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On Poetic Modes of Glorifying a Ruler and Telling His Past
The *Sāḷuvābhyudaya* Narrative on Sāḷuva Narasiṃha the Ahobilanarasiṃha Incarnate

Ewa Dębicka-Borek

Abstract: This paper discusses the poetic modes of recounting the past in a Sanskrit *mahākāvya* titled *Sāḷuvābhyudaya*, authored by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima ca. 1480 AD, to eulogise Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, the soon-to-be founder of the Sāḷuva dynasty of Vijayanagara. Focusing on the poem's second canto, which is built on the theme of divine intervention culminating in the miraculous conception of the future, I argue that depiction of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as the Ahobilanarasiṃha incarnate – a rather locally known form of Narasiṃha presiding over a Vaishnava religious centre in Ahobilam (currently Andhra Pradesh) – was aimed at enunciating his martial power and justifying his claims to the Vijayanagara throne, while simultaneously revealing the growing interests of Vijayanagara rulers in cooperating with temples and religious institutions.

Keywords: *Sāḷuvābhyudaya*, Ahobilam, Narasiṃha, Vijayanagara, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, recounting the past

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the Sanskrit literary motif of a god who promises a successor to a childless royal couple in terms of a medium which serves not only to glorify the ruler but also to poetically recount his exploits. The narrative I investigate is intertwined within the little known historical *mahākāvya* titled *Sāḷuvābhyudaya* (SA). Authored by an eminent poet, Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima, ca. 1480 (Krishnaswami Aiyangar 2003: 30; Shastri 1996: 350; Lienhard 1984: 22), the poem praises Sāḷuva Narasiṃha (r. 1485–1491). At the time of

its composition, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha was a general under the Saṅgama emperors with the title of the Governor of Candragiri. After seizing the throne in 1485, he started a dynasty which turned out to be the shortest lived and to date the least explored in the history of the Vijayanagara Empire.

My approach to the SA as purposefully imbued with historical facts chiefly draws on hints at a deliberate use of recognised motifs to deal with the eye witness accounts dropped by Phyllis Granoff in the context of modes of employing the *avatāra* theme in historical *kāvya*s (Granoff 1984). The issue of 'translating literature into memory' also became an essential part of Lidia Sudyka's inquiries in her book on a Vijayanagara poetess, Gaṅgādevī, and the ways she depicted the victories of her husband, Kampana (Sudyka 2013). In a yet larger context of Sanskrit narratives of the Muslim past, the use of poetical modes of expression to tell history has been recently investigated by Audrey Truschke 2021. As the narrative I scrutinise belongs to the genealogical material, besides the concepts presented by the three above authors, in my research I refer as well to theories concerning the ways of reading royal genealogies as an ideological tool, particularly when enriched with a narrative (Sharma 2011; Simmons 2018).

Although composed in Sanskrit, the SA belongs to the era of South Indian literary production, which, as Sheldon Pollock remarks, opted more and more often for vernacular languages. Designed to conventionally narrate the 'success' or 'exaltation' (*abhyudaya*) of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, the poem fits the aesthetic of, in Pollock's quite radical opinion, 'exhausted' Vijayanagara Sanskrit literary culture, which, contrary to the growing body of literature in regional languages, was soon reduced to the 'historicist-political' dimension aimed at serving the Empire through recounting royal campaigns. In Pollock's view, the Vijayanagara poets' tendency to stay within the context of the kingdom led to a decrease in the range of their works' circulation, disinterest of commentators in their contents, and so on (Pollock 2003: 94–95). As he remarks, the Sanskrit works produced in this milieu raise the question as to how they survived at all (Pollock 2003: 94). The SA did survive, but indeed hardly noticed either by contemporaries or recent scholarship. The poem remains still in manuscript form, extant to the best of my knowledge in only a couple of copies. The copy I refer to here (SA), is preserved at the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (GOML), Chennai.[1] As I shall demonstrate,

[1] I would like to thank Lidia Sudyka for sharing the photos of the manuscript (manuscript DC Nos. 11818 and 11819, on paper, in Devanagari script). Some excerpts from the text are given in Krishnaswami Aiyangar 2003: 30–31, 92–102, who remarks that the GOML copy is most likely the only one extant. However, the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, vol. XXXIX, pp. 15–16, instead of this copy mentions manuscripts preserved in Mysore, which I could not consult so far.

despite its conventionality in terms of composition, selection of themes and modes of poetic expression, the SA offers valuable material to study the past of the Sāḷuva dynasty, mostly in regard to its engagement with temples and religious institutions, the cooperation aimed at extending power.[2]

The SA consists of thirteen cantos. In brief, the issue which prevails in the cantos 3–13 is Narasiṃha's conquest aspirations (Chattopadhyaya 1998: 45–46). They are conventionally described through the *digvijaya* motif (i.e. conquest of the world) and thus reach far to the North, that is include territories that have never actually been in the orb of Vijayanagara influences. In the following, I focus on the narrative which constitutes the second canto of the poem, and in which Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima equates his patron with Ahobilanarasiṃha (Narasiṃha of Ahobilam), namely a rather locally known form of god Viṣṇu presiding over Ahobilam (currently in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh). Conforming to a pattern known to Sanskrit literary production, the poet depicts the deity's appearance in a dream of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's father, Guṇḍa, after he and his wife undertook austerities in Ahobilam to procure a son. In the subsequent sections I discuss this narrative as the means consciously applied by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima to fashion Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's identity as a victorious leader who deserves the throne, but also as the expression of how the poet perceived and understood his patron's activities against the backdrop of the changes in the political-cum-religious milieu of the Vijayanagara Empire towards the end of the 15th century.

2. The SA and the ways of narrating genealogy

According to Sudyka, the SA was modelled on the genealogy passages of the Sāḷuva family, which are appended to the first canto of the *Rāmābhyudaya* (RA), another historical *mahākāvya* eulogising Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and his deeds. The authorship of the latter is still disputed. Although it has been usually attributed to Sāḷuva Narasiṃha himself, recently scholars pointed rather to another poet of the Ḍiṇḍima family, that is Rājanātha's father, Aruṇagirinātha Ḍiṇḍima, who was the court poet of Devarāya II of the Saṅgama Dynasty (r. 1424–1446) (Pollock 2003: 94; Sudyka 2013: 127–133). Perhaps, Sudyka argues, the final touch to the RA, originally written in the first half of the 15th century, was given by the author's son, Rājanātha, who was supposed to urgently praise his patron to surround him with 'an aura of kingship' before he actually usurped the throne from the Saṅgama dynasty. The quickest way to fulfill this wish might have been to reuse Aruṇagirinātha's retelling of the

[2] On the beginnings of Sāḷuvas' cooperation with temples and religious institutions, see Appadurai 1977.

Rāmāyaṇa. Barring several interpolations, which display the true author's identity, its core was left intact. The Rāma's story itself opened possibilities to play with the concept of a ruler named Narasiṃha as Viṣṇu's incarnation, and his reign as equal to that of Rāma.[3] What required a serious reworking was just its opening canto, to which pieces of information on Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and his ancestors were added, and the subsequent colophons. Sudyka posits that only later, with more time at his disposal, did Rājanātha compose the SA from scratch, having included, however, the threads that make up the genealogy of Sāḷuvas presented in the RA (Sudyka 2013: 128–132).

