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

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muktvainaṃ daityarājānaṃ cakreṇa vinisūdaya |
māheśvareṇa vaikunṭha tato mṛtyum avāpsyati ||

“Having let him go, you should kill the king of the Daityas
with Maheśvara’s [“the Great Lord’s”, i.e. Śiva’s] *cakra*,
oh Vaikuṇṭha, so that he will find death.”

Skandapurāṇa 107.23

3 Limits to the permissible: Viṣṇu in the *Skandapurāṇa*

Viṣṇu the king. Viṣṇu the preserver. Viṣṇu the sage. Viṣṇu the sacrifice. Viṣṇu the saviour. These are just some of the numerous characterizations of Viṣṇu. In the manifestation myths, he is the saviour *in optima forma*. He rescues the earth, the universe and the gods from evil, and restores the cosmic order. In the *Skandapurāṇa*, he has this role as well and is successful in his task. This is, however, not the only characterization in the text. Viṣṇu’s portrait is a complex combination of having great success and needing serious help. On the one hand, Viṣṇu is the great saviour who kills the king of the Daityas who has become too powerful and has taken control of the universe. He returns the power over the universe to Indra and is lauded for this great deed. On the other hand, to reach this point, he needs to be empowered by the gods in general and by Śiva in particular.

This is just one of the transformations that Viṣṇu has undergone in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Many of these changes maintain, however, a key element that Viṣṇu is known for, just as in the saviour example. It is, for instance, Viṣṇu’s *cakra*, his standard attribute, that kills Hiranyākṣa. At the same time, we learn that the *cakra* is in fact Śiva’s. And although Narasiṃha needs just one slap of his claw to kill Hiranyakaśipu, Śiva is not the least hurt by that very same claw when he is hit. Moreover, whereas the manifestation myths are entirely about Viṣṇu, he is also structurally presented as a devotee of Śiva. And when Viṣṇu is eulogized by the gods at the moment he assumes the form of Varāha, they use a remarkably large number of Śiva-related epithets. In other words, the *Skandapurāṇa* presents an intricate combination of known and new elements, a balance between Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva characteristics.

This combination can be explained with the help of a narrative technique that I call “narrative consistency”, inspired by the narratological theory of “the unreliable narrator”²⁰⁷. What I mean by narrative consistency is that composers attempt to write a narrative that is in line with what is already told in the narrative itself, with the rest of the text (such as its ideology, its characterization of figures, and its ideal universe), with fixed knowledge (about the story itself and its main characters), and with literary conventions²⁰⁸. I have conceptualized these different types of consistency into a fourfold categorization, which has been adapted from an article on the unreliable narrator by Per Krogh Hansen, ‘Reconsidering the unreliable narrator’ (2007)²⁰⁹. Each category is employed in this

²⁰⁷ The concept of “the unreliable narrator” was coined by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. According to Booth, a narrator is “*reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not” (Booth 1961, 158—59). In other words, this definition entails the consistency between statements of the narrator (i.e. “the one who narrates as inscribed in a text. [...] Distinct from the author or implied author” (McQuillan 2000, 325)) and statements or the discourse of the rest of the work. For an overview of scholarship on the (un)reliable narrator, see Shen 2011/2013.

²⁰⁸ The subject and object of my research differs from those in the theory of the unreliable narrator. If I would study the narratologist’s *narrator* and *narration* (i.e. that which is narrated by the narrator), then Sanatkumāra and that which he narrates to Vyāsa would be the subject. However, since I am interested in the narrative techniques and motives of the anonymous composers of the text, instead of the narration by a fictional narrator, I study the *composers* (viz. the *Skandapurāṇa* composers) and the *narrative* (viz. Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths of Narasimha, Varāha and Vāmana).

Another deviation concerns what is put to the test. Instead of testing the *Skandapurāṇa* composers’ *unreliability*, I rather test their *consistency* for reasons of objectivity. Whereas (un)reliability can be subjective (after all, who is reliable and who is not may be judged differently), consistency is verifiable with actual textual records within the text itself and other texts. Moreover, by examining the *consistency* of the *Skandapurāṇa* composers, instead of their *inconsistency*, I take a positive approach to the topic, assuming that the composers were not intentionally creating inconsistencies. In fact, it is not unlikely that during the composition of the text, an “editor-in-chief” (Bakker 2014, 16) was assigned to guarantee “the unity of literary style and the quality of the Sanskrit, but this could not prevent minor differences remaining. He also took great care that the arrangement of stories, the complex narrative structure of the text, remained consistent and logical” (ibid.).

²⁰⁹ According to Hansen, a narrator can become unreliable on four different levels: intranarrational, internarrational, intertextual and extratextual (Hansen 2007, 241). A narrator is unreliable on the *intranarrational* level, when there are internal contradictions in his narration. A narrator is unreliable *internarrationally*, when his account is in contrast with an earlier version he narrated or with the account of another narrator (ibid, 241—42). Both levels of unreliability “rest on textually observable issues, which are manifested as conflict. They are therefore both to be considered as intratextual relations” (ibid, 242). The other two categories consider matters outside the text itself. There is *intertextual* unreliability when the narrator himself is described in such a way that the audience immediately becomes alerted whether the narrator is reliable or not, based on what they know from other texts about this character type. Expectation and knowledge about a typical (stereotyped) character are key in this sub-category (ibid, for a study on such “character-narrators”,

chapter to explain why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers made certain choices in their portrayal of Viṣṇu in the manifestation myths.

1. There is *intranarrational* consistency, when Viṣṇu's depiction in a particular text passage is in line with his depiction elsewhere in the manifestation myth. Since we may expect the *Skandapurāṇa* composers to generally present a consistent image of Viṣṇu within one narrative, I will only deal with intranarrational consistency when it displays the hand of the composers and demonstrates their skills and ambitions, or when it contributes to understanding a new characterization.
2. *Internarrational* consistency arises when particular characterizations agree with those in other narratives or reflect the text's ideology. For example, there is internarrational consistency on the narrative level, when specific aspects of Viṣṇu's character are consistent with what is told elsewhere in the text; and there is internarrational consistency on the ideological level, when an alteration of Viṣṇu's character agrees with the Śaiva ideology of the *Skandapurāṇa*.
3. There is *intertextual* consistency when the *Skandapurāṇa* composers adopt features of Viṣṇu that are well-known from other texts and intrinsically linked to his personality. These features do not only cover Viṣṇu's characteristics or appearance, but also topics like his preferred weaponry and how he kills his main opponent²¹⁰.
4. When a narrative element cannot be found in the *Skandapurāṇa* itself (intranarrational or internarrational), nor in another retelling (intertextual), it may still be consistent on the *extratextual* level. "[E]xtratextual frames of

see Riggan 1981). Finally, a narrator is unreliable on the *extratextual* level, when his "values or knowledge in the textual world" do not correspond with the reader's (ibid, 243). Whether the narrator is reliable or not is not based on the text itself, but on factors transcending the text. It is often the case, Hansen concludes, that two or more types coincide in one text and that combinations are made (ibid, 243—44).

²¹⁰ This category supplements the study of intertextuality in chapter 2. Whereas the focus of chapter 2 was on the relationship between the *Skandapurāṇa* and other texts, the focus of this chapter is why intertextual consistency is important.

reference”, as Ansgar Nünning calls it in a study on the unreliable narrator (Nünning 1999, 66), include general world-knowledge, cultural codes and moral norms, but also literary conventions and conventions of literary genres (ibid, 67—68)²¹¹.

To test the *Skandapurāṇa* composers’ narrative consistency and to explain the choices for Viṣṇu’s representation, I study five characteristics of Viṣṇu along this four-fold categorization. First, I examine the fact that Viṣṇu is the saviour, but at the same time needs the other gods to help him conquer the Asuras (3.1); then, I study the fact that Viṣṇu’s primary weapon, the *cakra*, is, in fact, Śiva’s *cakra* (3.2); thereafter, I focus on the fact that Viṣṇu’s weapons are powerful enough to kill the Asura king, but do not triumph in a battle against Śiva or Śiva’s attendants (3.3); then, I lay out the fact that Viṣṇu is a devotee of Śiva (3.4); and finally, I examine the fact that Viṣṇu is praised by the gods with a long eulogy including carefully selected epithets (3.5). In the conclusions (3.6), I will turn to the question what goal the different types of narrative consistency have, in particular the combinations of internarrational and intertextual consistency.

3.1 The saviour who needs to be saved

The first characterization of Viṣṇu concerns the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth. In these myths, the *Skandapurāṇa* presents a combination of factors. On the one hand, Viṣṇu helps the gods by defeating the Asuras, and on the other hand, he needs the gods to help him.

The first component of the combination is consistent on different levels. First of all, Viṣṇu’s portrayal as the saviour, who triumphs over the Asuras, is known from other sources and is thus intertextually consistent. The fact that Narasiṃha and Varāha conquer the Asuras in general and Hiraṇyakaśipu and Hiraṇyākṣa in particular is a fixed part of the storylines, and the fact that it is Viṣṇu who fights the Asuras and slays their king is

²¹¹ I follow Hansen in applying Nünning’s definition of extratextuality to this fourth category. It should be noted, however, that Nünning himself does not make a fourfold division. Instead, he distinguishes between “innertextual signals [of reliability... and] extratextual frames of reference in his or her [i.e. the reader’s] attempt to gauge the narrator’s potential degree of unreliability” (Nünning 1999, 66).

one of his standard characterizations²¹². This portrayal also fits the *Skandapurāṇa*, for in each myth where Viṣṇu has the leading part, he has the task of fighting the Asuras and he is successful in it²¹³. It is, in other words, also consistent on the internarrational level if we look at the content of Viṣṇu's narratives in the *Skandapurāṇa*. It is furthermore consistent on the internarrational level if we take the text's ideology into account, for the characterization matches the Śaiva universe as it is presented in the *Skandapurāṇa*. In sections 1.2 and 1.2.1, I have shown that in this universe, the gods generally keep the role that they are known for and execute the great (cosmic) tasks that they also have in other texts. Just as Indra remains the king of the gods and Brahmā is the creator of the universe, Viṣṇu likewise maintains the role as saviour of the gods, being the true Asura-slayer²¹⁴.

The second component of the combination, viz. that Viṣṇu needs the gods to help him in return, is a new element, introduced by the *Skandapurāṇa* composers. It is part of a larger idea that Viṣṇu is dependent on the other gods, which has far-reaching consequences: we are presented with a new image of Viṣṇu, one in which Viṣṇu needs the gods so badly that without their help, he would not even succeed in conquering the Asuras. Before I demonstrate how Viṣṇu's dependency fits in the *Skandapurāṇa* from an ideological level, I will first concretize how Viṣṇu's dependency is given shape in the narratives themselves. The sort of help that Viṣṇu receives in the main story of the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth can be divided into two groups, each having their own origins and interpretations²¹⁵.

The first type is found in the Varāha myth, where Viṣṇu physically needs to be revived several times during his battle with Hiranyākṣa. The first instance occurs immediately after Hiranyākṣa's very first attack on Varāha with bow and arrow (SP 105.24). When Varāha is hit by arrows, "he stood paralyzed" (*vistabdhaḥ samatiṣṭhata*, SP 105.25d). The gods come to the rescue, releasing him from the arrows by using special

²¹² See sections 2.1 and 2.2 for references to Sanskrit texts that narrate the manifestation myths of Narasiṃha and Varāha.

²¹³ See section 1.3 for an overview of the myths in which Viṣṇu is the main character.

²¹⁴ This task is furthermore narratively explained in the afterlife of Narasiṃha, when Viṣṇu receives the boon of *daityaghna*, "slaying Daityas" (SP 70.72b). See section 4.2.1 for a study of this boon.

²¹⁵ In this chapter, I focus on Viṣṇu's dependency within the main story of the manifestation myths. The most extreme form of dependency is, however, found in the afterlives of Viṣṇu's manifestations, where Viṣṇu needs Śiva to leave his manifested form and become Viṣṇu again. This will be discussed in section 4.1.

mantras (SP 105.26—27)²¹⁶. The other cases have a similar construction: when Varāha is bound by Nāgas, he is liberated by Garuḍa (SP 105.32)²¹⁷; when he is struck by Hiranyākṣa’s arrow, he is strengthened by the gods and the sages (SP 105.39—40)²¹⁸; and when he is hit by *moha*, “stupefaction”, he returns to his senses thanks to the gods using *mantras* (SP 106.25)²¹⁹.

In the fifth and final case where Viṣṇu is dependent on the other gods during the battle, it is Śiva himself who empowers Varāha (SP 107.2ff.). When Varāha falls on the ground because Hiranyākṣa’s spear has hit him almost fatally (SP 107.2), Brahmā pays homage to Śiva and calls him to mind (*sasmāra*, 5d). Or perhaps rather he “remembers” (another meaning of the verb *smṛ-*) that earlier, Śiva had promised the gods and the sages, including Brahmā, that his own *tejas*, “energy”, would enter Viṣṇu at the right moment,

²¹⁶ SP 105.26—27:

taṃ stambhitam tadā vyāsa dr̥ṣṭvā devā mahābalaṃ |
viśalyakaraṇair mantrair viśalyam abhicakrire || 26 ||
sa viśalyas tadā devaiḥ kṛto mṛgapatir mahān |
punar vegaṃ mahat kṛtvā jagāma ditijaṃ prati || 27 ||

“Having seen him being paralyzed then, oh Vyāsa, the gods made the very powerful one free from arrow-heads through *mantras* that free someone from arrow-heads. Then the great lord of animals, being made free from arrow-heads by the gods, having made great speed again, went to the son of Diti [i.e. Hiranyākṣa].”

²¹⁷ SP 105.32:

taṃ baddhaṃ vadhyamānaṃ ca patitaṃ nandivardhanaṃ |
garutmān bhujaḡendrebhyaḥ kṣipraṃ eva vyamocayat || 32 ||

“Garuḍa* immediately released Nandivardhana [Varāha]+, who was bound, beaten and had fallen down, from the lords of serpents [i.e. the Nāgas].”

