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

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Citation

Dokter-Mersch, S. (2021, April 15). *Revealing Śiva's superiority by retelling Viṣṇu's deeds: Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the Skandapurāṇa*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3160305>

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Issue Date: 2021-04-15

*vārāhaṃ rūpam āsthāya na devatvaṃ na māṇuṣam |
na ca tiryakṣu taj jātam naravārāham asti vai ||*

“Having resorted to a boar-body, which is neither divine, nor human, nor born among the animals; it is indeed [the form] of a Man-Boar.”

Skandapurāṇa 97.11

2 Tales as old as time: Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths in the epics and the Purāṇas

The Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana myths were well-known by the time they were included in the *Skandapurāṇa*. The Varāha myth goes back to the Vedic period; the Vāmana myth has several Vedic elements; and the Narasiṃha myth has its first reference in the *Mahābhārata*. Although the Narasiṃha myth is relatively new, all three narratives were well-established in the literary world by the time of the early Purāṇas, and continued to enjoy great fame in the later Purāṇas. The storylines of the manifestation myths were continuously adapted from other texts and reinvented to form new retellings. Some retellings are direct borrowings, but composers generally changed the narrative to a certain extent. Some changes are subtle, others are more radical. There are also cases in which a particular element is the same, but used in a different (religious) context, appealing to the audience’s knowledge about the narrative and its characters in order to allow for a new interpretation. Texts were constantly in contact with each other, as was the *Skandapurāṇa*.

In this chapter, I will explore the literary landscape in which the *Skandapurāṇa* is located and how the text relates to the different retellings of Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths. Do the *Skandapurāṇa* retellings display a general epic-Purāṇic representation of the narratives or do they (also) share crucial elements with one or more other texts specifically? In other words, what kind of intertextuality is encountered in the study of Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths?

Since intertextuality concerns the study of texts, I start by recapitulating from section 1.1 which texts the *Skandapurāṇa* composers had at their disposal to retell the manifestation myths. Although the oldest available texts are the Vedas and other Vedic

texts, like the Brāhmaṇas, the *Skandapurāṇa* shares most of its narrative choice, character features and language with the epics and the Purāṇas. The direct influence of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa* remains nevertheless limited because the epics only occasionally refer to the manifestations, without going into detail⁹⁴.

Concerning the availability of Purāṇas, the Purāṇic genre was still in an early phase at the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*. Only a small number of Purāṇas was accessible to the composers, including a form of the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Vāyupurāṇa*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. In other words, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers could have used these Purāṇas as a source for Viṣṇu's manifestation myths. The influence of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* must have been nihil though, for it only briefly mentions the three manifestations⁹⁵. The other three Purāṇas may, on the other hand, have played a role in the retelling of the manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Furthermore, assuming that the themes, lists and narratives collected in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* represent a shared Purāṇic notion on topics like creation and lineages, it is significant that this text corpus includes, to a greater or lesser extent, all three manifestation myths. Drawing on these texts would be the most straightforward form of intertextuality.

However, as mentioned in section 1.4, it is not always as easy as that, and a second type of intertextuality should be taken into consideration in the study of the Purāṇas. Purāṇas are fluid texts, from which individual narratives can be taken each time a new Purāṇa is composed. As a result, it is often difficult to identify one particular source, on which a retelling is based, and “the epic-Purāṇic genre” as a whole should then be considered as “the source text”. Cases in which it can be helpful to take this possibility into account mainly concern narrative elements that are so widespread that it is not possible to determine from which text an element was adopted. For example, many texts share the way in which they describe Varāha's appearance. Each limb of his is connected with an external entity, usually elements that are used during a sacrifice. Since the

⁹⁴ The only exception is the Vāmana myth in the *Rāmāyaṇa* which is told in the form of a narrative.

⁹⁵ On the whole, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* has only a few references to a limited number of Viṣṇu's manifestations, such as MkP 4.54—56 mentioning Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa.

description is so widespread I consider it a case of intertextuality with the genre as the source text⁹⁶.

A third form of intertextuality is possible, when parallel ideas or narratives elements are not found within the same narrative in other sources, but in a different narrative. In the Varāha myth of the *Skandapurāṇa*, for example, Varāha travels through the ocean to the netherworld in order to fight with Hiranyākṣa and rescue the earth. This journey is described in an extensive and scenic way (SP 99.5cd—22). Varāha sees all kinds of fabulous fish and animals in the water (SP 99.10—13) and passes various underwater places: Hayaśiras, Mount Maināka, the city called Bhogavatī, the quarter-elephant (*diggaja*) called Parjanya, the city of Varuṇa (the god of the ocean), the area where the divine cow called Surabhī and the foam-drinkers live, and the cities of various Nāgas, i.e. mythical serpents (SP 99.14—22). A similar description is not found in other early versions of the myth and it can be considered a dramatic visualization of Varāha's dive to the netherworld, including abundant cosmographic information. However, I found a parallel itinerary in the *Mahābhārata*, in the story of Mātali, who travels to the Nāgaloka in his search for a suitable husband for his daughter (MBh 5.95—103). He passes various places, of which several correspond to the *Skandapurāṇa* passage: the city of Varuṇa (MBh 5.96), the world of the elephants, Hayaśiras (MBh 5.97), the abode of Surabhī and the foam-drinkers (MBh 5.100), and the city called Bhogavatī where the Nāgas live (MBh 5.101). Although the details differ, the parallels in the cosmographic notion of different worlds in the underwater realm and the parallels in some of the actual locations are remarkable.

The different forms of intertextuality show the complexity of studying this topic in the field of Purāṇas. Paying attention to each form—from direct intertextuality to intertextuality outside the narrative—will, however, help in understanding the choices that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers made in their version of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths and how they relate to other texts. I will study the development of one narrative element per manifestation myth and examine possible relationships between the *Skandapurāṇa* and other sources. For the Narasiṃha myth, I analyse the description of Hiranyakaśipu's boon (2.1); for the Varāha myth, I examine how the characterization of the Boar changed from

⁹⁶ Varāha's appearance will be studied in detail in section 2.2.

Yajñavarāha, “Sacrificial Boar”, to Naravarāha, “Man-Boar” (2.2); and for the Vāmana myth, I look at the scenes after Viṣṇu strode thrice (2.3). In the final section (2.4), I take a different approach. Instead of comparing the *Skandapurāṇa* with other relevant Purāṇas, I compare the *Skandapurāṇa* only with the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42B), for these two texts seem to have a special intertextual relationship. I have identified parallels between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B on the level of the structure of the war between the gods and the Asuras in the Varāha myth and the war between the gods and the Asuras in the Vāmana myth respectively. Several factors complicate the definition of the precise relationship and will be studied in detail.

2.1 The Narasiṃha myth

The Narasiṃha myth⁹⁷ appears in textual form for the first time in the *Mahābhārata*⁹⁸. The epic does not tell a complete story, but only refers to it stating that Hiranyakaśipu was killed by Narasiṃha (e.g. MBh 3.100.20)⁹⁹. The *Vāyupurāṇa* and *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* are the first texts to tell a narrative, sharing largely the same text (PPL *vaṃśa* 2C.16—22)¹⁰⁰. They include core elements, such as Hiranyakaśipu’s *tapas*, boon and death, but everything is told in a condensed manner. The *Harivaṃśa* (HV 31.31—67), the *Brahmapurāṇa* (BrP 213.43—79) and the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* (VDhP 1.54) also share large sections¹⁰¹. The story is more elaborate in these texts; for instance,

⁹⁷ Several studies have been done on the Narasiṃha myth, such as Vaidya 1942, Hacker 1960a, 25ff., Swain 1971, Soifer 1991, 73—99 and Saindon 2009, 66ff.

⁹⁸ In *The Myths of Narasiṃha and Vāmana*, Deborah A. Soifer has argued that, although there is no direct Vedic counterpart of Narasiṃha, the story of Indra fighting against the Asura Namuci in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB 12.7.3.1ff.) “must be considered as the prototype of that [Narasiṃha] myth” (Soifer 1992, 38). This is based on the fact that Hiranyakaśipu’s conditions to his immortality are similar to Namuci’s. For example, Namuci cannot be killed by a stick nor by a bow, not by the palm of the hand nor by a fist, not by something dry nor by something wet. For a comparative analysis, see *ibid*, 38—40.

⁹⁹ MBh 3.100.20:

*ādidaityo mahāvīryo hiranyakaśipus tvayā |
nārasimhaṃ vapuḥ kṛtvā sūditāḥ puruṣottama || 20 ||*

“The powerful, ancient Daitya Hiranyakaśipu was destroyed by thee, greatest of persons, in the form of a man-lion” (translation by Van Buitenen 1975, 420).

For an overview of references to Narasiṃha in the *Mahābhārata*, see Saindon 2009, 65—66.

¹⁰⁰ The *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* has extended the shared text portion with approximately twenty verses.

¹⁰¹ The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* shares the same text with the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Brahmapurāṇa* until VDhP 1.54.34. After that, it has more extensive descriptions of Narasiṃha and of Narasiṃha’s battle with Hiranyakaśipu.

Hiraṇyakaśipu’s boon is expanded, and a description of Narasiṃha is added. The *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42A), the *Padmapurāṇa Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* (PdP *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* 42) and the *Matsyapurāṇa* (MtP 161—63) have many parallels and show only minor differences. The Narasiṃha myth in these texts includes several new passages, such as a description of Hiraṇyakaśipu’s garden and palace, Prahlāda’s realization that Narasiṃha is Viṣṇu and a description of the Asuras and their weapons.

Whereas all these texts narrate more or less the same story, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (ViP 1.16—20) tells a different one. In this version, Hiraṇyakaśipu continuously harasses his son Prahlāda, but Prahlāda is able to endure these hardships because of his devotion to Viṣṇu. Hiraṇyakaśipu’s death by Narasiṃha is described in just one verse. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* version of the story is not so much about Narasiṃha, as about how devotion to Viṣṇu can rescue a devotee in times of crises¹⁰².

The Narasiṃha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* shares its general storyline with most other sources (except for the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*), but the composers have added a number of new components and changed some narrative elements. A number of these new elements can be characterized as a dramatic visualization of the scene. For example, when the Asuras inform Hiraṇyakaśipu about this terrifying Man-Lion that has killed so many Asuras already, Hiraṇyakaśipu orders his subjects to catch the Lion and bring him alive, for “this lion-cub will be a pet for my wife” (*krīḍaṇaṃ siṃhapoto ’sau devyā mama bhaviṣyati*, SP 71.36cd). The audience obviously knows that the frightful Narasiṃha will kill Hiraṇyakaśipu, so the addition is an insider joke from the composers to the audience. Other new elements rather function as Śaivizations of narrative elements. For example, there is a new scene in which Viṣṇu asks the gods to enter his body for strength (SP 71.23cd—24) and an afterlife to Viṣṇu’s manifestation as Narasiṃha is introduced in which Viṣṇu continues to live as a Man-Lion and needs the help of Śiva to put an end to this form (SP 71.48—end). The *Skandapurāṇa* is the first text to introduce Viṣṇu’s dependency on the gods, as well as Narasiṃha’s afterlife, as will be shown in the next two chapters.

¹⁰² The list of retellings of the Narasiṃha myth is not exhaustive. I have limited the discussion to sets of texts that contain at least one text that probably predates the *Skandapurāṇa*. Purāṇas like the *Śivapurāṇa* (ŚiP *Śatarudrīyasamhitā* 10—12) and the *Liṅgapurāṇa* (LiP 1.95—96) are hence excluded, but will be discussed in chapter 4.

An example of how the *Skandapurāṇa* composers changed a basic narrative element in the Narasiṃha myth and how the text relates to other Purāṇas is Hiranyakaśipu’s boon. The Narasiṃha myth generally starts with a scene in which Hiranyakaśipu practices *tapas*, and as a reward, Brahmā wants to grant him a boon. The requested boon is more or less the same in most Purāṇas (e.g. HV 31.41—45). “May neither gods, Asuras and Gandharvas, nor Yakṣas, serpents and Rākṣasas, nor human beings and Piśācas kill me, oh best of gods” (e.g. HV 31.41). “May there be no death for me by a weapon nor an arrow, not by a rock nor tree, not by something dry nor something wet nor by anything else” (e.g. HV 31.43). “May I become the sun, moon, wind, fire, ocean, sky, stars and the ten directions” (e.g. HV 31.44). In other words, Hiranyakaśipu wants to have near complete immortality and rule over the universe.

Variations on this theme usually concern small changes. For example, other sorts of beings may be unable to kill Hiranyakaśipu, or restrictions to time or place may be added¹⁰³. However, a small group of texts adds a more substantial element to the boon, *viz.* a loophole: the one method by which Hiranyakaśipu *can* be slain.

After a list of conditions in the characteristic “neither... nor...” construction, the *Brahmapurāṇa* (BrP 213.55cd—56ab) and the *Harivaṃśa* (HV 31.43*466¹⁰⁴ and HV App. 1 No. 42A ll. 29—30)¹⁰⁵ supply an extra verse, in which Hiranyakaśipu specifies how he can be killed, *viz.* by a single slap of the hand (*pāṇiprahāreṇaikena*), thinking that no creature is able to do that. Since this is the only way Hiranyakaśipu can be killed, Madeleine Biardeau, in an article on Narasiṃha, has aptly called the loophole Hiranyakaśipu’s “Achilles’ heel” (Biardeau 1975, 39), his weak spot.

¹⁰³ For example, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* adds that Hiranyakaśipu shall not be killed on earth nor in the sky (*na bhūmau nāmbare*, BhāP 7.3.36c), the *Nṛsiṃhapurāṇa* adds time restrictions, “not during the day nor by night” (*na dine na ca naktam*, NsP 40.9c), and the *Śivapurāṇa* adds “neither from above nor from below” (*naivorddhvato nāpy adhataḥ*, ŚiP *Rudrasaṃhitā* 5.43.17d).

¹⁰⁴ The passage is found in manuscripts N (except Ś₁), T_{1,3–4} and G_{1,3–5}, so it is supported by almost all Northern and many Southern manuscripts. However, since it is not found in the outermost manuscripts—the Śāraḍa and Malayālam manuscripts—, it has not been adopted in the main text of the critical edition, but has been qualified by the editor as star passage instead.

¹⁰⁵ HV App. 1 No. 42A ll. 29—30 (= HV 31.43*466.1—2 = BrP 213.55cd—56ab):

pāṇiprahāreṇaikena sabhṛtyabalavāhanam | 29 |

yo mām nāśayituṃ śaktaḥ sa me mṛtyur bhaviṣyati || 30 ||

“He who is able to destroy me, along with my servants, armies and chariots, with a single slap of the hand, he will be my death.”

