7 Comparative and Concluding Reflections

With around a dozen Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas and Tamil Talapurāṇams, Kanchipuram has received a particularly large number of glorifying texts, reflecting the importance of the city (Buchholz 2022, 11). The range of texts also testifies to Kanchi's pluralistic religious landscape. As the analysis in the earlier chapters has shown, the three of the Sanskrit texts discussed in this book, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś)), the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (KV), and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)), offer parallel but not temporally concurrent perspectives; on that account it may be said that they refer to and represent the diachronic aspect of the historical place of Kanchipuram and its space. Taking a broader perspective of Kāñcī's sacred geography, the Sthalamāhātmyas reflect a Śaiva, a Vaiṣṇava, and a Śākta outlook. They thus represent the three predominant religious traditions co-existing in and shaping the city since centuries (Hüsken 2017; Srinivasan 1979, 231–279; Seshadri 2003, 29–39).

While the sectarian angle is the dominant factor with regard to the framing of Kāñcī as Śaiva, Śākta, or Vaiṣṇava as well as the selection of places included in them, the texts vary significantly in their interpretation of Kāñcī's sacred space and the extent and manner they relate to the local geography, religious landscape, and history. Yet, as the comparative discussion demonstrates, certain similarities get highlighted as well. Firstly, they concern the origin stories about individual places: across the three texts, one and the same narrative or motif is often linked to one and the same place irrespective of the sectarian affiliation of the text.[275] Secondly, there are commonalities in the area of spatial interpretation, as the following two sections on the region and the city underscore. Finally, the detailed analysis of the three texts demonstrates their firm grounding in the historical city. The locations of the existing—both natural and man-made—sites such as rivers, cities, temples, shrines, and sacred water bodies (*tīrthas*), clearly form common

275 For specific examples, see 3.3.4 and also the summaries of the myths of origin of the deities Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja and their role and interpretation across the texts in sections 3.3.1, 3.3.2, and 3.3.3.

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reference points and provide structuring elements to the individual layouts of Kāñcī showcased in the Sthalamāhātmyas.

The diversity of the Sthalamāhātmya texts allows for a cross-textual approach to the varied notions of Kāñcī's sacred geography. While the earlier chapters (4, 5, and 6) have explored, independently of each other, the three different concepts of Kāñcī found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, this chapter will interconnect the findings by looking into some select features of Kanchi and the region. Reversing the approach used in the earlier chapters, where each sectarian iteration of Kanchi was investigated separately, the present analysis starts from the historical city and region, the history, the (regional) physical geography, and the city's religious landscape, and then draws on the ideas found in the texts to present a concise and interlocking reflection.

The depictions of Kāñcī from the Sthalamāhātmyas take into account aspects of geography, urban history, spatiality, and the religious landscape of Kanchi. While the texts present myths about the origin of these sacred sites set in a mythical past, they refer to existing temples, shrines and water bodies and seem to interpret the religious landscape of the city as it might have looked in times before the texts were composed. As may be seen across the texts, most of the places mentioned in the Sthalamāhātmyas may be identified with extant historical sites and may still to be found in the present-day modern city.[276] The parallel literary landscapes of Kāñcī laid out in the texts thus closely correspond to the geography and religious landscape existing in the physically tangible world. They may be viewed as examples of what Melanie Conroy calls a realist geography, a fictional or imagined landscape that largely overlaps with the geographical one, with places mentioned in the text(s) corresponding to historical sites of the same name and at the same locations (2021, 8). In the words of Edward Soja (1996), such places are real-and-imagined; they are conceptually a blending of the physically tangible sites and mental conceptions about them. In Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas, the physical local and regional geography and structures of the religious landscape clearly serve as a basis for the interpretation of Kāñcī as sacred space.

276 There are different reasons why a place mentioned in the text cannot be identified with a historical site, see subsection 1.3.2 for a discussion on this issue. For comprehensive lists of the places from the three Sthalamāhātmyas and information on the historical sites they can be identified with, see the appendix; for such a list of only the *śivaliṅgas* from the KM(Ś), see Buchholz 2025.

Regional Contextualisation

For many centuries, Kanchi was a seat of power connected to several kingdoms. The clearest association of the city with a specific region as its own sphere of influence may be found during the rule of the Pallava dynasty (sixth–ninth century CE) when its kings ruled from Kanchi. In that period Kanchi was *the* capital of the kingdom and not *one* centre of power among many as under the Chola (tenth–thirteenth century) and the Vijayanagara sovereignty (fourteenth–seventeenth century; Mahalingam 1969). The area ruled by the Pallavas may be identified as Tondaimandalam. This region stretched between the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Then Pennai river in the south, the Kallar river in the west, and the Swarnamukhi river in the north (Mahalingam 1969, 2–4; Srinivasan 1979, 7; see visualisation in figure 7.1). The cross-textual analysis then yields the following interesting findings: all three of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas attest to the association of Kāñcī with a region of this spread and all three notions of Kāñcī's region roughly correspond to the spatial reach of Tondaimandalam as visualised in figure 7.1.

To start with the larger framing, the element common to the spatial concepts from the KM(Ś), the KV, and the KM(V) is the initial geographical contextualisation of Kāñcī with a surrounding region as its sphere of influence. While the KV outlines a multilayered design of several areas of decreasing size surrounding Kāñcī, there is only one space each in the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) to delineate the area (*kṣetra*) surrounding Kāñcī. The characterisation of the regional space differs between the three Sthalamāhātmyas in line with their sectarian outlook: the KM(Ś) associates it with Śiva, the KV links it with Kāmākṣī, and the KM(V) understands it as systematised by the Vaiṣṇava worldview (see sections 4.2, 5.2, and 6.2). Yet all three texts agree on the spread and position of the area they identify as belonging to Kāñcī (see figure 7.1[277]). Furthermore, across the texts, Kāñcī is defined as the centre of the regional space(s), partly explicitly, partly implicitly; the Vaiṣṇava text even indicates a specific location in Kāñcī, namely Hastiśaila, the abode of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja, as the centre point of the regional space (KM(Ś) 4.6–9a; KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5).

The modelling on the historical Tondaimandalam is quite clear in the KV, which defines an area called Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala—a Sanskrit equivalent

277 The visualisations of spaces described in the texts on a map can only ever be an approximation as temporal, that is, non-fixed, length units are used in the Sthalamāhātmyas (see subsection 1.3.3).