In both poems, the way of presenting Sāḷuvas' previous generations adheres to a typical paradigm of royal genealogy. The family's origin is traced to the lunar dynasty, and after enumerating several mythical figures, the chain of successors focuses upon 'recent' chiefs. Their line begins with Sāḷuva Maṅgi. Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's direct line of descendance comprises one of Maṅgi's sons called Gautama, whose son's name is Guṇḍa/Guṇḍaya. The name of Guṇḍa's wife is Mallāmbikā. In both poems, next is a narrative in light of which, after unsuccessful attempts at producing a successor, the couple decides to undertake penance in Ahobilam. Soon, Mallāmbikā becomes pregnant and delivers a son whom, out of gratitude to the god who presides over this site, they call Narasiṃha. Thus, Sudyka's hypothesis that SA's content is based on the genealogy passages, which were earlier integrated into the RA appears to be further corroborated by the way of intertwining the narrative on Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's miraculous conception into its framework. In the case of the RA, the narrative is embedded in its first canto and covers just a couple of stanzas (RA 1.43–51) (Dębicka-Borek 2015). They are inserted between the chain of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's predecessors and praise for the perfect ruler he had become. In the SA, the narrative gains a fuller treatment as it becomes the main topic of the second canto. Its occurrence after the presentation of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's ancestors praised in the initial canto, and before the consecutive cantos, where various aspects of the ruler's career are depicted, makes the episode structurally in line with the pattern known from the RA. In the SA Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima poetically develops most of the RA's narrative threads. In addition, he enriches it with episodes absent in RA, such as the description of Ahobilam. Moreover, unlike in the RA passage, he enhances the genealogical character of the narrative by closing it with a decision

[3] A connection to the *Rāmāyana* tradition was important for Vijayanagara rulers from the very beginning. Local beliefs have linked the territory of Vijayanagara with Kiṣkindha, the kingdom of epic monkey-kings, where Rāma allied himself with Hanumān and Sugrīva. Although during the reign of the first Vijayanagara dynasty the site became a centre of Virūpākṣa cult, in the early 15th century the Rāmacandra temple was built in the royal zone, as if to highlight a ruler's homology with Rāma. See Verghese 2004: 421–424.

of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's father to retire to the forest and pass the power to his son (see below).

Situating the motif from the outset within the framework of genealogical material entails its interpretation in terms of crafting the ruler's identity. Contemporary scholarship offers several views on how to read royal genealogies, regarding royal inscriptions and narratives, produced either for large imperial powers or small kingdoms (see, e.g., Ali 2000; Sharma 2011; Simmons 2018). Despite their variegated setup, all these approaches agree that the primary aim of genealogies was to create the image of a king and to provide an ideological sanction for his rule. This was achieved by a number of strategies often related to situating a king in his times. Basically, the origin of kings was traced to Brahmā's cosmic creation. Kings were linked to gods and heroes through association with either the solar line of Ikṣvāku related to Rāma or the lunar line of Yadu related to Kṛṣṇa. Involved in this way in a cyclic time, rulers were portrayed as born to restore *dharma* in the times of their reign depicted as Kaliyuga. On the other hand, showing a given king as the last in a line of successors underscored his role from a chronological perspective, as he embodied the culmination of all of virtues of his predecessors (Simmons 2018: 602–604).

According to Caleb Simmons, the range of strategies employed in South India to fashion a ruler with the help of genealogy material broadened with the emergence of new kingdoms, which replaced the major early medieval dynasties (Simmons 2018: 604). A similar trend in reference to North India is observed by Mahesh Sharma in his article on the western Himalayan kingdom of Chambā (Sharma 2011). Both scholars point in this context to a growing role of additional narratives, which were inserted within the genealogies, usually between the list of Purāṇic and legendary or quasi-historical ancestors. Their aim was to explain how a certain lineage, and often also a site, became powerful in the region (Simmons 2018: 604). What seems especially helpful for interpretation of the genealogy that belongs to the RA and SA, in Sharma's opinion such integrated narratives were a tool which was exceptionally useful at the early stages of establishing a new dynasty for with their help one king could be differentiated from another. Sharma considers genealogies 'a part of the process that not only forged links with the hegemonic political and socio-cultural cosmos, but also contrived a specific sacred-cultural space by establishing cultic affiliations' (Sharma 2011: 407). In addition, he considers geographical peripheries of a given territory as a special target of 'manipulations' to confirm a new king's rule (Sharma 2011: 406). Remarkably in this context, in the time of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's service for the Vijayanagara

army, Ahobilam was indeed situated on its 'perennially contested northern border' (Stoker 2016: 97). If we add that a poet who aptly linked his patron with his ancestors and mythical lore presented the patron's glorious past, but also, in order to spread his fame among contemporary and future generations, he wrote about what he witnessed (Sudyka 2013: 14), this could mean that by mentions of distant Ahobilam, the narrative about Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as the incarnation of its presiding deity aims as well at establishing his influences over the disputed area, an issue I come back to below.

An ideologically influenced character of Sāḷuvas' genealogy has been already treated by Sudyka in reference to the mode of presenting Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's great-grandfather, Sāḷuva Maṅgi, in the Gaṅgādevī's historical *mahākāvya*, the *Madhurāvijaya*. The poetess composed it in the second half of the 14th cent. to describe, as expressed in the title, 'the conquest of Madhurā' (Madurai) by Kampana (Kamparāya, the son of Bukka I). As one of the queens of Kampana, Gaṅgādevī must have been an eye-witness to the events she dealt with in the poem. Serving as a general in Kampana's campaign against the Madurai Sultanate, Sāḷuva Maṅgi was an important historical figure that joined the dynasties of Saṅgamas and Sāḷuvas. However, as Sudyka demonstrates, the way of introducing him into the royal lineage of Sāḷuvas departs from the events as preserved in other sources and is apparently more faithfully described by Gaṅgādevī. In brief, the genealogy of Sāḷuvas ascribes the triumphs of Kampana and his commander-in-chief, Gopaṇṇa, to the ancestor of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha. Both RA and SA show Sāḷuva Maṅgi as a close friend of the prince Kampana, whom he accompanied on his campaign to the South. Moreover, in their light it is Sāḷuva Maṇgi who overcomes the Sultan in the decisive battle. Maṅgi erects a pillar of victory over the sultanate forces on the banks of Tāmrapaṇi river, visits Srirangam temple and donates riches to the god.

From inscriptional evidence of Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD 2) it follows that the Sāḷuvas were indeed a powerful family that comprised of several branches. Their rise to power began in the times of Mallikārjuna (r. 1447–1465) and eventually led to Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's ascension to the throne after usurping it from Virūpākṣa (r. 1465–1485). The branch to which Sāḷuva Narasiṃha belonged included his elder brother Sāḷuva Timmarāja Uḍaiyar, and their father, Sāḷuva Guṇḍarāja Uḍaiyar – alternatively called Guṇḍayadeva Mahārāja – who most likely headed the clan at that time. Another member of the family was a son of Guṇḍarāja's brother, Sāḷuva Parvatarāja, namely the first cousin of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha. The second cousin of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha was Tripurāntaka, a grand-son of Tippa, another brother of Guṇḍarāja. Tripurāntaka's father, Gopa/Goppa, was married to a daughter of Devarāya II (Sastry

