatāras*) Varāha (KM(V) ch. 2), Narasiṃha (chs. 3, 9–17), Vāmana (chs. 18–28), and Kṛṣṇa (ch. 29) respectively. In the transition between these larger narratives, there is both a spatial shift of the venues in Kāñcī and a temporal one. The arrangement of the narrative cycles reflects a chronological sequence: the first three larger mythologies are set in the Kṛtayuga (chs. 2, 3, 9–17, 18–28), the first world age according to Hindu cosmology; the last and fourth circle is set in the later Dvāparayuga (ch. 29); the last story about one of Viṣṇu's manifestations in Kāñcī is set in the even later Kaliyuga (KM(V) ch. 30).²³⁰

Since the place Kāñcī is the central topic of the text, we can observe its development also in the temporal sphere. In the myths preceding Varadarāja's myth, that is, in the myths of Varāha and Narasiṃha (KM(V) chs. 2 and 3), Kāñcī does not yet exist as a city. Instead, a forest of 10 *yojanas* extends around Hastiśaila in Satyavratākṣetra (KM(V) 3.57c–58b) on the spot where the city will later be built, during the preparations for Brahmā's sacrifice. All the sacred places introduced before the KM(V) details the building of the city, are hence first conceived to be part of a non-urban landscape. Similarly, the third narrative cycle refers to the existing city (KM(V) 19.57), which is structurally and conceptually set after the preceding narrative cycle in which Kāñcī was built. In the same way, the area has again turned into a forest populated by animals and full of trees at the beginning of the fourth narrative cycle, which is set in a later era than the previous ones. This narrative tells of the king Janamejaya, who restores the city and abodes of the gods before he performs a sacrifice there (KM(V) 29.1c–5).

Similarly, the nature of Hastiśaila changes over the course of the text: its transformation to Varadarāja's abode begins with Viṣṇu as boar Varāha who lifts up the ground there to form a hill (KM(V) ch. 2). Later on, Viṣṇu as man-lion pursues the demons from the army of Hiranyakaśipu up to the hill where they disappear into the netherworlds (KM(V) ch. 3). In a local Narasiṃha form, Viṣṇu therefore resides in a cave at the foot of Hastiśaila to guard that entry to hell (KM(V) chs. 10 and 12). Eventually, Varadarāja manifests himself at the top of the hill and agrees to permanently stay there

230 For details on the structure of the narratives in the KM(V), see subsection 3.3.3 and Porcher 1985.

(KM(V) ch. 16). Drawing on this example, we can detect an inseparable relationship between the mythical events of the narratives and the way the text perceives the nature of the sacred space and the sacred places. This is a relation which is not found to the same extent in the other two Māhātmyas. In the Vaiṣṇava text, sacred space seems to be conceived through and for the narratives rather than based on the geo-spatial dimensions of the sacred landscape of the city, as is the case in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the unfolding of narratives reflects a prospective approach in the description of the sacred places in the KM(V). The myths—in particular the narrative cycles—follow along a spatial and temporal axis, in which first the events leading to the origin of a sacred site, the appearance of the resident deity, are told before the place is located. Accordingly, the sacred place does not exist conceptually before the story of its origin is laid out in the text and therefore its location cannot be indicated right at the beginning of the narrative.²³¹ For example, the origin of Viṣṇu as Dipaparakāṣa (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāl) is detailed in the second half of chapter 12 (12.40/61–84) in the KM(V). His appearance is stated in KM(V) 12.79, while his name and location—west of Hastiśaila—are only stated in the last verses of the chapter (KM(V) 12.83–84) to describe where Dipaparakāṣa takes his abode in Kāñcī. Accordingly, the story can only be attached to a place at the very end of the narrative describing its origin because it is conceptually not considered to exist before, that is, at the beginning of the story. With this approach, in which places are brought into existence through mythology, the KM(V) contrasts the retrospective perspective found in both the Śaiva Māhātmya and the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* and reflects the significance of the mythology for the layout of space in the text.

For the four main narrative cycles, which follow the myths of the four *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, areas within Kāñcī are defined as spatial frames for the events taking place in the narratives. They are conceived as sacrificial arenas (*yajñasālās*) for three Vedic sacrifices.²³² In the course of the text, the spatial focus shifts from one area to the next, from the southeast

231 The chapters describing sacred water bodies in Kāñcī (KM(V) chs. 5–8) are differently structured and first introduce the location of a site before presenting the narrative of its origin. This retrospective approach agrees with the one followed in the KM(Ś) and KV and presupposes existing places whose location can therefore be specified before the story of its origin is told.

232 In her analysis, Marie-Claude Porcher interprets the settings in the KM(V) in their entirety as an interplay of cosmological divisions, space, and ritual correspondences (1985, 41–49).

to the northwest. Each of these spaces has a focal point that serves as reference point to locate the sacred places that are mapped in the corresponding area. In this spatial aspect, the mythology-oriented approach to space in the Vaiṣṇava text appears to be combined with reflections of the urban development of Kanchi in history (see section 6.5). Moreover, the particular arrangement of the outlined areas around focal points reflects the historically conditioned polycentric religious landscape of Kanchi—in this case focusing on the Vaiṣṇava sites.

Three spaces are laid out in the space of Kāñcī in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya. The first one serves as spatial frame for Varadarāja's myth (KM(V) chs. 9–17). Its focal point is Hastiśaila. The hill with a cave (*bila*) at its foot orients Varadarāja's myth towards the southeastern part of Kanchi and the Varatarāja Perumāl temple in particular. This area is known today as Vishnu-Kanchi (see section 2.3 and figure 2.2 for details). The sacred places that are introduced in the first two narrative cycles of the Māhātmya are all located in reference to Hastiśaila. These are predominantly Vaiṣṇava sites—and *tīrthas*—and are located in the surroundings of Varadarāja (see figure 6.3).²³³

With the Māhātmya's narrative cycle linked to Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Vāmana (KM(V) chs. 18–28), the geo-spatial setting shifts within Satyavratākṣetra to the northwest, to the central and northwestern part of Kanchi (KM(V) 23.27–29). Like the space around Hastiśaila, there is a cave where the focal point is placed. It is located close to Trivikrama (Ulakaḷanta Perumāl). Vāmana in the form of a snake is said to have opened it up as a passage from the netherworlds and since abides at its door (KM(V) 20.5, 96cd). The cave's entrance (*dvāra*) and the entire area are referred to as Kāmakoṣṭha (KM(V) 20.97cd, 23.29ab) and thus bears the same designation that the *Kāmākṣī-vilāsa* assigns to the area in the centre of Kanchi that is under the reign of Kāmākṣī (see subsection 5.3.3; on the name, see n. 84). Given its position in the central and northwestern part of the city, which also includes Ekāmrānātha's abode, the space defined as Kāmakoṣṭha in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcī-māhātmya* certainly overlaps spatially to some extent with Kāmākṣī's territory from the KV, but also with the realm of Ekāmrānātha in the latter text (cf. figure 5.11). The KM(V) incidentally also mentions Kāmakoṣṭha as the place where Kāmākṣī comes to live. Primarily, though, the close connection is drawn to other Vaiṣṇava myths presided over by Vāmana. The

233 Only a few sacred places mentioned in the myth lie further away (see subsection 6.4.3). Their comparative remoteness is reflected in the text by an indication of their distance from Hastiśaila.

places mapped in the Vāmana narrative cycle are primarily Viṣṇu's abodes (and *tīrthas*) and are located in the surroundings of Trivikrama (Ulakaḷanta Perumāl), that is, in the northwestern part of Kanchi.

Additionally, the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava version of the intertwined myth of Śiva as Ekāmrānātha (Ēkāmparanātar) and the goddess Kāmākṣī (Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ) also evolves in Kāmakoṣṭha (KM(V) chs. 23–25). Interestingly, the chapter of the KM(V) that ends the introduction of Viṣṇu's manifestations in the Māhātmya characterises Kāmakoṣṭha as a space where both Viṣṇu *and* Śiva are worshipped in Kāñcī (KM(V) 30.17-19).²³⁴ Considering the aspect of mythology, this statement and the Vaiṣṇava-infused inclusion of Ekāmrānātha's and Kāmākṣī's myths acknowledge the relevance of both deities in the corpus of local mythologies on Kanchi. Moreover, it can be read as a spatial reflection of the Śaiva and Śākta traditions represented by the prominent Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temples in the religious landscape of Kanchi. These sites are located in the very area defined as Kāmakoṣṭha in the KM(V). Besides, the association of this area in Kanchi's northwest with Śiva discloses is similar to the notion of the Śaiva domain in the city expressed by the contemporary designation Shiva-Kanchi.²³⁵

Still within Kāñcī but further west of Kāmakoṣṭha, the KM(V) identifies another sacrificial arena. It is designed for the myth presided over by Viṣṇu's manifestation Kṛṣṇa and is centred around Pāṇḍavadūta (Pāṇṭavātūta Perumāl; KM(V) ch. 29). This third and most western positioned space completes the spatial shift in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya from the southeast to the (north-)west.

There seems to be a gradation in terms of the size of the three spaces conceived as sacrificial arenas. This results from the inner-textual significance attached to the corresponding myths set in them. The sacrificial arena for Brahmā's *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) is the largest (KM(V) 10.48c–49b) given the text's focus on Varadarāja; Kāmakoṣṭha is smaller (KM(V) 20.2). For the arena in which Pāṇḍavadūta appears further west no extent is specified (KM(V) 29.49). It would be likely, though, given the lack of attention paid to this space, that it is conceptually conceived of as being smaller than Kāmakoṣṭha. Moreover, the dimensions of the spaces seem to be intended to emphasise the grandeur of the events described in the narratives rather

234 [Nārada tells:] *ito [']sti dakṣiṇe bhāge paṃcāsadyojane śubhe | kāmcīti samyag vikhyātā purī puṇyavivardhanī || KM(V) 30.17 tatrāsti paramaṇ sthānaṃ puṇyadaṃ pāpanāśanam | kāmakoṣṭham iti khyātaṃ sarvābhīṣṭapradam nṛṇām || KM(V) 30.18 viṣṇuṃ vā tatra rudraṃ vā saṃpūjya vidhivan narāḥ | prāpnuvanti hi sarvārthān kṣīpram eva na saṃśayaḥ || KM(V) 30.19.*

235 On Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi, see sections 2.3 and 5.4.

than to reflect a geography-based interpretation. Brahmā's *yajñasālā*, as mapped in the KM(V), would cover an area extending circa 18 kilometres (5 *krośa*) from east to west and circa 7 kilometres (1 *gavyūti*; KM(V) 10.48cd) in the north-south direction. This neither marks the area in which the sacred sites mentioned in Varadarāja's myth are located—Kanchi's southeast, plus some sites located up to circa 90 kilometres to the west (cf. figures 6.3 and 6.7)—nor does seem to reflect another deliberate modelling of the scaling.

A more precise geography-oriented dimensionality thus appears to be less important in the design of the spaces within Kāñcī. One reason for this detachment from geographical conditions may lie in the imagined transience, which is connected with the aspect of evolution. Within the temporal setting of the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya, the spaces conceived as sacrificial arenas are temporarily constructed for a specific purpose in the narratives happening in mythical times and do not seem to be of lasting nature. Accordingly, the previously installed sites—and even the city of Kāñcī—are to be rediscovered when king Janamejaya comes to Kāñcī in the following era. In this regard, the understanding of the spaces within Kāñcī in the KM(V) is quite different from that of the other two texts. In those—particularly in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*—the defined spaces are interpreted as persistent and constructed as detached from the temporality of the narratives. In the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya only Satyavrataṣṭra is considered to be permanent. This understanding may be grounded in the area's modelling on the historical region Tondaimandalam, the area of the Pallava kings ruling from Kanchi (see section 6.2). It is, thus, not an imagined, mythical space, but an allusion to an historical spatial concept. This characteristic may explain the significance assigned to Satyavrataṣṭra in the Māhātmya and strengthens the notion of a lasting and general Vaiṣṇava nature of Kāñcī and its region expressed in the text.

Both structurally and geo-spatially, the narrative cycles in the KM(V) display a design that is oriented towards the focal point of the space they are set in. They have an ascending development in terms of dramaturgy and each builds towards a particular manifestation of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī. As the finale, Varāha, Varadarāja, Trivikrama, or Pāṇḍavadūta manifest themselves and stay in Kāñcī where the orientation point of "their" narrative cycle is located. The first two abide at Hastiśaila and Trivikrama near the cave at Kāmakoṣṭha. Pāṇḍavadūta is the central (and only) manifestation in the

fourth cycle.²³⁶ The latter seem to follow the same basic structural pattern as the previous narrative cycles but in a greatly simplified version so that no separate focal point is defined. With Varāha conceptually attached to Varadarāja's myth, it is the three other Viṣṇus who are structurally attributed greater significance in the text's concept of evolving importance within each narrative cycle. The other manifestations of Viṣṇu are unmistakably linked to the three main ones through the myths. They are conceptualised as their harbingers and of subordinate relevance. Accordingly, the large-scale structuring into narrative cycles focused on Varadarāja, Trivikrama, and Pāṇḍavadūta, with interspersed episodes about the other Viṣṇus, creates a hierarchy of Viṣṇu's manifestations in Kāñcī, the most important among them all being Varadarāja.

In terms of spatiality, the inherent evolution in the narratives and the gradation of significance translates into a concentric arrangement with regard to the Viṣṇus that are introduced in one narrative cycle. While the most significant form is at the centre, all other manifestations of Viṣṇu that appear in the course of the same larger narrative are located around the respective focal point and the highlighted form of Viṣṇu in the same space. Similar to the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* and its descriptions of Varadarāja's, Ekāmra-nātha's, and Kāmākṣī's territories, first the sacred places in the surroundings are mapped before the spatial focus and plot shift to the centre site of the space and the deity residing there. Unlike the KV, though, the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* stresses the concentric concept through statements on the location of the Viṣṇus, the sacred water bodies, and many of the other sacred sites mentioned in one narrative cycle. While the location references in the KM(V) remain general throughout and only indicate the direction, but not the distance to the reference site, they refer to the focal point of the space to which the site belongs in terms of space and narrative. For example, the sacred places mentioned in the myth that aims at Varadarāja's origin are located with the reference to Hastīśaila. When a site is not associated with a specific space, a focal point of another space is used to indicate its location. For example, Viṣṇu called Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka (KM(V) ch. 30), for whose narrative no space is outlined, is located in relation to Hastīśaila as well. Overall, the spatial conception in the KM(V) is to a high degree determined by the narrative structure, delineating concentric arrangements of Viṣṇu's abodes and selectively highlighting forms of Viṣṇu which are attributed a greater

236 For Varāha's myth (KM(V) ch. 2), no spatial setting is outlined, but Hastīśaila—physically existing as a hill but not yet named—is constructed as an orientation reference.

significance and found at the constructed focal points. These elements structure the relations of Viṣṇu's manifestations in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya and connect mythology to space.

6.4 Sacred Places and Spatial Syntax

In interaction with the shift of the spatial focus, another element determines the mapping of the sacred places in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya. This is a set of eighteen sacred water bodies and eighteen abodes of Viṣṇu located in Kāñcī.²³⁷ The text initially separates the two groups structurally by describing the origin of the *tīrthas* separately in self-contained stories in the *tīrtha*-chapters (KM(V) chs. 5–8; see subsection 6.4.2). The abodes of Viṣṇu are introduced both before in the initial chapters and after in the main part of the text (KM(V) chs. 2–3, 9–30). However, many of the *tīrthas* are also mentioned in the myths about Viṣṇu's manifestations, since they are part of their story lines. Additionally, the *tīrtha*-chapters locate both sacred water bodies and abodes of Viṣṇu further away from Kanchi, but still situated in the space defined as Satyavrataṣetra. These do not seem to count among the eighteen *tīrthas* nor among Viṣṇu's eighteen dwelling places, although some of them are revisited in the narrative cycles. These will be dealt with below separately from the sets of eighteen Viṣṇus and *tīrthas* (see subsection 6.4.3).

The sacred places in each group of eighteen are linked to each other by their common character. Viṣṇu's abodes and sacred water bodies are presented as the primary characteristics of Kāñcī's sacred landscape (see figure 6.2). In a summarising statement at the end of the main part, the KM(V) itself states to have described eighteen sites of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī (KM(V) 30.73²³⁸). Similarly, eighteen *tīrthas* in Kāñcī are noted to have been introduced in the *tīrtha*-chapters (KM(V) 8.39²³⁹). As sets of sites, they define what the text considers to constitute Kāñcī. More precisely, it is above all the group of Viṣṇus that is decisive. In the words of Anne Feldhaus, a set of places that are connected to each other form a region that is thought of

237 See the appendix for the sites mentioned in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

238 [Nārada states:] *evam aṣṭādaśasthānamāhātmyaṃ śārṅgadhanvanaḥ | kāmcyām satyavrataṣetre kathitaṃ te mayā nṛpa* || KM(V) 30.73.

239 [Nārada tells:] *evam etāni tīrthāni kāmcyām uktāni mukhyataḥ | śreṣṭhāni tatra tīrthānām etāny aṣṭādaśaiva hi* || KM(V) 8.39.

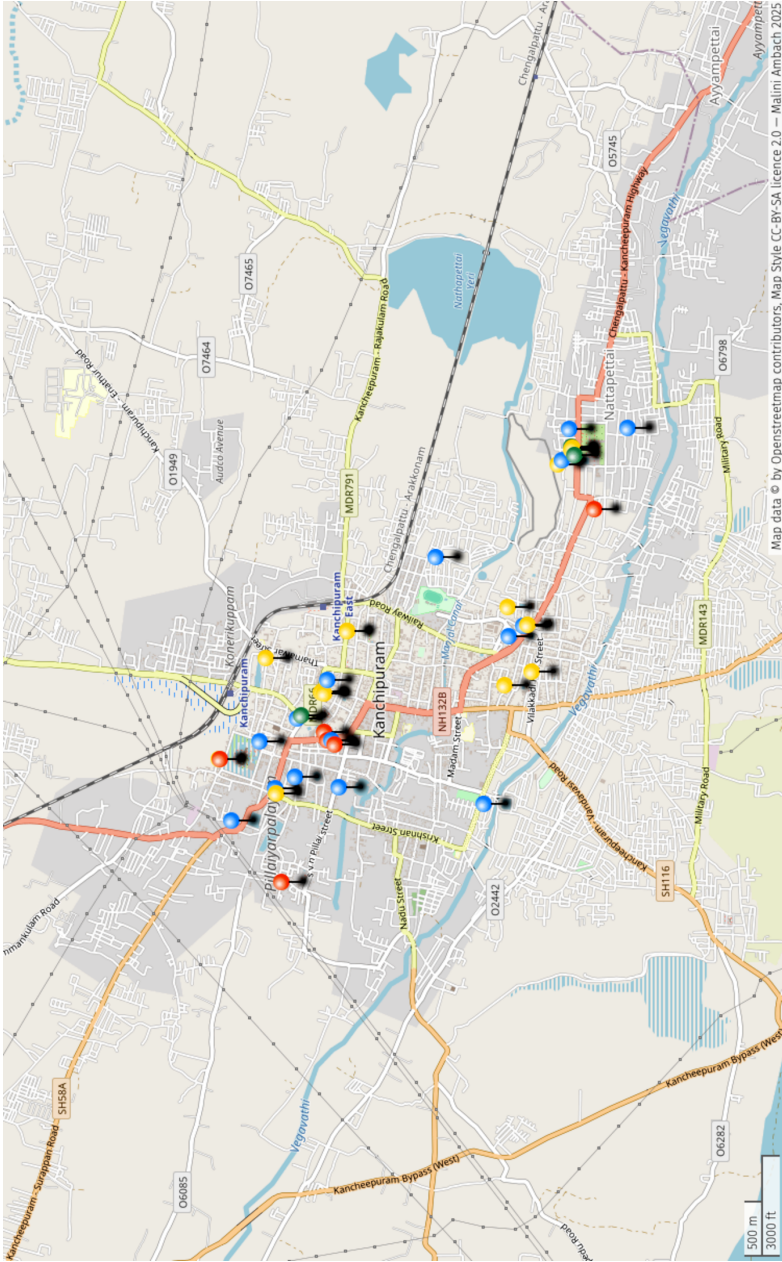


Fig. 6.2 Locations of the sacred places in Kanchi in the KM(V). Vaiṣṇava places are marked in yellow, śivaliṅgas—orange, Goddesses—green, tīrthas—blue.

as a coherent territory and given significance and identity (2003, 5). Applied to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, such a region can be discovered in the explicit, even numerically determined, group of Viṣṇu. The *Māhātmya* considers Kāñcī through them, and their existence consequently defines the text's conception of Kāñcī as Vaiṣṇava. In this more overarching context, I consider the identification of Kāñcī as a place of Viṣṇu as primary and its spatial aspect as subordinate. Conceptually as space, Satyavrataṣṭra is more relevant and transfers the perceived Vaiṣṇava nature of the region belonging to Kāñcī into the spatial dimension.

In parallel to the focus on Viṣṇu's places and *tīrthas*, and the origin of Varadarāja (previewed in KM(V) 5.1–7b), the *Māhātmya* indicates another, less pronounced approach to Kāñcī's sacred geography. It is stated in the first-layer frame-story when the sages gathered in the Naimiśāraṇya, requesting to hear about the power of Satyavrataṣṭra and the sacred places located therein, namely Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva places, *tīrthas*, lakes, and rivers (KM(V) 2.12–14b; see n. 216). This broader concept supplements the Viṣṇu-oriented focus to present a more comprehensive perspective on Kāñcī's sacred geography. Nevertheless, the KM(V) largely disregards places of Śiva, Devī, or Gaṇeśa. It is thus more restricted in its consideration of different categories of sacred places than the other two *Māhātmyas*.

6.4.1 Eighteen Viṣṇu

Among the eighteen abodes of Viṣṇu in Satyavrataṣṭra, some can be grouped together based on the narrative structure and thus their location one of the areas outlined in Kāñcī. There is one set located in Kanchi's southeast, another one in the centre and northwest of the city, and two Viṣṇus that appear independently. In addition, a few Vaiṣṇava sites are structurally highlighted. These are Varadarāja and Varāha, Trivikrama, and Pāṇḍavadūta as the manifestations towards whose appearance the narrative cycles are oriented. They are the same ones associated with the spatial focal points of the different spaces laid out in Kāñcī (see section 6.3).

In a passage in the third narrative cycle (KM(V) ch. 29), sixteen of Viṣṇu's sites in Kāñcī are listed. The story speaks of king Janamejaya, who wishes to see Kṛṣṇa and is advised to go to Kāñcī to perform a sacrifice there. This narrative is set in a later era (*Dvāparayuga*) than the preceding narrative cycles and can therefore look back at sites and events that happened in earlier times, that is, to what is narrated in preceding chapters of the text. Thus, we are presented with a nearly complete list of the Viṣṇus that the Vaiṣṇava

Māhātmya situates in Kāñcī. At the point of time when the narrative is set, the city of Kāñcī has turned into a forest again and the “old” places need to be rediscovered and restored. The corresponding passage reads:

[Nārada narrates to king Ambarīṣa about king Janamejaya entering Kāñcī:]

There he saw the city of Kāñcī, which increases merit, which is crowded with various groups of game, filled with different trees, resounding with various birds, endowed with different *tīrthas*, the divine city that has turned into a forest, covered with withered abodes of the gods.

He saw Hari, the lord of gods, there at Hastigiri (= Varadarāja), Narasiṃha in the cave, and Varāha at the Śeṣa-pond and bowed [to them]. Seeing the divine places of Śārṅgin (= Viṣṇu) here and there, he went [to them] together with the sages led by Vaiśampāyana. The king saw the god Yathoktakārī, and Hari [as] Aṣṭabhuja, Dīpākāra, Nṛsiṃha, and also Hari as Śārṅgadhara; at Kāmakoṣṭha, [he saw] Vāmana, who grants all desires at the entrance of the cave, Śeṣākāra, Sudhākāra, Meghākāra, and Trivikrama, Pravālavarna, Hemābha, Candrakhaṇḍa, and Hara²⁴⁰ (Śiva) residing at the foot of the single mango tree (= Ekāmranātha) together with Kāmākṣī, bowed [to them] all with devotion, and became pleased in his mind. (KM(V) 29.38–45b)²⁴¹

240 The 1907 printed edition of the KM(V) reads *harim*, indicating Viṣṇu (see n. 241), whereas the paper manuscript from the French Institute of Pondicherry reads instead *haram*, that is, Śiva. The latter variant seems to be more plausible in this context, since the half-verse 29.44cd refers to Śiva as Ekāmranātha (lit. the lord of the single mango tree). Therefore I have translated it according to the reading of the paper manuscript.

