

## 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.<sup>214</sup> The

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214 [Vasiṣṭha speaks to the sages:] *puṣkaraṃ naimiśāraṇyaṃ siddhāśramam aho-bilam | govardhanaś citrakūṭaḥ kurukṣetram 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 Āṅvārs composed verses of praise.<sup>215</sup> 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).<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, the

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*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 kalikalmaṣanāśinī* || 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).<sup>217</sup> 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.

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217 [Ambarīṣa asks:] *tatra tīrthāni puṇyāni viṣṇor āyatanāni ca | anyāni kati puṇyāni santi satyavrate śubhe | | KM(V) 5.5 śreṣṭhāni kati tīrthāni tathaivāyatanāni 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.<sup>218</sup> 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).<sup>219</sup> 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

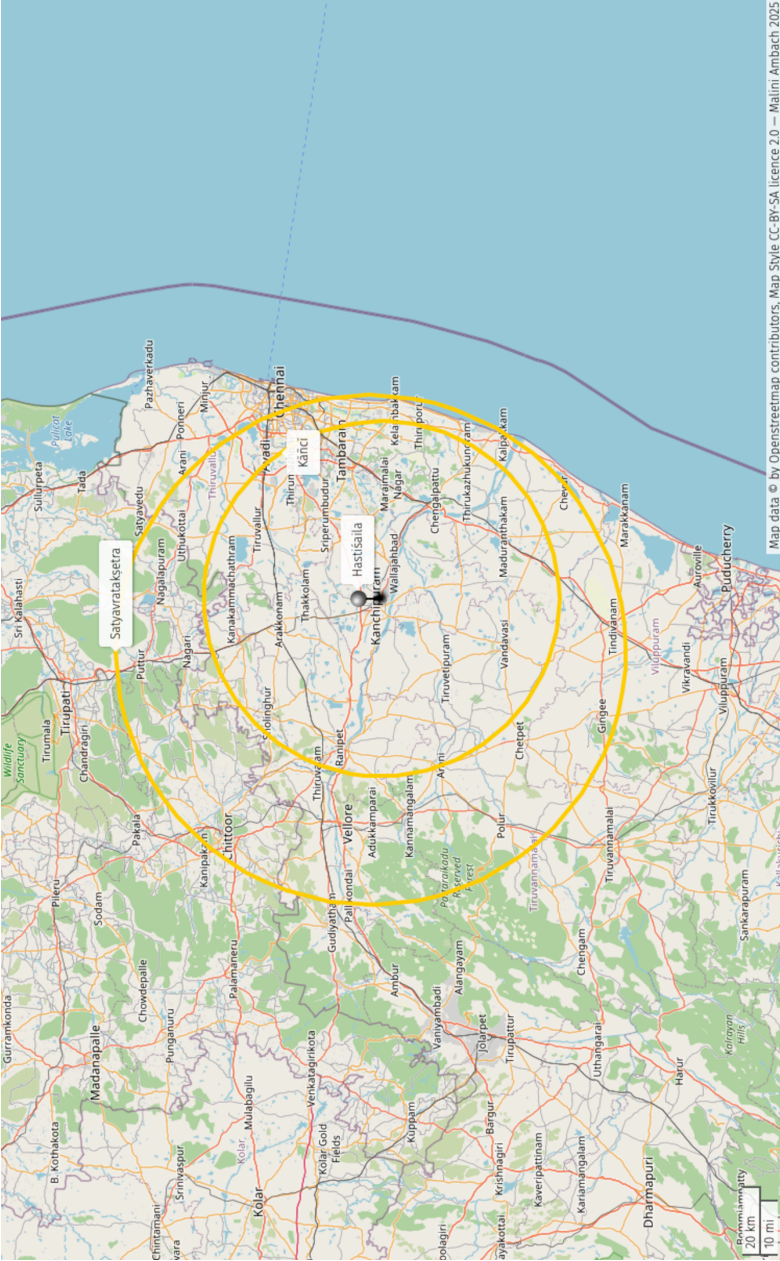
a distinct Vaiṣṇava framing and is almost exclusively used in the KM(V).<sup>220</sup> Illustrative passages in the Māhātmya describe the area as inhabited by divine beings, who worship Viṣṇu; it is dotted with meritorious *tīrthas*, mountains, lakes, beautiful gardens, different kinds of trees, with 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).<sup>221</sup> 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).<sup>222</sup> 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 Varāha[-kṣetra] is derived from the boar residing in Satyavratākṣetra together with the earth as goddess in Kāñcī (KM(V) ch. 2). The designation Nāra-siṃha[-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** Satyavratākṣetra and the city Kāñcī (both approximations, see subsection 1.3.3) according to the KM(V), with Hastisāila 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.<sup>223</sup> 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.<sup>224</sup>

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

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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.<sup>225</sup> It is called *Kāñcī*, which is understood as revered by Brahmā (*ka*), as Brahmā worships Viṣṇu here.<sup>226</sup> 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.<sup>227</sup> 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).<sup>228</sup> 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 Satyavrataśetra (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.<sup>229</sup> 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.