1998: 138). The name of their ancestor, Maṅgideva Mahārāja, occurs in the record of his services in the Veṅkaṭeśvara temple in 1359 CE. Most probably, his headquarters were in Candragiri, that is the fort in which later Sāḷuva chiefs, including Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, also stationed their army. According to Burton Stein, the governorship of Candragiri was given to Maṅgi as a reward for conquering the chiefdoms of Yādavarāyas and Sambhuvarāyas. Due to his commitment during the military operations against the latter, under Sāvaṇṇa, the cousin of Kampana who supervised military operations, Maṅgi, was also given the title of the founder of Sambhuvarāyas (*sambhuvarāyasthāpanācarya*). Soon, the general and his descendants extended the newly constituted territory around Candragiri he obtained, both northward, towards southern Andhra, and to the south, in the latter case using the matrimonial connections with Devarāya II, into whose family the descendants of Maṅgi's were married (Stein 1989: 55). The title Sāḷuva [a hawk], under which his descendants were known, is mentioned in two inscriptions of a slightly later production, found in Kanchi (1361) and Dalavanur (South Arcot district) (1363). As Sastry suggests, assuming this title might be connected to respect for Sāḷuva Maṅgi's determination in his fight against sultanates and other, Hindu, rivals (Sastry 1998: 130–131). Inscriptions corroborate that Maṅgi served as general in the campaign against the Madurai Sultanate. However, there is no inscriptional evidence which would confirm Maṅgi's decisive role in overcoming sultanate powers, killing the Sultan and reestablishing the Hindu practice in the Srirangam temple. According to Sudyka, it seems that the poet/s serving under Sāḷuva Narasiṃha appropriated the accomplishments of Kampana (and the poets who praised him) to their own needs. This strategy, focused on peripheral treatment of Saṅgama's achievements, proved successful in producing the legend of the Sāḷuva dynasty. The praise of Maṅgi was soon repeated in other compositions and contributed to the creation of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's image as seizing the throne in the name of continuing the old lineage of victors.[4] Not without meaning in this context would have been also Sāḷuvas' claims of descending from the same lineage as the Saṅgama dynasty, that is the lunar race of the Yādava line (Ramanayya 1933: 78).

Rājanātha's account of the circumstances of his patron's conception, however, even if embedded in a mythical framework, does not seem to fulfil the function of taking the reader into the distant, quasi-mythical past of the Sāḷuva family solely to explain its claims to power. This aim appears to have been already accomplished through the legend of Sāḷuva Maṅgi. Instead,

[4] The praise is included in the *Jaimini Bhāratamu*, another work dedicated to Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, by a Telugu poet Pinavīrabhadra who served at his court (see Krishnaswami Aiyangar 2003: 29–30, 85–87; cf. Sudyka 2013: 134–139).

having been composed by a poet who most likely was a close observer of his patron's career, the account should be approached as a means by which it triggers the telling of the historical present.

Looking for reasons why, despite the growing support of Vijayanagara rulers for vernacular languages, Gaṅgādevī chose Sanskrit to write about Kampana's victory over the Sultanate, Truschke points not so much to the cosmopolitan character of the language as to its expressive potential by way of referring to motifs and metaphors rooted in this particular literary tradition. This applies to Gaṅgādevī's own sensitivity and feelings but also to the literary ways she found most congenial to grasping the ruler's exploits according to her best judgment and interpretation (Truschke 2021). As Granoff has shown, framing the birth of a ruler within a mythical plot which includes the intervention of a god was exactly one such mode used by Sanskrit poets to convey their perception and understanding of contemporary events (Granoff 1984: 295). The narrative about Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's miraculous conception by the grace of Ahobilanarasiṃha follows a complex Sanskrit literary theme, which according to Granoff has been operating for centuries by using, among other things, the doctrine of divine *avatāra*s.[5] This strategy relied on the assumption that the task of *avatāra*s is to defend order/righteousness and fight transgression. The descent of a god to assure the royal couple that as the result of performing *tapas* they will be given an offspring means in fact that the god promises to be reborn as their son. As if to enhance the notion of the sameness between the two, in such narratives a god, who often acts as the tutelary deity of the family, shares his name with the child. Sanskrit poets used this trope to project a king's identity as divine, but also, in line with puranic and epic literature, to metaphorically equate the purpose of their rule with freeing the earth from demons. Accordingly, this paradigm employs demonisation of the concerned enemies, be they his rival Hindu kings or foreigners, most often Muslims (Granoff 1984: 292–295). Drawing a parallel between the victories of a king and successes of any incarnation of Viṣṇu over a demon was facilitated by the fact that conventionally the only accepted ending for a historical *mahākāvya* was the hero's victory (Sudyka 2013: 13). Placing narration in a literary theme allowed a skillful poet to both glorify his patron and describe the events that he most likely had witnessed himself in a specific time and place

If, as scholars seem to agree, Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima wrote the SA ca. 1480, the time of its composition clearly coincides with Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's successes

[5] See Granoff 1984: 292–295 for a brief overview of the use of the motif in the *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākāranandin (12th cent.), *Raghunāthābhyudaya* of Rāmabhadrāmbā (17th cent.), *Śāhendravilāsa* by Śrīdhara Veṅkateśa (18th cent.?), *Vikramānkābhyudaya* by Someśvara (12th cent.), *Vikramānkadevacarita* by Bilhaṇa (12th cent.).

in the war he fought in 1478–1481, still as a generalissimo in Saṅgama's army, against the joint forces of Hamir, an Oriya nobleman, and the Bāhamanī sultan Muhammad III, who invaded the territory of Orissan King Puruṣottama Gajapati. However, defeating the sultanate troops was not the only significant victory Sāḷuva Narasiṃha won on behalf of the Vijayanagara Empire before he himself became its ruler. According to Sastry, his martial career took off during the reign of Mallikārjuna. Already in this period he and his kin were mighty provincial governors who enjoyed considerable independence.[6]

Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's wars with the Bāhamanī Sultanate were preceded by seizing Udayagiri, the fort often held by Kaliṅga's rulers Gajapatis with whom Vijayanagara had had a long military conflict and shared a border (1470), suppressing rebellion in Tamil districts and capturing eastern districts of the Empire (before 1477). Sāḷuva Narasiṃha was in fact the first to establish the Vijayanagara command over the Tamil plain, up to Rameshvaram (Stein 1989: 55). The geographical location of his inherited fort in Candragiri, from which he could control northern and southern territories, was for sure helpful in this context. The importance, in turn, of conquering Udayagiri, is shown by the fact that records of Kṛṣṇadevarāya of the Tuḷuva dynasty dated 1514, that is 23 years after the death of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, mention that recapturing it was one of the former's greatest military successes (Stoker 2016: 29). Remarkably, the military victories of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha came when the sons of Devarāya II, Mallikārjuna and Virūpākṣa II, quarreled (Stein 1989: 71). Such circumstances, as Stein suggests, allowed Narasiṃha to take over even more power as the trusted commander and defender of the country (Stein 1989: 29). Soon, after Mallikārjuna's death, supported by his general Īśvara Nāyaka from the Tuḷuva family, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha headed the group that eventually prevented the central government from a total fall caused by the incompetent rule of Mallikārjuna's successor, Virūpākṣa II. The wars Sāḷuva Narasiṃha waged and decisions he took before the final versions of the RA and SA were finished, might have indeed been considered by many as acts of rescuing the kingdom from a collapse in a way any divine incarnation does. As Stein aptly remarks, 'Narasiṃha commanded a large royal army for service against Muslim and Hindu enemies; and like the others, the army was Narasiṃha's instrument for gaining ever greater power within the kingdom' (Stein 1989: 55).

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[6] An inscription dated 1446 (reign of Devarāya II) mentions one other member of the Sāḷuva clan, Sāḷuva Peri-Mallayadeva Mahārāja, who was perhaps a descendant of one of five brothers of Sāḷuva Maṅgideva Mahārāja and a cousin of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha. Most probably he was in charge of Candragiri then (Sastry 1998: 135).

Let us now look at Rājanātha's usage of the theme of king as a divine incarnation for the background of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha path to the throne as recorded in 'professional' historical sources.

3. Historicising the narrative on Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as Ahobila-narasiṃha's incarnation

The narrative which constitutes the second canto of SA involves all the elements regarded by Granoff as essential for the motif of a king as a divine incarnation when applied to recounting his triumphs over the enemies: a royal childless couple, their austerities to produce a son, the descent of a god who announces that their son will be born, and, eventually, the birth of an heir. As I demonstrate below, Rājanātha additionally enriches the well-known paradigm with a number of other themes typical for Sanskrit literature, such as a description of an ideal city, or abdication of a leader in favour of his son. The poet proves his artistry by embellishing them with the help of well-known tropes, multi-layered comparisons engaging double-entendres (*śleṣa*), etc.

Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima begins the narrative about Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's miraculous conception as the incarnated god with short characteristics of his parents, Guṇḍa and Mallāmbikā.[7] He equates Mallāmbikā with the earth, which should be honoured as the abode of the king's wife (*mahiṣīpadamānanīyāṃ kṣoṇīm iva*) and Guṇḍa with the earth-guardian (*guṇḍyabhūmipālaḥ*) (SA 2.2).[8] Alluding to the metaphor widely known from the ninth chapter of the *Manusmṛti*, which envisages woman as the soil and man as a farmer, the poet from the outset refers to the concept of fertility as closely connected with the kingship and the kings' utmost duty as 'growing a seed'. By means of this analogy, he also conveys Mallāmbikā's submission to her husband and his responsibility to protect her; a relationship relevant to that of a king and his land. Not limited to the *Rāmāyaṇa* as the frame of reference as was the case with the RA, in the following stanza the poet additionally reaches for elements

[7] In the RA, the poet compares Mallāmbikā to Kauśalyā and Guṇḍa to Daśaratha, which makes the narration fit the overall intention of the poem, which is equating the deeds of the praised ruler, implicitly identified with Rāma, with the deeds of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s hero:

mallāmbikā mahābhāgā tasyāsīt sahacārīṇī |
devī daśarathasyeva kausalyā kulabhūṣaṇam ||RA 1.42||
His wife was eminent Mallāmbikā, a queen,
who like Daśaratha's Kausalyā was the jewel of the family (RA 1.42).

All translations from the RA are reproduced from Dębicka-Borek 2015, at times slightly modified.

[8] Since the manuscript contains many lacunas, I provide complete translation only of those stanzas which are preserved. If not otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

of a figure of speech called double-entendre (*śleṣa*) to communicate, by means of another possible reading, an imagery of Śiva's and Pārvatī's romance and their intense relationship (SA 2.3):

> *bhūbhṛtkulāvataraṇāṃ bhuvanaiṣamātrabhāvocitāṃ*
> *priyatamārdhaśarīrabhūtām |*
> *sādhvīṃ śivām iva haras sa bhajann api drāk kṣoṇiṃ patir na bhajati*
> *sma samam kumāram* ||SA 2.3||
>
> Although he, like Hara, was cultivating the earth –
> his gracious faithful wife (Śivā) forming part of her husband's body,
> whose appearance suits all wishes of a man,
> who brings continuity to the royal family –
> the Lord did not get any son quickly.

The most obvious and productive usage of *śleṣa* concerns the term *kumāra*; whereas, as I propose in the translation, it may be simply rendered as 'son', 'prince', 'heir' etc., the word *kumāra* serves also as another name of Skanda, the son of Śiva and Pārvatī. What seems crucial in the context of praising a ruler, is Kumāra/Skanda being basically the god of war. For an experienced reader, playing with this term brings in fact a number of essential connotations: Sanskrit poets (e.g., Kālidāsa in his *Kumārasaṃbhava*) happen to present Kumāra as conceived on gods' request to destroy demon Tāraka, who had threatened the world. In this way, already before the motif of Ahobilanarasiṃha as the divine counterpart of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha is introduced, Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima alludes to his patron's birth as determined by the gods' decision to eradicate demonic enemies. In addition, various shades of meaning of the term *kumāra* appear to metaphorically grasp the kinship between Narasiṃha, Sāḷuva's namesake, and the terrifying aspects of Śiva; they both share fierce nature and can mediate between different domains. These traits, owed to the common tribal origin of both deities,[9] perfectly convey characteristics considered ideal for a king.

The context of Kumāra's conception, poetically described in various myths involving the episode of Śiva and Pārvatī passionately making love on Himalaya mountain, allows as well an alternative interpretation of the participle *bhajan*. Instead of lit. 'cultivating', the term might be translated as 'enjoying', especially 'enjoying carnally'. Consequently, the term *kṣonī*, might be taken not as the earth in the sense of soil as a metaphor for a woman, but as 'the goddess of Earth associated with Umā-Pārvatī'. On this level of meaning, Pārvatī's associations with the mother, namely the goddess of Earth

[9] On parallels between Śiva and Narasiṃha in reference to their tribal substratum, iconography, mythology and cults see, for instance, Sontheimer 1987.

and fertility, additionally intensify the notion of the couple's – Guṇḍaya's and Mallāmbikā's – endeavors at begetting a successor. As shown by Daniel Ingalls, in Kālidāsa's depiction of Umā's ascetic practice she undertook to win Śiva, she is indeed an embodiment of the Earth, with steam evaporating from her skin as it evaporates from the perched soil with the advent of the monsoon, etc. (Ingalls 1965: 27–29). However, the parallel between Mallāmbikā and Pārvatī may still convey something more than just the queen's ability to deliver a divine heir. Contrary to the brief portrayal of Mallāmbikā in the RA, where, in line with the popular assumptions of a *kāvya* genre, only her beauty and marital status are indicated, the stanza appears to additionally portray her role in the following events. Relevant in this context seem to be Gary Tubb's remarks that in the version of the Śiva and Pārvatī story known from the *Kumārasaṃbhava*, Pārvatī's decision to undertake severe mortifications to win Śiva's love might be seen as expressing her unusual activity, which finally leads to the union with god (Tubb 1984: 233). Rājanātha hints at these features of Pārvatī by means of a double entendre in which he praises Mallāmbikā-the soil, as *priyatamārdhaśarīrabhūtā* (forming part of her husband's body).

In the next stanza, the poet turns to Guṇḍa's anxiety caused by the so far unfulfilled duty of paying off his final debt (*antima ṛṇa*) to ancestors by producing a son.[10] In the simile which expresses Guṇḍa's fear of being the cause of interrupting the lunar lineage he belongs to, Rājanātha skillfully plays with the meanings rendered by the term *indu* (the Moon). The burden of not having an heir makes Guṇḍa's soul fade like the Moon in the deep dark: 'He thinks that his soul bound by the final debt is like the Moon shrouded by deep darkness' (*āśaṅkate sutamaseva gṛhītam indum ātmānam antima ṛṇena*[11] *pinaddham eṣaḥ*, SA 2.5). According to Vedic concepts, the lack of a son prevents one from obtaining immortality: it is the son in whom the family persists, as the father survives in him even after his own death (Olivelle 1993: 43–45). In Rājanātha's imagination, Guṇḍa 'loses his innate patience because of not raising a child' (*dhairyaṃ sutānudayatas sahajaṃ sa muñcan*, SA 2.5) and 'having felt the burden of the duties of governing and having put everything aside, he completely lost himself in thoughts, indifferent to people' (*sarvan nidhāya samavāpya ca rājyabhāraṃ cintām agahata bhṛśaṃ jananirviśeṣam*,

[10] The Vedic triad of inborn debts pertaining to the twice-born men involves the debt of studying to be repaid to the sages (*ṛṣi*), the debt of a sacrifice to the gods, and the debt of procreation to the ancestors (*piṭṛ*). To pay off the last debt one has to be married. Although Vedic sources are not clear whether it is only the first-born son who can perform the paying off of this debt, the later authors emphasise the role of the oldest son in this respect. See Olivelle 1993: 46–53.

[11] I assume that in this context *antima* ('final') qualifies *ṛṇa* ('debt'), therefore I treat the phrase as an incorrectly written compound (*antimarṇena*).