241 [Nārada narrates to king Ambarīṣa:] *tatra kāñcīpurīm dṛṣṭvā purīm puṇya-vivardhanīm | nānāṃrgagaṇākīrṇām nānāvṛkṣasamākulām || KM(V) 29.38 nānāśakunisamghuṣṭām nānātīrthasamanvitām | vanībhūtām purīm divyāṃ jīrṇair devālayair yutām || KM(V) 29.39 nanaṃda dṛṣṭvā deveśaṃ tatra hastigirau harim | guhāyāṃ narasihmañ ca varāhaṃ śeṣapalvale || KM(V) 29.40 paśyan sthānāni divyāni tatra tatra ca śārṅgiṇaḥ | cacāra sahito viprair vaiśampāyanapūrvakaiḥ || KM(V) 29.41 yathoktakāriṇaṃ devaṃ tathaiṅvāṣṭabhujaṃ harim | dīpākāraṃ nṛsihmaṃ ca tathā śārṅgadharaṃ harim || KM(V) 29.42 kāmakoṣṭhe biladvāre vāmanaṃ sarvakāmadam | śeṣākāraṃ sudhākāraṃ meghākāraṃ trivikramam || KM(V) 29.43 pravālavarnaṃ hemābhaṃ candrakhaṇḍaṃ ca pāṛthivaḥ | dṛṣṭvā caikamramūlasthaṃ kāmākṣyā sahitaṃ harim || KM(V) 29.44 praṇāmya bhaktyā tān sarvān babhūva pṛitimānasaḥ | KM(V) 29.45ab.*

The passage mentions the sacred sites that are conceptually considered to characterise Kāñcī's sacred space. Owing to the Vaiṣṇava perspective of the KM(V), Viṣṇus are clearly in focus. Altogether sixteen of them are said to be present in Kāñcī, as well as Śiva as Ekāmranātha, together with Kāmākṣī. With the exception of Varadarāja, who is named first in the list as the most important site, the deities are arranged in the sequence of their appearance in the text. Accordingly, the arrangement reflects the spatial settings that go hand in hand with the structural outline of the text. Even more so, the sequence follows the chronology of the successive narrative cycles. The list therefore leaves out those manifestations of Viṣṇu that are still to appear in the remaining course of the main part, that is, in KM(V) chapters 29 and 30.

The first seven of Viṣṇu's manifestations given in the list are introduced in the first two narrative cycles (presiding deities: Varāha and Narasiṃha). These are—in the order of appearance in the text—Varāha (Varākar Perumāl; fourth *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple); Narasiṃha (Yōka Naracimma Perumāl; second *prākāra*); Śārṅgapāṇi (identification uncertain); Nṛsiṃha (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāl); Dīpaprakāśa (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāl); Aṣṭabhujā (Aṣṭapuja Perumāl); Yathoktakārī (Yatōktakārī Perumāl); and Varada (Varatarāja Perumāl).²⁴²

The identification of the Viṣṇus in this subgroup with historical sites in Kanchi is largely unambiguous. The names from the KM(V) correspond to the modern—Sanskrit(-ised)—designations of the deities in the temples.²⁴³ Additionally, the directions given in the Māhātmya in relation to Hastiśaila are specific enough to identify the sites among the around thirty-five Vaiṣṇava sites in Kanchi. The Viṣṇus are linked to each other by their location in the southeastern part of Kanchi. This corresponds to the focal

The spelling of *narasihmañ* in 29.40c and *nṛsihmaṇ* in 29.42c is a result of a particular orthography followed in the printed edition of the KM(V). In the translation, I have adapted the normalised spelling Narasiṃha and Nṛsiṃha.

242 The designations of Viṣṇu's manifestations are given as they are most frequently used throughout the Māhātmya and may thus differ insignificantly from the names mentioned in the passage quoted above (cf. n. 241).

243 The only one that I have not been able to identify so far is Viṣṇu as Śārṅgapāṇi (the one [holding] the bow in the hand). Whereas Dīpaprakāśa (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāl, its contemporary Sanskrit(-ised) name is Dīpaprakāśa), Aṣṭabhujā, and Yathoktakārī bear designations that point to specific local forms of Viṣṇu, the name Śārṅgapāṇi is rather general. In iconography, the bow is at times displayed as one of Viṣṇu's attributes. In particular, the *avatāra* Rāma is often depicted with a bow (Basham 1959, 303). However, this connection does not provide further hints, as there are no Viṣṇu temples in the direction indicated by the text (southwest of Hastigiri) in Kanchi that could be linked to Śārṅgapāṇi.

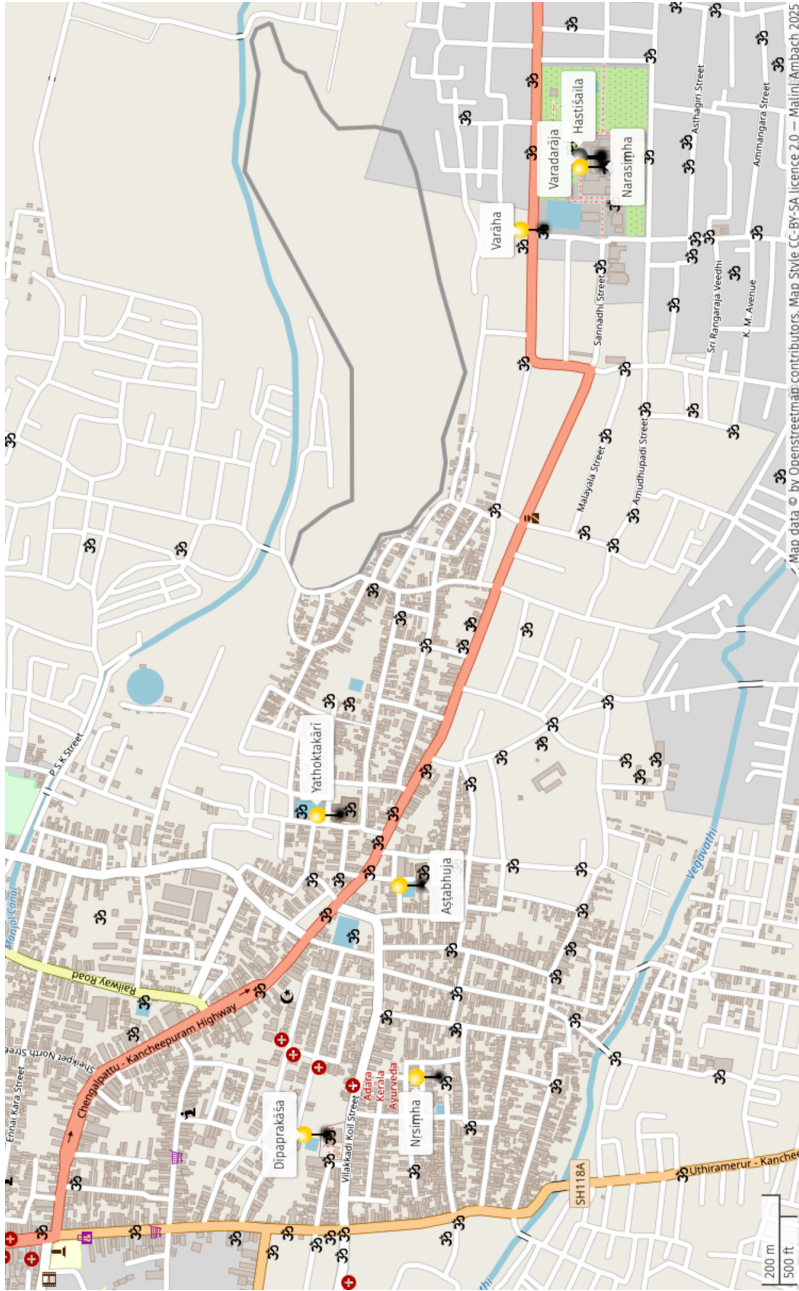


Fig. 6.3 Viṣṇus (yellow) in Kanchi's southeast in the KM(V), with Hastisāila (grey) as their reference point.



Fig. 6.4 Viṣṇu (yellow) in Kanchi's centre and northwest in the KM(V), with the *bilā* (cave; grey) at Kāmakōṭi as their reference point.

area of the space defined by the KM(V) as the sacrificial hall for Brahmā's *aśvamedha* and hence Varadarāja's myth (see figure 6.3.) This also applies to Varāha (KM(V) ch. 2) and Narasiṃha (KM(V) ch. 3), although their abodes are introduced independently of the Varadarāja myth. Both Varāha (Varākar Perumāl) and Narasiṃha (Yōka Naracimma Perumāl) are linked to Hastiśaila and Narasiṃha has a supporting role in that myth once his presence is discovered in the cave at Hastiśaila (from KM(V) 12.12 onwards).

Since they are a part of the larger narrative that aims at Varadarāja's manifestation, Viṣṇu's forms of Śārṅgapāṇi, Dīpaprakāśa, Nṛsiṃha, Aṣṭabhujā, Yathoktakārī, and Varadarāja are in particular linked to each other.²⁴⁴ The first five Viṣṇus are the harbingers of Varadarāja as they pave the way for the latter. As culmination of the larger narrative, Varadarāja is central among them. The text structurally highlights this arrangement by locating the five Viṣṇus in relation to Hastiśaila and thus Varadarāja. In the oral tradition, Viḷakkoḷi Perumāl, Aṣṭapuja Perumāl, and Yatōktakārī Perumāl are considered as the older brothers of Varadarāja Perumāl and their relationship is ritually negotiated during processions of these temples (Hüsken 2025). This notion not only indicates their special connection with Varadarāja but also reflects the chronology of the KM(V), in which Varadarāja appears last.

Similar to Viṣṇu's manifestations linked to Varadarāja and Hastiśaila, the above-cited passage on sacred places in Kāñcī indicates another subset of eight Viṣṇus. These are located in the space called Kāmakoṣṭha in the KM(V) and introduced in the narrative cycle presided over by Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Vāmana. In the order of their appearance, these are Vāmana in a

244 Apart from Varadarāja, each of these manifestations appears in order to remove a particular obstacle that threatens the successful completion of Brahmā's sacrifice. They have their own stories of origin, which are, though, part of the larger narrative. Śārṅgapāṇi supports the gods in their fight against the demons, who intent to disturb Brahmā's sacrifice (KM(V) ch. 11); Nṛsiṃha chases the demons out of Kāñcī in the meantime (KM(V) ch. 12); Dīpaprakāśa appears to light up Kāñcī, which has been plunged into darkness (KM(V) ch. 12); Aṣṭabhujā subdues Śiva's manifestation as Śarabheśa (KM(V) ch. 13); and Yathoktakārī stops Brahmā's wife Sarasvatī in aquatic form, who arrives to drown her husband's sacrifice (KM(V) chs. 14–15). Nṛsiṃha (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāl) is said to emerge from Narasiṃha (Yōka Naracimma Perumāl), who took his abode in the cave at Hastiśaila in the local version of the Purāṇic story on Narasiṃha fighting the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu (KM(V) ch. 3; cf. Soifer 1991 for different versions of the narrative). Narasiṃha comes out the cave when the demons attempt to reach hell through it and chases them around before he then settles as Nṛsiṃha in Kāñcī.

local form (identification uncertain²⁴⁵); Śeṣākṛti (Viṣṇu depicted as a snake; in the porch (*ardhamanḍapa*) of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple); Meghākṛti (Kārakattu Perumāḷ; outer *prākāra*, south of the main shrine); Trivikrama (Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ; in the sanctum sanctorum); Sudhākāra (identification uncertain); Pravālavarna (Pavaḷavaṇṇa Perumāḷ); Hemābha (identification uncertain); and Candrakhaṇḍa (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ; first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple).

The abodes of these Viṣṇus are all found in the northwestern and central part of Kanchi, identified as Kāmakoṣṭha in the KM(V) (see figure 6.4). In this area, some forms of Viṣṇu are further grouped together by the partly nested narratives. Vāmana, Śeṣākṛti, and Meghākṛti appear in the narrative about the demon Bali, who carries out an *aśvamedha* in order to see Viṣṇu in Kāñcī. They help to ensure the successful completion of the sacrifice, with Trivikrama emerging at the culmination of that sacrifice.²⁴⁶ The narrative motif of Bali is known from the Purāṇic literature as the standard myth about Viṣṇu's dwarf-incarnation Vāmana, who disguises himself as a dwarf-sized Brahmin to later grow into a giant form named Trivikrama and measure the universe in three steps (cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VIII, 15–22). The close relationship of the four forms of Viṣṇu on the narrative level is reflected in their spatial closeness. Trivikrama, Śeṣākṛti, and Meghākṛti—and presumably also Vāmana (see n. 245)—are all located in the same complex of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple. As one of the few references to specific features of temples in the KM(V), Trivikrama is explicitly described as facing west (KM(V) 20.71c–73), just as the image of the deity in the *garbhagrha* is oriented on site in the temple.

245 Maybe this is the dwarf found at the foot of the *mūlamūrti*, the main image in the sanctum sanctorum of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple. One might conflate Vāmana with Trivikrama, for Viṣṇu first takes on the dwarf-form before turning into the giant form of Trivikrama in the known Purāṇic narrative about Viṣṇu tricking the demon king Bali (cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VIII, 15–23). This transformation is also reflected in the localised version of the Vāmana myth found in the KM(V). Conceptually, though, Vāmana is different from Trivikrama. In the list of Viṣṇus in Kāñcī from the KM(V) quoted above, they are named separately (see n. 241) and Trivikrama's location is indicated separately in the passage describing his appearance in Kāñcī (KM(V) 20.71c–73, 20.93c–94). Although spatially close to each other, Vāmana is more closely connected with the cave Kāmakoṣṭha (KM(V) 19.77, 21.2, 23.29–30b, 24.1c–2b).

246 Vāmana acts as custodian of both Bali's endeavours and the cave around which Kāmakoṣṭha extends (from KM(V) ch. 18 onwards), Śeṣākṛti (Viṣṇu as a snake) guides Bali from the netherworlds to Kāñcī (KM(V) ch. 20) and Meghākṛti (Viṣṇu as clouds) brings rain when the gods dry up the area in an attempt to disturb Bali's sacrifice (KM(V) ch. 20).

The frame story in the narrative cycle set in Kāmakoṣṭha introduces three further manifestations of Viṣṇu (KM(V) chs. 18, 21–22). It deals with the sage Bhṛgu, who desires to know about the concept of *sattvaguṇa* (the quality of purity of the primordial matter *prakṛti*) and is promised this when he sees Viṣṇu as dwarf on earth. Keeping his word, Viṣṇu shows Bhṛgu his universal form, representing his threefold nature. This is expressed, among others things, by the fact that Viṣṇu becomes visible in three eras, in three colours, in three postures, and at three abodes (KM(V) 21.20–31b). In the first world age called Kṛtayuga Viṣṇu appears white, in the next era, Tretāyuga, he is red-coloured, and yellow in the following Dvāparayuga; accordingly, he is said to sit in lotus posture on the island of the blessed in the Kṛtayuga, reclining on his snake Śeṣa as a bed in the milk ocean in the Tretāyuga, and standing in his heaven Vaikuṅṭha in the Dvāparayuga.²⁴⁷ As more tangible representations, Viṣṇu manifests himself as Sudhākāra (Kṛtayuga; white), Pravālarvaṇa (Tretāyuga; coral) and Hemābha (Dvāparayuga; yellow/golden; all KM(V) ch. 21) in Kāñcī in Kāmakoṣṭha. These three are clearly connected as an expression of Viṣṇu's three-dimensionality.

In accordance with the referencing pattern in the KM(V), these Viṣṇus are located in relation to the cave at Kāmakoṣṭha. Pravālarvaṇa is said to be east of the cave whereas Sudhākāra is said to be very close to the cave to the south, and Hemābha north of it (KM(V) 21.65–66). The identification of Pravālarvaṇa with the Pavaḷavaṇṇa Perumāḷ temple is straightforward, given the correspondence in names. His contemporary Tamil designation also indicates his coral colour (Tamil *pavaḷam* means red coral, *vaṇṇam* colour (TL, s.v. *pavaḷam*, *vaṇṇam*)). The temple is located northeast of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, similar to the direction indicated in the KM(V).²⁴⁸

The other two non-dark coloured Viṣṇus and their abodes, though, can less clearly be identified with sites in Kanchi. The only other Vaiṣṇava temple in Kanchi that may be linked to a coloured appearance of Viṣṇu

247 The idea of associating Viṣṇu's appearance with different eras—partly expanded by a fourth and dark coloured appearance in the Kaliyuga—is found, for example, in the *Varāhapurāṇa* (3.18) and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (*Skandha* X, 8.13, *Skandha* X, 26.16, and *Skandha* XI, 5.20–29). On the concept of the *yugas* in connection to Viṣṇu, see Couture 2018.

248 T. V. R. Chari (1987, 79) notes that the temple of Pavaḷavaṇṇa Perumāḷ was once situated 2 kilometres away from where it is found now in an area called Banappattarai. He is the only author of the secondary literature available to me who mentions this and unfortunately, I was not able to find out more about a possible shift of location of this temple. Maybe, though, the possible former location was indeed situated east and not northeast of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, where the KM(V) understands the cave at Kāmakoṣṭha to be.

is Paccaivaṅṅa Perumāl, who is of an emerald, green colour (Tamil *paccai* means green/emerald (TL, s.v. *paccai*) and is said to represent Viṣṇu manifesting himself in this colour in the Dvāparayuga (Chari 1987, 77). The temple is situated north of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple, corresponding to the location of Hemābha north of the cave at Kāmakoṣṭha in the KM(V). However, the colour is not even remotely similar—Hemābha is said to have a golden appearance—so that the identification of Hemābha remains uncertain. Similarly, Viṣṇu’s white-coloured manifestation Sudhākāra could not be clearly associated with a historical site in Kanchi. The Māhātmya points to a location south of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple. There does not seem to exist a temple in that area of Kanchi associated with such a form of Viṣṇu. However, there once existed a temple dedicated to a white-coloured Viṣṇu further north near Paruti Kuḷam, northwest of the Ēkāmparanātar temple (M. Ramesh, pers. comm., June 2024).²⁴⁹ It is not unlikely but remains unclear whether the Vaiṣṇava text might refer to this site after all, despite the reference in the text pointing to a different location further south.

Furthermore, Viṣṇu as Candrakhaṇḍa (the one with a part of the moon; Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāl) is said to abide in Kāmakoṣṭha (KM(V) ch. 24). He appears in the Māhātmya’s version of Ekāmranātha’s and Kāmākṣī’s intertwined myth, which is set in Kāmakoṣṭha and features Viṣṇu as the decisive character. The name Candrakhaṇḍa strongly reminds of Śiva, who is known under this name, as he wears a crescent moon on his head. As David Shulman (1980, 172) analyses, Viṣṇu adopts properties of Śiva in this narrative and is also situated spatially close to Śiva as Ekāmranātha in Kanchi, which reflects their likeness.²⁵⁰ Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāl is found in the first enclosure of the Ēkāmparanātar temple. The KM(V) attempts to find meaning in this close proximity by interpreting the narrative about Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī in a Vaiṣṇava framing (see subsection 6.4.4).

Besides the sixteen Viṣṇus in Kāñcī discussed above, two still remain to complete the set of eighteen listed in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya. These are Pāṇḍavadūta (Pāṇṭavātūta Perumāl) and Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka (Vaikuṅṭa Perumāl). In the fourth narrative cycle, Pāṇḍavadūta is the only manifestation

249 The *Kāmākṣivilāsa* seems to mention this site of a white-coloured Viṣṇu at the shores of Paruti Kuḷam in the northern area of Kanchi and calls the deity Śvetavarna (KV 6.5cd, 6.25c–36b). In contemporary Kanchi, there are remains of a temple known under this name at this site (see n. 187).

250 David Shulman further compares the version of Ekāmranātha’s myth from the KV (8.13–133), which knows this form of Viṣṇu as Candrakhaṇḍa (the one with a moon on his throat). On the effects of this transformation on the interpretation of the narrative, see Shulman 1980, 172–174.

of Viṣṇu to appear in this narrational setting. He is located in a sacrificial hall west of the cave at Kāmakoṣṭha (KM(V) 29.49; see section 6.3). For the last narrative about a local form of Viṣṇu (ch. 30), no space is created. Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka is located with reference to Hastiśaila, thus referring to the central orientation point in the spatial outline of the KM(V). Still, a performance of an *asvamedha* is a central element in the narrative, mirroring the other narrative cycles.²⁵¹

Of Kanchi's around thirty-five Vaiṣṇava temples, most of the major sites and several of those found in subsidiary shrines of temples are included in the KM(V) though not all. Notably, the Vaiṣṇava sites found in subsidiary shrines within the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, Pūtanikraha Perumāḷ and Kaḷva Perumāḷ, are not mentioned, while both the Śaiva *Kāñcimāhātmya* and *Kāmākṣivīlāsa* do include these places (see n. 167). Besides, the Viṣṇu located within the Kumarakoṭṭam temple, Urukumuḷḷa Perumāḷ, is also not mentioned in the KM(V). Accordingly, even the distinctly Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* appears to select among the Vaiṣṇava places in Kanchi.

Since not just one but several Vaiṣṇava places are mentioned in the text and Kanchi is home to several Divyadeśams, a comparison between both is readily apparent. The classification as Divyadeśam does not seem to be of relevance for the selection of Vaiṣṇava sites mapped in the KM(V). Still, there is a high degree of correspondence between the Viṣṇus named in the text and the deities of the Vaiṣṇava sites that are counted among the Divyadeśams in Kanchi. This results from the fact that nearly all Vaiṣṇava places in the city are part of the larger-scale Śrīvaiṣṇava devotional geography based on the poems of the Ālvārs.²⁵² The selection of the sites included in

251 Chapter 30 is not part of any narrative cycle, and neither presided over by one of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*. It equally focuses on Śiva as Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar; KM(V) 30.1–46) and Viṣṇu as Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka (KM(V) 30.47–76). The part on the Śaiva site is set southwest of Kāmakoṣṭha, whereas the appearance of Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka is situated northwest of Hastiśaila (KM(V) 30.70ab; see figure 6.5). In the absence of spaces of their own in this context, reference points that are already known are used.

252 Different publications list different numbers of Divyadeśams in Kanchi. Out of the fourteen Vaiṣṇava places sung by the Ālvārs in Kanchi listed by R. K. K. Rajarajan (2018, 17–21; see n. 61), eleven are included in the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya*. Compared to this list, Kaḷva Perumāḷ / Kaḷvaṇūr in the first *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, Kārvāṇa Perumāḷ / Kārvāṇam in the outer *prākāra* of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, and Nīrakkatu Perumāḷ / Nīrakam, also in the outer *prākāra* of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, are missing in the KM(V). Conversely, only Varāha, Narasiṃha at Hastiśaila, Śārṅgapāṇi, Hemākṛti, and Sudhākṛti are mapped in the KM(V) but not identified with a Divyadeśam. The last three, incidentally, are those Viṣṇus from the text, which cannot yet

the KM(V) instead aligns to the inner-textual aspects that are guided by the mythological narratives (for example the three non-dark-coloured Viṣṇu grouped together). As will be discussed below (see section 6.5), these trace developments of the local religious Vaiṣṇava landscape throughout history in order to document and consolidate a perspective in which Varadarāja emerges as the most important Vaiṣṇava place in Kanchi.

