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Revealing Śiva’s superiority by retelling Viṣṇu’s deeds: Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the Skandapurāṇa

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śṛṇudhvaṃ munayaḥ sarve kārttikeyasya sambhavam |
brahmaṇyatvaṃ samāhātmyaṃ vīryaṃ ca tridaśādhikam ||
"Listen, all you sages, to Kārttikeya's [i.e. Skanda's] birth, his devotion to Brahmins, his greatness and his heroism that surpasses [even that of] the gods."
Skandapurāṇa 1.14

1 Introduction

In the opening verses of the *Skandapurāṇa*, the *sūta*, "the bard", announces that he will tell the story of Skanda's birth, piety, eminence and valour. Skanda is the son of the gods Śiva and Pārvatī, and his miraculous birth and heroic deeds are certainly worth telling. He becomes the leader of the divine army and kills one of the terrifying enemies of the gods, the evil Tāraka. Although the *sūta* introduces the composition as one about Skanda, he recounts many other stories along the way. It contains numerous narratives and other text portions—from theological tractates to devotional eulogies, from glorifications of places to a myth of creation. The *Skandapurāṇa* is far more than just the story of Skanda; it is a Purāṇa.

The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word *purāṇa* is "ancient" or "belonging to ancient times". It is an adjective that can be used as a reference to the antiquity of things. When a narrative, for example, is qualified as ancient, it is considered to contain authority, respect and a notion of truth. From the first centuries CE onwards, *purāṇa* is not only an adjective, but becomes the word for a literary genre, that of the Purāṇas[1]. A Purāṇa is a compendium of mythological narratives and related text units dealing with gods and their worship[2]. Some Purāṇas are centred around one god who is presented as the highest deity, the axis of the universe, whom everybody should worship. Others are of a more general character. Among the Purāṇas that have a theological basis, each Purāṇa has its own

[1] For studies on Purāṇas in general, see Hazra 1940, Winternitz 1927/1972, Rocher 1986 and Bailey 2018. Studies on individual Purāṇas can often be found in the introduction to an edition or translation of a Purāṇa, such as Horace Hayman Wilson's introduction to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (1840) and Peter Schreiner and Renate Söhnen's introduction to the *Brahmapurāṇa* (1989). Some of these and other studies on Purāṇas as a genre will be discussed at the end of section 1.1.
[2] By text unit, I mean any text portion. Some tell a story, others explain doctrines, express eulogies, etcetera. Some examples of text units in Purāṇas will be given in passing below.

perspective on who the ultimate god is, as well as its own narratives and corresponding ideology, resulting in a unique piece of literature. Despite the possible doctrinal differences between individual Purāṇas, a Purāṇa is recognizable as a Purāṇa, not only by its name, but also by its content, style and structure. Purāṇas receive their unique character because of the combination of on the one hand, canonicity which prescribes certain parameters within which the Purāṇa composers operated[3], and on the other hand, fluidity which gave the composers freedom to modify the content according to their own time, place and context.

Being composed in the sixth to seventh century in North India, the *Skandapurāṇa* can be counted among the early Purāṇas. It has a strong affiliation with Śaivism; a religious ideology centring around Śiva and promoting devotion to him. The text presents, for example, a Śaiva universe in which the gods maintain the roles they are known for, such as Brahmā being the creator, Indra being the king of the gods and Skanda becoming the leader of the divine army. Śiva is on top of this universe, accompanied by his wife Pārvatī, assigning the gods their executive tasks. He is the force behind all existence and action. The *Skandapurāṇa* is the first known Purāṇa with such a strong Śaiva message across the entire text.

By comparison with both early and later Purāṇas, it is possible to trace some key Purāṇic features in the *Skandapurāṇa*. One of these is the central means by which the text's Śaiva ideology is proclaimed, *viz.* through the retelling of well-known narratives. This thesis is dedicated to three such retellings in particular. Each of them is concerned with a manifestation of god Viṣṇu, taken on by him to conquer evil: the Man-Lion

[3] Purāṇas are, in a sense, authorless texts, for they are not signed by anyone, nor claimed by one author. However, the Purāṇas are sometimes believed to be composed by the mythical sage Vyāsa, who also composed the *Mahābhārata* and divided the Vedas into four. At the same time, the texts must have been composed by actual people, whom I refer to as "the composers", even though we do not know who they were. I deliberately use the plural form here because Purāṇas were most likely composed by a group of people, instead of by one individual. It is not unthinkable that parts of the composition were assigned to different people and were then brought together into one composition. Purāṇas were furthermore not compiled in one breath. Instead, they grew over generations, possibly even centuries. Since some goals of my thesis concern the decisions made and aims intended by the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa*, I will return to a short discussion on who these people might have been in section 1.2.3. I choose to postpone this discussion because, in order to be able to hypothesize on the composers, we first need to know more about the text itself, identifying some key features of the *Skandapurāṇa*, as well as of the genre of Purāṇas.

(Narasiṃha), the Boar (Varāha) and the Dwarf (Vāmana). The stories of these manifestations were not new at the time of their appearance in the *Skandapurāṇa*. They are already known from texts from several centuries before the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*. This is, however, not a matter of plagiarism or lack of originality. One of the key characteristics of Purāṇa literature, even in its early stages, is to retell stories that were well-known, both by the Purāṇa's composers and its audience. In the case of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa*, the audience would instantly recognize the main storyline of Viṣṇu conquering evil, but it was probably the first time that they heard that the manifestation in question refuses or is unable to make place for Viṣṇu again after it has executed its task. Hence a new problem arises; a problem that can only be solved by Śiva.

Since this thesis is about the retelling of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in an early Purāṇa, I start this introduction with the *Skandapurāṇa* composers' perspective on what constitutes a Purāṇa and how this matches definitions of the genre provided in secondary literature on Purāṇas (1.1). How do the *Skandapurāṇa* composers categorize the *Skandapurāṇa*; to which specific texts do they refer in the text itself and how do they relate to them; which other texts may be assumed to be known by the composers; and on the basis of these internal references and chronological considerations, to what extent do the various definitions of the genre found in Purāṇa studies match the situation of the *Skandapurāṇa*? After this, I will partially redefine the genre by concentrating on narratives, *viz.* through an analysis of the content of the *Skandapurāṇa* and a comparison with other early Purāṇas (1.2). Which narratives and other text units constitute the *Skandapurāṇa*; what is the role of retellings; what modifications are found in these retellings; and what can we say about the *Skandapurāṇa* composers themselves based on this information? Finally, I will turn to the topic of the main body of my thesis, Viṣṇu's manifestation myths. I will introduce the myths involved (1.3), the research questions related to them, and the methodologies used in my analysis (1.4).

1.1 Purāṇa according to the *Skandapurāṇa*

There are several indications that the *Skandapurāṇa* is regarded as a Purāṇa. This does not only follow from the name of the text, but also from the colophons at the end of each

chapter[4] and from one text-internal reference. This reference appears in what is at present the last chapter of the text, SP_{Bh} 183[5]. The passage enumerates several types of text units featuring in the text.

> SP_{Bh} 183.63—64:
> *evaṃ sanatkumāras tu pṛṣṭo vyāsena dhīmatā* |
> *munīndraḥ kathayāmāsa purāṇaṃ skandasambhavam* || *63* ||
> *sarvāgamasamāyuktaṃ manvantarajagatsthitim* |
> *śivayogodbhavaṃ dhyānaṃ sarvajñānārṇavaṃ mahat* || *64* ||
> "Thus asked by the wise Vyāsa, the great sage Sanatkumāra[6] told the Purāṇa about the birth of Skanda, furnished with all traditional doctrines, [which is also about] the preservation of the world in [this] Manvantara [i.e. a large timeframe, lit. "age of Manu"], meditation that originates from Śiva's *yoga* system; [it is] a great ocean of all knowledge."[7]

[4] The colophons in the manuscripts record the name and/ or the number of the chapter *skandapurāṇe*, "in the *Skandapurāṇa*".
[5] The abbreviation SP_{Bh} refers to the *editio princeps* of the *Skandapurāṇa* by Kṛṣṇaprasāda Bhaṭṭarāī, which counts 183 chapters. One of the manuscripts of the *Skandapurāṇa* consists of 183 chapters, but the others break off prematurely. The abbreviation SP refers to the Sanskrit text as it appears in one of the volumes of the critical edition. Five volumes have been published thus far, referred to as SP Vol. I, SP Vol. IIA, SP Vol. IIB, SP Vol. III and SP Vol. IV. The next volume, SP Vol. V, is under way and is used in this thesis as well. Including this publication, over half of the text is edited: up to and including chapter 112. SP_{Bh} is generally used for chapter 113 and further, with the exception of SP 167 which has been critically edited by Peter Bisschop (2006) and is used instead.
N.B. this *Skandapurāṇa* is not to be confused with another publication going under the name of '*Skandapurāṇa*', abbreviated here as SkP. This is a later collection of individual texts. In fact, "[t]he assumption […] that the printed *Skandapurāṇa* forms a single whole (even if parts may have been separately composed), is quite groundless" (SP Vol. I, 3—4). The collection is one of the most extensive Purāṇas, consisting of seven *khaṇḍas* ("books"). It consists of numerous Māhātmyas ("Glorifications"), including an extensive eulogy of the holy city of Vārāṇasī, which is the fourth book, called *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (Rocher 1986, 228—37).
[6] The main interlocutors of the *Skandapurāṇa* are the sages Vyāsa and Sanatkumāra. Vyāsa asks questions and Sanatkumāra answers them, usually in the form of a story.
[7] I translate all Sanskrit passages, including epithets, into English. All translations are my own, unless stated otherwise.

The passage gives the impression that it is a summary of the text: it is a Purāṇa (63d), which consists of the story about Skanda's birth (63d), doctrinal and theological parts (64a, 64c), and narratives about the preservation of the world in the current era (64b).

The *Skandapurāṇa* composers were not only aware of the text's status as a Purāṇa, they also positioned the text in an epic and Purāṇic landscape. In the opening verses of the text, where the sages ask the *sūta* to tell the story of Skanda's birth, two other compositions are mentioned in the same breath, to which the story of Skanda is compared.

> SP 1.8—9, 11:
> *tam āsīnam apṛcchanta munayas tapasaidhitāḥ* |
> *brahmasattre purā sādho naimiśāraṇyavāsinām* || *8* ||
> *kathitaṃ bhāratākhyānaṃ purāṇaṃ ca paraṃ tvayā* |
> *tena naḥ pratibhāsi tvaṃ sākṣāt satyavatīsutaḥ* || *9* ||
> *[…] bhāratākhyānasadṛśaṃ purāṇād yad viśiṣyate* |
> *tat tvā pṛcchāma vai janma kārttikeyasya dhīmataḥ* || *11* ||
> "The sages, filled with *tapas* ["austerity"][8], asked the seated one [i.e. the *sūta*]: 'Oh wise one, earlier, during the *brahmasattra* [sacrifice], the story of the Bhāratas [i.e. the *Mahābhārata*] and another Purāṇa were told by you to [the sages] who live in the Naimiśa forest. Therefore, you appear to us like another son of Satyavatī [i.e. Vyāsa]. […] We ask you to tell [the story about] the birth of the wise Kārttikeya [i.e. Skanda], which is equal to the story of the Bhāratas and excels the Purāṇa."

Two compositions are mentioned here that have been narrated by "the Purāṇic bard" (*paurāṇikaṃ […] sūtaṃ*, SP 1.5ab) earlier (*purā*, SP 1.8c). The first is "the story of the Bhāratas" which refers to the *Mahābhārata*, one of the two famous Indian epics (the other being the *Rāmāyaṇa*). The *Mahābhārata* is a major work, covering numerous stories and

[8] For a short introduction into *tapas* in the sense of "asceticism", see note 31.

teachings, alongside its main narrative, composed over several centuries[9]. It is told by Ugraśravas to the sages, who have assembled in the Naimiṣa forest for Śaunaka's twelve-year *sattra*, "sacrifice" (MBh 1.1).

The other composition mentioned in SP 1 is "the Purāṇa". This text is not further specified, but since it is said to have been told by the same *sūta* as the one of the *Mahābhārata*, its storyteller should be Ugraśravas. I would like to argue that the *Harivaṃśa* is meant here[10]. In the opening verses of the *Harivaṃśa*, Śaunaka asks "the

[9] The main narrative of the *Mahābhārata* tells about the great war between two families, *viz.* the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas (both descendants of Bharata and thus occasionally referred to as "the Bhāratas"), its preamble and aftermath. It is interspersed with numerous mythological narratives, accounts of holy places, doctrinal recitals, of which the *Bhagavadgītā* is the most famous, and many other text units. It was probably composed in stages, starting as early as the third century BCE and lasting until roughly the third to fourth century CE, and even continuing afterwards. For an overview of alternative dates, see e.g. Brockington 1998, 130—58; for a brief summary of the *Mahābhārata*, see e.g. Smith 2009, xv—xvii; for a general introduction to the text, including references to other secondary literature, see e.g. Fitzgerald 2018. The *Mahābhārata* served as a literary example for many Purāṇa composers, who frequently drew upon the narratives told in the epic and sought connection with the epic tradition, for example, by starting with questions that were left unanswered in the *Mahābhārata* (Bailey 2018, "Definition of the Genre and Its Content" section, para. 7) and by having the same composer as the epic, Vyāsa (ibid, "Performance and Performers" section, para. 2).