SA 2.5). The poet gives voice to Guṇḍa to intimate his growing concerns, imbuing the following verses with a great load of emotions. Guṇḍa despairs: 'the lineage of uninterrupted generations starting with the Moon will end with me' (*ārabhya candramasam askhalitaprasūtiḥ vaṃśo 'yam eṣyati mayaiva sahāvasānam*, SA 2.5) and looks for the cause of misery in his own deeds: 'certainly a reason of discontinuance in the birth of sons lays in a wretched practice' (*abhāgyayogān nissaṃśayan tanayajanmaniṣedhahetuḥ*, SA 2.5). Rājanātha continues the depiction of Guṇḍa's longing for a son – when all other methods, including offerings, have failed – by means of a vivid description of a child he imagines raising[12] (SA 2.6–8):

āśīrvacāṃsi mahatām aphalāni tasmād anyādṛśāny
abhimatārpaṇakalpavallyaḥ |
santoṣitā na khalu kin dharaṇīsurās te mṛṣṭāśanena niyataṃ
bahudakṣiṇena ||SA 2.6||

Blessings of great men were fruitless,
therefore [the methods] of another kind [are needed]:
fabulous creepers granting desires procure what is wished for.
Why these gods on earth (i.e. Brahmins)
are by no means satisfied with the constantly offered lavish dainty food?

yadvā lalāṭataṭalolalalantikāśmabālātapadyutimanojñamukhā-
ravindaḥ |
ātmīyabimbaharaṇatvaritaḥ kadā me dṛśyeta ratnabhuvi jānucaraḥ
kumāraḥ ||SA 2.7||

Or else, when shall I see a boy of a charming lotus face
shining with the brightness of the morning sun,
with a stony pendant dangling on the forehead,

[12] Comp. the RA's version of this episode:
tataḥ kadācid ekānte sa guṇḍayamahīpatiḥ |
cintām anantām atanot santānāptivilambanāt ||RA 1.43||
atarpitāgni savanam alakṣitapataṃ nabhaḥ |
anudgatendum ambhodhim aputraṃ māṃ pracakṣate ||RA 1.44||
anyād [antyād?] ṛṇād vimukto 'yaṃ (haṃ) yadi rājyasukhāya me |
sukhodarkam idaṃ kartum suprasanno hariḥ prabhuḥ ||RA 1.45||
Then, once, in a secluded place, King Guṇḍaya displayed an endless anxiety caused by delay in having an heir (1.43):
'They consider me, sonless, as an offering with unsatisfied Agni,
as a cloud, which dispersed unnoticed, as an ocean, which did not bring out the moon (1.44).
If I am to pay off the last debt for the happiness of my kingdom,
this is the gracious God Hari [who may] bring happiness as a consequence' (1.45).

who quickly steals my own image (i.e. takes after me)
and crawls on all fours on the jewel-earth?

avyājaśuṣkaruditāntaritātmamandahāsañ janair asakṛd arpitam aṅkam aṅkāt |
paśyanty aho sukṛtinaḥ paritas svabimbam avyaktavarṇamadhuraṃ sutam ālapantam ||SA 2.8||

Ah, happy are those who see around a son
who speaks sweet indistinct syllables to his own reflection,
is often handed from lap to lap by people,
genuinely weeps without tears while inside laughing gently.

Although Rājanātha builds his narrative on the theme of Guṇḍa and Mallāmbikā's childlessness, inscriptional evidence proves that Guṇḍa had actually two sons, of whom Narasiṃha was the younger. The name of the older, as already mentioned, was Timma. Timma's payment for excavating a canal to provide water to a temple village so that daily offerings at the Veṅkaṭanātha/Veṅkateśvara temple in Tirumala-Tirupati would be appropriate is commemorated in a record dated 1463.[13] He is also referred to in the Telugu *Varāhapurāṇamu*.[14] Moreover, under the name Rāmāraja, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's elder brother is mentioned in the chronicle of the Srirangam temple, the *Kōyil Oḻuku.* The chronicle identifies him with Kantāṭai Rāmānuja Aiyengar, an agent of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, who for many years administrated the Veṅkaṭanātha temple (I come back to this issue later).[15] Shall we assume then that the poet passed over in silence Sāḷuva Timma's existence for the sake of adjusting the reality into the known literary paradigm? Rather, as often happened regarding various members of royal families, there was no need to mention him, for as far as the actual exercise of royal power was concerned, he apparently lived in his brother's shadow. Another plausible explanation would be that Guṇḍa's sons were of different mothers, therefore, while focusing on the praise of his patron, Rājanātha limited the narrative to Sāḷuva's closest relatives,

[13] TTD 2, no. 17, cf. Sastry 1998: 142.

[14] Annotation in Hari Rao (trans.) 1961: 170.

[15] According to the Srirangam chronicle, after his pilgrimage to Ayodhya, Rāmāraja obtained from his brother the privilege of *deśāntari mudrā* at 108 *divyadeśa*s, that is a seal of visitor's authority. Next, he received the title of the overseer (*śrīkāryakārtṛ*) of the Śrīraṅganātha temple. 'As he was the elder brother of the Rāya, he was honoured with the cap and to suit his ascetism, the sacred cloth was tied round his head. The same honours are being done to those who succeed to the mutt' (Hari Rao, trans. 1961: 165–170, cf. Lester 1994: 44). In the opinion of Lester this account was most probably 'made up' to clarify a Srirangam inscription dated 1489, which, as the only one there, refers to Kantāṭai Rāmānuja's activity at the temple. In addition, no other sources corroborate that Timma was a renouncer (Lester 1994: 45).

which, in turn, led to the exclusion of the half-brother, even though he was the older.

The content of next verses switches to Guṇḍa's decision to resort to Ahobilanarasiṃha (in his peaceful aspect coupled with Lakṣmī) for the sake of securing a successor[16] (SA 2.10–11):

tad duṣkaraṃ viracayāmi tapo murārer āvāsamandiram ahobalam abhyupetaḥ |
sadyo mameṣṭaphalado bhavitā sa eva namnābhayārpaṇaparo narasiṃhamūrtiḥ ||SA 2.10||

Thus, after reaching Ahobalam,
the temple which is a seat of Murāri,
I will perform arduous *tapas*.
At once, he, indeed, Narasiṃha's manifestation called
Abhayārpaṇapara [the best procurer of peace],
will fulfill my desires.

tasya prasādamahimā yadi tena śakyam utkūlapaitṛkaṛṇārṇavam uttarītum|
naivānyad asti śaraṇaṃ narasiṃharūpāl lakṣmīpater bhuvanarakṣaṇajāgarūkāt ||SA 2.11||

His grace is great, if thanks to him
one is able to cross the ocean of overflowing paternal debts.
There is no other shelter than the incarnation of Narasiṃha,
the Lord of Lakṣmī, intent on protecting the world.

The poet depicts Ahobilam in terms of a beautiful and bustling religious centre. For instance, he sketches a mass of smoke produced during fire-offerings, which incessantly hovers over the site as if causing an eclipse of the Sun and the Moon (*sadā yajanadhūmatatis samudyan rāhubhraman dinakarasya vidhoś ca date*, SA 2.14). He also delineates Ahobilam's landscape as dominated by the inner gopura of immaculate beauty, which reaches the sky with its peak and shimmers with the reflected world (*abhraṃlihāgram atinirmalaśobham antaryad gopuraṃ lasati bimbitalokalakṣyāt*, SA 2.15). Although the choice of typical imagery to evoke the site's beauty and glory[17] lays grounds for

[16] Comp. the RA's version of this episode:
iti cintāparo dhyātvā nṛhariṃ kuladaivatam |
sa tayā sahacāriṇyā tapo 'kuruta duścaram ||RA 1.46||
Lost in thought, having meditated upon Nṛhari, the family deity,
he, together with his wife, performed severe penances (1.46).