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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).<sup>230</sup>

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

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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.<sup>231</sup> For example, the origin of Viṣṇu as Dipaparakāśa (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 Dipaparakāśa 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.<sup>232</sup> In the course of the text, the spatial focus shifts from one area to the next, from the southeast

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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).<sup>233</sup>

With the Māhātmya's narrative cycle linked to Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Vāmana (KM(V) chs. 18–28), the geo-spatial setting shifts within Satyavrataḥsetra 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 Ekāmranātha'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 Ekāmranātha 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

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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).<sup>234</sup> 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.<sup>235</sup>

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 pañcāsadyojane śubhe | kāñcīti samyag vikhyātā purī puṇyavivardhanī || KM(V) 30.17 tatrāsti paramaṇ sthānaṇ puṇyadaṇ pāpanāśanam | kāmakoṣṭham iti khyātaṇ sarvābhīṣṭapradamaṇ ṇṇām || KM(V) 30.18 viṣṇuṇ vā tatra rudraṇ vā saṃpūjya vidhivaṇ narāḥ | prāpnuvanti hi sarvārthān kṣīpraṇ 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.<sup>236</sup> 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

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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

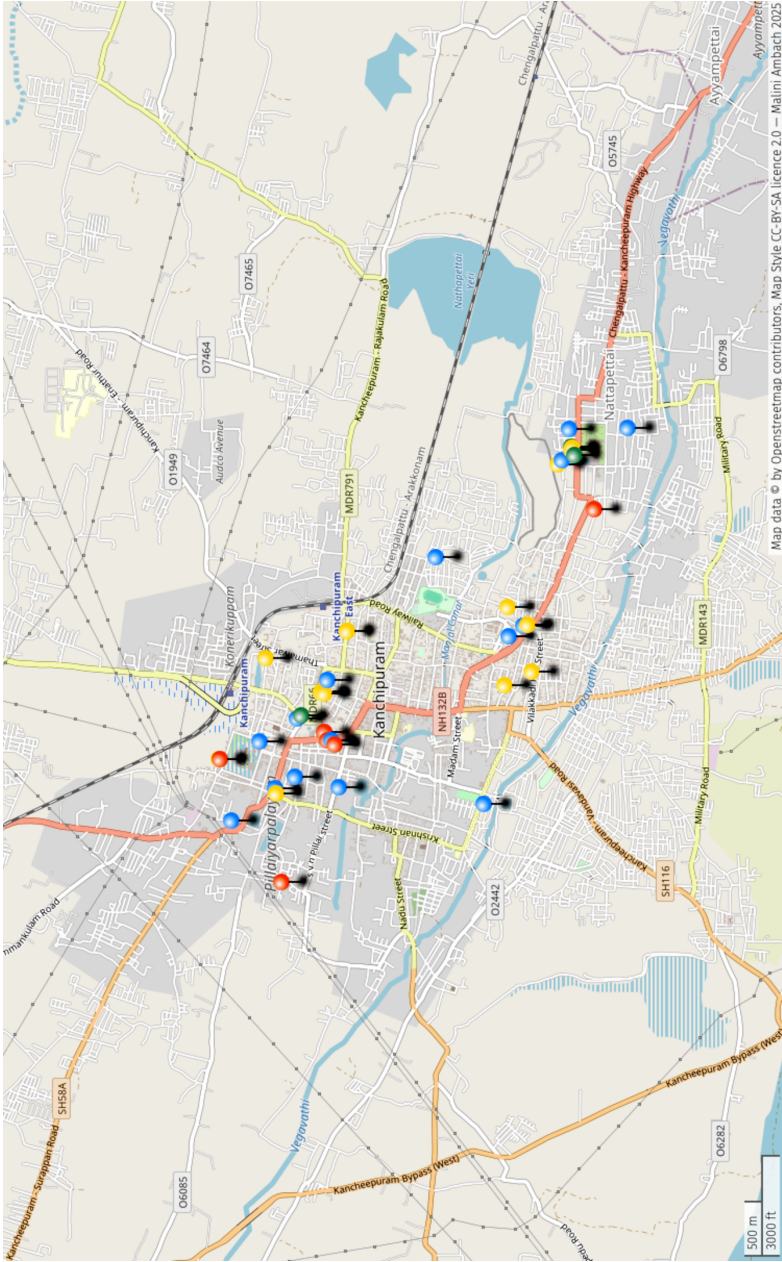
In interaction with the shift of the spatial focus, another element determines the mapping of the sacred places in the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya. This is a set of eighteen sacred water bodies and eighteen abodes of Viṣṇu located in Kāñcī.<sup>237</sup> The text initially separates the two groups structurally 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) 30.73<sup>238</sup>). Similarly, eighteen *tīrthas* in Kāñcī are noted to have been introduced in the *tīrtha*-chapters (KM(V) 8.39<sup>239</sup>). 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 | kāmcyāṃ 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 Hara<sup>240</sup> (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)<sup>241</sup>

