

The Textual Sanctification of Vārāṇasī

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Introduction

This research investigates the complex literary processes involved in sanctifying the famous city of Vārāṇasī, a religious destination in North India. A key aspect is the continuous textual construction and rendition of the city; that is, the discursive and narrative reframing that Vārāṇasī has been subject to during most of its religious history.

A central primary source for the project is a unique 12th-century palm-leaf manuscript of a *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha*. That is, a compendium of Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas, texts celebrating the greatness (*māhātmya*) of Vārāṇasī as a religious destination. The texts included in the compendium are attributed to various Purāṇas. However, they often do not correspond with the extant versions of the texts they are attributed to, due to their evolution and adaptation to fit changing spatial and temporal contexts. The compendium provides a snapshot of Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas in a state of flux. It is a unique primary source which forces us to critically think of Vārāṇasīmāhātmyas and Purāṇas as “living texts.”

I employ three analytical perspectives to show the multiple dimensions of the creation of a sanctified Vārāṇasī. First, the perspective of “deep textual history,” involving issues of intertextuality, textual creation processes, and historical connections. Second, the perspective of “localization,” used to investigate how sacred space is created in and around specific locations. Last, the perspective of “sovereignty,” focusing on power dynamics.

However, as the overall scope of the research is quite broad, in this research report I mainly focus on one of the three analytical perspectives, namely “deep textual history.” To highlight intertextuality, I present examples of two relevant chapters from the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha*, corresponding with parts of the *Matsyapurāṇa* and the early *Skandapurāṇa*.¹ Then, to display textual creation processes, I discuss alterations which have been made to the texts to adapt the material to the context of Vārāṇasī. Additionally, the perspective of “localization” overlaps with some of the considerations below, as the alterations show how textual material has been deliberately changed to refer to specific locations in Vārāṇasī, thus creating sacred space around these locations. Further, I also show how the process of editing and translation is made more complex by at least two later correctors who have made changes in the current manuscript.²

¹ The early *Skandapurāṇa* is a text that has been the subject of a long academic project in the Netherlands, starting in the early 1990s, and continuing until the present day. The early *Skandapurāṇa* is the earliest extant version of a text called *Skandapurāṇa*, instead of the newer text of the same name which is a compilation of later compositions (Adriaensen, Bakker, and Isaacson 1998, vii).

² I only have two manuscripts to work with, namely the 12th-century palm-leaf manuscript (in the old Nāgarī script), and its later apograph (in Devanāgarī). This makes the preparation of a more reliable critical edition with multiple sources impossible, and I must make do with only these two manuscripts. The palm-leaf manuscript is currently in the Kaiser Library in Kāthmāṇḍū, Nepal (accession number 66, originally microfilmed by the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project on reel C 6/3). I have been able to use colour photographs of the manuscript, kindly provided by Peter Bisschop.

The starting point of the research consists of the texts assembled in the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* manuscript. Here, I discuss parts of chapters 36 and 37, which I have edited and translated. In the manuscript, these two chapters are attributed to the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Puṣkarapurāṇa*, respectively. However, chapter 36 does not overlap with the *Skandapurāṇa*, and the *Puṣkarapurāṇa* does not exist anymore. In reality, chapter 36 overlaps with chapters 100, 184, and 185 of the extant *Matsyapurāṇa*, and chapter 37 overlaps with chapter 26 of the early *Skandapurāṇa*.³ These overlaps show the confusing nature of the text attributions. The format of my editions, as I will show below, is designed to highlight parallels with other texts, enable comparison, and display all of the variant readings⁴ through a fully positive textual apparatus.⁵ In this way, I provide a look into the intertextuality of the sources, and highlight issues related to editing and presenting texts with such a large number of later alterations.

Although they are often grouped into canonical lists of 18 Mahāpurāṇas and 18 Upapurāṇas,⁶ Purāṇas have evolved due to changes made by various individuals and communities. The examples presented below show us how Purāṇas are “living texts.” Their evolution has happened deliberately through recontextualizing and correcting passages, and unintentionally through scribal errors. Because of the seemingly incorrect attributions of its chapters and the multiple layers of corrections in its current manuscript, the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* compendium I discuss here is a good example of Purāṇas as truly “living texts”. Further, the perspective of “deep textual history” helps to display the living nature of Purāṇas, especially through its focus on intertextuality and textual creation processes.

I will initially provide an explanation of the primary sources I am working with. Then, I show examples of intertextuality and adaptation from the two aforementioned chapters of the compendium. I conclude with a discussion on scribal corrections, editing, and translation. Through the examples and the discussion, the main aim is to show why my approach for analyzing the material is the most appropriate one for this compendium of “living texts”.

³ Hazra dates *Matsyapurāṇa* chapters 184 and 185 to between 700 and 1200 CE (Hazra 1940, 46), and chapter 100 to between 600 and 900 CE (ibid., 43). The age of the early *Skandapurāṇa* is estimated to be between the 6th and early 7th centuries CE (Bakker and Isaacson 2004, 52).

⁴ That is, readings of the manuscript before and after correction (*ante correctionem* [ac] and *post correctionem* [pc], respectively).

⁵ A fully positive apparatus reports the readings for all available sources instead of only reporting those readings that differ from the main reading.

⁶ See e.g. Smith 2016, 358-362 for a discussion on the five characteristics of Purāṇas, and how the Mahāpurāṇa and Upapurāṇa lists are fluid and used to group the texts in a canonical manner.

Sources

The *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* is a problematic and difficult source to work with. The Sanskrit it is written in is often irregular, and the manuscript contains multiple layers of additions, alterations, and corrections (see fig. 1). We do not have direct information about its author(s), scribe(s), or compiler(s) either. The palm-leaf manuscript can be dated and placed in 12th century CE Vārāṇasī because of other, more easily datable manuscripts (Bisschop 2021, 19).⁷

If we compare the texts of the compendium with extant editions, the chapters often appear to be attributed incorrectly in the colophons (see Bisschop 2021, 6-7). Both of the chapters I discuss here are “incorrectly” attributed. The texts themselves are also sometimes created by using multiple sources (as we can see with chapter 36). However, it is difficult to know whether parts of a text have been incorporated or what the nature of the attributions is; if seemingly incorrect incorporations and attributions are a result of earlier, different source texts; and if a text has been adapted to include locations and themes more suitable for the context of Vārāṇasī.