[17] See, e.g., Pontillo 2010 on description of a city in epics and Kālidāsa's works.

questioning the factual character of its description, it is very likely that Ahobilam drew a number of the pilgrims long before the end of the 15th cent. Neither can one rule out the possibility that the story of Narasiṃha's parents visiting Ahobilam has some grain of plausibility. Ahobilam had been known in the south of India since the times of Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār, who praised it in his *Perīya Tirumoḻi* (ca. 9th cent.). The site's existence on the pilgrimage map of the region, for instance, is suggested by the mention of Ahobilanarasiṃha in the *Vihagendrasaṃhitā* of Pāñcarātra (14th cent.) (Gonda 1977: 106) and the copper plate inscription issued by Anavema Reddy in 1378 near Guntur, which states that he constructed steps leading to both Śrīśailam and Ahobilam for the benefit of pilgrimaging devotees. Even earlier, legends related to the site and its presiding deity might have been circulated in the region by means of texts such as the Sanskrit *Śrīśailakhanda* (12/13th cent?), which contains several chapters on Ahobilam,[18] or the Telugu *Narasiṃha Purāṇamu* by Errapragada (14th cent.), which glorifies Ahobilam. Although the two Sanskrit glorifications, i.e., the *Ahobilamāhātmya*,[19] which praises the site, and the Vaishnava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, namely the glorification of the Varadarāja temple in Kanchi, which includes one chapter that mentions Ahobilam (Dębicka-Borek 2019), so far remain undated, one cannot exclude that they, too, were composed before the 16th cent.

Basically, the uniqueness of Ahobilam arises from its hosting different aspects of Narasiṃha. These aspects are traditionally encapsulated in the pattern of nine, reflected in the nine temples built within the Ahobilam sacred complex, most likely in the pre-Vijayanagara era.[20] The nine temples are scattered between the so called Upper and Lower Ahobilam and governed by Ahobilanarasiṃha in his ferocious (*ugra*) aspect. In view of local myths, Ahobilam is the exact spot where Narasiṃha killed the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. Excluded from the traditional group of nine is the temple, which is dedicated to the mild (*saumya*) aspect of Narasiṃha, called Prahlādavarada ('the one who grants boons to Prahlāda'), coupled with his consort Lakṣmī. Noteworthy, R. Vasantha suggests that some of its structures might have been built during the times of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha (Vasantha 2001: 86), hence later than the other

[18] On dating its manuscripts, see Reddy 2014: 16; on mentions of Ahobilam, see Reddy 2014: 109.

[19] The *Ahobilamāhātmya* claims to be a part of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāna*. Sucharita Adluri notices that this (uncorraborated) association between the two texts goes back at least to the 14th cent. For instance, Erragada states that his Telugu *Narasiṃhapuraṇa* is based on the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* version (Adluri 2019: 178, fn. 74).

[20] These are: Ahobilanarasiṃha, Varāhanarasiṃha, Mālolānarasiṃha, Yogānandanarasiṃha, Pāvananarasiṃha, Karañjanarasiṃha, Chatravaṭanarasiṃha, Bhārgavanarasiṃha, Jvālā-narasiṃha (see *Ahobilamāhātmya* 4.8–54).

shrines at the site. Unlike the abundance of inscriptions left by Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and his family in Tirupati-Tirumala, there is however no epigraphical evidence that would point to Sāḷuvas' influence in Ahobilam. The earliest Vijayanagara record at the site is dated 1515 and was issued by Kṛṣṇarāya Tuḷuva. This poses a question as to whether Rājanātha – when praising the peaceful form of Narasiṃha to whom Guṇḍa resorts to secure an heir – refers to a particular, localised aspect of the deity worshipped at Ahobilam. Given that Vasantha is right in dating the Prahlādavarada temple, does it mean that the poet, between words, legitimises his patron's architectural project aimed at paying homage to the benevolent Narasiṃha to whom he owes his life? Or perhaps Rājanātha hints at the earlier Mālolānarasiṃha shrine, one of the nine? Both indeed host the god making the gesture of peace (*abhaya*) with his right hand and Lakṣmī seated on his lap. Another possibility is that, on the contrary, Rājanātha has in mind the rather standard image of Narasiṃha, who, as often happens in regard to the terrifying gods, in order to become auspicious and accessible to his devotees has to be tamed by his consort. Due to the lack of sources, I leave this question open.

Most importantly for the development of the narrative, Rājanātha portrays Ahobilam as associated with power to heal diseases (SA 2.17–18):

jātyandhakāṇabadhirādijanasya bhūyo 'py aṅgāni yatra vitarann anupādhibandhuḥ |
viśvaṃbharo vikalakarmakṛto vidhātur ātmodbhavasya kim apākurute 'pavādam ||SA 2.17||

Will Viṣṇu, after all a friend,
in the site, where he applies a remedy
to the body of people blind from birth, one-eyed, deaf, and others,
remove the denial of a son to a father
who has committed imperfect deeds?

snātvātha tīrthasalile dayitāsakho yaṃ datvā samastam api vittajaṃ dvijebhyaḥ |
natvā ca tatra narasiṃham ahoba(bi)leśaṃ putrādṛto 'sya purato nyavasat trirātram ||SA 2.18||

In the company of his wife, he bathed in *tīrtha*'s water,
offered the whole wealth to Brahmins,
bowed in front of Narasiṃha, the Lord of Ahobilam.
Zealous of a son,
he stayed there for three nights in his presence.

In the following stanzas the poet evokes another literary motif common in Sanskrit narratives and vernacular tales, namely the theme of the miraculous conception, which involves an application of a concrete method to overcome infertility. Based on the yoga practice, the procedure chosen by Guṇḍa and his wife seems to fall into the category of means called by Sudyka 'psycho-physical',[21] and covers ascetic practices, fasts and other mortifications. Rājanātha depicts Guṇda meditating on his subtle body consisting of *cakra*s, which leads to the abandonment of body nourishment and a common state of awakening until evening (SA 2.18). When the peerless dissolution occurred (*laye nirupame janite*, SA 2.19), Guṇḍa releases the mind focused on *bhakti* and stiffens like a branch of a tree (*viṭapavaj jaḍatāṃ prapannaḥ*, SA 2.20). Eventually, when he enters into the meditation-sleep denoted as the state of *samādhi*, Narasiṃha appears in his dream and instructs him on the succession (SA 2.21–22):

ante asatsahacarīgamitaprabodham aspandagātram
atimātrasamādhiniṣṭham |
āmīlitākṣam anubhāvitayoganidram āvirbhavan naraharir nṛpam ity
abhāṇīt ||SA 2.21||

Narahari appeared and said to the king,
whose consciousness was sent to a wife sitting nearby,
whose limbs were not moving,
who was in the state of exceeding *samādhi*,
as he was experiencing the meditation-sleep having eyes closed.

bhaktyaiva niṣpratibhayā pṛthivīpate te prīto smi
yogadṛḍhabhāvanayopahūtaḥ |
aikyan tayātmani gato smayi saṃbhavāmi tvayyeva
purnayanṛpānvayaśikṣaṇāya ||SA 2.22||

'Oh! King of the earth!
Summoned by demonstration of firmed yoga
I am pleased with your devotion devoid of splendor.
Thanks to it (*bhakti*), I reached oneness [with you] in the soul.
I smile at you to teach you
on the succession of kings-managers of citadels.'