[10] The *Harivaṃśa*, "the lineage of Hari [i.e. Viṣṇu]", is a collection of narratives, including the life story of one of Viṣṇu's manifestations called Kṛṣṇa, myths on creation and recreation and Vaiṣṇava mythology. It celebrates Viṣṇu in his manifestation as Kṛṣṇa as the highest god and is affiliated to a form of Vaiṣṇavism, a religious ideology centring around Viṣṇu and devotion to him. The oldest parts of the text were possibly composed between the mid-first to the mid-third centuries CE (Brodbeck 2019a, "Editions, Translations, and Textual History" section, para. 7), but the text has continued to grow in the centuries that follow. For an introduction to the *Harivaṃśa*, including a summary of parts of the text and references to other secondary literature, see Brodbeck 2019a.
The *Harivaṃśa* is at the junction of the transition from the epic to the Purāṇic period. On the one hand, it is called a *khila*, "a supplement", to the *Mahābhārata* in the summary of the books of the *Mahābhārata*: *harivaṃśas tataḥ parva purāṇaṃ khilasaṃjñitam*, "then [there is] the book [called] *Harivaṃśa*, the Purāṇa, known as a supplement" (MBh 1.2.69ab). It is therefore often categorized among the epics. I will, however, categorize it among the Purāṇas, based on some textual references, as well as on the style and content of the *Harivaṃśa*. The references to the *Harivaṃśa* as a Purāṇa are scarce. However, as I will argue in the main text, I interpret the *Skandapurāṇa* to refer to the *Harivaṃśa* by the name of 'Purāṇa' in SP 1. Second, two verses from the *Mahābhārata* possibly refer to it as a Purāṇa. The first is the verse quoted above and the other is MBh 1.1.204ab, which reads: *itihāsapurāṇābhyāṃ vedaṃ samupabṛmhayed*, "one should strengthen the Veda with both the epic and the Purāṇa". Based on the chronological order of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, as well as on their close connection, I suggest that "the Purāṇa" stands for the *Harivaṃśa*—as, for instance, André Couture (2015c, 56) and Peter Schreiner (2015, 538) have done. Since the Sanskrit references are scarce, the parallels in style and content with other Purāṇas are even more convincing. First of all, the *Harivaṃśa* shares quite a number of verbatim parallels with other Purāṇas, collected by Willibald Kirfel (1927) as *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* (see below for more information on this text corpus). Second, other stories in the *Harivaṃśa* have a "Purāṇic"

sūta", who had told the great story of the Bhāratas (HV 1.1), to tell about the lineage of the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas (HV 1.5). Although he is not mentioned by name, Ugraśravas is generally considered as the *sūta* of the *Harivaṃśa* (see e.g. Couture 2015c in passim, Brodbeck 2019b, xxii), for it was he who had told the *Mahābhārata* during Śaunaka's sacrifice. Since Ugraśravas once told the *Mahābhārata*, followed by the *Harivaṃśa*, and since the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* are intimately related in general (see note 10), I conclude that the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa* also presented them as a set in SP 1 and that the *Skandapurāṇa* was thus told by the same *sūta*: Ugraśravas[11].

The identification with the *Harivaṃśa* differs from the one cautiously suggested by the editors of SP Vol. I. The editors suggest that this Purāṇa is "possibly the same one" (SP Vol. I, 21) as an early version of the *Vāyupurāṇa* to which seems to be referred in SP 5[12]. This chapter tells how the sages reach the Naimiśa forest and start a sacrifice. Vāyu, the god called "Wind", visits them, and "the sages ask him about: the creation, dissolution and preservation of the world, genealogy (of the gods), world-periods and reigns of Manu [etcetera …]. He tells them all of it in the course of a thousand divine years" (ibid, 68, translation of SP 5.5ef—8). The editors of SP Vol. I have suggested that this passage refers to a part of the *Vāyupurāṇa* (ibid, 60 note 2)[13], which I find plausible as well. However, I do not think that this text is also meant in SP 1. Not only do these two chapters

character, as argued by André Couture in 'The Harivaṃśa and the Notion of Purāṇa'. Especially the myths about Viṣṇu taking on different forms to save the universe "are surely one of the main subjects dealt within the Purāṇas" (Couture 2015c, 58).

[11] Since the *Harivaṃśa* is told immediately after the *Mahābhārata*, we may assume that the location where this scene takes place is the Naimiṣa forest. The location of the *Mahābhārata*—and thus presumably that of the *Harivaṃśa*—also matches the description in the *Skandapurāṇa* (*brahmasattre purā […] naimiśāraṇyavāsinām*, SP 1.8cd). The place (Naimiṣa) and the occasion (a *sattra*) may, however, also be a conventional setting for the telling of epics and Purāṇas (see SP Vol. I, 60 note 2 and 67 note 23).

[12] The *Vāyupurāṇa* is one of the earliest Purāṇas, for which "the fifth century or the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. have generally been proposed as the date" (Rocher 1986, 245). The content is a combination of general Purāṇic material and some Śaiva ideology.

[13] The *Skandapurāṇa* seems to refer to the text portion of the *Vāyupurāṇa* that is shared with another Purāṇa, the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*. The two texts share a large number of topics and narratives verbatim that mainly concern the topics listed in SP 5 and can be categorized as "the five characteristics of Purāṇas" (*purāṇapañcalakṣaṇas*). The *Vāyupurāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* have both been extended with narratives that are only found in either of them. The parallels are generally considered older than the narratives that extended the individual Purāṇas. For an analysis of the shared text portion (for example, on whether they have once formed one text) and a concordance of the parallels, see Kirfel 1927, x—xix and Vielle 2005.

appear in different narrative frames (a dialogue between the sages and the *sūta* in SP 1 vs. a dialogue between Vyāsa and Sanatkumāra in SP 5) and thus in a different time period (SP 1 is the frame story and SP 5 is part of an actual narrative), the *Vāyupurāṇa* is not told by Ugraśravas, but by Ugraśravas' father Lomaharṣaṇa[14].

By mentioning the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Vāyupurāṇa*, the *Skandapurāṇa* is positioned in an epic and Purāṇic landscape and relates to each text differently. It should be equal to the *Mahābhārata*, from which a great ambition speaks, but the composers know their place: it should not excel the great epic. This is, however, stated about the *Harivaṃśa*, which is fitting, since the *Harivaṃśa* is a Vaiṣṇava text, mainly concerned with the family-related stories of Kṛṣṇa, while the *Skandapurāṇa* is a Śaiva text, dealing, among others, with the family-related stories of Skanda. It is, in other words, the very counterpart of the *Harivaṃśa*. The relationship with the *Vāyupurāṇa* is again different. As the editors of SP Vol. I already observed, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers seem to deliberately refer to the *Vāyupurāṇa*, so that they do not have to deal with the topics told by Vāyu—that is, the topics covered in the *Vāyupurāṇa* (SP Vol. I, 21). Even though in the end, the *Skandapurāṇa* does cover some of the topics, for instance by including a myth of creation[15], in general, the *Skandapurāṇa* supplements the *Vāyupurāṇa*, rather than that it excels it.

Since the *Skandapurāṇa* composers clearly place the text in an epic and Purāṇic context, we may assume that they were familiar with other texts present at the time of composition as well. This set of assumed known texts reaches beyond the epics and the Purāṇas.

- The oldest known Sanskrit texts are the Vedas, of which the earliest parts date back to 1500 BCE[16]. Since the Vedas were an intrinsic part of the Brahmin

[14] Lomaharṣaṇa told the *Vāyupurāṇa* to the sages (VāP 1.13), who at the time of the reign of king Asīmakṛṣṇa (VāP 1.10) were doing a *sattra* in Kurukṣetra, probably in the Naimiṣa forest (VāP 1.12; the sages are *naimiṣāraṇyagocarāḥ*, "whose abode is the Naimiṣa forest").
[15] I will discuss the *Skandapurāṇa* version of a myth of creation in section 1.2.1.
[16] The Vedas constitute a text corpus that is generally divided into four sections: the *Ṛgveda*, the *Sāmaveda*, the *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. They are mainly concerned with the invocation of gods and ritual formulas and also contain mythological material. For an overview study on the Vedas, including references to secondary literature, see e.g. Gonda 1975 and Proferes 2018. For a recent translation of the *Ṛgveda*, see Jamison and Brereton 2014.

society, constituting the basis of Sanskrit teaching and of the Sanskrit knowledge of the learned people, they must have been known by the *Skandapurāṇa* composers.

- The *Rāmāyaṇa* is the other major Sanskrit epic. Based on its widespread fame and its dating that starts in the mid-first millennium BCE and lasts a couple of centuries[17], the *Skandapurāṇa* composers must have known the central story of Rāma and other narratives in the epic[18]. There are some textual parallels between the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, including, for instance, SP 72, as Ben Staiger has shown in his dissertation on the Skanda myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* (Staiger 2017, 26ff.).
- The *Skandapurāṇa* composers probably knew the *Kumārasambhava* by the poet Kālidāsa, which relates the life story of Skanda. The *Kumārasambhava* was possibly composed in the fifth century CE and precedes, therefore, the *Skandapurāṇa*. It seems to have served as a basis for several portions of the *Skandapurāṇa* version of this narrative, as Amandine Wattelier-Bricout (2017) and Martine Kropman (Kropman 2019, 104ff.) have argued.
- Since the *Skandapurāṇa* composers were well-versed in other texts, we may assume them to have been familiar with other major early Purāṇas, even if there

[17] Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 2018, "*Rāmāyaṇa* Scholarship, History, and Debates" section, para. 9. For the controversy on the dating of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see, for example, ibid, para. 9—11 and Brockington 1998, 377—97).

[18] The central narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as told by the legendary seer and poet Vālmīki, is about Rāma, one of Viṣṇu's manifestations, and his wife Sītā, who is abducted by Rāvaṇa, the evil king of the Rākṣasas. With an army of monkeys, Rāma goes to Laṅkā, the land of Rāvaṇa, to battle against his enemy. Rāma wins, takes Sītā back to his own kingdom and is consecrated as king. There are other major (local) *Rāmāyaṇas* (see Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 2018 for references), but when I refer to "the *Rāmāyaṇa*", it is Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*.

are no direct parallels in the *Skandapurāṇa*. This applies to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*[19] and parts of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*[20].

- With the knowledge of different Purāṇas comes also the knowledge of what is usually referred to as the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*, "the Five Characteristics of Purāṇas". Many Purāṇas share verbatim parallels on five topics: creation (*sarga*), recreation (*pratisarga*), lineages (*vaṃśa*), Manvantaras (*manvantara*) and genealogies of dynasties (*vaṃśānucarita*). These parallels have been collected by Willibald Kirfel in *Das Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa: Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (1927)[21]. Kirfel's collection is based on fourteen different Purāṇas, from early Purāṇas such as the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Vāyupurāṇa* to relatively later ones such as the *Śivapurāṇa* and the *Garuḍapurāṇa*. It includes both mythological narratives and long lists of gods, kings, etcetera.

Since so many Purāṇas show such strong parallels on these five topics and since, as the name suggests, the topics are supposedly characteristic for Purāṇas, many studies on Purāṇas as a genre take the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* as one of the standard components of

[19] The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is a Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa, celebrating Viṣṇu as the highest god and promoting devotion to him. This ideology is expressed in eulogies to Viṣṇu, the many myths in which Viṣṇu is the main character, and book five which is entirely devoted to Krṣṇa. However, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* also includes content of a more general character, such as the second book that gives a description of the universe and the fourth book that describes the royal dynasties. Concerning the date of this Purāṇa, Rocher explains that it "is as contested as that of any other purāṇa" (Rocher 1986, 249), but several attempts have been made, ranging from 700 B.C. to 1045 CE. More recently, the middle of the first millennium CE seems to be most excepted (Eltschinger 2014, 57: fifth to beginning of sixth century; Schreiner 2013, 592: mid fourth century; and Vielle 2005, 546: sixth century).

[20] "The *Mārkaṇḍeya*˚ consists of 137 *adhyāyas*; the purāṇa proper is interrupted by the thirteen chapters (81—93) of the Devīmāhātmya ["Glorification of the Goddess"]" (Rocher 1986, 191). The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* proper consists of three sections, each containing various narratives and "[d]iscussions of *karma*, rebirth, and *saṃsāra*" (ibid, 192). The third section, dealing with creation, genealogies, etcetera, is a conversation between Mārkaṇḍeya and his disciple, which could suggest that it is the oldest part of the Purāṇa (ibid, 192—93). It may date back to the third century CE or earlier, but the *Devīmāhātmya* is a later addition, perhaps even a few centuries (ibid, 195—96). In her PhD thesis, Yuko Yokochi has dated the *Devīmāhātmya* to the second half of the eighth century or possibly even early ninth century (Yokochi 2004, 21—23 note 42).