The creation, alteration, and adaptation process of the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* is layered and complex, as can be seen both in the textual content and the visible additions and identifiable alterations of the manuscript. Some of the chapters of the compendium do not have extant textual parallels. Although I have chosen to discuss two chapters that, for the most part, correspond with extant sources, editing them is not a simple task either. Even the parts that contain parallels and overlap with other texts can be difficult to edit. On the one hand, if there is no point of comparison, the errors and illegible parts can be harder to correct. On the other, following a partially overlapping text can lead to a result that simply repeats an existing, “canonical” version of a text instead of showing us what is transmitted in the compendium.

I illustrate my arguments here by using examples from the two aforementioned *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* chapters. I present the examples in different ways because the complexity of the material requires a varied approach. Presenting the examples in only one way would not show all the aspects of the texts I want to show. Some examples are presented as they would be in a critical edition, alongside fully positive textual apparatuses and also translations; some in a synoptic edition in tabular form; and some in a diplomatic edition to show the state of the texts as they are transmitted in the manuscript.⁸

⁷ Additionally, two correctors have written down dates corresponding to 1530 and 1669 CE in the last folio of the palm-leaf manuscript.

⁸ Brackets “()” indicate illegible characters, and cruxes “††” enclose corrupt passages. In the apparatus, the lemma sign “]” is preceded by the selected reading; the bullet symbol “●” is placed before a second apparatus entry within a single *pāda*; and the “◌” symbol is used to indicate words which are treated as separate in the apparatus but are compounded with other words in the Sanskrit text. The *Matsyapurāṇa* readings are reported as starting with “MtP”, followed by the chapter and verse number and *pāda* letter (e.g. “MtP 100.17ab”).

Examples of Intertextuality and Adaptation

I present three groups of examples from the compendium, starting with chapter 36. If we view chapter 36 from a present-day perspective and compare it with the extant *Matsyapurāṇa*, we can see how it has been created and assembled from three separate chapters of text. The first section of chapter 36 corresponds with *Matsyapurāṇa* chapter 100, followed by a passage of *circa* 16 verses with no extant parallel. The next section corresponds with *Matsyapurāṇa* chapter 184, and the following one with *Matsyapurāṇa* chapter 185.

In the first example, I show how passages have been taken from *Matsyapurāṇa* chapter 100, which in origin has nothing to do with Vārāṇasī, and have been altered to fit a new context as a Vārāṇasīmāhātmya in chapter 36 of the compendium. Thus, *Matsyapurāṇa* chapter 100 is *not* a Vārāṇasīmāhātmya. Instead, in the extant *Matsyapurāṇa*, the chapter is about a vow called Vibhūtidvādaśī, and how performing the vow is very beneficial to a devotee. The Vibhūtidvādaśī vow is related to Viṣṇu instead of Śiva, the deity with whom Vārāṇasī is most commonly associated. In *Matsyapurāṇa* 100, a courtesan named Anaṅgavatī (who is not mentioned in chapter 36 of the compendium at all) performs this vow in Vaidīśa, a city associated with Viṣṇu. The main deity of *Matsyapurāṇa* 100 is clearly Viṣṇu, whereas in chapter 36, the main deity is Śiva. The version of the text as we can see it in chapter 36 of the compendium contains alterations which have been made so that the passage would fit the context of Śiva and Vārāṇasī.

The second example consists of verses which are not found in the *Matsyapurāṇa*. It shows how verses have also been added to chapter 36. The additions have been made to further recontextualize the passages taken from the *Matsyapurāṇa*, and serve to make the entire chapter more focused on Vārāṇasī and specific locations within the city.

The last example concerns the next chapter in the compendium; that is, chapter 37, which overlaps with chapter 26 of the early *Skandapurāṇa*. I show how two separate ways of presenting the text are appropriate for different purposes. The first focuses on showing the problematic state of the texts as they are transmitted in the manuscript, and the second illustrates how editing can be very useful for a clearer comparison with other texts.

Example I: Recontextualized Passages from Chapter 36

In the following example verses, the upper apparatus shows the textual variants from the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha* palm-leaf manuscript (V₁) and its apograph (V₂), whereas the lower apparatus shows *Matsyapurāṇa* overlap. The verses are a part of a story about the king Puṣpavāhana. As the king is uncertain of how he has reached his present, prosperous state, he

requests the sage Pracetas to tell him about his previous life. The sage recounts a story of the previous life of the king as a ruthless hunter who, during a harsh drought, finds a pond filled with lotuses and collects a large amount of them in hopes of gaining a profit. He then goes to Avimukta⁹ to sell the lotuses. However, he ends up finding a specifically auspicious place and sees the worship of Śiva being performed there. The king – then still a hunter – becomes very impressed and subsequently offers the lotuses to Śiva, and this auspicious act leads to his prosperous rebirth.

athābhīpaśyan mahad ambujāḍhyaṃ sarovaram paṅkapaṛītarodham |
padmāny athādāya tato bahūni gataḥ puram avimuktanāmadheyam || 15 ||⁰

15a athābhīpaśyan] V_{1pc}, athābhi(s)asya V_{1ac} (unmetrical), athyābhīśasya V₂ (unmetrical), • mahad ambujāḍhyaṃ] em., ma(dde)h(em) (vu)jādāpyaṃ V₁ (unmetrical), maddehaṃ ma(mbu)jādyāṃ V₂ (unmetrical); **15b** paṅkapaṛītarodham] em., paṃ(ka)paṛīteroṣaṃdha V_{1pc} (unmetrical), paṃ(ka)paṛīteroṣaṃ V_{1ac}, (sva)rūpaṛīteroṣaṃ V₂; **15d** avimuktanāmadheyam] em. (unmetrical), avimuktanāmadhiyam V₁ (unmetrical), aviktanāmadhiyam V₂

15ab] MtP 100.14ab: athābhīdīṣṭaṃ mahad ambujāḍhyaṃ sarovaram paṅkapaṛītarodhaḥ; **15c** = MtP 100.14c; **15d**] MtP 100.14d: gataḥ puram vaidīśanāmadheyam

“Then, you [were] seeing a great pond surrounded by mud, abounding in lotuses. Thereupon, having taken many lotuses [from the pond], you went to the city called Avimukta.”