6.4.2 Eighteen Sacred Water Bodies

Similar to the set of eighteen abodes of Viṣṇu, the KM(V) mentions a set of sacred bodies of water. As the text itself states (KM(V) 8.39), there are eighteen *tīrthas* situated within the space of Kāñcī. All these sites are introduced one after another in a text section of their own, the *tīrtha*-chapters (KM(V) chs. 5–8). To a large extent the structure of these passages and the presentation of the places differ significantly from most parts of the *Māhātmya*. Whereas Viṣṇu's abodes are mostly located as part of larger narrative cycles and at the end of longer episodes, the *tīrtha*-chapters present the origin of the *tīrthas* in shorter stories. The site is located first, then the story of origin is summarised, sometimes barely hinting at the story motif. The directions statements usually refer to the previous water body or to Hastiśaila as central reference point. With regard to their outline, the *tīrtha*-chapters resemble the chapters detailing the territories of the three deities in Kāñcī in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* and most of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. In common with the KV and in contrast to the KM(Ś), the KM(V) ascribes separate powers to the sacred water bodies, most often redemptive or liberating qualities. Hence, the ascribed efficacy of this class of sacred places is conceptually understood as independent of the power of other sites, for example Viṣṇu's. In this regard, the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* places *tīrthas* outside of a Vaiṣṇava hierarchy, albeit most episodes detailing the origins of the sacred water bodies establish a link to Viṣṇu.

The arrangement of the *tīrthas* mirrors the sequence of the narrative cycles and thus follows the same spatial shift from the southwest to the centre and northwest in Kanchi. Additionally, almost half of the *tīrthas* mapped in the *tīrtha*-chapters are again featured in the narratives about

be located in Kanchi. Varāha and Narasiṃha, in turn, are found within the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple complex, where Varadarāja takes centre stage and is considered a Divyadeśam (Attikiri). For details on the Divyadeśams, see n. 61 and the sources referenced therein.

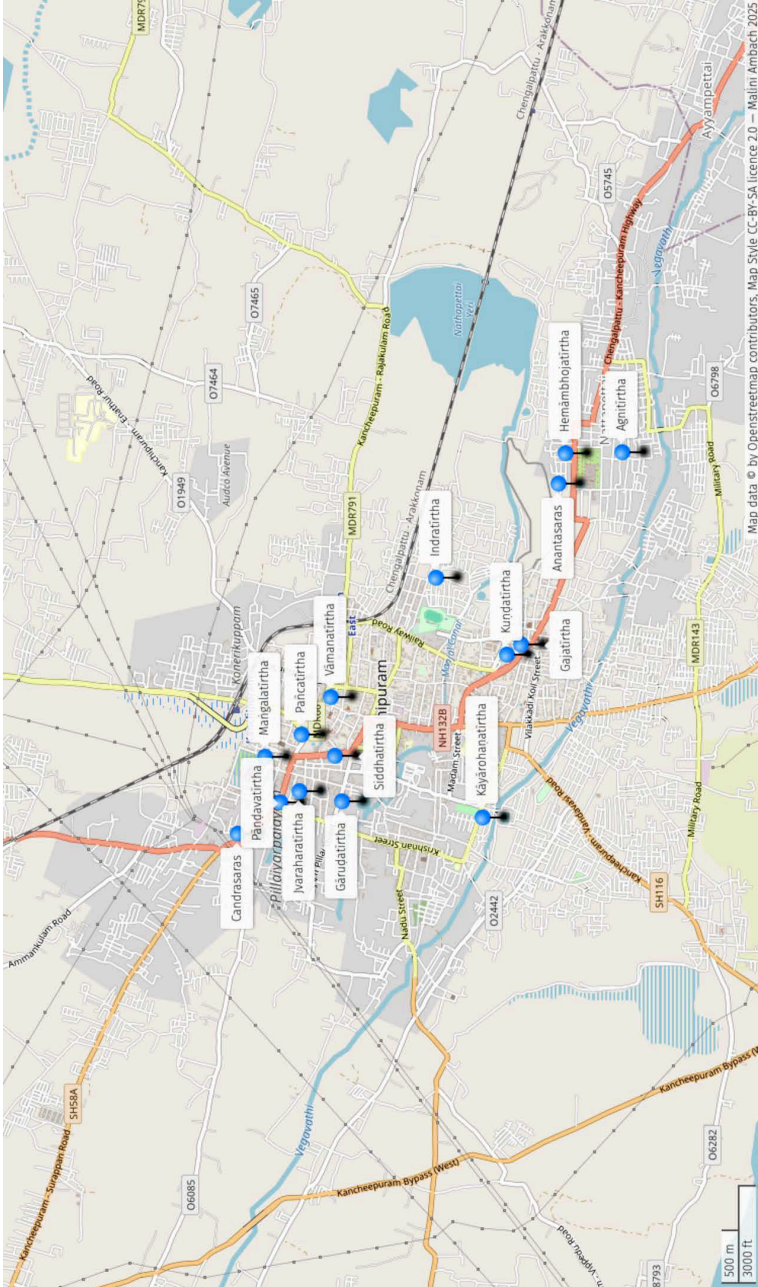


Fig. 6.6 Tirthas in Kanchi in the KM(V).

Viṣṇu's manifestations (KM(V) chs. 2–3, 9–30) and their stories are linked to individual elements from these myths. Those sacred water bodies that are solely mentioned in the *tīrtha*-chapters are placed in the sequence according to their location in the arrangement following the spatial shift from the southeast to the northwest in Kanchi.

In the southeast of Kanchi, in the area defined as Brahmā's sacrificial arena, five sacred water bodies are linked to the myth of Brahmā's horse sacrifice (see figure 6.6). The most prominent one is Anantasaras, also called Varāhatīrtha in the *Māhātmya* (Aṅantacaras; KM(V) 5.10c–11b, ch. 2). It can be identified with the main temple tank at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple and is a significant characteristic of Kāñcī in the Vaiṣṇava text. Apart from this *tīrtha*, further ones are said to be created within Brahmā's sacrificial hall for different purposes, similar to Viṣṇu's manifestations that appear to remove obstacles during Brahmā's sacrifice. For example, Agnitīrtha (Agnitīrtha; in Nethaji Nagar area) serves as a pit for the sacrificial fire (KM(V) 5.13c–15), while the goddess Sarasvatī, intend on drowning the sacrifice, emerges in aquatic form from Kuṇḍatīrtha (Raṅkacāmi Kuḷam; KM(V) 5.17c–19b, ch. 15).²⁵³

At Kāmakoṣṭha, in the centre of Kanchi, the KM(Ś) maps further sacred water bodies (see figure 6.6). Their stories of origin link them to the myths set in that space. Vāmanatīrtha (Cittitīrttam; old *tīrtha* of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, to its east,²⁵⁴ KM(V) 5.28c–29, ch. 20) is central among them, reflecting the position of Anantasaras in Brahmā's sacrificial hall further

253 Furthermore, the KM(V) mentions Brahmātīrtha, which can probably be identified with the Brahmā-well within the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (and is thus different from the Brahmātīrtha mentioned in the KM(Ś); cf. KM(V) 5.13ab) and Kuśatīrtha (identification uncertain; KM(V) 5.16–17b) in the space of Brahmā's sacrificial hall. The story of origin of Kuśatīrtha refers to Brahmā's sacrifice in Kāñcī but is not integrated into the myth of Varadarāja's origin (KM(V) chs. 9–17).

254 The *tīrtha* Nākatīrttam nowadays belonging to the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple is located west of the temple. The KM(V), however, locates Trivikrama (Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ) on the western shore of Vāmanatīrtha (KM(V) 20.71c–72b). The *Māhātmya* accordingly refers to another *tīrtha* east of the temple and not to the one that is presently associated with the temple in Kanchi. Directly adjacent to the east of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple is a fallow area around which, but not on it, buildings have been built. According to the locals, this is the site where the old *tīrtha* of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, Cittitīrttam, was situated (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., March 2023). The Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya* thus clearly refers to the old *tīrtha*. As of now, I have not been able to find out more details about the transition from the old to the new temple tank.

east. In the space west of Kāmakoṣṭha, Pāṇḍavatīrtha (Matsyatīrttam; at the Pāṇḍavatūta Perumāḷ temple; KM(V) 5.49c–50b, 29.50), takes this role.

The sacred water bodies Maṅgalatīrtha (Maṅkaḷatīrttam; next to Maṅkaḷēsvarar; KM(V) 5.40c–42, chs. 27–28), Candrasaras / Śivagaṅgātīrtha (Civakaṅkaiīrttam; fourth *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple; KM(V) 5.43–45, chs. 24, 27), and Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam; KM(V) 5.46–49b, ch. 27) in Kāmakoṣṭha are more closely connected to each other by an episode from the myth revolving around Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī.²⁵⁵ These three latter *tīrthas* are featured in a story about the goddess Gaṅgā, who seeks purification after she has been cursed by Pārvatī for attempting to flood—on Śiva’s command—the locale of Pārvatī’s worship in Kāñci (KM(V) ch. 27). Essentially, though, this episode aims to explain the origin of the Garuḍasevā procession of Varadarāja during the annual festival of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple and thereby forms a transition from the Śaiva narratives back to a purely Viṣṇu- / Varadarāja-oriented setting.²⁵⁶ At the same time, the story about Garuḍasevā also illustrates a connection of the sites in Kāmakoṣṭha to Hastiśaila and Varadarāja. It begins as a story of the origin of the three *tīrthas* in Kāmakoṣṭha, to then expand the spatial venue from Kāmakoṣṭha east to Hastiśaila. A similar, though spatially inverted, setting is reflected in the story of Hemāmbhojatīrtha (Poṛṛamarai Kuḷam; second and eastern temple tank at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple; KM(V) 5.11c–12; ch. 22). Lakṣmī, who appears as the daughter of the sage Bhṛgu at Kāmakoṣṭha, worships Varadarāja and becomes his wife. The story is part of the narrative cycle set in Kāmakoṣṭha, while the site itself is situated next to Hastiśaila further east. Both stories show a spatial permeability between the constructed spaces to accommodate the events from the narratives, reflecting the emphasis on mythology throughout the text. Moreover, the link to Varadarāja in both cases stresses an overall spatial orientation towards Hastiśaila and the overriding significance of Varadarāja.

The stories of all further sacred water bodies introduced in the chapters on *tīrthas* and counted among the set of eighteen are not part of the narrative cycles. These self-contained stories of origin are of different length

255 Besides, the KM(V) mentions Pañcatīrtha (Pañcakaṅkaiīrttam; outer *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple; KM(V) 5.34–40c and ch. 22) in Kāmakoṣṭha. Despite its spatial proximity to Kāmākṣī’s site, the Māhātmya introduces this *tīrtha* not within the context of the myth about the goddess, but in a previous chapter of the same narrative cycle presided over by the *avatāra* Vāmana.

256 On the processions during the annual temple festival (Brahmotsava) of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, see Hüsken 2013; on episodes about the *tīrthas*, especially Sarvatīrtha, from the KM(V), the KV, and the KM(Ś), see Ambach 2022.

and usually feature characters and narrative motifs known from the epic and Purāṇic mythologies. For example, the story about Paurandaratīrtha (Intiratīrttam; associated with Satyanātasvāmi, to its west; KM(V) 5.19c–28ab) refers to the motif of the god Indra, who is cursed to lose his testicles after seducing Ahalyā, the wife of the sage Gautama (cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bālakāṇḍa* 47.14–48.11 and *Skandapurāṇa*, *Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 207.5–51). The intention is clearly to glorify the power of the sacred water bodies and elevate their standing by referring to pan-Indian mythologies. With the exception of Gajatīrtha (Kajentira Puṣkarīṇi; KM(V) 8.38), which is adjacent to the north of the Aṣṭapuja Perumāl temple, these *tīrthas* are not located at or close to a Vaiṣṇava site but in the proximity of a *śivaliṅga*. Besides Paurandaratīrtha, this setting applies to Jvaraharatīrtha (Uppēri Kuḷam; KM(V) 5.50c–51b), linked to the Curakarēśvarar temple, to its south; Gāruḍatīrtha (presumably Okkappiṛantāṇ Kuḷam; KM(V) 5.51c–52b, ch. 6), found in the western part of Kanchi, with the Śaiva site Vaṇṇicar at its shore and a few more *śivaliṅgas* located nearby; Siddhatīrtha (Iṭṭacittitīrttam; KM(V) 5.52c–62, 6.67–74b), the *tīrtha* of the Kaccapēśvarar temple; and Kāyārohaṇatīrtha (Tāyār Kuḷam; KM(V) 7.1–8.37), connected to Kāyārōkaṇesvarar and situated across the Vegavathi river to the south of the temple.²⁵⁷ Similarly, the previously mentioned Śivagaṅgātīrtha (within the Ēkāmparanātar temple compound), Maṅgalatīrtha (next to Maṅkaḷēśvarar), and Sarvatīrtha (several *liṅgas* on its banks) are also spatially closer to a *śivaliṅga* than a Vaiṣṇava site and are associated with the myth of Ekāmranātha.

The criteria for selecting the *tīrthas* said to be located in Kāñcī are not apparent. An expected Vaiṣṇava framework is found in most episodes about the origins of these sites in the KM(V), but the selection of the eighteen is rather broad, both in terms of the attention given to the sites and their spatial location in Kanchi. Some *tīrthas* are integral parts of a Vaiṣṇava narrative cycle, others are barely given a story; some are located at Vaiṣṇava sites, others are closest to places of Śiva. Leaving aside the *tīrthas* that either feature in the narratives about Viṣṇu's manifestations or are close

257 The story about Siddhatīrtha narrates how a thunderbolt is made from the bones of the sage Dadhīci for Indra to kill the demon Vṛtra (cf. *Mahābhārata*, *Vanaparvan* 100); the one about Gāruḍatīrtha details a narrative about Viṣṇu's mount Garuḍa carrying enemy brothers in form of an elephant and a turtle (cf. *Mahābhārata*, *Ādiparvan* 29–30); Kāyārohaṇatīrtha is linked to a story about the desire of king Triśaṅku to attain heaven in his bodily form (cf. *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.57–59); and the story about Gajatīrtha refers to the legend of the elephant Gajendra worshipping Viṣṇu (cf. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Skandha* VIII, 2–4), which is also hinted at in KM(V) ch. 13 (see also n. 221).

to Viṣṇu's abodes in Kanchi (such as Anantasaras or Śivagaṅgātīrtha), the rest seems to include *tīrthas* to which some significance is attached regardless of a Vaiṣṇava association. In the Māhātmya's perception of Kāñcī, these *tīrthas* seem to differ in some way from the other ponds and temple tanks located in Kanchi that are not mentioned. For some sacred water bodies, an association with a place of spatial importance in the urban fabric or a place with a long history and religious significance can be noted, which could be a reason for their incorporation in the text. For example, Siddhatīrtha (Iṭṭacittitīrttam) is found at the Kaccapēsvarar temple. The temple is located at the southwestern corner of the Rājavīthis, the four streets enclosing the oldest urban core, once situated at the borders of the Pallava city (Stein 2021, 101) and halfway between the Pallava temples Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ and Kailācanātar. Moreover, the story of the three *liṅgas* nearby is also given in the KM(V) (see subsection 6.4.4). Similarly, Kāyārohaṇatīrtha (Tāyār Kuḷam) is connected to Kāyārōkaṇesvarar, a place whose history dates back to the ninth century (Stein 2021, 57–58). Overall, both a Vaiṣṇava association in their myths and their location in the urban space seem to be the primary elements shaping the selection of *tīrthas* in the KM(V).

6.4.3 Viṣṇus and Sacred Water Bodies in the Region

Apart from the eighteen Vaiṣṇava abodes and eighteen *tīrthas*, the KM(V) introduces five further manifestations of Viṣṇu and six sacred water bodies in Satyavratākṣetra at various distances from Kanchi (see figure 6.7). These sites are first introduced briefly in one of the *tīrtha*-chapters (KM(V) ch. 8). The stories of five of these *tīrthas* also introduce a Vaiṣṇava place located nearby and serve to situate these manifestations of Viṣṇu. Narrative motifs and the renown of the Vaiṣṇava sites as Divyadeśam seem to play a role in the selection of these sites. Two of the *tīrthas* and two Vaiṣṇava sites are associated with the myth on Varadarāja's origin, more specifically with the episode on Yathoktakārī therein (KM(V) ch. 15). One set containing one Viṣṇu and one *tīrtha* is formed by Śayaneśa (Uttira Raṅkanāta Cuvāmi; Pallikonda) and Sārasvatatīrtha (Yākatīrttam; to the east of the temple; KM(V) 8.48–52). The second set comprises of Viṣṇu as Praḷayarodhaka (Raṅkanāta Svāmi; Thiruparkadal) and the *tīrtha* Pāpanāśanatīrtha (probably called Raṅkanātatīrttam; to the north to the temple; KM(V) 8.46–47). All these four sites are found at the shores of the Palar river (called Vegavatī in the text). A river narrative motif, taken together with the course of the Palar and its tributary Vegavathi, links those two Viṣṇus near the Palar with Yathoktakārī

(Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ) in Kanchi, which is said to lie on the shores of the same river.²⁵⁸ The network made up of the three places emphasises the spatial construction in the KM(V): with Viṣṇu as Śayaneśa, which is said to be situated west of Hastiśaila at the border of Satyavrataṣetra (KM(V) 8.48–51, 15.34–36), the Vaiṣṇava text moves to the periphery of its conceptualised regional space. The spatial notion of Satyavrataṣetra and its connection with Kanchi is thus strengthened. Additionally, Viṣṇu is depicted in a reclining form in the sanctum sanctorum of the temples at all three sites. This specific iconographic feature further illustrates the connectedness of these places. It is also alluded to in the *Māhātmya* when Viṣṇu is described to lie down three times to stop Brahmā's wife, Sarasvatī, who is approaching Kāñcī in aquatic form.

Three more sets consisting of a Viṣṇu-*tīrtha* pairing are introduced in Satyavrataṣetra. Their self-contained stories link two pairs of sites to Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Rāma when he was living in the Daṇḍaka-forest²⁵⁹ and one to Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha. One set comprises of Vijayarāghava (Vijayarākava Perumāḷ; Thiruppukuzhi) and the associated *tīrtha* Gr̥dhratīrtha (Caṭāyutīrttam; to the east of the temple; KM(V) 8.40c–45); the second is formed by Vīrarāghava (Vīra Rākavā Perumāḷ; Thiruvallur) with its *tīrtha* Hr̥ṭṭāpanāśanatīrtha (Hruttapanācīnītīrttam; to the south of the temple; KM(V) 8.56–60); Nṛkesari residing on the hill Ghaṭikādri (Yōkanaracimma Cuvāmi; Sholingur) and the two sacred water bodies Brahmātīrtha (Takkāṅ Kuḷam; at Sholingur) and Vasiṣṭhatīrtha (identification uncertain; another of the five *tīrthas* at Sholingur; KM(V) 8.53–55) constitute the third set. Their location is given in reference to Hastiśaila, suggesting the idea of their belonging to Kāñcī in the text. Apart from this spatial layer, an explicit link to Kāñcī is not established in their stories. The mention of the three Viṣṇus instead seems to be based on their renown as Divyadeśams.²⁶⁰ It emphasises the conception of a Vaiṣṇava area surrounding Kāñcī, which itself is filled with the presence of many manifestations of Viṣṇu and Varadarāja on Hastiśaila as the most significant.

258 For the Yathoktakāri myth in the Sanskrit and Tamil texts glorifying Kanchi, see the contributions in Hüsken and Buchholz (forthcoming). Some versions of this story also refer to the Viṣṇus in Pallikonda and Thiruparkadal.

259 Cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Āraṇyakāṇḍa* for the Rāma narrative motifs.

260 All three, the Vijayarākava Perumāḷ / Puṭkuḷi, Vīra Rākavā Perumāḷ / Evvuḷūr, and Yōkanaracimma Cuvāmi / Kaṭikai temples are rather well-known and counted among the 108 Vaiṣṇava Divyadeśams. However, other significant Vaiṣṇava sites in the region like the Divyadeśam of Paktavatcala Perumāḷ / Niṅṅravūr in Thirunindravur (a suburb of Chennai) are not mentioned.

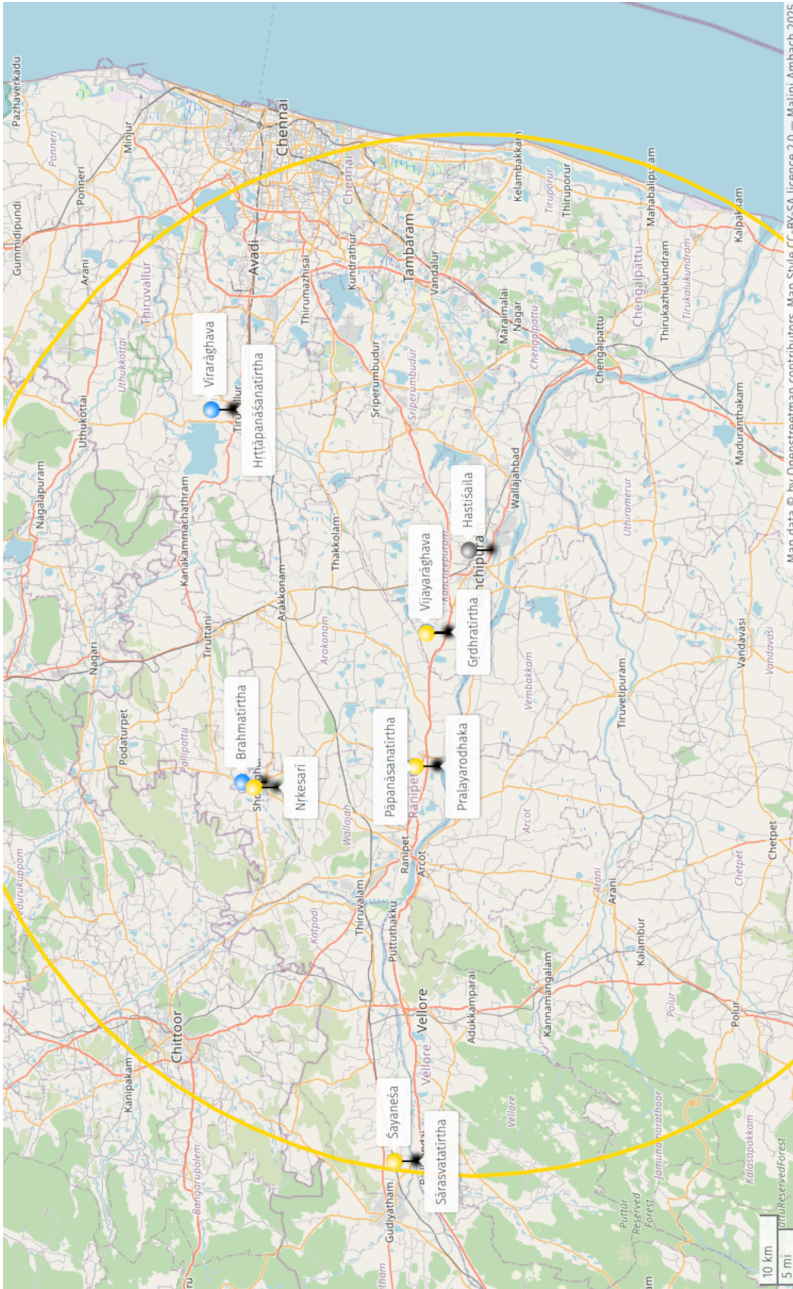


Fig. 6.7 Viṣṇu (yellow) and tīrthas (blue) outside Kanchi in the KM(V), with Hastiśāila (grey) as their reference point.

6.4.4 Śaiva and Other Sacred Places

Although they are not particularly accentuated, places of Śiva—and rivers—are explicitly mentioned in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* as elements of Kāñcī's sacred geography (KM(V) 2.12–14b; see n. 216). This broader concept supplements the Viṣṇu-oriented focus to present a more comprehensive perspective on Kāñcī. The KM(V) includes some Śaiva sites and some goddesses, but is nevertheless more restricted in its consideration of different categories of sacred places than the other two Māhātmyas. Not considering sacred sites of other deities such as the Goddess in larger numbers reflects this approach.