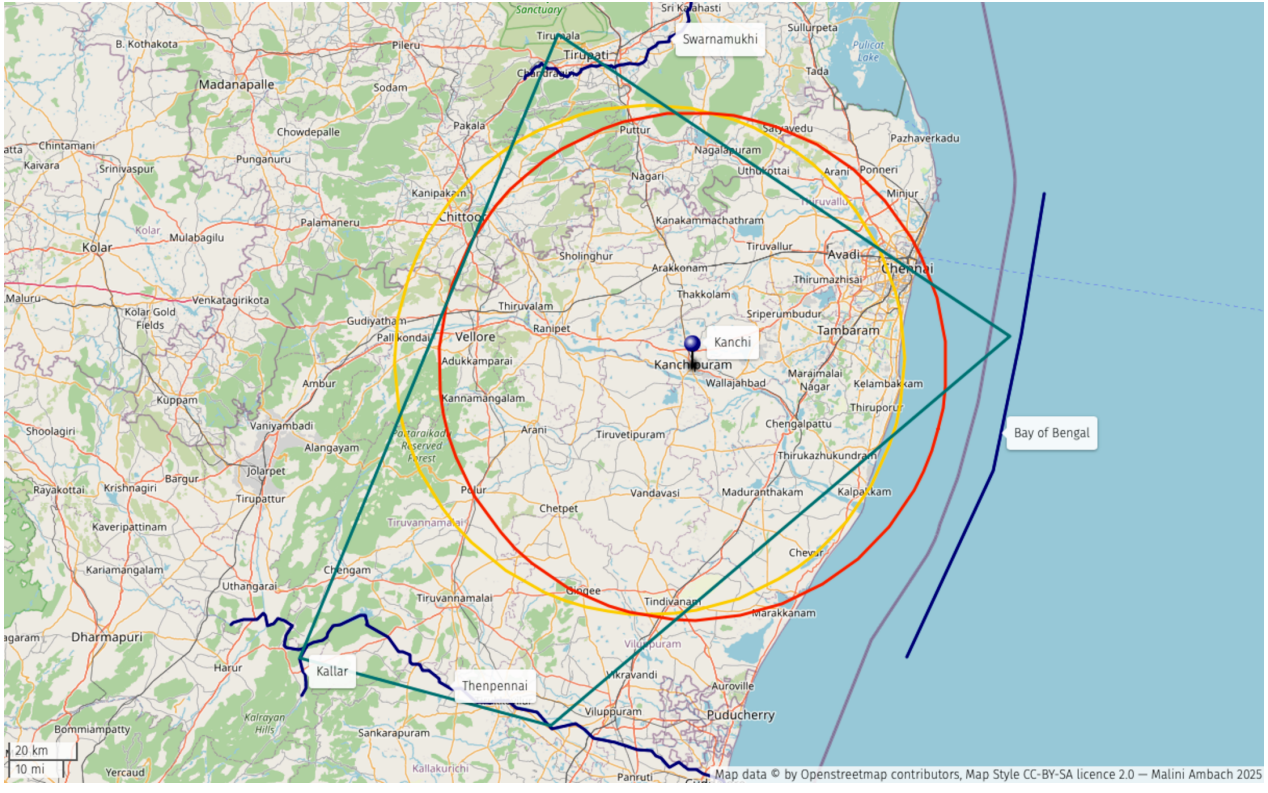

Fig. 7.1 The dimensions of Kāñcī's region in the KM(Ś) (red), in the KV (green), and in the KM(V) (yellow) compared to the historical region Tondaimandalam, marked by four rivers (dark blue; based on Mahalingam 1963, 2–3).

to Tondaimandalam—of similar dimensions (see section 5.2 and figure 7.1). In the KM(Ś) and the KM(V), in contrast, there is no direct allusion to the historical region. The dimensionality of the regional space—called Satyavratakṣetra—in the Vaiṣṇava text might still be implicitly referring to Tondaimandalam. This Sthalamāhātmya structurally seems to address local historical developments, such as the evolution of Kanchi's urban space and the shift of attention in the local Vaiṣṇava communities in favour of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34, 43–44; see section 6.5). It is therefore plausible that Satyavratakṣetra is modelled on the historical region Tondaimandalam. Besides, another noteworthy detail becomes apparent when comparing the conception of Kāñcī's regional space from the KM(V) and the KM(Ś). With a diameter of ten *yojanas*, the extent of Satyavratakṣetra corresponds to the dimension of the regional space, Kāñcīkṣetra, in the Śaiva text, which is five *yojanas* in radius (KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5; 4.6–9a; KM(Ś) 4.8).

The tracing of Tondaimandalam in all three Sthalamāhātmyas and the shared details point to a prevailing notion of the regional space as associated with Kanchi and the city with this surrounding area. By referring to the historical region, which probably most aptly stands for the political and historical significance of Kanchi as a centre of power, the texts tie in with a conception of Kanchi as the *sole* dominant place in the region. Conceptually, this centred layout is particularly well framed in the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) in which the region seems to be conceived as a circle with Kāñcī at its centre. As the Pallava times were formative centuries with regard to the urban outline of the city (Raman 1987, 66–68; Stein 2021, 63–68) and in view of Kanchi's central position in the region in this period, the city's connection with this particular regional concept seems to be especially strong and expresses particularly well Kanchi's significance in history.

Another noteworthy element that becomes apparent by the comparative perspective is how rivers and hills function as spatial landmarks across the Sthalamāhātmyas. Both are natural markers of the landscape; rivers serve as easily recognisable linear spatial demarcations and elevations are particularly prominent in largely flat terrain such as that surrounding Kanchi. The most distinct example of a hill to which significance is attached in the texts is Hastiśaila (Hastigiri). It is conceived as centre point of the regional space in the Vaiṣṇava text (KM(V) 2.37–41b, 4.10c–11b, 10.5) and stands for the abode of Varadarāja, the most significant among Viṣṇu's manifestations in Kāñcī in the KM(V). The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* similarly acknowledged the importance of Hastiśaila as Varadarāja's abode and includes a separate myth detailing its origin (KV ch. 3). With a view to today's perception, the idea of

Varadarāja residing on the hill is upheld at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, as the central two-storey building housing the sanctum sanctorum on its first floor is understood as a hill (Raman 1975, 44–45).