* The fact that Garuḍa frees Varāha from the Nāgas fits Garuḍa’s characterization as Viṣṇu’s loyal assistant and as the enemy of serpents, because he loves to eat them (for references to both characterizations, see Gonda 1954/1969, 101—3).

+ For the usage of Nandivardhana as a name, see note 340.

²¹⁸ SP 105.39—40:

tatas te daivatāḥ sarve ṛṣayaś ca tapodhanāḥ |
tapasā svena taṃ devaṃ sarva evābhyapūrayan || 39 ||
tasya tv āpyāyamānasya ṛṣibhir daivataiś ca ha |
babhau rūpaṃ yugāntāgnikālamṛtyusamaprabham || 40 ||

“Then all the deities and the sages, rich in austerities, all of them, filled the god [i.e. Varāha] with their own *tapas*. And being strengthened by the sages and deities, [Varāha’s] body shone like the fire at the end of a *yuga*, time and death.”

²¹⁹ SP 106.25:

mohaḥ samāviśac caiva taṃ devaṃ nandivardhanaṃ |
devair mantraprabhāvena naṣṭamohaḥ punaḥ kṛtaḥ || 25 ||

“And stupefaction entered god Nandivardhana [Varāha], [but] the stupefaction was again destroyed by the gods through the power of *mantras*.”

so that Viṣṇu would quickly kill Hiranyākṣa (SP 98.30—31)²²⁰. When Brahmā invoked Śiva, the following event takes place.

SP 107.6—7:

tato vitimiram sarvam abhavat pūrvavac chubham |
prakṛtistham jagac cābhūd varāhaś codatiṣṭhata |
tejo māheśvaram divyaṃ viveśa madhusūdanam || 6 ||
so 'pyāyitatanus tena śūlam niṣkṛṣya mādhabaḥ |
sahasrānalasaṃkāśo babhūva sa mahābalaḥ || 7 ||

“Then everything became free from darkness and bright like before, the world reached its natural state, Varāha stood up and Maheśvara’s [“the Great Lord’s”, i.e. Śiva’s] divine *tejas* entered Madhusūdana [“the Slayer of Madhu”, i.e. Viṣṇu]. Mādhaba [i.e. Viṣṇu], whose body was strengthened by it [i.e. Śiva’s *tejas*], having pulled out the spear, immediately became powerful like a thousand fires.”

The strengthening is effective, for Viṣṇu is not harmed anymore after this intervention. However, Śiva’s promise that as soon as his *tejas* would enter Viṣṇu, Viṣṇu would quickly kill Hiranyākṣa, does not come to fruition because the battle continues for many years to come and only then, Varāha kills Hiranyākṣa.

Viṣṇu’s need for help during a battle is found in at least one other myth in the *Skandapurāṇa*. In the battle between Viṣṇu and Prahlaḍa in SP_{Bh} 172, Viṣṇu is unable to conquer Prahlaḍa, so he calls Śiva to mind and praises him. This gives him the strength to

²²⁰ SP 98.30—31:

uktaḥ praṇamya deveśo viṣṇum āpyāyaya prabho |
tejasā svena sarveśa yathā hanyāt suradviṣam || 30 ||
bhagavān uvāca |
tasmin kale sureśānam śārvam tejo 'vyayam harim |
pravekṣyati tato daityam kṣipram eva nihaṃsyati || 31 ||

“Deveśa [“the Lord of the Gods”, i.e. Śiva], having bowed down, was spoken to [by the gods and the sages (SP 98.29cd)]: ‘Oh lord, please strengthen Viṣṇu with your own *tejas*, oh lord of all, so that he shall kill the enemy of the gods.’ The lord said: ‘At the right moment, Śarva’s [i.e. Śiva’s, i.e. my] *tejas* will enter the lord of the gods, the imperishable Hari [i.e. Viṣṇu], then he will quickly kill the Daitya.’”

fight again (SP_{Bh} 172.39cd—45ab). There is, in other words, internarrational consistency for this particular narrative element.

The second type of Viṣṇu's dependency in the main story of the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth is expressed just before Viṣṇu assumes the form of Narasiṃha and Varāha. At that moment, he tells the gods that he cannot kill the king of the Daityas on his own and that he needs their help.

When, in the Narasiṃha myth, the gods go to Viṣṇu to ask him to kill Hiranyakaśipu (SP 71.19—21), Viṣṇu gives the following response (SP 71.23—26)²²¹. He first promises the gods that everything will be fine, but admits, at the same time, that Hiranyakaśipu is extremely strong (SP 71.23). Therefore, the gods should enter his body, so that he becomes *sarvadevamaya*, “consisting of all the gods”, and then he will kill Hiranyakaśipu (SP 71.24). The gods comply with Viṣṇu's request and enter his body (SP 71.25ab). Having made a powerful, awe-inspiring body of a Narasiṃha, Viṣṇu takes off to Hiranyakaśipu's city (SP 71.25cd—26).

The Varāha myth has a very similar construction. When the gods ask Viṣṇu to kill Hiranyākṣa (SP 97.30), the following scene is narrated (SP 97.35—39, SP 98.1)²²². Viṣṇu

²²¹ SP 71.23—26:

evam astu suraśreṣṭhāḥ sarvaṃ kartāsmi vo vacaḥ |
mahābalaḥ sa daityendro yato yuṣmān vadāmy aham || 23 ||
āviśantu bhavanto 'pi śarīraṃ mama suvratāḥ |
sarvadevamayo bhūtvā dṛptaṃ haṃsyāmi vo ripum || 24 ||
tato devās tadā sarve viviśur vaiṣṇavīm tanum |
sa cāpi balavān bhūtvā rūpaṃ kṛtvā bhayānakam || 25 ||
nārasimhaṃ mahātejā nakhadamaṣṭrāvibhīṣaṇam |
jagāma vilasan viṣṇur hiraṇyakaśipoh puram || 26 ||

“23. ‘Let it be so, oh best of gods; I will do everything you said. [However,] the king of Daityas is very strong, therefore, I tell you: 24. you all (*api*) should enter my body, oh very pious ones. Having become consisting of all the gods, I will kill this arrogant enemy of yours.’ 25. As a result then, all the gods entered Viṣṇu's body. And he, being empowered, having made the terrifying body 26. of a Man-Lion, frightening because of [his] teeth and fangs, the very glorious Viṣṇu playfully went to the city of Hiranyakaśipu.”

²²² SP 97.35—39, SP 98.1:

hataḥ sa daityo durbuddhir devadviḍ vighnakāraḥ |
kriyatām rūpaṃ abhyetya vārāhaṃ mā vicāryatām || 35 ||*
mahātmā sa ca daityendro balavān dhārmikāś ca ha |
na ca śakyo mayaikena hantuṃ satyaṃ bravīmi vaḥ || 36 ||
sarvadevamayaṃ rūpaṃ vārāhaṃ nandivardhanam |
tat samāsthāya hantāsmi daityendraṃ taṃ mahābalaṃ || 37 ||
tena rūpeṇa sarveṣāṃ yuṣmākaṃ devasattamāḥ |
mahīm śakyaṃ punas tasmād ihānayitum ojasā || 38 ||

first tells the gods that they should kill the evil Daitya, after having created a boar-form (SP 97.35). The reason for Viṣṇu's request is that Hiraṇyākṣa is so powerful and virtuous that he cannot kill him on his own (SP 97.36). However, once Viṣṇu will consist of all the gods, being thus empowered, he will be able to kill the enemy of the gods (SP 97.37—39)²²³. The gods act accordingly and make Varāha's body (SP 98.1), by taking their

*yuṣmadarthe tam adyāhaṃ dānavaṃ dharmapālinam |
vadhīṣyāmi yathā siṃhaṃ śarabhaḥ sumahābalaḥ || 39 ||
[...]*jatha te suraśārdūlās tasya rūpaṃ pracakrire |
viśvakarmāṇaṃ ādāya brahmāṇaṃ lokakāraṇaṃ |
saptalokamayaṃ tasya śarīraṃ cakrur īśvarāḥ || 1 ||**

“35. ‘After having obtained a boar-form, you should kill [lit. “you should make dead” (*hataḥ* [...]*kriyatām*)] the evil Daitya, the enemy of the gods, the creator of obstructions; do not hesitate. 36. This lord of Daityas is great, strong and virtuous, and it is not possible to kill [him] on my own, to tell you the truth. 37. Having assumed this boar-form, consisting of all the gods, increasing joy, I will kill the very strong lord of Daityas. 38. With this body and with the strength of all of you, oh best of gods, it will be possible to bring the earth back here from him/ it [i.e. Rasātala]. 39. For your sake, I will kill this Dānava, the protector of *dharma*, today, just like a very strong Śarabha [kills] a lion.’+ [...] 98.1. Then the tiger-like gods made his [i.e. Viṣṇu's] body. Together with Brahmā, the creator of the world, as the architect, the lords [i.e. the gods] made his body, consisting of the seven worlds.”

* The manuscript evidence for *rūpaṃ abhyetya* is poor, because none of the oldest Nepalese manuscripts, given the siglum S in the critical editions of the *Skandapurāṇa*, can be consulted for this passage due to the loss of several folios, and the R and A manuscripts give different readings. For a short discussion on the manuscript transmission and other possibilities for the passage, see SP Vol. V, forth. For an overview of the available manuscripts, divided into three recensions (Nepalese (S), Revākhaṇḍa (R) and Ambikākhaṇḍa (A)), their script, dating and location of production and preservation, see SP Vol. I, 31—38 and SP Vol. IIA, 10—12.

+ This is a beautiful comparison because Viṣṇu himself was defeated in the form of Narasiṃha by Śiva in the form of a Śarabha in the afterlife episode of the Narasiṃha myth (see section 4.1.1 for an analysis of Narasiṃha's afterlife as well as more information on the Śarabha).

²²³ The fact that the gods' entering is a prerequisite to kill the king of the Daityas is supported by two statements uttered by Hiraṇyākṣa in the Varāha myth. First, in SP 104.54ab, Hiraṇyākṣa says that “out of fear for me, this Varāha is steered by all the gods” (*madbhayāt sa varāhaś ca sarvadevair adhiṣṭhitah*). Then, in SP 106.15, he expresses his disdain again, by making the difference between Varāha and him explicit. Varāha had to resort to the gods (and is, therefore, considered weak) and Hiraṇyākṣa can rely on his own strength (and is, therefore, considered strong).

SP 106.15:

*tvaṃ lokamayaṃ āsthāya śarīraṃ tair adhiṣṭhitam |
sarvair āpyāyitāś caiva saṃyuge mām upāgataḥ |
ahaṃ tu svena tapasā balena ca samanvitaḥ || 15 ||*

“You, having resorted to a body that consists of the world[s], being steered by them [i.e. the gods], and being strengthened by all of them, have approached me in battle; I, on the other hand, am furnished with my own *tapas* and power.”

positions in his limbs (SP 98.2—19)²²⁴. The result is a powerful, awe-inspiring body, as becomes clear later in the story, when the Asuras Prahlāda (SP 100.54)²²⁵ and Vipracitti (SP 104.40)²²⁶ separately warn Hiranyākṣa about this unnatural Boar.

The passages do not only show great similarity in structure, but also in the implementation of the concept of *sarvadevamaya*. Whereas, as I will show below, the concept is widely known from other sources as a positive character trait of various entities—from Narasiṃha to Śiva’s chariot—the way in which it is used in the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* is new and unique. Namely, as I will also demonstrate below, in these passages, an exceptional connection is made between Narasiṃha and Varāha being *sarvadevamaya* (i.e. a sign of strength) and them being otherwise unable to kill their enemies (i.e. a sign of weakness).

First of all, there are many examples of *sarvadevamaya* in other texts, where the compound has a positive meaning. It is sometimes applied to gods, such as Viṣṇu²²⁷ and Śiva²²⁸, and sometimes to other entities, such as Śiva’s chariot in the Tripura myth²²⁹.

²²⁴ The gods’ entering is described in SP 98.2—18, where each limb is connected to a god, natural element or sacrificial element, as shown in section 2.2.

²²⁵ SP 100.54:

*yādṛśaṃ tad varāhasya tasya rūpaṃ tvayā śrutam |
sarvadevamayaṃ rājan varāho ’prākṛto mataḥ || 54 ||*

“In as much as this body of this Boar has been heard about by you [namely, as] consisting of all the gods, oh king, the Boar is considered unnatural.”

²²⁶ SP 104.40:

*tasyāṅge munayaḥ sarve dṛśyante saha devataiḥ |
kṛtyā seti mataṃ me ’dya tava hetor vinirmitā || 40 ||*

“All the sages, together with the deities, are seen in his limb[s]. Now I think: ‘this is sorcery, created for your sake [i.e. for the sake of your destruction].’”

²²⁷ For example, MBh 6.61.54—56 is an enumeration of Viṣṇu’s body parts, which are identified with gods. His two feet are the goddess earth, his arms are the cardinal directions, his head is heaven (MBh 6.61.54ab), his ears are the two Aśvins, his tongue is the goddess Sarasvatī (MBh 6.61.56ab), etcetera.

²²⁸ For instance, in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, a eulogy of the 1008 names of Śiva (MBh 13.17.30—150ab) includes: *sahasramūrdhā devendraḥ sarvadevamayo guruḥ*, “the one having 1000 heads, the lord of the gods, the one consisting of all the gods, the master” (MBh 13.17.129ab). Since a *nāmastotra* is by definition an act of worship, *sarvadevamaya* should be interpreted as a venerable epithet (for a definition and overview of sources of *nāmastotras* and other eulogies, see Stainton 2010). In a hymn in the *Skandapurāṇa*, Śiva is also called *sarvadevamaya* (SP 28.54).