Actually, on this occasion Rājanātha puts into Ahobilanarasiṃha's mouth an explanation of the reasons for his descent to earth in an extraordinary two-fold body (*vikṛtadvirūpa*): 'from the column which was the mouth of a blazing

[21] The other two being 'ritualistic means (sacrifices, special rituals) engendering a male issue' and 'animal and vegetal remedies: special food and concoctions'. Sometimes the methods can overlap, or instead of them a son can be adopted, see Sudyka 2016: 19.

fire, laughing at a quivering demon (*atra*), Man-Lion appeared for the sake of saying to the disgraced one (*ayaśas*), "Be afraid!"' (*vikṛtadvirūpaḥ | trasya tra sātrasahasajvaladagnivaktrastaṃbhād abhūn nṛharir ity ayaśaḥ prabhāṣṭum*, SA 2.23). The allusion to Narasiṃha's act of killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu is followed by other motifs associated with any *avatāra*'s manifestation – restoring Kṛtayuga and Vedic teaching – and culminates with god's duty to protect the king, his kingdom and its inhabitants. This strategy allows the poet to aptly blur the boundaries between the ruler's and the god's identity and their obligations towards their subjects (SA 2.24):

> *netuṃ kaliṃ kṛtayugaṃ nijanītimārgān nirvighnam āracayitun nigamopadeśam |*
> *sadvīpabhūbharaṇatatparacakravartisāmrājyayogyam avituñ ca dhanena hīnān* ||SA 2.24||
>
> 'For the sake of leading Kali[yuga] towards Kṛtayuga,
> For the sake of arranging Vedic teaching as independent from a native conduct,
> For the sake of protecting a man capable of ruling as an emperor,
> whose highest aim is to maintain the earth and islands,
> and the abandoned ones with the help of wealth.'

Before his disappearance, Narasiṃha requests Guṇḍa inform his chaste, afflicted by fast, wife (*sādhvīm imāṃ sahacarīm upavāsadīnām*, SA 2.25) that their wish will be fulfilled.[22] Again, he emphasises his satisfaction with the quality of the king's devotion (*baddho 'smi bhaktiguṇatas tava*, SA 2.25).[23] The

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[22] In the RA this episode goes as follows:
tapasā tena santuṣṭas tasya svapne puro 'bhavat |
ahobalanṛsiṃhas tam abravīd adbhutaṃ vacaḥ ||RA 1.47||
śauryagāmbhīryasaundaryadhairyaudāryādibhūṣaṇaḥ |
tavāstu tanayo vatsa! sarvorvīcakranāyakaḥ ||RA 1.48||
ityudīrya vaco bhaktyā harṣitasyāsya bhupateḥ |
ahobalanṛsiṃho 'yam adhitāntar dayānidhiḥ ||RA 1.49||
Satisfied with the penances, Ahobalanṛsiṃha appeared before him
in his dream and said marvelous words (1.47):
'My dear child, yours will be a son adorned with heroism, dignity, beauty, intelligence and generosity,
the leader of troops of the entire earth' (1.48).
Having said these words to the king, [whose hair] were bristling with devotion
Ahobalanṛsiṃha, treasure of mercy, disappeared (1.49).

[23] In the RA this episode goes as follows:
atha svapnāvasāne 'sāv ānandāmṛtatundilaḥ?|
hariprasādam ācaṣṭa devyā darśitakautukaḥ ||RA 1.50||
Moreover, when his dream came to the end, he, who experienced the wonder,
informed the queen about the grace of god, talking with happiness (1.50).

couple bows to Narasiṃha referred to as 'easily accessible due to devotion' (*bhaktisulabha*) and returns to their capital city (*nijarājadhānī*) (SA 2.29).

Keeping to the norms of the *kāvya* genre, in consecutive stanzas Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima describes auspicious omens that foreshadow Mallāmbikā's pregnancy. She beholds a certain phantom consisting of a previously unseen scattered light, clothed in yellow, with a beautiful golden complexion and the emblems of *śaṅkha* and *cakra* on its arms, which enters her (*kanakābhirāmavarṇaṃ piśaṅgavasanaṃ pravibhaktarūpam | sā paśyati sma karadhāritaśaṅkhacakram antarviśat kim api rocir adṛṣṭapūrvaṃ*, SA 2.30). The lustre evokes the child's royal fame, which is associated with the colour white (Ali 2000). The Vaishnava emblems hint at a baby's divinity. And indeed, two stanzas further, Rājanātha applies a multi-layered comparison to convey that the fetus has been implanted in Mallāmbikā's womb by Viṣṇu himself[24] (SA 2.32):

> *tatra praviṣṭavati śārṅgiṇi garbhaśayyāṃ tannirgamaṃ bahir iva pratipālayantīm |*
> *lakṣmīn tadīyavirahād iva pāṇḍurūpām anyādṛśīṃ śriyam alabdha narendrapatnī* ||SA 2.32||
>
> When Vishnu entered the womb,
> the king's wife obtained a lustre (Śrī) of another kind,
> in the form of a pale appearance, reminding Lakṣmī,
> [pale-skinned] due to separation from him,
> as if waiting for the one who left.

By juxtaposing the pallor of Mallāmbikā and Lakṣmī – in the former case, physical, as caused by pregnancy ailments, in the latter brought on by longing – Rājanātha again seems to play with the concept of royal fame traditionally expressed by brightness. On another level, when paired with Lakṣmī the goddess, the term *śrī,* which he uses to describe Mallāmbikā's condition after conception, connotes her status as Viṣṇu's second consort. Yet another layer of associations concerns Lakṣmī as *proṣitabhartrikā* or *virahotkaṇṭhikā*, namely two types of heroines (*nāyikā*) characterised by theoreticians of Indian literature as languishing in love because separated from a beloved; the former suffering for her beloved is far away on a business trip, the latter cannot meet her for some other reasons (Sudyka 2007: 132–133).

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[24] In the RA the episode concerning conception goes as follows:
tathā guṇḍayabhūbhartuḥ tanayo 'bhūt tataḥ phalāt |
nanaguṇagaṇas tasyāṃ narasiṃha iti śrutaḥ ||RA 1.51||
Thus, as a result, the son of King Guṇḍaya, possessing various qualities,
known as Narasiṃha, was [conceived] in her (1.51).

When the poet eventually switches to the auspicious moment of the heir's delivery, he conventionally depicts this event as accompanied by fortunate prayers/blessings of the well-disposed people of all *āśrama*s, austerities of the inhabitants of the three worlds, and a feast (*āśīrbhir āsumanasām akhilāśramāṇāṃ bhāgyais trilokatapasā ca pacelimena*, SA 2.56). The delivery takes place at the right moment distinguished by five planets in high ascent (*pañcagrahoccagatiśālini sanmuhūrte*, SA 2.56). The boy, denoted as the ruler of the earth (*kṣitīśa*), is named after Narasiṃha (*nāmārbhakasya narasiṃha iti kṣitīśaḥ*, SA 2.67).

The canto ends with Guṇḍa's departure to the forest after realising that his son has reached adulthood and acquired knowledge appropriate to rule (SA 2.86–87):

vidyāpāram avāpi tad gurujanair nītaṃ puro vīkṣya taṃ
sāṣṭāṅgapraṇataṃ sutaṃ savinayaṃ sasneham utthāpayan |
āliṅgyotpulakaṃ punaḥpunar asāv āghrāya mūrdhny ādarāt
antarlīna ivātmanātmani sukhād āmīlitākṣo 'bhavat ||SA 2.86||

The ocean of knowledge has been achieved by the elders.
Having seen him brought to it,
modestly prostrating with eight limbs in front of him,
he, with affection, lifted his son.
Having embraced the one whose hair were bristling,
with care he kissed him over and over on the head.
He closed his eyes with happiness in his soul
as if he had dissolved within himself.

sakalām upadiśya dharmanītiṃ nijasāmrājyadhuran nidhāya tasmin |
agamad vanam ātmavaṃśarītyā saha mallāmbikayā sa guṇḍyendraḥ
||SA 2.87||

Having instructed him about the entire policy of *dharma*,
and having passed the burden of kingship to him,
Guṇḍaya accompanied by Mallāmbikā departed to the forest
in accordance with the custom of his lineage.[25]

The final episode of the narrative seems to reflect one more popular motif, in light of which a ruler abdicates in favour of his son and chooses asceticism. However, as Sharma remarks (Sharma 2011: 401), when uncorroborated

[25] The same motif closes the first canto, where it is Gauta, the father of Guṇḍa, who departs to the forest having passed the responsibilities to his son; see an excerpt in Krishnaswami Aiyangar 2003: 92.

it often serves as a strategy aimed at showing an uninterrupted chain of successors if there is some uncertainty regarding the details of handing over power, or, even, to euphemistically refer to a murder caused by succession fights. Although the poem was composed before Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's actual powerful overtaking of the throne from Saṅgamas, this is most likely how the poet understood Narasiṃha's right to rule, not because of blood bonds with the Saṅgamas, but due to merits, mostly martial achievements, of his and his predecessors.