tanmūlyalābhāya puram samastaṃ bhrāntaṃ tvayā śeṣam ahas tadāsīt |
kretā na kaścit kamaleṣu jātaḥ śrānto bhṛṣaṃ kṣutparipīḍitaś ca || 16 ||

16b bhrāntaṃ] em., bhrāntaṃ V₁, (vāṃ)taṃ V₂, • śeṣam ahas tadāsīt] V_{1pc}, saha mahat sadāsīḥ V_{1ac}, sahat sadāsīḥ V₂ (unmetrical); **16c** kretā] V_{1pc}, krīto V_{1ac}, (vrī)to V₂, • kamaleṣu] V_{1pc}, kamaloṣu V_{1ac}V₂; **16d** śrānto] V_{1pc} (śrā unclear), sānto V_{1ac}

16 = MtP 100.15

“To obtain profit from them, you were roaming about the entire city for an entire day, [but] no buyer appeared for the lotuses, and [you were] wearied, violently tormented by hunger.”

upaviṣṭas tvam ekasmin sabhāryo bhavanāṅgaṇe |

⁹ Avimukta refers here to Vārāṇasī, or possibly a specific part of Vārāṇasī which is smaller than the current city.

¹⁰ Note the change from *vaidīśa*^o to *avimukta*^o, reflecting the aforementioned change from a more Viṣṇu-oriented location to a Śiva-oriented one. The meter is Upajāti of Indravajrā and Upendravajrā. The last *pāda* is unmetrical, and contains an extra syllable in the last compound, *avimuktanāmadheyam*. This is clearly the intended meaning, which is why I have left the hypermetrical reading intact. The extra syllable is most definitely a result from changing the name of the city from the three-syllable Vaidīśa to the four-syllable Avimukta.

rudrāvāse tu śabdaś ca tvayā rātram mahāñ chrutaḥ || 17 ||

17b bhavanāṅgaṇe] V₁, bhavatām gaṇe V₂; **17c** rudrāvāse] V_{1pc}, bhadrāvāse V_{1ac}V₂, • śabdaś ca] conj., samsthasya V₁V₂; **17d** mahāñchrutaḥ] conj., mahāśrutāḥ V_{1ac}V₂, sahaḥ smṛtaḥ V_{1pc}

17ab = MtP 100.16ab; **17cd**] MtP 100.16cd: *atha maṅgalaśabdaś ca tvayā rātrau mahāñchrutaḥ*;

“You entered a courtyard of a house together with your wife, and you heard a loud noise in the night [coming] from Rudrāvāsa.”

sabhāryas tatra gataṅ yatrāsau maṅgaladhvaniḥ |
tatra dr̥ṣṭam tvayā divyaṅ devadevasya śūliṅgaḥ |
rātrijāgaraṅgaṅ śambhoḥ pañcāyatanavāsinaḥ || 18 ||

18b maṅgala°] V₁V₂ (ñ unclear in V₁); **18c** dr̥ṣṭam] em., driṣṭam V₁, dr̥ṣṭvam V₂; **18e** rātri°] V₂, rātr° V₁

18ab = MtP 100.17ab; **18cdef**] MtP 100.17cd-18ab: *tatra maṅḍapamadhyasthā viṣṇor arcāvalokitā || veśyānaṅgavaṭī nāma vibhūtidvādaśivratam |*

“Together with your wife, you went there, where that auspicious sound [was coming from]. There, you saw the divine nightly vigil of the god of gods, the one with the spear, Śambhu, the inhabitant of Pañcāyatana...”

vaiśākhamāse devasya divyāś caiva vibhūtayah |
†oṃkāraṅ paramaṅ brahma† devagandharvakinnaraiḥ || 19 ||¹¹

19a vaiśākha°] V_{1pc}, vaiśave V_{1ac}, vaiśāsa° V₂

19ab] MtP 100.18cd: *samāptau māghamāsasya lavaṅācalam uttamam*; **19cd**] MtP 100 omit.

“...and the divine powerful manifestations of the god during the Vaiśākha month. †The supreme Oṃkāra, the Brahman,† by the *devas*, *gandharvas*, and *kinnaras*...”

brāhmaṅair vedatattvajñaiḥ siddhaiḥ pāsupataiḥ paraiḥ |
hr̥ṭpadmadr̥ṣṭisamsthaiś ca mūrdhāñjalibhis tathā || 20 ||¹²

¹¹ It is likely that two *pādas* have been lost here, that is, *pāda* d and a. Brahman refers here simultaneously to the five *brahmanmantras* of Pāsupatas and to Śiva. Similar content is found in chapters 12 and 29 of the compendium. Regarding the identification of Oṃkāra/Pañcāyatana as a *liṅga*, and the connecting of the site to Pāsupatas through the use of the Pāsupata-specific term *pañcārtha*, see 12.11-12:

anyac caivāṭidevasya divyaṅ liṅgaṅ ca muktidaṅ |

oṃkāreśvaranāmānaṅ pañcāyatanam īśvaram || 11 ||

pañcaviṃśātmake tattve ṣaḍviṃśaṅ tatprakīrtitaṅ |

tatra sthāne tu labhyate pañcārtham jñānadurlabham || 12 ||

For another verse connecting Pañcāyatana with the Pāsupatas, see 29.8:

yattat pāsupataṅ jñānaṅ pañcārtham iti śabditaṅ |

tasya jñānasya taṅ hetuḥ pañcāyatanam ucyate || 8 ||

¹² Read *mūrdhāñ*.

20b pāśupataiḥ] V₁ , pāśupa(taiḥ) V₂ ; **20c** hr̥t°] V₂ , dr̥ hr̥t°] V₁ (unmetrical) , • °sam̐sthaīś ca] V_{1pc} , °sam̐(stha)sya V_{1ac}V₂ ; **20d** mūrdhānāñjalibhis] V₁ , mūrdhā(bh)āñjalibhis V₂

20] MtP 100 omit.