²²⁹ For example, in the *Mahābhārata* version of the Tripura myth, the gods make a chariot for Śiva that he can use during the battle for Tripura (MBh 8.24.67—76). Each part of the chariot is a divine being or an element on earth. For instance, the sun and the moon become the chariot’s two wheels (MBh 8.24.71ab) and the lords of Nāgas become its pole (MBh 8.24.72ab). Although the word

Even Narasiṃha's body occasionally consists of all the gods because the gods have taken their positions in his limbs. In one of the Narasiṃha retellings in the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42A ll. 199—214)²³⁰, for example, it is said that when Prahlāda sees Narasiṃha, he warns Hiranyakaśipu that such a Man-Lion has never been seen before. Prahlāda says that “the gods, as well as the oceans and rivers reside in his [i.e. Narasiṃha's] body” (*asya devāḥ śarīrasthāḥ sāgarāḥ saritas tathā*, HV App. 1 No. 42A l. 207) and he enumerates a long list of other entities inhabiting Narasiṃha's body (HV App. 1 No. 42A ll. 208—214), like gods (such as Kubera and Paśupati), creatures (such as Gandharvas and Nāgas), natural phenomena (such as the Himavat and other mountains) and other items (such as sacrifices and desire). Although Narasiṃha is not literally qualified as *sarvadevamaya*, the concept is certainly there, as is its positive meaning. Since Prahlāda sees the entire universe residing in Narasiṃha's body, he tries to convince Hiranyakaśipu that the form is divine and terrifying, and will be the Daityas' destruction (HV App. 1 No. 42A ll. 205—6). In other words, the fact that Narasiṃha is made up of all the gods is a sign of strength and extraordinary power.

This positive connotation of *sarvadevamaya* also finds expression in the *Skandapurāṇa*. For example, in the story of how Vṛṣabha, “the Bull”, became Śiva's vehicle, it is told that all the gods “took up their own positions and Śiva became the owner of the bull” (*jagmuḥ svāni kṣayāni sma devo 'pi vṛṣavān babhau*, SP 33.116cd). Each deity then resorted to a limb of Vṛṣabha (SP 33.117—28)²³¹. The concluding verse describes the final positive result: Vṛṣabha became endowed with the highest supremacy and consisting of all the gods (SP 33.129)²³². What is particularly interesting about this

sarvadevamaya is not used here, the concept is the same. The *Skandapurāṇa* follows the *Mahābhārata* version of the Tripura myth closely and also includes a passage on the chariot's arrangement. Here, it is made explicit that the gods made a chariot that is *sarvadevamaya* (SP_{Bh} 169.19c, 27c) because the gods (such as Indra and Agni), the Vasus, the Rudras, the season, the months, etcetera are arranged in the chariot (SP_{Bh} 169.20—26).

²³⁰ The *Matsyapurāṇa* and the *Padmapurāṇa Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* share the same passage almost verbatim (MtP 162.2—9 and PdP *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* 42.85—92).

²³¹ For instance, “Brahmā resorted to his head” (*brahmā mūrdhānam āśritaḥ*, SP 33.117d) and “Varuṇa [was] in his tongue” (*jihvāyāṃ tasya varuṇo*, SP 33.118a).

²³² SP 33.129:

*evaṃ sa bhagavān devaḥ paramaiśvaryasaṃyutaḥ |
saurabheyo mahādevaḥ sarvadevamayo 'bhavat ||*

“This is how this son of Surabhī became master, god, endowed with the highest supremacy, the great god, consisting of all the gods.”

example is that there is a possible explanation why Vṛṣabha is entered by the gods. In the verses preceding the gods' entering (SP 33.114), Śiva created a Gaṇeśa (lit. "Lord of Gaṇas", an assistant of Śiva)²³³ called Prabhākara and ordered him: "you must contain the Bull's impetuosity" (SP Vol. IIB, 64). Even though it is not explicitly stated how Prabhākara followed Śiva's command, the entering of the gods could be his solution to control Vṛṣabha²³⁴. What the Bull had too much, Narasiṃha and Varāha had too little: strength and power.

This brings us to the unique situation in the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers reworked this well-known concept of *sarvadevamaya* as strictly a sign of strength into a characterization that has an additional sign of weakness of Viṣṇu. Without the gods' entering, Viṣṇu would not be able to complete his task. He is thus presented as dependent on the gods. Whereas the positive outcome of being *sarvadevamaya* is consistent on the intertextual (and internarrational) level, the "negative" reason to become *sarvadevamaya* is consistent on the intranarrational level. After all, the portrayal agrees with the rest of the *Skandapurāṇa* from the perspective of the content of various narratives. I have already shown other cases in which Viṣṇu needs the gods in general and Śiva in particular during battles (both in the battle between Varāha and Hiraṇyākṣa and in the battle between Viṣṇu and Prahlāda), and I will show Viṣṇu's dependency on Śiva during the afterlives of his manifestations in section 4.1.

With this new interpretation of *sarvadevamaya*, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers are not only consistent on the internarrational level from the perspective of the narratives, but also from the perspective of the ideology of the text. Viṣṇu's dependency gives expression to the text's belief that Śiva is the highest god and superior to everybody, including Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu may still be the heroic and successful Asura-slayer in the manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa*, there are several moments in the story that he desperately needs the other gods. The examples given so far mainly concern Viṣṇu's dependency on the gods

²³³ The Gaṇas, Gaṇeśas, Gaṇapas ("Protectors of Gaṇas") and Gaṇeśvaras ("Lords of Gaṇas") are classes of beings who are Śiva's attendants.

²³⁴ Alternatively, there are some *pādas* lost, in which it is narrated how Prabhākara fulfilled Śiva's command. This could then also explain why the transition from Śiva's command to the gods' entering does not run smoothly (SP Vol. IIB, 19). However, according to the editors of this part of the text, "there is no trace in any of the MSS [i.e. manuscripts]" (ibid, 64 note 206) of a possible loss of *pādas*.

in general, and to a lesser degree on Śiva. However, Śiva's help in the battle between Varāha and Hiranyākṣa is just a tip of the iceberg of his role in the manifestation myths for the success of Viṣṇu, as will become clear in this and the next chapter.

3.2 From Viṣṇu's *cakra* to Maheśvara's *cakra*

The second characterization concerns Viṣṇu's weapon, the *cakra*, "discus". At least by the times of the *Mahābhārata*, the *cakra* is identified as one of Viṣṇu's weapons²³⁵. It is generally described as a fiery weapon²³⁶, adorned with one thousand spokes²³⁷. It is also known to always return to its owner, as expressed in one of the origin stories of the *cakra* in the *Mahābhārata*. At the moment that Agni gives the *cakra* to Kṛṣṇa, he tells that it will return to his hand, every time he has thrown it at his enemies (MBh 1.216.24)²³⁸.

The *cakra* is also the weapon that Varāha uses in his war against Hiranyākṣa. One of the first texts that incorporated this element is the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42).

²³⁵ In his book *Viṣṇu's Flaming Wheel*, Wayne Edison Begley argues that in the Vedas, the *cakra* belonged to Indra instead of Viṣṇu (Begley 1973, 8). Although not all provided references are convincing (such as RV 2.11.20cd, cf. the translation by Brereton and Jamison 2014, vol. 1: 415), RV 8.96.9 seems indeed to connect Indra not only with his *vajra*, "thunderbolt", but also with the *cakra*.

RV 8.96.9:

tigmām āyudham marūtām ānīkam kās ta indra prāti vājraṃ dadharṣa |
anāyudhāso āsurā adevās cakreṇa tāṃ āpa vāpa rjīṣin || 9 ||

"[Maruts:] "Sharp is the weapon, the vanguard of the Maruts. (And) who dares venture against your mace, Indra? The lords lacking gods are weapon-less. With your wheel [=discus?] scatter them, possessor of the silvery drink" (translation by Brereton and Jamison 2014, vol. 2: 1201; the additions in round and square brackets are the translators').

²³⁶ For example, MBh 3.23.32:

rūpaṃ sudarśanasyāsīd ākāśe patatas tadā |
dvitīyasyeva sūryasya yugānte pariviśyataḥ || 32 ||

"And the shape of Sudarśana [*cakra*] as it flew in the sky was that of the haloed sun at the end of the Eon" (translation by Van Buitenen 1975, 266).

²³⁷ For example, HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 566—67:

ataś candrapratīkāśaṃ so 'grhṇāc chaṅkham uttamam | 566 |
sahasrārāṃ ca tac cakram cakraparvatasamsthitaṃ || 567 ||

"Then he [i.e. Varāha] took the great conch, which resembles the moon, and that *cakra*, which is thousand-spoked and resembles Mount Cakra."

²³⁸ MBh 1.216.24:

kṣiptaṃ kṣiptaṃ raṇe caitat tvayā mādharma śatruṣu |
hatvāpratihatam samkhye pāṇim eṣyati te punaḥ || 24 ||

"Whenever thou hast hurled it in battle at thy foes, O Mādhava [i.e. Viṣṇu], and hast slain them with it unobstructed, it shall return to thy hand" (translation by Van Buitenen 1973, 417).

HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 599—602:

tato bhagavatā cakram āvidhyād ity asaṃnibham | 599 |

pātitaṃ dānavendrasya śirasy uttamatejasah || 600 ||

tataḥ sthitasyaiva śiras tasya bhūmau papāta ha | 601 |

daityendrasyāśanihataṃ meruśṛṅgam ivottamam || 602 ||

“Then the incomparable *cakra* was thrown at the head of the lord of the Dānavas [i.e. Hiranyākṣa], of great *tejas* [“lustre”], by the lord [i.e. Viṣṇu], thinking: ‘may it pierce [Hiranyākṣa]’. Then the head of that lord of the Daityas standing [there] fell on the ground, like the highest top of [Mount] Meru struck by lightning.”

The *cakra* is also Viṣṇu’s weapon in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Viṣṇu uses the *cakra* in a fight against Kālanemi during the Tārakāmaya war (SP_{Bh} 122.3cd—5)²³⁹, and to kill Hiranyākṣa as Varāha.

SP 107.35, 40—41:

tad yugāntānalaprakhyam kṣurāntaṃ sphoṭayan nabhaḥ |

jaḡāma dānavaṃ kṣipraṃ diśaḥ sarvā dahann iva || 35 ||

[...] tāḥ sarvās tat tadā cakram mahad bhīmam anāśayāt |

gatvā tasya śiraḥ kāyād unmamātha yathācalam || 40 ||

tat tena kṛttaṃ sumahac chiro ’gryaṃ

vyāttānanāgnipratimogranetram |

daṃṣṭrālam atyadbhuta bhīmanādaṃ papāta meror iva śṛṅgam

uccam || 41 ||

²³⁹ SP_{Bh} 122.3cd—5:

sa rathaṃ mahad āsthāya śatanaḥvordhvaketumat |

abhidudrāva vegena keśavaṃ prati dānavaḥ || 4 ||

tasyāpatata evātha cakram apratighaṃ mahat |

sasarja keśavo vyāsa sa tad vyaṣṭambhayat tadā || 5 ||

“Having mounted [his] big chariot, furnished with an erect flag [measuring] 100 *nalvas*, the Dānava [i.e. Kālanemi (SP_{Bh} 122.3c)] quickly rushed towards Keśava [i.e. Viṣṇu]. When he approached him, Keśava discharged the great, unobstructed *cakra*, oh Vyāsa, but he [i.e. Kālanemi] then stopped it.”

“The sharp-edged [*cakra*], resembling the fire at the end of an era, splitting the sky, quickly went to the Dānava, as if burning all directions. [...] Then that big, terrifying *cakra* destroyed all these [magical spells sent by Hiranyākṣa (SP 107.38—39)]. Having gone to his [i.e. Hiranyākṣa’s] head, it cut [it] off from [his] body, just like a mountain. This very large, foremost head, being cut by him [i.e. Varāha]/ it [i.e. the *cakra*], with its mouth wide open and eyes fierce like fire, with tusks, with an extremely extraordinary and terrifying roar, fell, like the high top of [Mount] Meru.”

The passage does not only contain one of the common characteristics of the *cakra* that it is fiery, it is also remarkably similar to the description of Hiranyākṣa’s death in other texts, so we can speak of intertextual consistency. First of all, the very fact that Viṣṇu kills Hiranyākṣa with his *cakra*, beheading him, agrees with other texts²⁴⁰. Second, the comparison of Hiranyākṣa’s head with the top of Mount Meru is also found in HV App. 1 No. 42.

The *Skandapurāṇa* composers, on the other hand, added a particular feature to the *cakra* that is not seen in the previous examples: the *cakra* comes from Śiva, as a bodiless voice told to Viṣṇu.

SP 107.21—23:

śṛṇu deva varāhedam śrutvā caiva samācara |
aśakyo 'yaṃ tvayā hy evaṃ hantum daityo mahābalaḥ || 21 ||
abalo 'yaṃ kṛtaḥ krūro dhruvaṃ māheśvareṇa hi |
tejasā paśya caivainam eṣa kālo 'sya vartate || 22 ||
muktvainam daityarājānaṃ cakreṇa vinisūdaya |
māheśvareṇa vaikuṇṭha tato mṛtyum avāpsyati || 23 ||

²⁴⁰ Besides the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, for instance, also speaks of Hiranyākṣa being beheaded (VDhP 1.53.36).

“Listen, oh god Varāha, and having listened to this, execute [it], for this very strong Daitya cannot be killed by you like this. Since this cruel one has certainly been made weak by Maheśvara’s [“the Great Lord’s”, i.e. Śiva’s] *tejas*—look at him—, his time has come. Having let him go, you should kill the king of the Daityas with Maheśvara’s [“the Great Lord’s”, i.e. Śiva’s] *cakra*, oh Vaikuṇṭha [i.e. Viṣṇu], so that he will find death.”

In other words, the voice tells Varāha that if he keeps on fighting the way he does, he will not be able to kill Hiraṇyākṣa. The Daitya has already been weakened by Śiva’s *tejas*²⁴¹, and now, Varāha should use Śiva’s *cakra* to give him the final blow. Although it is not new that the *cakra* originally comes from another god than Viṣṇu himself, as the *Mahābhārata* example with Agni above has shown²⁴², it is new that this god is Śiva²⁴³.

And this is not the only case in the *Skandapurāṇa* that Śiva is involved in Viṣṇu’s *cakra*. In SP 68.10, it is said that after Viṣṇu had propitiated Śiva, Śiva granted boons to Viṣṇu. One of the boons is the Sudarśana *cakra* (SP 68.10—11ab)²⁴⁴. Later, in the Tārakāmaya myth, it is said that the *cakra* was made by Rudra, i.e. Śiva (SP_{Bh} 122.11)²⁴⁵.