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 kāñcīpurim dṛṣṭvā purim puṇya-vivardhanim | nānāṃrgagaṇākīrṇām nānāvṛkṣasamākulām || KM(V) 29.38 nānāśakunisamghuṣṭām nānātīrthasamanvitām | vanībhūtām purim divyāṃ jīrṇair devālayair yutām || KM(V) 29.39 nanaṃda dṛṣṭvā deveśam tatra hastigirau harim | guhāyām narasihmañ ca varāham śeṣapalvale || KM(V) 29.40 paśyan sthānāni divyāni tatra tatra ca śārṅgiṇaḥ | cacāra sahito viprair vaiśampāyanapūrvakaiḥ || KM(V) 29.41 yathoktakāriṇam devam 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 candrakhaṇḍam ca pāṛthivaḥ | dṛṣṭvā caikamramūlastham 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); Aṣṭabhuja (Aṣṭapuja Perumāl); Yathoktakārī (Yatōktakārī Perumāl); and Varada (Varatarāja Perumāl).<sup>242</sup>

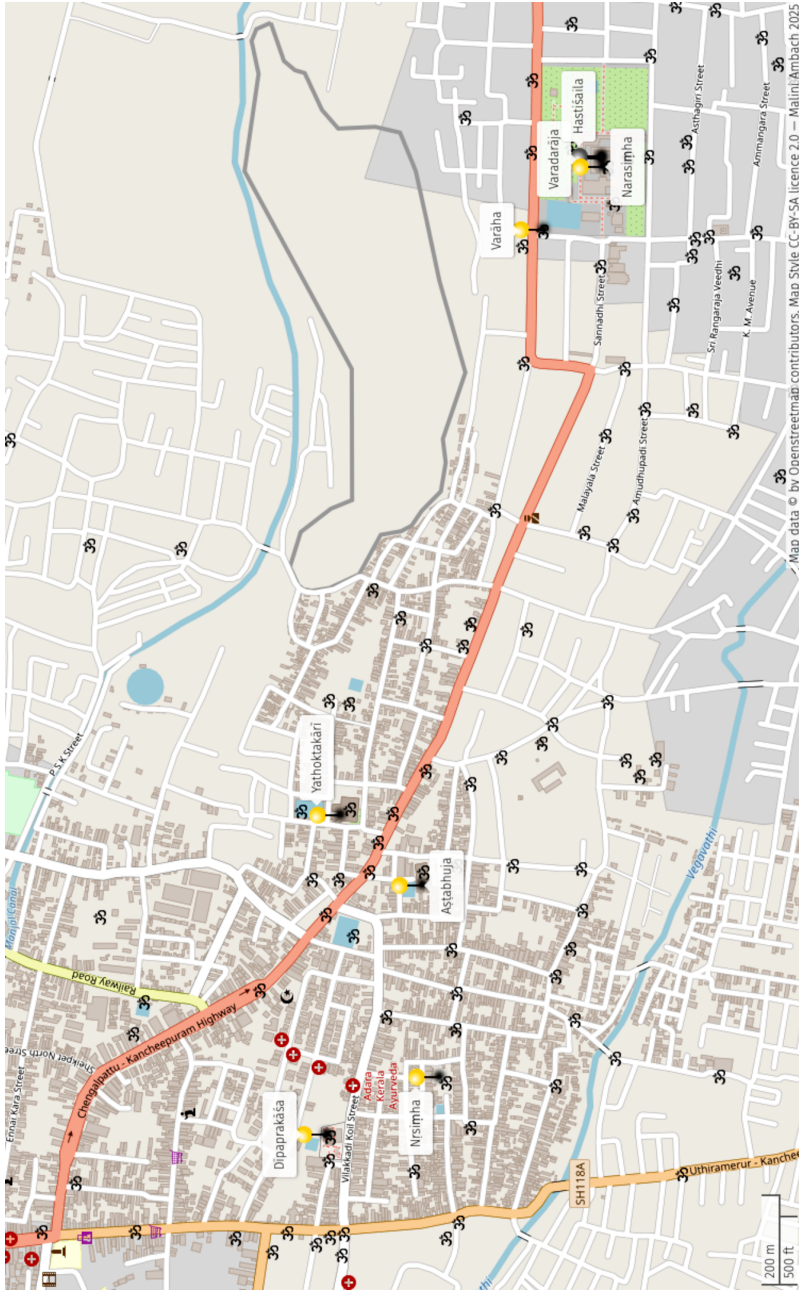
The identification of the Viṣṇus in this subgroup with historical sites in Kanchi is largely unambiguous. The names from the KM(V) correspond to the modern—Sanskrit(-ised)—designations of the deities in the temples.<sup>243</sup> Additionally, the directions given in the Māhātmya in relation to Hastiśaila 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