The *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* also includes a loophole, but frames it differently. When “Brahmā gave his consent to this boon containing a loophole” (*brahmānujajñe sāntaram varam*, literally, “boon with an opening”, BḍP 2.5.17d), he in fact gave his consent to the boon with the “neither... nor...” construction, as quoted above. The underlying idea is that Hiranyakaśipu can be killed in all other cases remaining¹⁰⁶.

The *Skandapurāṇa* has its own version of the boon, containing the following circumstances in which Hiranyakaśipu cannot be killed.

SP 70.30—33:

bhagavan yadi tuṣṭo 'si vara eṣo 'stu me vibho |
amarah syām avadhyas ca jarāhīno mahābalaḥ || 30 ||
na śastreṇa na mantreṇa na rātrau na divā tathā |
naivārdreṇa na śuṣkeṇa na puṃsā na ca yoṣitā || 31 ||
abravit sāntaram brahmā sa cainam samabhāsata¹⁰⁷ |
ataś ca yo 'nyathā mṛtyur bhaviṣyati sa me prabho || 32 ||
evam astv iti taṃ procya brahmā suravarottamaḥ |
jagāmātmapuram kṣipram śāntaḥ prītaḥ pitāmahaḥ || 33 ||

“30. [Hiranyakaśipu said:] ‘Oh lord [i.e. Brahmā], if you are pleased [with me], let there be the following boon for me, oh master: may I be immortal and inviolable, free from old age and very powerful. 31. Not [to be killed] by a weapon nor by a *mantra* [“sacrificial formula”], not by night nor by day, not by

¹⁰⁶ Since this part of the boon is absent in the otherwise parallel version of the *Vāyupurāṇa*, it is probably a later addition, of which the dating is difficult to determine. If narratives or parts of narratives are shared by both the *Vāyupurāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, they can, in general, be considered to be early Purāṇic records. If, however, narratives or parts of narratives only appear in either the *Vāyupurāṇa* or the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, the dating is less clear. Some scholars have attempted to date the moment that the *Vāyupurāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* diverged. For example, Kirfel cautiously suggested the year 620 as “die Abspaltung des Textkerns Bḍ-Vā” (“the separation of the text core of the *Brahmāṇḍa-Vāyupurāṇa*”, Kirfel 1927, XIX). By comparison, in *Studies in the Purāṇic records on Hindu rites and customs*, R.C. Hazra has suggested “that the separation took place after 325 A.D., and most probably not earlier than 400 A.D.” (Hazra 1940, 18). As a rule, I consider the separated *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* to postdate the *Skandapurāṇa*.

¹⁰⁷ The wiggle indicates that the editors had some doubt whether the reading is correct, either because of limited manuscript evidence or because the meaning is not clear. I adopt these wiggles in my transliterations and translations for the sake of transparency about uncertainties.

something wet nor by something dry, not by a man nor by a woman.’ 32. Brahmā spoke [to Hiraṇyakaśipu] about a loophole (sāntara), and he [i.e. Hiraṇyakaśipu] said to him [i.e. Brahmā]: ‘And [the kind of] death that is different from that will be mine, oh lord.’ 33. Having said to him [i.e. Hiraṇyakaśipu] ‘Let it be so’, Brahmā, the greatest of gods, the grandfather, immediately went to his own city, being at ease and content.”

The *Skandapurāṇa* list of conditions to Hiraṇyakaśipu’s death contain some subtle changes. For instance, Hiraṇyakaśipu’s request to be free from old age and very powerful is different from, yet comparable to, his request to become the sun, the moon, the wind etcetera, in other texts. Furthermore, the number of conditions under which Hiraṇyakaśipu cannot be killed is limited. Although four types of means to kill (weapon, *mantra*¹⁰⁸, something wet and something dry) and two moments of the day (night and day) are fairly restrictive, the fact that only two types of beings (men and women)¹⁰⁹ are mentioned leaves many options open; options that are in fact covered in other texts, which include creatures like supernatural beings, as well as human beings (*manuṣāḥ*), to which men and women can be counted. Since there are many restrictions in these other texts, only a few beings are able to kill Hiraṇyakaśipu. This results in the solution that Viṣṇu becomes a mythical being that is half human and half animal. In the case of the *Skandapurāṇa*, there

¹⁰⁸ Whereas most texts read *na śastreṇa na cāstreṇa*, “not by a weapon nor an arrow”, the *Skandapurāṇa* is the only text that reads *na śastreṇa na mantreṇa*. Already at an early stage, Pāśupatas and other Śaiva groups attached great value to *mantras* in religious life. The Pāśupatas “meditated upon Śiva under five aspects with the help of the five brahmantras, which are revealed in the fundamental *Pāśupatasūtra*: Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa, and Īśāna. These five aspects of god shaped much of Śaivism’s later theology and iconography” (Bisschop 2009, 753). The choice for *mantra* therefore “fits the Śaiva context of the *Skandapurāṇa*”, as the editors of this chapter of the *Skandapurāṇa* observe (SP Vol. IV, 39 note 70). In the case of Hiraṇyakaśipu’s boon, *mantra* probably has to be understood as a “divine weapon” (*divyāstra*). As Sthaneshwar Timalsina has written on “The Power of *Mantras*”, “[*m*]antras are often compared to weapons. *Mantras* that grant protection – identified as *sudarśanamantṛa* (“the disc *mantra* related to Viṣṇu), *aghoramantra* (Śiva’s weapon), *pāśupatamantra* (Śiva’s weapon), *nṛsimḥamantra* (the *mantra* to invoke the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu), and so on – and *mantras* given the mythological names for weapons, both highlight the paradigm of warfare” (Timalsina 2010, 406).

¹⁰⁹ I found no other texts that include this restriction, so it seems to be an innovation in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

is no need for Viṣṇu to become a Man-Lion specifically. As long as he is not a man or a woman, he should be able to conquer Hiranyakaśipu. Although we should not demand an exhaustive list, more restrictions would match the rest of the boon better, as well as Viṣṇu’s solution to manifest himself as a Man-Lion. This could point to the loss of two *pādas*¹¹⁰ during the transmission that would have contained more restrictions concerning the sorts of creatures that are unable to kill Hiranyakaśipu.

The possibility that something has gone wrong during the transmission of the text is also suggested by another component in the boon: its loophole. As indicated by the wiggle in SP 70.32ab, the reading of these two *pādas* is uncertain. I translate *pāda* 32a as “Brahmā spoke [to Hiranyakaśipu] about a loophole”, which should be understood as Brahmā reminding the Daitya king that the boon should contain a loophole, if he wants the request to be honoured. What follows in 32cd, however, is not really a loophole. Rather, the loophole is already stated in verse 31, namely that he cannot be killed by certain weapons etcetera. The statement of 32cd that he *can* be killed in other circumstances is already implied in verse 31, so this statement is not the actual loophole¹¹¹. This has been noticed by the editors of SP Vol. IV, proposing the possibility that *pādas* 32ab—those stating that the boon should contain a loophole—may have been originally placed before verse 31. This suggestion is based on a later passage in the Narasiṃha myth (SP Vol. IV, 39 note 72)¹¹². In the next chapter, the gods go to Brahmā because they fear the power of Hiranyakaśipu. In SP 71.10—11, Brahmā reassures them that Hiranyakaśipu can be killed because he had earlier made the Daitya state a loophole.

SP 71.10—11:

tenāhaṃ prārthitaḥ pūrvaṃ sarvāvadhyatvam uttamam |
antaraṃ bhāṣitaś cāsau mayā saṃjñāvimohitaḥ || 10 ||
yadaivāntaram āhātha daityarājo vicetanaḥ |
tadaiva manasā toṣam aham āgāṃ mahābalāḥ || 11 ||

¹¹⁰ A *pāda* (literally “foot”) is a quarter of a verse.

¹¹¹ In fact, the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* implies precisely this by enumerating the cases in which Hiranyakaśipu cannot be killed.

¹¹² For other problems and possible solutions in this passage, see SP Vol. IV, 39 note 72.

“Earlier, I [i.e. Brahmā] was requested by him [i.e. Hiranyakaśipu] for supreme inviolability from all [beings], but he, being confused in his consciousness, was addressed by me about a loophole. As soon as the foolish king of the Daityas had uttered the loophole, I reached satisfaction with my mind, oh very strong ones [i.e. gods].”

Comparing Brahmā’s summary of the events with the actual boon-granting scene, it is possible to reconstruct an alternative order of the conversation in chapter 70. First, Hiranyakaśipu asks for immortality from all beings (SP 71.10ab/ SP 70.30), then Brahmā speaks to Hiranyakaśipu about a loophole, as if reminding him that the boon should include an intervening clause (SP 71.10cd/ SP 70.32a), then Hiranyakaśipu states a loophole (SP 71.11ab/ SP 70.31 and SP 70.32bcd), after which Brahmā consents to this boon (SP 71.11cd/ SP 70.33)¹¹³. In other words, the requested boon is complete immortality and the conditions under which Hiranyakaśipu can be killed are the loophole to the boon. As if thinking that he has mentioned enough weapons, time frames and beings, Hiranyakaśipu is comfortable enough to say that he will die in any other case.

As shown above, there are some Purāṇas that contain a loophole as well, which raises the question whether the loophole in the *Skandapurāṇa* is a case of intertextuality. Comparing this loophole with the one in the *Brahmapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa*, a similar arrogance is encountered. However, the arrogance in the latter two is more explicit, as Hiranyakaśipu specifies the only case in which he can be killed. He cannot believe that there is a creature that could slay him with one slap of the hand. Moreover, in particular the loophole itself differs significantly. Whereas the *Brahmapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa* state in which case Hiranyakaśipu *can* be killed, the *Skandapurāṇa* makes explicit in

¹¹³ Based on this reconstruction, the order of SP 70.30—33 would be as follows:

bhagavan yadi tuṣṭo 'si vara eṣo 'stu me vibho | 30ab |
amaraḥ syām avadhyaś ca jarāhīno mahābalaḥ || 30cd ||
abravīt sāntaram brahmā sa cainam samabhāsata | 32ab |
na śastreṇa na mantreṇa na rātrau na divā tathā | 31ab |
naivārdreṇa na śuśkeṇa na puṃsā na ca yoṣitā || 31cd ||
ataś ca yo 'nyathā mṛtyur bhaviṣyati sa me prabho || 32cd ||
evam astv iti taṃ procyā brahmā suravarottamaḥ | 33ab |
jagāmātmapuram kṣipram śāntaḥ prītaḥ pitāmahaḥ || 33cd ||

which cases he *cannot* be killed. Therefore, I do not consider it a case of intertextuality. The *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, on the other hand, also qualifies the conditions to the boon as its loophole¹¹⁴, which might suggest a possible intertextual relationship. However, there is one important difference between the two texts. In the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, Hiranyakaśipu states the conditions himself and does not need Brahmā to encourage him to do so. Since Brahmā’s role is relatively prominent in the *Skandapurāṇa* version of the boon, the argumentation for intertextuality weakens. Furthermore, there is in fact a stronger case for intertextuality with other instances of a boon with a loophole, *viz.* in the *Skandapurāṇa* itself.

The text speaks of four other boons that are likewise requested by Asuras and have a similar construction: the Asuras and Brahmā negotiate about the boon and come to the agreement on a loophole¹¹⁵. Maya’s boon in the Tripura myth¹¹⁶ (SP_{Bh} 168.11—17) is highlighted here because it does not only show strong agreements with Hiranyakaśipu’s boon in the *Skandapurāṇa*, but also has a parallel with the *Mahābhārata* version of the narrative, where the main Asuras are the three sons of Tāraka (MBh 8.24.7—12). When Brahmā offers Maya or Tāraka’s sons a boon, they first ask for immortality (SP_{Bh} 168.11—13ab and MBh 8.24.7). Brahmā replies that he cannot grant them this wish (SP_{Bh} 168.13cd, 14a and MBh 8.24.8a—d). The *Mahābhārata* provides a reason for Brahmā’s rejection: there is no such thing as complete immortality for Asuras and they should be able to be reborn again (*nivartadhvam*, “you should be born again”, MBh 8.24.8d)¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ There are two other correspondences between the two texts. First, the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* does not include many restrictions either (Hiranyakaśipu cannot be killed by something wet nor something dry, not by day nor by night). Second, the restriction “not by day nor by night” is relatively uncommon, as it appears in only a few texts (HV 31.45*469a, MtP 161.13d, NsP 40.9c).

¹¹⁵ These concern Andhaka’s boon in the Andhaka myth (SP 74.44), Sunda and Nisunda’s boon in the narrative leading to their death by Tilottamā (SP 60.77—79), Sumbha and Nisumbha’s boon in the myth on their battle against the dark form of Pārvatī called Kauśikī (SP 62.57—61), and Maya’s boon in the Tripura myth (SP_{Bh} 168.14).

¹¹⁶ The Tripura myth revolves around the destruction of Tripura, “the Triple City”, and the enemy of the gods called Maya. Due to a boon Maya receives from Brahmā, he can only be killed by the one who is able to destroy Tripura with just one arrow. When the Asuras have taken control over the entire cosmos, the gods are in distress. Śiva decides to help them, taking his bow, releasing one arrow and ruining Tripura at once. In this way, Maya and his fellow-Asuras are destroyed.

¹¹⁷ A similar explanation is given by Brahmā in his conversation with Sumbha and Nisumbha in negotiating about their boon in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

SP 62.58:

avaśyaṃ yuvayor eṣyaṃ maraṇaṃ yena kenacit |

They should ask for another boon (SP_{Bh} 168.14bcd and MBh 8.24.8ef), which is qualified in the *Skandapurāṇa* as “containing a loophole” (*sāntaram*, SP_{Bh} 169.14b). Maya and Tāraka’s sons then request that only the one who is able to destroy Tripura with one arrow, can kill them (SP_{Bh} 168.15—17ab and MBh 8.24.9—12cd), and Brahmā consents to this formulation (SP_{Bh} 168.17c—f and MBh 8.24.12ef).

The reconstructed boon of Hiraṇyakaśipu follows exactly the same pattern: first, the Asura asks for absolute immortality, then Brahmā replies that he cannot grant him this (because immortality is reserved for the gods) and that the Asura should supply a loophole, after which the Asura adds how he can be killed after all. Since the construction occurs several times in the *Skandapurāṇa*, as well as in the *Mahābhārata*, it appears to be an epic-Purāṇic narrative element that could be introduced into new retellings, even when it was not originally there in other tellings. It is, in other words, a case of intertextuality that is found in other narratives than the one under discussion.

2.2 The Varāha myth

The Varāha myth comes in two main variants. The oldest is a cosmogonic myth that is linked to the origin of the universe. It narrates how god manifests himself as Varāha in order to rescue the earth, when she has sunk into the cosmic ocean or to the netherworld, and brings her back to her original place. The oldest versions of this myth appear in texts

surebhyo 'nyatra daityendrāv amaratvaṃ na vidyate || 58 ||

“Inevitably, there will be death for the two of you, one way or another. Oh you two lords of Daityas, there is no immortality, other than for the gods.”

from the Vedic period, like the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (TS 7.1.5.1—12)¹¹⁸, where the god is identified with Prajāpati, instead of Viṣṇu¹¹⁹.