²⁴¹ The voice’s statement is not based on a well-definable event in the text, but seems to refer to the moment that Śiva’s *tejas* enters Varāha in order to empower him (see section 3.1).

²⁴² Another example is the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, where the creational “architect” Viśvakarman granted the *cakra* to Viṣṇu (ViP 3.2.10—11ab).

²⁴³ It is, however, found in later Śaiva Purāṇas, which according to Begley, is a sectarian development: “in certain other *Purāṇas* the creator of the discuss is said not to be Viśvakarman, but Śiva—suggesting overtones of a deep-seated sectarian rivalry between the two great deities of Hinduism” (Begley 1973, 20). The Purāṇas quoted by Begley are the *Padmapurāṇa* and the *Śivapurāṇa*, to which the *Liṅgapurāṇa* can be added as well (LiP 2.5.43).

²⁴⁴ SP 68.10—11ab:

*kasyacit tv atha kālasya svarṇākṣe hi mahātapāḥ |
yatra viṣṇur varāṃl lebhe devam ārādhya śaṃkaram |
cakram sudarśanam nāma dviṣatām antakopamam || 10 ||
ṛṣir āste mahābhāgaḥ śaradvān nāma gautamaḥ |*

“And at some moment then, there was indeed a very pious and illustrious sage called Śaradvat Gautama [SP 68.11ab] in Svarṇākṣa, where Viṣṇu, after having propitiated Deva [“God”, i.e. Śiva], Śaṃkara, received boons [including] the *cakra* called Sudarśana, which is like death for [one’s] enemies.”

²⁴⁵ SP_{Bh} 122.11:

sa tadā dyām bhuvam caiva vyāpya rūpeṇa sarvaśaḥ |

Each time the *cakra*, Viṣṇu's weapon *pur sang*, is mentioned, it is made explicit that it ultimately stems from Śiva. There is, in other words, internarrational consistency from the perspective of the narratives told in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

It is furthermore internarrationally consistent from the perspective of the Śaiva ideology of the text. In section 1.2.1, I identified several cases of Śaivizations in the text, where a narrative element is changed or a new component is introduced, so that the narrative matches the Śaiva teaching. One of the examples concerns Brahmā's task in the Śaiva universe as it is presented in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Even though Brahmā fulfils the same task as the one he has in other texts, this task of creation is assigned by Śiva. Brahmā is not the only example. In fact, it is Viṣṇu who officially obtains the task of Asura-slayer because Śiva granted him this as a boon in the afterlife episode of the Narasiṃha myth, as I will show in section 4.2.1. In the Śaiva universe of the *Skandapurāṇa*, the gods maintain their original roles, but Śiva assigns the tasks and actions to them. The result of this Śaivization is that Śiva is presented as being in full control of everything that happens in the universe. The same idea is behind the distribution of weapons. Although Viṣṇu remains associated and successful with his *cakra* in the *Skandapurāṇa*, this weapon is granted to him by Śiva. Thanks to this Śaivization, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers are able to give Śiva control over the *cakra*. With this subtle addition to Viṣṇu's *cakra*, Śiva becomes its agent, and, we may add, he becomes responsible and thus laudable for the great deeds performed with it²⁴⁶. Just as Śiva is the mastermind behind the tasks and actions of the gods, he is likewise the mastermind behind Viṣṇu's weapon *par excellence*. In other words, distribution becomes a form of taking control.

cakraṃ tad abjaṃ sasmāra yat tad rudreṇa nirmītam || 11 ||

“Having completely pervaded heaven and earth with his body then, he [i.e. Viṣṇu] called to mind the water-born *cakra*, which was created by Rudra.”

²⁴⁶ Viṣṇu's *cakra* is not the only weapon that is associated with Śiva. The afterlife episode of the Varāha myth tells about the battle between Varāha and Skanda, when Viṣṇu did not give up his Boar manifestation. Towards the conclusion of the battle, Skanda uses the Saṃvartikā spear that makes Viṣṇu leave his boar-form. This spear is given to Skanda by Śiva, which makes Śiva its agent (SP 109.30, see section 4.1.2 for more information on this weapon).

3.3 “The Śarabha did not even budge”

The innovation that Viṣṇu’s *cakra* comes from Śiva is not the only addition to the representation of Viṣṇu’s weapons in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Another new component to his weapons features in the afterlife of Narasiṃha and Varāha, where it becomes clear that whereas the weapons proved successful against Hiranyakaśipu and Hiranyākṣa respectively, they are not powerful enough in Viṣṇu’s fights in his afterlives.

In the case of Narasiṃha, Viṣṇu continues to live in this manifested form, and the gods ask Śiva to do something about this (SP 70.11—14). Śiva assumes the form of a Śarabha, a mythical being²⁴⁷, and approaches Narasiṃha (SP 71.48—50). As soon as Narasiṃha notices the Śarabha, he strikes him with the palm (*tala*) of his claw, the exact same weapon he used so effectively against Hiranyakaśipu, needing just one hit²⁴⁸. The situation is different when he fights against Śiva in the form of a Śarabha.

SP 71.51—52:

atha siṃhas tadā dṛṣṭvā śarabhaṃ samupasthitam |
krodhena mahatāviṣṭo talenainam atāḍayat || 51 ||
sa hatas tena siṃhena śarabho naiva cukṣubhe |
tataḥ śarabham āhatya vajradehaṃ mahābalaṃ |
ātmanaivāgamat kṛcchraṃ sparśāt tasya mahātmanaḥ || 52 ||
“Then the Lion, having seen the Śarabha standing nearby, being
filled with great anger, struck him [i.e. the Śarabha] with the
palm [of his claw]. The Śarabha, hit by the lion, did not even
budge. Having struck the very strong Śarabha then, whose body
was [hard] like diamond, he himself felt pain by the touch of the
great-minded one.”

²⁴⁷ For more information on the Śarabha, see section 4.1.1.

²⁴⁸ SP 71.44:

grhītvā sa tadā siṃho hiranyakaśipuṃ sakṛt |
talenāhatya taṃ prāṇair vyayojayata satvaram || 44 ||

“Then the Lion, having grabbed Hiranyakaśipu, having struck [him] with the palm [of his claw only] once, immediately took away his life.”

Even though the same weapon is used, the Śarabha is not the least injured. The same word, *tala*, is used deliberately, for it perfectly contrasts the power of Viṣṇu's weapon against Hiranyakaśipu on the one hand, and its ineffectiveness against Śiva on the other²⁴⁹.

The same situation occurs in the Varāha myth. As shown above, Varāha uses the *cakra* to cut off Hiranyākṣa's head (SP 107.40), and he uses it again in the afterlife episode. When Viṣṇu does not want to give up his boar-form, he eventually ends up in a fight with Skanda and one of Skanda's Gaṇapas (lit. "Protectors of Gaṇas") called Kokavaktra, throwing his *cakra* at Kokavaktra²⁵⁰.

SP 110.6—9:

tataś cakram sahasrāraṃ yugāntāgnisamaprabham |
śīlāgrahaṇavyagrāya gaṇāya vyaśrjat prabhuḥ || 6 ||
tad antakapratikāśaṃ cakram sarvasurāriham |
viveśa na gaṇaṃ tūrṇaṃ tatas tad vyanivartata || 7 ||
tan nivr̥ttaṃ punaś cakram akṛtvā kāryam ujvalam |
na jagrāha tadā viṣṇur avamene ca tat tadā || 8 ||
tat tadānarcitaṃ tena cakram dānavaghātīnā |
viṣṇunā prayayau kṣipraṃ svam eva bhavanaṃ prati || 9 ||

"6. Then the lord discharged the thousand-spoked *cakra*, which is like the fire at the end of a *yuga*, at the Gaṇa [i.e. Kokavaktra], who was focussed on catching a rock. 7. [However,] that *cakra*, resembling death, the slayer of the enemies of all the gods, did not quickly enter the Gaṇa, [but] it returned then. 8. Viṣṇu did not take up the blazing *cakra* again, which had returned, without doing its job, and disregarded it then instead. 9. Being disrespected by this Dānava-slaying Viṣṇu then, the *cakra* quickly went to its own abode."

²⁴⁹ This difference has been noted by the editors of the *Skandapurāṇa*: "This contrasts with the earlier blow delivered to Hiranyakaśipu. While Narasiṃha was able to kill Hiranyakaśipu with a single blow (*talena*), this blow has no effect on the Śarabha" (SP Vol. IV, 44 note 90).

²⁵⁰ The reason why Varāha ends up in this fight is that he is informed by Nārada that his son, Vṛka, having wrecked Skanda's palace garden, is kept in captivity and is being tortured by Skanda and his Gaṇapas. When Varāha wants to release his son, he encounters Skanda and his entourage.

Whereas Varāha's *cakra* instantly cut off Hiranyākṣa's head from his body, it does not even reach Kokavakra. This is, I would argue, because Kokavakra is the Gaṇapa of Skanda, who himself is the son of Śiva. He therefore falls within the realm of Śiva's company. There is an analogy with the Narasiṃha myth: Viṣṇu's weapon (claw or *cakra*) does its job in a fight against the Asuras, but it does not when it is used against Śiva or one of his attendants.

This contradiction in the afterlife episodes is, just as the afterlife episodes as a whole, an innovation in the *Skandapurāṇa*²⁵¹. It shows once again a balance between what is known and what is new; a balance between elements with a Vaiṣṇava background and elements with a Śaiva background. On the one hand, the elements that Narasiṃha kills Hiranyakaśipu with his claw and that Varāha kills Hiranyākṣa with his *cakra* are known facts and fixed elements of the storyline. By being faithful to these components, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers are consistent on the intertextual plane. On the other hand, the inclusion of the contradiction in the afterlife episodes can be explained from the perspective of internarrational consistency on the ideological level. Śiva's indestructability (and that of his entourage by proxy) matches his superiority to anybody, including Viṣṇu who is otherwise a successful fighter. This new narrative element is, in other words, in line with the changes and innovations discussed in this chapter thus far that express a coherent Śaiva message of Śiva being the supreme god on top of the universe.

3.4 Viṣṇu as Śiva's devotee

Another noteworthy characteristic of Viṣṇu in the *Skandapurāṇa* is the fact that he is presented as a devotee of Śiva. This is done twice in the main story of the Varāha myth. First, Varāha pays respect to Rudra, i.e. Śiva, muttering the *rudramantra* (SP 98.50)²⁵²,

²⁵¹ The idea that a weapon is unable to fulfil its task is not new. For example, Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* contains a passage of all the weapons of the gods that were unable to kill the Asura called Tāraka. One of the unsuccessful gods with ditto weapon is Viṣṇu with his *cakra* (KS 2.49). The inclusion of this element in the *Kumārasambhava* is not prompted by ideology, but probably rather by the aspiration to embellish the narrative.

²⁵² SP 98.50:

tataḥ siddhir iti proktvā kṛtvā rudrāya vai namaḥ |
japañ jayāvahaṃ rudraṃ prayayau varuṇālayam || 50 ||

and later, he pays homage to Pinākin, “the one with the Pināka bow”, i.e. Śiva (SP 107.26)²⁵³. The passages that showcase Viṣṇu as Śiva’s devotee most explicitly are, however, in the afterlife episodes of the Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana myth.

When, in the afterlife of Narasiṃha, Narasiṃha hits the Śarabha without any effect, he realizes that it is Śiva. He bows down to Śiva and starts praising him with a long *stotra*, “hymn of praise” (SP 71.54—64). Some epithets refer to Viṣṇu and his relationship with Śiva specifically, such as *naranārāyaṇeśāya*, “[homage] to the master of Nara and Nārāyaṇa”²⁵⁴ (SP 71.58c), and *yogadāya namo mahyaṃ tathaivaiśvaryadāya ca*, “homage to the one who grants union and supremacy to me”²⁵⁵ (SP 71.63ab). A eulogy is by definition an act of worship, so it shows Viṣṇu’s devotion to Śiva.

When Viṣṇu has taken on his own form again in the afterlife episode of the Varāha myth, he goes to Śiva’s dwelling to see Śiva and praises him (SP 110.22—24). In this *stotra*, Viṣṇu puts emphasis on the theological notion that everything is dependent on Śiva and exists thanks to him, such as “oh god, you [will] always [be] the cause of creation and destruction” (*tvaṃ deva kāraṇaṃ nityaṃ sambhūteḥ pralayasya ca*, SP 110.22ab). Śiva is pleased with Viṣṇu’s devotion and grants him a boon. Viṣṇu asks for a boon that is typically related to Pāśupata Śaivism: he wants to learn the *pāśupatavrata*. This suggests that Viṣṇu is entirely devoted to Śiva within a specific Pāśupata context²⁵⁶.

The Pāśupata theme continues in the afterlife of Vāmana, where Viṣṇu, after having left his dwarfish body, praises Śiva for 1,006 years and six months (*varṣaiḥ ṣaḍbhis tu sahasreṇa [...] māsaḥ ṣaḍbhiś ca*, SP_{Bh} 121.14a—c). As a result, Śiva appears with his full entourage (Pārvatī, Nandin and the Gaṇas) and offers Viṣṇu a boon (SP_{Bh}

“Then, having said ‘Success’, having paid homage to Rudra, muttering the *rudra[mantra]*, which is the vehicle to victory, he [i.e. Viṣṇu] set out to Varuṇa’s abode [i.e. the ocean].”

²⁵³ SP 107.26:

*bhagavān api dīpyantaṃ śriyā daityaṃ samīkṣya tam |
sasmāra tat tadā cakraṃ namaskṛtvā pinākinē || 26 ||*

“And the lord [i.e. Viṣṇu], having seen the Daitya [i.e. Hiraṇyākṣa], shining with lustre, remembered that *cakra* then, after paying homage to Pinākin [“the one with the Pināka bow”, i.e. Śiva].”