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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), Aṣṭabhuja, 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** Viṣṇu (yellow) in Kanchi's southeast in the KM(V), with Hastisāila (grey) as their reference point.



**Fig. 6.4** Vişņus (yellow) in Kanchi's centre and northwest in the KM(V), with the *bīla* (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.<sup>244</sup> 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 Yatōttakārī 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

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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 uncertain<sup>245</sup>); 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.<sup>246</sup> 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.<sup>247</sup> 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).<sup>248</sup>

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).<sup>249</sup> 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.<sup>250</sup> 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 (Pāṇṭavatūta 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 Śvetavarṇa (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.

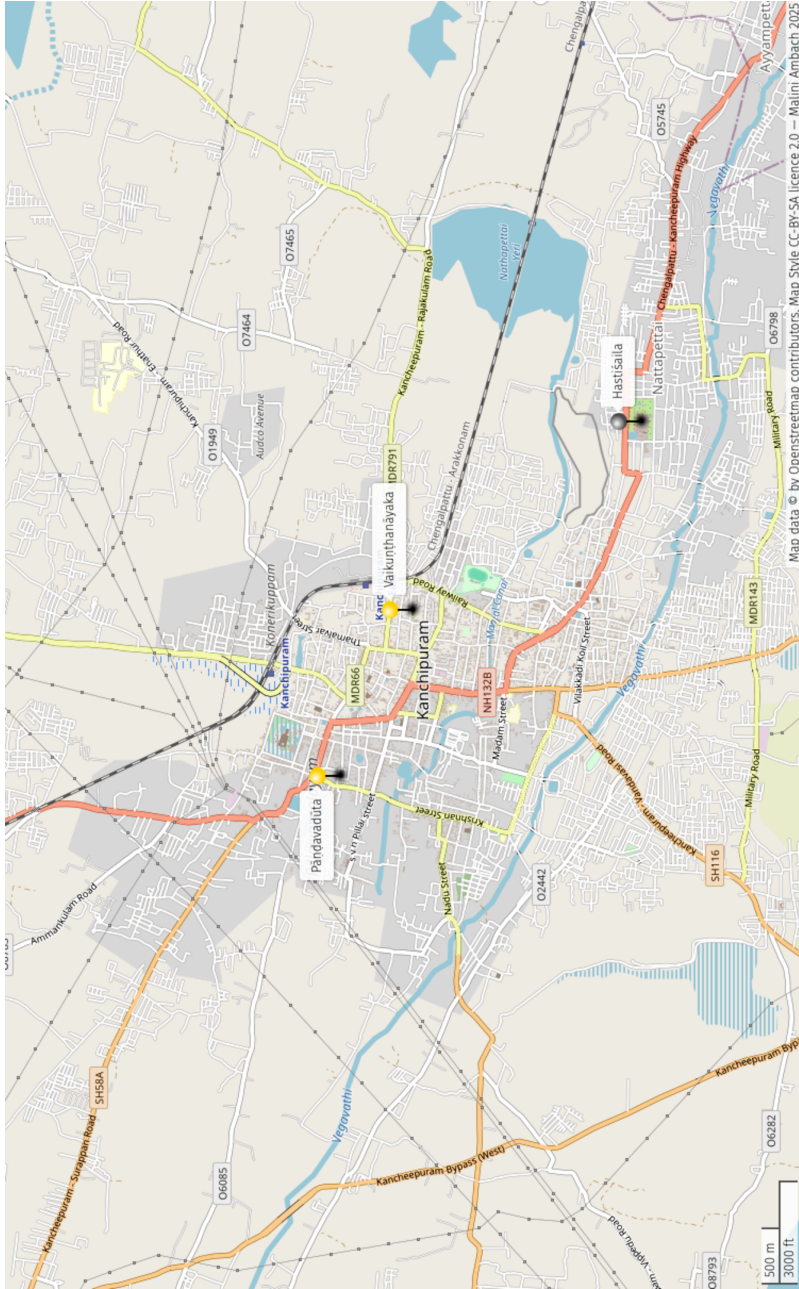


Fig. 6.5 The Viṣṇus Pāṇḍavadūta and Vaiṣṇava Kāñcīmahātmya (yellow) in the KM(V), with Hastisāila (grey) as their reference point.

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 *aśvamedha* is a central element in the narrative, mirroring the other narrative cycles.<sup>251</sup>

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 *Kāñcīmāhātmya* and *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* 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 Āḷvārs.<sup>252</sup> 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 Āḷvārs 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

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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.



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).<sup>253</sup>

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,<sup>254</sup> KM(V) 5.28c–29, ch. 20) is central among them, reflecting the position of Anantasaras in Brahmā's sacrificial hall further

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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 Kāmakōṣṭha, 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 Kāmakōṣṭha are more closely connected to each other by an episode from the myth revolving around Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī.<sup>255</sup> 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.<sup>256</sup> At the same time, the story about Garuḍasevā also illustrates a connection of the sites in Kāmakōṣṭha to Hastiśaila and Varadarāja. It begins as a story of the origin of the three *tīrthas* in Kāmakōṣṭha, to then expand the spatial venue from Kāmakōṣṭha 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 Kāmakōṣṭha, worships Varadarāja and becomes his wife. The story is part of the narrative cycle set in Kāmakōṣṭha, 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 Kāmakōṣṭha. 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.<sup>257</sup> 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

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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 Vaikuṅṭa 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.<sup>258</sup> 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 Satyavrataḥṣetra (KM(V) 8.48–51, 15.34–36), the Vaiṣṇava text moves to the periphery of its conceptualised regional space. The spatial notion of Satyavrataḥṣetra 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 Satyavrataḥṣetra. Their self-contained stories link two pairs of sites to Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Rāma when he was living in the Daṇḍaka-forest<sup>259</sup> 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.<sup>260</sup> 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.