As for the rivers, several traverse Kanchi. In the contemporary city, the most prominent ones are the channel Manjalneer Kalvai, the Vegavathi, a northern sidearm of the Palar, and the Palar itself. While being seasonal watercourses, the Vegavathi and Palar rivers in particular are distinct topographical markers of Kanchi's space (see section 2.1 and figure 2.1). The geographical localisation and spatial demarcation by way of rivers is a common feature of the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi. The KV indicates four rivers to delineate the largest regional space, Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala (KV 1.11–32; see section 5.2), while both the Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava text list seven rivers each that characterise the space they define as the city Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 3.78c–80b; KM(V) 4.29–31b; see sections 4.2 and 6.2). In the two latter texts, it has not yet been possible to identify some of the rivers, therefore their function as spatial markers of the spatial extent of Kāñcī cannot be fully assessed. Corresponding to the contemporary topography, most attention among the identified rivers from the KM(Ś) and the KM(V) is paid to the Manjalneer Kalvai, the Vegavathi, and the Palar. These watercourses are not only listed as topographical features of Kāñcī's area but are also highlighted in the texts' myths.

Another river, called Kampā, deserves a separate discussion, as its descriptions in the three texts seem to reveal details about the relative chronology of the Sthalamāhātmyas. The Kampā is named in the KM(Ś) and KM(V) among the rivers that characterise Kāñcī (KM(Ś) 3.78c–80b; KM(V) 4.29–31b). In the contemporary city, there prevails the perception that the river can be identified with Kampaitīrttam, the southern temple tank at the Ēkāmparanātar temple; this tank is said to form the visible portion of the Kampā river flowing underground (Schier 2018, 106). The Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava text agree on the nature of the Kampā and undoubtedly classify it as a river. In contrast, the KV mentions it to be an invisible, dried-up watercourse (KV 9.7–9). Based on this difference, Kerstin Schier considers the Śākta Sthalamāhātmya to refer to a changed geography; she assumes that one of the two now dried-up rivers in Kanchi's area was the Kampā and that the KV records its altered state (2018, 88, 88, n. 47).[278] The fact that the Kampā was

278 Kerstin Schier bases her assessment on the analysis of the Ekāmranātha myth from different Sthalamāhātmya texts. While the Kampā is an integral element of the myth in the KM(Ś) and the KM(V), appearing as a river intending to flood the sand-*liṅga* Pārvatī has built to worship Śiva, the river is not included in the version from the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (Schier 2018, 80–90, 88).

once a river—and presumably a significant one in the area—is also implied in the KV, in which the explicit mention of its dried-up state serves as a reminder of its former role. I was not able to find any details yet on when the Kampā river might have dried up. Still, the characterisation of the river as a dried up watercourse in the KV and its absence in the text's version of Ekāmranātha's myth may indicate a later composition date of the text compared to the other two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, which describe it as a river (*nadī*) and feature it as the locale of their versions of Ekāmranātha's myth (Schier 2018, 80–90, 88; see also section 4.2). This assessment is in line with other arguments that suggest a late date of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (see pp. 85–89 and section 5.4). The description of local topographical features in the Sthalamāhātmyas could therefore prove to be a relevant focus for future research in order to correlate them with historical sources and thus attempt a relative chronology, albeit not an exact dating, of the texts.[279]

Kanchi as an Urban Space

From the early centuries CE, Kanchi is documented as an urban settlement with the Tamil poems *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* (ca. second to fourth century CE; Zvelebil 1974, 23; Wilden 2014, 8) and *Maṇimēkalai* (ca. 500 CE; Zvelebil 1995, 409) describing it as such. In the Pallava times, the city consisted of the area around the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple, which is marked by four roads, the Rājavīthis, and also includes the Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ temple in the present-day city (see the space framed in figure 2.8; Nagaswamy 2011, 2–3; Raman 1987, 66; Stein 2021, 63–68; Srivatsan 1992, 102). Following this stage, the city gradually expanded and merged with the surrounding settlements that also centred around temples (Raman 1987, 67; Srivatsan 1992,

279 Kerstin Schier further notes that the Kampā river might have been one of the rivers that caused floods in Kanchi (2018, 88, n. 47). In Ekāmranātha's myth from the KM(Ś) and KM(V), it is described how Śiva sends a flood to arise in the Kampā and the KM(V) also includes this motif (KM(Ś) 45.66–92; KM(V) ch. 25; see pp. 62–63 on Ekāmranātha's myth in the KM(Ś)). Besides, the river Kampā (*kampanadī*) is praised in a separate *phalaśruti* section in the Śaiva text (KM(Ś) 37.1.–21b). The flood motif is similarly found in the myth of Viṣṇu as Yathoktakārī (for example KM(V) 14.1–16.22b) in which the Vegavatī appears as a destructive flood that threatens to drown Kanchi. As David Shulman (1980, 55–77) shows, the mythological processing of the motif of a (destructive) flood is widespread in Tamil mythologies and we see examples of this also in the Talapurāṇams on Kanchi.

103; Stein 2022, 297, 301). The agglomerative growth led to a polycentric layout of the city and thus also of its religious landscape. The most distinct marker of this arrangement is found in the distribution of Kanchi's three largest temples, the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple at the southeastern end of the city away from the other two major temples, the Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ (see figure 2.8). The area around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple was once the independent village called Attiyur, which merged with Kanchi in the thirteenth century (Stein 2022, 297). The Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple subsequently rose to be the most important Vaiṣṇava temple in the entire city during the fourteenth century, surpassing in importance other major Vaiṣṇava sites such as the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples (Nagaswamy 2011, 5–6, 34, 43–44; Raman 1975, 60).