Goddesses as figures in the myths and even less so sites of Devī are a rare find in the KM(V). Similar to the Śaiva Māhātmya, the most prominent exception is Kāmākṣī, understood as a local form of Pārvatī. In the KM(V), she is said to abide near to Viṣṇu as Vāmana at the door of the cave at Kāma-koṣṭha (Kāmākṣi Amman; KM(V) 24.8–13). The goddess has a structuring role in the text's rendition of Ekāmranātha's myth. This setting acknowledges Kāmākṣī's renown in Kanchi but fails to provide her with a myth independent from Ekāmranātha. Nevertheless, she is spatially set apart from Ekāmranātha, who is positioned even further northwest of Vāmana under the single mango tree (KM(V) 24.19c–20, 24.22–24b; see figure 6.8). Incidentally, the same narrative mentions the goddess to be joined by eight mother goddesses (*māṭṛkās*) and her sons Skanda and Gaṇeśa when she worships Vāmana but does not mention them taking an abode there (KM(V) 24.5–6).²⁶¹

Similarly, Varadarāja's consorts Bhū and Śrī (Lakṣmī; Tāyār in Tamil) are not specifically located in the Māhātmya. The goddess of the earth is included in the myth about Viṣṇu as Varāha, which ends with a statement about the boar abiding in Satyavrataṣetra together with Bhū (KM(V) 2.82). Apart from that note, the Varadarāja myth tells that the god appears together with Bhū and Lakṣmī on the Puṇyakoṭivimāna from the sacrificial fire on top of Hastiśaila but refrains from assigning the goddesses a permanent place (KM(V) 16.49c–58b). The two goddesses are clearly append-

261 If one were to identify Skanda and Gaṇeśa mentioned in this context with historical sites in Kanchi, the former could be the known Kumarakōṭṭam temple right west of the Kāmākṣi Amman temple. The latter could be the Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar temple at Sangupani Vinayagar Koil Street, two blocks to the east from the goddess's temple. Alternatively, the KM(V) could refer to the presence of Pārvatī's sons as part of the divine family in the immediate proximity of Kāmākṣī, that is within the precincts of the Kāmākṣi Amman temple, where several forms of Skanda and Gaṇeśa may be found.

ages to Varadarāja, albeit indispensable ones, in this episode and hence simply considered to be there with him. Still, their mention clearly refers to Varadarāja's consorts Bhū and Peruntēvī Tāyār at the Varadarāja Perumāl temple (see figure 6.8).²⁶²

Another episode from the Varadarāja myth also mentions a Gaṇeśa at Hastiśaila, who is worshipped by the divine constructor Viśvakarman before preparing the grounds for Brahmā's sacrifice (KM(V) 10.47ab). No further attention is paid to him,²⁶³ reflecting the text's streamlined emphasis on Viṣṇu's manifestations, their abodes and myths, with all other deities being mostly supplementary. Kāmākṣī thus remains the only goddess to be specifically allocated a place in the text.

Śaiva sites are mapped in a small number in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya (see figure 6.8). Each of the episodes referring to Śiva in the KM(V) has a unique setting but often exemplifies a general constructed antagonistic relation between Viṣṇu and Śiva. This is partly expressed through a confrontation of specific manifestations of the two deities. In particular, the Narasiṃha and Śarabha motif that is part of the Narasiṃha narrative cycle illustrates a Vaiṣṇava-Śaiva opposition. While the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* links a Vaiṣṇava site to a *śivaliṅga* nearby, the KM(V), less consistently but in a conceptually similar way, seems to narratively link a form of Śiva to a manifestation of Viṣṇu in its vicinity. Most distinctly, this connection can be seen with regard to Viṣṇu as Candrakhaṇḍa (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāl) and Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmparanātar), whose sites are found next to each other at the Ēkāmparanātar temple (see below). Like Viṣṇu's abodes, the Śaiva places are located in reference to the focal point of the narrative cycle of

262 The local forms of the wives of the main deity Varadarāja, Bhū and Lakṣmī, are thought of as one in the temple (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., February 2021). The goddess Bhū does not have a separate shrine with a *mūlamurti*, a stationary image, at the temple, only a festival image (*utsavamūrti*) at the sanctum sanctorum. Lakṣmī / Tāyār, in turn, has both a shrine in the third *prākāra* (Peruntēvī Tāyār) and a festival image in the sanctum sanctorum.

263 There is, though, a particular Gaṇeśa found in the Varadarāja Perumāl temple. He is depicted with his trunk turned rightwards and accordingly called Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka (Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa) [with his trunk] wound rightwards) in Sanskrit. His shrine (Valampuri Vināyakar) is found in the second *prākāra*. In the Śaiva Māhātmya, the story of Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka is told at some length (KM(Ś) ch. 6; see pp. 129–130) and he is also mentioned among the sites in the space Harikṣetra in the KV (2.9–10b) where the linked myth refers to Brahmā worshipping him for an unobstructed *aśvamedha*—just as indicated in the KM(V). When considering the details about Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka from the KV, it is likely that the Vaiṣṇava text refers to the same mythical event without mentioning the specific name of Gaṇeśa.

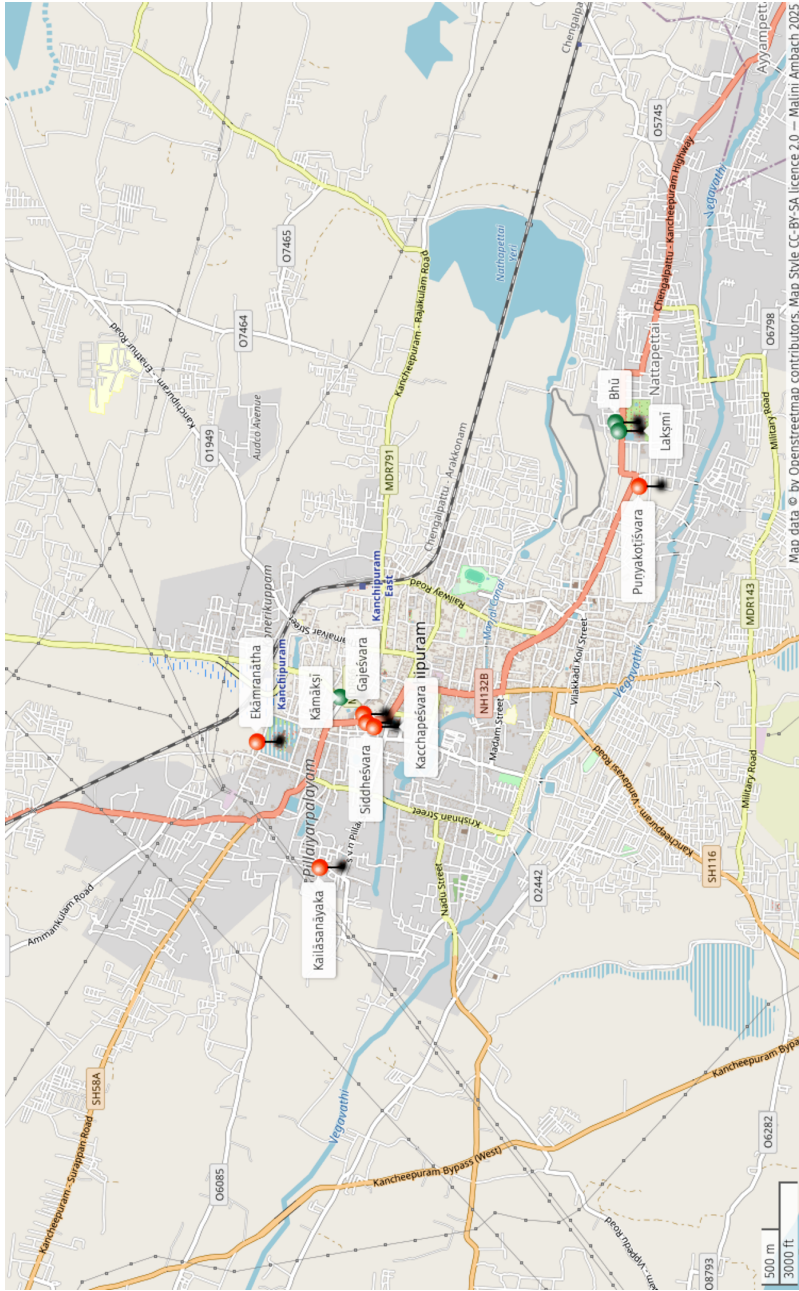


Fig. 6.8 Non-Vaiṣṇava sacred places in Kanchi in the KM(V). Śivaliṅgas are marked orange, Goddesses—green.

which their story is part. This centralised location pattern applies to the rather incidentally mentioned *śivaliṅgas*, which appear in the narrative cycle presided over by Narasiṃha, such as Śarabheśa (identification uncertain; KM(V) 13.15–16b), residing northwest of Hastiśaila and introduced as counterpart of Viṣṇu as Aṣṭabhuja,²⁶⁴ and Satyanātha (Satyanātasvāmi; KM(V) 3.68–71b), located northwest of Hastiśaila.²⁶⁵ Also in the Narasiṃha narrative cycle, another *liṅga* in the region is mentioned. This is said to be located next to a *tīrtha* called Anantasaras, at a distance of 2 *yojanas* in the area northeast of Hastiśaila. This *liṅga* can be identified with the Pūtapūrisvarar temple at Sriperumbudur (KM(V) 10.41–45b).²⁶⁶ It illustrates the spatial extent of the area considered to belong to Kāñcī in the Māhātmya.

A more balanced idea of the Viṣṇu-Śiva relation is found with regard to Śiva as Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar), said to be located southwest of Kāmakoṣṭha. A narrative about king Virocana and his sons links him to Viṣṇu as Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka (Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ), said to be situated northwest of Hastiśaila (KM(V) ch. 30).²⁶⁷ In this case, the connection between the deities is not established spatially but through their names. Both names bear the designation of the respective deity's heavenly abode—Kailāsa for Śiva, Vaikuṅṭha for Viṣṇu. Thus, this last chapter of the Māhātmya's main part does not emphasise an explicit Vaiṣṇava outlook. Śiva and Viṣṇu are

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- 264 In short, the demons visit Śiva staying at Śrīśaila to enlist him to kill Narasiṃha, who is watching Brahmā's sacrifice. Śiva creates the half-lion half-bird creature Śarabha to counter Narasiṃha. As one counteraction, Viṣṇu manifests as the eight-armed Aṣṭabhuja to fight Śarabha himself, who then surrenders as soon as he sees Viṣṇu (KM(V) 12.50–13.16). In Śaiva mythologies from the Purāṇas, Śarabha is created to fight Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Narasiṃha (*Śivapurāṇa*, *Śatarudrasaṃhitā* 10–12). This specific opposition is also reflected in the KM(V) but in the Vaiṣṇava interpretation.
- 265 The demons worship Śiva as Satyanātha to acquire his help in fighting Narasiṃha; this, however, is unsuccessful. Satyanātasvāmi is one of five sites in Kanchi sung by the Śaiva Nāyaṇmār, a Pāṭal Peṇṇa Stalam. In the Śaiva Māhātmya, the site is intimately linked to its surroundings in the southeast of Kanchi, which are called Satyavratakṣetra—the strong Viṣṇu-oriented designation used in the Vaiṣṇava text to denote the larger area around Kāñcī.
- 266 The Pūtapūrisvarar temple is located close to the Atikēcavar Perumāḷ temple at SriPerumbudur, whose temple tank is called Aṇantacaras.
- 267 The first part involves the king Virocana and his wife, who turn to worshipping Śiva in order to have their wish for sons fulfilled. As they are not able to go to Śiva's abode at Mount Kailāsa, they come to Kāñcī. This explains the appearance of Śiva under the name Kailāsanāyaka (KM(V) 30.1–65b). The second part deals with the king's and queen's sons, who go to Kāñcī to offer an *aśvamēdha* to Viṣṇu. The god shows them his heaven Vaikuṅṭha and stays in Kāñcī as Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka (KM(V) 30.65b–76).

presented in a parallel as the highest object of worship without hierarchising their relationship. The balanced notion is explicitly stated and Kāñcī—or rather Kāmakoṣṭha—is described as a place where people worship both Śiva *and* Viṣṇu (KM(V) 30.17c–19; see section 6.3 for details). Furthermore, the Kailācanātar and Vaikuṅṭa Perumāḷ temples share a common history as historical monuments marking the periphery of the expanding Pallava city (Raman 1987, 66), which might be reflected in the spatial design in the KM(V) (see section 6.5) and in the narrative that equally considers the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sites.

In addition, the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya maps a few more *śivaliṅgas* in less elaborate episodes. A set of three is found in one of the *tīrtha*-chapters. Starting from a myth partly set at Siddhatīrtha (Iṭṭacittitūrttam; at the Kaccapēsvarar temple), Siddheśvara (Iṣṭasittisvarar), within the Kaccapēsvarar temple compound, Kaccapēsvara (Kaccapēsvarar), and Gajeśvara (Airāvātisvarar) are introduced and said to be north, south and northeast of Siddhatīrtha (KM(V) 6.71–76b). They seem to form a self-contained set of places linked by their spatial closeness around Iṭṭacittitūrttam, which is founded in the myth. Neither the *tīrthas* nor the *śivaliṅgas* are mentioned again in any other section in the KM(V). As has been highlighted above (see subsection 6.4.2), Siddhatīrtha and the three *liṅgas* introduced in its story of origin, may present another reflection of the Māhātmya's consideration of the urban space in history, in this case of the Kaccapēsvarar temple in a central position within the larger urban layout.²⁶⁸

As the only form of Śiva in the Vaiṣṇava text, Ekāmranātha is acknowledged as an inseparable characteristic of Kāñcī's sacred geography. His place, where he is said to reside together with Kāmākṣī, is explicitly mentioned in the list among Viṣṇu's abodes that were rediscovered in the later era (KM(V) ch. 29; see n. 241). This recognition clearly separates Ekāmranātha from other Śaiva sites in Kāñcī. Ekāmranātha's myth is spatially set in Kāmakoṣṭha and told rather extensively and closely intertwined with

268 Another three *liṅgas* are mentioned in the very last chapter of the text, which forms a sort of appendix. These sites are framed as places of Śiva in Kāñcī, which are said to be eighteen (KM(V) 32.20c–21b). The number is supposedly intended to mirror the sets of the eighteen abodes of Viṣṇu and the eighteen *tīrthas* introduced in the main part of the text. However, only Vṛṣabheśa (identification uncertain) at the banks of the Palar river, Puṇyakoṭīśa (Puṇṇiyakōṭṭisvarar), and Śāntisa (identification uncertain) are mentioned. Why specifically these sites are included is not clear and the entire chapter has a distinctly different character than the rest of the text. It refers to the Puṇyakoṭīvimāna—Varadarāja's heavenly chariot—but is otherwise free of Vaiṣṇava references.

the narrative about Kāmākṣī, who is understood as Ekāmranātha's consort (KM(V) ch. 23–25). It features Viṣṇu in a decisive role and includes the narrative element about Viṣṇu manifesting as Candrakhaṇḍa (Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ).²⁶⁹ In terms of both content and space, Vāmana residing at the cave in Kāmakoṣṭha is the reference point, Kāmākṣī takes her abode not far from him and then builds a *liṅga* of sand in his northwestern direction. Where Pārvatī worships the *liṅga*, there the single mango-tree, Candrakhaṇḍa, the moon-crested Viṣṇu, and Ekāmranātha appear (KM(V) ch. 24). While Ekāmranātha is particularly connected to Candrakhaṇḍa through their spatial proximity—Ēkāmparanātar in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ in the first *prākāra*—, the overall spatial alignment still points to the cave at Kāmakoṣṭha and thus to Vāmana as the presiding deity of the relevant larger narrative cycle.

As the discussion above demonstrates, the approach of the KM(V) to non-Vaiṣṇava sites is largely one of selective ignorance. Overall, few of these sacred places are mentioned (see figure 6.8), but those that are included are explicitly pinpointed, as are the abodes of Viṣṇu and the *tīrthas*. For several of these sites, the reason for their consideration seems apparent, even if the places are merely a side note. One aspect may be the inclusion of the associated characters in the well-known Purāṇic narratives, which are locally adapted to unfold in Kāñcī and reflect its sacred landscape. For example, the mention of the *sivaliṅgas* in the Narasiṃha narrative cycle constructs an active antagonism between Viṣṇu and Śiva, and the characters associated with them. In particular, the stories featuring Narasiṃha express this relation that is inherent to the Purāṇic Narasiṃha motif in general.

With Ekāmranātha's and Kāmākṣī's intertwined myth, a second element comes into play. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* contains a version of these local Śaiva and Śākta mythologies and details it at some length in three chapters. The elements of Viṣṇu countering Śiva and Viṣṇu as decisive agency still find a reflection, but the framing clearly points to the objective of telling Ekāmranātha's and Kāmākṣī's myth of origin. At the end of the shared myth, there is even a *phalaśruti* statement on the benefit of seeing and being seen (*darśana*) by Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī (KM(V) 25.44c–45). Notes on the power of deities or efficacy of sites other than *tīrthas* are not a common element in the KM(V), wherefore this Śaiva-Śākta praise is

²⁶⁹ For a comparative analysis of the different versions of the Ekāmranātha myth from the three Sanskrit Māhātmyas and other Sanskrit and Tamil texts, see Schier 2018, 73–96. For a summary of Ekāmranātha's story from the KM(V), see subsection 3.3.3, for details on Viṣṇu's manifestations as Candrakhaṇḍa, see subsection 6.4.1.

worth a note. Still, the following and concluding verse again emphasises the agency of Viṣṇu as Vāmana (KM(V) 25.46) as if to remind of the actual acting power. The Vaiṣṇava text thus unequivocally acknowledges the existence and myths of both Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī. This can be read as consideration of the significance of Kanchi's most prominent Śaiva and Śākta sites. With the Vaiṣṇava interpretation of their myths, the KM(V) then attempts to establish a Vaiṣṇava-infused interpretative sovereignty, which exists in parallel to the renditions from the other Māhātmyas.

Moreover, in my view, the different approaches towards the non-Vaiṣṇava deities in the KM(V) represent a recognition of the spatial relations in the urban and religious layout in Kanchi, and a negotiation of space. With regard to the southeast of Kanchi, where the Narasiṃha narrative cycle and especially Varadarāja's myth are spatially oriented, there seems to be an increased attention to documenting a Vaiṣṇava affiliation. In this part of Kāñcī, Varadarāja, who occupies a highlighted position in the text, resides at Hastīśaila. Consequently, his surroundings are given a strong Vaiṣṇava connotation. This notion corresponds to the historical layout of the city, including the former settlement of Attiyur, which was centred around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple there (Raman 1975, 3). To this day, the southeastern part of Kanchi is particularly associated with the Vaiṣṇava tradition and called Vishnu-Kanchi (for details, see section 2.3 and figure 2.2). Moreover, the tendency in the stories towards a confrontational attitude to the Śaiva tradition and its sites in that area could be interpreted as a reflection of the distinct Vaiṣṇava association of the southeast of Kanchi. With regard to the central / northwestern part of Kanchi, in turn, the context differs. The Vaiṣṇava tradition, as represented through the KM(V), has marked its specific territory across the city around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, wherefore it might be less incisive to make an interpretative concession with regard to the area around Kāmākṣī and Ekāmranātha. The interpretation as a shared space is suggested by the KM(V) itself, which characterises Kāma-koṣṭha, corresponding to the centre and northwest of Kanchi, as a space where both Viṣṇu *and* Śiva are worshipped in Kāñcī.²⁷⁰ Importantly, however, the fundamental assignment of Kāñcī as Viṣṇu's domain is not called into question in this context but is supplemented for the central / northwestern part of the city where Ekāmranātha—and Kāmākṣī—reside.

270 Since Kāmākṣī is considered as Ekāmranātha's consort and not as an independent goddess in the KM(V), she is apparently not taken into account in the spatial assignment.

6.5 A Reflection of Urban and Religious History

While the scaling and interpretation of the spaces in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcī-māhātmya* is largely based on mythology-based aspects—the dimension of Satyavratakṣetra as the main exception—their positioning and the arrangement of the places within the narrative cycles seem to trace historical developments of Kanchi's urban and religious landscape. It is particularly worthwhile to compare the temporality of the texts with local history when looking at the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya*. Here, temporality is a structuring aspect, whereas in the other two *Māhātmyas* on Kanchi the stories about the sacred places are organised according to geographical factors. The Vaiṣṇava text evidently addresses central stages of the urban development in its outline and spatial design of Kāñcī's sacred landscape. Evidently, the text post-dates the historical developments alluded to in the myths and offers an interpretation of them to document a particular perspective on Kanchi's religious landscape. The text's ahistorical framing contributes to an impression of authority in relation to the interpretation of Kāñcī and its sacred sites, which consolidates the perspective of the *Māhātmya*.

Varadarāja takes centre stage in the Vaiṣṇava text. This perspective relates to Kanchi's religious landscape in which the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple has become the most important Vaiṣṇava site in Kanchi today. From the eleventh century onwards the temple gained prominence through its first substantial expansion and its connection with the principal preceptors of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas such as Ramanuja (Raman 1975, 56, 88). The shift of attention within the local Vaiṣṇava community in favour of this temple took then place in the fourteenth century, when the significance of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple began to exceed that of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples (Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34, 43–44; Raman 1975, 60).²⁷¹

All four of these sites rank among the oldest Vaiṣṇava temples in Kanchipuram (Raman 1992, 43) and are featured prominently in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcī-māhātmya*. The three highlighted Viṣṇus in the text are Varadarāja, Trivikrama, and Pāṇḍavadūta, which are located at the three spaces within Kāñcī where the focal points are positioned. They reflect the multifocal spatial arrangement not only of the KM(V) but also of Kanchi's religious

271 The shift of focus in favour of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple is evidenced by the distribution of inscriptions dating from Vijayanagara times (Nagaswamy 2011, 6, 34).

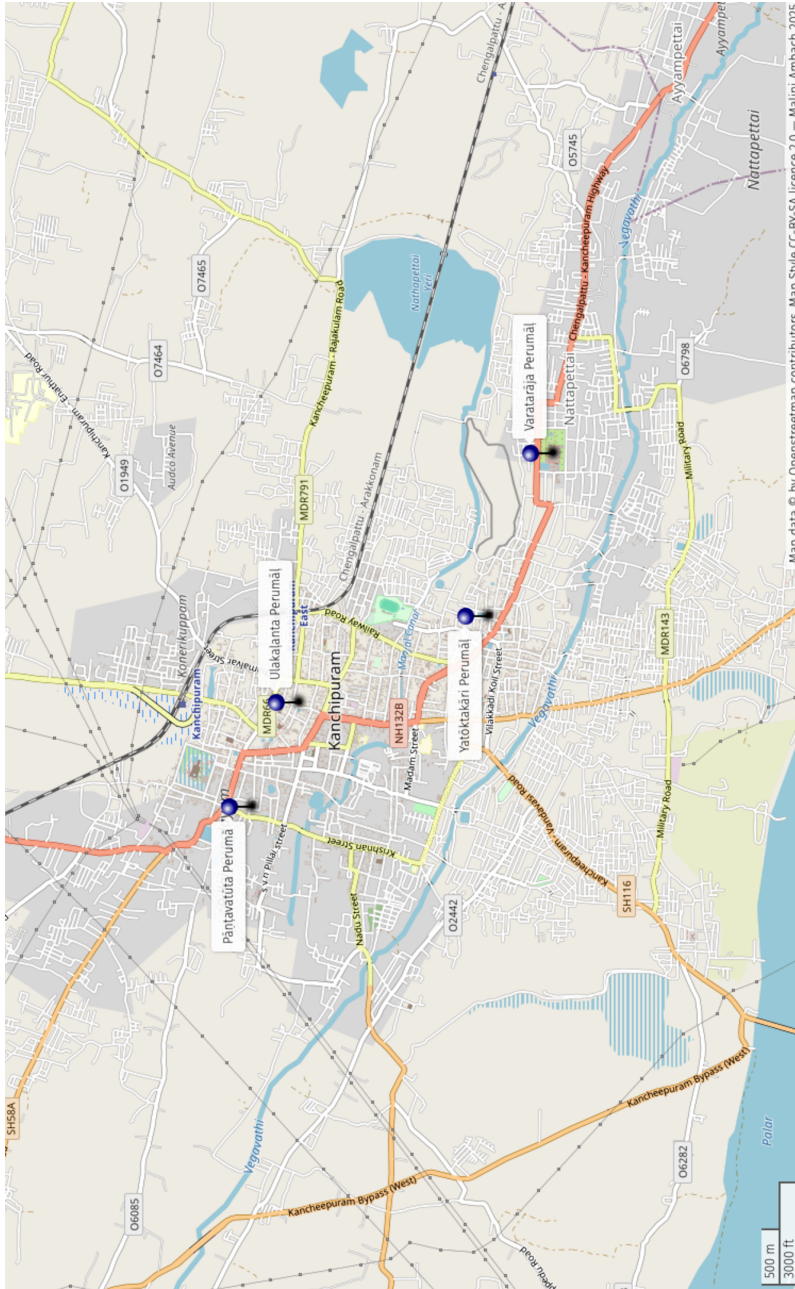


Fig. 6.9 Central Vaiṣṇava temples in formerly individual settlements in Kanchi that correspond to focal points in the *KM(V)*.

landscape. These three sites correspond to three temples that were central (Vaiṣṇava) places in individual settlements that emerged around temples as centres of religious activities—and spatial markers—with the rise of the Bhakti movement and coalesced during the Chola period (Srivatsan 1992, 103; Veluthat 1979; Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 301; see section 2.3): the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple in the southeast of today's city is located in the former village of Attiyur, which was independent of Kanchi until the thirteenth century (Raman 1975, 3; Stein 2022, 297); the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple is located in the oldest urban core, which later became the north-western part of the city; and the Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temple further west is situated in the former settlement of Padagam (Raman 1987, 67; see figure 6.9).²⁷²

The Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ temple was also the centre of a formerly individual settlement, Tiruvehka (Raman 1987, 67). In the times of the Āḷvārs (sixth–ninth century), Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ (called Veḷḷkā) appears to have been more prominent than Varatarāja Perumāḷ (Raman 1975, 59). Based on Kanchi's history, one could thus assume that the site of Yathoktakāri is also constructed as a focal point of its own space in the text, or even instead of Varadarāja. However, this would not be compatible with the general outline of the KM(V), which conceives Varadarāja at the centre and subordinates the other Vaiṣṇava places in Kanchi to him. Yathoktakāri is instead given a more prominent position in Varadarāja's narrative, which sets him apart from the other of Viṣṇu's manifestations in that myth.