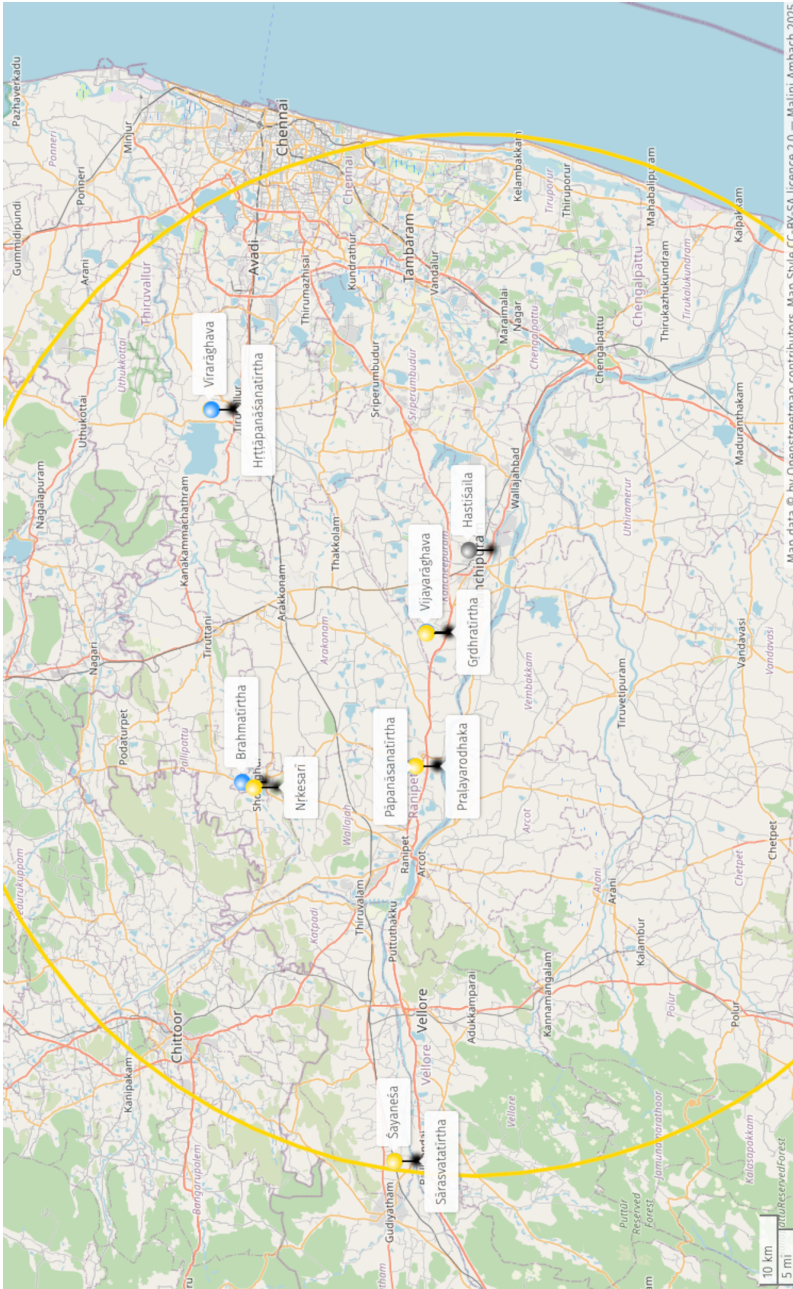


Fig. 6.7 Viṣṇu (yellow) and tīrthas (blue) outside Kanchi in the KM(V), with Hastiśāila (grey) as their reference point.

#### 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 Kāmakōṣṭha (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).<sup>261</sup>

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-

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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).<sup>262</sup>

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,<sup>263</sup> 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 (Ēkāmpanātar), whose sites are found next to each other at the Ēkāmpanātar 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.