“...by the *brāhmanas* who know the truth of the Vedas, those accomplished, great Pāśupatas; by those established in the vision of the heart-lotus, and [others] performing *añjalis* with their heads.”¹³

tadbhāvagatasamkalpair om̐kāragatamānasaiḥ |
anyaiś ca vividhaiḥ siddhais tasmin deśa †upāsataḥ† || 21 ||¹⁴

21a °kalpair] V₁ , °(ka)lyai(r) V₂ ; **21b** om̐kāra°] V₁ , (om̐)kāra° V₂ ; **21c** anyaiś] V₁ , any(ai)ś V₂ ; **21d** deśa] V_{1pc}V₂ , deśe V_{1ac} (unmetrical)

21] MtP 100 omit.

“By the ones whose intentions are focused at that state, by the ones whose minds are set on Om̐kāra, and by other various *siddhas*, in that place †...†.”

dhyāyamānaiḥ param brahma om̐kāṛākhyam tu īśvaram |
mayā cānugataṁ sarvaṁ pañcāyatanadarśanāt || 22 ||¹⁵

22a dhyāyamānaiḥ] V₁ , dhyā(yamā)naiḥ V₂ , • param] V_{1pc} , V_{1ac}V₂ omit. (unmetrical) ; **22b** om̐kāṛākhyam°] V_{1pc} om̐kārasya V_{1ac}V₂ , • tu] V₂ , °rttu V₁ ; **22c** mayā cānugataṁ] V_{1pc} , V_{1ac}V₂ omit. (unmetrical)

22] MtP 100 omit.

“By those meditating on the supreme Brahman, the lord known as Om̐kāra, everything has been understood by me (i.e., Pracetas) because of seeing Pañcāyatana.”

Some of the alterations in chapter 36 are location-focused. The alteration in verse 15 is quite simple. The name of the city Vaidīśa – associated with Viṣṇu – has been changed to Avimukta. In this way, someone altering the text has recontextualized verse 15 in a very direct way: a name of a location has been replaced with another, more contextually fitting one.

A different, but also location-focused alteration can be seen in verse 17. The first part of the compound *maṅgala-śabda* has been changed to mention Rudrāvāsa, which here refers to a specific location in Vārāṅasī. Verse 17 shows how a location was added to a verse where the *Matsyapurāṇa* version does not refer to a location. The likely reason for such a change is to further pinpoint the location within the geography of Vārāṅasī (or Avimukta). That is, verse 15 first changes Vaidīśa to

¹³ Being “established in the vision of the heart-lotus” most likely refers to some kind of yogic practice. This practice might involve mentally concentrating on the region of the heart and visualizing it as a lotus.

¹⁴ *Upasthitaiḥ* would make more sense, as an instrumental plural is needed here.

¹⁵ Note that with the correct sandhi *tv īśvaram*, *pāda* b would be unmetrical. There is probably a loss of two or more *pādas* (d and a) here.

Avimukta, but then here in verse 17, Rudrāvāsa has been added to make part of the story take place in this more specific location in Vārāṇasī instead of referring to the city as a whole.

Verses 18-19 show another recontextualization: a verse centered around Viṣṇu and the Vibhūtidvādaśī vow in the *Matsyapurāṇa* has been altered to focus on Śiva and the Pañcāyatana (here referring to a location in Vārāṇasī nearby Rudrāvāsa). Note that the timing of the verse has also been changed from the Māgha month to the Vaiśākha month, most likely to reflect the new context. That is, the Vibhūtidvādaśī vow is done in the Māgha month, but the Śaiva worship of this recontextualized passage is best done during Vaiśākha. Additionally, the second half of verse 19 is not found in the *Matsyapurāṇa*. The second half – although irreversibly corrupt – seems to connect the verse to Oṃkāra as a location. The alterations in verses 18-19, perhaps obviously, lessen the degree of direct intertextuality between chapter 36 and the *Matsyapurāṇa*. The parallels are here more related to the content than the structure of the verses.

Further, verse 16 has been left as is, and nothing has been changed. It fits the context of a Vārāṇasīmāhātmya in its unaltered form. However, the reading in *pāda* b (*śeṣam ahas tadāsīt*) which I have selected, is a *post correctionem* reading (see the apparatus of verse 16 above, and also fig. 2 below). It is likely that the corrector of the text had a copy of the *Matsyapurāṇa* on hand and based his correction on that. The *ante correctionem* reading (*saham mahat sadāsīt*) does not make much sense, which is why I have chosen to follow the *post correctionem* reading.

I have also included verses 20-22 in the example passage above, as they show the end of the statement regarding the greatness of Oṃkāra in this specific part of the text. The following section discusses the omitted passages in chapter 36 in more detail, using other verses as an example.

Example II: Added Verses in Chapter 36

The following example shows how verses have been added to recontextualize the text. The apparatuses function in the same way as above. That is, the first shows the readings of the manuscript and its apograph, and the second shows *Matsyapurāṇa* parallels – which, quite obviously, do not exist for these verses. However, see footnote 18 for a parallel found in an earlier chapter of the same Vārāṇasīmāhātmya compendium. See also footnote 19 for a parallel found in the *Tīrthaprakāśa*.¹⁶

śaṃbhoḥ priyatame deśe pañcāyatanamuktide ।
matsyodaryās taṭe brahman rudrāvāsasya cottare ।
uttarāṃ mūrtim saṃsthāya oṃkāras tatra saṃsthitaḥ ॥ 36 ॥

¹⁶ The *Tīrthaprakāśa* is a 17th-century Dharmanibandha; that is, a “digest” of *dharma* containing quotations from various sources.

36a śambhoḥ] V_{1pc}V₂ , śambho V_{1ac} , • deśe] V₁ , daśe V₂ ; **36b** pañcāyatana] V_{1pc}V₂ , pañcāyatane V_{1ac} (unmetrical) , • muktide] V_{1pc}V₂ , muktida V_{1ac} ; **36c** matsyodaryās] V_{1pc}V₂ , matsyedarśās V_{1ac} ; **36d** rudrāvāsasya cottare] V₁ , rudrāvā V₂ (unmetrical; end of ms.) ; **36f** samsthitaḥ] V_{1pc} , sthitaḥ V_{1ac} (unmetrical)

36] MtP 100 omit.