The *Mahābhārata* marks the beginning of a Vaiṣṇavization of the myth¹²⁰. There are several references to and stories about Viṣṇu becoming a Boar¹²¹. MBh 3.100.19, for instance, tells the general storyline of how Viṣṇu became a Boar to save the earth when she had sunk into the cosmic ocean¹²². The same core narrative elements continue in the Purāṇas, but are extended into actual narratives, and the actual recreation of creatures is added as a separate narrative¹²³. Many Purāṇas share the same story and have been collected by Kirfel in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*¹²⁴; some more elaborated than others. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, for example, has expanded an omnipresent eulogy to Viṣṇu, by providing it with a more extensive description of the Boar's appearance. Besides the retellings that

¹¹⁸ TS 7.1.5.1.1—12:

āpo vā idām āgre salilām āsīt | tāsmin prajāpatir vāyūr bhūtvācarat | sā imām apaśyat | tām varāhō bhūtvāharat | tām viśvakarmā bhūtvā vyāmart | sāprathata | sā pṛthivy ābhavat | tāt pṛthivyāi pṛthivivām | tāsyaṃ āsrāmyat prajāpatih | sā devān asṛjata vāsūn rudrān ādityān | té devāḥ prajāpatim abruvan | prā jāyāmahā iti |

“This was in the beginning the waters, the ocean. In it Prajāpati becoming the wind moved. He saw her, and becoming a boar he seized her. Her, becoming Viçvakarma, he wiped. She extended, she became the earth and hence the earth is called the earth (lit. ‘the extended one’). In her Prajāpati made effort. He produced the gods, Vasus, Rudras, and Ādityas. The gods said to Prajāpati, ‘Let us have offspring.’” (translation by Keith 1914/1967, 560).

¹¹⁹ There is another Vedic story about a boar, called Emūṣa, who is closely related to Viṣṇu and Indra. For a short study on this myth, see Kuiper 1950, 18, Gonda 1954/1969, 137—39 and Gail 1977b, 128—29.

¹²⁰ The *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the other hand, identifies the Boar manifestation with Brahmā Svayambhū, “the self-existent Brahmā” (Rām 2.102.2—3ab).

¹²¹ See Brockington 1998, 280—81 and Prasad 1987 for relevant passages.

¹²² MBh 3.100.19:

*tvayā bhūmiḥ purā naṣṭā samudrāt puṣkarekṣaṇa |
vārāhaṃ rūpam āsthāya jagadarthe samuddhṛtā || 19 ||*

“When of yore the earth was lost, lotus-eyed God, thou didst rescue it from the ocean, assuming the form of a boar, for the sake of the world” (translation by Van Buitenen 1975, 420).

¹²³ Thomas Kintaert has pointed out that the moment of creation has shifted in the course of time. Whereas in the Vedas, god manifests himself as a Boar before the creation of the universe has started (*prākṛtasarga*), in the epic-Purāṇic period, the Boar manifestation emerges at the beginning of a new time cycle (*pratisarga*). The era of the manifestation of the Boar is called Varāhakaḷpa (Kintaert 2011—12, 92).

¹²⁴ The Varāha myth appears in PPL *sarga* 3 in text group IIA (*Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, *Padmapurāṇa* *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, *Padmapurāṇa* *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, *Varāhapurāṇa* and *Viṣṇupurāṇa*) and text group IIB (*Brahmaṇḍapurāṇa*, *Kūrmapurāṇa*, *Liṅgapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa*). In these Purāṇas, the creator god is identified with “Brahmā, who is called Nārāyaṇa” (*brahmā nārāyaṇākhyo*), which is another name of Viṣṇu.

have been collected in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*, the cosmogonic Varāha myth also appears in various other sources, such as the *Harivaṃśa* (HV 31.21—30 and HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 1—488).

The second main variant of the Varāha myth comes into being in the epic and Purāṇic period. In this version, Viṣṇu becomes a Boar in order to put an end to Hiranyākṣa, the king of the Daityas, who has stolen the earth. This Asura-slaying version of the myth is in line with other early manifestations of Viṣṇu that fight with the Asuras¹²⁵. The *Mahābhārata* alludes at least three times to this myth. In the first reference, Viṣṇu kills Hiranyākṣa, but he is not specified as a Boar (MBh 7.13.44)¹²⁶. The second reference involves Viṣṇu in his Boar manifestation who slays the Asuras, but only one Daitya is mentioned by name, Naraka, whereas Hiranyākṣa remains absent (MBh 12.202)¹²⁷. The third reference is in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section, where Viṣṇu announces that as Varāha, he will return the earth to her own place and will kill Hiranyākṣa (MBh 12.326.71—73ab)¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ In an article on the Varāha myth, Horst Brinkhaus argues that the origin of the Asura-slaying Varāha myth must be sought in the manifestation lists of Viṣṇu (Brinkhaus 1992, 60—61). Already in the earliest fourfold manifestation list that consisted of Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa, Varāha is the only manifestation that is not an Asura-slayer. When the manifestation lists grew to six-fold and eight-fold lists (for instance in the *Harivaṃśa*) composers felt the need to assimilate the cosmogonic Varāha to other Asura-slaying manifestations.

¹²⁶ MBh 7.13.44:

*lakṣmaṇaḥ kṣatradevena vimardam akarod bhṛśam |
yathā viṣṇuḥ purā rājan hiranyākṣeṇa saṃyuge || 44 ||*

“Lakṣmaṇa put up a horrific fight with Kṣatradeva, just like Viṣṇu, oh king, [put up a horrific fight] with Hiranyākṣa earlier in battle.”

¹²⁷ MBh 12.202 is a myth about Viṣṇu in which he becomes a Boar in order to rescue the earth from the netherworld and to kill the Daityas. The Southern Kumbhakonam edition adds several verses, one of which reports that Hiranyākṣa has been slain by Viṣṇu as a Boar, but this is probably a later addition.

¹²⁸ MBh 12.326.71—73ab:

*yathā sūryasya gaganād udayāstamayāv iha |
naṣṭau punar balāt kāla ānāyaty amitadyutiḥ |
tathā balād ahaṃ pṛthvīm sarvabhūtahitāya vai || 71 ||
sattvair ākrāntasarvāṅgām naṣṭām sāgaramekhalām |
ānāyisyāmi svam sthānaṃ vārāhaṃ rūpam āsthitaḥ || 72 ||
hiranyākṣaṃ haniṣyāmi daiteyaṃ balagarvitam |*

“Just as time, of infinite splendour, forcefully brings back again the rising and setting of the sun from the sky, when they have disappeared, just like that I [i.e. Viṣṇu], who have resorted to a boar-form, will forcefully bring the earth, whose entire body is covered with living beings, who is [completely] lost, whose girdle are the oceans, back to her own place for the sake of the welfare of all beings [and] I will kill Hiranyākṣa, the arrogant son of Diti.”

This is the first *Mahābhārata* passage where all basic elements for the Asura-slaying version of the Varāha myth are brought together.

Another early reference to the battle between Viṣṇu as Varāha and Hiranyākṣa is in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*. In a list of twelve wars between the gods and the Asuras, henceforth “*devāsura wars*” (PPL *vaṁśānucarita* 5B.71—85)¹²⁹, the third is the Vārāha war (the one “related to Varāha”), during which Hiranyākṣa was killed and the ocean split into two by Varāha (PPL *vaṁśānucarita* 5B.77)¹³⁰. The splitting of the ocean seems to refer to Varāha’s dive into the ocean in order to find Hiranyākṣa and rescue the earth.

The *Harivaṁśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42) is, together with the *Skandapurāṇa*, the first text to narrate the Asura-slaying version in full. After the cosmogonic Varāha myth (HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 1—488), the text continues with the Asura-slaying version of the manifestation myth (HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 489—662). The narrative is set in the framework of the story of the flying mountains. When the flying mountains arrive in Hiranyākṣa’s kingdom, they tell the Asuras that “the sovereignty has taken refuge with the gods” (*adhipatyam surāśrayam*, HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 493b), which means that the gods are superior to the Asuras. This message infuriates Hiranyākṣa, and he starts a war against the gods. A fierce battle unfolds, and Hiranyākṣa and his Asura army win. To help the gods, Viṣṇu manifests himself as a Boar, “called Mount Varāha” (*varāhaḥ parvato nāma*, HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 564a)¹³¹, and goes to Hiranyākṣa. Varāha wins the battle, beheading Hiranyākṣa with his weapon, the *cakra* (“discus”). Viṣṇu releases the gods and saves the earth from the Asuras, placing her back in her original place¹³². Since the flying

¹²⁹ The passage is found in the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Padmapurāṇa Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, *Padmapurāṇa Uttarakhaṇḍa* and *Vāyupurāṇa*, and will be discussed in section 5.2.

¹³⁰ PPL *vaṁśānucarita* 5B.77:

hiranyākṣo hato dvandve prativāde tu daivataih |
daṁṣṭrayā tu varāheṇa samudras tu dvidhākṛtaḥ || 77 ||

“Hiranyākṣa was killed in a duel, during a dispute with the gods, and the ocean was split into two by the Boar with his fang.”

For alternative readings, see section 5.2.

¹³¹ By giving Varāha a name, he is distinguished from the cosmogonic Varāha of the first part of HV App. 1 No. 42, which instead is described as Yajñavarāha, “the Sacrificial Boar” (HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 179a). The distinction will be discussed below.

¹³² It is not explicitly stated that the Asuras took the earth in captivity, but their intention is expressed twice. First, when the Asuras prepare for war, it is said that the Asuras were “intent upon stealing the earth” (*pṛthivīharāṇe ratāḥ*, HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 495b), and later, when the Asuras conquered the gods, Hiranyākṣa “thought the world to be his own ground” (*ātmastham manyate*

mountains were the reason for the *devāsura* war to start, Indra cuts their wings, except for Mount Maināka’s.

At the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*, both the cosmogonic and the Asura-slaying Varāha myth were thus well-known among Purāṇa composers. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers nevertheless gave preference to the Asura-slaying one¹³³. The narrative centres around Hiranyākṣa, who gains power over the universe by defeating the gods, and Viṣṇu, who conquers the Asuras as Varāha¹³⁴. The text only twice speaks of another Boar who can be identified with the cosmogonic Varāha. First, when Viṣṇu takes the form of a Boar, Madhusūdana (“the Slayer of Madhu”, i.e. Viṣṇu)¹³⁵ is identified with Svayāmbhū, “the self-existent one”, who, in the form of a Boar had lifted the earth in the past (SP 98.20)¹³⁶. The identification is reminiscent of the cosmogonic Varāha myth,

jagat, HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 557b). The latter could also refer to the (non-personified) universe, of which Hiranyākṣa considers himself the owner now.

¹³³ Later Purāṇas, on the other hand, usually tell both myths. For example, the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* narrates the cosmogonic story in VDhP 1.3 and the Asura-slaying version in VDhP 1.53. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhāP 3.13, 3.17—19) merges the two variants into one narrative with only one Boar. When the earth has sunk to Rasātala during the creation, there is no place for beings, mountains, etcetera to live. Viṣṇu manifests himself as a Boar to solve this problem and dives to the netherworld. As he lifts the earth with his fang, he meets a Daitya with a club and kills him (BhāP 3.13.32—33ab). Later, this Daitya appears to be Hiranyākṣa.

¹³⁴ The Asura-slaying version of the Varāha myth fits the *Skandapurāṇa* better than the cosmogonic one for a few reasons. First of all, the *Skandapurāṇa* has already dealt with the topic of creation in SP 3—4. Second, as will be shown in chapter 5, the war between Varāha and Hiranyākṣa is told in a sequence of *devāsura* wars. Third, it is Viṣṇu’s task in the *Skandapurāṇa* to fight with the Asuras. During Viṣṇu’s afterlife as Narasiṃha, Śiva granted Viṣṇu the boon of *daityaghna*, “slaying Daityas” (SP 70.72b). This boon is studied in detail in section 4.2.1.

¹³⁵ Viṣṇu’s epithet *madhusūdana*, *madhuhan* or *madhughātin* is very common. It refers to the story in which Viṣṇu kills the Asura called Madhu and his fellow-Asura Kaiṭabha, who often appear as a duo. The epithet occurs ten times in the *Skandapurāṇa*, of which nine in the Varāha and Vāmana myth (SP 97.23d *madhukaiṭabhaughātine*, SP 98.20d *madhusūdanaḥ*, SP 99.20a *madhuhā*, SP 107.6b *madhusūdanam*, SP 108.17b *madhusūdanaḥ*, SP_{Bh} 116.37b *madhusūdanaḥ*, SP_{Bh} 116.65b *madhusūdanaḥ*, SP_{Bh} 116.133d *madhusūdanaṃ*, SP_{Bh} 117.9b *madhusūdanaḥ*); the only reference in another narrative is *madhunihan-* in SP_{Bh} 144.4, used in a comparison. Leaving the latter aside, the compositional range in which the epithet is used is very limited, which may point to the hand of a particular group of composers. The editors of SP Vol. IV have demonstrated that the descriptions of the *devāsura* wars recounted in SP 76—108 and SP_{Bh} 115—29 share various stylistic features that are not found in the rest of the text, such as the use of the epithet *śaktinandana*, “son of Śakti”, for Vyāsa, particular similes, formulaic battle descriptions that are shared with the *Mahābhārata*, and particular stock phrases (SP Vol. IV, 18—23). The editors therefore conclude that this section could have been composed by the same group of composers. The use of *madhuhan* etcetera may serve as another piece of evidence for this hypothesis.

¹³⁶ SP 98.20:

purā svayāmbhūr bhagavān uddhariṣyan mahīm imām |

where in the past, the Boar manifestation—either Viṣṇu or Brahmā/ Prajāpati—lifted the earth from below the surface so that creation could take place. The association with this version of the Varāha myth is even clearer in a comparison between Viṣṇu’s Asura-slaying Varāha manifestation and another Boar (SP 108.15)¹³⁷. When Varāha (Viṣṇu) carries the earth with his tusk from the netherworld, he is compared to Brahmā, “who had the form a Boar” (*varāharūpī*) “at the end of time” (*kālānte*). Even though the act of creation is again not specified and is not expected to take place at the end of time, Brahmā’s manifestation as Varāha is unmistakably associated with the (re-)creation of the universe at the turn of an era.

The references have two functions. First, the composers hereby acknowledge the existence of the cosmogonic Boar in the past. Even though the Asura-slaying version of the myth must have been known by the time of the *Skandapurāṇa*, the cosmogonic version was, at least textually, still much more widespread. If the composers would ignore this Boar entirely, the Varāha myth may feel incomplete. The second function is to make a distinction between Viṣṇu Svayambhū/ Brahmā as the cosmogonic Varāha and Viṣṇu as the Asura-slaying Varāha. To prevent any confusion about which version of the Varāha myth is told, the cosmogonic Varāha of the past is clearly distinguished from the Asura-slaying Varāha of the present.