The idea of Kanchi as a city is also taken up in the Sthalamāhātmya texts. In detail, the manner in which the city is characterised is revealing. Most space devoted to the description of the city is given in the Vaiṣṇava text, in which the myth of Varadarāja (KM(V) chs. 9–17) has the additional function of being the foundation myth of the city Kāñcī (Porcher 1985, 34; see n. 227). In line with the overall temporal approach in the Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya, the text conceptually begins plotting Kāñcī's origin story at a point when the city is considered to have not yet come into existence; there is nothing there but a forest (KM(V) 10.12c–10.13b) which serves as the mythical setting for the city's origin. My close analysis has revealed that developments in Kanchi's religious landscape are addressed by the structural layout of the KM(V). The transformations within the religious sphere accompanied changes in the urban layout, which are thus implied in the text as well. One such example is the stories of Viṣṇu Vaikuṇṭhanāyaka (Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ) and Śiva Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar; KM(V) ch. 30), which are linked with each other in the text. A look at the history of these two sites reveals a common feature; the Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ and the Kailācanātar temple are the most monumental sites from the Pallava era and marked the limits of the royal capital at that time (Raman 1987, 66; 1992, 40–41, 44–45). The Pallava era was formative for Kanchi's urban development (Raman 1987, 66–68; Stein 2021, 63–68) and the KM(V) records both circumstances in its stories. Another, and more defining example is the allusion to the multifocal layout of the local Vaiṣṇava religious landscape. The spatial configuration is processed in the arrangement of the narrative cycles in which the text is structured. The sites that form the focal points in these narrative cycles correspond to central Vaiṣṇava sites, the Varatarāja Perumāḷ, Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, and Pāṇṭavatūta Perumāḷ temples. These were central temples

of the formerly independent settlements that gradually grew together after the Pallava era to form an expanded city (Raman 1987, 66–68; Stein 2022, 297). This cluster-like arrangement is traced in the KM(V) through the arrangement of the narratives, with the oldest and central Vaiṣṇava sites in each zone highlighted as focal sites in the text (see section 6.5).

The Vaiṣṇava text further includes a chapter-length glorifying description of the city Kāñcī (KM(V) ch. 4). Similar glorifying passages are found in the KM(Ś), which evoke an ideal picture of a beautiful place with decorated houses, gardens, pavilions, and ponds (KM(Ś) 42.9–15b; see section 4.2 and pp. 101–106). Additionally, the Śaiva text explicitly mentions Kāñcī being a city and—true to its sectarian outlook—characterises it as Śiva's. It conceptually starts out from Kāñcī being an already existing city, thus adopting a retrospective perspective and referring to a stable, coherent, and systematic conception of the city and its sacred places at a certain point in time.

Such a retrospective approach is also taken by the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. The simple idea of Kāñcī being a city seems to be taken for granted in this text. The KV, however, glorifies in several passages and characterises in more detail the idea of the city which belongs equally to the Goddess, to Śiva, and to Viṣṇu, all of whom are conceived as forms of the Goddess power (*śakti*; KV 1.56–68ab). This conveys an underlying Śākta orientation, with the city also being associated with the concept of the Śaktipīṭhas, the seats of the Goddess, and even more closely with the goddess Kāmākṣī (see section 5.1). Notably, as the only text among the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* subdivides the space of Kāñcī. In an apparently carefully considered spatial layout, the KV constructs three zones that are aligned with the locations of the Śaiva Ēkāmparanātar (in the (north-)west), the Śākta Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ (centre), and Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ ((south-)east) temples and linked to the resident deities Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja (see section 5.3 and figure 5.11). The allocation of separate areas for the three deities is reminiscent of the contemporary division of the city into the devotional zones Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi (see section 2.3 and figure 2.2 for details).[280] Apparently acknowledging the association of Kanchi's southeast with Viṣṇu (Vishnu-Kanchi) and the city's northwestern part with Śiva (Shiva-Kanchi), the KV adds a space in-between—with the Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ temple as focal point—and assigns it to the Goddess.

280 There is also a third zone, Jina-Kanchi. It corresponds to the suburb Tiruppāruttikkunram in Kanchi's southwest around the city's major Jain temples does not seem to be of relevance in the texts; Jain sites are neither considered in the KV nor in the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*. Jina-Kanchi is therefore excluded from the following analysis.

Considering the Śākta outlook of the KV and its presumed late date of origin, the tripartite interpretation of Kāñcī's space can be read as addressing the clear disregard of the city's strong Śākta tradition centring around the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple in the conceptual division of Kanchi into a Śaiva and a Vaiṣṇava zone alone (for details, see section 5.4). According to Emma Stein, the designations—Shiva-, Vishnu-, and Jina-Kanchi—were established in the second half of the nineteenth century (2021, 36–37) and they are probably an expression of a consolidated local conception of space from the period. Since there is reason to assume that the KV is a rather late text, possibly written only shortly before its first printed edition of 1889 (see pp. 85–89 and the literature referenced there), it is likely that the KV actually addresses and seeks to expand on this historical conception.

Taking a step back again and considering the city in its entirety, it is similarly worthwhile to explore how the ideas of Kāñcī from the texts relate to the administrative or political unit Kanchi in terms of spatial reach. Identifying the limits of the city through historical evidence as found in secondary literature is based on assumptions as sources such as maps are sparse. As Emma Stein (2021, 240) notes, the first map of Kanchi is the *Map of Conjeeveram* by John Gould which dates to 1816 (see figure 2.3). Consequently, potentially relevant references have to be mainly derived from the city's history. One major change in the spatial extent of the city was the merging of the oldest urban core with the previously independent settlements in its surroundings occurring mainly during the thirteenth century (Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301). In particular, the inclusion of the former village Attiyur significantly added to the city in the southeast.

The encompassing study of the sacred places mapped in the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi yields a revealing insight. All of the texts clearly refer to a post-thirteenth century city. By that time the now southeastern part, the former Attiyur, was included in the city (see Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301) and the city Kāñcī from the Sthalamāhātmyas is evidently considered to include Varadarāja's abode in the southeast as well as several other places in the same area. Apart from that, the spatial extent of Kāñcī is rather broadly conceptualised in the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, outlining spaces that far exceed the expansion of the city at any point in history.[281] These layouts seem to signify the wide-spread importance and influence of Kāñcī, but cannot be used

281 In the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, a space of 1 1/2 *yojanas*—corresponding to around 22 kilometres—in radius spreading in all directions is indicated as the city's (KM(Ś) 4.6–9a). The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* mentions Kāñcī to stretch 7 *yojanas*—around 102 kilometres—each east-west and north-south (KM(V) 4.19–20). On the conversion values, see subsection 1.3.3

to draw more precise correlations with the spatial extent of the historical city.

As the only one of the three Sthalamāhātmyas, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* offers a more tailored design that actually seems to match with the dimensions of the historical city.[282] Interestingly, this idea largely corresponds to the outline of Kanchi as given in John Gould's *Map of Conjeeveram* (1816; see figure 2.3). Precisely this comparison is not far-fetched as several arguments point to a nineteenth-century origin of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (see section 5.4 and pp. 85–89 and the literature referenced there). In this case, the city's conceptualisation in the text seems to overlap with the outline of the real-world city. It further reflects the fundamental orientation of the sacred geography in the KV towards the geo-spatiality of Kanchi. Altogether it can be concluded that Kanchi's urban character is addressed in all three texts, with the KV showing a clear modelling of the spatiality of the historical city (in the nineteenth century) and the KM(V) tracing urban developments in its spatial design.