“In the favourite place of Śambhu, the giver of liberation, Pañcāyatana; on the shore of the Matsyodarī to the north of Rudrāvāsa, O *brahman*, Oṃkāra is situated there, having assumed a northern manifestation.”

tatra devahradam nāma devasyāgre sthitaṃ param |
durlabham ca paraṃ sthānam mānuṣair akṛtātmabhiḥ || 37 ||

37b devasyāgre] em. , devāsyāgre V₁ ; **37d** akṛtātmabhiḥ] em. , akṛtrātmabhiḥ V₁

37] MtP 100 omit.

“There, stationed in front of the god, is the supreme Deva pond, the excellent place very difficult to obtain by men with uninformed minds.”

rudrāvāseti vikhyātaṃ trāṇadaṃ sarvadehinām |
devā api vadantīśaṃ kāmpaṃ vacanam uccakaiḥ || 38 ||

38] MtP 100 omit.

“It is celebrated as Rudrāvāsa, [and] it gives shelter to all living creatures. Even the gods talk about that lord in an excessively lofty, trembling voice.”

rudrāvāse kṛtā snānāḥ pañcāyatanavāsinaḥ |
drakṣyanti īśvaraṃ devaṃ †yaṃ drṣṭvā īśvaraḥ punaḥ† || 39 ||¹⁷

39a kṛtā] V_{1ac} , kṛta V_{1pc}

39] MtP 100 omit.

“Those who dwell in Pañcāyatana and have ritually bathed in Rudrāvāsa will see the god, the lord, †[and] having seen him, [the] lord also [sees them]†.”

manoratham prakurvanti tasya devasya darśanāt |
durādharṣe duḥsahe ca samantād dhy anatikrame || 40 ||¹⁸

¹⁷ The cruxes have been added to this line because *pāda* d does not make sense contextually. It is quite likely that something has been lost after this *pāda*. Combining *pādas* c and d results in a line where the subject and the object are the same (i.e. *Īśvara*).

¹⁸ Chapter 5 of the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* has a parallel for this line and a few of the next verses. 5.32cd-35: *durādharṣam ca duḥsaham samantād duratikramam* || 32 ||
kalikalmaṣasaṃbhūtā yeṣāṃ copahatā matiḥ |
na teṣāṃ tad dhi gamyam tu sthānam ardhendumaulinaḥ || 33 ||

40] MtP 100 omit.

“Because of seeing that god, they realize their hearts’ desire[s] in [the place which is] invincible, unbearable, and completely inviolable.”

kalikalmaṣabhūtā tu yeṣāṃ copahatā matiḥ ¹⁹
teṣāṃ caiva agamyam tu tatsthānam śāśimaulinaḥ || 41 ||²⁰

41a °kalmaṣa°] V_{1ac} , °kalmeṣa° V_{1pc} , • °bhūtā] em. , °bhūtais V₁ ; 41b yeṣāṃ] V_{1ac} , yaṣāṃ V_{1pc} ; 41c agamyam] em. , āgamyam V₁

41] MtP 100 omit.

“Those whose mind[s] are (lit. is) distressed by the evil of the Kali age, for them that abode of the one with a moon as his diadem is unreachable.”

teṣv eva gopitam sthānam devadevena śūlinā |
na kaścit paśyate tatra kṛṣṇakaliyuge bhaye || 42 ||

42a teṣv eva] conj. , tiṣṭec ca V_{1pc} (unclear correction) , tiṣṭhec ce V_{1ac} (unclear) , • sthānam] conj. , vyāsa V₁ ; 42b devadevena] V_{1pc} , devayedevena V_{1ac} (unmetrical) ; 42d kṛṣṇa] V₁ (ṣṇa unclear) , • bhaye] em. , bhava V₁

42] MtP 100 omit.

That place is protected from them by the god of gods, Śūlin, O Vyāsa. During the frightening, dark Kali age, no one is seen there.”²¹

gandharvaiḥ kiṃnaraiḥ devair apsarobhis tathoragaiḥ |
siddhaiḥ sampūjyate tatra dānavānāṃ ca nāyakaiḥ |
antardhānagatair nityam pūjyate parameśvaraḥ || 43 ||

43b devair] V_{1pc} , r V_{1ac} (unmetrical) ; 43d dānavānāṃ ca nāyakaiḥ] V_{1pc} , tathā dānavanāyakaiḥ V_{1ac} ; 43e °dhāna°] em. , °dhāne V₁ (ne unclear)

43] MtP 100 omit.

teṣv eva gopitam sthānam devadevasya śūlinaḥ |
na kaścīd drśyate tatra kṛtsne kaliyuge bhaye || 34 ||
gandharvaiḥ kiṃnarair yakṣair apsarobhis tathoragaiḥ |
siddhaiḥ sampūjyate devais tathā dānavanāyakaiḥ |
antardhānagatair nityam avimuktaṃ niṣevyate || 35 ||

¹⁹ A very similar verse is quoted in the *Tīrthaprakāśa* as being from the *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*. *Tīrthaprakāśa*, page 143: *kalikalmaṣasambhūtā yeṣāṃ upahatā matiḥ |*

na teṣāṃ viditum śakyam sthānam tat parameṣṭhinaḥ ||

²⁰ With the correct sandhi *caivāgamyam*, *pāda* c would be unmetrical.

²¹ Most likely, the scribe was influenced by *gopitam* here and mistakenly changed an earlier *devadevasya śūlinaḥ* to the instrumental *devadevena śūlinā*. The emendation *bhaye* has been done for contextual reasons. Although *bhava* can refer to Śiva, and would otherwise make sense (as sometimes devotees are said to enter Śiva’s mouth in *Vārāṇasī*), *bhaya* is contextually more fitting here as the Kali age is supposed to be terrifying.

“He is honoured there by the *gandharvas*, the *kinnaras*, the *devas*, the *apsarases*, the *uragas* and the *siddhas*, and the lords of the demons. The supreme lord is always worshipped by them invisibly.”

tatra gatvā tu rājarṣiḥ paraṃ tapaḥ samāsthitaḥ ²²
ārādhayaṃś ca deveśaṃ pañcāyatanam īśvaram ||44 ||

44b tapaḥ] V_{1ac} , bhāvaṃ V_{1pc} , • samāsthitaḥ] V_{1pc} , samāsthitaṃ V_{1ac} ; **44c** ārādhayaṃś] V_{1ac} , ārādhayaś V_{1pc} ; **44d** pañcāyatanam īśvaram] V_{1pc} , V_{1ac} omit. (unmetrical)

44] MtP 100 omit.