The *Skandapurāṇa* composers introduced a second method to differentiate the Asura-slaying Boar from the cosmogonic one: their outer appearance is different. The cosmogonic Boar is usually described as Yajñavarāha, “Sacrificial Boar”. Each limb of the Yajñavarāha is connected to an item that is used during a sacrifice, and most Purāṇas agree on the combinations. For example, the Boar’s four feet are the four Vedas, his

sa reje tena rūpeṇa dīptimān madhusūdanaḥ |
niśāyām auśadhīdīpto himavān iva parvataḥ || 20 ||

“When the luminous slayer of Madhu carried the earth as lord Svayambhū in the past, he shone forth in this [boar-]form, just like Mount Himavat when it is lit up at night because of the herbs [on it].”

¹³⁷ SP 108.15:

sa tām sāgaramadhyena vahan bhāti mṛgeśvaraḥ |
varāharūpī kālānte brahmeva vasudhām purā || 15 ||

“As the lord of animals [i.e. Viṣṇu as Varāha] was carrying her [i.e. the earth] in the middle of the ocean, he looked like Brahmā in the past, having the form of a Boar, [carrying] the earth at the end of time.”

tongue is the sacrificial fire and his hair is the sacrificial grass¹³⁸. At least until the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42, the cosmogonic Boar is described as Yajñavarāha, while the Asura-slaying Boar has a different appearance¹³⁹.

The Asura-slaying Varāha in the *Skandapurāṇa* has, just like the cosmogonic Yajñavarāha, his limbs connected to other entities (SP 98.2—18), including sacrificial elements. For example, the chants, the Vedas and the oblations are in his pores (SP 98.16)¹⁴⁰. Since this principle idea is present in so many different Purāṇas, I consider it a case of intertextuality with the Purāṇic genre as “the source text”. However, there are two substantial differences between the *Skandapurāṇa* and other texts. First, in the *Skandapurāṇa*, Varāha’s limbs are not exclusively identified with sacrificial elements. Some limbs are identified with a god and others with an element on earth. For example, mother goddesses, local gods and other entities became his hairs (SP 98.17)¹⁴¹, and “lightening became his tongue” (*jihvā tasyābhavad vidyut*, SP 98.8a)¹⁴². The second difference concerns Varāha’s limbs which are not exclusively those of an animal.

¹³⁸ PPL *sarga* 3.12₁ (text group IIB: *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa*):
sa vedapād yūpamaṣṭraḥ kratuvakṣās citūmukhaḥ |

agnijihvī darbharomā brahmaśr̥ṣo mahātapāḥ || 12₁ ||

“His feet are the Vedas, his tusk is the sacrificial post, his chest is the offering*, his mouth is the pile of wood, his tongue is the sacrificial fire, his hair is the sacrificial grass, his glorious head is Brahmā.”

* Most texts read *kratudantaś*, “his teeth are the offering”.

This verse appears almost verbatim in HV 31.22, HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 165—66, VDhP 1.3.3, VDh 66.43 and MtP 248.67cd—68ab. For the equivalent of this verse in the Varāha myth in text group IIA, see PPL *sarga* 3.25. For all corresponding verses, see Agrawala 1963.

¹³⁹ This distinction fades in later Purāṇas. For example, in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which combines the cosmogonic and Asura-slaying Varāha myth into one narrative, Varāha is glorified as the Sacrificial Boar, whose limbs are likewise connected with sacrificial elements (BhāP 3.13.35—47).

¹⁴⁰ SP 98.16:

tathā sarvāṇi chandāṃsi vedā iṣṭaya eva ca |
romakūpeṣu sarvāṇi tāni tasthuḥ pṛthakpṛthak || 16 ||

“Furthermore, all chants, the Vedas and the oblations were each separately in the pores of [his] skin.”

¹⁴¹ SP 98.17:

dānāni niyamās caiva yamāḥ sarvās ca mātaraḥ |
sthānābhīmānino devāḥ paśavaḥ pakṣaṇās ca ha |
sarve romāṇi tasyāsan varāhasya mahātmanaḥ || 17 ||

“Donations, observances and rules, as well as all mother goddesses and gods worshipped in [particular] areas, domestic animals and birds were all the hairs of this great Boar.”

Compare, for example, HV 31.22c: *darbhalomā*, “[his] hair is the sacrificial grass”.

¹⁴² Compare, for example, HV 31.22c: *agnijihvo*, “[his] tongue is the sacrificial fire”.

Although Varāha has fangs (SP 98.7ab)¹⁴³ and a tail (SP 98.13e)¹⁴⁴, he also has human body parts, like “four arms and feet” in total (*catvāro bāhupādāḥ*, SP 98.10cd)¹⁴⁵, “two hands” (*hastau*, SP 98.8f), “fingers” (*aṅgulyas*, SP 98.10a) and “toes” (*aṅgulyas tasya pādābhyām*, literally “fingers for the two feet”, SP 98.18a)¹⁴⁶. In other words, in the *Skandapurāṇa*, the Boar is not a Yajñavarāha with his boar-limbs identified with sacrificial elements, but a Naravarāha, “Man-Boar”, with both boar and human limbs that are identified with sacrificial elements, gods and natural elements.

The *Skandapurāṇa* is the first text to describe Viṣṇu’s manifestation so explicitly as half boar, half human. As the text itself explains, this is the only way to kill Hiranyākṣa. In the beginning of SP 97, the gods go to Brahmā to ask him what they should do about Hiranyākṣa. Brahmā gives the following answer.

SP 97.8—12:

pūrvaṃ hi jāte tasmimś tu vāg uvācāsarīriṇī |
nāyaṃ vadhyo manuṣyasya na devasya kathamcana || 8 ||
nāpi tiryakṣu jātasya na bhūmau na ca tejasi |
nākāse nāpi lokeṣu mahātmāyaṃ bhaviṣyati || 9 ||
sa eṣa devā daityeśo mahātmā dhārmikas tathā |
avadhyaḥ sarvabhūtānām vadhyo duḥkhād bhaviṣyati || 10 ||
vārāhaṃ rūpam āsthāya na devatvaṃ na mānuṣam |
na ca tiryakṣu taj jātam naravārāham asti vai || 11 ||
pātāle ca praviśyaiva nāsau bhūr nāpi khaṃ hi tat |
na tejo nāpi loko ’sau sarvato yuktam eva tat || 12 ||

¹⁴³ SP 98.7ab: *catvāry astrāṇi daṃṣṭrās ca kṛtāni sumahānti vai*, “the very great four weapons are indeed made into [his] fangs”.

¹⁴⁴ SP 98.13e: *aśvinau tasya lāṅgulaṃ*, “the two Aśvins are his tail”.

¹⁴⁵ This substitutes Varāha’s four feet that are identified with the four Vedas in other texts.

¹⁴⁶ Varāha also regularly fights with two hands and two feet, of which the following verse is just one example.

SP 101.29:

karābhyām caraṇābhyām ca daṃṣṭrābhiś ca vidārayan |
tanmuktaiḥ āyudhaiś caiva cicchedānyān rarāsa ca || 29 ||

“Tearing [some Asuras] to pieces with [his] two hands, two feet and fangs, he crushed others with the weapons that were released by them and he roared.”

“8. Indeed in the past, when he [i.e. Hiranyākṣa] was born, a bodiless voice said: ‘He cannot be killed by a man nor by a god, in any way, 9. nor by someone born among animals; neither on earth, nor in fire, nor in space, nor in the worlds. He will be a mighty being.’ 10. Oh gods, this righteous lord of the Daityas cannot be slain by any being, [yet] he will be slain with difficulty, 11. after having resorted to a boar-form—which is neither divine, nor human, nor born among animals; it is indeed [the form] of a Man-Boar—12. and after having entered Pātāla [i.e. the netherworld]—which is neither the earth, nor the sky, nor fire, nor a world; [it is] indeed appropriate in all respects.”

The prophecy about Hiranyākṣa’s life and death immediately brings to mind Brahmā’s boon to Hiranyākṣa’s brother, Hiranyakaśipu (SP 70.30—33). Despite the differences between the two text passages—the cause of the Daitya’s near immortality (destiny vs. *tapas*) and the conditions under which the respective Daitya cannot be killed (beings and places vs. weapons, time slots and beings)¹⁴⁷—the structure of the reasoning with the “neither... nor...” construction and the outcome of a creature that is half human half animal are the same. Therefore, it seems very likely that the composers used Hiranyakaśipu’s boon in the Narasiṃha myth as a model for Hiranyākṣa’s prophecy in the Varāha myth¹⁴⁸. The prophecy can be seen as an example of intertextuality with a different narrative than the one under discussion.

¹⁴⁷ Each difference can be explained individually. First, the fact that Hiranyākṣa’s conditions to death are destined at birth—instead of a reward for *tapas*—fits the broader context of the Varāha myth. In SP 73, Hiranyākṣa has already done severe *tapas* for the sake of a son. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers seem to have come up with a different cause for Hiranyākṣa’s partial immortality in order to prevent doublings for the same character. Second, the limitations related to place seem to be rooted in the fact that in every version of the Asura-slaying Varāha myth, the place of Hiranyākṣa’s death is the netherworld, so the condition fits the rest of the myth.

¹⁴⁸ In an article on Varāha, Adalbert J. Gail recognized a similar connection (“Anbindung” (Gail 1977b, 137)) between the Narasiṃha myth and the Varāha myth in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* (VDhP 1.53), which is the only other text that also speaks of restrictions to Hiranyākṣa’s death and introduces a Man-Boar as the solution (*nṛvarāho*, VDhP 1.53.14a). In the relevant text passage, the gods come to Viṣṇu to ask his help. Viṣṇu answers with the following consideration.

VDhP 1.53.13—14:

tiryāṇmanuṣyadevānām avadhyāḥ sa surāntakah |

Although Narasiṃha may be the most direct predecessor of a Naravarāha, other manifestations may have played a role in the origin of a Man-Boar as well. The most famous Asura-slaying manifestations that were common by the time of the *Skandapurāṇa* were human or semi-human: Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma Jāmadagnya and Rāma Dāsarathi. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers may have wanted to align the Asura-slaying Boar with other Asura-slaying manifestations of Viṣṇu by making Varāha semi-human¹⁴⁹.

Furthermore, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers and its audience must have been familiar with the numerous Naravarāhas in material art. In fact, in iconography, the anthropomorphic Varāha was both older and more common than its zoomorphic variant. At least from the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period (fifth to early sixth century) onwards, Varāha imagery was popular, in particular in Madhya Pradesh¹⁵⁰. Most of the exemplars represent an anthropomorphic Varāha at the climactic moment of saving the earth from the ocean or the netherworld¹⁵¹. One of the primary examples of this iconographic type is the Varāha of Udayagiri Cave 5, Madhya Pradesh, from the early fifth century (see Figure 1 in *Appendix II: Figures*)¹⁵². The Boar has two arms and stands in a strong and heroic position

brahmaṇo varadānena tasmāt tasya vadhepsayā || 13 ||

nṛvarāho bhaviṣyāmi na devo na ca mānuṣaḥ |

tiryagrūpo na caivāhaṃ+ ghātayisyāmi taṃ tataḥ || 14 ||*

“This slayer of the gods cannot be killed by an animal, man or god because of a boon given by Brahmā. Therefore, in order to kill him, I will become a Man-Boar, [which is] neither a god, nor a human being, nor the body of an animal, and then, I will kill him.”

* I would like to thank Prof. Yuko Yokochi for suggesting to emend *tiryagrūpeṇa*, which is reported in the edition, to *tiryagrūpo na*.

+ The edition reads *cauvāhaṃ*, which is probably a typographical mistake for *caivāhaṃ*.

Cf. Magnone 1987, 37—38 for an alternative emendation: *tiryagrūpeṇa cordhvo 'haṃ*, “I, standing upright, together with an animal body”.

¹⁴⁹ A similar alignment seems to have been (one of) the reason(s) to create an Asura-slaying Varāha in the first place, as argued by Brinkhaus 1992 (see note 125).

¹⁵⁰ I have adopted this time frame from Gail 1977b, who identified four phases in the development of the iconography of the Boar manifestation, based on iconographic features, such as the position of the earth, the number of arms of Varāha, and the absence or presence of Vaiṣṇava attributes. The four phases proposed by Gail are the Kuṣāṇa period (second to third century), the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period (fifth to early sixth century), the period of the dynasties of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Cālukyas and Pallavas (mid sixth to the ninth century, under the Narmadā river) and the period from the ninth century onwards.

¹⁵¹ In Dokter-Mersch 2020, I show that most Varāha images have one or more Nāgas under the Boar’s feet. Based on textual parallels, I argue that these mythical serpents sometimes represent the cosmic ocean and sometimes the netherworld, from which the earth is rescued.

¹⁵² Various studies have been done on this panel, such as Mitra 1963, Williams 1982, 43—46 and Willis 2009, 41ff.

called *ālīḍha*¹⁵³. The earth, personified as a woman, is dangling, as she holds on to the Boar's tusk. Varāha is surrounded by numerous gods, watching how he rescues the earth.

From the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period onwards, sculptors also made zoomorphic boars. The Boar stands on his four bulky feet, and the earth is again personified as a woman, hanging on to the Boar's tusk. However, the earth plays a less significant role, because the image primarily displays the Boar in his Yajñavarāha aspect instead of a particular narrative moment where the earth is one of the main figures, as is the case in the anthropomorphic images¹⁵⁴. The fifth century zoomorphic Boar from Eran, Madhya Pradesh (see Figure 2 in *Appendix II: Figures*)¹⁵⁵, exemplifies this characterization, for the Boar's body is carved with numerous rows of gods and sages. Although the combination of gods and limbs cannot be led back to one particular textual description of the Yajñavarāha¹⁵⁶, the Varāha sculpture represents the same idea. Both the anthropomorphic and the zoomorphic Boar continue to be produced, but the anthropomorphic variant keeps on enjoying more fame, also by the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*. The widespread presence of an iconographic Varāha as half man, half boar may have contributed to the creation of a textual Naravarāha as well.

Finally, there may even be one textual precursor of a Naravarāha in the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42). As mentioned above, HV App. 1 No. 42 recounts the cosmogonic Varāha myth first and then the Asura-slaying version. The composers created a few characteristic features for the second Boar to make a distinction between the two Boar manifestations. First, the Boar in the cosmogonic myth is described and referred to as Yajñavarāha (HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 165—79), whereas the Boar in the Asura-slaying myth

¹⁵³ One leg is stretched backwards and one leg is bent in front. This position is generally used for figures with bow and arrow, but can be applied more broadly to valiant figures expressing power, as is the case here.