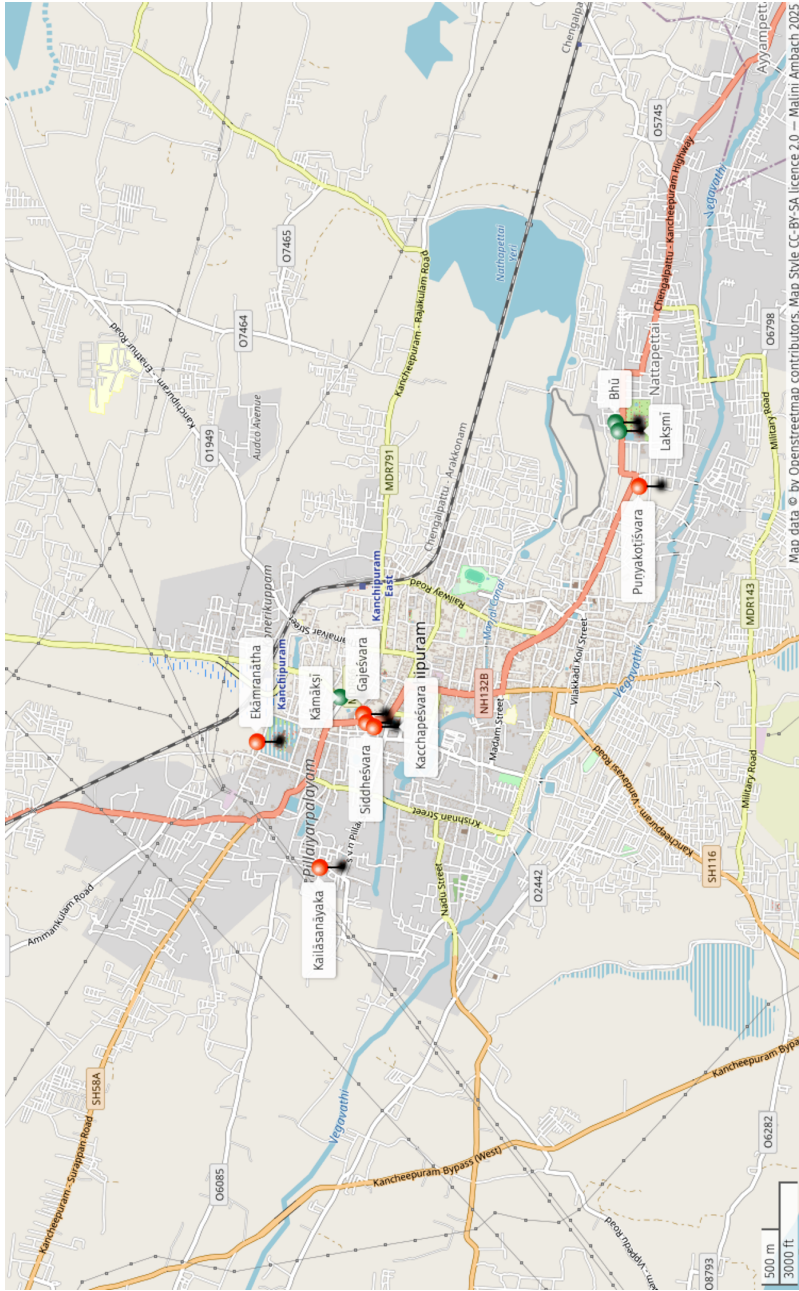


Fig. 6.8 Non-Vaiṣṇava sacred places in Kanchi in the KM(V). Śivaliṅgas are marked orange, Goddesses—green.

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,<sup>264</sup> and Satyanātha (Satyanātasvāmi; KM(V) 3.68–71b), located northwest of Hastiśaila.<sup>265</sup> 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).<sup>266</sup> 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).<sup>267</sup> 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 (*Śivapurāna*, *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.<sup>268</sup>

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

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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).<sup>269</sup> 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