[21] Other similar works on verbatim parallels between Purāṇas are Pargiter 1913/1962 and Kirfel 1920/1954. Although at the start of Purāṇa research, it was thought that the parallels are proof for a common source, an "Ur-Purāṇa" (Rocher 1986, 41—43), already Kirfel is cautious with this conclusion (ibid, 43—44), and many other scholars have given alterative interpretations (for an example, see Narayana Rao's interpretation mentioned in the main text below).

the literary genre[22]. At the same time, already in the mid-nineteenth century, one of the first Purāṇa scholars, Horace Hayman Wilson, questioned the prevalence of the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* topics in the introduction to his translation of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. "Do they [i.e. the Purāṇas] conform to this description [of the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇas*]? Not exactly in any one instance; to some of them it is utterly inapplicable; to others it only partially applies" (Wilson 1840, viii—ix). Alternative interpretations of the *purāṇapañcalakṣaṇas* have been suggested ever since. For instance, according to Velcheru Narayana Rao, they rather "order the events of the Purāṇa. They provide the listeners with a view of time and place in which the events narrated in Purāṇas occur" (Narayana Rao 1993, 89). They are, in other words, an "ideological frame" (ibid, 87). "Since the ideas of *pañcalakṣaṇa* are tacitly assumed in the Brahminic worldview, they do not even appear in every Purāṇa and do not constitute a sizeable length of the text even when they appear" (ibid, 87—88).

This final citation is particularly relevant for the study of the *Skandapurāṇa* and its composers. First of all, the idea that the themes, lists and narratives collected in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* are part of "the Brahminic worldview" and thus represent shared Purāṇic notions, supports my assumption that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers were aware of them and knew the content of this collection[23]. Second, the latter part of the statement applies to the *Skandapurāṇa* because, as shown above, it appears to deliberately distance itself from subjects like the creation and preservation of the universe, and genealogies of gods, sages and kings, which are *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*-type of topics *par excellence*. Although the *Skandapurāṇa* covers some of the themes, as will be shown in section 1.2, their treatment remains limited and is not presented in the systematic manner as found in other Purāṇas.

Since Purāṇas cannot be defined along the *purāṇapañcalakṣaṇas* alone, alternative definitions of the genre have been suggested by different scholars. One of the methods has been to classify Purāṇas along categories found in the texts themselves. One

[22] See, for example, Narayana Rao 2004, 99 and Bailey 2018, "Definition of the Genre and Its Content" section, para. 1 and "Content and Modes of Composition" section, para. 4—7.

[23] An additional reason to assume that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers knew the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* corpus is that those early Purāṇas that could be considered known by the *Skandapurāṇa* composers—the *Harivaṃśa*, *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, *Vāyupurāṇa* and *Viṣṇupurāṇa*—are four of the Purāṇas on which the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* collection is based.

of the better-known classifications is the division between *mahāpurāṇas* "greater Purāṇas", and *upapurāṇas*, "minor Purāṇas"[24]. Ludo Rocher, for instance, has examined this classification in his volume on Purāṇas in *A history of Indian literature*. Several Purāṇas provide a list of eighteen *mahāpurāṇas* with texts like the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, *Brahmapurāṇa* and *Vāmanapurāṇa*. There is, however, variation on which Purāṇas are included and which not, as well as uncertainty on the antiquity of lists like these (Rocher 1986, 30—34). The inclusion of Purāṇas such as the *Liṅgapurāṇa* and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* strongly suggests that as a rule, the lists postdate at least the *Skandapurāṇa*. There is even more variation in and uncertainty about the *upapurāṇas*. They "are reputed to be later compositions, more sectarian, of local interest only" (ibid, 67)[25]. Although such classifications give a sense of the genre as a canon and how the genre is traditionally classified, the references are probably later than the *Skandapurāṇa* and are therefore less relevant for the present discussion on the *Skandapurāṇa* as belonging to the Purāṇic genre[26]. In order to reach a definition of Purāṇas that is also applicable to the *Skandapurāṇa*, how Purānas function and what unites them, a different approach is needed; one more focussed on their content.

I would like to highlight one article that meets this demand, *viz.* 'History and Primordium in Ancient Indian Historical Writing' by James L. Fitzgerald[27]. Fitzgerald

[24] This classification is occasionally expanded with other categories, such as *sthalapurāṇas*, "regional Purāṇas", and *jātipurāṇas*, "caste Purāṇas". For more information on these two, see Rocher 1986, 71—72.

[25] Well-known examples of *upapurāṇas* are the *Nīlamatapurāṇa* and the *Kālikāpurāṇa*. For a comprehensive work on the *upapurāṇas*, see Hazra 1958 and 1963; for the canonicity of the Purāṇas, their division into *mahāpurāṇas* and *upapurāṇas*, as well as their fluidity, see, for example, Smith 2016.

[26] Another classification, though with similar problems, is based on the text's religious affiliation. A threefold division has been suggested in several Purāṇas. Rocher mentions, for example, the *Padmapurāṇa* which makes a distinction between Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas (*sāttvika* Purāṇas), Purāṇas related to Brahmā (*rājasa* Purāṇas) and Śaiva Purāṇas (*tāmasa* Purāṇas, Rocher 1986, 21). Rocher wonders, however, "whether the sectarian divides between the purāṇas – and within Hinduism generally – have not been exaggerated" (ibid.) for two main reasons. First, some Purāṇas include a fourth or fifth category, such as "mixed" Purāṇas or those related to Sūrya or Agni. Second, Purāṇas do not just pay attention to the main god but to other gods as well (ibid, 21—22).

[27] An example of a study that specifically deals with how Purāṇas function is 'What Enables Canonical Literature to Function as "True"?' by McComas Taylor. Taylor investigates the methods by which Purāṇas are legitimized as true, by approaching the subject from within individual Purāṇas, seeking markers of truth claims. Purāṇas appear to have similar "internal textual strategies" that the Purāṇa author "adopted to instil a sense of authority and truthfulness into his

translates Purāṇa as a "primordial account of primordial things" (Fitzgerald 2014, 44), with the Purāṇa's primordiality conveying "the additional, critically important sense of *being the first instance of something that is still current*" (ibid, 49). The idea that primordial matters are connected to the present finds expression in the Purāṇa's view on

> "how and why the world is the way it is, how and why the typical things of our world began – cosmology and philosophy and its anthropomorphic cousin theology that in the *purāṇas* ordinarily takes the form of a "cosmological monotheism", in which the old polytheism of the Vedic religion finds its place in lower orders of creation derived from the unique Supreme Lord (conceived in different theological traditions as the Supreme Being Kṛṣṇa, or Viṣṇu, or Śiva, or as the Goddess, Devī)" (ibid, 50).

As a result of this monotheism, each Purāṇa is different.

> "Though some of the core elements of the oldest *purāṇas* share the same basic text, as Pargiter 1913 and Kirfel 1927 showed, details of the *purāṇa* cosmologies vary and the subsequent theologies, philosophies, and ethics they present are numerous and different from each other" (ibid, 51).

This combination of *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*-type of topics and theology has long been recognized and is indeed characteristic for Purāṇas, including the *Skandapurāṇa*. As, however, the summary-like verses of chapter 183 quoted above (SP_{Bh} 183.63—64) show, the *Skandapurāṇa* does not only deal with narratives about the preservation of the world in the current era—which can be characterized as *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*—and doctrinal

text" (Taylor 2008, 325). These include the text being told by Brahmā or mythical sages, whose lineages are continued to human authors; the text being performed in shared divine places of power, such as the Naimiṣa forest; and the promise of benefits of listening to the text and reciting and propagating it (ibid, 325—26).

and theological parts, but also—or rather, in the first place—with the birth story of Skanda. The latter, as I will show in the next section, stands for a third key feature of Purāṇas: telling new stories and retelling narratives that are known from other sources. These three components—*Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* topics, theology and (re)tellings—cover (the majority of) the content of the *Skandapurāṇa*, other early Purāṇas, as well as later Purāṇas, and can therefore be seen as characteristic for the genre. These correspondences in content may point to an early stage of a standardization of the genre. The following section addresses correspondences as well as differences in text units of the *Skandapurāṇa* compared to other early Purāṇas[28].

1.2 Tell and retell

The *Skandapurāṇa* first of all treats its *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* material differently. Instead of following other early Purāṇas in building on verbatim parallels, the composers seem to have deliberately referred to these topics in the above-cited passage from SP 5, as if to justify that they will not deal with them. The amount of *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* material is indeed scarce, but the *Skandapurāṇa* composers did not neglect the topics entirely. If, however, this type of material is recounted, it is always done in the text's own characteristic wording and style of writing. An example of this is the topic of creation, discussed in section 1.2.1.

The Purāṇas are not only characterized by narratives on creation, lists of lineages, etcetera. Already at an early stage of the genre, Purāṇas are used as vehicles for a theological message. Whereas the *Vāyupurāṇa* has only some theological parts that are

[28] For the present study, I focus on textual sources, primarily narratives from the epics and other Purāṇas. However, there are many other sources where narratives or narrative ideas may have originated. For example, some narratives have a provenance in other genres of literature. Nirajan Kafle has shown that the earliest version of the *Liṅgodbhava* myth (the myth of "the origin of the *liṅga*", the phallus-shaped icon representing Śiva) is found in the *Śivadharma*, predating the earliest versions in the Purāṇas (Kafle 2013). There are also cases where textual elements rather go back to an iconographic source. Yuko Yokochi has illustrated this process for the *Skandapurāṇa*. The way in which the text depicts the war goddess called Vindhyavāsinī, "she who lives in the Vindhya [mountains]", is remarkably similar to the iconography of the goddess in what Yokochi calls "the Vindhya subtype" of the Gupta type (Yokochi 2004, 127—41). We should furthermore allow for the possibility that a narrative does not come from a physical source, but from "the culture" in general. Narratives were told and retold in temples and at home, so local or even family-specific versions must have been omnipresent. Purāṇa composers may occasionally have used such versions rather than or in addition to versions from physical sources.

Śaiva in character[29], the majority of the *Harivaṃśa* eulogizes Kṛṣṇa as the highest deity, and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* does so with regard to Viṣṇu. The text's ideology is proclaimed by telling the most important myths about the god in question, praising him or her with eulogies (*stotras*) and teaching central doctrines[30].

Like the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the *Skandapurāṇa* is used as a vehicle for the promotion of a theological message. The *Skandapurāṇa* proclaims a Śaiva ideology, in which Śiva is the supreme god who should be worshipped. He is often presented as a gracious and benevolent god, who grants fabulous boons to his devotees when they worship him, meditate on him or practice *tapas*, "asceticism"[31]. The ultimate reward for sole devotion to Śiva is *mokṣa*, "liberation" from the continuous cycle of rebirth. The text does not only promote Śiva worship, it also presents a Śaiva universe. Śiva is on top of this universe, overseeing, directing and designing all actions by the other gods. Although the other gods play an important role in the execution of great (cosmic) tasks, there is a clear hierarchy between the superior god Śiva and the other gods who are dependent on Śiva for receiving their tasks[32]. Śiva is generally accompanied by Pārvatī, living in their palace on the divine mountain called Mandara, and his Gaṇas. The Gaṇas "are Śiva's loyal assistants, accompanying him and the goddess wherever they go, and they perform all kinds of often destructive tasks for their master. Together they constitute Śiva's army, but some of them have a more individual character of their own" (Bisschop 2009, 749). The active participation of both the Gaṇas and the gods gives an impression of the text's view on Śiva's role in the universe: he generally remains at the background, being transcendent and designing plans which are then executed by others[33].

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[29] See SP Vol. I, 22 for correspondences between the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Vāyupurāṇa* on Śaiva topics.

[30] For the Vaiṣṇava ideology of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, including the centrality of eulogies, see Schreiner 2013, 621ff.

[31] "The Sanskrit word *tapas* is frequently translated as "austerity" or more broadly as "asceticism." The word itself derives from the Sanskrit verb *tap*-, "to heat," "to be hot." Accordingly *tapas* can refer to a variety of practices aimed at the generation of a kind of "heat" as well as to the heat so generated. [… T]he term eventually comes to mean a specifically "ascetic," often painful heat produced by the practice of austerities such as fasting" (Carpenter 2018, para. 1).

[32] I will examine the power dynamics between Śiva and the other gods in more detail in section 1.2.1.

[33] In 'Śiva and his Gaṇas. Techniques of Narrative Distancing in Purāṇic Stories', Phyllis Granoff has studied Śiva's reluctance on the basis of several myths, referring to it as ""narrative distancing." What I mean by this term is that the stories place Śiva at a distance from the action that occurs in

The text's Śaiva ideology and representation of a Śaiva universe is expressed in different text units. The most explicit statements of devotion to Śiva are eulogies to him. For example, SP 21.18—49 is a *stotra* by Nandin, in which he praises Śiva with some of his most famous epithets and characteristics, like *nīlakaṇṭhāya vai namaḥ*, "homage to Nīlakaṇṭha ["the one with the dark neck"]" (SP 21.18d), and *namas triśūlahastāya*, "homage to the one whose hand [holds] a trident" (SP 21.25a). The Śaiva ideology is also communicated through the numerous myths about Śiva and his wife Pārvatī[34] and specifically through Māhātmyas ("Glorifications") of Śaiva holy places. The long Māhātmya of Vārāṇasī (SP 26—31.14) is most illustrative, for it enumerates a range of Śaiva *tīrthas* ("bathing places") and *liṅgas* (phallus-shaped icons representing Śiva) in the holy city. The text units that describe the way to liberation also form part of this theological scheme and associate the *Skandapurāṇa* with a particular branch of Śaivism, *viz.* Pāśupata Śaivism[35]. For example, SP_{Bh} 174—81 explain how liberation can be attained by means of sole devotion to Śiva and the performance of Pāśupata practices, such as the *pāśupatayoga*, "the Pāśupata *yoga* system", and the *pāśupatavrata*, "the Pāśupata observance"[36]. The effectiveness of these practices is illustrated by various

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the story. In fact in most of the stories it is not Śiva at all who is the prime actor. Śiva acts by proxy; he summons a being, usually identified as one of his *gaṇas*, who does what needs to be done" (Granoff 2006, 79).