²⁵⁴ Nara and Nārāyaṇa are aspects of Viṣṇu in the form of two sages. By calling Śiva “the master of Nara and Nārāyaṇa”, Narasiṃha acknowledges Śiva’s superiority over himself.

²⁵⁵ At the end of the afterlife episode of the Vāmana myth, Śiva grants Viṣṇu supremacy and union (SP_{Bh} 121.19d, 20cd). This passage will be discussed in section 4.2.3.

²⁵⁶ This boon will be examined in section 4.2.2. For a short introduction to Pāśupata Śaivism, see note 35.

121.15). Viṣṇu wants to know how he will not be contaminated by sin or *tapas* (SP_{Bh} 121.16). Śiva tells him to perform the *mahāvrata*, “the great observance”, which is qualified as a *pāśupatavrata* (SP_{Bh} 121.17). Viṣṇu practices it for twelve years (SP_{Bh} 121.18—19). This is one more clear instance in which Viṣṇu is presented as a devoted Pāśupata worshipper of Śiva²⁵⁷.

It is not entirely new that Viṣṇu praises Śiva. As shown by John Brockington in his book *The Sanskrit Epics*, Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva in at least two stories in the *Mahābhārata*. The first story appears in the *Droṇaparvan*, in “the account of the killing of Jayadratha to avenge Abhimanyu’s death” (Brockington 1998, 252). It enumerates various acts of worship towards Śiva by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (MBh 7.57). For example, when they visit Śiva, “they recite Vedic litanies to him (39—45); Śiva asks why they have come and is praised again (49—58) with litanies more specific to Rudra-Śiva” (ibid, 253); and later, they recite the *Śatarudriya*, one of the key *mantras* to Rudra (MBh 7.57.71). Another episode in which Kṛṣṇa is presented as Śiva’s worshipper is in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (MBh 13.14—18) within the framework of “Kṛṣṇa’s worship of Śiva in order to get a son, Sāmba” (ibid, 254). According to Brockington, this account “may broadly be seen as a Śaiva equivalent of the *Nārāyaṇīya* [i.e. the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*]” (ibid.). One of Kṛṣṇa’s most prominent acts of Śiva worship is his recitation of the *Śivasahasranāma*, “[the hymn of] the thousand names of Śiva”, which takes up most of MBh 13.17.

Although these two examples predate the *Skandapurāṇa*, this characterization is not broadly supported. It can, in other words, not be seen as intertextual consistency. Rather, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers are consistent on the internarrational level. There are various passages besides those in the manifestation myths, in which Viṣṇu praises Śiva. Sometimes he worships Śiva by himself, as is the case in SP_{Bh} 172 during the fight between Viṣṇu and Prahlāda. When Viṣṇu realizes that he is unable to kill Prahlāda, “he called Mahādeva [“the Great God”, i.e. Śiva] to mind and bowed down [to him] again and again” (*atha dhyātvā mahādevaṃ praṇāmya ca punaḥ punaḥ*, SP_{Bh} 172.42cd). There are also instances in which Viṣṇu praises Śiva together with the other gods, as is explicitly stated in the following verse in a short Māhātmya on the holy place of Kedāra.

²⁵⁷ This boon will be analyzed in section 4.2.3.

SP_{Bh} 167.40:

brahmā śakras tathā viṣṇuḥ somo yakṣagaṇādhipaḥ |
arcayanti sthitaṃ tatra bhaktitaḥ parameśvaram || 40 ||

“Brahmā, Śakra [i.e. Indra], Viṣṇu, Soma and the lord of the
Yakṣas and the Gaṇas [i.e. Kubera] praise Parameśvara [“the
Highest Lord”, i.e. Śiva] who is present there with devotion.”

There are also countless examples of “the gods” in general praising Śiva, to which Viṣṇu should be counted²⁵⁸. Not only the gods are devoted to Śiva, sages, Asuras and people are as well²⁵⁹. In other words, in the Śaiva universe as it is presented in the *Skandapurāṇa*, everybody is a worshipper of Śiva²⁶⁰. The portrayal of Viṣṇu in the manifestation myths as Śiva’s devotee fits this scheme perfectly. The fact that Viṣṇu receives a boon after each act of worship also contributes to one of the text’s core messages that Śiva is a benevolent god and that worship to him is highly beneficial and can even lead to final liberation. As I have shown in section 1.2, the benefits of Śiva worship are expressed in the theological parts of the *Skandapurāṇa* that deal with the performance of Pāśupata practices, such as the *pāśupatayoga* and the *pāśupatavrata* (SP_{Bh} 174—81), as well as in narratives on Śiva’s devotees, such as the story of the sage Jaigīśavya (SP 29.96—124). Viṣṇu’s

²⁵⁸ For instance, in SP 13, Viṣṇu and the other gods go to Pārvatī’s *svayaṃvara* (the ceremony during which a woman chooses a husband). Indra arrives on his elephant called Airāvata, Viṣṇu arrives on Garuḍa, etcetera (SP 13.7—24). The gods hope to be chosen by Pārvatī as her husband and become angry, when Śiva in the form of a child is elected. As soon as Brahmā realizes that the boy is Śiva, he solicits Śiva to have mercy on the gods and urges the gods to resort to Śiva (SP 13.39—50). “The immobilized gods bow to Śarva [i.e. Śiva] in their hearts and he pardons them and restores them to their normal state. He assumes his highest form possessed of three eyes, the splendour of which makes the gods ask for a transcendent eye. This is given to them, whereupon they see the supreme god himself. They bow to him [(SP 13.51—55)]” (SP Vol. I, 87). Since Viṣṇu is explicitly stated to have arrived at the *svayaṃvara*, he must be one of the gods bowing down to Śiva.

²⁵⁹ For example, the sage Upamanyu takes refuge with Śiva by practicing *tapas* (SP 34.69—72), and the Daitya Hiranyākṣa expresses his devotion to Śiva at several occasions, for instance when he boasts that he will offer Viṣṇu as an offering to Paśupati, i.e. Śiva (SP 100.60).

²⁶⁰ One exception is king Kṣupa, who is a devotee of Viṣṇu. His story is told in SP 31.48—115, which deals with the enmity between Dadhīca, who is a Brahmin and a Śaiva, and Kṣupa, who is a *kṣatriya* and a Vaiṣṇava. The story “revolves around a dispute about the superiority of *brahman* over *kṣatra* and of Śiva over Viṣṇu. Dadhīca’s victory proves the superiority of *brahman* and Śiva” (SP Vol. IIB, 5). The fact that Dadhīca is the winner is consistent with the overall message of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

devotion to Śiva and the subsequent boon-granting by Śiva are another confirmation of the efficacy of Śiva worship.

3.5 A Śaiva eulogy of Viṣṇu

Even though Śiva is generally the object of devotion, other gods are sometimes eulogized with a *stotra* as well. For example, in SP 32.113—7²⁶¹, Pārvaṭī is praised with a large number of epithets, from those concerning her marital status to Śiva (*mahādevapatnīm*, “the wife of Mahādeva [“the Great God”, i.e. Śiva]”, SP 32.113) to those related to her appearance (*viśālekṣaṇām pītakaṣeyavastrām*, “the wide-eyed one who is dressed in yellow silk”, SP 32.113). In SP 24.49—57, Nandin is praised by Viṣṇu. He is eulogized with epithets showing, for example, his devotion to Śiva (*rudrabhaktāya devāya*, “[homage] to the god who is a devotee of Rudra [i.e. Śiva]”, SP 24.50c) and his familial relationship (*umāputrāya devāya*, “[homage] to the god who is the son of Umā [i.e. Pārvaṭī]”, SP 24.52c). The fact that Pārvaṭī and Nandin are eulogized can be easily explained, for they belong to Śiva’s entourage and are two key Śaiva figures.

Although this is not the case with Viṣṇu, he is nevertheless eulogized in a long *stotra* in the Varāha myth (SP 97.15—29cd). When the gods want to ask Viṣṇu to help them find a solution to the troublesome Hiranyākṣa, they first honour him with a *stotra*. Since the *Skandapurāṇa* is designed to promote worship to Śiva, a hymn to Viṣṇu may seem at first sight to be out of place from an ideological perspective. It is moreover the only *Viṣṇustotra* in the entire *Skandapurāṇa*. The eulogy is therefore not included for the sake of internarrational consistency on a narrative level. The eulogy is not consistent on the intertextual level either, for it is not a standard element in the Asura-slaying Varāha myth²⁶² (as opposed to the cosmogonic Varāha myth)²⁶³. If the *stotra* is not compliant with the rest of the text—neither on the ideological plane, nor on the narrative plane

²⁶¹ The hymn “is in the Daṇḍaka metre, a sort of rhythmic prose” (SP Vol. IIB, 48 note 130), resulting in long verses containing a large number of epithets and characteristics of Pārvaṭī.

²⁶² Sometimes this can be explained from the perspective of the narrative. For example, in HV App. 1 No. 42, Viṣṇu himself decides to intervene, and the gods do not play a role here (HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 562—63).

²⁶³ For instance, in the cosmogonic Varāha myth in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, there are two hymns addressing Viṣṇu. The first is sung by the earth, asking Viṣṇu to lift her from the netherworld (ViP 1.4.12—24) and the second is sung by the sages, watching Varāha as he saves the earth (ViP 1.4.31—44).

(internarrational)—nor with other versions of the story (intertextual), the question raises why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers added it. The answer may partly lay in the extratextual sphere.

To recapitulate, forms of extratextual consistency are general world-knowledge, cultural codes and moral norms, but also literary conventions and conventions of literary genres. The inclusion of the *Viṣṇustotra* appears to be a literary convention for the context in which the eulogy appears: a request for help. When epic-Purāṇic composers wanted to describe a scene in which the gods approach another god for aid, they could follow a pattern of narrative elements. I will demonstrate this pattern on the basis of a comparison with another example from the *Skandapurāṇa*, the Tripura myth, in which Śiva conquers the Asuras by destroying the city of Tripura (SP_{Bh} 168—69).

1. The Asuras take control of the triple world. In the Varāha myth, this is done by Hiranyākṣa (SP 93—95) and in the Tripura myth, by Maya (SP_{Bh} 168.28—31).
2. The gods go to Brahmā for help (SP 97.1 and SP_{Bh} 168.32).
3. Brahmā tells the gods that the king of the Daityas cannot be killed in certain circumstances, as determined by birth in the case of Hiranyākṣa (SP 97.5), or as a result of a boon from Brahmā himself in the case of Maya (SP_{Bh} 168.33).
4. However, there is a solution and the gods should go to god X, who will help them. This is Viṣṇu in the Varāha myth (SP 97.6) and Śiva in the Tripura myth (SP_{Bh} 168.34).
5. The gods go to god X: Viṣṇu (SP 97.14) and Śiva (SP_{Bh} 168.35) respectively.
6. The gods praise god X and ask for help. In the Varāha myth, the gods sing a hymn of praise to Viṣṇu and ask him to kill Hiranyākṣa (SP 97.15—30). In the Tripura myth, the gods sing a hymn of praise to Śiva and ask him a favour (SP_{Bh} 168.36—51cd).
7. God X replies that he will help them and tells them the solution. Viṣṇu says he will kill Hiranyākṣa in the form of a Boar (SP 97.34—39) and Śiva says that he will kill Maya by destroying Tripura with one arrow (SP_{Bh} 169.14—15).

A praise of the god who is requested for help is a standard element of such narrative constructions, even when the god being praised would usually not be the object of worship according to the text's ideology. Looking at the *Viṣṇustotra* from this narratological perspective as a literary convention, the *stotra* is stylistically appropriate for this particular passage.

Even though there is extratextual consistency, the praise of the gods can also be implemented differently. For instance, the Narasiṃha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* shows the same pattern, but when the gods ask Viṣṇu for help and praise him, they do so without an actual *stotra*. It is simply stated that the gods were “praising Janardāna [i.e. Viṣṇu]” (*saṁstuvanto janardānam*, SP 71.18d). We may therefore assume an additional reason to include the *Viṣṇustotra* in the Varāha myth. This reason can be unveiled when we look at the content of the eulogy, for it can be shown that the epithets in the *stotra* have been carefully selected by the composers of the text.

Many epithets show the hand of the composers because they perfectly match the context of the eulogy, viz. an Asura-slaying manifestation myth in the *Skandapurāṇa*. In other words, the context is reflected in the choice of epithets. I have classified all 67 epithets in eight categories, some of which are analyzed in detail in the sections below.

1. Viṣṇu as warrior: *sarvaripughna*²⁶⁴, “slaying all enemies” (SP 97.15a), *dānavāntaka*-, “killer of Dānavas” (15b), *ajita-deva*-, “invincible god” (15c), *yama-deva*-, “god Yama” (17a), *jaya*-, “victory (17b), *śūra*-, “hero” (23c), *asurasūdin*-, “slayer of Asuras” (27b), *jaya*-, “victory” (28c)²⁶⁵.
2. Viṣṇu as Brahmin: *nirdhūtarajas*-, “by whom dust is shaken off” (16a)²⁶⁶, *dhāman-suvedhas*-, “pious abode” (16d), *yogin*-, “Yogin” (25c), *yajamāna*-,

²⁶⁴ In this enumeration, I give the stem of the epithet, but in the text, the epithets are in the dative paring with *namaḥ*, “homage”.

²⁶⁵ The seven dotted epithets in SP 97.28cd—29cd do not survive in the oldest surviving recension because the folios of all three S manuscripts are lost for this part.

²⁶⁶ I understand this epithet to mean a “pure”, sinless person and associate it with a Brahmin.