“Having gone there, the royal sage resorts to supreme penance, and he is propitiating the lord of the gods, the lord, Pañcāyatana.”

The verses in chapter 36 which do not overlap with any extant source have been added to transform the text more clearly into a Vārāṇasīmāhātmya. Some of the added verses are quite general regarding their content, and they are all in the Anuṣṭubh meter (instead of using other meters such as the Upajāti in verses 15-16). The examples presented above are about the greatness of the Oṃkāra site as a religious destination. Oṃkāra is not mentioned in the *Matsyapurāṇa* chapters which chapter 36 has been created from, and as it is a very central location in the compendium in general, it makes sense that verses such as these have been added.

Verse 36 identifies Oṃkāra as being in the same area as Pañcāyatana, Matsyodarī (which most likely refers to a lake that used to exist in Vārāṇasī), and Rudrāvāsa. Then, verse 38 mentions the “Deva pond”, which seemingly refers to Rudrāvāsa as a pond. Further, verse 39 again mentions Pañcāyatana and Rudrāvāsa, connecting the locations more concretely by repetition. Then, verses 40-43 emphasize the greatness of the location(s) by describing how even all kinds of supernatural beings worship Śiva there and how seeing Śiva in that location is extremely beneficial for the devotees. Finally, verse 44 again mentions Pañcāyatana, equating the site with Śiva himself.

Thus, the added verses contain many quite specific references to other locations in the area of Vārāṇasī that the text discusses – although all these locations are described as being close to Oṃkāra and should likely be understood as being parts of the same complex of religious sites. The verses create a pilgrimage framework which links together the locations within a specific area in Vārāṇasī. It is quite clear that although all these sites are connected to Śiva and can sometimes be equated with him, they do not refer to a single site but a localized network of Śaivite sites which a suitable pilgrim should visit; or more specifically, stay in and worship until the desired result of

²² It should be noted that at this point in the story, the king is not merely a king anymore. He has become a “royal sage” due to his penance.

liberation is achieved.²³ Without these verses and others like them, chapter 36 of the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha* would not fit the specific way of understanding Vārāṇasī that its creator(s) had in mind.

Example III: Two Ways of Presenting the Text of Chapter 37

The 37th chapter of the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha* corresponds largely with a *Vārāṇasīmāhātmya* as transmitted in the early *Skandapurāṇa*, chapter 26. The story is about the king Divodāsa and his eviction from Vārāṇasī. The king needs to be removed from the city because Śiva needs a new home for himself and Devī, and Vārāṇasī is deemed to be the right place for such a home. As Divodāsa himself is a devotee of Śiva, he cannot be directly asked to leave, and his removal from the city has to be done in a different, more indirect way. A *gaṇapa* (a leader of the *gaṇas*, the “troops” or “attendants” of Śiva) called Nikumbha is sent to the city, and he manages to make the king commit an act of anger. This act of anger – destroying a shrine – becomes the reason for a curse that causes Vārāṇasī to be abandoned for a thousand years. In this way, the king Divodāsa is thrown out of the city and the area becomes suitable for a new home for Śiva and Devī. After creating their home in the city, Śiva never leaves.

Here I show two ways of presenting the text of chapter 37. Firstly, as a diplomatic edition in a synoptic, tabular form with the corresponding passages from *Skandapurāṇa* 26. With “diplomatic” I mean that I try to report the text exactly as it is in the manuscript.²⁴ Secondly, also in synoptic, tabular form with *Skandapurāṇa* 26, but as an edited text. I include the textual apparatus as a footnote for each verse in both ways of presentation.

<i>Skandapurāṇa</i> 26	<i>Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha</i> 37 (diplomatic)
sanatkumāra uvāca ।	sa(t)kumāra uvāca ।
bhagavān <i>himavacchr̥ṅge</i> <i>śarvo devyāḥ priyepsayā</i> । gaṇeśair vividhākāraiḥ <i>hāsaṃ saṃjanayan</i> muhuḥ ॥ 3 ॥	bhagavān himava(to) cchr̥ṅge † <i>sarvvaddevamayecchayā</i> † । gaṇeśair vvividhākāraiḥ trāsasaṃjananair muhuḥ ²⁵
<i>deva</i> uvāca ।	(īś)vara uvāca ।

²³ The idea of remaining in Vārāṇasī is quite common in Purāṇic texts about the city, and it is seen in the etymological explanation of the name Avimukta as “that which has not been abandoned”, referring to Śiva not abandoning the city.

²⁴ In addition to the conventions used in the above examples (see footnote 8), in the diplomatic presentation, bold font represents retraced text, italics show places where the two texts differ, and the “{}” brackets indicate changes in manuscript folios.

²⁵ 2a bhagavān] V_{1pc} , bhagavan V_{1ac} , ● himava(to)c°] V_{1pc} , hamava(nac) V_{1ac} ; 2d trāsa°] V_{1pc} , (hāsa°) V_{1ac}

sadā tvam ucyamānā vai mayā vāsārtham īsvari । anyatra rocitavatī nāvāsam devi karhicit ॥ 11 ॥	sadā tvam ucyamānā (hi) mayā vāsā(rtha)m īsvari । anyatra nai(va) roceta saṃvāsam neha karha {124r end}rci(t) ॥ 11 ॥ ²⁶
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Skandapurāṇa 26	Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha 37 (edited)
sanatkumāra uvāca ।	sanatkumāra uvāca । ²⁷
bhagavān himavacchr̥ṅge śarvo devyāḥ priyepsayā । gaṇeśair vividhākārair hāsam saṃjanayan muhuḥ ॥ 3 ॥	bhagavān himavacchr̥ṅge †sarvvadevamayecchayā† । gaṇeśair vividhākāraih trāsasaṃjananair muhuḥ ॥ 2 ॥ ²⁸
deva uvāca ।	īsvara uvāca ।
sadā tvam ucyamānā vai mayā vāsārtham īsvari । anyatra rocitavatī nāvāsam devi karhicit ॥ 11 ॥	sadā tvam ucyamānā hi mayā vāsārtham īsvari । anyatra naiva roceta saṃvāsam neha karhicit ॥ 11 ॥ ²⁹

The diplomatic way of presenting the text illustrates the problematic state of the text as it is transmitted in the manuscript. However, the textual apparatus is still needed. The text is presented as a diplomatic *edition* because of the fact that more than one person has worked on the manuscript and made changes to the text. Such a situation means that I have had to select readings over others.³⁰ Otherwise, a transcript would have sufficed. All the changes and selected readings need to be visible for the reader, which is made possible by the apparatus. Further, the diplomatic way of presenting the text also enables the analysis of grammatical forms that are now considered incorrect in classical Sanskrit, but which might have been considered correct by the creators of the texts here.