[34] The examples are abundant, like Śiva proposing to Pārvatī to marry him and their subsequent wedding (SP 12—13), as well as their union (*yoga*) leading to the conception of their son Skanda (SP 72).

[35] The Pāśupatas are a particular branch of ascetics within Śaivism. They worshipped Śiva, particularly in his form as Rudra or Rudra-Paśupati, they smeared themselves with ashes and lived at cremation grounds, where they also performed religious services for the laity. Some of the Pāśupata ascetics adhered to even more extreme practices, such as behaving like a bull and adopting unethical and unorthodox behaviour (Acharya 2011, 458). References to these and other unorthodox practices are found in one of the pivotal and earliest Pāśupata scriptures called *Pāśupatasūtra*. The commentary on this *sūtra*, the *Pañcārthabhāṣya* by Kauṇḍinya (ca. 4th century CE), is more moderate (ibid, 459). The final goal of Pāśupatas is liberation, presented as union (*yoga*) with Rudra.

[36] In this part of the text, *pāśupatayoga* generally refers to yogic practices, for example: "[a]fter one has adopted a sitting posture and withdrawn all limbs, one should become motionless and meditate, while one directs one's thought on the twenty-sixth reality" (Bakker 2014, 141, translation of SP_{Bh} 179.28). However, in the *Skandapurāṇa*, *yoga* also means "union", i.e. union with Śiva, which is more in line with the interpretation of the word in the *Pāśupatasūtra* (Bisschop 2006, 39). The *pāśupatavrata* is a vow one takes, "which contains mainly of a bath in ashes. A person who practises such an observance is designated a 'Pāśupata' (SP_{Bh} 180.23)" (ibid, 40). In sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, I will discuss the sorts of *pāśupatavrata* practised by Viṣṇu.

myths in other parts of the text, like the story of the sage Jaigīṣavya (SP 29.96—124), who received boons from Śiva by practising *tapas* and following the rules of the Pāśupatas[37]. Other devotees of Śiva also receive fabulous boons thanks to their devotion to Śiva[38].

Another element that is shared by both the *Skandapurāṇa* and other early Purāṇas and which, in my view, is one of the key characteristics of Purāṇas, is the combination of new and known material[39]. New narratives and text units are those that do not appear in textual sources that are earlier than or contemporary to the text in question[40]. The life story of Kṛṣṇa, for instance, is new when it is first told in the *Harivaṃśa*[41]. One of the major new narratives in the *Skandapurāṇa* is the Andhaka myth. It tells how Andhaka is born from the darkness created by Pārvatī, when she covers Śiva's eyes. Śiva gives the blind boy to Hiraṇyākṣa, an Asura[42], as a reward for his *tapas* (SP 73). Since Andhaka is raised

[37] "Bathing in ashes and anointed with ashes, Jaigīṣavya pleases (Deva ["God", i.e. Śiva]) by dancing, singing, muttering (his name) and by bellowing like a bull" (SP Vol. IIA, 235). The boons granted by Śiva include that "he will be a great yogin who, thanks to the miraculous power of the mystery of this holy field [i.e. Avimukta in Vārāṇasī], will attain the eightfold mastery in yoga. And he shall be a famous yoga teacher (*yogācārya*)" (ibid.).

[38] For example, in SP 34.62—122, the sage Upamanyu takes refuge with Śiva, practices *tapas* and meditates on Śiva because he desires milk, which his mother cannot give. Thanks to his devotion to Śiva and the practice of *tapas*, Śiva grants him an ocean of milk.

[39] It has been suggested "by a number of scholars that Purāṇas contain myths that are already known each time they are heard, mirroring well the traditional view that Purāṇas juxtapose new and old material continuously" (Bailey 2018, "Previous Scholarship on the Purāṇas" section, para. 10). One of these scholars is Greg Bailey himself in his study on the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, a relatively late Purāṇa (ca. fourteenth century (ibid, para. 12)), where he makes a distinction between "traditional", i.e. known material, and "non-traditional", i.e. new material (Bailey 1995, 155ff.).

[40] I am aware of the fact that the texts that are available to us today probably provide only a hint of the texts that once existed. Texts may have fallen into disuse or they may have gone lost because of the fragile material that was used for writing. This means that a narrative that is identified as "new" may, in fact, have had a precursor in a text presently unknown. If that is the case, the narrative should be qualified as a retelling instead. However, since it is impossible to know if and which texts may have existed—let alone their content—I focus on those texts that are available to us today.

[41] "Many of these Krishna stories were developed and expanded in later Hindu and Jain texts, but the *Harivamsha* contains what are probably the earliest surviving versions" (Brodbeck 2019b, xv).

[42] Asuras are the enemies of the gods. They can be categorized in different lineages, of which the Daityas and the Dānavas are the most prominent ones. The Daityas are the descendants of Kaśyapa and Diti; the Dānavas are the descendants of Kaśyapa and Danu. Since they are the enemies of the gods and follow the contrary *dharma*, "rules", of the Asuras (*viz. adharma*), *asura* is often translated as "demon". I do not use this translation because not all Asuras are purely evil. Some even practice *tapas* and worship god, in particular Śiva. I use the Sanskrit terms instead, making a distinction between Daityas and Dānavas (as their familiar lineages are well-defined in the epics and the Purāṇas), but applying "Asuras" to both Daityas and Dānavas.

among the Asuras, he becomes the enemy of the gods. After several journeys and battles, the story of Andhaka ends with Śiva defeating Andhaka and accepting him as his own son (SP 155—56). The editors of SP Vol. IV have argued that "[t]he *Skandapurāṇa* is the first Purāṇa to give a full account of the life story of Andhaka. We learn very little about Andhaka from the *Mahābhārata*, although the epithet 'Slayer of Darkness/Andhaka' (Andhakaghātin) occurs in some praise hymns to Śiva" (SP Vol. IV, 11)[43].

Many other stories in Purāṇas, on the other hand, are retellings: narratives that are known from earlier or contemporary textual sources[44]. There are countless examples; from the verbatim parallels of the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* to more liberal retellings of (epic)

[43] The *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* "does include a passage on the origin of Śiva's third eye (MBh 13.127.26—45) that is remarkably close to the episode of Devī's ["Goddess'", i.e. Pārvatī's] covering of Deva's ["God's", i.e. Śiva's] eyes told in the *Skandapurāṇa*" (SP Vol. IV, 11). However, the *Mahābhārata* passage is not connected with Andhaka, so the inclusion of the narrative element of covering the eyes into the Andhaka myth is an innovation in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

[44] This does not mean that I assume one "original" narrative to which a retelling can be retraced. Since narratives are often found in various sources and are not claimed by one particular composer, it is often impossible to know whether a given retelling goes back to one specific source, and if so, which one. I will come back to this topic in section 1.4, where I discuss the implications of this situation for the chapters to come. I furthermore do not wish to make a hierarchical distinction between a retelling and an earlier version or "the original". On the contrary, I would like to argue that the very fact that a narrative is retold signifies its importance in a particular time, place and context.

Similar connotations of the term "retelling" are not limited to narratives in the Purāṇas. In his well-known article on the numerous *Rāmāyaṇas* existing across time and place, A.K. Ramanujan therefore prefers "the word tellings to the usual terms versions or variants because the latter terms can and typically do imply that there is an invariant, an original or *Ur*-text" (Ramanujan 1991, 24—25). He wonders whether there is, at all, "a common core to the Rāma stories, except the most skeletal set of relations like that of Rāma, his brother, his wife, and the antagonist Rāvaṇa who abducts her?" In fact, in the case of the discussed "tellings" of the story of Rāma, "one [telling] is not necessarily all that like another. Like a collection of people with the same proper name, they make a class in name alone" (ibid, 44). This is where Ramanujan's article differs from my thesis and why I use the term "retellings", because at least the narratives that are at the centre of this thesis do share a common core which is more than "the most skeletal set of relations". Additionally, Ramanujan's study is on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, about which many people have a strong feeling about "an original", *viz.* Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, "the earliest and most prestigious of them all. But as we shall see, it is not always Vālmīki's narrative that is carried from one language to another" (ibid. 25). In the case of the narratives in my thesis, there is no such consensus on an original. Finally, Ramanujan makes a relevant remark on the importance of new tellings. He justly writes that each author makes "a crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context. [… N]o text is original, yet no telling is a mere retelling—and the story has no closure, although it may be enclosed in a text" (ibid, 46). Likewise, I would like to add, no retelling is a mere retelling.

narratives[45]. The *Skandapurāṇa* contains many retellings that include both narratives with Śiva or his relatives playing the main part, like the birth of Skanda, and narratives in which other gods and figures take the lead. In the retellings of the *Skandapurāṇa*, verbatim parallels with other texts are hardly found. Rather, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers combined old and new elements, hence telling their own, new version. Since retellings appear in a new text, they may not immediately fit their context, such as the location of composition of the text, its time, its genre and its audience. Each context asks for different solutions. In my thesis, I will focus on two specific types of contexts to which retellings should be adjusted and innovated: that of ideology (Śaivization) and style of writing (dramatic visualization).

1.2.1 Śaivization

Whereas new narratives can be composed from the start in such a way that its characters and ideas fit the ideology of the text, this is not always the case with retellings. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, with its Śaiva affiliation, a new narrative like the Andhaka myth summarized above blends in naturally with the rest of the text, since it starts and ends with a prominent role for Śiva and Pārvatī. Some retellings of myths likewise readily match the Śiva-oriented parameters of the *Skandapurāṇa*, such as the life story of Skanda. However, in the case of myths that do not deal with Śiva or his relatives, nor with Śaiva themes, we can observe an attempt to make the retelling fit within the new, Śaiva context of the *Skandapurāṇa*. I refer to this process of changing a narrative (element) or introducing new narrative elements to make the retellings match a Śaiva context or teaching as "Śaivization".

Since this thesis concentrates on narratives in a Śaiva Purāṇa, all examples concern textual changes. However, Śaivization can be seen in other forms of religious expressions as well, such as iconography, rituals or places. As a phenomenon that centres around alterations and innovations in religion, it can be put against the background of the

[45] The study of the development of individual narratives has grown to a separate sub-field in epic and Purāṇic studies, with examples such as Rüping (1970), Stubbe-Diara (1995) and Mertens (1998).

theory of "Inklusivismus", formulated by Paul Hacker in 'Inklusivismus' (1983)[46]. According to Hacker, Indian thought can be characterized by its tendency towards inclusivism, which he defines as the declaration that a central notion of a different religious community is, in fact, identical to a central notion of one's own community[47]. In this way, one is "claiming for, and thus including in, one's own religion what really belongs to an alien sect" (Hacker 1995, 244)[48]. The "other" is often, explicitly or implicitly, considered subordinate or inferior[49]. Inclusivism is, according to Hacker, particularly a means of expression for those religions that are inferior or weaker and still in development, in order to prevail and to validate themselves. Among the Purāṇas, this is, according to Hacker, most notably the case in Śaiva Purāṇas[50].