¹⁵⁴ This has also been suggested by Haripriya Rangarajan in her study on Varāha images in Madhya Pradesh. In this article, she argues that the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images of the Boar each depict a different aspect of Varāha: “the concepts of *śṛṣṭi* (creation) and *yajña* (sacrifice) are depicted on the zoomorphic images, the concept of *avatāra* (incarnation) is brought out in the anthropomorphic images of Varāha” (Rangarajan 1997, 103).

¹⁵⁵ The oldest surviving zoomorphic Boar is the Varāha from Rāmagiri (Maharashtra), which is ascribed to the first quarter of the fifth century (Bakker 1997, 138—39).

¹⁵⁶ Several scholars tried to identify the figures on the zoomorphic Boar, like Williams 1982, 129—30 and Becker 2010.

is called “Mount Varāha” (HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 564a). Second, typical features of the cosmogonic Varāha are not applied to the Asura-slaying Boar. For instance, the latter’s limbs are not connected to sacrificial elements. If the composers had one and the same Varāha in mind, then they could have used the same terminology as well. Third, the Asura-slaying Varāha is said to hold two of Viṣṇu’s attributes, the conch and the *cakra*, which is not said of the cosmogonic Boar. It gives the impression that this Boar is closer to Viṣṇu, the divine god in human form. He is even said to be “standing like a man” (*saṁsthitaṁ puruṣaṁ yathā*, HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 586b) and one “whose raised hands have a conch and a discus” (*śaṅkhacakrodyatakaraṁ*, HV App. 1 No. 42 l. 587a). The term Naravarāha is not used, but based on these descriptions, the composers may have had a Man-Boar in mind. The parallels with the Man-Boar of the *Skandapurāṇa* are nevertheless too scarce and uncertain to draw firm conclusions on a possible intertextual relationship between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42 on this particular point.

There is, however, one clear parallel between the two texts, *viz.* that the composers of both texts gave the Asura-slaying Boar a different appearance than the cosmogonic one, of which the former is closer to the “human” Viṣṇu, in order to make a distinction between the two Varāhas. Although the audience may have been familiar with the Asura-slaying version of the Varāha myth and were aware of other Asura-slaying manifestations that are (semi-)human, they may still have expected to hear about the Varāha they knew, a Yajñavarāha. Besides giving the Varāha a different appearance, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers even created a narrative explanation of the (relatively) new appearance of Viṣṇu’s manifestation as a Man-Boar, *viz.* Hiranyākṣa’s near immortality, prophesized at birth. The structure and the outcome of this prophecy have such striking similarities with Hiranyakaśipu’s boon in the Narasiṃha myth that it would not be surprising if the composers expected the audience to recognize them. Whereas the (relatively) new description of the Naravarāha may have initially caused confusion based on what is known from other retellings, the similarities with an external narrative may have created clarity and stability after all.

2.3 The Vāmana myth

Some of the core elements of the Vāmana myth have their roots in the Vedas¹⁵⁷. Already in the *Ṛgveda*, it is told that Viṣṇu strode the universe three times for mankind (e.g. ṚV 6.49.13)¹⁵⁸, and that he helped Indra slaying the Asura Vṛtra by striding three times (e.g. ṚV 8.12.26—27)¹⁵⁹. Viṣṇu’s manifestation as a Dwarf appears for the first time in the Brāhmaṇas¹⁶⁰. For example, in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (MS 3.7.9)¹⁶¹, it is said that, after Viṣṇu had become a Dwarf, he came to an agreement with the Asuras that whatever he would cover in three steps, would be for the gods. He then strode on “this, that here and that there”, i.e. the earth, sky and heaven. The only element of the core Vāmana story that is missing in this and other Brāhmaṇa accounts is Viṣṇu’s opponent Bali.

Bali makes his entrance as Vāmana’s enemy in the epics. Although the *Mahābhārata* only refers to the story, the references include the most essential narrative elements: Viṣṇu becomes a Dwarf in order to conquer Bali and to regain power over the

¹⁵⁷ For studies on the three strides of Viṣṇu in the Vedas, see Macdonell 1895, Kuiper 1962, Gonda 1954/1969, 55ff., Tripathi 1968, 2ff., Rai 1970 and Soifer 1992, 15ff.

¹⁵⁸ ṚV 6.49.13:

*yó rājāmsi vimamé pārthivāni trís cid viṣṇur mánave bādhitāya |
tāsya te śármann upadadyámāne rāyá madema tanvā tánā ca || 13 ||*

“He who measured out the earthly realms three times exactly, for Manu, who was hard-pressed—Viṣṇu—in this shelter of yours (still) being offered might we rejoice with wealth, with life and lineage” (translation by Jamison and Brereton 2014, vol. 2: 843).

¹⁵⁹ ṚV 8.12.26—27:

*yadā vṛtrāṃ nadīvṛtam śávasā vajrinn ávadhīh |
ād ít te haryatā hārī vavakṣatuḥ || 26 ||
yadā te viṣṇur ójasā trīṇi padā vicakramé |
ād ít te haryatā hārī vavakṣatuḥ || 27 ||*

“When, o mace-bearer, with your vast power you smashed Vṛtra who was blocking the rivers, just after that your two beloved fallow bays waxed strong. When Viṣṇu strode his three steps by your might, just after that your two beloved fallow bays waxed strong” (translation by Jamison and Brereton 2014, vol. 2: 1053).

¹⁶⁰ For references to Viṣṇu/ Vāmana in Brāhmaṇa literature, see Tripathi 1968, 27ff. and Gonda 1954/1969, 145ff.

¹⁶¹ MS 3.7.9:

*viṣṇuṃ vai devā ānayan vāmanāṃ kṛtvā |
yāvad ayāṃ trír vikramate tād asmākam iti |
sá vá idám evāgre vyākramatāthedám áthādás |
tásmāt trikāpālo vaiṣṇavāḥ |*

“[Die Götter wollten von den Dämonen ihr Reich zurück haben]. Sie machten Viṣṇu zu einem Zwerg und brachten ihn [zu den Dämonen]. “Was er dreimal ausschreitet, das ist unser [und der Rest soll euch gehören].” Er schritt zuerst eben dieses, dann dieses und dann jenes (=die Erde, Luftraum und Himmel). Deshalb besteht der Anteil Viṣṇu [am Soma-Opfer] aus drei Bechern [Soma]” (translation by Tripathi 1968, 35).

universe¹⁶². The *Rāmāyaṇa* gives one of the oldest full accounts of the myth (Rām 1.28). Versions of a similar length are found in the *Harivaṃśa* (HV 31.68—92) and in two text groups of the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*¹⁶³. The story is extended in another account of the myth in the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42B) as well as other Purāṇas, such as the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* (VDhP 1.21 and VDhP 1.55) and the *Matsyapurāṇa* (MtP 244—46).

The *Skandapurāṇa* follows the main story of the Vāmana myth quite faithfully, making relatively small changes. An example of a minor adjustment concerns Vāmana’s request. Vāmana usually asks for a humble piece of land covering three steps¹⁶⁴, but in the *Skandapurāṇa*, he asks for “a big house measuring three steps of mine” (*mahāgrham | mama kramais tribhir yuktaṃ*, SP_{Bh} 116.61bc). The request has a humorous undertone in it because a house measuring three steps of a dwarf can hardly be “big”. Additionally, assuming that the audience knew that Viṣṇu would leave his Vāmana form and become so big that he covers the entire universe, the adjective *mahā* may also allude to that moment, creating a special relation between the composers and the audience. Another subtle change concerns Viṣṇu’s three steps: when Viṣṇu leaves his dwarfish form, he does not simply traverse earth, sky and heaven¹⁶⁵. The first step is most innovative, as it is much richer than the one in other texts. It is usually simply qualified as “the earth”, but it may be specified with a particular place on earth, as the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* did, according to which the first step is “on the top of Naubandha”, i.e. the Himālaya

¹⁶² For example, MBh 3.100.21:

*avadhyaḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ baliś cāpi mahāsuraḥ |
vāmanaṃ vapur āśritya trailokyād bhraṃśitas tvayā || 21 ||*

“The great Asura Bali, who was invulnerable to all beings, was thrown out of the three worlds by thee in the form of a dwarf” (translation by Van Buitenen 1975, 420).

¹⁶³ PPL *vaṃśa* 2A.142—45 (text group IA: *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa*) and PPL *manvantara* A.31—34 (text group III: *Kūrmapurāṇa* and *Viṣṇupurāṇa*).

¹⁶⁴ According to many texts, Viṣṇu simply asks for “three steps”, but some texts make explicit that Viṣṇu means a piece of land by this, such as the *Harivaṃśa* in HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 2815: *pratīccha dehi kiṃ bhūmiṃ kiṃmātrā bhoḥ padatrayam*, “[Bali said:] ‘Accept [a gift].’ [Vāmana said:] ‘Give.’ [Bali said:] ‘What?’ [Vāmana said:] ‘Land.’ [Bali said:] ‘What size’ [Vāmana said:] ‘Three steps.’

¹⁶⁵ This is the case in, for example, the *Harivaṃśa*, which reports the three locations as *bhūmiṃ* (“earth”, HV 31.89a), *nabhas* (“sky”, HV 31.89c) and *param* (“the other [realm]”, HV 31.90a). For the location of Viṣṇu’s steps in other texts, see Rai 1970, 135—37.

(*naubandhaśikhare*, VDhP 1.55.42b¹⁶⁶). The *Skandapurāṇa* is even more explicit, indicating the places where Viṣṇu’s feet are placed to cover the entire earth: “[one] foot on [Mount] Udaya” (*pādam udaye*, SP_{Bh} 117.7a) and “the second [foot] on the lord of the rivers [i.e. the ocean]” (*dviṭīyaṃ saritām patau*, SP_{Bh} 117.7b). Mount Udaya is the Eastern mountain, from where the sun and the moon rise, and the ocean may be associated with the West, since Varuṇa, the god of the ocean, is also the god of the western cardinal direction. In this way, the horizontal extent of Viṣṇu’s first step is identified: from the far East to the far West. Both examples are cases of dramatic visualization: basic narrative elements being presented in an appealing and scenic manner; in this case, with an insider joke and cosmographical details¹⁶⁷.

For the study of intertextuality in the Vāmana myth, the final scene of the main story—*viz.* after Viṣṇu has stridden three times and has returned the power over the universe to Indra—is particularly interesting. The length of this concluding part varies significantly, depending on the presence or absence of the following three components. First, according to most texts, Viṣṇu sends Bali to Pātāla to live there. The element is included already in one of the *Mahābhārata* references to the myth (*balim caiva kariṣyāmi pātālatalavāsinam*, “and I [i.e. Viṣṇu] will make Bali live at the bottom of Pātāla”, MBh 12.326.76ef) and continues to be adopted by a vast number of early and late Purāṇas. The second element concerns Viṣṇu’s promise to Bali that he will become king in the next Manvantara, which means that Bali’s exile to the netherworld is limited to a particular timeframe. This element is found throughout the Purāṇic corpus. In the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, for example, Viṣṇu promises Bali: “and in the second Manvantara, you will achieve great kingship” (*manvantare dviṭīye ca mahendratvaṃ kariṣyasi*, VDhP 1.55.49ab). The third optional component is Viṣṇu’s binding of Bali. This element is present already in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (*niyamya balim ojasā*, “having bound Bali with energy”, Rām 1.28.11b) and continues to appear in several Purāṇas. Early texts, such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Vāyupurāṇa* and *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, do not explain why Bali is bound. Those later Purāṇas in which Viṣṇu is not always able to complete his third step

¹⁶⁶ The edition has a typographical error *naurbandhaśikhare*.

¹⁶⁷ Retellings that simply report that Viṣṇu asked for three steps and crossed earth, sky and heaven can be considered a summary presentation of the events.

tend to make a connection between Bali’s binding and Viṣṇu’s unfinished final step. In one of the *Vāmanapurāṇa* retellings of the myth, for example, it is made explicit that Bali is in debt because Viṣṇu was unable to complete his strides¹⁶⁸.

The final scene in the *Skandapurāṇa* includes all three elements in an encounter between Brahmā and Bali.

SP_{Bh} 117.16—20:

atha brahmā tadābhyetya samayaṃ pracakāra ha |
vimucya pāsān deveśa imaṃ lokapitāmahaḥ || 16 ||
bale tvayākhilam rājyaṃ devānām pratipāditam |
satye tvaṃ samaye sthitvā mā rājyaṃ kāmāyeḥ punaḥ || 17 ||
yāvan manvantaram idam eṣa te samayaḥ śubhaḥ |
paripālyāḥ sadā vatsa gaccha caiva yathāsukham || 18 ||
idam yajñaphalam samyag avāpsyasi na saṃśayaḥ |
yogaṃ ca matprasādena bhūya eva hy avāpsyasi || 19 ||
saiva muktas tam āṛcchya pātālam saṃviveśa ha |
devā api tataḥ prāpya svaṃ rājyaṃ mumudur bhṛśam || 20 ||

“16. Then Brahmā, the lord of the gods, having arrived at that moment, made an agreement [with Bali]. Having released [Bali’s] ties, the lord of the gods, the grandfather of the world [said] to him [i.e. Bali]: 17. ‘Oh Bali, the entire kingdom is given by you to the gods. Being fixed on [this] sincere agreement, you should not wish for the kingdom again. 18. As long as this Manvantara [lasts], this glorious agreement of yours is always to be followed, oh son, and now go as you like. 19. You will rightly obtain the fruit of a sacrifice; no doubt about it. And you will obtain power again by my grace.’ 20. He [i.e. Bali], being released, having bid him [i.e. Brahmā] farewell,

¹⁶⁸ VāmP 65.35ab: *rṇād bhavati daityendra bandhanam ghoradarśanam*, “because of debt, oh lord of Daītyas, there is terrible binding”.

entered Pātāla, and then the gods, having obtained their own kingdom [again], were very happy.”

The first element that Bali is sent to Pātāla is reworked in Bali finally going back to Pātāla (SP_{Bh} 117.20b). The second element—the promise that Bali will reign again—is framed as a restriction for the current Manvantara (SP_{Bh} 117.17cd—18c). During this era, Bali should not go after the kingdom of the gods, implying that in the next era, he is free to attempt another conquest. The element of the binding of Bali is also present in the *Skandapurāṇa*, but the text only reports that Bali is released from his bonds (SP_{Bh} 117.16cd). Although it is not uncommon that the reason why Bali is bound is omitted, the binding itself is usually mentioned. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, the motif of the binding is absent, as well as why he should be released again¹⁶⁹.