- “sacrificer” (25c)²⁶⁷, *dānta-*, “restrained” (26c), *brahmasatpathadarśin-*, “showing the true path of *brahman*” (28b)²⁶⁸.
3. Viṣṇu as deity: *sādhya- deva-*, “Sādhya god” (16c), *ādityaputra-*, “son of Aditi” (17c), *ādityānām vara-*, “best of Ādityas”²⁶⁹ (26b).
 4. Viṣṇu’s manifestations: *vāmanarūpa-*, “with the form of a Dwarf” (18c), *kṛṣṇadvaipāyana-*, “Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana” (18d), *rāma-*, “Rāma” (19a), *rāma-*, “Rāma” (19a)²⁷⁰, *dattātreyā-*, “Dattātreyā” (19b), *narasiṃha-*, “Man-Lion” (19c), *dāmodara-*, “with a rope around the waist”, i.e. Kṛṣṇa (20b), *kapilarūpa-*, “with the form of Kapila” (21a), *śaurin-*²⁷¹, “grandson of Śūra”, i.e. Kṛṣṇa (26d), *vṛṣṇibandhu-*, “relative of the Vṛṣṇis”, i.e. Kṛṣṇa (26d), *nastadharmapravartin-*, “establishing *dharma*, when it has perished” (29b).
 5. Mythological references²⁷²: *śakunihantr-*, “slayer of Śakuni” (20a), *nāgaśayyāpriya-*, “delighted in lying on a Nāga” (20d), *dhundhumāra-*, “killer of Dhundhu” (23c), *madhukaiṭabhaḥātīn-*, “slayer of Madhu and Kaiṭabha” (23d), *trivikramaviyātstha-*, “standing in the sky in three steps” (24c)²⁷³, *puravighāta-*, “destroyer of the city” (25a), *bhṛgupatnīpramāthin-*, “destroyer of Bhṛgu’s wife” (25d), *purāśvagrīvanāśa-*, “destroyer of Aśvagrīva in the past” (27a),

²⁶⁷ I have considered grouping *yajamāna-* under the category of Viṣṇu as warrior because the *yajamāna* is the patron of a sacrifice, with the king being the *yajamāna* of the grandest of rituals, such as a horse sacrifice. However, since the context in which the *yajamāna* operates is a religious one, I have concluded that it matches the epithets of the category of Viṣṇu as Brahmin better.

²⁶⁸ This reading is a conjecture of the editors of the text because of the poor manuscript transmission for this *pāda*.

²⁶⁹ The Ādityas are a class of deities.

²⁷⁰ In section 3.5.2, I specify the two Rāmas.

²⁷¹ The text reports *śauriṇe*, with the root *śaurin-*, but the regular form of Kṛṣṇa’s epithet as “grandson of Śūra” is *śauri-*. However, such a shift of the ending *-i-* to *-in-* also appears elsewhere in the *Skandapurāṇa* (SP Vol. IV, 26).

²⁷² Some epithets apply to Viṣṇu and some to Kṛṣṇa.

²⁷³ The four underscored epithets in SP 97.24cd—25ab are omitted by S₁, the only surviving S manuscript for this passage. Concerning this specific epithet, I have considered to classify *trivikramaviyātstha-* under the category of Viṣṇu’s manifestations, referring to Vāmana. However, the category of mythological references fits the epithet better for three reasons. First, Vāmana is already mentioned with the epithet *vāmanarūpa-*. Second, *trivikramaviyātstha-* refers to a specific moment in the story of Vāmana. Third, Viṣṇu’s three strides goes beyond the Vāmana myth. As shown in section 2.3, in the Vedas, the three strides are not associated with Viṣṇu’s Dwarf manifestation but, among others, with his battle against Vṛtra together with Indra (RV 8.12.26—27).

- saubhasālvavighātin-*, “slayer of Saubha and Sālva” (27d), *padmanābha-*, “from whose navel a lotus [emerged]” (28a)²⁷⁴.
6. Epithets related to Śiva or the *Skandapurāṇa*²⁷⁵: *salile tapyamāna-*, “practicing *tapas* on water” (20c), *jīmūtarūpa-*, “with the form of a cloud” (21c), *mahādevapriya-*, “dear to Mahādeva [“the Great God”, i.e. Śiva]” (21d), *rudrārdharūpa-*, “whose body is half Rudra [i.e. Śiva]” (22a), *umārūpin-*, “with the form of Umā [i.e. Pārvatī]” (22b), *maheśvaragaṇa-*, “Gaṇa of Maheśvara [“the Great Lord, i.e. Śiva]” (22d), *śarva-*, “Śarva” (28c), *rudradattavara-*, “to whom boon(s) is/ are given by Rudra [i.e. Śiva]” (28d).
 7. Physical features: *cakramudgarahasta-*, “having a *cakra* and hammer in his hand” (22c), *śrīvatsadhārin-*, “wearing the Śrīvatsa” (23b), *caturbhūja-*, “four-armed” (24a), *kṛṣṇa-*, “dark” (24a)²⁷⁶, *ratnakaustubhadhārin-*, “wearing the Kaustubha jewel” (24b), *pītavastraśuvāsas-*, “well-dressed in yellow cloth” (24d), *gadākhadgogradhārin-*, “holding the fierce club and sword” (25b), *śārṅgadhanus-*, “with the Śārṅga bow” (27c), *śatabāhu-*, “with a hundred arms” (29d).
 8. Others²⁷⁷: *vaikuṇṭha- mahātman-*, “great Vaikuṇṭha” (15d), *satya-*, “truth” (16b), *naranārāyaṇa-*, “Nara and Nārāyaṇa” (17d), *sumati-*, “benevolent one” (18a), *viṣṇu-*, “Viṣṇu”²⁷⁸ (18b), *dhātṛ-*, “supporter” (19d), *mahat- puruṣa-*, “great Man” (21b), *śivipiṣṭa-*, “bald-headed” (23a)²⁷⁹, *vṛṣarūpa-*, “with the form of a bull”

²⁷⁴ I have considered categorizing *padmanābha-* under Viṣṇu’s manifestations as the equivalent of Viṣṇu’s manifestation known as Pauṣkara, “the one related to the lotus”. This manifestation is connected with the story in which Viṣṇu slays the two Asuras Madhu and Kaiṭabha (e.g. HV 31.14—20 and HV 42.14—33). However, since *padmanābha* is also used in other contexts than that of manifestations, I consider it to be a mythological reference. The doubling with *madhukaiṭabhaḥghātine*, “slayer of Madhu and Kaiṭabha” (SP 97.23d) is, however, undesirable.

²⁷⁵ Some of these epithets can only be understood if the entire *Skandapurāṇa* is taken into account, which is done in section 3.5.3.

²⁷⁶ I have considered categorizing *kṛṣṇa-* under Viṣṇu’s manifestations as Kṛṣṇa, but since he is already represented three times—*dāmodara-* (SP 97.20b), *śaurin-* and *vṛṣṇibandhu-* (SP 97.26d)—I take *kṛṣṇa-* as an external feature.

²⁷⁷ Either the epithets in this category have a more general character, or they are difficult to file under one of the other categories.

²⁷⁸ Alternatively, *viṣṇu-* can be translated as “pervader”.

²⁷⁹ I have considered to classify *śivipiṣṭa-* under ‘epithets related to Śiva or the *Skandapurāṇa*’, because the *Skandapurāṇa* may be the first available text that gives a mythological explanation of the epithet. The text reports that during Pārvatī’s *svayamvara*, Śiva immobilized various gods,

(26a)²⁸⁰, *cekitāna-*, “intelligent” (26c), *sarveśvara-*, “lord of all” (29a), *purusa-varenya-*, “best Man” (29c).

I will not deal with each category individually. Instead, I choose those categories from which it is possible to recognize the hand of the composers. Categories 1, 4, 5 and 6 are particularly useful for this, so most epithets in these categories are discussed below²⁸¹. Since the other categories are either limited in number (2 and 3) or contain general qualifications of Viṣṇu that show little innovation (7 and 8), they are left out of the discussion.

3.5.1 Viṣṇu as warrior and mythological references

Two of the eight categories include epithets that focus on Viṣṇu as an Asura-slayer, viz. Viṣṇu as warrior and the majority of mythological references. The former speaks for itself: they celebrate Viṣṇu in his heroic aspect with epithets such as *sarvaripughna-*, “slaying all enemies” (SP 97.15a), and *śūra-*, “hero” (SP 97.23c). Other epithets are less directly linked to this characterization, but are nevertheless related, like *yama-deva-*, “god Yama” (SP 97.17a). I understand the comparison with Yama, the god of death, as referring to Viṣṇu’s role as slayer (of Asuras).

Most mythological references also qualify Viṣṇu as Asura-slayer. Nine out of the ten epithets in this category refer to stories in which Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa fights with the

when they became angry with him in the form of a child (SP 13.32—38). Viṣṇu is one of them (SP 13.36), who “shakes his head in anger, but Śiva makes his hair fall out” (SP Vol. I, 86). There are two other references to this story in the form of epithets of Śiva, who is described as the cause of Viṣṇu’s baldness: *kṛṣṇakeśāpahārin*, “the seizer of Kṛṣṇa’s hair” (SP 14.9), and *śipiviṣṭakṛte viṣṇor*, “[homage] to him who made Viṣṇu bald” (SP 32.55, *śipiviṣṭa* is a variant of *śivipiṣṭa*). Because the latter two seem to refer to this particular story, Viṣṇu’s epithet *śivipiṣṭa-* may too. At the same time, the epithet is already known from the *Rgveda* (RV 7.99.7b, RV 7.100.5a, 6b, 7b) and the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 12.330.6—8); both of which do not give an explanation of the epithet. Since it is apparently an old Vedic epithet, I categorize it under “others”.

²⁸⁰ I follow the editors of this chapter in their interpretation of the bull as Dharma (SP Vol. V, forth.). Elsewhere, the editors of the *Skandapurāṇa* already noted that “[t]he idea that Dharma is embodied in or personified by a bull is old (see e.g. MaS [*Manusmṛti*] 1.81: *catuspāt sakalo dharmah* [“the entire Dharma has four feet”], and MaS 8.16: *vṛṣo hi bhagavān dharmas* [“for the bull is lord Dharma”])” (SP Vol. IIB, 65). For Viṣṇu’s identification with Dharma, see Gonda 1954/1969, 171.

²⁸¹ Many epithets have been identified in SP Vol. V, forth., to which I occasionally refer, and which I expand where needed.

Asuras²⁸². The main opponent is generally mentioned in the epithet, as the following cases exemplify.

- Śakuni in *śakunihantrī*-, “slayer of Śakuni” (SP 97.20a). When Kṛṣṇa was still a baby, he killed the female bird (*śakunī*) called Pūtanā, “Stinking”, after she had offered him her milk (HV 50.20—25)²⁸³.
- Madhu and Kaiṭabha in *madhukaiṭabhaḡhātī*-, “slayer of Madhu and Kaiṭabha” (SP 97.23d). Viṣṇu killed the two Asuras Madhu and Kaiṭabha on his thighs, when they woke him from his cosmic sleep (MBh 3.194.6—end). The story is often connected to Viṣṇu’s manifestation called Pauṣkara²⁸⁴.
- Aśvagrīva (“Horse-necked”) in *purāśvagrīvanāśa*-, “destroyer of Aśvagrīva in the past” (SP 97.27a). There are brief allusions to this story in the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 5.128.49)²⁸⁵ and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Rām 4.41.22)²⁸⁶. The *Agnipurāṇa* (AgP 1.2.16cd—17ab) and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhāgP 8.24) connect the myth to Viṣṇu in his manifestation as a Fish (Matsya)²⁸⁷.

²⁸² The epithet of *nāgaśayyāpriya*-, “delighted in lying on a Nāga” (SP 97.20d), which refers to Viṣṇu sleeping on the cosmic ocean before a new era (e.g. ViP 1.2.60—66), is the only epithet that does not refer to a war myth.

²⁸³ For a summary of this and other versions of the story (e.g. ViP 5.5.7—23), see Couture 2015b, 242—45.

²⁸⁴ For other references to Madhu and Kaiṭabha, see for example, Bock 1987 and Couture 2009. On Pauṣkara, see note 274.

²⁸⁵ MBh 5.128.49:

*ekārṇave śayānena hatau tau madhukaiṭabhau |
janmāntaram upāgamyā hayagrīvas tathā hataḥ || 49 ||*

“When sleeping in the one vast ocean he slew Madhu and Kaiṭabha, and in another birth slew Hayagrīva*” (translation by Van Buitenen 1978, 427).

* *Hayā*- in *hayagrīva*- is a synonym of *aśva*- in *aśvagrīva*-, both meaning “Horse-necked”.

²⁸⁶ Rām 4.41.22:

*tatra pañcajanam hatvā hayagrīvam ca dānavam |
ājahāra tataś cakram śankhaṃ ca puruṣottamaḥ || 22 ||*

“There [i.e. on Mount Cakravān (Rām 4.41.21)] Viṣṇu, the Supreme Being, killed Pañcājana and the *dānava* Hayagrīva and took that discus and a conch” (translation by Goldman and Lefebvre 1984/2007, 148).

²⁸⁷ According to Vettam Mani, in *Purāṇic Encyclopaedia*, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* tells about a story of the Asura Aśvagrīva who can only be killed by someone with a horse neck. To circumvent this boon, Viṣṇu becomes Aśvagrīva himself and kills the Asura (Mani 1975, 183—84, 311).

Viṣṇu's Asura-slaying aspect does not only become clear from the vast number of epithets of both categories together, but also when they are contrasted with their "counterparts". First, the nine war-related mythological references outnumber the one reference that is not related to war. Second, the category of Viṣṇu as warrior can be set against the category of Viṣṇu as Brahmin, among which the former outnumbers the latter²⁸⁸.

The emphasis on Viṣṇu's warrior aspect can be explained on two levels. First of all, it fits Viṣṇu's task as slayer of the Asuras in the *Skandapurāṇa* as a whole, so it creates internarrational consistency. It also specifically fits the context in which the eulogy takes place. After all, the gods approach Viṣṇu to ask him to put an end to Hiranyākṣa, so they invoke Viṣṇu in his warrior aspect. This intranarrational consistency shows that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers carefully selected epithets that particularly fit the Varāha myth.

3.5.2 Viṣṇu's manifestations

Another well-represented category is the one referring to Viṣṇu's manifestations. I have identified ten manifestations, besides the all-encompassing epithet *naṣṭadharmapravartin-*, "establishing *dharma*, when it has perished" (SP 97.29b). All ten manifestations are known from other early sources. In order to find out whether it is possible to know if the *Skandapurāṇa* follows a standard list of manifestations, I have made a survey of various early sources.