Moreover, Yathoktakāri's spatial position seems to be of relevance in the interpretation of Kāñci's sacred landscape in the KM(V). He is included in Varadarāja's myth and said to be situated in the space designed for the myth, Brahmā's sacrificial hall. Accordingly, his affiliation with Varadarāja is strong. When one considers the urban development of Kanchi, the Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ temple formed the eastern boundary of the oldest urban core in its southern parts (Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6). It thus belonged to another settlement unit before Attiyur became a part of Kanchi. Yathoktakāri's association in the Māhātmya can thus be read as a connecting element to tie Varadarāja to Kāñci in its entirety or, conversely, Kāñci to Varadarāja in view

272 The Yatōktakāri, Ulakaḷanta, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples further share an iconographic similarity, as the image of the main deity in the sanctum sanctorum is huge and made of stucco (Raman 1992, 43–44). Viṣṇu is depicted reclining as Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ, standing as Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, and sitting as Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ (Nagaswamy 2011, 7). They reflect three of the four standard forms of Viṣṇu in the Śrīvaiṣṇava iconography, namely reclining, sitting, standing, striding (Narayanan 1985, 56).

of the spatial arrangement of the sacred sites.²⁷³ The interpretation of the spatial aspects goes hand in hand with the hierarchisation of the Vaiṣṇava sites in the KM(V) to consolidate a process—traced through the evolution of the narratives and the references to historical developments—from which Varadarāja has emerged as the most significant of all sites in Kāñcī. Conveying precisely this perspective on Kanchi's religious landscape is the essence of the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya*. The dissemination of such a perspective was certainly also in the interest of people in the milieu of the Varadarāja Perumāl temple, the presumed compilers of the KM(V).

Aspects of local history also seem to be reflected in the sequence of Viṣṇu appearing in the KM(V). In the text, Narasiṃha appears first (KM(V) ch. 3) and Varadarāja much later (KM(V) ch. 17). Similarly, Viṣṇu as Yathoktakārī (KM(V) ch. 15) appears before Varadarāja. On the site of the Varadarāja Perumāl temple, the shrine of Narasiṃha (Yōka Naracimma Perumāl) was more prominent in earlier times, while Varadarāja gained popularity from the eleventh century onwards (Nagaswamy 2011, 137). The same applies to the Yatōktakārī Perumāl temple (see above), whose significance is thus woven into the temporal framework of the *Māhātmya*.

Another setup considering historical spatial developments may be found in the narrative about Vaikuṇṭhanāyaka (Vaikuṇṭa Perumāl) and Śiva as Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar; KM(V) ch. 30). It seems to capture the urban layout of Kanchi established in the Pallava era (sixth–ninth century). The Pallavas changed the spatial outline of their capital by expanding the previous urban core—the area around the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple framed by the four Rājavīthi—first to the west (Kailācanātar) and later to the east (Vaikuṇṭa Perumāl) while adhering to a specific pattern (Srivatsan 1992, 103; Stein 2021, 63–68, 121, fig. 38). Both built in the eighth century, the Kailācanātar came to be the western limit and the Vaikuṇṭa Perumāl temple the eastern limit of the Pallava city (Raman 1987, 66).²⁷⁴

273 Other examples of these linking elements are the story about Hemāmbhojā-tīrtha (Porāmarai Kuḷam; second and eastern temple tank at the Varadarāja Perumāl temple; KM(V) 5.11c–12, ch. 22) and the passage describing Garuḍasevā (KM(V) ch. 27), the Varadarāja procession through Kanchi during the annual festival of the Varadarāja Perumāl temple. Both are initially set in the space of Kāmakōṣṭha, corresponding to the central part of Kanchi, but then expand to the site of Varadarāja in the southeast as if to strengthen the bond of the latter to Kāñcī (see subsection 6.4.2).

274 On the architecture and history of the two temples, see n. 40 and the sources cited therein.

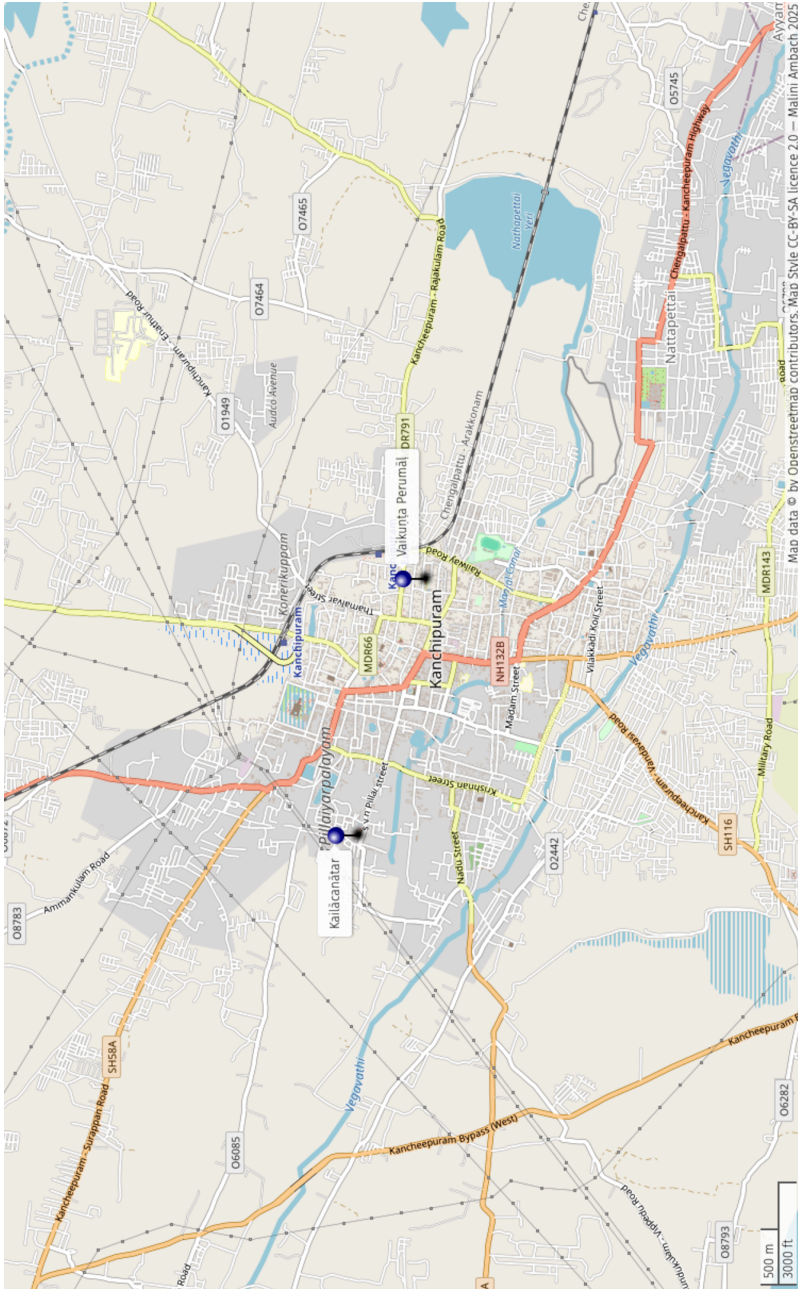


Fig. 6.10 Kailācanātar and Vaiḥaṅga Perumāḷ temples as bounding spatial markers in Kanchi.

Their location in the historical urban layout could explain why the Śaiva site is included alongside Viṣṇu's abode in the KM(V) in the same story, which gives equal attention to both sites without overtly hierarchising them. Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka and Kailāsanāyaka appear to be used as bounding spatial markers to locate an area in Kāñcī where Śiva is considered equivalent to Viṣṇu. In the KM(V), this area corresponds to Kāmakoṣṭha. It is characterised as a place where both Viṣṇu and Śiva are worshipped—in precisely the myth about Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka and Kailāsanāyaka (KM(V) 30.17c–19)—and forms the space where the myth of Ekāmranātha is set (see subsection 6.4.4). Consequently, the presence of the Śaiva tradition and its sites in Kāñcī is recognised but, importantly, conceptually fixed to one area bound by Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka and Kailāsanāyaka. It thus does not call into question the fundamental Vaiṣṇava interpretation of Kāñcī. When considering today's city, the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ and Kailācanātar temples still frame Shiva-Kanchi, the northwestern part of Kanchi (see figure 6.10).

The allusions to Kanchi's urban space and religious landscape through history are a particular feature of the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya. These allusions strengthen the local anchoring and a Varadarāja-centric perspective on the religious (Vaiṣṇava) landscape of Kanchi. While both the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* orient their layout towards the geography of Kanchi's religious landscape, the KM(V) instead aligns its spatial layout primarily with the mythological stories, which in turn underpin a particular interpretation of local spatial history. Referring to local particularities, the KM(V), though, does not trace the selected historical developments in terms of a chronicle; the timeframe is the mythical past and the mythological narratives are the conceptual framework. This Māhātmya-typical temporality projects a certain authority concerning the described design of Kāñcī's sacred landscape that presents Kāñcī as a place of Viṣṇu and Varadarāja as the most important among the Vaiṣṇava sites. Expressed through the emphasis on the evolutionary aspect in the myths, the interpretation of Kāñcī's sacred landscape in the KM(V) emphasises a changeability and dynamism. Both elements characterise the history of the religious landscape of the city, and the KM(V) seems to address selected developments to underpin a perspective that documents the superior position of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple among all other (Vaiṣṇava) places in Kanchi.

6.6 In a Nutshell

The design of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* is predominantly guided by Vaiṣṇava myths. The dimensionality and interpretation of the spaces, the arrangement and selection of sacred sites, and the idea of Kāñcī are all based on the evolution of the myths. With its focus on the unfolding of the narratives—in particular those framed in the four narrative cycles—a prospective approach is expressed. This means that sacred places are conceptually considered non-existent before their story of origin is told and their location is determined at the end. As a result, the Vaiṣṇava text remains largely at a level of mythology and only makes connections to geography in isolated instances, when it locates sacred sites at the end of the myths. In this approach, the KM(V) differs from both the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and *Kāmākṣivilāsa* with their geography-based layouts. In the Vaiṣṇava *Māhātmya*, the link to the local settings is instead established by way of references to the spatial and thus also religious aspects of the urban history. Through the arrangement of the narratives and the spatial design, allusions to most fundamental stages of urban evolution are made. By referencing to the extent of the Pallava-era city and tracing the growth of the city when individual temple-centred settlements grew to join the urban nucleus in Chola times, the text most fundamentally aims to consolidate an arrangement with Varadarāja—and thus the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple—as *the* central Vaiṣṇava site in the city. Since the selection of places considered in the KM(V) is largely limited to Vaiṣṇava places, the text seems to be intended for the Vaiṣṇava community rather than for the representatives and followers of other Hindu traditions. This only emphasises the assumption that the KM(V) originated in the milieu of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, whose administrative and priestly exponents as well as affiliated institutions would have had the greatest interest in documenting and promoting such a design of Kāñcī's sacred landscape.

Spatially embedded into Satyavratākṣetra, the area that carries Kāñcī's assigned Vaiṣṇava character into the region, the KM(V) focuses on Vaiṣṇava sites—or rather on the different forms of Viṣṇu that take their abode in Kāñcī in the course of the text. As the *Māhātmya* itself states, eighteen Viṣṇus in Kāñcī are presented, mirrored by a set of eighteen sacred water bodies. With the selection of the eighteen, the KM(V) covers most of the major Vaiṣṇava sites in Kanchi. The eighteen Viṣṇus are arranged in concentrically constructed spaces in Kāñcī with a focal point and a spatial focus that shifts from the southeast of Kanchi to the northwest in the course of

the text. Three orientation points—most prominently Hastiśaila—serve to locate other sacred sites located in the same area or are conceptually connected to it through myths. In addition, the form of Viṣṇu that is considered the most significant in a narrative cycle and the related area is at the centre, at the focal point, of the space to which it spatially belongs. There are three of these sites, Varadarāja, Trivikrama, and Pāṇḍavadūta. They can be identified with the Varatarāja Perumāḷ, Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples, which were centres of individual settlements before the formerly different parts of Kanchi grew together in an agglomerative manner (Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301). In spite of its focus on Vaiṣṇava sites, the conceptual design with several centres reflects the polycentric sacred and religious landscape of Kanchi that is grounded in the history of the city.

The overall focus in the Vaiṣṇava text is on Varadarāja. This orientation is reflected structurally by the extensiveness of his myth, references to him in narratives set in other spaces within Kāñcī, and a chapter with a story about his abode and the annual festival with its different processions celebrating Varadarāja. Deities other than Viṣṇu are rather a side note in the KM(V). The exceptions are Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī—both located at the other end of Kanchi away from Varadarāja—and Kailāsanāyaka, presumably given the position of the Kailācanātar temple as spatial marker in an urbanising city in Pallava times. With Ekāmranātha, the Vaiṣṇava text acknowledges the significance of the Śaiva traditions in Kanchi and even terms Kāmakoṣṭha, corresponding to the central / northwestern part of the city, as a place of both Viṣṇu and Śiva. In essence, however, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* represents a selective-interpretative Vaiṣṇava design of the sacred space of Kanchi, reflecting the multifocal arrangement of the Vaiṣṇava religious landscape and consolidating an interpretation in which Varadarāja outshines them all.

7 Comparative and Concluding Reflections

With around a dozen Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas and Tamil Talapurāṇams, Kanchipuram has received a particularly large number of glorifying texts, reflecting the importance of the city (Buchholz 2022, 11). The range of texts also testifies to Kanchi's pluralistic religious landscape. As the analysis in the earlier chapters has shown, the three of the Sanskrit texts discussed in this book, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)), the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* (KV), and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)), offer parallel but not temporally concurrent perspectives; on that account it may be said that they refer to and represent the diachronic aspect of the historical place of Kanchipuram and its space. Taking a broader perspective of Kāñcī's sacred geography, the Sthalamāhātmyas reflect a Śaiva, a Vaiṣṇava, and a Śākta outlook. They thus represent the three predominant religious traditions co-existing in and shaping the city since centuries (Hüsken 2017; Srinivasan 1979, 231–279; Seshadri 2003, 29–39).

While the sectarian angle is the dominant factor with regard to the framing of Kāñcī as Śaiva, Śākta, or Vaiṣṇava as well as the selection of places included in them, the texts vary significantly in their interpretation of Kāñcī's sacred space and the extent and manner they relate to the local geography, religious landscape, and history. Yet, as the comparative discussion demonstrates, certain similarities get highlighted as well. Firstly, they concern the origin stories about individual places: across the three texts, one and the same narrative or motif is often linked to one and the same place irrespective of the sectarian affiliation of the text.²⁷⁵ Secondly, there are commonalities in the area of spatial interpretation, as the following two sections on the region and the city underscore. Finally, the detailed analysis of the three texts demonstrates their firm grounding in the historical city. The locations of the existing—both natural and man-made—sites such as rivers, cities, temples, shrines, and sacred water bodies (*tīrthas*), clearly form common

275 For specific examples, see 3.3.4 and also the summaries of the myths of origin of the deities Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja and their role and interpretation across the texts in sections 3.3.1, 3.3.2, and 3.3.3.

reference points and provide structuring elements to the individual layouts of Kāñcī showcased in the Sthalamāhātmyas.

The diversity of the Sthalamāhātmya texts allows for a cross-textual approach to the varied notions of Kāñcī's sacred geography. While the earlier chapters (4, 5, and 6) have explored, independently of each other, the three different concepts of Kāñcī found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, this chapter will interconnect the findings by looking into some select features of Kanchi and the region. Reversing the approach used in the earlier chapters, where each sectarian iteration of Kanchi was investigated separately, the present analysis starts from the historical city and region, the history, the (regional) physical geography, and the city's religious landscape, and then draws on the ideas found in the texts to present a concise and interlocking reflection.

The depictions of Kāñcī from the Sthalamāhātmyas take into account aspects of geography, urban history, spatiality, and the religious landscape of Kanchi. While the texts present myths about the origin of these sacred sites set in a mythical past, they refer to existing temples, shrines and water bodies and seem to interpret the religious landscape of the city as it might have looked in times before the texts were composed. As may be seen across the texts, most of the places mentioned in the Sthalamāhātmyas may be identified with extant historical sites and may still to be found in the present-day modern city.²⁷⁶ The parallel literary landscapes of Kāñcī laid out in the texts thus closely correspond to the geography and religious landscape existing in the physically tangible world. They may be viewed as examples of what Melanie Conroy calls a realist geography, a fictional or imagined landscape that largely overlaps with the geographical one, with places mentioned in the text(s) corresponding to historical sites of the same name and at the same locations (2021, 8). In the words of Edward Soja (1996), such places are real-and-imagined; they are conceptually a blending of the physically tangible sites and mental conceptions about them. In Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas, the physical local and regional geography and structures of the religious landscape clearly serve as a basis for the interpretation of Kāñcī as sacred space.

276 There are different reasons why a place mentioned in the text cannot be identified with a historical site, see subsection 1.3.2 for a discussion on this issue. For comprehensive lists of the places from the three Sthalamāhātmyas and information on the historical sites they can be identified with, see the appendix; for such a list of only the *śivaliṅgas* from the KM(Ś), see Buchholz 2025.

Regional Contextualisation

For many centuries, Kanchi was a seat of power connected to several kingdoms. The clearest association of the city with a specific region as its own sphere of influence may be found during the rule of the Pallava dynasty (sixth–ninth century CE) when its kings ruled from Kanchi. In that period Kanchi was *the* capital of the kingdom and not *one* centre of power among many as under the Chola (tenth–thirteenth century) and the Vijayanagara sovereignty (fourteenth–seventeenth century; Mahalingam 1969). The area ruled by the Pallavas may be identified as Tondaimandalam. This region stretched between the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Then Pennai river in the south, the Kallar river in the west, and the Swarnamukhi river in the north (Mahalingam 1969, 2–4; Srinivasan 1979, 7; see visualisation in figure 7.1). The cross-textual analysis then yields the following interesting findings: all three of Kanchi’s Sthalamāhātmyas attest to the association of Kāñcī with a region of this spread and all three notions of Kāñcī’s region roughly correspond to the spatial reach of Tondaimandalam as visualised in figure 7.1.

To start with the larger framing, the element common to the spatial concepts from the KM(Ś), the KV, and the KM(V) is the initial geographical contextualisation of Kāñcī with a surrounding region as its sphere of influence. While the KV outlines a multilayered design of several areas of decreasing size surrounding Kāñcī, there is only one space each in the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) to delineate the area (*kṣetra*) surrounding Kāñcī. The characterisation of the regional space differs between the three Sthalamāhātmyas in line with their sectarian outlook: the KM(Ś) associates it with Śiva, the KV links it with Kāmākṣī, and the KM(V) understands it as systematised by the Vaiṣṇava worldview (see sections 4.2, 5.2, and 6.2). Yet all three texts agree on the spread and position of the area they identify as belonging to Kāñcī (see figure 7.1²⁷⁷). Furthermore, across the texts, Kāñcī is defined as the centre of the regional space(s), partly explicitly, partly implicitly; the Vaiṣṇava text even indicates a specific location in Kāñcī, namely Hastīśaila, the abode of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja, as the centre point of the regional space (KM(Ś) 4.6–9a; KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5).

The modelling on the historical Tondaimandalam is quite clear in the KV, which defines an area called Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala—a Sanskrit equivalent

277 The visualisations of spaces described in the texts on a map can only ever be an approximation as temporal, that is, non-fixed, length units are used in the Sthalamāhātmyas (see subsection 1.3.3).

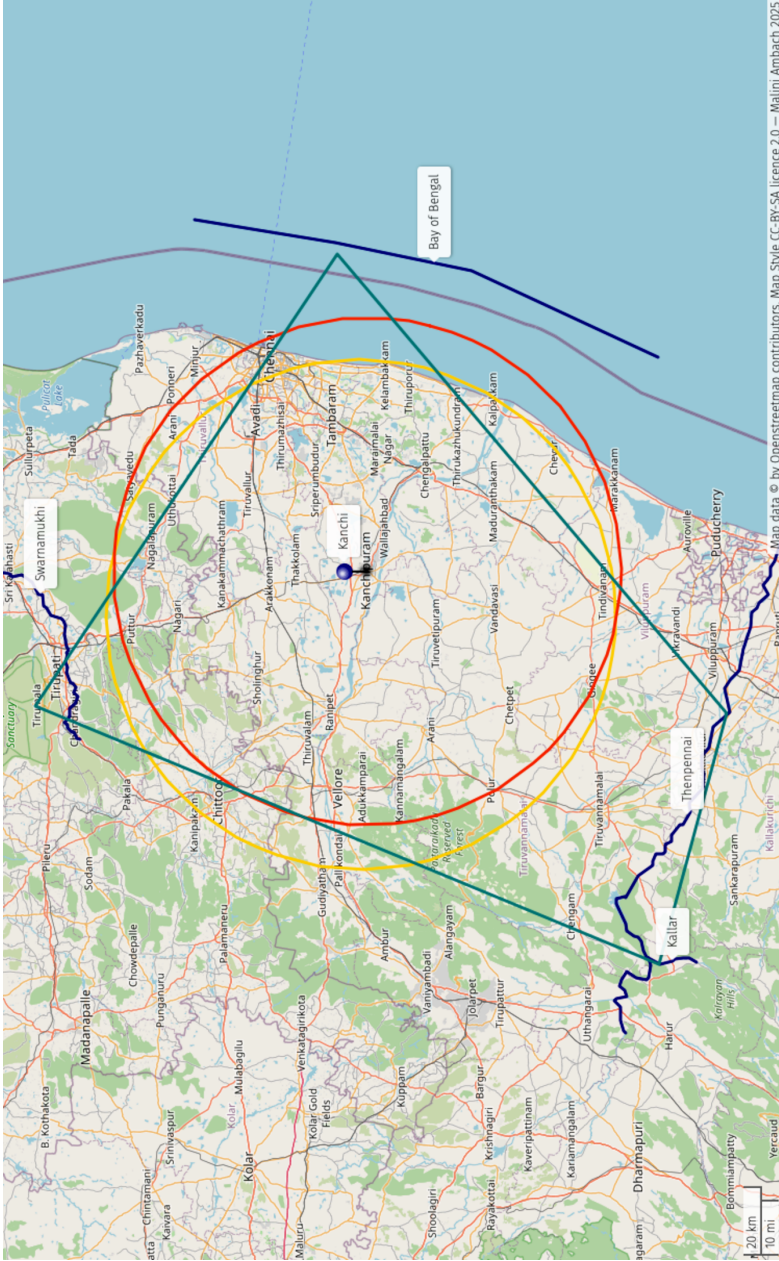


Fig. 7.1 The dimensions of Kañci's region in the KM(S) (red), in the KV (green), and in the KM(V) (yellow) compared to the historical region Tondaimandalam, marked by four rivers (dark blue; based on Mahalingam 1963, 2-3).

to Tondaimandalam—of similar dimensions (see section 5.2 and figure 7.1). In the KM(Ś) and the KM(V), in contrast, there is no direct allusion to the historical region. The dimensionality of the regional space—called Satyavrata-kṣetra—in the Vaiṣṇava text might still be implicitly referring to Tondaimandalam. This Sthalamāhātmya structurally seems to address local historical developments, such as the evolution of Kanchi’s urban space and the shift of attention in the local Vaiṣṇava communities in favour of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34, 43–44; see section 6.5). It is therefore plausible that Satyavratakṣetra is modelled on the historical region Tondaimandalam. Besides, another noteworthy detail becomes apparent when comparing the conception of Kāñcī’s regional space from the KM(V) and the KM(Ś). With a diameter of ten *yojanas*, the extent of Satyavratakṣetra corresponds to the dimension of the regional space, Kāñcī-kṣetra, in the Śaiva text, which is five *yojanas* in radius (KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5; 4.6–9a; KM(Ś) 4.8).