In terms of intertextuality between the *Skandapurāṇa* and other sources, each element showcases intertextuality with the epic-Purāṇic genre as the source text. As shown above, Bali’s exile is found in numerous texts, including one early reference in the *Mahābhārata*. It is impossible to point one particular source from where Purāṇic composers, including the *Skandapurāṇa*’s, would have taken this idea from. The second element appears in no less than seven retellings across six Purāṇas, according to Deborah A. Soifer in her book *The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana*¹⁷⁰, to which the retelling in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* can be added as eighth. However, all these texts are

¹⁶⁹ This is probably not a deliberate choice, but rather the result of the loss of several *pādas*. This is also indicated by the preceding verses which concern the scene of Viṣṇu’s three strides (SP_{Bh} 117.6—15). Although Viṣṇu’s first step (the earth) and second step (the sky) are complete, the narration of his third step is not rounded off properly. During the third step, Viṣṇu passed Svarloka and Janaloka, and “[the striding] was not finished yet then” (*na samāptam ca tat tataḥ*, SP_{Bh} 117.12d). “And while he was striding there, Daityas with weapons and arrows in their hands forcefully attacked [him]” (*tasya cotkramatas tatra daityaḥ śastrāstrapānayaḥ | abhyakramanta vegena*, SP_{Bh} 117.13abc). The description of Asuras attacking Viṣṇu continues in verses 14—15. Then, out of nothing, Brahmā arrives, and the text omits some crucial information. It, first of all, remains unknown how Viṣṇu’s strides end. This information is always provided, even when a text tells that the third step was not completed. For example, the *Brahmapurāṇa* says that “there is no place for a third step here” (*tr̥tīyasya padasyātra sthānaṃ nāsty*, BrP 73.49ab). Second, although we learn from Brahmā’s speech that the kingdom has been returned to the gods (SP_{Bh} 117.17ab, 20cd), the actual return of power is not reported, which is, in fact, a fixed part of the story. Third, the binding of Bali is absent, which we would expect, since Bali is released from his ties.

¹⁷⁰ *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, *Brahmapurāṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Skandapurāṇa* *Prabhāsakhaṇḍa*, *Vāmanapurāṇa* and *Vāmanapurāṇa Saromāhātmya* (Soifer 1992, 142 note 45).

presumably later than the *Skandapurāṇa*. The only Purāṇa predating the *Skandapurāṇa* that has two variations on the theme is the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42B). The first variation comes immediately after Viṣṇu’s strides: Viṣṇu promises Bali that he will reign over the Asuras as soon as he goes to the netherworld and stays there (*daityādhipatyam ca sadā matprasādād avāpsyasi*, “you will always have sovereignty over the Daityas by my grace”, HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 2937). This promise concerns the near future. The second variation comes at the very end of the myth, when Garuḍa releases Bali from his ties and tells him that he should live in the netherworld for one Gavyuṭī, i.e. a time indication of a very long period (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 3037—38, see below). Since the element is found in many sources, even though most of these are later than the *Skandapurāṇa*, this could be a case of intertextuality with the Purāṇic genre as the source text. The same applies to the third element, the binding of Bali, which already appeared in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Even though this may be a similar case of intertextuality, there may even be a form of direct intertextuality because the dialogue in the *Skandapurāṇa* shows several striking similarities with a dialogue in the final scene of the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42B).

In the *Harivaṃśa* retelling, Viṣṇu first strides three times and then he kills all the Asuras (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2909—2913). He conquers the triple world, returns the earth to Indra and gives the Pātāla called Sutala to Bali (2914—16). Viṣṇu grants Bali several boons, while at the same time setting rules to the boons to which Bali should adhere, otherwise he will be bound by *nāgapāśas*, “nooses that are Nāgas” (2922—40)¹⁷¹. Bali agrees and goes to Pātāla (2956—58), and Viṣṇu goes to heaven after dividing the kingdoms (2959—67). When Viṣṇu has gone to heaven, he binds Bali with *nāgapāśas* (2970—71)¹⁷². Then Nārada goes to Bali and gives him the key to liberation (2972—81)¹⁷³. Bali does what Nārada told him (2982—3025) and as a result, Viṣṇu orders Garuḍa, his animal-vehicle, to set Bali free (3028—29). Garuḍa goes to Bali, and the Nāgas that

¹⁷¹ For instance, Bali should not block Indra’s power, he should remember Viṣṇu’s command and honour the gods (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2932—34).

¹⁷² This implies that Bali broke (one of) the rules that came along with the boons received from Viṣṇu, but this is not made explicit.

¹⁷³ The method is the recitation of the *mokṣaviṃśaka*, “twenty verses on liberation”. See Saindon 2009, 364 notes 22 and 23 for more information on this recitation.

kept Bali captive, immediately run away (3030—33). Garuḍa addresses Bali with a speech, which is remarkably similar to Brahmā’s speech to Bali in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 3036—41:

dānavendra mahābāho viṣṇus tvām abravīt prabhuh | 3036 |

mukto nivasa pātāle saputrajanabāndhavaḥ || 3037 ||

itas tvayā¹⁷⁴ na gantavyaṃ gavyūtim api dānava | 3038 |

samayaṃ yadi bhindyās tvaṃ mūrdhā te śatadhā vrajet || 3039 ||

pakṣīndravacanaṃ śrutvā dānavendro ’bravīd idam | 3040 |

sthito ’smi samaye tasya anantasya mahātmanaḥ || 3041 ||

“Oh lord of the Dānavas, the very strong lord Viṣṇu said to you: ‘Being released, you should live in Pātāla, together with your sons, people and friends. Hence it [i.e. Pātāla] should not be abandoned by you for exactly the time period of a Gavyūti, oh Dānava. If you break [this] agreement, your head will turn into a hundred pieces.’” Having heard the speech of the lord of the birds [i.e. Garuḍa], the lord of the Dānavas said this: ‘I will stay true to the agreement with the glorious Ananta [i.e. Viṣṇu].’”

Garuḍa’s speech in the *Harivaṃśa* has much in common with Brahmā’s speech in the *Skandapurāṇa*. For a start, the very idea that Bali is released from his ties is relatively unique. The only other source I am aware of is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a later text, which tells that Viṣṇu releases Bali from his fetters at the request of Brahmā (BhāP 8.23.3cd)¹⁷⁵. Moreover, the composition of the speeches also have some remarkable similarities. First, Bali is released (SP_{Bh} 117.16cd) or he is told that he will be released (HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 3037a). Then, some restrictions concerning his release are set: he should no longer go after the kingdom of the gods (SP_{Bh} 117.17d) or he should not leave Pātāla anymore (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 3037—38a). All this should be adhered to within the current era (SP_{Bh}

¹⁷⁴ The critical edition reads *itasvayā*, which is probably a typo for *itas tvayā*.

¹⁷⁵ For other texts that include Bali’s binding (without him being released), see Rai 1970, 137—39 and Hospital 1980, 275.

117.18 and HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 3038b). Finally, both texts speak of a *samaya*, “an agreement”, between Bali and the god in question (SP_{Bh} 117.16b, 17c and HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 3039a, 3041a). As shown above, the idea that a promise is confined to a particular era and subject to certain rules is widespread among Purāṇas. However, such a promise in combination with Bali’s release and the emphasis that an agreement has been reached is only found in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa*¹⁷⁶.

The parallel word choice as well as the parallel composition of the speech are striking, and these are not the only correspondences between the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa* identified so far. In the study on the Varāha myth above, I have demonstrated two other correspondences: the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42 are the first available texts that provide a complete account of the Asura-slaying version of the Varāha myth, and both make a clear and conscious distinction between the cosmogonic Yajñavarāha and the Asura-slaying Varāha, who is closer to Viṣṇu and might even have been a Naravarāha in both texts. Bali’s release from his ties can be added as another parallel between the two texts. However, in terms of intertextuality, the Vāmana case is different. Whereas the Varāha parallels are probably not an example of a direct intertextual relationship and can be explained in multiple (and possibly additional) ways, the release of Bali as part of an agreement between Bali and a god point to a case of direct intertextuality between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B because the parallel is uniquely shared between the two. Finally, there is one more parallel that speaks for a relationship between these two texts. There are remarkable similarities between the *devāsura* war at the start of the Varāha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *devāsura* war at the start of the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B. In the next section, I discuss these parallels more closely.

2.4 The *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42B)

The corresponding passages concern SP 77.8—95.end and HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 47—2462. These large sections describe the *devāsura* war that leads to the Asuras’ power over

¹⁷⁶ The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, on the other hand, combines a similar conversation between Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Bali with Bali’s release, but it does not speak of a *samaya* (BhāP 8.22.31—36). This, however, might still be considered the only late parallel with the scene in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa*.

the universe and Viṣṇu’s subsequent intervention to manifest himself in order to resolve the cosmic disorder. The similarities between the two war narratives are striking, but at the same time, there are several factors that make it difficult to define the exact relationship between the two texts. Not only do the correspondences appear in different myths, there are also no verbatim parallels¹⁷⁷. The similarity rather concerns the fact that each section includes almost the same narrative elements—*viz.* different stages in warfare—and that these components are predominantly structured in the same order.

The relevant chapters in the *Skandapurāṇa* include all steps taken by Hiranyākṣa in his battle against the gods: from the decision to take revenge against the gods for killing his brother Hiranyakaśipu¹⁷⁸, to a description of the conditions in the kingdom when Hiranyākṣa has taken full control over the universe¹⁷⁹. The relevant section in HV App. 1 No. 42B describes all steps taken by Bali in his battle against the gods: from the moment that the Asuras encourage Bali to take the kingdom back from the gods¹⁸⁰, to Bali’s

¹⁷⁷ There are some verbatim parallels, but these are stock phrases that do not only appear in the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B, but also in the *Mahābhārata*. For example, “[t]he phrase *śaraiḥ samnataparvabhīḥ* (‘with arrows with bent knots’), occurs three times in the chapters at issue [*viz.* SP 76—108 and SP_{Bh} 115—129], with variations [...]. It is very popular in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but their concentration in the battle books of the *Mahābhārata* is conspicuous: 41 times in book 6, 32 times in book 7 and 16 times in book 8. It may be noteworthy that it also occurs five times in HV App. 1 No. 42B, which narrates a version of the Vāmana myth with lengthy battle scenes between the gods and the Asuras” (SP Vol. IV, 21—22). For other examples, see *ibid.*, 21—23. The fact that the verbatim parallels are formulaic phrases makes them part of the “language” shared by the composers of these texts, instead of unique parallels. They are therefore not taken into account in the analysis.

¹⁷⁸ SP 77.12ab, 13:

rājyārthe sa hato devair nikṛtyā mūḍhamānasaiḥ |
[...]teṣāṃ kartum ahaṃ daṇḍaṃ śakto ’smy asuravidviṣāṃ |
bhavatāṃ tatra bālānāṃ rakṣārthaṃ nodyamāmy aham || 13 ||

“He [i.e. “my dear brother Hiranyakaśipu” (SP 77.10a, c)] has been killed by the foolish gods through fraud, for the sake of his kingdom. I am able to punish these enemies of the Asuras by myself. [However, this means that] in that case, I cannot undertake the task of protecting you, [my] children.”

¹⁷⁹ SP 95.25:

yajadhvaṃ dānavāḥ sarve viprān pūjayateti ca |
devaṃ ca śūliṇaṃ sarve namasyata punaḥ punaḥ |
dharmam eva niṣevadhvam iti so ’jñāpayat tadā || 19 ||

“Then he [i.e. Hiranyākṣa] ordered: ‘Oh Dānavas, you should all perform sacrifices and honour the sages, you should all continuously pay homage to Deva [“God”, i.e. Śiva], Śūlin [“the one with the trident”], and you should follow the *dharma*.’”

¹⁸⁰ HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 51—53:

pitāmahaṃ tu hatvā te suraiḥ suraniṣūdana | 51 |
hṛtaṃ tad eva trailokyam śakraś caivābhiṣecitaḥ | 52 |

righteous reign when he has conquered the gods¹⁸¹. I have identified ten parallel narrative elements, each describing a step in the warfare.

	Narrative element	<i>Skandapurāṇa</i>	<i>Harivaṃśa</i>
1.	Decision to start the battle	SP 77.8—40	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 47—59
2.	The Asuras go to war	SP 77.41—end	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 60—486
3.	The gods go to war	SP 78	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 487—716
4.	General battle description	SP 79—83	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 717—32 ¹⁸²
5.	The battle as a sacrifice	SP 84.1—7	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 822—74 ¹⁸³
6.	“ <i>Anukramaṇikā</i> ” of individual duels ¹⁸⁴	SP 84.8—12	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 733—76

tat pitāmaharājyaṃ svaṃ pratyāhartum ihārhasi || 53 ||

“When your grand-father was killed by the gods [i.e. Hiranyakaśipu by Narasiṃha], oh slayer of the gods, this triple world was taken [by them], and Śakra [i.e. Indra] was consecrated [as king]. Please bring this kingdom of your own grandfather back here.”

¹⁸¹ HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2436—37, 2441:

abhāve sarvapāpānāṃ bhāve caiva tathā sthite | 2436 |

bhāve tapasi siddhānāṃ sarvatrāśramarakṣiṣu || 2437 ||

[...] *abhiṣikto 'suraiḥ sarvair devarājye balis tadā* || 2441 ||

“When all [sorts] of sins were absent and when there was fortitude instead, when there was *tapas* for the Siddhas [“Accomplished Ones”, i.e. sages at a high stage of yogic realization], when hermitages everywhere were protected [...], then Bali was consecrated in the kingdom of the gods by all the Asuras.”

¹⁸² The description in HV App. 1 No. 42B is significantly shorter than the one in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

¹⁸³ The order starts to diverge here. First, the battles are enumerated and announced in a kind of *anukramaṇikā*, “table of contents” (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 733—76), then a series of bad omens is enumerated (777—821), next the battle is compared to a sacrifice (822—74) and a general description of the war is given (875—908), and finally the duels corresponding to the *anukramaṇikā* are told (909—2227, 2333—403).

¹⁸⁴ The following individual duels are announced in short sentences, which are a sort of “table of contents” (*anukramaṇikā*). The element will be studied further below, including examples.

7.	Individual duels, corresponding to the “ <i>anukramaṇikā</i> ”	SP 84.13— 88.10 ¹⁸⁵	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 909— 2227, 2333— 403 ¹⁸⁶
8.	Agni interferes	SP 92 ¹⁸⁷	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2228—319
9.	The Asuras win	SP 93.26—95.15	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2404—27
10.	Description of the post-war kingdom	SP 95.16—end	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2428—62

As can be seen from the above table, both texts dedicate a large section of the text to the *devāsura* war (almost twenty chapters in the *Skandapurāṇa* and over 2400 half-verses in HV App. 1 No. 42B), sharing ten narrative elements that are more or less in the same order. Some elements are standard for *devāsura* wars, but elements 6—8 are relatively unique, as will be argued below. I found only one other myth that includes two of these relatively unique elements: the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa*¹⁸⁸. This

¹⁸⁵ After the description of the individual duels, the *Skandapurāṇa* adds a general battle description, with special attention to Vāyu and Soma (SP 88.11—91.end).