Religious Landscape

In the space defined as Kāñcī, each of the three Sthalamāhātmyas maps an array of sacred sites in the city. Importantly, the places mentioned in the texts can generally be identified with historical sites, that is, temples, shrines, and temple tanks. Given the close correspondence, a comparison between the texts' designs of Kāñcī's sacred geography and the city's religious landscape is particularly productive. Kanchipuram is characterised by a particularly pluralistic religious landscape and a multitude of temples, shrines, and sacred water bodies densely dotting the entire city (Stein 2021, 106). A historically developed multifocal arrangement is another specific characteristic of the city. In this regard, Kanchi stands out among the usually

282 The exact outline of Kāñcī as per the text can only be estimated as I was not able to identify any of the places that are given as boundary markers in the text (KV 1.50c–57b). Nevertheless, the dimensions of Kāñcī indicated by the KV provide sufficient pointers to assume a modelling on the historical city in line with the text's clear orientation towards the geo-spatiality of the latter (see pp. 150–151 and figure 5.2).

monocentric layouts around a single temple found in other major temple cities in Tamil Nadu, such as Madurai or Srirangam (Michell 1993).[283]

There are more than four hundred larger and smaller temples, shrines, and dozens of temple tanks in Kanchi today.[284] Many if not most of them would also have existed when the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi were composed, with the large-scale construction of Kanchi's temples beginning with the Pallavas (sixth–ninth century; Stein 2021). The three largest and most prominent temples in Kanchi today, the Śaiva Ēkāmparanātar, the Śākta Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, and the Vaiṣṇava Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, primarily structure the ritual and spatial aspects of the cityscape and the religious landscape (Seshadri 2003; Hüsken 2017). Their central significance and size owe much to the fact that these particular temples have received abundant patronage through the tenth to seventeenth century (Hudson 1993, 20). Their prominence is also reflected in the Sthalamāhātmyas; each of the three texts on Kanchi places its structural emphasis on the myths about Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī, and/or Varadarāja and concentrates its spatial design of Kāñcī around these deities. The KM(Ś) focuses on Ekāmranātha and conceives him as the centre of its spatial design; the KV ultimately promotes Kāmākṣī, but achieves a balance by dedicating equally structured parts to Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī and by presenting a tripartite division of Kāñcī's space by assigning separate areas to each of the three deities; and the KM(V) includes an elaborate myth of Varadarāja and highlights him among several spatial focal points (see chapters 4, 5, and 6).

The three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi show close ties to the city's three largest temples and their ritual traditions. The texts may have even originated in the milieu of the Ēkāmparanātar (KM(Ś)), Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ (KV), and Varatarāja Perumāḷ (KM(V)) temples and/or affiliated institutions. A publication by P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy on the Indian census from 1961 seems to comment on the links between these temples and the glorifying texts, although the details remain fairly vague. The connection is

283 For details on the spatial layouts of these cities including Kanchi, see contributions in Michell 1993.

284 All numbers concerning religious sites in Kanchi are reasoned estimates; the vast majority of the existing sites have been found and mapped somewhere, but not all of them. The Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences; since 2022), has taken on the task to prepare a database of the sites and the figures in this section are based on the current (October 2025) status of this work. Similarly, the numbers of sacred places are slightly imprecise as not all of them could be identified with historical places and might contain doublets.

most specifically stated in the case of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple, which is said to have a place legend that was published "by the Karvettinagar Samasthanam in the name of *Kamakshi Vilasam*" (Nambiar and Krishnamurthy 1965, 102). This note clearly refers to the first edition of the KV which was published in Karvetinagaram (Andhra Pradesh) in Telugu script in 1889.[285] P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy (1965, 102) further refer to the glorifying text ("Sthala Puranam") of the Ēkāmparanātar temple, although no details are given. Their phrasing "Sthala Puranam" does not seem to be intentionally employed for disambiguation to point to a Tamil Talapurāṇam as opposed to a Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya. Moreover, the word *Sthalapurāṇa* is often used quite loosely and does not have to refer exclusively to a text of one of these genres, but can also include modern temple brochures or the story of origin of a temple in general. Considering the contents of the available Sthalamāhātmyas and Talapurāṇams, the comment might well refer to the first book of the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam*, which is a rather popular text that appears to be of crucial importance in sculpting Kanchi's Śaiva landscape and highlights Ekāmranātha (Buchholz 2022, 24–26; 2025). As this work is based on the KM(Ś), the Sanskrit text, too, would have been associated with the Ēkāmparanātar temple via the Tamil Talapurāṇam. Regarding the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy mention that the temple had released "a Sthala Puranam with photographs" (1965, 105). It is unlikely that the remark refers to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*; the KM(V) does not seem to be widely known, and there are no images included in the available edition from 1907. When considering other Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmya texts—there are no Tamil Talapurāṇams centring on Varadarāja—, the *Hastigirimāhātmya*, a Sthalamāhātmya focusing on the myth of Varadarāja, and thus the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple, is a possible candidate. It is a popular text, which is available in various formats with commentaries in different languages and plays a central role during the Pallavotsava festival of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ (Buchholz 2022, 18–19). Accordingly, it is possible that the *Hastigirimāhātmya* is considered to form the temple's myth of origin—which the text indeed contains. As this excursus shows, certain temples seem to affiliate themselves with particular glorifying texts. These might not be the KM(Ś), the KM(V), or the KV but yet other texts that are more significant to the lived religious traditions (see also pp. 89–91).

285 The second edition of the KV from 1968 in Devanagari script was obviously not yet published when the book by P. K. Nambiar and N. Krishnamurthy came out in 1965.

When looking into the content of the Sthalamāhātmyas, their affiliations to the three largest temples are illustrated in various ways. The *Kāmākṣī-vilāsa* is firmly grounded in the local religious tradition of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ temple. Its longest and last chapter (KV ch. 14) contains miscellaneous topics related to the forms of worship in the Śākta Śrīvidyā tradition which is followed in the temple as well as philosophical expositions on the nature of the representations of the Goddess that are present there (see subsection 3.3.2).[286] Besides, the KV contains references to festival celebrations related to Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī (KV 4.54–84b, 8.85–15, 12.74–119) and notes architectural features of their abodes (see section 5.3). The parallel acknowledgement of all three deities is grounded in the threefold structure of the text with a similarly structured Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta part centring on Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. In addition, the description of Ekāmranātha's wedding, which is a core element of the origin myth of the god in the KV, can be cited as an example of the connections of the Sthalamāhātmyas to the lived religious practice. The emphasis on the wedding is in keeping with the central position that the re-enactment of the wedding takes during the largest annual festival at the Ēkāmparanātar temple (Schier 2018).