The tracing of Tondaimandalam in all three Sthalamāhātmyas and the shared details point to a prevailing notion of the regional space as associated with Kanchi and the city with this surrounding area. By referring to the historical region, which probably most aptly stands for the political and historical significance of Kanchi as a centre of power, the texts tie in with a conception of Kanchi as the *sole* dominant place in the region. Conceptually, this centred layout is particularly well framed in the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) in which the region seems to be conceived as a circle with Kāñcī at its centre. As the Pallava times were formative centuries with regard to the urban outline of the city (Raman 1987, 66–68; Stein 2021, 63–68) and in view of Kanchi’s central position in the region in this period, the city’s connection with this particular regional concept seems to be especially strong and expresses particularly well Kanchi’s significance in history.

Another noteworthy element that becomes apparent by the comparative perspective is how rivers and hills function as spatial landmarks across the Sthalamāhātmyas. Both are natural markers of the landscape; rivers serve as easily recognisable linear spatial demarcations and elevations are particularly prominent in largely flat terrain such as that surrounding Kanchi. The most distinct example of a hill to which significance is attached in the texts is Hastiśaila (Hastigiri). It is conceived as centre point of the regional space in the Vaiṣṇava text (KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5) and stands for the abode of Varadarāja, the most significant among Viṣṇu’s manifestations in Kāñcī in the KM(V). The *Kāmākṣivilāsa* similarly acknowledged the importance of Hastiśaila as Varadarāja’s abode and includes a separate myth detailing its origin (KV ch. 3). With a view to today’s perception, the idea of

Varadarāja residing on the hill is upheld at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, as the central two-storey building housing the sanctum sanctorum on its first floor is understood as a hill (Raman 1975, 44–45).

As for the rivers, several traverse Kanchi. In the contemporary city, the most prominent ones are the channel Manjalneer Kalvai, the Vegavathi, a northern sidearm of the Palar, and the Palar itself. While being seasonal watercourses, the Vegavathi and Palar rivers in particular are distinct topographical markers of Kanchi's space (see section 2.1 and figure 2.1). The geographical localisation and spatial demarcation by way of rivers is a common feature of the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi. The KV indicates four rivers to delineate the largest regional space, Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala (KV 1.11–32; see section 5.2), while both the Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava text list seven rivers each that characterise the space they define as the city Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 3.78c–80b; KM(V) 4.29–31b; see sections 4.2 and 6.2). In the two latter texts, it has not yet been possible to identify some of the rivers, therefore their function as spatial markers of the spatial extent of Kāñcī cannot be fully assessed. Corresponding to the contemporary topography, most attention among the identified rivers from the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) is paid to the Manjalneer Kalvai, the Vegavathi, and the Palar. These watercourses are not only listed as topographical features of Kāñcī's area but are also highlighted in the texts' myths.

Another river, called Kampā, deserves a separate discussion, as its descriptions in the three texts seem to reveal details about the relative chronology of the Sthalamāhātmyas. The Kampā is named in the KM(Ś) and KM(V) among the rivers that characterise Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 3.78c–80b; KM(V) 4.29–31b). In the contemporary city, there prevails the perception that the river can be identified with Kampaitīrttam, the southern temple tank at the Ēkāmparānātar temple; this tank is said to form the visible portion of the Kampā river flowing underground (Schier 2018, 106). The Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava text agree on the nature of the Kampā and undoubtedly classify it as a river. In contrast, the KV mentions it to be an invisible, dried-up watercourse (KV 9.7–9). Based on this difference, Kerstin Schier considers the Śākta Sthalamāhātmya to refer to a changed geography; she assumes that one of the two now dried-up rivers in Kanchi's area was the Kampā and that the KV records its altered state (2018, 88, 88, n. 47).²⁷⁸ The fact that the Kampā was

278 Kerstin Schier bases her assessment on the analysis of the Ekāmranātha myth from different Sthalamāhātmya texts. While the Kampā is an integral element of the myth in the KM(Ś) and the KM(V), appearing as a river intending to flood the sand-*liṅga* Pārvaṭī has built to worship Śiva, the river is not included in the version from the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (Schier 2018, 80–90, 88).

once a river—and presumably a significant one in the area—is also implied in the KV, in which the explicit mention of its dried-up state serves as a reminder of its former role. I was not able to find any details yet on when the Kampā river might have dried up. Still, the characterisation of the river as a dried up watercourse in the KV and its absence in the text’s version of Ekāmranātha’s myth may indicate a later composition date of the text compared to the other two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, which describe it as a river (*nadī*) and feature it as the locale of their versions of Ekāmranātha’s myth (Schier 2018, 80–90, 88; see also section 4.2). This assessment is in line with other arguments that suggest a late date of the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* (see pp. 85–89 and section 5.4). The description of local topographical features in the Sthalamāhātmyas could therefore prove to be a relevant focus for future research in order to correlate them with historical sources and thus attempt a relative chronology, albeit not an exact dating, of the texts.²⁷⁹

Kanchi as an Urban Space

From the early centuries CE, Kanchi is documented as an urban settlement with the Tamil poems *Perumpāñārruppaṭai* (ca. second to fourth century CE; Zvelebil 1974, 23; Wilden 2014, 8) and *Maṇimēkalai* (ca. 500 CE; Zvelebil 1995, 409) describing it as such. In the Pallava times, the city consisted of the area around the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, which is marked by four roads, the Rājavithis, and also includes the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple in the present-day city (see the space framed in figure 2.8; Nagaswamy 2011, 2–3; Raman 1987, 66; Stein 2021, 63–68; Srivatsan 1992, 102). Following this stage, the city gradually expanded and merged with the surrounding settlements that also centred around temples (Raman 1987, 67; Srivatsan 1992,

279 Kerstin Schier further notes that the Kampā river might have been one of the rivers that caused floods in Kanchi (2018, 88, n. 47). In Ekāmranātha’s myth from the KM(Ś) and KM(V), it is described how Śiva sends a flood to arise in the Kampā and the KM(V) also includes this motif (KM(Ś) 45.66–92; KM(V) ch. 25; see pp. 62–63 on Ekāmranātha’s myth in the KM(Ś)). Besides, the river Kampā (*kampanadī*) is praised in a separate *phalaśruti* section in the Śaiva text (KM(Ś) 37.1.–21b). The flood motif is similarly found in the myth of Viṣṇu as Yathoktakāri (for example KM(V) 14.1–16.22b) in which the Vegavatī appears as a destructive flood that threatens to drown Kanchi. As David Shulman (1980, 55–77) shows, the mythological processing of the motif of a (destructive) flood is widespread in Tamil mythologies and we see examples of this also in the Talapurāṇams on Kanchi.

103; Stein 2022, 297, 301). The agglomerative growth led to a polycentric layout of the city and thus also of its religious landscape. The most distinct marker of this arrangement is found in the distribution of Kanchi's three largest temples, the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple at the southeastern end of the city away from the other two major temples, the Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ (see figure 2.8). The area around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple was once the independent village called Attiyur, which merged with Kanchi in the thirteenth century (Stein 2022, 297). The Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple subsequently rose to be the most important Vaiṣṇava temple in the entire city during the fourteenth century, surpassing in importance other major Vaiṣṇava sites such as the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples (Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34, 43–44; Raman 1975, 60).

The idea of Kanchi as a city is also taken up in the Sthalamāhātmya texts. In detail, the manner in which the city is characterised is revealing. Most space devoted to the description of the city is given in the Vaiṣṇava text, in which the myth of Varadarāja (KM(V) chs. 9–17) has the additional function of being the foundation myth of the city Kāñcī (Porcher 1985, 34; see n. 227). In line with the overall temporal approach in the Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya, the text conceptually begins plotting Kāñcī's origin story at a point when the city is considered to have not yet come into existence; there is nothing there but a forest (KM(V) 10.12c–10.13b) which serves as the mythical setting for the city's origin. My close analysis has revealed that developments in Kanchi's religious landscape are addressed by the structural layout of the KM(V). The transformations within the religious sphere accompanied changes in the urban layout, which are thus implied in the text as well. One such example is the stories of Viṣṇu Vaikuṇṭhanāyaka (Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ) and Śiva Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar; KM(V) ch. 30), which are linked with each other in the text. A look at the history of these two sites reveals a common feature; the Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ and the Kailācanātar temple are the most monumental sites from the Pallava era and marked the limits of the royal capital at that time (Raman 1987, 66; 1992, 40–41, 44–45). The Pallava era was formative for Kanchi's urban development (Raman 1987, 66–68; Stein 2021, 63–68) and the KM(V) records both circumstances in its stories. Another, and more defining example is the allusion to the multifocal layout of the local Vaiṣṇava religious landscape. The spatial configuration is processed in the arrangement of the narrative cycles in which the text is structured. The sites that form the focal points in these narrative cycles correspond to central Vaiṣṇava sites, the Varatarāja Perumāḷ, Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples. These were central temples

of the formerly independent settlements that gradually grew together after the Pallava era to form an expanded city (Raman 1987, 66–68; Stein 2022, 297). This cluster-like arrangement is traced in the KM(V) through the arrangement of the narratives, with the oldest and central Vaiṣṇava sites in each zone highlighted as focal sites in the text (see section 6.5).

The Vaiṣṇava text further includes a chapter-length glorifying description of the city Kāñcī (KM(V) ch. 4). Similar glorifying passages are found in the KM(Ś), which evoke an ideal picture of a beautiful place with decorated houses, gardens, pavilions, and ponds (KM(Ś) 42.9–15b; see section 4.2 and pp. 101–106). Additionally, the Śaiva text explicitly mentions Kāñcī being a city and—true to its sectarian outlook—characterises it as Śiva’s. It conceptually starts out from Kāñcī being an already existing city, thus adopting a retrospective perspective and referring to a stable, coherent, and systematic conception of the city and its sacred places at a certain point in time.

Such a retrospective approach is also taken by the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. The simple idea of Kāñcī being a city seems to be taken for granted in this text. The KV, however, glorifies in several passages and characterises in more detail the idea of the city which belongs equally to the Goddess, to Śiva, and to Viṣṇu, all of whom are conceived as forms of the Goddess power (*śakti*; KV 1.56–68ab). This conveys an underlying Śākta orientation, with the city also being associated with the concept of the Śaktipīṭhas, the seats of the Goddess, and even more closely with the goddess Kāmākṣī (see section 5.1). Notably, as the only text among the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* subdivides the space of Kāñcī. In an apparently carefully considered spatial layout, the KV constructs three zones that are aligned with the locations of the Śaiva Ēkāmparanātar (in the (north-)west), the Śākta Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ (centre), and Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ ((south-)east) temples and linked to the resident deities Ekāmrānātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja (see section 5.3 and figure 5.11). The allocation of separate areas for the three deities is reminiscent of the contemporary division of the city into the devotional zones Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi (see section 2.3 and figure 2.2 for details).²⁸⁰ Apparently acknowledging the association of Kanchi’s south-east with Viṣṇu (Vishnu-Kanchi) and the city’s northwestern part with Śiva (Shiva-Kanchi), the KV adds a space in-between—with the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple as focal point—and assigns it to the Goddess.

²⁸⁰ There is also a third zone, Jina-Kanchi. It corresponds to the suburb Tirupparuttikkunram in Kanchi’s southwest around the city’s major Jain temples does not seem to be of relevance in the texts; Jain sites are neither considered in the KV nor in the two *Kāñcimāhātmyas*. Jina-Kanchi is therefore excluded from the following analysis.

Considering the Śākta outlook of the KV and its presumed late date of origin, the tripartite interpretation of Kāñcī's space can be read as addressing the clear disregard of the city's strong Śākta tradition centring around the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple in the conceptual division of Kanchi into a Śaiva and a Vaiṣṇava zone alone (for details, see section 5.4). According to Emma Stein, the designations—Shiva-, Vishnu-, and Jina-Kanchi—were established in the second half of the nineteenth century (2021, 36–37) and they are probably an expression of a consolidated local conception of space from the period. Since there is reason to assume that the KV is a rather late text, possibly written only shortly before its first printed edition of 1889 (see pp. 85–89 and the literature referenced there), it is likely that the KV actually addresses and seeks to expand on this historical conception.

Taking a step back again and considering the city in its entirety, it is similarly worthwhile to explore how the ideas of Kāñcī from the texts relate to the administrative or political unit Kanchi in terms of spatial reach. Identifying the limits of the city through historical evidence as found in secondary literature is based on assumptions as sources such as maps are sparse. As Emma Stein (2021, 240) notes, the first map of Kanchi is the *Map of Conjeeveram* by John Gould which dates to 1816 (see figure 2.3). Consequently, potentially relevant references have to be mainly derived from the city's history. One major change in the spatial extent of the city was the merging of the oldest urban core with the previously independent settlements in its surroundings occurring mainly during the thirteenth century (Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301). In particular, the inclusion of the former village Attiyur significantly added to the city in the southeast.

The encompassing study of the sacred places mapped in the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi yields a revealing insight. All of the texts clearly refer to a post-thirteenth century city. By that time the now southeastern part, the former Attiyur, was included in the city (see Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301) and the city Kāñcī from the Sthalamāhātmyas is evidently considered to include Varadarāja's abode in the southeast as well as several other places in the same area. Apart from that, the spatial extent of Kāñcī is rather broadly conceptualised in the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, outlining spaces that far exceed the expansion of the city at any point in history.²⁸¹ These layouts seem to signify the wide-spread importance and influence of Kāñcī, but cannot be used

281 In the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, a space of 1 1/2 *yojanas*—corresponding to around 22 kilometres—in radius spreading in all directions is indicated as the city's (KM(Ś) 4.6–9a). The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* mentions Kāñcī to stretch 7 *yojanas*—around 102 kilometres—each east-west and north-south (KM(V) 4.19–20). On the conversion values, see subsection 1.3.3

to draw more precise correlations with the spatial extent of the historical city.

As the only one of the three Sthalamāhātmyas, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* offers a more tailored design that actually seems to match with the dimensions of the historical city.²⁸² Interestingly, this idea largely corresponds to the outline of Kanchi as given in John Gould's *Map of Conjeeveram* (1816; see figure 2.3). Precisely this comparison is not far-fetched as several arguments point to a nineteenth-century origin of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (see section 5.4 and pp. 85–89 and the literature referenced there). In this case, the city's conceptualisation in the text seems to overlap with the outline of the real-world city. It further reflects the fundamental orientation of the sacred geography in the KV towards the geo-spatiality of Kanchi. Altogether it can be concluded that Kanchi's urban character is addressed in all three texts, with the KV showing a clear modelling of the spatiality of the historical city (in the nineteenth century) and the KM(V) tracing urban developments in its spatial design.

Religious Landscape

In the space defined as Kāñcī, each of the three Sthalamāhātmyas maps an array of sacred sites in the city. Importantly, the places mentioned in the texts can generally be identified with historical sites, that is, temples, shrines, and temple tanks. Given the close correspondence, a comparison between the texts' designs of Kāñcī's sacred geography and the city's religious landscape is particularly productive. Kanchipuram is characterised by a particularly pluralistic religious landscape and a multitude of temples, shrines, and sacred water bodies densely dotting the entire city (Stein 2021, 106). A historically developed multifocal arrangement is another specific characteristic of the city. In this regard, Kanchi stands out among the usually

282 The exact outline of Kāñcī as per the text can only be estimated as I was not able to identify any of the places that are given as boundary markers in the text (KV 1.50c–57b). Nevertheless, the dimensions of Kāñcī indicated by the KV provide sufficient pointers to assume a modelling on the historical city in line with the text's clear orientation towards the geo-spatiality of the latter (see pp. 150–151 and figure 5.2).

monocentric layouts around a single temple found in other major temple cities in Tamil Nadu, such as Madurai or Srirangam (Michell 1993).²⁸³

There are more than four hundred larger and smaller temples, shrines, and dozens of temple tanks in Kanchi today.²⁸⁴ Many if not most of them would also have existed when the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi were composed, with the large-scale construction of Kanchi's temples beginning with the Pallavas (sixth–ninth century; Stein 2021). The three largest and most prominent temples in Kanchi today, the Śaiva Ēkāmparanātar, the Śakta Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ, and the Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, primarily structure the ritual and spatial aspects of the cityscape and the religious landscape (Seshadri 2003; Hüsken 2017). Their central significance and size owe much to the fact that these particular temples have received abundant patronage through the tenth to seventeenth century (Hudson 1993, 20). Their prominence is also reflected in the Sthalamāhātmyas; each of the three texts on Kanchi places its structural emphasis on the myths about Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣi, and/or Varadarāja and concentrates its spatial design of Kāñcī around these deities. The KM(Ś) focuses on Ekāmranātha and conceives him as the centre of its spatial design; the KV ultimately promotes Kāmākṣi, but achieves a balance by dedicating equally structured parts to Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣi and by presenting a tripartite division of Kāñcī's space by assigning separate areas to each of the three deities; and the KM(V) includes an elaborate myth of Varadarāja and highlights him among several spatial focal points (see chapters 4, 5, and 6).

The three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi show close ties to the city's three largest temples and their ritual traditions. The texts may have even originated in the milieu of the Ēkāmparanātar (KM(Ś)), Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ (KV), and Varatarāja Perumāḷ (KM(V)) temples and/or affiliated institutions. A publication by P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy on the Indian census from 1961 seems to comment on the links between these temples and the glorifying texts, although the details remain fairly vague. The connection is

283 For details on the spatial layouts of these cities including Kanchi, see contributions in Michell 1993.

284 All numbers concerning religious sites in Kanchi are reasoned estimates; the vast majority of the existing sites have been found and mapped somewhere, but not all of them. The Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences; since 2022), has taken on the task to prepare a database of the sites and the figures in this section are based on the current (October 2025) status of this work. Similarly, the numbers of sacred places are slightly imprecise as not all of them could be identified with historical places and might contain doublets.

most specifically stated in the case of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple, which is said to have a place legend that was published “by the Karvettinagar Samasthanam in the name of *Kamakshi Vilasam*” (Nambiar and Krishnamurthy 1965, 102). This note clearly refers to the first edition of the KV which was published in Karvetinagaram (Andhra Pradesh) in Telugu script in 1889.²⁸⁵ P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy (1965, 102) further refer to the glorifying text (“Sthala Puranam”) of the Ēkāmpanātar temple, although no details are given. Their phrasing “Sthala Puranam” does not seem to be intentionally employed for disambiguation to point to a Tamil Talapurāṇam as opposed to a Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya. Moreover, the word *Sthalapurāṇa* is often used quite loosely and does not have to refer exclusively to a text of one of these genres, but can also include modern temple brochures or the story of origin of a temple in general. Considering the contents of the available Sthalamāhātmyas and Talapurāṇams, the comment might well refer to the first book of the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam*, which is a rather popular text that appears to be of crucial importance in sculpting Kanchi’s Śaiva landscape and highlights Ekāmranātha (Buchholz 2022, 24–26; 2025). As this work is based on the KM(Ś), the Sanskrit text, too, would have been associated with the Ēkāmpanātar temple via the Tamil Talapurāṇam. Regarding the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy mention that the temple had released “a Sthala Puranam with photographs” (1965, 105). It is unlikely that the remark refers to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcimāhātmya*; the KM(V) does not seem to be widely known, and there are no images included in the available edition from 1907. When considering other Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya texts—there are no Tamil Talapurāṇams centring on Varadarāja—, the *Hastigirimāhātmya*, a Sthalamāhātmya focusing on the myth of Varadarāja, and thus the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, is a possible candidate. It is a popular text, which is available in various formats with commentaries in different languages and plays a central role during the Pallavotsava festival of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ (Buchholz 2022, 18–19). Accordingly, it is possible that the *Hastigirimāhātmya* is considered to form the temple’s myth of origin—which the text indeed contains. As this excursus shows, certain temples seem to affiliate themselves with particular glorifying texts. These might not be the KM(Ś), the KM(V), or the KV but yet other texts that are more significant to the lived religious traditions (see also pp. 89–91).

285 The second edition of the KV from 1968 in Devanagari script was obviously not yet published when the book by P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy came out in 1965.

When looking into the content of the Sthalamāhātmyas, their affiliations to the three largest temples are illustrated in various ways. The *Kāmākṣī-vilāsa* is firmly grounded in the local religious tradition of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple. Its longest and last chapter (KV ch. 14) contains miscellaneous topics related to the forms of worship in the Śākta Śrīvidyā tradition which is followed in the temple as well as philosophical expositions on the nature of the representations of the Goddess that are present there (see subsection 3.3.2).²⁸⁶ Besides, the KV contains references to festival celebrations related to Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī (KV 4.54–84b, 8.85–15, 12.74–119) and notes architectural features of their abodes (see section 5.3). The parallel acknowledgement of all three deities is grounded in the threefold structure of the text with a similarly structured Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta part centring on Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. In addition, the description of Ekāmranātha's wedding, which is a core element of the origin myth of the god in the KV, can be cited as an example of the connections of the Sthalamāhātmyas to the lived religious practice. The emphasis on the wedding is in keeping with the central position that the re-enactment of the wedding takes during the largest annual festival at the Ēkāmparanātar temple (Schier 2018).

Owing to their quite one-sided perspectives, the references to festivals and temple structures in the KM(Ś) and KM(V) are limited to the place that is central in the respective text. The Śaiva Māhātmya with its focus on Ekāmranātha includes a passage describing his abode (KM(Ś) 42.9–27b) and several chapters are devoted to the benefits one may obtain when performing various religious acts related to Ekāmranātha (KM(Ś) chs. 46–50).²⁸⁷ There is also a passage describing the main festival (Brahmotsava) at Ekāmranātha's place, including the sequence of the vehicles on which the god is taken during the festival (KM(Ś) 49.95–124). From my initial analysis correlating the details from the text with the sequence of the vehicles as observed by Kerstin Schier (2018, 197–198) during the Brahmotsava of the Ēkāmparanātar temple in 2010, a broad agreement of the latter with the former may be

286 Furthermore, the design of the 1968 Devanagari edition of the KV emphasises the association with the Kāmākṣī Amman temple, including several illustrations of its deities' images and architectural features.

287 As I have shown (see pp. 101–106), the layout of Ekāmranātha's dwelling place described in the KM(Ś) largely corresponds to the design of the present-day temple. It is important to note, however, that the temple underwent several reconstructions through the centuries. The most recent took place around 1900, following the publication of the first printed edition of the KM(Ś) in 1889, which also contains the relevant passage (Schier 2018, 29–38).

noted. Very generally, this correspondence might suggest a certain continuity of the festival up to the present day.

The Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya underscores Varadarāja's central position with stories providing an account about the building of the god's abode, the fashioning of three of his images (*pratimās*), and the celebrations of Brahmotsava, which is described as an annual festival marking Varadarāja's appearance (KM(V) ch. 28).²⁸⁸ The mention of just Brahmotsava coincides with the living festival tradition of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple in which this festival stands out as the most significant among the around two hundred festivals celebrated annually (Hüsken 2013, 101). Such inner-textual elements—often woven into mythological stories—thus illustrate the texts' connection to one of Kanchi's three largest temples.