¹⁸⁶ The individual duels are “interrupted” by the next element, *viz.* Agni’s intervention, so that the duel between Bali and Indra is postponed.

¹⁸⁷ After the Agni episode, the *Skandapurāṇa* continues with a short general battle description (SP 93.1—25).

¹⁸⁸ The Sumbha and Nisumbha myth tells the story of the Asura brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha (SP 62.50—66.end). They “are brought up by Mt. Vindhya and his wife. When they have grown up, they head the demons and defeat the gods in the war. Sumbha courts Kauśikī through the messenger Mūka and is challenged to defeat her in battle to gain her as his wife. After consulting other demons Sumbha decides to fight” (SP Vol. III, 9). This is where the corresponding war narrative starts. The *devāsura* war consists of the following narrative elements, provided with the numbers of the table in the main text. The asterisks indicate narrative elements that do not correspond with the Varāha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B. 1. Decision to start the battle (SP 63.45—end). 2. Asuras go to war (SP 64.1—11). * Evil omens (SP 64.12—14). * Asuras dare Kauśikī, and Kauśikī expands herself into different goddesses (SP 64.15—18). 3. Goddesses go to war (64.19—end). 4. General battle description (SP 65.1—23ab). 6. *Anukramaṇikā* of individual duels (SP 65.23cd—25). * General battle description (SP 65.26—29). 7. Individual duels corresponding to the *anukramaṇikā* (SP 65.30—81). * General battle description, including Kauśikī fighting Sumbha and Nisumbha (SP 65.82—66.30). 9. Kauśikī wins (SP 66.31—end). 10. Description of the post-war kingdom (SP 67.1—17). The fifth and the eighth narrative elements—the battle as a sacrifice and Agni’s intervention—are absent.

narrative likewise incorporates an *anukramaṇikā* and corresponding duels in its war narrative, dealing with the battle between the Asuras and the goddesses led by Kauśikī. This section counts only four chapters, but covers eight of the ten identified steps in the warfare: from the moment that Sumbha decides to fight with Kauśikī (SP 63.45) to the goddesses' victory (SP 66.31—end). Despite the fairly significant overlap with the Varāha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B, there are considerably more correspondences between the war elements in the Varāha and Vāmana myth, so the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth will be dismissed from the analysis itself (2.4.1), but will be taken up again in section 2.4.2 to help explain the complexity of all parallels involved¹⁸⁹.

2.4.1 Analysis

The war narrative starts with elements 1—4 that are structured in the same way. Then there is some variation in the section with elements 5—8, either because the order of the narrative components is different (e.g. the fifth element) or a passage is added (e.g. the *Skandapurāṇa* adds an extra general battle description after the eighth element). Finally, the arrangement of elements 9—10 is the same. The overall structure is thus very similar in both texts, though not identical.

As far as the content of the individual narrative components is concerned, it is possible to make a division between those elements that appear in other war narratives and those that seem to be (almost) unique for the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B.

¹⁸⁹ Although the focus is on the Varāha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B, I will occasionally refer to other war narratives in the notes, including the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth. In order to show how unique elements 6—8 are and how common the others, I will refer to other stories that include a war narrative. After all, an extensive war narrative is by no means rare. The grandest of all is the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas in the *Mahābhārata*, covering several books of the epic. Additionally, book six of the *Rāmāyaṇa* called Yuddhakāṇḍa (“book of the battle”) is concerned with the battle between Rāma and his monkey army on one side and Rāvaṇa and his Rākṣasa army on the other. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, there is another extensive war narrative, told in SP_{Bh} 130.31 to SP_{Bh} 154, which forms a part of the Andhaka myth. It describes different steps in the warfare between Śiva's Gaṇas (a class of divine beings that are Śiva's attendants in the *Skandapurāṇa*) and Andhaka *cum sui*: from the moment that Pārvatī sends her Gaṇas to fight against Andhaka and his army, to Andhaka's victory over the gods. Although all these narratives share elements with the *devāsura* wars in the Varāha and Vāmana myth, they do not share the exact same pattern, nor do they contain some of the more unique narrative elements that the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B have in common.

Standard components include elements 1—4 and 9, for war narratives usually include the decision and the reason to start a war by a certain king or people¹⁹⁰, scenes in which the competing parties approach each other¹⁹¹, general descriptions of the fighting¹⁹² and the announcement of the winner¹⁹³.

The fifth element concerns the concept of *yuddhayajña*, “the battle as a sacrifice”, in which the main members of the battle are compared to essential parts of a sacrifice. The battle-sacrifice is known from the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 5.57.12—14, MBh 5.139.29—51 and MBh 12.99.15—25) and is not unknown in the rest of the epic-Purāṇic tradition. The *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B also share the concept, but not the actual combinations. For example, in the *Skandapurāṇa*, the Vasus are the *udgātr* priests for the gods, Prahlāda is the *udgātr* for the Asuras (SP 84.4b, 7a), and the Aśvins have the function of *śamitr*, “slaughterer” of the sacrificial animal (SP 84.5a). On the other hand,

¹⁹⁰ As mentioned above, in the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B, the Asura kings decide to wage war against the gods, because of the death of their relative, a previous king of Daityas. By comparison, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma determines to fight Rāvaṇa because Rāvaṇa abducted Rāma’s wife Sītā, and he wants her back.

¹⁹¹ Passages like this present, among other things, the preparations for war: putting on armour, preparing chariots, making noise with drums, etcetera. E.g. Hiraṇyākṣa’s chariot is made ready in SP 77.58—65, and in HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 503—504, the gods mount tigers, elephants, Nāgas and bulls. A similar situation is described, for example, in the *Harivaṃśa* retelling of the Tārakāmaya *devāsura* war with Tāra and Maya as the principal figures on the side of the Asuras and Viṣṇu as the main figure on the side of the gods (HV 32—38). HV 33 describes the army of the Asuras, highlighting the chariots and ornaments of the principal Asuras, and HV 34 does the same from the perspective of the gods.

¹⁹² General battle descriptions include the sounds and actions of a battlefield: clashing swords, shooting arrows, smashing each other’s chariots, etcetera. E.g. SP 79.32 describes how “[a]nother cuts off the trunk of an advancing elephant, but he is hurled to the ground by the same elephant” (SP Vol. IV, 73), and HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 731—32 reports how hundreds of gods roar, while grabbing spears and trees that are set to fire. Similar descriptions are in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (see Goldman et al. 2009, 89ff. for examples of the rich style of the epic in its battle descriptions), and in the Tārakāmaya war of the *Harivaṃśa* (e.g. HV 37.20—36).

¹⁹³ In SP 93.33—95.7cd, Hiraṇyākṣa conquers the kingdom of the gods, by taking control of important places and appointing Asuras as the regents of these areas: first Amarāvati, then the abodes of Varuṇa and Yama (i.e. Saṃyamana) and finally, Kubera’s residence (i.e. Laṅkā). Hiraṇyākṣa himself rules over the earth and takes her in captivity (SP 95.7ef—15). In HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2404—2417, a bodiless voice tells Indra that Bali cannot be conquered in battle because of a boon he had received earlier, and in HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 2427, Bali indeed becomes *indra*, “king”, of the entire universe. To compare, in the Andhaka war narrative in the *Skandapurāṇa*, the victory of the Asuras is announced by enumerating the casualties “in the battle with Andhaka” (*andhakena raṇe*, SP_{Bh} 154.39c, 40c, 41c, 42c, 43c, 46a and 47a), such as Viṣṇu, Pitāmaha (i.e. Brahmā), Ananta (i.e. Śeṣa) and Śatakratu (i.e. Indra, SP_{Bh} 154.39ab), as well as Gandharvas, Guhyakas, snakes, Garuḍas and Mahoragas (“great serpents”, 43ab).

in HV App. 1 No. 42B, it is Maya who is the *udgātr* and Śambara the *śamitr* (HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 836, 860)¹⁹⁴. Even though not all war narratives include a *yuddhayajña*, the concept is broadly supported in epic-Purāṇic literature and is therefore not unique for the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B.

However, the elements 6—8 are, to the best of my knowledge, uniquely shared by the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B. The sequence starts with a kind of *anukramaṇikā*, “table of contents” (the sixth element), of the upcoming duels between the gods and the Asuras (the seventh element). In short sentences, it is told which god fought with which Asura, as the following verses exemplify.

SP 84.8c—f:

indraḥ samāsadaḍ daityaṃ hiraṇyākṣaṃ mahābalaṃ |
vāyur abhyāyayau tūrṇaṃ vipracittiṃ mahābalaḥ || 8 ||

“Indra encountered the very strong Daitya Hiraṇyākṣa. The very strong Vāyu quickly approached Vipracitti.”

HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 733—34:

marutāṃ pañcamo yas tu sa bāṇenābhyayudhyata | 733 |
mahābalaḥ suravaraḥ sāvitra iti yaṃ viduḥ || 734 ||

“He who is the fifth of the Maruts [“Wind Gods”], whom they knew as the very strong Sāvitra, the best of gods, fought with Bāṇa.”

¹⁹⁴ There are only two structural parallels between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B: the sacrifice is narrated from the perspective of one party of the battle, and the head of the army is the sacrificer, the most important position during a sacrifice. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, the battle-sacrifice is first narrated from the perspective of the gods, with Indra (together with the gods) as the sacrificer (SP 84.1cde), and then from the perspective of the Asuras, with Hiraṇyākṣa as the sacrificer (SP 84.6ab). In HV App. 1 No. 42B, the battle-sacrifice is only narrated from the perspective of the Asuras, with Bali as the sacrificer (HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 859). At the same time, MBh 5.139.29—51 and HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 822—74 are very similar, including some verbatim *pādas* (e.g. MBh 5.139.31ab ≈ HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 834, MBh 5.139.32ab = HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 832, and MBh 5.139.34cd ≈ HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 839). This may be a case of direct intertextuality.

All announced duels correspond exactly with the duels that are narrated subsequently. For instance, the battle between Indra and Hiranyākṣa is narrated in SP 84.13—end, the battle between Vāyu and Vipracitti in SP 85.1—10¹⁹⁵, and the battle between Sāvitra and Bāna in HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 909—935¹⁹⁶. There is little interference of other figures, when

¹⁹⁵ The following table presents a complete overview of the duels in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

God vs. Asura	<i>Anukramaṇikā</i>	Duels
Indra vs. Hiranyākṣa	SP 84.8cd	SP 84.13—end
Vāyu vs. Vipracitti	SP 84.8ef	SP 85.1—10
Aṁśa vs. Śambara	SP 84.9a	SP 85.11—16
Bhaga vs. Vala	SP 84.9b	SP 85.17—28
Pūṣan vs. Virocana	SP 84.9c	SP 85.29—86.4
Mitra vs. Bali	SP 84.9d	SP 86.5—7
Varuṇa vs. Bāṇa	SP 84.10a	SP 86.8—16
Yama vs. Andhaka	SP 84.10b	SP 86.17—44
Jayanta vs. Ilvala	SP 84.10c	SP 86.45—end
Candramas vs. Maya	SP 84.10d	SP 87.1—10
Ahīrbudhna vs. Rāhu	SP 84.11a	SP 87.11—17
Kāpālin vs. Śataketu	SP 84.11b	SP 87.18—25
Ajaikapād vs. Kālanemi	SP 84.11c	SP 87.26—38
Jvara vs. Kārtasvana	SP 84.11d	SP 87.39—end
Aryaman vs. Prahlāda	SP 84.12a	SP 88.1—5
Dhara vs. Anuhlāda	SP 84.12b	SP 88.6—8
Dhruva vs. Hrada	SP 84.12c	SP 88.9—10

¹⁹⁶ The following table presents a complete overview of the duels in HV App. 1 No. 42B.

God vs. Asura	<i>Anukramaṇikā</i>	Duels
Sāvitra vs. Bāṇa	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 733—34	HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 909—35
Dhruva vs. Bala	735—36	936—82
Dhara vs. Namuci	737—38	983—1030
Tvaṣṭṛ vs. Maya	739—40	1031—88
Vāyu vs. Puloman	741—42	1089—155
Pūṣan vs. Hayagrīva	743—44	1156—201
Bhaga vs. Śambara	745—46	1202—71
Soma vs. Śarabha and Śalabha	747—48	1272—338
Viṣvaksena vs. Virocana	749—50	1339—96
Aṁśa vs. Kujambha	751—52	1397—455
Hari (the Marut) vs. Asiloman	753—54	1456—529
Aśvin twins vs. Vṛtra	755—56	1530—81
Raṇāji vs. Ekacakra	757—58	1582—640
Mṛgavyādhā vs. Bala	759—60	1641—86
Ajaikapād vs. Rāhu	761—62	1687—732
Dhaneśvara/ Dhūmrākṣa (the Rudra) vs. Keśin	763—64	1733—85

a duel is narrated. In the duel between the Rudra called Jvara and Kārtasvana (SP 87.39—end), for example, only these two figures feature in the battle, and the same goes for the duel between Dhruva and Bala (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 936—83)¹⁹⁷. Although descriptions of duels are in themselves not unique for war narratives, the fact that they follow the enumeration in the *anukramaṇikā* meticulously is only found in HV App. 1 No. 42B and the *Skandapurāṇa*—this includes the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth¹⁹⁸.

As far as the eighth element is concerned, Agni does not feature in a duel but he intervenes in the *devāsura* war. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, Agni sees that the gods have fled when all seventeen duels and some subsequent fights have taken place¹⁹⁹. He intervenes by rushing to the Asuras (SP 92.1), but instead of hereby putting an end to the war, Agni instigates another series of battles, such as the thousand-year war called Āṭi-Baka (SP 92.16ff.). In HV App. 1 No. 42B, on the other hand, Agni sees that the gods are defeated after twenty out of twenty-one duels, and decides to help the gods (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2228—319). As Agni is fighting, Prahrāda addresses Bali and urges him to fight against Indra and the other gods (HV App. 1 No. 42B ll. 2320—32). This marks the beginning of the final duel between Indra and Bali.

Niṣkumbha vs. Vṛṣaparvan	765—66	1786—832
Kāla vs. Prahrāda	767—68	1833—994
Kubera vs. Anuhrāda	769—70	1995—2142
Varuṇa vs. Vipracitti	771—72	2143—227
Śakra vs. Bali	773—74	2333—403

¹⁹⁷ There are only a few exceptions in the *Skandapurāṇa* of other gods or Asuras assisting the main fighter. One of these is at the end of the duel between Vāyu and Vipracitti (SP 85.1—10), where Hiraṇyākṣa steps in when Vipracitti loses power. Hiraṇyākṣa gives Vāyu the final blow. In HV App. 1 No. 42B, there are some exceptions as well. For instance, during the duel between Aṃśa and Kujamba, Kujambha also fights with other gods.