Owing to their quite one-sided perspectives, the references to festivals and temple structures in the KM(Ś) and KM(V) are limited to the place that is central in the respective text. The Śaiva Māhātmya with its focus on Ekāmranātha includes a passage describing his abode (KM(Ś) 42.9–27b) and several chapters are devoted to the benefits one may obtain when performing various religious acts related to Ekāmranātha (KM(Ś) chs. 46–50).[287] There is also a passage describing the main festival (Brahmotsava) at Ekāmranātha's place, including the sequence of the vehicles on which the god is taken during the festival (KM(Ś) 49.95–124). From my initial analysis correlating the details from the text with the sequence of the vehicles as observed by Kerstin Schier (2018, 197–198) during the Brahmotsava of the Ēkāmparanātar temple in 2010, a broad agreement of the latter with the former may be

286 Furthermore, the design of the 1968 Devanagari edition of the KV emphasises the association with the Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ temple, including several illustrations of its deities' images and architectural features.

287 As I have shown (see pp. 101–106), the layout of Ekāmranātha's dwelling place described in the KM(Ś) largely corresponds to the design of the present-day temple. It is important to note, however, that the temple underwent several reconstructions through the centuries. The most recent took place around 1900, following the publication of the first printed edition of the KM(Ś) in 1889, which also contains the relevant passage (Schier 2018, 29–38).

noted. Very generally, this correspondence might suggest a certain continuity of the festival up to the present day.

The Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya underscores Varadarāja's central position with stories providing an account about the building of the god's abode, the fashioning of three of his images (*pratimās*), and the celebrations of Brahmotsava, which is described as an annual festival marking Varadarāja's appearance (KM(V) ch. 28).[288] The mention of just Brahmotsava coincides with the living festival tradition of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple in which this festival stands out as the most significant among the around two hundred festivals celebrated annually (Hüsken 2013, 101). Such inner-textual elements—often woven into mythological stories—thus illustrate the texts' connection to one of Kanchi's three largest temples.

Beside these, there exist many other temples, shrines, and subsidiary shrines, both large and small, within the compounds of the larger sites in Kanchi. The Śaiva sites number the most in Kanchi, probably hundred and sixty of them are spread across the city, marked by larger complexes like the Kaccapēsvarar temple to smaller and simpler, one-room structures like the shrine of Kāmēsvarar (at Carvatīrttam). There also exist around thirty-five Vaiṣṇava sites in the city, both as—mostly larger—temples with Viṣṇu as the main deity, such as the Yatōktakāri Perumāḷ or the Vaikuṇṭa Perumāḷ temples, as well as in the form of subsidiary shrines at other—also the non-Vaiṣṇava—temples, such as Mattēca Perumā located in the Śaiva Maccēca temple. Moreover, there are around seventy temples and shrines of the Goddess. The vast majority of them represent unmarried, more fierce forms of locally rooted traditions, such as the regional/local goddess Reṇukā. While also considered an independent goddess, Kāmākṣī is today firmly tied to the pan-Indian, orthodox-Sanskritic Śrīvidyā tradition and is understood as *śānta* (gentle) goddess, distinguishing her from the goddesses of local character.[289] As common in South India, there are additionally subsidiary shrines of the Goddess also found in other temples, mainly as the consorts of male gods such as Viṣṇu. Furthermore, there are a dozen Hanuman temples in Kanchi, around seventy shrines dedicated to Gaṇeśa / Vināyakar, and a few housing Skanda / Murukaṉ, with the largest, Kumarakōṭṭam, being the

288 Different from the text, Varadarāja's appearance today is not commemorated and re-enacted during Brahmotsava, but during two other festivals, namely Pallavotsava and Avatārotsava (Ute Hüsken, pers. comm., August 2024).

289 On the character of Hindu goddesses, see Flood 1997, 174–198.

most prominent one.[290] Additionally, there are a smaller number of shrines dedicated to other deities such as Ayyappaṉ or Citragupta. In other words, temple buildings, best identified by the gateway towers and the white and red-striped outer walls, dominate the cityscape.

As the present study shows, several important insights can be gained from closely analysing the selection of places whose myths are recounted in the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi. As far as the numerical ratio of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sites is concerned, the KM(Ś) reproduces the situation in today's Kanchi the best. It introduces around one hundred *śivaliṅgas*, mainly in Kanchi, but also some in the surrounding area, furthermore around fifteen Vaiṣṇava sites, individual goddesses and other deities. To compare, the contemporary city houses around hundred and sixty Śaiva sites, around thirty-five Vaiṣṇava temples, around seventy sites of the Goddess, seventy of Gaṇeśa, and some of other deities. It is clear, though, that the text refers to the city at a period in the past; the extent to which the Śaiva Sthalamāhātmya represents the conditions of Kanchi at a given time cannot be satisfactorily assessed without going into the details of temple construction in the city through history, which is beyond the scope of the present study. Temples have been continuously built and rebuilt since temple construction first started in South India from the sixth century onwards (Sahai 2010, 7; Stein 2021, 46–50), so that the landscape of temples constantly changed and still changes. Accordingly, the emphasis on the Śaiva sites in the KM(Ś) surely represents the sectarian outlook speaking from the text but might well reflect a historical arrangement in which Śaiva temples (already) outnumbered other Hindu religious sites in the city. The acknowledgement of all major Vaiṣṇava sites as well as the clear orientation on the geo-spatiality of the religious landscape in its arrangement of the sacred sites (see section 4.3) suggest the very assessment that the KM(Ś) has a certain accuracy in its reference to the historical city.