Beside these, there exist many other temples, shrines, and subsidiary shrines, both large and small, within the compounds of the larger sites in Kanchi. The Śaiva sites number the most in Kanchi, probably hundred and sixty of them are spread across the city, marked by larger complexes like the Kaccapēsvarar temple to smaller and simpler, one-room structures like the shrine of Kāmēsvarar (at Carvatīrttam). There also exist around thirty-five Vaiṣṇava sites in the city, both as—mostly larger—temples with Viṣṇu as the main deity, such as the Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ or the Vaikuṅṭa Perumāḷ temples, as well as in the form of subsidiary shrines at other—also the non-Vaiṣṇava—temples, such as Mattēca Perumā located in the Śaiva Maccēca temple. Moreover, there are around seventy temples and shrines of the Goddess. The vast majority of them represent unmarried, more fierce forms of locally rooted traditions, such as the regional/local goddess Reṇukā. While also considered an independent goddess, Kāmākṣī is today firmly tied to the pan-Indian, orthodox-Sanskritic Śrīvidyā tradition and is understood as *śānta* (gentle) goddess, distinguishing her from the goddesses of local character.²⁸⁹ As common in South India, there are additionally subsidiary shrines of the Goddess also found in other temples, mainly as the consorts of male gods such as Viṣṇu. Furthermore, there are a dozen Hanuman temples in Kanchi, around seventy shrines dedicated to Gaṇeśa / Vināyakar, and a few housing Skanda / Murukaṅ, with the largest, Kumarakōṭṭam, being the

288 Different from the text, Varadarāja's appearance today is not commemorated and re-enacted during Brahmotsava, but during two other festivals, namely Pallavotsava and Avatārotsava (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., August 2024).

289 On the character of Hindu goddesses, see Flood 1997, 174–198.

most prominent one.²⁹⁰ Additionally, there are a smaller number of shrines dedicated to other deities such as Ayyappaṅ or Citragupta. In other words, temple buildings, best identified by the gateway towers and the white and red-stripped outer walls, dominate the cityscape.

As the present study shows, several important insights can be gained from closely analysing the selection of places whose myths are recounted in the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi. As far as the numerical ratio of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sites is concerned, the KM(Ś) reproduces the situation in today's Kanchi the best. It introduces around one hundred *śivaliṅgas*, mainly in Kanchi, but also some in the surrounding area, furthermore around fifteen Vaiṣṇava sites, individual goddesses and other deities. To compare, the contemporary city houses around hundred and sixty Śaiva sites, around thirty-five Vaiṣṇava temples, around seventy sites of the Goddess, seventy of Gaṇeśa, and some of other deities. It is clear, though, that the text refers to the city at a period in the past; the extent to which the Śaiva Sthalamāhātmya represents the conditions of Kanchi at a given time cannot be satisfactorily assessed without going into the details of temple construction in the city through history, which is beyond the scope of the present study. Temples have been continuously built and rebuilt since temple construction first started in South India from the sixth century onwards (Sahai 2010, 7; Stein 2021, 46–50), so that the landscape of temples constantly changed and still changes. Accordingly, the emphasis on the Śaiva sites in the KM(Ś) surely represents the sectarian outlook speaking from the text but might well reflect a historical arrangement in which Śaiva temples (already) outnumbered other Hindu religious sites in the city. The acknowledgement of all major Vaiṣṇava sites as well as the clear orientation on the geo-spatiality of the religious landscape in its arrangement of the sacred sites (see section 4.3) suggest the very assessment that the KM(Ś) has a certain accuracy in its reference to the historical city.

A different approach is taken in the Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya. Strongly characterised by a sectarian perspective, the KM(V) mentions almost exclusively the Vaiṣṇava sites. Eighteen Viṣṇus are mapped in Kanchi, with a few more located in the region. The comparison to today's religious landscape clearly shows that the KM(V) covers most of the Viṣṇu temples in the city. Other deities' places (individual), *śivaliṅgas* (around five) and goddesses (very few), are clearly outnumbered in the text. This selection of places is

290 Not included in these numbers of the Gaṇeśa and Skanda temples are most of those found within the compound of Śiva temples, which almost always also include a subsidiary shrine each for Gaṇeśa and Skanda.

not representative of the ratio of temples in Kanchi today and presumably never was, considering the many Śaiva sites which would also have existed in the city and are mapped in the KM(Ś). The Vaiṣṇava outlook instead attests to a high degree of interpretation. Looking through the Vaiṣṇava lens, the KM(V) still clearly refers to the historical city. This is expressed by tracing far-reaching spatial changes in the urban development, which also affected the layout of the religious landscape (Nagaswamy 2011; see section 6.5 and the section on the city above). Accordingly, the locations of the central Vaiṣṇava sites in the city serve as spatially structuring points in the KM(V). The selection of the few non-Vaiṣṇava sites—most of which are Śaiva—points to the acknowledgement of temples that are located in spatially crucial spots or are of other significance. These sites include, among selected others, the Airāvatisvarar and Kaccapēsvarar, once marking the limit of the old Pallava city, and the Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temples.²⁹¹ Importantly, the allusion to historical processes as a structural element in the arrangement of Kāñcī's space is a feature singular to the KM(V) and does not seem to be expressed in a similar way in the other two of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas. These texts instead take a pronounced geography-based approach and structure their description of Kāñcī mainly in accordance with the location of the historical sites in the space of the city.

The *Kāmākṣivilāsa* again offers a more balanced selection of sacred sites. It is notable that it best reflects the plurality and multifocality of Kanchi's religious landscape that is characteristic of the city today. The KV mentions around twenty-five goddesses, twenty *śivaliṅgas* and twenty Viṣṇus, and around ten other deities (Gaṇeśas, Skandas). Of the first three kinds, roughly around the similar number is mapped in the three spaces, the territories of Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī, into which Kāñcī is divided in the text (see figure 5.4). This arrangement displays the inner-textual attempt at balance but does not take into account the frequency of a particular type of place, for example Śaiva, in a particular area, for example the centre, in Kanchi. On the one hand, this perspective is highly selective and does not reflect the numerical distribution of temples of Śiva, Viṣṇu, the Goddess, and other deities, found onsite. On the other hand, with the relatively frequent mention of goddesses, the KV is the only text of the three Sthalamāhātmyas that attests to the existence of the many (around seventy) temples of the Goddess in the city. The (equal) inclusion of these sites can certainly be seen as an expression of the text's Śākta outlook. Given the presumably late date of the KV compared to the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, it could also reflect possible

291 On the temples in the urban layout, see Stein 2021, 66, 68, 86–87.

changes in the religious landscape, which may have increasingly included more stand-alone Goddess temples.²⁹²

Reviewing the Sthalamāhātmyas together, I am able to ascertain that of all those mentioned in the texts, only a limited number of sites is included in all three texts. In fact, many are introduced in two of the three Sthalamāhātmyas. For example, the twenty *śivaliṅgas* mapped in the KV are (almost) all included also in the KM(Ś), which comprehensively refers to Kanchi's many Śaiva sites. According to my findings, the reason why the texts do not overlap more in regard to the sacred places they map is found in the KM(V). The Vaiṣṇava text focuses on Viṣṇus and includes only selected *śivaliṅgas* and goddesses. Vaiṣṇava sites, however, are only found in a small number (around twenty-five) in Kanchi and *śivaliṅgas* and sites of the Goddess and Gaṇeśa number significantly more. Notably, by mostly excluding the most numerous types of sites, the Śaiva, the Vaiṣṇava text thus refers to only a select portion of the city's temples, of which the KM(Ś), in turn, includes a large number. The vast majority of the *śivaliṅgas* is only named in the Śaiva text. With regard to categories of places the above-mentioned constellation of sites mapped across the texts leads to another important insight: if one were to look at different classes of sites, the closest overlap between the texts is at the sites of Viṣṇu. Most of the city's Vaiṣṇava temples are referred to in all three Sthalamāhātmyas.

As far as sacred water bodies are concerned, around forty are found in Kanchi. While often given less attention, sacred water bodies are integral elements of a religious landscape, often even spatially integrated into the design of a temple. These comprise sites with built structures like temple tanks on the one hand and water bodies largely left in their natural state, such as ponds, on the other.²⁹³ The analysis of the three texts shows that

292 In this context, it would be worthwhile to explore, whether and how the number of temples dedicated to the Goddess has increased over the centuries. The construction of separate temples for the Goddess began to be common later (with the tenth/eleventh century) than of sites dedicated to Śiva or Viṣṇu (from the seventh century; Veluthat 2009, 62–63; Stein 2021, 29, n. 5). This historical development, however, would not concern the relevant period, as the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi all seem to refer to a (post-)Chola Kanchi; they thus point to a larger city in which the formerly independent settlements surrounding the oldest urban core have been already incorporated, a process that mainly happened in the thirteenth century (Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301).

293 The texts throughout refer to sacred water bodies as *tīrtha*, with some individual proper names also containing the word *saras* (lake), as in Anantasaras. In the contemporary names, both the Sanskrit term *tīrtha*—Tamilised as *tīrttam*—, and the Tamil term *kuḷam*, (tank or pond; TL, s.v. *kuḷam*) are found.

mainly those attached to older, larger, and significant temples, such as the Kaccapēsvarar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, or Kāyārōkaṇesvarar, are referred to in the Sthalamāhātmyas.²⁹⁴ Across the three Sthalamāhātmyas, thirty *tīrthas* are mentioned; eight of these are named in all the Sthalamāhātmyas, with each text including a different selection but similar numbers (KV: fifteen; KM(V): eighteen; KM(Ś): around twenty).²⁹⁵

Taking an overall view, my cross-textual study of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* provides several interesting insights when comparing the places mentioned in the texts to the historical sites found in Kanchi's contemporary religious landscape as a whole. Firstly, places of the Goddess, of Gaṇeśa, and of Skanda are most underrepresented in the Sthalamāhātmyas. Secondly, the proportions of the places of Śiva and of Viṣṇu, in turn, appear to be adequately represented.²⁹⁶ Both aspects are related and are probably due to the fact that Śiva and Viṣṇu are firmly grounded in the Sanskritic, Brahminical traditions and were therefore of greater relevance to the authors of the Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas, while the local goddesses and Gaṇeśas belong more to everyday and local religiosity. Thirdly, the focus on Varadarāja, Ekāmrānātha, and Kāmākṣī corresponds to the prominence of their temples in the city. Lastly, the distinctly pluralistic character of Kanchi's religious landscape

The appellations appear to mark differences in the appearance and function of the water bodies. *Tīrtha* tends to be used for temple tanks primarily used for ritual bathing, whereas *kuḷam* suggests a water reservoir that may have been—or still is—part of a local irrigation system.

- 294 The Kaccapēsvarar temple marked the border of Kanchi in the eight century (Stein 2021, 101; Seshadri 2003, 135–137), the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ is the central Śākta site in the city, and the Kāyārōkaṇesvarar was associated with the Śaiva Pāśupata ascetics (Stein 2021, 57–58).
- 295 The eight *tīrthas* mentioned in all three of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmya texts are Intiratīrttam (linked to the Satyanātasvāmi temple), Tāyār Kuḷam (linked to the Kāyārōkaṇesvarar temple), Iṭṭacittitīrttam (within the Kaccapēsvarar temple compound), Uppēri Kuḷam (linked to the Curakarēsvarar temple), Pañcakaṅkai-tīrttam (within the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple compound), Mañkaḷatīrttam (next to Mañkaḷesvarar), Civakaṅkai-tīrttam (within the Ēkāmparanātar temple compound), and Carvatīrttam in Kanchi's northwest.
- 296 In light of Murukaṅ's popularity in contemporary Tamil religious traditions, one might wonder why places of Skanda are rarely mentioned in Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas. However, a distinct Murukaṅ tradition in the Tamil speaking area is a development that started in the nineteenth century, supported by the rise of print culture (Peres 2025). Besides, Kanchi's largest Skanda / Murukaṅ temple, Kumarakōṭṭam, is mentioned in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* and featured more prominently in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

is recognised—in varying degrees—in all three Sthalamāhātmyas, despite their respective Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, or Śākta orientation. Such comparisons certainly lack some accuracy considering that the texts capture and interpret the religious landscape at a particular point in the past; at the same time, they indicate a continuity in the existence, arrangement and perception of the sites and the cities religious landscape.

The understanding of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to present literary maps of Kanchi is another noteworthy conclusion. With descriptions replacing the graphic element of a geographical-religious map, the texts introduce the sacred sites in the city through mythological stories. The included direction statements indicating the location of the places—in varying accuracy—express a marked attention to the spatial aspect. The evident consideration of the spatiality and history of Kanchi and its religious sites anchors the texts firmly in the local space. Just as the anchoring of their stories in mythical time expresses a claim to timelessness, so are the designs of Kāñcī and the stories from the Sthalamāhātmyas still relevant today. Tamil prose accounts on Kāñcī's sacred sites based on the Sanskrit texts—the KM(Ś) and the KV—emerged in the course of the twentieth century, and some still appear in reprints (Buchholz 2022, 33–34). Similarly, stone slabs, signboards, and oral narratives telling about the origin stories of the temples refer to the popularly more accessible Tamil Talapurāṇams or retellings—in most cases the first book of the Śaiva *Kāñcipurāṇam*—which draw on the Sanskrit texts (Buchholz 2022, 2025; Hüsken 2022, 185–186). The Sthalamāhātmyas thus allow nuanced perspectives on the processes of preserving and transmitting collective memory over centuries. Besides, with some effort, it would even be possible to explore the temples in present-day Kanchi by following the Sthalamāhātmyas through their literary geographies of Kāñcī, thereby weaving together the mythical with the physical, the past with the present in one perpetually sacred space.

Outlook

This study has taken a broad approach to explore Kanchipuram's sacred geography from three Sthalamāhātmyas. As it focuses on the Sanskrit texts, it can be seen as a starting point for further research on the city's sacred geography that also takes into account the closely related Tamil Talapurāṇams on Kanchi. The combined consideration of texts in Sanskrit and the local

language Tamil is a key area that needs to be explored further to gain insights into these two closely related literary traditions.²⁹⁷

Focusing on the comparative aspect engendered by the existence of several Sthalamāhātmyas and Talapurāṇams dealing with the same space, the same place, in-depth studies on individual sacred places could fruitfully deepen the knowledge on the relations between the different source texts and transformations of narratives. Further expanding of the sources to include both historical and contemporary ones, such as modern leaflets, oral narratives, performative and pictorial representation that tell the story of the same site, could also provide extensive insights into the past and lived religious traditions in Kanchi that deeply imprint the city's cultural fabric.

Similarly, the methodical expansion of the sources to include temple inscriptions could prove to be an important area for future research into glorifying texts. Looking into the history of temples as drawn from inscriptions could help to further narrow down which period of the urban and religious landscape of the historical city of Kanchi each particular Sthalamāhātmya refers to, linking the date of temples with their mention in the texts. In particular with regard to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* with its tracing of historical developments in the urban and religious landscape, inscriptions might also shed further light on the spatial dimensions of both these elements through the centuries.

With regard to the aspect of mythology, it would be interesting to systematically look into the relationship of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas to the Purāṇas. Many of the mythological stories told in the Sthalamāhātmyas process regional and pan-Indian narrative motifs known from the epics and the Purāṇas, and they attribute themselves to specific Purāṇas. Both these elements are not unique to the texts on Kanchi, therefore such research would give relevant insights into the study of both text genres. When limiting the scope to the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, exploring the textual correspondences between the texts, in particular of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* as a presumably text later than the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, would expand the knowledge on the relation between the texts and their textual history.

Moreover, future studies could look into the references to and descriptions of rituals and festivals included in the Sthalamāhātmyas in a more specific context framed by the lived religiosity of the past and the present to explore reciprocal links. This angle also entails a spatial component, since,

297 This and several of the research topics further mentioned in this section are being addressed by the Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (since 2022).

for example, processions move within the city and interpret its sacred space (Hüsken 2021b, 169). Similarly, looking at the relationships between several sites or groups of sites linked by myths in the texts, religious practices or organisational structures would lead to a better understanding of the functioning of the religious landscape in the city, including the actors that represent and shape it.

Lastly, studies of literary geography such as the present one would surely profit from the broader application of tools that the field of Digital Humanities offers, making literary space more accessible and inter-connectable to the finds of related research with a more meaningful visualisation that could be actually used as a guide to Kanchi's sacred geography.

Appendix

The appendix lists the sacred places in Kanchipuram which are mapped in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)), the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (KV), and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)) and details of the historical sites with which they can be identified. It is divided into two categories: temples/shrines and bodies of water (*tīrthas*). The entries in each section are arranged in alphabetical order based on the modern Tamil (in some cases Sanskrit) names of the historical sites, using the English alphabet and disregarding diacritical marks. The entry on each place gives the modern Tamil name and the coordinates of the historical place in the first line; if the modern Sanskrit name is the common form, then this is listed (mainly concerns deities in the Kāmātcī Ammaṇ temple). Notes (if any) follow in the second line and the name(s) used in the Sthalamāhātmya(s) and the verse(s) which indicates the name(s) are given in the last line. Places from the texts which could not yet be identified with a historical site are listed separately, only giving the name(s) and verse(s) from the Sthalamāhātmya(s). Cities and places mentioned only in passing are not included. The details on the places from the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Śaiva) are based on the work of Jonas Buchholz (2025).²⁹⁸

For a visual overview, I have created an online map based on this appendix, which shows the places mapped the three Sthalamāhātmyas. The map is accessible at https://umap.openstreetmap.de/de/map/ma-2024_68868 or alternatively through the following QR code:



298 The KANCHI database of the Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities provides a comprehensive list of the places mentioned in the Sthalamāhātmyas and Talarapurāṇams on Kanchi, as well as the religious sites situated in Kanchipuram. It is accessible at https://htl.hadw-bw.de/htl_web/index.

Temples and Shrines

Airāvatisvarar, 12.8388, 79.7018

Airāvateśvara (KM(Ś) 13.97cd), Gajeśvara (KM(V) 6.75ab)

Akattisvarar, 12.8472, 79.6995

first *prākāra* (enclosure) of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Agastyeśvara (KM(Ś) 43.2ab)

Aḷakiya Ciñka Perumāḷ, 12.8222, 79.7066

Narasimha (KM(Ś) 12.19cd), Simha (KV 2.22cd), Nṛsimha (KM(V) 12.32ab)

Amarēsvarar / Tiripurāntakēsvarar, 12.8399, 79.7004

Tridaśeśvara (KM(Ś) 15.19cd)

Aṇantapatmanāpa Īsvarar, 12.8448, 79.6986

Anantapadmanābheśvara (KM(Ś) 35.28ab)

Anēkatāṅkāvatēsvarar, 12.8407, 79.6912

Anekapeśvara (KM(Ś) 16.2ab, KV 6.17cd)

Aṅkirēcvarar, 12.8185, 79.7132

Aṅgirasīśvara (KM(Ś) 11.24ab)

Annapurṇa (Sanskrit name), 12.8407, 79.7031

inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple
Śivā Annapūrṇeśvarī (KV 10.30ab)

Antakēcuvvarar, 12.8705, 79.6210

in Thiruppukuzhi
Andhakeśvara (KM(Ś) 22.45cd)

Apirāmīsvarar, 12.8384, 79.7045

Abhirāmeśvara (KM(Ś) 13.93cd)

Aracukātta Ammaṇ, 12.8433, 79.6996

Sampatkarīśvarī (KV 6.12cd)

Aricāpapayam Tirttisvarar, 12.8371, 79.7033

Hariśāpabhayāpaheśvara (KM(Ś) 13.84cd)

Aṣṭapuja Perumāḷ, 12.8225, 79.7107

Aṣṭabhuja (KM(Ś) 12.7ab, KV 2.20cd, KM(V) 13.16cd)

Āti Kāmāṭci, 12.8418, 79.7026

Kālikā Piṭhavartī (KV 10.16cd)

Ātipatisvarar, 12.8246, 79.7035
Ādīpitesvara (KM(Ś) 12.14ab)

Attirisvarar, 12.8202, 79.7136
Atrisvara (KM(Ś) 11.22cd)

Baṅgāru Kāmākṣi (Sanskrit / Telugu name), 12.8406, 79.7030
empty shrine, inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple (see subsection 3.3.2)
Hemāṅgi Kāmākṣi (KV 14.3cd)

Bhū (Sanskrit name; Viṣṇu's consort), 12.8189, 79.7253
festival image (*utsavamurti*) in the sanctum sanctorum of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, no separate shrine with a stationary image (*mūlamurti*)
Bhū (KV 2.27ab)

Calantarēsvarar, 12.8502, 79.6942
adjacent to the Ōṇakāṇṭaḷisvarar temple compound
Jalandharsvara (KM(Ś) 23.112cd)

Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar. 12.8382, 79.7047
Gaṇādhyakṣa Śaṅkupāṇi (KV 10.9cd)

Cantaveḷi Ammaṇ, 12.8441, 79.6950
Reṇukāmbujavallikā (KV 6.13cd)

Cantirēsvarar, 12.8442, 79.6944
Candreśvara (KM(Ś) 29.60ab)

Caṇnakēsvarar, 12.8388, 79.6977
Śaunakeśvara (KM(Ś) 14.45cd)

Cevvantisvarar, 12.8509, 79.6989
Javantisvara (KM(Ś) 29.43cd)

Cippisvarar (name not entirely certain), 12.8219, 79.7039
originally located in the open area east of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple
Svayaṃbhuliṅga (KM(Ś) 32.37ab)

Cittisvarar, 12.8315, 79.7032
Siddheśvara (KM(Ś) 13.39ab)

Cokkīsvarar, 12.8407, 79.7041
Tvakkauśikeśvara (KM(Ś) 33.14cd)

Cōḷisvarar / Vayiravēsvarar, 12.8354, 79.6856
Bhairaveśvara (KM(Ś) 18.1ab)

Curakarēsvavarar, 12.8421, 79.6985
Jvarahareśvara (KM(Ś) 14.77cd, KV 6.16cd)

Dharmaśāstā (Sanskrit name; Ayyappaṇ), 12.8407, 79.7031
inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple
Śāstā (KV 10.33ab)

Ēkāmparanātar, 12.8473, 79.6996
Ēkāmrānātha (KM(Ś) 36.39cd, KV 8.4ab, KM(V) 24.44ab)

Ēlavārkuḷali, 12.8475, 79.6993
second *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Gaṅgācailalakā (KV 6.28ab)

Hayakrīva Perumāḷ 12.8244, 79.7048
Vidyākuṇḍa (KV 2.21cd)

Hiraṇyēsvavarar, 12.8466, 79.6938
Hiraṇyēśvara (KM(Ś) 21.63cd/64cd)

Irāmanātēsvavarar, 12.8442, 79.6999
Rāmeśvara (KM(Ś) 35.12ab)

Iṛavattāṇēsvava / Mrutyuñjayēsvavarar, 12.8453, 79.7048
Mrtyuñjayeśa (KM(Ś) 30.1cd)

Iṣṭasittisvarar, 12.8386, 79.7012
outer *prākāra* of the Kaccapēsvarar temple
Iṣṭasiddhīśvara (KM(Ś) 13.104ab), (Iṣṭa-)siddheśvara (KM(V) 6.72cd)

Iṭapēcuvarar, 12.8473, 79.7002
fourth *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Vṛṣabheśvara (KM(Ś) 41.3ab/42cd)

Kaccapēsvarar, 12.8380, 79.7009
Kacchapeśvara (KM(Ś) 14.1cd, KM(V) 6.75cd), Kāñciśvara (KV 10.26ab)

Kaccimāyāṇam, 12.8469, 79.7004
fourth *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Śmaśāneśvara (KM(Ś) 35.44cd), Śmaśāneśa (KV 6.22cd)

Kācipēsvarar, 12.8210, 79.7131
within the Arṛaṅkaṅrai Māriyammaṇ temple compound
Kāśyapeśvara (KM(Ś) 11.24ab)

Kāci Visvanātar, 12.8468, 79.6938
Viśvanātheśvara (KM(Ś) 29.34cd), Viśveśvara (KV 6.20cd)

Kailācanātar, 12.8422, 79.6895

Kailāsanātha (KM(Ś) 16.60cd), Kailāsanāyaka (KV 6.5ab, KM(V) 30.40cd)

Kaḷḷakkampar, 12.8473, 79.6997

first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple

Coraikāmreśvara (KM(Ś) 38.10ab), Corekāmrapati (KV 6.26cd)

Kaḷva Perumāl, 12.8407, 79.7031

inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Amman temple compound

Corasthitaviṣṇu (KM(Ś) 31.126cd)