Hacker's thesis that inclusivism is particularly a means for developing religious traditions has been taken up by Peter Bisschop in 'Inclusivism revisited. The worship of other gods in the *Sivadharmaśāstra*, the *Skandapurāṇa*, and the *Niśvāsamukha*'. Bisschop notices that Śaivism "appears comparatively late on the scene and as such, perhaps more than others, had to secure itself a position among the dominant religious traditions of the time" (Bisschop 2019, 511—12)[51]. The article revolves specifically around "the representation of the worship of other gods than Śiva in three early Śaiva texts: the *Śivadharmaśāstra*, the *Skandapurāṇa*, and the *Niśvāsamukha*. In varying degrees, the approaches towards other gods in these three texts may be regarded as inclusivist, in the sense that they recognise and teach the worship and existence of other gods but that they

[46] This article is a lecture originally given by Hacker in 1977, published posthumously in *Inklusivismus. Eine indische Denkform* by Gerhard Oberhammer (1983).
[47] "Inklusivismus bedeutet, daß man erklärt, eine zentrale Vorstellung einer fremden religiösen oder weltanschaulichen Gruppe sei identisch mit dieser oder jener zentralen Vorstellung der Gruppe, zu der man selber gehört" (Hacker 1983, 12).
[48] This citation comes from a lecture given by Hacker in 1970, published posthumously in *Philology and Confrontation. Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta* by Wilhelm Halbfass (1995).
[49] "Meistens gehört zum Inklusivismus ausgesprochen oder unausgesprochen die Behauptung, daß das Fremde, das mit dem Eigenen als identisch erklärt wird, in irgendeiner Weise ihm untergeordnet oder unterlegen sei" (Hacker 1983, 12).
[50] "Wie ich schon sagte, ist der Inklusivismus ein Mittel des Unterlegenen oder des noch Schwachen, des noch in Entwicklung Begriffenen, sich durchzusetzen, sich Geltung zu verschaffen. Die śivaitischen Purāṇen, die ich gesehen habe, machen das deutlich, in manchen Fällen sogar überdeutlich" (Hacker 1983, 17).
[51] For references to other secondary literature on inclusivist tendencies in Śaivism, see Bisschop 2019, 512.

do so from a hierarchical perspective, in which the true and ultimate master is Śiva and their power derives from him" (ibid, 512—13). One point on which Bisschop differs from Hacker, however, following a similar critique expressed by Albrecht Wezler in 'Bemerkungen zum Inklusivismus-Begriff Paul Hackers' (1983), concerns the implied dichotomy between Śaivism and "das Fremde" as presented by Hacker[52]. Bisschop finds that, in the three texts under study, only a few passages demonstrate signs of inclusivism of gods or figures that clearly stem from a different religious ideology[53]. The other cases expressing an inclusivist tendency rather concern deities that "in fact all form part of a well-established Brahmanical tradition, to which Śaivism aligns itself. The inclusivism encountered here is not a case of "claiming, what really belongs to an alien sect," but rather seem to reflect a more general Brahmanical perspective on what constitutes religion" (Bisschop 2019, 532)—and this includes gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā, regardless of the religious tradition's own ideology.

The type of retellings that I will deal with, *viz.* Viṣṇu's manifestation myths, may at first glance be considered to belong to Vaiṣṇavism and thus fall in the scope of Hacker's idea of "das Fremde". However, as I will show in chapter 2, the narratives are found across the epic and Purāṇic tradition, which rather points in the direction of belonging to a shared Brahmanical tradition. Nevertheless, processes of Śaivization are certainly observable

[52] "Bei näherer Betrachtung stellen sich aber alsbald Zweifel ein, und zwar zunächst einmal im Hinblick auf die Auseinandersetzung zwischen den hinduistischen Sekten, d. h. vor allem zwischen Śivaismus und Viṣṇuismus. Ist die Annahme, so wird man fragen, überhaupt berechtigt, daß die Mythenüberlieferungen beider zu irgendeinem frühen Zeitpunkt, 'ursprünglich', in dem Sinne strikt śivaitisch bzw. viṣṇuitisch waren, daß der Gott des konkurrierenden Glaubens in ihnen nicht nur keine Rolle spielte, sondern auch gar nicht vorkam? Muß nicht angesichts der letzlich vedischen Herkunft beider Traditionsströme vielmehr davon ausgegangen werden, daß die zentrale göttliche Gestalt des einen von Anfang an auch in dem anderen nicht nur vorkam, sondern auch eine gewisse, wenn auch nachgeordnete, Rolle spielte? Und, wenn letzteres richtig ist, kann man dann eigentlich von "Inklusivismus" im wörtlichen Sinne sprechen?" (Wezler 1983, 81—82).

[53] The relevant passages are found in the *Śivadharmaśāstra*. The passages are enumerations in which "we are taught […] that the gods acquired their position as god through worship of different types of *liṅga*s" (Bisschop 2019, 514). Whereas most deities are gods like Vāyu, Brahmā and Viṣṇu, some manuscripts added the Arhat, the most-revered figure in Jainism, and the Buddha, the most-revered figure in Buddhism (ibid, 516, 518 and 523—24). The fact that the Arhat and the Buddha are missing in some of the manuscripts "attests to the perceived boundaries of Brahmanical religion, which would not normally include the spiritual masters of the Buddhist and Jaina communities" (ibid, 518).

here, as well as in other retellings that may be considered "Brahmanical". There are different ways to Śaivize a narrative or narrative element.

For instance, a god can be replaced by Śiva, as exemplified by the Vṛtra myth. In this myth, Indra slays the gigantic cobra Vṛtra, who prevented the monsoon from coming[54]. The *Skandapurāṇa* version (SP 60.22—71) is based on the story in the *Udyogaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 5.9.1—10.41), as demonstrated by Yuko Yokochi in SP Vol. III, 14—15. On the one hand, the *Skandapurāṇa* follows the *Mahābhārata* in some key narrative elements. For example, Indra is unable to conquer Vṛtra by himself[55], but when he gets help, Indra kills the Asura with a weapon hidden in foam, that has been entered by Viṣṇu[56]. On the other hand, there is an important plot twist. Whereas in the *Mahābhārata* version, Viṣṇu designs the plan for Indra how to kill Vṛtra (MBh 5.10.12), in the *Skandapurāṇa*, it is Śiva who tells the gods how they can slay him (SP 60.64). The identification of the ultimate saviour has thus shifted from Viṣṇu to Śiva. This small but crucial change turns the myth into a new, Śaiva version. It is, as Yokochi has noted, a case of "Śaiva adaptations of popular myths" (ibid, 14)[57].

Another strategy with the same result of Śaivization is to add Śaiva elements. An example of this process is the *Skandapurāṇa* version of the myth of creation. Other early Purāṇas often share the same creation myth, as it forms part of the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*'s section on *sarga*. Despite deviation in length of the myth and variations between individual text groups[58], there are several key narrative elements that are found throughout the Purāṇic corpus with verbatim parallels per text group. These include, for instance, the

[54] The story is told for the first time in the *Ṛgveda*, where ṚV 1.32 forms the core story, and is retold several times in the epics (e.g. MBh 5.9—18) and the Purāṇas (e.g. VDhP 1.24). For other Purāṇic references, see Klostermaier 1984, 33—39.
[55] MBh 5.9.45ff.; SP 60.24ff.
[56] MBh 5.10.36—38; SP 60.64.
[57] The *Mahābhārata* version (MBh 5.9—18) itself is a modified retelling of the *Ṛgveda* version of the myth (see Klostermaier 1984, 29—31 and Van Buitenen 1978, 159—66). Whereas in the *Ṛgveda*, Indra designs the plan on how to kill Vṛtra and executes it, in the *Mahābhārata*, Viṣṇu makes the plan and Indra executes it. Thanks to this change, the role of saviour shifts from Indra to Viṣṇu. The *Mahābhārata* version is a Vaiṣṇavized version of the *Ṛgveda* story. The tendency to add an extra layer like this continues in the Purāṇic versions, where Indra's "victory is ultimately credited to the intervention of Viṣṇu, Śiva, or Devī" (Klostermaier 1984, 33).
[58] Kirfel 1927 gathered texts into text groups that share verbatim parallels. Each text group has its own version of a narrative.

idea that Brahmā is born from the cosmic egg and becomes the creator god[59]. The *Skandapurāṇa* does not have such literal parallels with the other Purāṇas, but creates its own version, by both including elements that are known from other sources and giving its own explanation of how the universe is created. On the one hand, the cosmic egg and Brahmā as creator god also feature in the *Skandapurāṇa* version of the creation myth (SP 3—4). The myth starts with Brahmā being born from the cosmic egg (SP 3.4ab). He becomes "the lord of the offspring" (Prajāpati, SP 3.22) and brings forth all kinds of beings, who then start to produce offspring themselves (SP 4.19cd—21). On the other hand, although Brahmā retains the role of creator god and creates new beings, it is Śiva who assigns this task to him (SP 3.19—22). In this way, the creation myth fits into the larger scheme of the Śaiva universe as it is presented in the text: all the gods have executive tasks, usually the ones they are known for, but Śiva oversees the process and sets it in motion. He is the force behind the actions and tasks of the other gods. The creation myth exemplifies this perfectly, where a small, yet crucial plot twist—the addition of Śiva—makes Śiva the ultimate decision-maker, the mastermind behind the plan of creation. Although the retelling of the creation myth preserves some key elements, Śiva along with a Śaiva ideology is added as an extra, decisive layer[60].

[59] For instance, text group I as identified by Kirfel (*Agnipurāṇa*, *Brahmapurāṇa*, *Harivaṃśa* and *Śivapurāṇa Dharmasaṃhitā*) share the following two verses with only minor differences.
PPL *sarga* and *pratisarga* 1.12—13:
hiraṇyavarṇam abhavat tad aṇḍam udakeśayam |
tatra jajñe svayaṃ brahmā svayaṃbhūr iti naḥ śrutam || *12* ||
hiraṇyagarbho bhagavān uṣitvā parivatsaram |
tad aṇḍam akarod dvaidhaṃ divaṃ bhuvam athāpi ca || *13* ||
"There was a golden egg lying in the water, from which Brahmā himself was born, known by us as Svayaṃbhū. Having dwelled [there] for a year, lord Hiraṇyagarbha ["Golden Embryo", i.e. Brahmā] divided that egg into two: heaven and earth."

[60] In chapter 3, I will argue that it was important to combine key known narrative elements with new Śaiva components in order to meet different demands. The former enhanced the chance that the retelling would be accepted, and thanks to the latter, the retellings could become integrated and accommodated in the Śaiva ideology of the text. I choose to postpone a thorough discussion on the goal of integration and accommodation because I wish to base it on text-internal evidences for Viṣṇu's manifestation myths specifically. As a result, in the present section, I have limited myself to present Śaivization as a process of changing narrative (elements) and introducing new narrative elements in order to make the retellings match the text's Śaiva ideology.

1.2.2 Dramatic visualization

Not all modifications in the retellings of the *Skandapurāṇa* concern the text's ideology. Some adjustments rather involve the style of writing of the *Skandapurāṇa* composers, which can be characterized as rich, engaging and appealing. Although not all narratives receive the same amount of attention, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers almost always pay stylistic attention to the way they tell or retell narratives by including lively dialogues, humorous insider jokes and scenic descriptions that make it easier to envision the scene before one's eyes. The editors of SP Vol. I already noted the rich style of the *Skandapurāṇa*. "As readers who do not aspire to be literary critics, we find the SP to be written in the main in an enjoyable, often very lively, style; more so than most other Puranic works that we have read. In the dialogues there are not infrequent touches of humour" (SP Vol. I, 29). The comparison is made with other Purāṇas that can occasionally be dry and monotonous. Especially the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* material with its long lists of gods, Asuras and kings is not always particularly exciting from a storytelling point of view. The fact that precisely such lists are omitted in the *Skandapurāṇa* and that, at the same time, some of the content of lists like these find expression in narrative form suggests that the composers made an active effort to produce appealing narratives[61].

In the case of the retellings, where other versions are comparatively straightforward with limited attractive scenes, I refer to this technique as dramatic visualization, a term borrowed from David Pinault in his book *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*. Pinault defines

> "dramatic visualization as the representing of an object or character with an abundance of descriptive detail, or the mimetic rendering of gestures and dialogue in such a way as to make the given scene 'visual' or imaginatively present to an audience. I contrast 'dramatic visualization' with 'summary presentation,' where an author informs his audience of an object or event in abbreviated fashion without dramatizing the scene

[61] This will be argued in section 5.3.

> or encouraging the audience to form a visual picture of it" (Pinault 1992, 25—26)[62].

A similar distinction can be made for retellings where the *Skandapurāṇa* represents dramatic visualization and other texts only a summary presentation of the same narrative. The story of the seven Brahmins can illustrate this. This narrative has been studied by Yuko Yokochi in her article 'The story of the seven brahmans in the *Harivaṃśa*', where she shows that the *Skandapurāṇa* version of the story (SP 56.1—57.47) has a close parallel with the retelling of the main event in the *Harivaṃśa* (HV 16—19)[63]. The *Skandapurāṇa* "adapts and enlarges the main story of the HV to a considerable extent, omitting some episodes and adding new ones" (Yokochi 2000, 532). One of the new passages is a speech of the father of the Brahmins during their rebirth as hunters (SP 56.64—82). The father speaks emotionally to his sons, when they ask him permission to commit suicide before he and their mother have died. The father tells the story of his own previous life as a Brahmin, which is similar to their situation, and asks his sons not to commit suicide as long as their father and mother are still alive. The hunters do as they are asked. In the *Harivaṃśa*, the Brahmins' rebirth as hunters occupies only three verses that simply report that the seven hunters worshipped their parents and that when they died, the seven hunters committed suicide. The affectionate speech in the *Skandapurāṇa* can be

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[62] Pinault compares his distinction between dramatic visualization and summary presentation with the distinction that Wayne C. Booth made between "showing" and "telling" in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: "when an author "shows" his audience something he renders it dramatically so as to give the "intensity of realistic illusion"; when he "tells" his audience about a thing he is using his authorial powers to summarize an event or render judgment on a character's behaviour, without, however, using descriptive detail to make the given event or character imaginatively present" (Pinault 1992, 26, referring to Booth 1961, 3—9, 40). The distinction between telling and showing is a well-developed subfield in narratology, dealt with by many other scholars in different ways. In 'Telling vs. Showing', Klauk and Köppe demonstrate that "current narratology shows a broad diversity of possible meanings of the telling vs. showing distinction" (Klauk and Köppe 2013/2014, "3 Aspects and History of the Concept" section, para. 7). They list seven different distinctions, each focussing on a particular narrative phenomenon (ibid, para. 8—14). For example, "the 'speed' of the narration, which can be comparatively fast (telling) or slow (showing), and which can convey more (showing) or less detailed (telling) information, is taken to be decisive" (ibid, para. 13).