A different approach is taken in the Vaiṣṇava Sthalamāhātmya. Strongly characterised by a sectarian perspective, the KM(V) mentions almost exclusively the Vaiṣṇava sites. Eighteen Viṣṇus are mapped in Kanchi, with a few more located in the region. The comparison to today's religious landscape clearly shows that the KM(V) covers most of the Viṣṇu temples in the city. Other deities' places (individual), *śivaliṅgas* (around five) and goddesses (very few), are clearly outnumbered in the text. This selection of places is

290 Not included in these numbers of the Gaṇeśa and Skanda temples are most of those found within the compound of Śiva temples, which almost always also include a subsidiary shrine each for Gaṇeśa and Skanda.

not representative of the ratio of temples in Kanchi today and presumably never was, considering the many Śaiva sites which would also have existed in the city and are mapped in the KM(Ś). The Vaiṣṇava outlook instead attests to a high degree of interpretation. Looking through the Vaiṣṇava lens, the KM(V) still clearly refers to the historical city. This is expressed by tracing far-reaching spatial changes in the urban development, which also affected the layout of the religious landscape (Nagaswamy 2011; see section 6.5 and the section on the city above). Accordingly, the locations of the central Vaiṣṇava sites in the city serve as spatially structuring points in the KM(V). The selection of the few non-Vaiṣṇava sites—most of which are Śaiva—points to the acknowledgement of temples that are located in spatially crucial spots or are of other significance. These sites include, among selected others, the Airāvatīsvarar and Kaccapēsvarar, once marking the limit of the old Pallava city, and the Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ temples.[291] Importantly, the allusion to historical processes as a structural element in the arrangement of Kāñcī's space is a feature singular to the KM(V) and does not seem to be expressed in a similar way in the other two of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas. These texts instead take a pronounced geography-based approach and structure their description of Kāñcī mainly in accordance with the location of the historical sites in the space of the city.

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* again offers a more balanced selection of sacred sites. It is notable that it best reflects the plurality and multifocality of Kanchi's religious landscape that is characteristic of the city today. The KV mentions around twenty-five goddesses, twenty *śivaliṅgas* and twenty Viṣṇus, and around ten other deities (Gaṇeśas, Skandas). Of the first three kinds, roughly around the similar number is mapped in the three spaces, the territories of Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī, into which Kāñcī is divided in the text (see figure 5.4). This arrangement displays the inner-textual attempt at balance but does not take into account the frequency of a particular type of place, for example Śaiva, in a particular area, for example the centre, in Kanchi. On the one hand, this perspective is highly selective and does not reflect the numerical distribution of temples of Śiva, Viṣṇu, the Goddess, and other deities, found onsite. On the other hand, with the relatively frequent mention of goddesses, the KV is the only text of the three Sthalamāhātmyas that attests to the existence of the many (around seventy) temples of the Goddess in the city. The (equal) inclusion of these sites can certainly be seen as an expression of the text's Śākta outlook. Given the presumably late date of the KV compared to the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, it could also reflect possible

291 On the temples in the urban layout, see Stein 2021, 66, 68, 86–87.

changes in the religious landscape, which may have increasingly included more stand-alone Goddess temples.[292]

Reviewing the Sthalamāhātmyas together, I am able to ascertain that of all those mentioned in the texts, only a limited number of sites is included in all three texts. In fact, many are introduced in two of the three Sthalamāhātmyas. For example, the twenty *śivaliṅgas* mapped in the KV are (almost) all included also in the KM(Ś), which comprehensively refers to Kanchi's many Śaiva sites. According to my findings, the reason why the texts do not overlap more in regard to the sacred places they map is found in the KM(V). The Vaiṣṇava text focuses on Viṣṇus and includes only selected *śivaliṅgas* and goddesses. Vaiṣṇava sites, however, are only found in a small number (around twenty-five) in Kanchi and *śivaliṅgas* and sites of the Goddess and Gaṇeśa number significantly more. Notably, by mostly excluding the most numerous types of sites, the Śaiva, the Vaiṣṇava text thus refers to only a select portion of the city's temples, of which the KM(Ś), in turn, includes a large number. The vast majority of the *śivaliṅgas* is only named in the Śaiva text. With regard to categories of places the above-mentioned constellation of sites mapped across the texts leads to another important insight: if one were to look at different classes of sites, the closest overlap between the texts is at the sites of Viṣṇu. Most of the city's Vaiṣṇava temples are referred to in all three Sthalamāhātmyas.

As far as sacred water bodies are concerned, around forty are found in Kanchi. While often given less attention, sacred water bodies are integral elements of a religious landscape, often even spatially integrated into the design of a temple. These comprise sites with built structures like temple tanks on the one hand and water bodies largely left in their natural state, such as ponds, on the other.[293] The analysis of the three texts shows that

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292 In this context, it would be worthwhile to explore, whether and how the number of temples dedicated to the Goddess has increased over the centuries. The construction of separate temples for the Goddess began to be common later (with the tenth/eleventh century) than of sites dedicated to Śiva or Viṣṇu (from the seventh century; Veluthat 2009, 62–63; Stein 2021, 29, n. 5). This historical development, however, would not concern the relevant period, as the Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi all seem to refer to a (post-)Chola Kanchi; they thus point to a larger city in which the formerly independent settlements surrounding the oldest urban core have been already incorporated, a process that mainly happened in the thirteenth century (Raman 1987, 67; Stein 2022, 297, 301).

293 The texts throughout refer to sacred water bodies as *tīrtha*, with some individual proper names also containing the word *saras* (lake), as in Anantasaras. In the contemporary names, both the Sanskrit term *tīrtha*—Tamilised as *tīrttam*—, and the Tamil term *kuḷam*, (tank or pond; TL, s.v. *kuḷam*) are found.

mainly those attached to older, larger, and significant temples, such as the Kaccapēsvarar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ, or Kāyārōkaṇesvarar, are referred to in the Sthalamāhātmyas.[294] Across the three Sthalamāhātmyas, thirty *tīrthas* are mentioned; eight of these are named in all the Sthalamāhātmyas, with each text including a different selection but similar numbers (KV: fifteen; KM(V): eighteen; KM(Ś): around twenty).[295]

Taking an overall view, my cross-textual study of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* provides several interesting insights when comparing the places mentioned in the texts to the historical sites found in Kanchi's contemporary religious landscape as a whole. Firstly, places of the Goddess, of Gaṇeśa, and of Skanda are most underrepresented in the Sthalamāhātmyas. Secondly, the proportions of the places of Śiva and of Viṣṇu, in turn, appear to be adequately represented.[296] Both aspects are related and are probably due to the fact that Śiva and Viṣṇu are firmly grounded in the Sanskritic, Brahminical traditions and were therefore of greater relevance to the authors of the Sanskrit Sthalamāhātmyas, while the local goddesses and Gaṇeśas belong more to everyday and local religiosity. Thirdly, the focus on Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī corresponds to the prominence of their temples in the city. Lastly, the distinctly pluralistic character of Kanchi's religious landscape

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The appellations appear to mark differences in the appearance and function of the water bodies. *Tīrtha* tends to be used for temple tanks primarily used for ritual bathing, whereas *kuḷam* suggests a water reservoir that may have been—or still is—part of a local irrigation system.