¹⁹⁸ SP 65.23cd—25 announces eight duels between the goddesses who had arisen from Kauśikī and the Asuras. For example, “Ṣaṣṭhī advances against Meghasvana, Mṛtyu against Kārtasvara” (SP Vol. III, 128). After some general battle descriptions, all eight duels are narrated in a few verses (SP 65.30—81). For instance, Ṣaṣṭhī’s fight with Meghasvana is described in verses 30—33 and Mṛtyu’s fight with Kārtasvara in verses 34—39. Although it is impossible to know whether such an *anukramaṇikā* with corresponding duels is indeed absent in other narratives and texts, I did not come across it in other parts of the *Skandapurāṇa*, nor in the epics, nor in other early Purāṇas. For example, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there are various descriptions of battles with one main figure (like the Rākṣasa called Dhūmrākṣa in Rām 6.42), but these duel-like fights are not announced in an *anukramaṇikā*.

¹⁹⁹ For example, the Asuras are challenged by Vāyu (SP 89.20—end) and Soma (SP 90—91).

Even though Agni acts differently, he has an interventionist role in both texts, putting, as it were, a halt to the all-encompassing *devāsura* war for a moment. It is remarkable that both texts reserve this special role for Agni, who, unlike other primary gods—Indra, Soma, Varuṇa, Vāyu and Yama—, does not fight in a duel against an Asura. I am not aware of a similar intervention by Agni in the epics²⁰⁰ or in other early Purāṇas²⁰¹. It seems therefore a unique parallel between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B.

Finally, the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B both conclude the war narrative with a description of how each Asura king rules. They both rule according to law and the rules of a king, take care of their subjects, ensure that *dharma*, “righteousness”, prevails, etcetera (see notes 179 and 181). In the case of HV App. 1 No. 42B, Bali’s righteous ruling is an intrinsic part of the Vāmana myth. He is repeatedly described as *dharmic* and pious. Already at the beginning of the narrative, when he was consecrated as the king of the Asuras and the netherworld (and when Indra was still the king of the gods and the heavens), Bali is, for example, “having *dharma* as his highest priority at all times, speaking the truth [and] having his senses in check” (*dharmaparaṃ nityaṃ satyavākyaṃ jitendriyam*, HV App. 1 No. 42B l. 35). Further on in the story, Bali’s good character is reflected in the way he rules over the entire universe. This characterization continues to be applied in other Purāṇas, including the *Skandapurāṇa*.

Hiraṇyākṣa, on the other hand, is not known for his honest and pious character, but in the *Skandapurāṇa*, these qualifications are attributed to him. Other good qualities,

²⁰⁰ I found several references to the involvement of fire in the *Mahābhārata*, but none of these are in the eighteen-day war itself. For example, in MBh 1.215—25, a Brahmin who identifies himself with Fire (*pāvaka*) burns the Khāṇḍava Forest (Van Buitenen 1973, 412—31); and in MBh 1.124—38, Duryodhana has the Pāṇḍavas led to a highly inflammable house, made of lacquer, to burn them to death, but the Pāṇḍavas find a way to escape (ibid, 7 and 274—93). Agni’s absence in the war may be due to the fact that the war is waged by people, instead of gods. One of the warriors is, however, an incarnation of Agni: Dhṛṣṭadyumna (MBh 1.57.91 and MBh 1.155). Dhṛṣṭadyumna becomes the general of the Pāṇḍava army and kills, for example, one of the generals of the Kaurava army, Droṇa (MBh 7.165.52cd). Even though this is a big success, Dhṛṣṭadyumna’s action is in the midst of the vast war and cannot be considered a distinctive moment.

²⁰¹ For instance, in the Andhaka war narrative in the *Skandapurāṇa*, Agni does not play a role, nor in the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth in the same text. This may be due to the fact that these battles are not fought by the gods, but by Gaṇas and goddesses instead. In the Tārakāmaya war in the *Harivaṃśa*, on the other hand, there is a story about a fire, but this is not the god Agni, but a fire called Aurva. It is employed by the Asuras to counter an attack by Indra (HV 35).

at least from the perspective of the *Skandapurāṇa*, is that he is a devotee of Śiva²⁰² and knows, for example, the mandatory rites at the victory of a battle²⁰³. In other words, Hiraṇyākṣa is a good Śaiva king. The Asura-slaying Varāha myth in HV App. 1 No. 42 does not characterize Hiraṇyākṣa as a *dharmic* king, nor do later Purāṇas. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers probably added this new component because they believe that no matter what creature—god, human or Asura—every king should follow the *rājadharmā*, “rules for a king”, which includes taking care of one’s subjects. The Varāha myth has several other parallels with routines of kings on earth as well. For example, the way in which Hiraṇyākṣa conquered the universe, *viz.* by taking over the most important places and assigning his own people to important ruling posts, resembles a king’s *digvijaya*, “conquest of the directions”. Even though Hiraṇyākṣa is an Asura, who should follow the *dharma* of the Asuras, he should also adhere to the *dharma* of a king²⁰⁴.

2.4.2 Hypothesis

The parallels show both differences and similarities. On the one hand, the parallels appear in two different narratives, there are no verbatim parallels, and there is some variation in the narration of the identified narrative elements. On the other hand, the overlap of the narrative elements constituting the *devāsura* war, as well as the correspondences in structure nevertheless suggest some form of relationship between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B. I would like to propose two possible explanations of this complex combination of differences and correspondences, and hence two possible relationships between the two texts.

²⁰² For example, Hiraṇyākṣa practices *tapas* for the sake of a son, by meditating upon Śiva (SP 73.68); and as part of the festival to celebrate the Asuras’ victory, Hiraṇyākṣa orders his subjects to worship Śiva and offer him various sorts of offerings and presents (SP 75.31a—d).

²⁰³ For example, in SP 75.26, Hiraṇyākṣa orders that “Brahmins must be fed and everywhere Vedic recitations and proclamations of an auspicious day must be made” (SP Vol. IV, 63).

²⁰⁴ Likewise, Asura priests have to navigate between the *dharma* of the Asuras and the *dharma* of their position, as Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty has shown in *The Origin of Evil in Hindu Mythology*. “In Vedic times, the demon priests follow their *svadharmā* [“own *dharma*”] as priests rather than demons [...]. Finally, in the bhakti myths, the demon priest acts either as priest (advising the demon devotee to worship the god) or demon (advising the demon devotee to try to destroy the god)” (O’Flaherty 1976/1988, 99).

A case of direct intertextuality would be most straightforward. This seems to be the situation for the final scene of the main story of the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B and in the *Skandapurāṇa*, as argued in section 2.3. The texts are, in other words, closely related to each other, and the *Skandapurāṇa* composers seem to have known the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B. If we would accept a similar relationship for the *devāsura* wars studied in section 2.4, then the differences should be understood as the *Skandapurāṇa* composers' tendency not to copy passages verbatim but to tell them in their own characteristic style.

Although this possibility cannot be ruled out, especially since there are more parallels between the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa*, there is a second option which fits the situation better. For this possibility, the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth should be brought into the discussion because this myth has the same complex situation of some significant differences, as well as similarities in structure. The differences concern the repetition of some of the narrative elements and the exclusion of two of the ten identified components: the *yuddhayajña* and Agni's intervention. The similarities, on the other hand, are found in the structuring of the war narrative and in the inclusion of two of the three (relatively) unique parallel components: the *anukramaṇikā* and the corresponding duels. With the presence of these two elements in the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth, the total number of myths that include them adds up to three. Not only that, the total number of groups of composers adds up to three as well. After all, based on the usage of particular formulaic phrases and other features, the editors of SP Vol. IV have argued that the part where the Varāha myth appears was probably composed by a different (group of) composers than the part of the *Skandapurāṇa* where the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth occurs, *viz.* in the Vindhyavāsīnī cycle²⁰⁵ (SP Vol. IV, 23, see note 135 for other arguments for this hypothesis). In other words, the relatively unique *anukramaṇikā* and the corresponding duels appear in three different narratives, composed by three different groups of people, at three different moments.

²⁰⁵ I have adopted the terms “cycle” and “myth cycle” from the critical editions of the *Skandapurāṇa*, where it is used “in a loose sense to indicate a more or less complete narrative unit that centres around a main character or group of characters with a storyline that has a beginning and an end. Individual cycles may be included in other cycles” (SP Vol. IV, 3 note 1). The Vindhyavāsīnī cycle covers SP 34.1—61 and SP 53—69 and narrates multiple myths. For an overview of the narratives included, see SP Vol. III, 5—9.

If we would, then, conjecture a case of direct intertextuality, we would have to assume a situation in which two war narratives are modelled after one, or that one narrative influenced the others. I find this scenario too speculative and propose an alternative situation, in which the three groups of composers belonged to the same literary milieu, drawing upon the same pool of narratives, using the same language, and employing the same compositional techniques. One of these compositional techniques may have included a format on how to describe a war narrative, including what kind of narrative elements could be used for a war description and the order that would be suitable for these individual components. The status of a format, readily available for Purāṇa composers, could explain why there are both similarities and differences between the three narratives. On the one hand, a format provides composers with guidelines—thus explaining the corresponding elements, such as war preparations, an *anukramaṇikā* and the announcement of the winner—as well as room for modifications—thus explaining the differences in the final decision on choice and order of narrative elements.

2.5 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to explore how the *Skandapurāṇa* relates to the epic-Purāṇic tradition that retells Viṣṇu's manifestation myths, for which I have referred to different forms of intertextuality. Looking at the general storyline, the *Skandapurāṇa* generally follows the majority of texts and hereby places itself in the midst of a vibrant epic-Purāṇic landscape. The Varāha myth forms an exception, since the *Skandapurāṇa* does not tell the cosmogonic version of the myth but its Asura-slaying version. Although the latter must have been known by other epic and Purāṇic composers, based on references to this event in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*, the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42) and the *Skandapurāṇa* are the first to tell the story in full.

The *Harivaṃśa* is furthermore the text with which the *Skandapurāṇa* shows the closest parallels, one of them possibly being a case of direct intertextuality. The *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B share some remarkable details in the final scene of the main story of the Vāmana myth. When Viṣṇu has stridden across the universe and has returned the kingdom to Indra, both texts tell that at some point, Bali is released from

his ties. Although the binding itself is present throughout the epic and Purāṇic corpus²⁰⁶, I found Bali's liberation only in the *Skandapurāṇa*, HV App. 1 No. 42B and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Since the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is later than the other two texts, it is less relevant for the present study. The similarities between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B, on the other hand, are all the more significant. There are some striking parallels in word choice and composition. This suggests a case of direct intertextuality, in which the final scene in the *Skandapurāṇa* seem to have been modelled on the one in HV App. 1 No. 42B.

The other parallel between the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B that has been discussed in detail concerns the *devāsura* war of the Varāha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *devāsura* war of the Vāmana myth in HV App. 1 No. 42B. Since these war narratives do not only show striking similarities in the order and choice of narrative elements, but also some undeniable differences, I have argued that this does not point to direct intertextuality. Rather, the composers of these texts belonged to the same literary milieu, having, among others, the same compositional techniques at their disposal; one of these being a format on how to compose and order a war narrative.

I have drawn a similar conclusion in the case of Hiranyakaśipu's boon in the Narasiṃha myth. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, the boon contains a loophole. Even though some other Purāṇas likewise include a loophole, none of these represent the same situation as the *Skandapurāṇa*. Instead, Hiranyakaśipu's boon shows close parallels with the boons of other Asuras in other narratives in both the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. This type of intertextuality with narratives other than the one in question shows that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers shared a stylistic repertoire with other epic-Purāṇic composers.

I have furthermore identified cases of intertextuality where the epic-Purāṇic genre must be considered as "the source text". Two narrative elements that show this kind of intertextuality appear in the final scene of the main story of the Vāmana myth, just before Bali is released from his ties. At this point in the story, the *Skandapurāṇa* recounts at least two widespread components. First, Bali is sent to Pātāla. This narrative component is

²⁰⁶ Since Bali's binding is so widespread among the epics and the Purāṇas, I have argued that this is a form of intertextuality with the epic-Purāṇic genre as "the source text". More examples of this type of intertextuality are given below.

found in almost all retellings, from the epics to the late Purāṇas, and is therefore considered a case of intertextuality with the epic-Purāṇic genre as the source text. Second, Bali's exile to Pātāla is said to be limited to the current era. When the next era comes, he is free to attempt another conquest of the universe. This element is widespread in the Purāṇas, be it mainly in Purāṇas that postdate the *Skandapurāṇa*. The only other early text that includes this element is HV App. 1 No. 42B. I have argued that since the element is so widespread, it may have been known at the time of the *Skandapurāṇa* and HV App. 1 No. 42B already, which makes it another case of intertextuality with the Purāṇic genre as the source text.

Finally, the origin of the remarkable representation of the Boar manifestation in the *Skandapurāṇa* is more complex. On the one hand, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers followed other Purāṇas with regard to their description of the Boar's limbs, *viz.* each limb is connected to an external element. There is, in other words, intertextuality with the epic-Purāṇic genre as "the source text". The specification of Varāha's limbs in the *Skandapurāṇa*, as well as the elements connected to them, reveal, however, that we are not dealing with a Yajñavarāha, as in other Purāṇas, but with a Naravarāha. This qualification is relatively new in a textual context, and I have argued that the component has been modelled after the Narasiṃha myth because there are striking similarities between Hiranyakaśipu's boon and Viṣṇu's solution to become a Narasiṃha on the one hand, and Hiranyākṣa's prophecy at birth and Viṣṇu's solution to become a Naravarāha on the other. Besides this textual explanation, I also identified several other explanations for the origin of a Man-Boar. First of all, the Asura-slaying Naravarāha may be an attempt to align him with other Asura-slaying manifestations of Viṣṇu that are generally (semi-)human, instead of animals. Second, the most frequent iconographic representation of the Boar is anthropomorphic, and it seems but a small step to create a textual anthropomorphic Boar. Third, although HV App. 1 No. 42 does not explicitly call the Asura-slaying Varāha a Naravarāha, it makes a clear distinction between the Asura-slaying Varāha and the cosmogonic Yajñavarāha, just as the *Skandapurāṇa*.

To conclude, the *Skandapurāṇa* is positioned in the middle of a vast landscape of epics and Purāṇas that tell and retell Viṣṇu's manifestation myths. The composers of the text were certainly familiar with other texts and display a special relationship with the

Harivaṃśa (in particular HV App. 1 No. 42B). In the current chapter, I have focussed on parallels with other texts and the possible origins of certain narrative elements in order to determine the position of the *Skandapurāṇa* in the literary landscape of its time. In the next chapter, however, I will examine the retellings in full swing, taking into account not only the preservations in the *Skandapurāṇa* retellings of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths, but also the changes and innovations.