[63] The narrative tells how seven Brahmins are reborn into lower beings because they are cursed for a sin that they committed: first as hunters, then as deer, next as *cakravākas* (i.e. birds) and finally as humans. However, due to their devotion to the forefathers, they "do not fall to the hells […]; instead, they suffer transmigration through low births […] and finally reach the ultimate perfection" (SP Vol. III, 17).

considered a dramatic visualization of the hunters' request and the brief account in the *Harivaṃśa* can be seen as a summary presentation of the same narrative element.

As this style of narrating events is characteristic for the *Skandapurāṇa*, there are many examples of dramatic visualization, including some cases where they can be placed next to a passage that can be rather characterized as summary presentation. In the chapters that follow, various other instances will be discussed. For example, in SP 71, an insider joke at the expense of the enemy of the gods creates a special relationship between the composers and the audience and shows that the composers expected the audience to know how the retelling (usually) proceeds[64]; and in SP 95, we encounter a scenic description of different layers of the netherworld where fabulous creatures like sea-monsters and mermen live[65].

Both examples make it easier for the audience to be absorbed in the story, which in itself can be seen as the function of dramatic visualization. Pinault, however, adds another reason why this narrative technique is employed. According to him, "dramatic visualization is reserved especially for scenes which form the heart of a given narrative. […] The effect of all this visualized detail is to slow the pace of narration; and we are not permitted any resolution till the last possible moment […]. Thus the technique of dramatic visualization enables the storyteller to heighten the tension in a scene and increase his audience's experience of pleasurable suspense" (Pinault 1992, 28). The wish for a similar suspense may have been the reason to include the father's speech in the story of the seven Brahmins, anticipating the big question whether the father will give the hunters permission to commit suicide. The speech builds up to the climax of that particular scene (as opposed to the entire narrative as Pinault suggested). Although considerations like this may be behind other instances of dramatic visualization in the *Skandapurāṇa* as well, I

[64] In SP 71.36cd, Hiraṇyakaśipu, the enemy of the gods, orders his subjects to bring Viṣṇu in his Man-Lion manifestation to him alive, so that "this lion-cub will be a pet for my wife" (*krīḍaṇaṃ siṃhapoto 'sau devyā mama bhaviṣyati*, SP 71.36cd). In section 2.1, I will show that this verse should be interpreted as an insider joke because the audience knows that Viṣṇu will kill Hiraṇyakaśipu.

[65] SP 99.11:
makarāṃś caiva śaṅkhāṃś ca tathaivāśvamukhān api |
tathā vai pakṣisaṃkāśān mānuṣān api cāparān || *11* ||
"[Viṣṇu in his Boar manifestation saw] sea-monsters, shells, [fish] with horse-heads, [fish] that resemble birds, human-like [fish] and other [fish types]."
I will discuss this passage in the introduction to chapter 2.

will also identify alternative and more specific motivations behind this technique in chapter 2. In the *Conclusions* (chapter 6), I will furthermore consider the importance of dramatic visualization of the retellings as a whole, in particular those that have been radically changed and do not belong to the Śaiva milieu.

1.2.3 "The" *Skandapurāṇa* composers

Having outlined the base content of the *Skandapurāṇa* and having explored some of its key features, it is time to address the question who the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa* might have been. For a start, the choice of the plural "composers" is deliberate. In his book *The World of the Skandapurāṇa*, Hans Bakker proposes a compositional situation in which an "editor-in-chief" was appointed to lead the project, while being "assisted by some editors who were assigned specific portions of the composition. The Pāśupata network was called in to assemble information about places sacred to the Māheśvara [i.e. Śaiva] community. Sometimes this resulted in new collaborators entering the group" (Bakker 2014, 16). I follow Bakker in assuming a group of composers, instead of just one person. This situation is furthermore suggested by the fact that the text was not composed in one breath. Instead, its composition probably took place in stages, covering approximately one century, ca. 550—650 CE, to reach its first complete recension (SP Vol. III, 57)[66].

Taking the content of the *Skandapurāṇa* into account, it is possible to say something about the literary knowledge and compositional skills of the composers. First of all, the references to a variety of other texts—from the Vedas to other Purāṇas—strongly suggest that we are dealing with learned people. Based on the fact that some of the key Purāṇic features also appear in the *Skandapurāṇa*, we may furthermore assume that they were aware of the topics, narratives and style of writing of the genre of Purāṇas. At the same time, the adjustments made regarding topics known from the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* for instance, show both their affiliation with a particular religious strand and their creativity. Narratives showing processes of Śaivization, but even more so

[66] For a possible scenario of the political and religious situation of the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*, see Bakker 2014, 12—21. For a possible relative chronology of the narratives told in the text, see Kropman 2019. For an extensive review of the different stages of the composition in terms of redactions, see SP Vol. III, 33—66.

theological text units like the section on Pāśupata doctrine (SP_{Bh} 174—81), demonstrate that at least some of the composers were learned Pāśupata Śaivas, as Bakker has noted. "Whether they were ascetics, *ācāryas* ["teachers"], laymen devotees (*laukika*), or a mix, they belonged to a milieu of learned Māheśvaras" (Bakker 2014, 4). I would like to add another character trait of the composers, *viz.* that most of them were professional composers, skilled in epic-Purāṇic writing. The cases identified as dramatic visualization are just a hint of the compositional skills, narrative techniques and the rich epic-Purāṇic repertoire and language employed by the composers, as I will argue throughout this thesis. I will show that the identified compositional skills are not coincidences, but represent structural and deliberate decisions on the part of the *Skandapurāṇa* composers with a particular goal in mind. Even though the composers are anonymous about whom no biographical data are known, I will demonstrate that it is nevertheless possible to hypothesize on the intentions and aims of the composers on the basis of one specific set of retellings, *viz.* Viṣṇu's manifestation myths.

1.3 Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa*

Among the retellings in the *Skandapurāṇa*, a relatively large amount is dedicated to Viṣṇu. He is the main character in at least six narratives, across 25 chapters[67]. In each of these myths, he fights against the enemies of the gods, the Asuras. The Asuras take control of the universe and the gods are conquered. Viṣṇu is the god tasked to solve this problem.

- In the Narasiṃha myth, Viṣṇu kills Hiraṇyakaśipu (SP 70—71)[68].
- In the Varāha myth, he slays Hiraṇyākṣa (SP 76.14—110.end).
- During the Amṛtamanthana war, Viṣṇu battles with Prahlāda (SP_{Bh} 115.1—116.3)[69].

[67] The following enumeration is based on a table created by Yuko Yokochi as accompaniment of a paper she presented at the World Sanskrit Conference in 2009 in Kyoto ('How to incorporate Vaiṣṇava myths into the Śaiva mythology').

[68] The Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana myths are summarized in short below. For extensive summaries, see *Appendix I: Summaries*.

[69] The Amṛtamanthana myth consists of three main narratives: the first (SP_{Bh} 113) concerns the churning (*manthana*) of the milk ocean for the sake of nectar (*amṛta*), the second (SP_{Bh} 114) tells about Śiva swallowing the poison that had arisen from the churning and becoming Nīlakaṇṭha, "the one with the dark neck", and the third (SP_{Bh} 115.1—116.3) is about Viṣṇu fighting with Prahlāda.

- In the Vāmana myth, Viṣṇu conquers Bali (SP_{Bh} 116.13cd—121.22).
- During the Tārakāmaya war, Viṣṇu kills Kālanemi (SP_{Bh} 122.1—122.13)[70].
- Viṣṇu fights once more with Prahlāda (SP_{Bh} 172)[71].

In the three myths where Viṣṇu fights against Prahlāda and Kālanemi, he attacks them in his own form. In the other three myths—Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana—he takes on a manifestation, i.e. a particular form other than his own, to conquer the Asuras[72]. These manifestation myths are known from various other sources. The Narasiṃha myth appears for the first time in the *Mahābhārata* and (parts of) the Varāha and Vāmana myths already find a predecessor in Vedic literature. The main plot of all three myths is, however, more or less the same from the early Purāṇic period onwards and can be summarized as follows.

Narasiṃha myth. Once upon a time, the king of the Daityas called Hiraṇyakaśipu practised severe *tapas*. Brahmā is so pleased with his *tapas*, that he grants him a boon. Hiraṇyakaśipu asks for immortality in a number of circumstances. For example, he shall not be killed by gods nor by human beings, not by day nor by night, not by weapons nor by arrows. Brahmā consents to this wish, and Hiraṇyakaśipu sets off to conquer the gods. He succeeds and becomes the ruler of the universe. With the enemy in power, the gods are in great distress and ask Brahmā for help. Brahmā advises them to go to Viṣṇu, who

[70] The Tārakāmaya war and its aftermath covers several chapters (SP_{Bh} 121.23—124.end) and consists of several storylines and different wars between the gods and the Asuras. For instance, SP_{Bh} 121.23—end tells how Rāma Jāmadagnya defeats the Saiṃhikeyas, the enemies of the gods; SP_{Bh} 122.1—13 recounts the story of Viṣṇu killing Kālanemi; and SP_{Bh} 123.1—29 takes up the storyline of Rāma Jāmadagnya, telling about another war, *viz.* between Rāma and the *kṣatriyas*, "warriors".

[71] Several stories or narrative elements known from other sources are brought together in SP_{Bh} 172. The frame story is a variation on how the flying mountains caused trouble, and how, as a result, their wings had to be cut (except for Mount Maināka's). Within this frame story, several events take place, including Viṣṇu fighting Prahlāda, and Prahlāda becoming a teacher in Sāṃkhya philosophy.

[72] I use the word "manifestation" for the form that a god takes on to fulfil a particular task. There are other words one might consider suitable as well. The most common alternative is the Sanskrit word *avatāra*, "descent", or the Sanskrit word *prādurbhāva*, "appearance", but none of these terms appear in the *Skandapurāṇa* with reference to Viṣṇu. The text rather speaks of "forms" or "bodies" of Viṣṇu (Sanskrit *rūpa* or *vapus*). However, in secondary literature, these terms are not used as designations for this type of myths of Viṣṇu, so I have settled for the English term "manifestation". For studies on the development of the terminology related to manifestations, see Hacker 1960b and Couture 2001; for studies on Viṣṇu's manifestations specifically, see, for example, Gonda 1954/1969, 124—46 and 154—63, and Couture 2009, 792—97.

will take up the form of a Man-Lion in order to escape the conditions of Hiraṇyakaśipu's immortality. Viṣṇu, having become half man, half lion, kills Hiraṇyakaśipu with his claw. Having completed his task, he returns the control over the triple world to Indra[73].

Varāha myth. There are two main variants of the Varāha myth. The first is a cosmogonic myth, in which it is told that the earth has sunk into the cosmic ocean, due to which the creation cannot start. Viṣṇu takes on the form of a Boar and dives into the water to save the earth. When he puts her back into her original place, all the creatures in the universe are created. In the second variant, Viṣṇu becomes a Boar in order to save the earth from the hands of Hiraṇyākṣa, the king of the Daityas and Hiraṇyakaśipu's brother. Viṣṇu kills Hiraṇyākṣa in battle. He places the earth back in her original place, and Indra becomes the ruler of the triple world again. This second variant is told in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

Vāmana myth. In the Vāmana myth, Bali, Hiraṇyakaśipu's great-grandson, is the new king of the Daityas and takes control of the universe. The gods are unhappy that the Asuras rule the universe and ask Viṣṇu to defeat the Daitya. Viṣṇu decides to help the gods, taking on the form of a dwarfish Brahmin in order to trick Bali. Vāmana visits Bali during Bali's royal horse sacrifice and asks him for a piece of land measuring three steps of his. As soon as the generous Bali consents to the request, Viṣṇu leaves his dwarfish body and returns to his own divine, all-encompassing form. Striding thrice with his colossal body, he covers the entire universe and regains supremacy over the universe. He returns the power to Indra and sends Bali back to the netherworld.

Although the main plot remains the same in most texts and Viṣṇu preserves key characteristics, some Purāṇa composers introduced major changes, as did the *Skandapurāṇa* composers. On the one hand, they followed the general storylines, *viz*. Viṣṇu becomes Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana in order to conquer Hiraṇyakaśipu, Hiraṇyākṣa and Bali respectively, and he is successful in executing these tasks. Viṣṇu thus preserves his role as conqueror of the Asuras, and his characteristic feature that he manifests himself in a particular form to combat evil. On the other hand, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers introduced some new, decisive plot twists. For example, the

[73] The triple world consists of the earth (*pṛthivī*), sky (*antarikṣa*) and heaven (*dyaus*). For this and other divisions of the universe, see González-Reimann 2009.

composers changed how they portrayed Viṣṇu—e.g. he is often dependent on the other gods—and they introduced Śiva into the myths, providing him with a key role at crucial moments. Most radical are the additional episodes in which Viṣṇu does not or cannot give up his manifestation, after the Asuras have been conquered. He continues to live on in his manifested form, which I will refer to as "Viṣṇu's afterlives"[74], and the episodes in which he does so as "the afterlife episodes". I hereby make a distinction with what precedes the afterlife episodes, which I will refer to as "the main story of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths". The latter runs up to and including the moment that Viṣṇu conquers the Asuras and rescues the universe.