294 The Kaccapēsvarar temple marked the border of Kanchi in the eight century (Stein 2021, 101; Seshadri 2003, 135–137), the Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ is the central Śākta site in the city, and the Kāyārōkaṇesvarar was associated with the Śaiva Pāśupata ascetics (Stein 2021, 57–58).

295 The eight *tīrthas* mentioned in all three of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmya texts are Intiratīrttam (linked to the Satyanātasvāmi temple), Tāyār Kuḷam (linked to the Kāyārōkaṇesvarar temple), Iṭṭacittitīrttam (within the Kaccapēsvarar temple compound), Uppēri Kuḷam (linked to the Curakarēsvarar temple), Pañcakaṅkaitīrttam (within the Kāmākṣi Ammaṉ temple compound), Maṅkaḷatīrttam (next to Maṅkaḷēsvarar), Civakaṅkaitīrttam (within the Ēkāmparanātar temple compound), and Carvatīrttam in Kanchi's northwest.

296 In light of Murukaṉ's popularity in contemporary Tamil religious traditions, one might wonder why places of Skanda are rarely mentioned in Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas. However, a distinct Murukaṉ tradition in the Tamil speaking area is a development that started in the nineteenth century, supported by the rise of print culture (Peres 2025). Besides, Kanchi's largest Skanda / Murukaṉ temple, Kumarakōṭṭam, is mentioned in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* and featured more prominently in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

is recognised—in varying degrees—in all three Sthalamāhātmyas, despite their respective Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, or Śākta orientation. Such comparisons certainly lack some accuracy considering that the texts capture and interpret the religious landscape at a particular point in the past; at the same time, they indicate a continuity in the existence, arrangement and perception of the sites and the cities religious landscape.

The understanding of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to present literary maps of Kanchi is another noteworthy conclusion. With descriptions replacing the graphic element of a geographical-religious map, the texts introduce the sacred sites in the city through mythological stories. The included direction statements indicating the location of the places—in varying accuracy—express a marked attention to the spatial aspect. The evident consideration of the spatiality and history of Kanchi and its religious sites anchors the texts firmly in the local space. Just as the anchoring of their stories in mythical time expresses a claim to timelessness, so are the designs of Kāñcī and the stories from the Sthalamāhātmyas still relevant today. Tamil prose accounts on Kāñcī's sacred sites based on the Sanskrit texts—the KM(Ś) and the KV—emerged in the course of the twentieth century, and some still appear in reprints (Buchholz 2022, 33–34). Similarly, stone slabs, signboards, and oral narratives telling about the origin stories of the temples refer to the popularly more accessible Tamil Talapurāṇams or retellings—in most cases the first book of the Śaiva *Kāñcippurāṇam*—which draw on the Sanskrit texts (Buchholz 2022, 2025; Hüsken 2022, 185–186). The Sthalamāhātmyas thus allow nuanced perspectives on the processes of preserving and transmitting collective memory over centuries. Besides, with some effort, it would even be possible to explore the temples in present-day Kanchi by following the Sthalamāhātmyas through their literary geographies of Kāñcī, thereby weaving together the mythical with the physical, the past with the present in one perpetually sacred space.

Outlook

This study has taken a broad approach to explore Kanchipuram's sacred geography from three Sthalamāhātmyas. As it focuses on the Sanskrit texts, it can be seen as a starting point for further research on the city's sacred geography that also takes into account the closely related Tamil Talapurāṇams on Kanchi. The combined consideration of texts in Sanskrit and the local

language Tamil is a key area that needs to be explored further to gain insights into these two closely related literary traditions.[297]

Focusing on the comparative aspect engendered by the existence of several Sthalamāhātmyas and Talapurāṇams dealing with the same space, the same place, in-depth studies on individual sacred places could fruitfully deepen the knowledge on the relations between the different source texts and transformations of narratives. Further expanding of the sources to include both historical and contemporary ones, such as modern leaflets, oral narratives, performative and pictorial representation that tell the story of the same site, could also provide extensive insights into the past and lived religious traditions in Kanchi that deeply imprint the city's cultural fabric.

Similarly, the methodical expansion of the sources to include temple inscriptions could prove to be an important area for future research into glorifying texts. Looking into the history of temples as drawn from inscriptions could help to further narrow down which period of the urban and religious landscape of the historical city of Kanchi each particular Sthalamāhātmya refers to, linking the date of temples with their mention in the texts. In particular with regard to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* with its tracing of historical developments in the urban and religious landscape, inscriptions might also shed further light on the spatial dimensions of both these elements through the centuries.

With regard to the aspect of mythology, it would be interesting to systematically look into the relationship of Kanchi's Sthalamāhātmyas to the Purāṇas. Many of the mythological stories told in the Sthalamāhātmyas process regional and pan-Indian narrative motifs known from the epics and the Purāṇas, and they attribute themselves to specific Purāṇas. Both these elements are not unique to the texts on Kanchi, therefore such research would give relevant insights into the study of both text genres. When limiting the scope to the three Sthalamāhātmyas on Kanchi, exploring the textual correspondences between the texts, in particular of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* as a presumably text later than the two *Kāñcīmāhātmyas*, would expand the knowledge on the relation between the texts and their textual history.

Moreover, future studies could look into the references to and descriptions of rituals and festivals included in the Sthalamāhātmyas in a more specific context framed by the lived religiosity of the past and the present to explore reciprocal links. This angle also entails a spatial component, since,

297 This and several of the research topics further mentioned in this section are being addressed by the Hindu Temple Legends in South India research unit at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (since 2022).

for example, processions move within the city and interpret its sacred space (Hüsken 2021b, 169). Similarly, looking at the relationships between several sites or groups of sites linked by myths in the texts, religious practices or organisational structures would lead to a better understanding of the functioning of the religious landscape in the city, including the actors that represent and shape it.

Lastly, studies of literary geography such as the present one would surely profit from the broader application of tools that the field of Digital Humanities offers, making literary space more accessible and inter-connectable to the finds of related research with a more meaningful visualisation that could be actually used as a guide to Kanchi's sacred geography.