Kāmākṣi Amman, 12.8406, 79.7032

Kāmākṣi (KM(Ś) 31.96cd, KV 1.99cd, KM(V) 24.16ab)

Kāmēśvarar, 12.8467, 79.6938

Kāmeśvara (KM(Ś) 29.1cd)

Kaṅkaṅēśvarar, 12.8436, 79.7038

Rakṣabandheśvara (KM(Ś) 42.2)

Kaṅkāvarēśvarar, 12.8463, 79.6953

Gaṅgāvarēśvara (KM(Ś) 29.33ab)

Kaṅṅēśvarar, 12.8418, 79.7041

Kṛṣṇēśvara (KM(Ś) 33.5cd)

Kārakattu Perumāl, 12.8389, 79.7051

outer *prākāra* of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāl temple

Meghākṛti (KM(V) 20.44)

Kaṅkīśvarar, 12.8372, 79.6946

Kalkīśvara (KM(Ś) 17.53cd)

Kaṅtakeśvarar, 12.8435, 79.7042

Kaṅtakeśvara (KM(Ś) 42.4ab)

Kaṅtampanātasvāmi, 12.7050, 79.7474

in Kadambar Koil

Kadambeśvara (KM(Ś) 37.56ab)

Kautamēśvarar, 12.8175, 79.7046

Gautameśvara (KM(Ś) 11.23cd)

Kāyārōkaṅēśvarar, 12.8281, 79.6957

Kāyārōkaṅēśvara (KM(Ś) 13.13ab), Kāyādhirokaṅēśvara (KV 6.15cd)

Kuccēśvarar, 12.8202, 79.7135

Kutseśvara (KM(Ś) 11.23ab)

Kumarakōṭṭam, 12.8414, 79.7018
Kumārakoṣṭha (KM(Ś) 33.23cd, KV 10.10cd)

Mācātanraḷisvarar, 12.8399, 79.7011
Mahāśāstreśvara (KM(Ś) 34.53ab)

Maccēca, 12.8382, 79.7065
Matsyeśvara (KM(Ś) 32.71cd)

Mākāḷēsvarar, 12.8416, 79.7026
Mahākāḷeśvara (KM(Ś) 33.21ab), Mahākāla (KV 10.21cd)

Makāliṅkēsvarar, 12.8448, 79.7068
Mahāliṅga (KM(Ś) 30.73cd)

Mākāḷiyammaṇ, 12.8244, 79.7143
Bhinodarī (KM(Ś) 9.108ab)

Maṇikaṇṭhisvarar, 12.8216, 79.7161
Maṇikaṇṭheśvara (KM(Ś) 8.1cd, KV 2.16cd)

Maṇikaṇṭhisvarar, 12.9374, 79.6405
in Thirumalpur
Pravāḷeśvara (KM(Ś) 25.14ab)

Maṅkaḷēsvarar, 12.8438, 79.7009
Maṅgaḷeśvara (KM(Ś) 35.5ab)

Māṇṭukaṇṇisvarar, 12.8367, 79.6979
Māṇḍukarṇiśvara (KM(Ś) 14.29ab)

Mārkaṇṭēsvarar, 12.8473, 79.6996
first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Mārkaṇḍeya (KV 6.27cd)

Mātalisvarar, 12.8454, 79.7030
Mātaliśvara (KM(Ś) 35.24cd)

Mataṅkīsvarar, 12.8356, 79.7083
Mataṅgeśvara (KM(Ś) 13.91ab)

Mattalamātesvarar, 12.8473, 79.6996
first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Mardaḷamādhaveśvara (KM(Ś) 44.14ab)

Māvati Kantar. 12.8475, 79.6993
second *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Ṣanmukha (KV 6.10cd)

Muppurārīśvarar, 12.8515, 79.6670
Tripurārīśvara (KM(Ś) 21.21cd)

Muttīśvarar, 12.8282, 79.7077
Muktīśvara (KM(Ś) 12.70cd)

Nallakampar, 12.8473, 79.6998
first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Bhadraikāmreśvara (KM(Ś) 38.11ab)

Naraciñkēsvarar, 12.8901, 79.5927
in Damal
Nārasimheśvara (KM(Ś) 22.14ab)

Nilāttiñkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāḷ, 12.8473, 79.6997
first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Candrakhaṇḍa (KM(Ś) 33.11cd, KM(V) 24.56ab), Candragrīva (KV 6.24cd), Candra-
kaṅṭha (KV 8.77ab)

Ōṇakāñṭaḷīśvarar, 12.8504, 79.6943
the two *liṅgas* Ōṇēsvarar and Kāntēsvarar are thought of together
Auṇakānteśvara (KM(Ś) 23.112ab, KV 6.21cd)

Paccaivaṇṇa Perumāḷ, 12.8444, 79.7045
Śyāmaṇiṣṇu (KM(Ś) 31.53cd), Dūrvāvarṇa (KV 10.17cd)

Pākkīśvarar, 12.8167, 79.7066
Bhārgaveśvara (KM(Ś) 11.22cd)

Palapattirarāmēsvarar, 12.8358, 79.6926
Balabhadreśvara (KM(Ś) 17.58cd)

Paṇāmaṇīśvarar, 12.8240, 79.7143
Phaṇāmaṇīśvara (KM(Ś) 9.70ab)

Paṇāmuṭīśvarar, 12.8221, 79.7035
Phaṇādhareśvara (KM(Ś) 12.75cd), Phaṇādhara (KV 10.23cd)

Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ, 12.8427, 79.6968
Pāṇḍava (KV 6.23cd), Pāṇḍavadūta (KM(Ś) 15.17ab, KM(V) 29.60ab)

Parācarēsvarar, 12.8295, 79.7047
within the Vaḷakkaṟuttīśvarar temple compound
Parāśareśvara (KM(Ś) 11.37ab)

Paracurāmēsvarar, 12.9572, 79.6693
in Pallur
Paraśurāmeśvara (KM(Ś) 26.95cd)

Paruttisvarar, 12.8543, 79.6983
Sūryaliṅga (KM(Ś) 29.50ab/53ab)

Pavaḷavaṅṅa Perumāl, 12.8435, 79.7079
Pravāḷaviṣṅu (KM(Ś) 31.58ab), Vidrumābha (KV 2.25cd), Pravāḷavarṅa
(KM(V) 21.66ab)

Peruntēvi Tāyār (Viṣṅu's consort Lakṣmī), 12.8188, 79.7247
third *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple
Mahādevī (KV 2.29cd)

Piraḷayakāli Ammaṅ, 12.8471, 79.6998
second *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Bhadrakālī (KM(Ś) 20.67cd), Praḷayamandā (KM(Ś) 45.111ab), Praḷayabandhinī (KV
6.11cd)

Pirammaḷpurisvarar, 12.82909, 79.71770
Śivāsthāneśvara (KM(Ś) 7.63ab)

Piravātisvarar, 12.8454, 79.7062
Apunarbhavēśa (KM(Ś) 29.65cd)

Puṅṅiyakōṭṭisvarar, 12.8172, 79.7203
Puṅṅyakoṭṭisvara (KM(Ś) 5.2cd, KV 2.15cd), Puṅṅyakoṭṭisā (KM(V) 32.17ab)

Pūtanikraha Perumāl, 12.8408, 79.7032
outer *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple
Niṣaṅṅaviṣṅu, Śayānaviṣṅu, Asurarudhaviṣṅu (KM(Ś) 33.126cd),
Bhūtabandhaka (KV 13.4ab)

Raṅkanāta Svāmi, 12.8859, 79.4456
in Thiruparkadal
Praḷayarodhaka (KM(V) 8.47cd), (without name in KM(Ś) 7.31)

Rēṅukēsvarar, 12.9568, 79.6689
in Pallur
Rēṅukeśvara (KM(Ś) 27.1cd)

Satyanātasvāmi, 12.8290, 79.7177
Satyavrateśvara (KM(Ś) 4.35cd), Paurandareśvara (KV 2.4ab), Satyanātheśvara (KV
2.17cd), Satyanātha (KM(V) 3.69cd)

Saundāryalakṣmī (Sanskrit name), 12.8407, 79.7032
Gāyatrīmaṅḍapa (see n. 206) of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple
Lakṣmī (KM(Ś) 32.85ab/106), Mahālakṣmī Añjanacchāyākāmākṣī
(KV 10.34ab)

Takkēsvarar, 12.8351, 79.6882
Dakṣeśvara (KM(Ś) 20.1ab)

Tālapurīsvārar & Kirupānāta Svāmi, 12.8009, 79.6133
in Thiruppanangadu
Tālīvaneśa & Kṛpānātha (KM(Ś) 7.88cd)

Tāntōṅṛīsvārar, 12.8408, 79.6985
Svāyaṃbhuvāliṅga (KM(Ś) 15.1cd)

Tapaskāmākṣī (Sanskrit name), 12.8407, 79.7032
Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple
Mahāgaurī Kāmākṣī (KV 10.29cd)

Taṭciṅāmūrtti, 12.9452, 79.6665
in Govindavadi
Dakṣiṅāmūrtti (KM(Ś) 28.2cd)

Tavaḷēsvarar, 12.8471, 79.6946
Lakulīśvara (KM(Ś) 28.43c)

Tevaceṅāpatīcvarar, 12.8415, 79.7018
first *prākāra* of the Kumarakōṭṭam temple
Devaseṅāpatiśvara (KM(Ś) 33.79ab)

Tirikālaññāṅēcar, 12.8357, 79.7051
Trikālaññāneśvara (KM(Ś) 13.88cd)

Tīrttiśvarar, 12.8466, 79.6939
Tīrtheśvara (KM(Ś) 29.12cd)

Tīrumēṛraḷīśvarar, 12.8351, 79.6912
Paścimasthāna (KM(Ś) 15.49ab), Paścimeśvara (KV 6.19cd)

Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, 12.8390, 79.7052
Trivikrama (KM(Ś) 32.72ab, KV 10.18cd, KM(V) 20.71cd)

Urukumuḷḷa Perumāḷ, 12.8415, 79.7019
first *prākāra* of the Kumarakōṭṭam temple
Dravaccittaviṣṇu (KM(Ś) 34.1cd)

Uttira Raṅkanāta Cuvāmi, 12.9122, 78.9363
in Pallikonda
Śayaneśa (KM(V) 8.51ab)

Vaciṣṭeśvarar, 12.8179, 79.7135
Vasiṣṭheśvara (KM(Ś) 11.23cd)

Vaikunṭha Perumāl, 12.8370, 79.7101

Vaikunṭhanilaya (KV 2.24cd), Vaikuṅṭhanāyaka (KM(V) 30.70ab)

Valampuri Vināyakar, 12.8404, 79.7435

second *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple

Dakṣiṇāvartavighneśa (KM(Ś) 6.3ab), Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka (KV 2.9cd)

Vālicuvarar, 12.8468, 79.7007

second *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple

Vāliṅga (KM(Ś) 38.36ab)

Vālisvarar, 12.7671, 79.6909

in Kuranganilmuttam

Kuraṅgiṅgoṣṭha (KM(Ś) 7.80)

Vaṇmikanātar, 12.8385, 79.6874

Valmikanātha (KM(Ś) 17.78cd)

Vaṇṇicar, 12.8373, 79.6975

Vahniśvara (KM(Ś) 14.42ab)

Vaṇṇisvarar, 12.8546, 79.6911

Bāṇeśvara (KM(Ś) 23.16cd)

Varākar Perumāl, 12.8202, 79.7239

fourth *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple

Varāha (KM(V) 2.81)

Varākisvarar, 12.8895, 79.5933

in Damal

Vārāheśvara (KM(Ś) 22.20cd)

Varatarāja Perumāl, 12.8189, 79.7253

Varadarāja (KM(Ś) 7.26ab, KV 5.3cd), Varada (KV 1.124cd, KM(V) 16.54ab)

Vellakkampar, 12.8472, 79.6995

first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple

Svacchaikāmreśvara (KM(Ś) 38.8cd), Dhavaḷaikāmranāyaka (KV 6.29ab)

Vētapurisvarar, 12.6486, 79.5397

in Cheyyar

Adhyāpakeśvara (KM(Ś) 37.60cd)

Vijayarākava Perumāl, 12.8724, 79.6186

in Thiruppukuzhi

Vijayarāghava (KM(V) 8.44ab)

Vikaṭacakkara Vināyakar, 12.8468, 79.6990
fifth *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Vikaṭacakravīnāyaka (KV 6.9cd)

Vīlakkoḷi Perumāḷ, 12.8244, 79.7057
Dīpaprakāśa (KM(Ś) 12.17ab, KM(V) 12.83cd), Dīpādhara (KV 2.23cd)

Vīra Rākavā Perumāḷ, 13.1433, 79.9071
in Thiruvallur
Vīrarāghava (KM(V) 8.60ab)

Vīrarākavēsvārar, 12.8390, 79.6962
Vīrarāghaveśvara (KM(Ś) 17.52ab)

Vīraṭṭāṇēsvārar, 12.8460, 79.7085
Vīraṭṭāhāseśvara (KM(Ś) 31.11cd)

Viṣṇu Turkai, 12.8383, 79.7017
outer *prākāra* of the Kaccapēsvārar temple
Durgā Pañcasandhikā (KV 10.13cd)

Viṣṇuvēcvarar, 12.8471, 79.6991
within the Ēkāmparanātar temple compound
Viṣṇuvīśvara (KM(Ś) 42.30ab)

Viṣṇu depicted as snake (name uncertain), 12.8391, 79.7051
in the porch (*ardhamaṇḍapa*) of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple
Śeṣākṛti (KM(V) 19.77cd)

Viṭuvaccāṇisvarar, 12.8354, 79.6856
within the Cōḷisvarar / Vayiravēsvārar temple compound
Viṣvakseneśvara (KM(Ś) 19.1ab)

Viyāca Cāntālisvarar, 12.8183, 79.7128
Vyāsaśrāntāśrayeśvara (KM(Ś) 10.2cd)

Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ, 12.8240, 79.7124
Yathōktakāri (KM(Ś) 7.35cd, KM(V) 15.92cd), Digambara (KV 2.18cd)

Yōkanaracimma Cuvāmi, 13.0887, 79.4182
in Sholingur
Nṛkeśarī (KM(V) 8.54cd)

Yōka Naracimma Perumāḷ, 12.8190, 79.7252
second *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple
Guhāsiṃha (KV 2.19cd), Narasiṃha (KM(V) 3.78ab)

Unidentified Sacred Places

- Aṣṭabhujeśvara (KM(Ś) 12.7cd)
- Bhaṭṭārakeśvara (KV 10.22cd)
- Caṇḍikā Kambhudhāriṇī (KV 2.13cd)
- Caṇḍikā Tīrthamālinī (KV 10.14cd)
- Caṇḍikā Ugravāsiṇī (KV 10.11cd)
- Durgā Hemāsanā (KV 10.15cd)
- Durgā Kṣetrāṅgikā (KV 2.12cd)
- Durgā Pañcālikā (KV 2.11cd)
- Durgā Tāndonikā (KV 10.12cd)
- Hemābha (KM(V) 21.66cd)
- Jaigīṣivyeśvara (KM(Ś) 12.46cd)
- Jaṭāyuliṅga (KM(Ś) 22.39ab)
- Jīvatpākeśvara (KM(Ś) 7.92ab)
- Kailāsanātha (KM(Ś) 32.16cd)
- Kālāṅga (KV 10.20cd)
- Kanyakeśvara (KV 6.4cd)
- Krūreśvara (KM(Ś) 26.1ab)
- Kumāra (KV 2.10cd)
see n. 197
- Madhu (KV 10.19cd)
- Muktīśvara (KM(Ś) 29.74ab)
- Nārasimheśvara (KM(Ś) 12.22ab)
- Pāṇḍavadūteśvara (KM(Ś) 15.17ab/18ab)
- Pāṇḍaveśvara (KM(Ś) 32.8ab-9cd)

Phaṇīśa (KV10.25ab)

Śāntīśa (KM(V) 32.20ab)

Śārṅgapāṇi (KM(V) 11.85a)

Sparśavedhiśilāliṅga (KM(Ś) 29.57ab)

Sudhākāra (KM(V) 21.65cd)

Śvetavarṇa (KV 6.25cd)

see n. 187

Vāmana (KM(V) 18.77cd)

see n. 245

Vāṇāmbikā (KV 2.15ab)

Vedanūpureśvara (KM(Ś) 37.44ab)

Virabhairava (KV 6.30cd)

within the Ēkāmparanātar temple compound

Viravareśvarī (KV 6.14cd)

Vṛṣabheṣa (KM(V) 32.13cd)

Sacred Water Bodies

Agnitīrtha (Sanskrit name), 12.8145, 79.7270

Agnitīrtha (KM(V) 5.13cd)

Aṅantacaras, 12.8198, 79.7243

fourth *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple

Anantasaras (KV 2.31cd, KM(V) 5.10cd), Vārāhatīrtha (KM(V) 2.56)

Aṅantatīrttam, 12.8239, 79.7147

linked to the Paṇāmaṇīsvarar temple, to its east

Anantasaras (KM(Ś) 9.71cd)

Brahma-well (Tamil name uncertain), 12.8188, 79.7242

fourth *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple

Brahmatīrtha (KM(V) 5.13ab)

Cakkaratīrttam, 12.8436, 79.7072
linked to the Pavaḷavaṅṅa Perumāḷ temple
Cakratīrtha (KM(Ś) 31.51ab, KV 10.47ab)

Cakkaratīrttam, 12.8172, 79.7209
linked to the Puṅṅiyakōṭṭisvarar temple
Cakratīrtha (KM(Ś) 5.65cd)

Carvatīrttam, 12.8466, 79.6945
Sarvatīrtha (KM(Ś) 29.19ab, KV 9.4cd, KM(V) 5.46cd)

Caṭākaṅkatīrttam, 12.8016, 79.6147
linked to the Kirupānāta Svāmi temple in Thiruppanangadu
Jaṭāgaṅgātīrtha (KM(Ś) 7.94ab)

Caṭāyutīrttam, 12.8722, 79.6191
linked to the Vijayarākava Perumāḷ temple in Thirupputkuzhi, to its southwest
Gṛdhratīrtha (KM(V) 8.44cd)

Cittatīrttam, 12.8313, 79.7031
within the Cittisvarar temple compound
Siddhatīrtha (KM(Ś) 13.39cd)

Cittīrttam, 12.8387, 79.7058
old, now dilapidated tank of the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, to its east
Vāmanatīrtha (KM(V) 5.28cd)

Civakaṅkaiṭīrttam, 12.8473, 79.7006
fourth *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Śivagaṅgātīrtha (KM(Ś) 35.94cd, KM(V) 5.45cd), Gaṅgātīrtha (KV 6.31cd),
Candrasaras (KM(V) 5.44ab), Candratīrtha (KM(V) 24.52ab)

Hruttapānāciṇīṭīrttam, 13.1423, 79.9063
linked to the Vīra Rākavā Perumāḷ temple in Thiruvallur, to its south
Hṛṭṭāpanāśanatīrtha (KM(V) 8.56cd)

Intīratīrttam, 12.8301, 79.7163
linked to the Satyanātasvāmi temple, to its west
Satyavratatīrtha (KM(Ś) 4.110cd), Paurandaratīrtha (KV 2.37cd,
KM(V) 5.19cd)

Iṭṭacittīṭīrttam, 12.8383, 79.7012
outer *prākāra* of the Kaccapēsvarar temple
Siddhatīrtha (KV 10.44ab, KM(V) 5.52cd), Iṣṭasiddhatīrtha (KM(Ś) 13.115)

Kajentira Puṣkariṇi, 12.8229, 79.7106
linked to the Aṣṭapuja Perumāḷ temple, to its north
Gajatīrtha (KM(V) 8.38)

Kākkai Kuḷam, 12.7674, 79.6911
Dharmatīrtha (KM(Ś) 7.85ab)

Kampaitīrttam, 12.8462, 79.6997
fifth *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple
Kampā (KV 9.7cd)

Mañkaḷatīrttam, 12.8441, 79.7011
next to Mañkaḷēsvarar
Maṅgalatīrtha (KM(Ś) 35.9cd, KV 6.34cd, KM(V) 5.40cd)

Matsyatīrttam, 12.8428, 79.6972
outer *prākāra* of the Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temple
Pāṇḍavatīrtha (KV 6.38cd, KM(V) 5.49cd)

Nākatīrttam / Cēṣatīrttam, 12.8390, 79.7045
linked to the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, to its west
Vāmanakuṇḍa (KM(Ś) 32.81ab)

Okkappirantāṅ Kuḷam, 12.8380, 79.6973
Pañcāpsarassaras (KM(Ś) 14.35cd), Gāruḍatīrtha (KM(V) 5.51cd; identification not entirely certain)

Pañcakaṅkaiṭīrttam, 12.8410, 79.7030
outer *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple
Pañcatīrtha (KM(Ś) 31.120ab, KV 10.38cd, KM(V) 5.31ab)

Paruti Kuḷam, 12.8552, 79.6976
Paridhikuṇḍa (KM(Ś) 29.52ab)

Pirammatīrttam, 12.8096, 79.7301
linked to the Pirammaṅpurīsvavar temple, to its south
Brahmatīrtha (KM(Ś) 7.15cd)

Porṟāmarai Kuḷam, 12.8193, 79.7269
fourth *prākāra* of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple
Hemābjakatīrtha (KM(V) 22.43cd), Hemāmbhojatīrtha (KM(V) 5.11cd),
Lakṣmītīrtha (KM(V) 5.12cd)

Raṅkacāmi Kuḷam, 12.8248, 79.7123
former temple tank of the Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ temple, to its south
Kuṇḍatīrtha (KM(V) 5.19ab)

Raṅkanātātīrttam (name not entirely certain), 12.8864, 79.4461
linked to the Raṅkanāta Svāmi temple in Thiruparkadal, to its northeast
Pāpanāṣanatīrtha (KM(V) 8.46cd)

Takkāṇ Kuḷam, 13.1035, 79.4262
in Sholingur
Brahmatīrtha (KM(V) 8.54ab)

Tāyār Kuḷam, 12.8262, 79.6958
linked to the Kāyārōkaṇesvarar temple, to its south
Kāyādhirohaṇatīrtha (KV 10.41cd), Kāyārohaṇatīrtha (KM(V) 7.1cd)

Uppēri Kuḷam, 12.8414, 79.6982
linked to the Curakarēsvrar temple
Jvaraharatīrtha (KM(Ś) 14.73ab, KV 6.36cd, KM(V) 5.50cd)

Yākatīrttam, 12.9128, 78.9372
linked to the Uttira Raṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple in Pallikonda, to its east
Sārasvatatīrtha (KM(V) 8.51cd)

Unidentified Sacred Water Bodies

Bhaktodayatīrtha (KV 2.34cd)

Kuśatīrtha (KM(V) 5.17ab)

Pāñcālikatīrtha (KV 2.40cd)

Sahodaratīrtha (KM(Ś) 14.38cd)
linked to Māṇḍukarṇīśvara

Śuktikātīrtha (KM(Ś) 32.19cd)
linked to Kailāsanātha

Śūlatīrtha (KM(Ś) 29.43ab)
linked to Javantīśvara

Vasiṣṭhatīrtha (KM(V) 8.54ab)
in Sholingur

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Index

The index contains relevant sites and spatial formations from the study of Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchipuram. According to the style used in this book (see notes on transliteration on p. xiii), the spelling of the toponym indicates whether the particular name refers to a place mentioned in the source texts (Sanskrit name) or to an actually existing, historical site (modern Tamil name). As a rule, the name of the historical site is taken as keyword in this index, the name(s) of the place mentioned in the primary sources follow and are given in slanted style for further distinction. If there are variant names across the texts for the same place, they are ordered by frequency of occurrence. A comprehensive listing of the places mentioned in the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi can be found in the appendix of this book.

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2

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Multifarious Sacred Geographies takes an in-depth look at the sacred geography of the South Indian temple city Kanchipuram. Kanchipuram's particularly diverse religious landscape, with over four hundred temples, is attested to in numerous Sanskrit and Tamil texts that glorify the city. Malini Ambach investigates for the first time three of these glorifying Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas in detail and comparatively with regard to their literary geographies of Kanchipuram. These texts link mythology with the local physical landscape and each coloured by a sectarian perspective, they describe the same sacred space, Kanchipuram, by constructing shared and contradictory notions of the temple city.



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