Presenting the chapter in the edited way shows the usefulness of editing. By editing the text and removing obvious errors, we can change it to a form which is as grammatically correct as possible. This approach makes it possible to more easily focus on the differences and similarities between *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha 37* and *Skandapurāṇa 26*.³¹

Also note that a part of the first verse has been deemed too corrupt to reconstruct and for this reason it has been left as is even in the edited presentation of the material. This corrupt passage shows us how a grammatically or contextually sound end result is not always achievable. One way

²⁶ 11d karharcit] V_{1ac} , karharcita V_{1pc} (unmetrical)

²⁷ sanatkumāra] em. , satkumāra V₁

²⁸ 2a bhagavān] V_{1pc} , bhagavan V_{1ac} , • himavac^o] em. , himava(to)c^o V_{1pc} , hamava(nac) V_{1ac} ; 2d trāsa^o] V_{1pc} , (hāsa^o) V_{1ac}

²⁹ 11b vāsārtham] V₁ (rtha unclear) ; 11d karhicit] em. , karharcita V_{1pc} (unmetrical) , karharcit V_{1ac} omit.

³⁰ See verse 11, *pāda* d: I have selected the *ante correctionem* reading *karharcit* because it is metrical, whereas its *post correctionem* counterpart *karharcita* is unmetrical. However, it should be noted that both readings are grammatically incorrect.

³¹ See, verse 11, *pāda* d yet again: I have corrected the incorrect reading *karharcit/karharcita* to *karhicit* to create a verse that is grammatically sound.

of dealing with such corruption would have been to reconstruct the passage based on the *Skandapurāṇa*. However, such an approach, especially if applied more widely on the level of the entire chapter, would only result in a repetition of the transmission of this text in the *Skandapurāṇa* and thus make comparison redundant.

The main idea for such different ways of presenting the text is to show how the same textual material can be used for various purposes. By using multiple ways of presentation, I can highlight different aspects of the text and use the material as needed for my hypotheses.

Scribal Corrections, Editing, and Translation

The two chapters discussed above show how the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* can be a fascinating, albeit difficult source to work with. Presenting the research results in separate ways helps to use the primary texts to answer different questions. I have employed such an approach to try to deal with the complex and often problematic nature of the manuscript and its texts. However, although this kind of presentation helps, it also raises questions of how to edit and translate such material, how to deal with multiple levels of *ante correctionem* and *post correctionem* readings, and what exactly constitutes a text in this case.³²

The question of when to follow which reading is quite hard to answer for this research project. For example, if a second hand *post correctionem* reading corresponds with a *Matsyapurāṇa* reading, I should not instantly adopt that reading as an emendation. If I use an extant, “canonical” version of a text to reconstruct what is written on the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasaṃgraha* manuscript, I lose any possibility of easy comparison. When the text would not make sense otherwise – especially regarding unmetrical or grammatically very corrupt parts – I can quite confidently emend the readings following an extant source such as the *Matsyapurāṇa* or the early *Skandapurāṇa*. However, when the correction would radically alter the content of the text, such as changing readings referring to Śiva back to readings referring to Viṣṇu, I should not change the text. Thus, I can only evaluate when (and how) to emend the text on a case-by-case basis.

What I use the texts for also influences the nature of the emendations. If I want to provide insight into the state of the text as it is transmitted in the manuscript, for example to investigate scribal errors and irregular linguistic conventions,³³ it makes sense to present the text as a diplomatic edition. If I want to display cases of intertextuality between a chapter of the compendium and an extant edition, it is sensible to get rid of the most obvious scribal and

³² Regarding the editing process, I follow what Paolo Trovato calls the “reconstructionist” approach (Trovato 2017, 15). That is, trying to reconstruct an “archetype” of a text (i.e., not an unobtainable “original” text, but a version which is as close to one as possible), and then going one step further by correcting the errors of the archetype (ibid.).

³³ Some examples are the gemination of consonants after *ra*, “free” use of noun genders, irregular sandhi, and so on.

grammatical errors and try to reconstruct the text as a critical edition (although even then, using a positive apparatus to show all the textual variants is needed for a transparent end result). For the sake of presentation, a synoptic edition in a tabular form might be the most useful for comparing two texts, whereas a critical edition accompanied by a translation might be the best method for backing up my arguments and showing how I have understood the contents of a text.

A similar approach has been used by Charles Li (2023) in his edition of a story from the *Vahnipurāṇa*, also accompanied by a fully positive critical apparatus.³⁴ Li does not have enough textual witnesses for the complete text, and he has chosen not to create a *stemma*³⁵ for that reason (Li 2023, 9). As I only have the aforementioned palm-leaf manuscript and its apograph to work with, I do not have enough material for a *stemma* either. Or, more precisely, I could create a *stemma* but it would not be a genealogical “tree”, and rather merely a single linear branch leading from the main manuscript to its apograph. Even if I would include all the different *ante correctionem* and *post correctionem* readings of the main manuscript as different textual witnesses, the scarcity of sources would still make the *stemma* unnecessary as it would not provide any further insight into the textual transmission. The main difference between the *Vahnipurāṇa* edition and what I work with here is that Li uses only one way of presentation (edition with a critical apparatus and translations) in his printed article, whereas I present my texts in multiple ways, according to the purposes I need them for. His edition is most useful in its digital form (then accompanied by transcriptions and textual alignment tables for different witnesses), although the translations still need to be read from the printed article as they are not shown in the digital format.³⁶ Conversely, my edition and translation are meant to be displayed in their printed form.