<sup>269</sup> 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.<sup>270</sup> 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.

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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

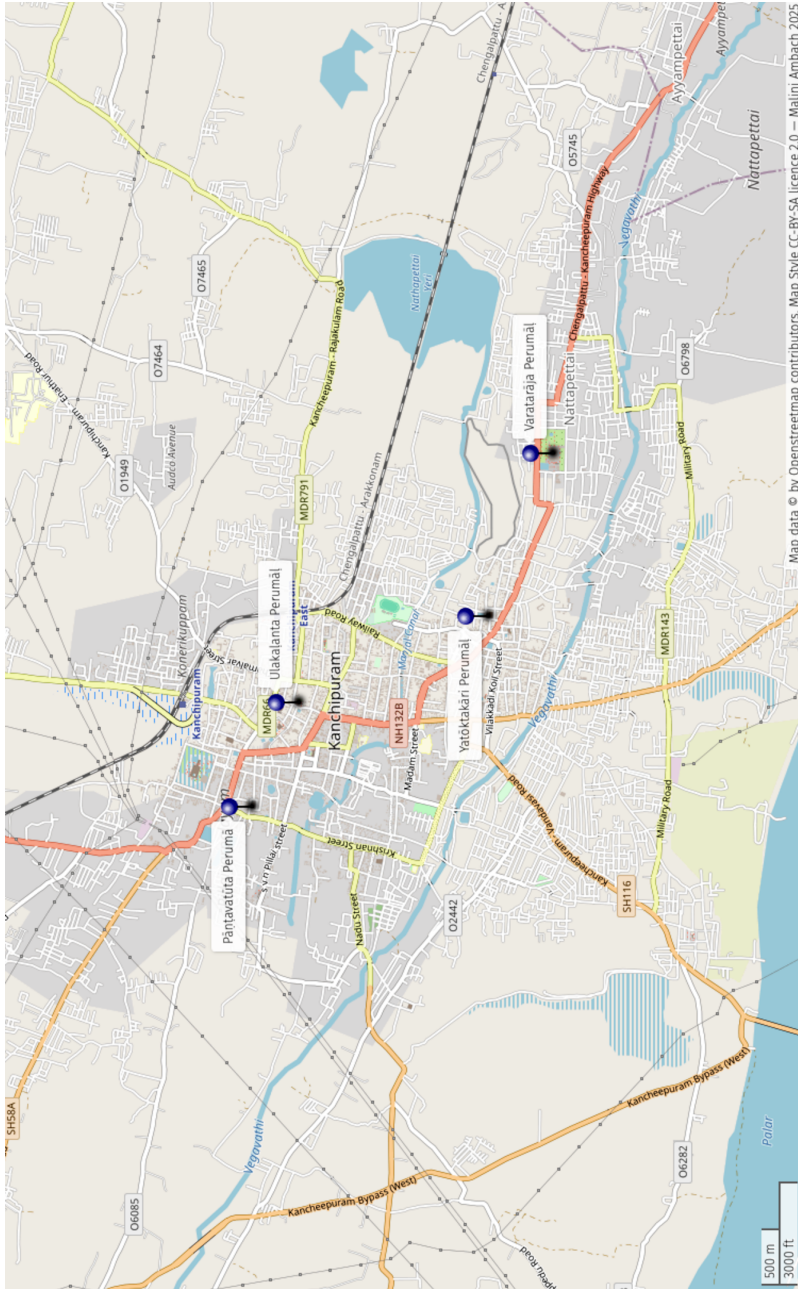
While the scaling and interpretation of the spaces in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcī-māhātmya* is largely based on mythology-based aspects—the dimension of Satyavratakṣetra as the main exception—their positioning and the arrangement of the places within the narrative cycles seem to trace historical developments 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).<sup>271</sup>