The aim of my thesis is to study Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa* as retellings, illustrating how narratives are retold and reworked. The thesis will identify processes of Śaivization and dramatic visualization, as well as other modifications introduced by the composers of the text, including Viṣṇu's afterlives. Viṣṇu's afterlives of Narasiṃha and Varāha in the *Skandapurāṇa* have been discussed earlier by Phyllis Granoff in her article 'Saving the Saviour. Śiva and the Vaiṣṇava Avatāras in the Early Skandapurāṇa'. Granoff closely examines the representation of Viṣṇu and Śiva in the afterlife episodes and rightly notices that

> "Śiva's role in the demon-killing stories in the early *Skandapurāṇa* is largely passive and […] this means that the stories of killing demons did not originally belong to him. He is an intruder. There is no doubt, I think, that this is the case with Śiva's appearance in these stories of the Boar and Man-lion incarnations, which as Puranic myths are Vaiṣṇava stories. We see then, in this text, the gradual incursion of Śiva into demon-killing stories in a variety of unusual ways" (Granoff 2004, 131).

[74] Viṣṇu's afterlives are studied in chapter 4, and a summary of these episodes are given in *Appendix I: Summaries*.

As examples, Granoff mentions Śiva giving strength to Varāha and "more importantly, Śiva is said to lie behind all the demon-fighting incarnations through the boon he grants Viṣṇu [i.e. the boon of being the slayer of Daityas]. He may not directly kill demons, but his presence is indispensable: without his intervention none of the demon-killing exploits of the other gods would be possible" (ibid, 131—32). In sections 3.1 and 4.2.1, I will further explore these two methods of imparting a role on Śiva in the stories and reveal other such "unusual ways" to insert Śiva into the manifestation myths. However, where my thesis differs from Granoff's article is, first of all, the extent of the research. Granoff focusses on the afterlife episodes of the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth and thus excludes both the portrayal of Viṣṇu in the rest of the myths and (the ending of) the Vāmana myth, which has been changed significantly as well. My thesis, on the other hand, deals with all three manifestation myths, from beginning to end. Another important difference will become clear in section 4.1.4, where I will challenge one of Granoff's other conclusions related to the portrayal of Viṣṇu and the *Skandapurāṇa* composers' view on his animal manifestations. Based on a comparison with later Purāṇas with similar afterlife episodes, Granoff concludes "that for the story-teller, these animal incarnations [i.e. Narasiṃha and Varāha] are somehow not entirely divine; they border on the demonic and need to be 'saved' from themselves. It seems possible to go even further and see in the stories of the early *Skandapurāṇa* a discomfort with the very idea of incarnations, that is, of the birth of a god on earth, whether in an animal or in a human form" (ibid, 128)[75]. I do not agree to this "discomfort" and I will rather argue that these afterlives of Viṣṇu's manifestations serve a different goal, which is not so much concerned with Viṣṇu or his ability to manifest himself, but rather with the glorification of Śiva.

Another aim of the thesis is to study why Viṣṇu's manifestation myths are told in the *Skandapurāṇa*. After all, it seems at first glance remarkable that Viṣṇu receives so much attention in a Śaiva Purāṇa, in which he moreover is the hero of the story, conquering the Asuras. As Hans Bakker has shown in *The World of the Skandapurāṇa*,

[75] According to Granoff, this discomfort reflects one of the explanations in (early) Purāṇas why Viṣṇu must be born on earth, *viz.* "*as a result of a curse of a sage*. Viṣṇu has actually done something very wrong; he has killed the wife of the sage Bhṛgu. In retaliation, Bhṛgu curses him to be born again and again. The early *Skandapurāṇa* knows about this curse of Bhṛgu that caused Viṣṇu to be born on earth" (Granoff 2004, 128). For references in the *Skandapurāṇa* and other Purāṇas, see ibid, 128—29 and 128 note 33.

the worship of Viṣṇu was popular in the sixth to seventh century—the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*—and Vaiṣṇava iconography, texts and temples must have been found everywhere. Flourishing under the Gupta court until the first decades of the sixth century, Vaiṣṇavism had received royal support not long before the *Skandapurāṇa* was composed, resulting in the establishment of numerous Vaiṣṇava temples and monuments (Bakker 2014, 35). At the same time, worship of Śiva was well-established too. From the second half of the sixth century onwards, Śaivism received substantial financial support from several new North Indian rulers, like the Aulikaras and the Maukharis. They worshipped Śiva and "played an important role in transmitting the Pāśupata movement to northern India" (ibid, 36). In the sixth century, the Pāśupatas "made good use of the patronage that fell to their lot. They set up religious centres (*sthāna*), temples (*āyatana*) and monasteries (*maṭhas*) in the country's most hallowed places, such as the Kapālasthāna in Kurukṣetra […] and Madhyameśvara, *circa* one kilometre north of the renowned cremation grounds of Avimukta of Vārāṇasī" (ibid, 13)[76]. This situation raises the question why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers dedicated so much attention to Viṣṇu in a Purāṇa that is distinctively Śaiva. According to Bakker, the large number of chapters dedicated to Viṣṇu's manifestation myths "seems to support the view that Vaisnavism was a major concern in early medieval Saivism" (ibid, 5). With this historical approach to the question why the myths made their appearance in the *Skandapurāṇa*, Bakker suggests that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers had to react to the strong presence of Vaiṣṇavism.

By looking at Viṣṇu's manifestation myths within the Purāṇic genre, I would like to demonstrate that there can be more explanations than a religious one alone. The fact that Viṣṇu features as main character in no less than six extant narratives may be explained from a religious perspective as a reaction to Vaiṣṇavism. However, this does not explain why three of these should be manifestation myths, *viz.* the Narasiṃha, Varāha and

[76] Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism are not the only religious traditions at the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*. The traditions centring around the Goddess (Devī) and goddesses, the Sun-God (Sūrya), the Buddha and the Jina had devoted followers, sanctuaries and a well-established iconography throughout North India. See, for example, Sanderson 2009 for an extensive study on the dominance of Śaivism in a diverse religious landscape; Bakker 2014, 4—12 for a short analysis on how these religious traditions feature in the *Skandapurāṇa*; and Yokochi 2004 for a study on goddess worship in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

Vāmana myth, nor does it explain why other manifestation myths are neglected. In other words, why is it that particularly the three manifestation myths of Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana are told in the *Skandapurāṇa*? By the time of the *Skandapurāṇa*, Viṣṇu was famous for manifesting himself in order to conquer evil. The *Harivaṃśa* is for the greater part about Viṣṇu's manifestation as Kṛṣṇa, the *Rāmāyaṇa* about his manifestation as Rāma Dāśarathi, and the epics and the Purāṇas have extensive lists of manifestations, ranging from three, four and six in the *Mahābhārata*[77] to nine in the *Harivaṃśa*[78] for example. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers must have been aware of the variety of Viṣṇu's manifestations, but they presented only a limited number of these manifestations in the form of a narrative[79].

In fact, there are two retellings in the text where we would expect to find Viṣṇu manifesting himself, but where the figure in question is not identified with Viṣṇu. The first concerns Viṣṇu's manifestation as a Tortoise (Kūrma) in the context of the churning of the milk ocean: the Amṛtamanthana myth[80]. When the gods and the Asuras churn the milk ocean for the sake of *amṛta*, "nectar", with Vāsuki as a rope and Mount Mandara as a churning stick, the mountain is placed on the back of a Tortoise. At least from the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* onwards, the Tortoise is identified with Viṣṇu (ViP 1.9.86)[81]. The

[77] MBh 3.100.19—21 enumerates three manifestations: Varāha, Narasiṃha and Vāmana. The list is expanded twice in the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*: once with "a human [form]" (*mānuṣa*), i.e. Kṛṣṇa (MBh 12.337.36ab), and once with Kṛṣṇa, Rāma Jāmadagnya and Rāma Dāśarathi (MBh 12.326.71—92). For the development of such manifestation lists, including the expansion in the *Mahābhārata*, see Brinkhaus 1993. The *Mahābhārata* is also the place where the concept of Viṣṇu's manifestations is determined by Kṛṣṇa, *viz.* in the *Bhagavadgītā* (BhG 4.7—8).

[78] The *Harivaṃśa* gives several lists of manifestations and also recounts nine short manifestation myths in HV 31: Puṣkara ("Lotus"), Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Dattātreya, Rāma Jāmadagnya, Rāma Dāśarathi, Kṛṣṇa and Kalki. For the various lists in this text, see Brinkhaus 2001.

[79] There are a few references to other manifestations of Viṣṇu that are not in the form of a narrative. Kṛṣṇa features three times in a comparison: once compared to Hiraṇyākṣa (SP 84.29) and twice in stock phrase-like comparisons that resemble each other a lot (SP 15.11 and SP_{Bh} 122.67 ≈ BrP 38.11 and LiP 1.101.44—45ab). Additionally, in the Varāha myth, Viṣṇu is praised by the gods with some of Viṣṇu's famous epithets, characteristics and manifestations, which will be discussed in section 3.5.

[80] For studies on the myth of the churning of the milk ocean, see Bedekar 1967, Couture 2007, Long 1976, Rüping 1970 and Stubbe-Diarra 1997.

[81] The *Harivaṃśa* is ambivalent regarding this manifestation. In most retellings of the Amṛtamanthana myth, Viṣṇu's manifestation as Kūrma is absent. However, in a manifestation list with one-verse descriptions of each manifestation, Viṣṇu is said to have taken on the form of a Tortoise during the churning for *amṛta* in order to carry Mount Mandara (HV 65.42).

Skandapurāṇa recounts the same myth (SP_{Bh} 113) and refers to the use of the same instruments as well: Vāsuki is caught by Viṣṇu to function as a rope and Mount Mandara is used as a churning stick, being placed on the back of a tortoise (Sanskrit *kacchapa*, instead of *kūrma*), called Akūpāra. However, this tortoise is not identified with Viṣṇu, who is mentioned separately and executes his own task (SP_{Bh} 113.22cd—25ab)[82].

The second is the manifestation of Rāma Jāmadagnya, also known as Paraśurāma, "Rāma with the axe"[83]. Already in one of the manifestation lists of the *Mahābhārata*, Paraśurāma is mentioned as one of the standard manifestations of Viṣṇu, and in the *Harivaṃśa*, for instance, it is told how he killed king Arjuna Kārtavīrya and the *kṣatriyas*, "warriors", twenty-one times[84]. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, Paraśurāma kills various groups: he destroys the *kṣatriyas* twenty-one times (SP_{Bh} 123.19—22), after having killed the Saiṃhikeyas earlier[85] (SP_{Bh} 121.53—54). There can be no doubt therefore that it is the same Rāma as the one we hear about in the *Harivaṃśa* for example. However, in the *Skandapurāṇa*, he is not a manifestation of Viṣṇu. In fact, Viṣṇu enters the stage separately in his own form[86].

To summarize, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers paid considerable attention to Viṣṇu in the text, but at the same time, they only concerned themselves with a selected number of manifestations and manifestation myths. Although the amount of attention to Viṣṇu in general may be explained from a religious, historical point of view—*viz.* the fact that the

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[82] SP_{Bh} 113.22cd—25ab:
prakṣipya tatra tat sarvaṃ tataḥ manthānam āvahan || *22* ||
mandaraṃ parvataśreṣṭham akūpārañ ca kacchapam |
tasya pṛṣṭhe ca manthānaṃ mandaraṃ parvateśvaram || *23* ||
kṛtvā viṣṇugṛhītaṃ te vāsukiṃ pragrahaṃ tathā |
yato mukhaṃ tato daityā yataḥ pucchaṃ tataḥ surāḥ || *24* ||
karṣantas taṃ tu manthānaṃ mathnanti bahulāḥ samāḥ |
"Having thrown everything there, they then fetched [Mount] Mandara, the best of mountains, as a churning stick, and the tortoise Akūpāra. Having made [Mount] Mandara, the lord of mountains, the churning-stick on his [i.e. Akūpāra's] back [and having made] Vāsuki, who was caught by Viṣṇu, the rope, all the Daityas and gods together churned the churning stick—the Daityas pulling the head [of Vāsuki] and the gods pulling [his] tail."

[83] For studies on Paraśurāma, see, for example, Gail 1977a, Goldman 1972 and Sathaye 2010.

[84] MBh 12.326.77 and HV 31.100cd—109.

[85] The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* is the only other text that speaks of Paraśurāma fighting with the Saiṃhikeyas (e.g. VDhP 1.36.18c: *saiṃhikeyabhayatrastāḥ*, the gods are "trembling out of fear for the Saiṃhikeyas"). In other texts, Rāma fights with the *kṣatriyas*.