²⁸⁸ Warriors and Brahmins have different duties in life and ditto qualifications and laws to adhere to. This difference can be observed in the Vāmana myth, where Viṣṇu says that he has adopted Brahminhood and no longer follows the *dharma* of the warriors. This theme will be discussed in section 4.1.3.

Manifestations ²⁸⁹	<i>Nārāyaṇīyaparvan</i> of the <i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Harivaṃśa</i> ²⁹⁰ and <i>Brahmapurāṇa</i> ²⁹¹	<i>Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa</i> (BdP, MtP, VāP)
Vāmana (SP 97.18c)	MBh 12.326.74—76, 12.337.36b ²⁹²	HV 31.68—92, BrP 213.80—104	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.73
Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana (SP 97.18d) ²⁹³	MBh 12.334.9a—d	HV 31.147*479.1— 4 ²⁹⁴ , HV App. 1 No.42B ll. 3014—15 (not in BrP)	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.79
Rāma Jāmadagnya (SP 97.19a) ²⁹⁵	MBh 12.326.77	HV 31.100cd—109, BrP 213.113—23	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.77

²⁸⁹ Because of the ample textual evidence of all manifestations quoted below, I do not agree with the designation “minor manifestations” for Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana, Dattātreyā and Kapila, as employed by several scholars. T.A. Gopinatha Rao, for instance, lists Kapila (Gopinatha Rao 1914, 247—48), Vyāsa, i.e. Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana (ibid, 250), and Dattātreyā (ibid, 251—56) under the category of “minor avatars and manifestations of Vishnu” in his work on Hindu iconography. More recently, Knut A. Jacobsen (2008) also uses the term in his book on Kapila. This terminology does not do justice to the wide range of textual sources in which the manifestations appear, and it even has a negative connotation, for it suggests that these manifestations are less important than others.

²⁹⁰ The *Harivaṃśa* has various manifestation lists (see Brinkhaus 2001), but I focus on the manifestations given in HV 31, which I only supplement with manifestations from other parts of the text, when they are not narrated here.

²⁹¹ One expects the manifestation list that is shared by the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Brahmapurāṇa* to be included in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*, but I did not find it in Kirfel 1927.

²⁹² MBh 12.326.71—92 is a list of six manifestations of Viṣṇu, starting with Varāha. Vāmana is not mentioned explicitly, but the actions of Viṣṇu’s Dwarf manifestation are described (MBh 12.326.74—76). MBh 12.337.36ab is a list of four manifestations, which also starts with Varāha.

²⁹³ Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana and Kapila are discussed below.

²⁹⁴ Most manuscripts include these four half verses between the manifestation myths of Kṛṣṇa and Kalkin. Only manuscripts Ś₁, G_{2,3} and M_{1—3} do not have these verses, but since the editorial policy demands Ś₁ and M_{1—3} to include a given verse in order to be adopted in the critical edition, the verses are categorized as a star passage. According to the editor of the *Harivaṃśa*, these star passages are later additions. Although this is generally true, the manuscript evidence shows that at some point Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana became a manifestation of Viṣṇu in the *Harivaṃśa*. In an article on Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana, Marcelle Saindon tries to explain how this variation in the *Harivaṃśa* came into existence, by highlighting the two most significant developments of the manifestation in early Purāṇas. On the one hand, the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa* include Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana as one of Viṣṇu’s manifestations. On the other hand, the *Brahmapurāṇa* does not include Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana. Since the *Brahmapurāṇa* borrows heavily from the *Harivaṃśa*, it is telling that it has not borrowed these star verses. Saindon proposes that at some moment, there were two coexisting *Harivaṃśa* versions: one without Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana, from which the *Brahmapurāṇa* borrowed its list, and the other with Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana, as suggested by the lists in the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa* (Saindon 2004—05, 313—14).

²⁹⁵ I identify the two Rāmas as Rāma Jāmadagnya and Rāma Dāśarathi for intertextual reasons. They both feature in numerous manifestation lists, including the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* and *Harivaṃśa* passages referred to in this table. For references to other texts, see Saindon 2004—05, 313. There

Rāma Dāśarathi (SP 97.19a)	MBh 12.326.78—81	HV 31.110—42, BrP 213.124—58	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.78
Dattātreyā (SP 97.19b) ²⁹⁶	—	HV 31.93—100ab, BrP 213.105—12	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.75
Narasimha (SP 97.19c)	MBh 12.326.73c—f, 12.337.36a	HV 31.31—67, BrP 213.43—79	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.71cd—72
Kṛṣṇa (<i>dāmodara</i> -, SP 97.20b ²⁹⁷ , <i>śaurin</i> - and <i>vṛṣṇibandhu</i> -, SP 97.26d ²⁹⁸)	MBh 12.326.82—92, MBh 12.337.36b	HV 31.143—47, BrP 213.159—63	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 5C.80 (not in MtP) ²⁹⁹
Kapila (SP 97.21a)	MBh 12.326.64, referring to Kapila as the founder of Sāṃkhya	HV 10.48—49, BrP 8.55—56, referring to Kapila as the slayer of the sons of Sagara	PPL <i>vaṃśānucarita</i> 2B.55cd—57 ³⁰⁰ (same text as HV and BrP; not in MtP), referring to Kapila as the slayer of the sons of Sagara

is a third Rāma, Balarāma, who is also one of Viṣṇu's manifestations. Balarāma seems to be meant in the Ambikākhaṇḍa recension of the *Skandapurāṇa*, for the A manuscripts read *nāgāya*, "[homage] to the Nāga", and Balarāma is often equated with the mythical serpent Śeṣa. For example, in the *Harivaṃśa*, Janameya wants to learn about Balarāma (called Baladeva here, HV 90.1b), "whom they know as the Nāga Ananta [i.e. Śeṣa]" (*anantaṃ yaṃ vidur nāgaṃ*, HV 90.3cd).²⁹⁶ Dattātreyā is a complex figure with different roles and identities in different traditions. One of these is that he is a manifestation of Viṣṇu. According to the *Harivaṃśa* (HV 31.93—100), Viṣṇu was born as the Brahmin Dattātreyā in order to bring back the cosmic order, by, among others, restoring the Vedas with their sacrifices and rituals, and the *dharma*. For an elaborate study on Dattātreyā, see Rigopoulos 1998.

²⁹⁷ For an analysis of Dāmodara as one of Kṛṣṇa's names, see Couture 2015a.

²⁹⁸ Both epithets relate to Kṛṣṇa's genealogy. The epithet *śaurin*- is a patronimicum of Kṛṣṇa, referring to Kṛṣṇa's grandfather Śūra. The epithet *vṛṣṇibandhu*- refers to Kṛṣṇa, being the son of Vasudeva and therefore born in the Vṛṣṇi clan.

²⁹⁹ The *Matsyapurāṇa* has the Buddha as the ninth manifestation instead.

³⁰⁰ This manifestation is present in a different section of the *vaṃśānucarita* than the other manifestations. The verse appears in text group I: the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, *Brahmapurāṇa*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Śivapurāṇa Dharmasaṃhitā* and *Vāyupurāṇa*.

As the table shows, all manifestations are well-supported. Two of these, however, have a relatively limited distribution and appear in a different context than the other manifestations: Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana and Kapila.

According to various texts, Viṣṇu manifests himself as Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana to divide the Veda into four parts. He is also known as (Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana) Vyāsa or Vedavyāsa³⁰¹. Among the texts shown in the table, only PPL *vaṁśānucarita* 5C.79 lists Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana (where he is called Vedavyāsa) among other manifestations of Viṣṇu. The *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*, on the other hand, only qualifies Vyāsa as a manifestation of Viṣṇu when it happens to mention Vyāsa, and not in a structured manifestation list. The references either speak of Vyāsa as born from (a part of) Nārāyaṇa, i.e. Viṣṇu³⁰², or equate him with Nārāyaṇa (MBh 12.334.9a—d)³⁰³. Even though the situation in the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* is different from the one in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*, there is enough textual evidence that Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana has been one of Viṣṇu's manifestations from an early epic-Purāṇic period onwards.

Kapila is considered to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu throughout the epic and Purāṇic genre as well, but there are at least two different Kapilas that qualify as such. There is one Kapila who killed the sons of Sagara. This narrative is found in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* (PPL *vaṁśānucarita* 3.55cd—57), represented by a large number of texts (see note 300), including the *Harivaṁśa* and the *Brahmapurāṇa*³⁰⁴. There is a

³⁰¹ Besides the surveyed texts, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is significant here as well because it features Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana in two manifestation lists. First, in ViP 3.2.54—end, Viṣṇu's functions in the four *yugas* are described. In the *Kṛtayuga*, Viṣṇu has the form of Kapila (ViP 3.2.56), in the *Tretāyuga*, the form of a king (ViP 3.2.57), in the *Dvāparayuga*, the form of Vedavyāsa (ViP 3.2.58), and at the end of the *Kaliyuga*, he has the form of Kalkin (ViP 3.2.59). Another passage, ViP 3.3.4—21, places Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana in a list of Viṣṇu's manifestations as different *vyāsas*, “compilers”, of the Vedas, in different eras. Parāśara, one of the interlocutors of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, explains that “after having seen that the heroism, energy and power of the people have diminished” (*vīryaṁ tejo balaṁ cālpaṁ manuṣyāṇāṁ avekṣya ca*, ViP 3.3.6ab), Viṣṇu “creates the portions of the Vedas” (*vedabhedān karoti sah*, ViP 3.3.6d). Parāśara then lists all the Veda-compilers (*vedavyāsā*, ViP 3.3.10a), concluding with the 28th, being Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana (ViP 3.3.19b).

³⁰² MBh 12.337.4, 14ff. and 55. For an overview of *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* passages with Vyāsa, see Grünendahl 1997, 238—39.

³⁰³ MBh 12.334.9a—d:

*kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaṁ vyāsaṁ viddhi nārāyaṇaṁ prabhum |
ko hy anyah puruṣavyāghra mahābhāratakr̥d bhavet |*

“Know that Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa is lord Nārāyaṇa, for who else can be the creator of the *Mahābhārata*, oh tiger-like man?”

³⁰⁴ The *Araṇyakaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* also refers to this story (MBh 3.45.25—27).

second Kapila, who is the founder of the Sāṃkhya system. One of the earliest attestations of this Kapila is in the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* (MBh 12.326.64)³⁰⁵, where he is listed among other philosophical founders³⁰⁶.

It is difficult to say which of the two Kapilas is referred to in the *Viṣṇustotra* of the *Skandapurāṇa*. In fact, both Kapilas appear elsewhere in the text, though never as manifestations of Viṣṇu³⁰⁷. In the eulogy, Kapila is nevertheless Viṣṇu's manifestation, just as Rāma Jāmadagnya is also a manifestation in the eulogy, but not in a narrative narrated elsewhere in the text³⁰⁸. Since both Kapilas are known in the *Skandapurāṇa*, the text itself does not provide a conclusive answer to the question which Kapila is meant in the *stotra*. However, based on the content of the myth in which the eulogy appears and on the comparison made with the other sources, I conclude that Kapila the slayer is more probable. After all, this Kapila fits the warrior-oriented content of the Varāha myth and the *Skandapurāṇa* corresponds exactly with the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* passage quoted in the table.

³⁰⁵ MBh 12.326.64:

vidyāśahāyavantam mām ādityastham sanātanam |

kapilam prāhur ācāryāḥ sāmkhyaṇīścitaniścayāḥ || 64 ||

“The teachers who are convinced of the design of Sāṃkhya call me ‘Kapila’, endowed with wisdom, whose base is the Ādityas, the eternal one.”

³⁰⁶ See Oberlies 1997, 128ff. for a discussion of the manifestations in this passage and see Jacobsen 2008, 31ff. for an overview of Purāṇas that contain manifestation lists with Kapila.

³⁰⁷ The myth of Kapila as the slayer of the 60,000 sons of Sagara is told in SP_{Bh} 126—27. It follows the *Mahābhārata* version of the myth (MBh 3.104—8) rather closely, where he is not a manifestation of Viṣṇu either. Kapila as the founder of Sāṃkhya features in SP_{Bh} 172, where Prahlāda becomes a Sāṃkhya teacher. When Prahlāda decides to dedicate his life to this philosophical system, he officially becomes a pupil, as stated in the following passage.

SP_{Bh} 172.59cd—60ab, 61cd—62ab:

sākṣād bhagavataḥ śiṣyaṃ kapilasyāsurim munim || 59 ||

śiṣyatvenopasaṃgamya mokṣavidyām avāptavān |

[...] mokṣavidyāparārthajñāḥ sāmkhyaśiddhāntapārāgaḥ || 61 ||

siddhaḥ pañcaśikhaḥ nāmnā so 'bhavad munisattama |

“Having publicly approached the sage Āsuri, the pupil of lord Kapila, in order to become [his] pupil, he [i.e. Prahlāda] reached knowledge [that shall lead to] liberation. [...] Knowing the highest goal of knowledge [that shall lead to] liberation, mastering Sāṃkhya-Siddhānta, he became the Siddha (“Accomplished One”) called ‘Pañcaśikha’, oh best of sages.”

The *Skandapurāṇa* follows the classical line of Sāṃkhya leaders. Kapila is the founder, Āsuri is his first disciple and Pañcaśikha is Āsuri's pupil. See Bakker 2014, 8—9 for a short discussion on why the Sāṃkhya tradition is included in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

³⁰⁸ In section 1.3, I have argued that in SP_{Bh} 121.23—124.end, Rāma Jāmadagnya is not a manifestation of Viṣṇu.

Since the *Skandapurāṇa* has the closest parallels with the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*, represented by the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* and *Vāyupurāṇa* (and for a large part by the *Matsyapurāṇa*), it is tempting to assume that an early form of these Purāṇas was the source of inspiration for the *Skandapurāṇa* composers. However, as the table also shows, the epithets are well-distributed among the other texts too. The wide range of textual sources indicates the general popularity of these manifestations. Each time a new Purāṇa was composed, these manifestations were at the disposal of Purāṇic composers, ready to be included in manifestation lists. The adoption of such standard manifestations in the *Skandapurāṇa* eulogy can be understood as intertextually consistent because they are intrinsically linked to Viṣṇu.