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

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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).<sup>272</sup>

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 Yathoktakārī 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. Yathoktakārī 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, Yathoktakārī'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. Yathoktakārī'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

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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.<sup>273</sup> 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).<sup>274</sup>

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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.

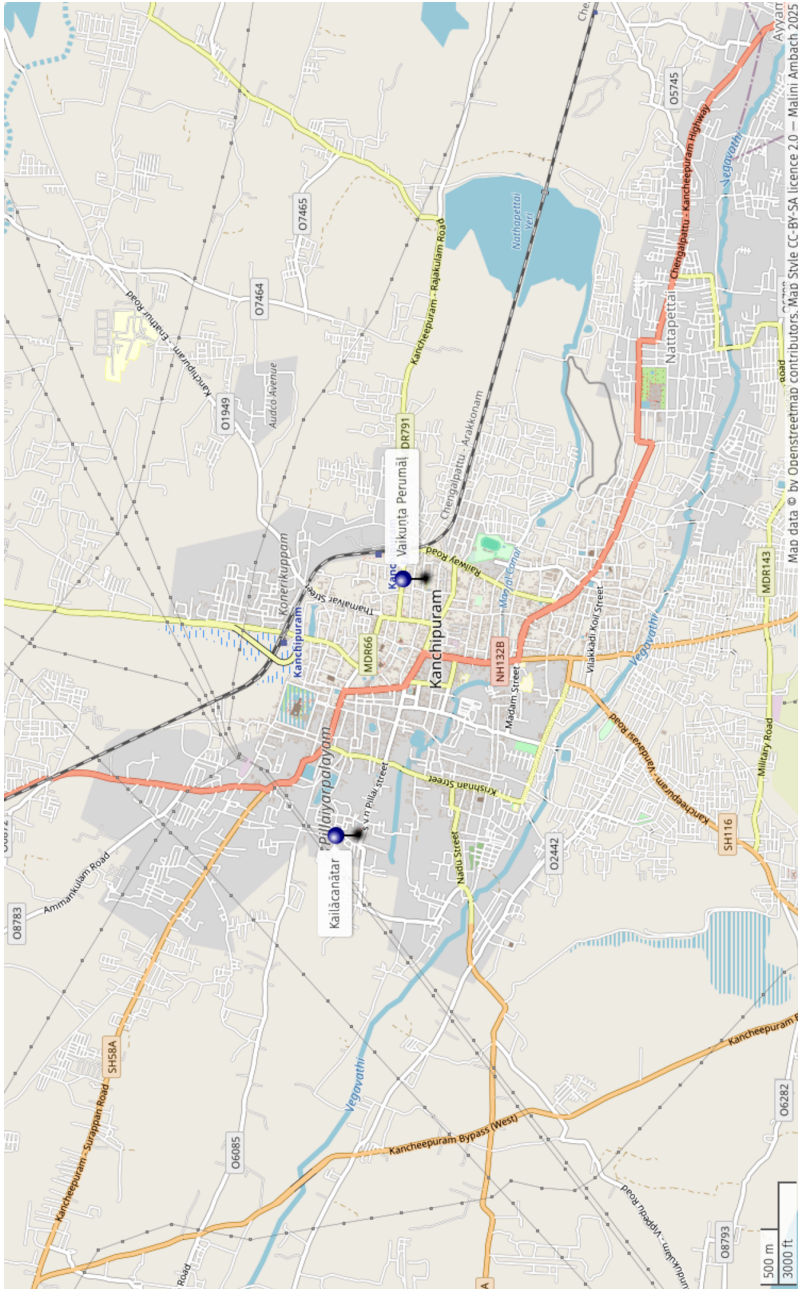


Fig. 6.10 Kailācanātar and Vaiḷuṅṅa Perumāḷ temples as bounding spatial markers in Kanchi.

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 Varadarāja 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.