[86] Rāma's fights are part of a larger narrative about the Tārakāmaya war and its aftermath.

worship of Viṣṇu was popular at the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*—, the choice for the extensive retelling of the myths of Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana is more difficult to explain from this perspective. Therefore, in my thesis, I take into consideration the literary tradition to which the *Skandapurāṇa* belongs. How popular were these myths in the epic and Purāṇic tradition? What role did the manifestation myths play in this literary tradition? Did they form an intrinsic part of it, similar to, for instance, a myth of creation? By looking at the narratives as part of a literary tradition, that is not exclusively religious, and by focussing on the *Skandapurāṇa* composers as professional storytellers who made deliberate decisions in their writing, I aim at finding new explanations why particularly Viṣṇu's manifestation myths as Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana are included in the *Skandapurāṇa*[87].

1.4 Research questions and methodology

In accordance with the aims of the thesis as set out above, the following research questions will be raised.

1. *Viṣṇu's manifestation myths as retellings.*
   Where does the *Skandapurāṇa* stand in the literary landscape of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths? How does it relate to other (re)tellings?

[87] By focussing on Viṣṇu's manifestation myths within a literary tradition and on the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa*, I am aware of the fact that my scope is limited. I have not, for example, taken into account that the manifestation myths may have had a local importance in the region where the *Skandapurāṇa* has supposedly been composed. Also, I only briefly touch upon a possible relation between the representation of the Boar manifestation in the *Skandapurāṇa* and its iconographical counterpart in section 2.2, but do not look into a possible significance of the iconography of Narasiṃha and Vāmana. The context in which the text is produced is, in other words, much broader than a religious, historical context and literary context, but I will limit myself to the latter. Furthermore, when speaking of the intentions and aims of the composers, a second party involved in the composition of a Purāṇa should at least be considered: the commissioning party of the text. After all, the composers were most probably just the executors of an idea ordered by a commissioning party, such as a king. However, these sponsors are as unknown to us as the text's composers. Therefore, I only consider the aims and ambitions of the composers, and base the conclusions related to these topics on the text-internal evidence as well as on a comparison with other (early) Purāṇas. After all, the composition of the Purāṇa was the domain of these professionals.

2. *Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the Skandapurāṇa.*
   Which narrative elements are preserved, which have been changed, and which have been newly added? What effect do these decisions have on the rest of the narrative? Why did the *Skandapurāṇa* composers make these decisions?
3. *Reasons for selection.*
   Why have Viṣṇu's manifestation myths been incorporated into the *Skandapurāṇa*?

These questions are addressed in five chapters. The first set of questions will be dealt with in chapter 2, called *Tales as old as time: Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the epics and the Purāṇas*. In this chapter, I give an overview of other early texts in which the three manifestation myths appear and how the *Skandapurāṇa* relates to them. For each myth, I present a case study of how a particular narrative element is implemented in the different texts in order to determine a possible relationship between the *Skandapurāṇa* and other texts. I finish this chapter with a comparison between the war between the gods and the Asuras in the Varāha myth of the *Skandapurāṇa* and the war between the gods and the Asuras in one version of the Vāmana myth of the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42B)[88] because they share some striking similarities that suggest a special relationship.

[88] The critical edition of the *Harivaṃśa* consists of two parts: one that the editor, Parashuram Lakshman Vaidya, reconstituted as the "Critical Text" (Vaidya 1969, see *Harivaṃśa* in the bibliography) and one that the editor called the "Appendices" (Vaidya 1971, see *Harivaṃśa* in the bibliography). The "Critical Text" contains stories that are found in the majority of the available manuscripts and at least in the "outermost manuscripts" (Vaidya 1969, xxiv; for a summary of this part of the text, see Brodbeck 2019b, xxviii—xxxiv). The stories that do not meet these requirements have been relegated to the "Appendices", and are considered by Vaidya to be later additions. Although this seems reasonable for the majority of the appendix, in some cases, the dating may actually not be so much later than the third or fourth century CE. Moreover, by calling a text unit "an appendix" and relegating it to "the appendices", the impression is given that it is less important than those text units in what is constituted as "the critical text". However, even if narratives in an appendix section are later additions, they were considered important enough to be included in the *Harivaṃśa* at some point in history, in a certain area, so they deserve our attention as well. To avoid a negative connotation as much as possible, I will refer to "the *Harivaṃśa*" in general, which can refer to both the "Critical Text" and the "Appendices". When a particular passage is meant, then I specify chapter numbers (e.g. HV 14—19) and, in the case of an appendix passage, the appendix number (e.g. HV App. 1 No. 42B). In this thesis, three appendix passages in the *Harivaṃśa* are of particular interest, *viz.* HV App. 1 No. 42—42B. They appear in all oldest manuscripts, except for one, and are thus well attested in the manuscript traditions of the *Harivaṃśa*. Their dating may therefore not be as late as their qualification as "appendices" might

At the basis of this and the following chapters lies the theory of intertextuality, a concept originally coined by Julia Kristeva in 'Word, Dialogue and Novel'. Engaging with Mikhail Bakhtin's idea on dialogism, Kristeva starts with "his conception of the 'literary word' as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (Kristeva 1986, 36). She translates Bakhtin's idea on words to texts, stating that "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read", and reaches the definition of intertextuality as: "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (ibid, 37). In other words, a text never stands on its own; its status is always defined on the one hand by both the writer and the addressee, and on the other by "an anterior or synchronic literary corpus" (ibid, 36—37)[89].

Intertextuality as the simplified idea that the writer of any text draws upon, alludes or refers to another text is omnipresent in the epics and the Purāṇas. The most explicit, and fairly unique, examples of this in the *Skandapurāṇa* are the references to the *Mahābhārata* and "the Purāṇa", i.e. the *Harivaṃśa*, in SP 1 and to an early version of the *Vāyupurāṇa* in SP 5 (see section 1.1). Such explicit references are not only relatively unique, this sort of allusions will not be the focus of this thesis. Instead of concentrating on the relationship between words (Bakhtin) or texts (Kristeva), I centralize narratives that belong "to both writing subject and addressee" and appear in "an anterior or synchronic literary corpus" (see note 89), *viz.* in the Purāṇas; and it is this literary genre that requires a customized model of intertextuality. The main reason for this is that just as Purāṇas are not claimed by one author (see note 3), narratives do not belong to one text either, which gives composers the opportunity to select narratives from different sources

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suggest. In fact, in an article on the development of the *Harivaṃśa*, Horst Brinkhaus has argued that HV App. 1 No. 42—42B were added in a relatively early phase. In the first developmental stage, the text may have constituted HV 1—114, in the second stage, the text was presumably extended with HV 115—18, and already in the third stage, with HV App. 1 No. 42—42B (Brinkhaus 2002, 173—74). Given the fact that HV App. 1 No. 42—42B are well attested and therefore possibly some of the earlier extensions, I consider them to predate the *Skandapurāṇa*.

[89] It should be noted that this paraphrasing is based on a quote by Kristeva, where she still uses Bakhtin's idea on words, but where, I think, her notions on text can be transposed: "The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)" (Kristeva 1986, 36—37).

for the composition of a new Purāṇa. Some narratives are so popular that they are retold in almost each Purāṇa. As a consequence, it is often impossible to know which text functioned as the source of a retelling in the target text. Rather, the retelling may come from the epic-Purāṇic genre as a whole. In other words, the genre itself is "the source text"[90]. Such a specification of intertextuality has been suggested by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests. Literature in the second degree*. He defines several levels of intertextuality, of which "architextuality" best applies to the situation of the Purāṇas: "By architextuality I mean the entire set of general or transcendent categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges each singular text" (Genette 1982/1997, 1). Both the composers and the audience draw upon the epic-Purāṇic tradition in order to determine the differences between the new version and the ones they already know, and to draw conclusions about the message that the target text wishes to proclaim. Intertextuality applies to the *Skandapurāṇa* (the target text), for it retells a number of stories that are known from the epic-Purāṇic tradition ("the source text")[91].

Chapters 3 to 5 are dedicated to the second set of research questions. To answer these, I additionally make use of theories and methods in the field of narratology, by identifying narrative techniques that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers used in order to create

[90] The concept of intertextuality has been used in other Indological studies as well. In 'Intertextuality in the Purāṇas' (1999), Greg Bailey has addressed the same issue of a source text in the case of retellings in the Purāṇas. Even though the body of the article is concerned with the *Vāmanapurāṇa*, a relatively late Purāṇa, and I am concerned with the *Skandapurāṇa*, an early Purāṇa, some of Bailey's suggestions are in line with my approach to the concept. For example, Bailey noted that "[m]uch of what we find in a Purāṇa is repeated often in other Purāṇas, precisely because these Purāṇas draw their material from this very rich universe of anecdotal narratives. This being so it is misleading to trace developments of a given text from one Purāṇa to another and regard this as an intertextual exercise when the entire collection of Purāṇic recitations is the source – at least from an indigenous perspective, I presume – of versions of the same myth. That is, the tradition becomes the intertext for itself" (Bailey 1999, 181).

[91] I am aware of the fact that at the time of composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*, the Purāṇic genre was not as vast as it would become a few centuries later, and "the source text" therefore would, strictly speaking, only include those Purāṇas and "the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*" as listed in section 1.1. However, as I will show in the introduction to chapter 2, there are also cases of intertextuality for narrative elements that are found in multiple Purāṇas, of which the majority postdates the *Skandapurāṇa*. I will argue that in those cases, the fact that the narrative element is shared by so many (later) Purāṇas suggests that the component represents a common idea which might well have been present at an earlier stage of the genre but is not found in early Purāṇas.

their own version of the manifestation myths[92]. Since each chapter answers these questions related to a different topic in the *Skandapurāṇa* version of the myths, each chapter requires its own specific narratological approach.

In chapter 3, *Limits to the permissible: Viṣṇu in the Skandapurāṇa*, I consider the question how Viṣṇu is portrayed in the *Skandapurāṇa*. The composers seem to be continuously balancing between new, Śaiva elements and known, Vaiṣṇava elements that were fixed and could not be modified. As I argue in this chapter, this is a narrative technique in order to establish consistency on different narrative levels.

In chapter 4, *And they lived happily ever after… or not? A new ending for Viṣṇu's manifestation myths*, I study how the composers changed the ending of each manifestation myth and what consequences and goals these decisions have. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers seem to have been aware of the importance of the ending of narratives, for they have changed these parts most radically and used them to proclaim their most important Śaiva message. The narrative technique concerning the endings of narratives will be demonstrated in this chapter.

In chapter 5, *Royal succession and divine wars: the textual context of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths*, I explore in which textual contexts Viṣṇu's manifestation myths appear in the *Skandapurāṇa* and why the composers chose to place the myths in their respective textual contexts. While in the rest of the thesis, I study the three narratives as if they form a set and are told in one sequence[93], they are in fact separated by other

[92] There are several examples of Indological studies that likewise make use of theories and methods developed in the field of narratology. For instance, for one of his studies on the *Devīmāhātmya*, Raj Balkaran builds on Umberto Eco's principle of the model reader (Balkaran 2020, 19—21), and in an article on the oral performance of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, McComas Taylor uses speech act theory (Taylor 2015).

[93] I have adopted this approach for three reasons. First of all, the myths are the only manifestation myths of Viṣṇu told in narrative form in the *Skandapurāṇa*, as shown above. Second, all three myths have undergone similar changes, including new endings, which moreover display a gradual build-up to a climax in the Vāmana myth, as will be argued in chapter 4. Third, the three manifestations are Viṣṇu's oldest manifestations. According to several scholars, they form the "core" of Viṣṇu's interventions during crises. For example, Freda Matchett noticed that "the three forms […] are so often found together" (Matchett 2001, 90). André Couture is even more explicit, stating that "it must not be forgotten that the sequence, Varāha, Narasiṃha, and Vāmana, already appears in *Mahābhārata* (3.100.19–21) and could correspond to a basic nucleus" (Couture 2009, 792). In other words, the three manifestation myths have long formed a set on their own and can be treated as such.

narratives. In chapter 5, I take these gaps into consideration and study the direct textual context—i.e. narratives directly surrounding the manifestation myths—and the indirect textual context—i.e. narratives that cover a larger part of the text and share the same theme(s), sometimes with non-related narratives in between. I will show how the direct and indirect textual context are used as a narrative technique: the chosen context can either blend a narrative with the surrounding narratives, set it apart, or connect it with narratives that are not in the narrative's immediate surroundings. Each decision has its own consequences and these will be studied in this chapter.

In chapter 6, *Conclusions*, I bring the findings of chapters 2 to 5 together and present evidence for my hypothesis regarding the third question concerning the reasons why Viṣṇu's manifestation myths have been incorporated into the *Skandapurāṇa*.

After the *Bibliography* (chapter 7), there are three appendices. *Appendix I: Summaries* contains extensive summaries of each manifestation myth in the *Skandapurāṇa*, which the reader can consult when descriptions of scenes are described only briefly in the body chapters of the thesis. *Appendix II: Figures* contains some photographs of iconography referred to in the thesis. *Appendix III: Critical edition of chapters 108, 109 and 110 of the Skandapurāṇa* is a critical edition of SP 108—10, forming the final chapters of the Varāha myth, which I prepared during my PhD trajectory within the international *Skandapurāṇa* project. These chapters will be published in the forthcoming volume, SP Vol. V.