The reason why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers included such a large set of manifestations is again probably related to the intranarrational level. Just as the eulogy is set in the context of slaying an Asura, it is also set in the context of Viṣṇu manifesting himself to re-establish the cosmic order. The large number of manifestations in the eulogy is in line with the topic of the Varāha myth and can be seen as a deliberate choice of the *Skandapurāṇa* composers.

3.5.3 Epithets related to Śiva and the *Skandapurāṇa*

Eight epithets can be grouped together because they have a link with Śiva, Pārvatī or the *Skandapurāṇa*. Some examples are given here to illustrate how these epithets can be interpreted and how they reveal the hand of the composers.

- The epithet *mahādevapriya*-, “dear to Mahādeva [“the Great God”, i.e. Śiva]” (SP 97.21d), expresses Viṣṇu’s devotion to Śiva³⁰⁹, which is a theme throughout the *Skandapurāṇa*, as shown in section 3.4.
- The epithet *salile tapyamāna*-, “practicing *tapas* on water” (SP 97.20c), generally refers to Śiva³¹⁰. For example, in a hymn of praise to Śiva in the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 7.5.49ff.), Śiva is invoked as *tapyamānāya salile*, and elsewhere in the

³⁰⁹ The epithet *maheśvaragaṇa*-, “Gaṇa of Maheśvara [“the Great Lord”, i.e. Śiva]” (SP 97.22d), also shows Viṣṇu’s devotion to Śiva.

³¹⁰ Another epithet that usually involves Śiva is *śarva*, “Śarva” (SP 97.28c), for it is one of Śiva’s names.

Skandapurāṇa, the epithet is likewise applied to Śiva (SP 14.16a and SP_{Bh} 122.36c). It goes back to the Sthāṇu myth, in which Śiva practices *tapas* in water (see for example MBh 10.17)³¹¹. The epithet is not known as Viṣṇu's, and I did not find a narrative in which Viṣṇu practices *tapas* on water. Instead, the composers may have intended Viṣṇu's "yogic sleep" (*yoganidrā*) on the cosmic ocean before a new era³¹². The following epithet, *nāgaśayyāpriya*- (SP 97.20d), should probably be connected to *salile tapyamāna*-, for they both involve water. Furthermore, the similarities between this epithet being used for Śiva in the context of the Sthāṇu myth and it being used for Viṣṇu in the context of his cosmic sleep may have also contributed to the transposition from Śiva to Viṣṇu: Śiva practices *tapas* before the (re)creation of the universe, and Viṣṇu lies on Śeṣa before creation; Śiva's *tapas* is done on water, and Viṣṇu lies on the water.

- The epithet *rudrārḍharūpa*-, "whose body is half Rudra [i.e. Śiva]" (SP 97.22a), refers to Viṣṇu's body that is associated with Śiva in the form of Harihara. Harihara is a type of imagery where Śiva and Viṣṇu are combined into one icon, each forming one half³¹³. This is a widespread iconographic phenomenon, which has been visualized textually in the *Skandapurāṇa* at the end of the Vāmana myth,

³¹¹ When Śiva practices *tapas* in the water for a long time, Brahmā mentally creates a second creator, Dakṣa (MBh 10.17.11). Brahmā helps Dakṣa feeding all creatures. The population grows so fast that Śiva becomes angry and emerges from the water. He makes clear that in fact, all food has been produced through his *tapas*. After this speech, Śiva leaves and starts practicing *tapas* on a mountain (summary based on Shulman 1986, 103).

³¹² There are numerous examples of Viṣṇu's yogic sleep (see Couture 2015d). For instance, in the Varāha myth of HV App. 1 No. 42, Viṣṇu sleeps before the creation starts.

HV App. 1 No. 42 ll. 62—63:

tataḥ svapiti dharmātmā sarvalokapitāmahaḥ | 62 |

kim apy amitavikrānto yoganidrām upāgataḥ || 63 ||

"Then the righteous grandfather of all the worlds [i.e. Viṣṇu], of such immeasurable might, sleeps, having gone to a yogic sleep."

³¹³ The epithet *umārūpin*-, "with the form of Umā [i.e. Pārvatī]" (SP 97.22b), has a similar compound construction and may be understood in the same sense. However, I am not aware of any narrative or image in which Viṣṇu merges with Pārvatī. Alternatively, Umā may be understood as the all-encompassing goddess, who represents all women. In that case, the epithet could refer to Viṣṇu's form as Mohinī, an enchanting woman who stole the *amṛta* back from the Asuras in the Amṛtamanthana myth. Another alternative has been suggested by the editors of this part of the *Skandapurāṇa* that *umā*- should rather be interpreted as "flax", a blue flower (SP Vol. V, forth.). *Umā*- then refers to Viṣṇu's blue skin: "with the colour (*rūpa*) of a flax". If Viṣṇu's colour is indeed meant, then the ambiguity with Umā as Śiva's wife must still have been intended, for the audience of the *Skandapurāṇa* would immediately associate *umā*- with Pārvatī.

where Śiva grants half of his body to Viṣṇu (SP_{Bh} 121.20), and Viṣṇu reaches *yoga*, “union”, with Śiva³¹⁴.

- The epithet *jīmūtarūpa-*, “having the form of a cloud” (SP 97.21c), refers to a story in the *Skandapurāṇa*, in which Yajña, “Sacrifice”, once had the form of a cloud (SP 31.38—46)³¹⁵. It is common practice to identify Viṣṇu with the sacrifice (see Gonda 1954/1969, 77—80).

The epithets in this category display the hand of the *Skandapurāṇa* composers most clearly, in particular those referring to stories that are only known from the text itself, as well as those epithets that demonstrate Viṣṇu’s devotion to Śiva. After all, these are new elements that are not found in texts prior to the *Skandapurāṇa*. By introducing these new designations, the composers integrate the *Viṣṇustotra* within the rest of the text, establishing internarrational consistency.

3.5.4 Which narrative consistency prevails?

I started this analysis of the gods’ eulogy to Viṣṇu with a comparison with other requests for help. In this textual context, it is a literary convention that the gods praise the requested god. Even though the *Viṣṇustotra* can thus be explained as consistent on the extratextual level, there are also cases in which a similar request for help follows the same pattern, but without an actual *stotra*. It is then simply stated that the god in question is praised by the gods. This raises the question why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers did not opt for this second possibility.

To answer this question, I have taken the content of the eulogy into consideration. Most epithets appear to fall into well-definable categories that moreover fit the context of the eulogy. The many epithets that are related to Viṣṇu as warrior and as a deity who manifests himself fit the context of the *stotra* perfectly, since the eulogy appears in the context of the Varāha myth, which celebrates Viṣṇu as Asura-slayer and in his

³¹⁴ The iconography of Harihara and its textual representation is discussed in note 388.

³¹⁵ The epithet *rudradattavara-*, “whose body is half Rudra [i.e. Śiva]” (SP 97.22a), probably also refers to specific moments in a myth in the *Skandapurāṇa*. In SP 68.10, Śiva grants Viṣṇu various boons, including the Sudarśana *cakra*, and also in each afterlife episode of Viṣṇu’s three manifestation myths, Śiva grants Viṣṇu a boon (see section 4.2).

manifestation of the Boar. Thanks to this intranarrational consistency, the eulogy is stylistically blent into the rest of the narrative. However, stylistic writing does not seem to have been the only concern of the composers. The epithets that are specifically related to the *Skandapurāṇa* and Śiva reveal an additional reason to include a *Viṣṇustotra*. Some of the epithets in this category make a unique connection with other narratives in the *Skandapurāṇa*, and others appeal for Viṣṇu's characterization in the *Skandapurāṇa* as Śiva's devotee. In this way, the *Viṣṇustotra* becomes a Śaiva variant of such a eulogy to Viṣṇu. With this new version, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers were able to take control of how Viṣṇu should be worshipped from a Śaiva perspective.

3.6 Conclusions

The way in which Viṣṇu is portrayed in the *Skandapurāṇa* is unprecedented. His character shows both Vaiṣṇava elements that are known from other sources and Śaiva elements that are innovations. To explain this new, composite image of Viṣṇu, a four-fold categorization of different narrative consistencies has been introduced. To prevent unnecessary repetition, a few examples of each type of consistency should suffice in order to demonstrate the composers' attempt to use different mechanisms of consistency.

- Intranarrational consistency can be observed in the choice of epithets for the *Viṣṇustotra* in the Varāha myth. By selecting a large number of epithets referring to Viṣṇu as an Asura-slaying warrior and his manifestations, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers create consistency with the rest of the Varāha myth being a story on Viṣṇu manifesting himself to conquer the Asuras.
- Internarrational consistency becomes particularly apparent in cases where Viṣṇu's characteristic traits have a Śaiva disposition. The idea that Viṣṇu's *cakra* stems from Śiva and does not work against Śiva's attendants can be understood from the text's ideology that Śiva is superior and the ultimate saviour. Such innovations reflect the *Skandapurāṇa*'s core principles found in the rest of the text.
- Intertextual consistency concerns those narrative elements and character traits that are known from other texts. The main storyline is, for a start, maintained in

the *Skandapurāṇa*. The same goes for some of Viṣṇu's key features, such as the *cakra* being one of his principle weapons.

- Extratextual consistency has been identified as one of the reasons to include a *Viṣṇustotra* in the *Skandapurāṇa*, as it appears to be a literary convention to add a praise to a request for help. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers actively engage with this literary standard, by narrating an extensive *stotra* to Viṣṇu.

The majority of the case studies show a combination of different levels of consistency. For example, the *Viṣṇustotra* displays all four levels. Its inclusion can be explained from an extratextual perspective, and its content displays intranarrational, internarrational and intertextual consistency. Most combinations of narrative consistency are, however, one of intertextual and internarrational consistency. These concern characteristics of Viṣṇu which are a mix of features that are known from other texts, mainly with a Vaiṣṇava background, and features that agree with the Śaiva ideology of the *Skandapurāṇa*. The reason why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers often chose this kind of characterizations can be explained with the help of a theory developed in the field of Greek and Latin literature, namely 'anchoring innovation'.

In the position paper 'Anchoring Innovation: A Classical Research Agenda'³¹⁶, Ineke Sluiter has defined anchoring innovation as follows (emphasis in italics mine).

"Innovations may become acceptable, understandable, and desirable when relevant social groups can effectively integrate and accommodate them in their conceptual categories, values, beliefs and ambitions. This is the case when they can connect what is perceived as new to what they consider familiar, known, already accepted, when, that is, innovations are 'anchored'"
(Sluiter 2016, 23).

³¹⁶ Anchoring Innovation is an NWO-funded project, studying innovations in Greek and Latin society. More information can be found in the position paper by Sluiter 2016 and on the project website <https://www.ru.nl/oikos/anchoring-innovation/>.

In other words, innovations of any kind—from new architectural constructions to new policies or new literary genres—should contain a familiar component in order to be accepted by the prospected users, voters or audience. The same applies to most of Viṣṇu's new characteristics in the *Skandapurāṇa* version of the manifestation myths. Viṣṇu's *new* features should contain elements that are *familiar, known, already accepted*, in order to become *acceptable*. In order to demonstrate that this process is present in the *Skandapurāṇa*, I will revisit some of the characteristics that I have identified as internarrational and intertextual consistency and as a combination of the two.

Viṣṇu's characteristics discussed in the category of internarrational consistency can be seen as what is *new*, the *innovations*. Many internarrational elements have a Śaiva nature and contribute to the text's ideology that Śiva is superior to all. This does not only *innovate* the myth, but it also contributes to the *integration and accommodation* of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Thanks to these innovations, the intrinsically Vaiṣṇava myths become integrated and accommodated in the Śaiva text. Hence, the words 'integrate' and 'accommodate' in Sluiter's definition is, at least in the case of the *Skandapurāṇa*, not limited to the audience's "conceptual categories, values, beliefs and ambitions", but can also be applied to the text of the innovators. In order to be accepted, the innovation should comply with the context in which the innovation takes place.

Integration and accommodation also takes place in the sense that the new Śaiva characteristics are integrated in and accommodated to the known Vaiṣṇava characteristics. Those features that fall under intertextual consistency are what is defined in the theory of anchoring innovation as *familiar, known, already accepted*. Innovations should be accommodated to known characteristics of Viṣṇu because they are already in the audience's *conceptual categories, values, beliefs and ambitions*. This means that innovations cannot be taken too far. For instance, if Brahmā, who is well-known as the god of creation, would be portrayed as the god of destruction, the composers might lose their credibility. After all, according to the general worldview of that time, Brahmā is the creator god and not the one who causes the end of the universe. Composers had to acknowledge certain general notions, including those related to Viṣṇu. Some of his features simply cannot be changed, such as the fixed narrative element that Viṣṇu is the one who conquers the king of the Daityas.

According to the theory of anchoring innovation, the goal of such combinations of the known and unknown is to *become acceptable, understandable, and desirable*. The *Skandapurāṇa* composers probably had a similar aim. Their version of the manifestation myths had to become accepted by their audience. Being accepted is crucial for retellings, in particular those that have been radically changed, because they do not yet belong to the established order. The greatest chance at acceptance is when there is a balance between the known and the unknown³¹⁷.

Whereas the *Skandapurāṇa* composers carefully weighted innovations and fixed knowledge for the main story of the manifestation myths, they took a different approach in their narration of the afterlives of Viṣṇu's manifestations. These afterlife episodes are unknown from earlier sources and replace Viṣṇu's heroism with strong Śaiva beliefs. How can we explain this alternative narrative approach?

³¹⁷ In chapter 6, the *Conclusions*, I will argue that a dramatic visualization of those retellings that have been changed radically from an ideological point of view can additionally contribute to their acceptance. Since the new, Śaiva retellings of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths did not belong to the established order yet, it seems important that they were told in an appealing, scenic and rich style of writing, instead of in a more static, straightforward summary presentation.