Using a multileveled approach is necessary here. Sometimes I want to mine information from the text, whereas at other times I might want to present the problematic state of a passage or show a tabular comparison with a parallel text. However, my approach inevitably makes the text slightly less user-friendly, forcing the reader to get used to multiple ways of presentation and alternating between them.³⁷ Such an approach is clearly more time-intensive and might make the text in itself slightly more heavy to read. In any case, I sincerely believe that the pros outweigh the cons. The varied ways of presentation surely allow for a more in-depth look into specific aspects of

³⁴ The edition of the early *Skandapurāṇa* (Vol. IIA) is another example of an edition with a fully positive apparatus and multiple apparatus registers which show different aspects of the textual transmission.

³⁵ The word *stemma* refers to a “family tree” of available witnesses for a text. That is, a graphic representation of the approximate ages of textual witnesses compared to others and what the likely relationships between different witnesses are (i.e., one being a copy of another, or multiple witnesses being descendants of the same, older manuscript, etc.).

³⁶ See <https://tst-project.github.io/siberupakhyana/Ed.xml> for Li’s digital edition.

³⁷ Li’s work is similar in this case: if a reader wants to consult the translation, looking at the printed article is necessary, whereas the edition in itself is more detailed in its digital form.

the texts and their transmission, and when accompanied by translations, help with backing up my arguments regarding the contents of the texts and the selection of textual variants.

Translating the texts is not straightforward either. Often there are multiple options regarding how to understand and translate a passage. Again, showing all the textual variants and discussing various ways of translating a passage is important. Translation helps to show how I have understood a text, and it can often also show why I chose a specific textual variant over another in the edition. I present translations alongside the Sanskrit passages in those situations where I want to use the translations to provide more evidence for my hypotheses. In other situations, such as the tabular way of presentation shown above, I might not always provide translations. In such a case, the main focus of presenting a part of a text is not content-related and is instead focused on displaying textual parallels and the transmission of the text.

Further, I need to also deal with how we understand the compendium as a whole and as separate parts. I can treat the compendium as a single work, although multiple people have altered and corrected it at different times. I can treat the chapters as separate texts, as they are attributed to various Purāṇas and sometimes overlap with other extant texts (as is the case with the two chapters discussed here). I can treat specific parts of single chapters as separate units, for example when dealing with chapter 36 and its origins in three different *Matsyapurāṇa* chapters. Even separate verses or passages within chapters can be analyzed as single units, for example if they can be understood as stock phrases.

The best way to present and analyze the texts of the compendium depends on what they are needed for. That is, which aspects of the texts I want to focus on and present for the reader. For a complex source like the *Vārāṇasīmāhātmyasamgraha*, a varied way of presentation and analysis is clearly necessary. Merely choosing one way of presenting the sources would not do justice to the sources themselves, and it would also restrict how well I can back up my arguments by using the primary sources. “Living texts” surely need a multileveled approach which, in its complexity, can accommodate their evolving and living nature.

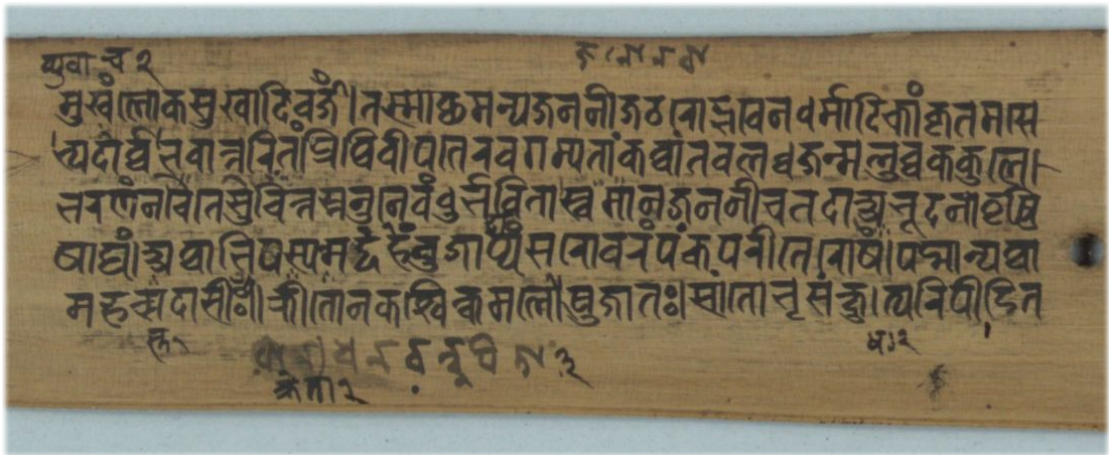


Fig. 1. One half of a folio of the palm-leaf manuscript (Kaiser Library, Kāthmāṇḍū, 66, 114 recto, left side). Note the deletions and additions, marginal corrections, corrections between the lines, and erased and rewritten syllables.

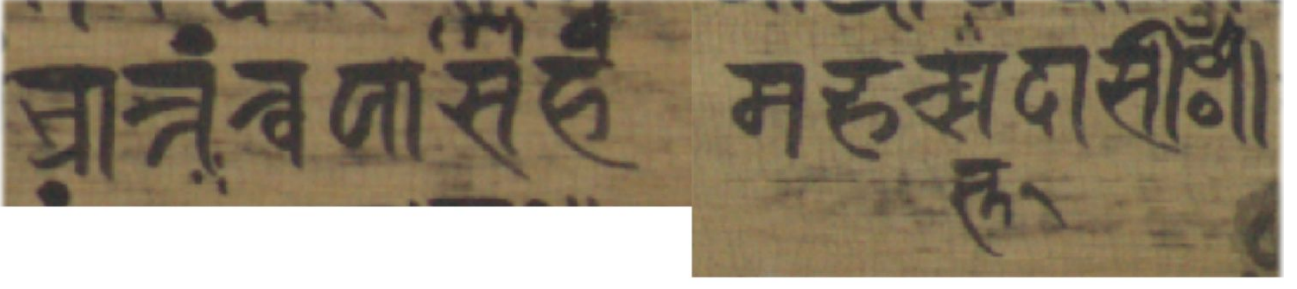


Fig. 2. The *post correctionem* and *ante correctionem* readings of verse 16, *pāda* b (śeṣam ahas tadāsīt] V_{1pc} , saham mahat sadāsīḥ V_{1ac}). (Kaiser Library, Kāṭhmāṇḍū, 66, 114 recto).

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