The last issue I discuss refers to possible reasons behind Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima's decision to equate his patron with Ahobilanarasiṃha.

4. Why Ahobilanarasiṃha?

According to Jan Gonda, what gave a basis to the concept of divine kingship was the emphasising of Viṣṇu's attributes connected to protecting all and defending the *dharma*. In epics and *purāṇa*s, Viṣṇu is paralleled with a model divine ruler and the god's certain portions are absorbed by sovereigns. Through his links to the powers of nature, Viṣṇu is also responsible for fertility, which is an issue essential for a king (Gonda 1969: 164–167). The simplest answer to the question why the poet (or his patron) chose Viṣṇu's incarnation as Narasiṃha for Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's divine counterpart would be hence the Man-Lion's ferocious character that made him the most dangerous *avatāra* of the god. Over centuries, the attributes of Viṣṇu-Narasiṃha were especially appealing to kings, for whom the deity embodied all the traits required of a ruler: bravery and commitment to restore *dharma*. In puranic and epic literature the myth of Narasiṃha was presented and retold in terms of his victory over the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu conceptualised within the 'neither-nor' scheme. Narasiṃha, himself a hybrid entity, defeats the king of demons regardless of his boon to remain invincible both during the day, and at night; and being beyond defeat by either man or animal, etc. Only with the passing of time does the focus of the myth shift to the issue of Hiraṇyakaśipu's son, Prahlāda, and the role of Narasiṃha in saving him from his father through his arduous devotion to Viṣṇu (Soifer 1991).

As essential to a narrative on a ruler's miraculous conception, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha shares the name with Viṣṇu's incarnation, which perfectly fits the old pattern of depicting a king through referring to the concept of *avatāra*. But why does the poet identify Sāḷuva Narasiṃha with a particular, local form of Narasiṃha, namely, Ahobilanarasiṃha? Does this prove Sāḷuvas' connection to Ahobilam? In what sense can the narrative on Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as the

Ahobilanarasiṃha incarnate be seen as reflecting true events? How did it help him to become a king?

I propose to discuss the purpose of inserting the narrative into the SA from two, yet overlapping, perspectives. One, focused on the toponymical nature of the name of the deity Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, is likened with attempts at confirming the chief's influences over a certain area that was crucial for underscoring his military successes and thus useful in terms of showing him as worthy of being the emperor. The other, more general, concerns employing the motif of *avatāra* to express Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's identity as a brave ruler and his martial successes in a way comprehensible for the audience.

In light of the already mentioned remarks of Simmons 2018 and Sharma 2011, narratives play an important role when integrated into genealogies of rulers of rising kingdoms to praise a new dynasty and to explained how it became powerful in a particular historical and geographical milieu. References to certain sites in genealogies, often by means of narratives, may point to attempts at establishing political and religious relations, and to claims of power over disputed areas. These are often the areas situated on the borders.

Accordingly, the political situation of the areas on the northern frontier of Vijayanagara on the turn of the 15th and 16th cent. suggests that the most telling feature of the narrative on the Ahobilanarasiṃha incarnate is locating it in Ahobilam. Although no inscriptional records seem to mention Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's political connection to Ahobilam, it seems very likely that pivotal for the poet's concept is the strategic value of the site. Ahobilam is situated slightly to the north of Tirupati (ca. 250 km), which, in turn is ca 16 km from Candragiri, that is the fort which had served Sāḷuvas as a military base since the times of Maṅgi, Narasiṃha's heroic predecessor. Building alliances in this particular region of southern Andhra was essential to control the Empire's northern territories in a Tamil area. It also provided a chance to remain far from the contested area of Kaliṅga (Stoker 2016: 88). As Stoker observes,

> That Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, a general in Emperor Virūpākṣarāya's army, who had been made governor of this region, was able to usurp the authority of the last king of the Saṅgama dynasty and establish the short-lived 'Sāḷuva' one attests to how much military power had been placed in his hands. This, in turn, attests to the strategic significance of the Tirupati region to the empire (Stoker 2016: 88).

Given that Sāḷuva Narasiṃha – considered the first to use the help of religious institutions to consolidate the power to a significant extent (Appadurai 1977:

47) – had been successfully establishing control over the Tirupati region through patronising Tirumala-Tirupati temples already while in the service of Saṅgamas, it seems plausible that his (or the poet's) ambitions reached further, towards Ahobilam, that is another religious centre situated close to the Candragiri fort in the zone of interests. Mentions of strategically important Ahobilam could thus enhance his image as proper emperor through emphasising his skill at conquering and protecting the land and his will to support temples.

Unlike the suggestion of RA 1.46 that the tutelary deity (*kuladaivatā*) of the Sāḷuvas was Narasiṃha – apparently serving the poet to inscribe the narrative into the popular motif of king as a divine incarnate – officially the dynasty maintained Virūpākṣa in this role.[26] However, inscriptions issued by Sāḷuva Narasiṃha show that from 1456 onwards, that is long before he seized the throne, his favourite god was Viṣṇu in the form of Veṅkatanātha/Veṅkateśvara associated with Tirumala-Tirupati, which neighboured his fort in Candragiri. In this respect, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha shared his religious preferences with his great ancestor, Sāḷuva Maṅgi, who according to the 1359 inscription in the Veṅkaṭeśvara temple fixed a gold *kalaśa* over a *vimāna* of the shrine. Other Sāḷuva chiefs left their records in Tirumala in the second half of the 15th cent. That the connections with the temple were equally essential for creating the image of the proper ruler as connecting him to a strategically important place is proved by a verse from the ninth canto of SA, in which Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima states that Sāḷuva Narasiṃha dwelt in his ancestral residence in Candragiri to worship the god (*ārādhanāyaiva harer nivāsam aicchan nṛpaś candraśironagaryām*, SA 9.21) and passes in silence other advantages of the fort.

Due to Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's support, the temple developed into a religious complex that absorbed the territory at the Tirumala's foot, Tirupati, and gained a cross-regional fame. Since transactions commissioned by him dealt with distribution of material resources and 'honours', they were instrumental in consolidating his power and extending control over new areas and new communities (Appadurai 1977: 47).[27] Sāḷuva Narasiṃha did it with a successful mediation of the already mentioned Kantāṭai Rāmānuja Aiyengar (ca. 1430–

[26] Before eventual replacement of tutelary deities, that is starting from the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya onwards, the name of Viṭṭhala was added to inscriptions as a witness of recorded events and transactions. See Verghese 2004: 422; Stoker 2016: 76.

[27] Over the years Sāḷuva Narasiṃha supported the Tirumala shrine with rich donations. He granted villages to the temple to procure daily offerings (1456; TTD 2 no. 4, 1467; TTD 2 no. 30, 1468; TTD 2 no. 34). Thanks to him, for instance, the *vasāntamaṇḍapa* on the *svāmipuṣkariṇi* was built (1468; TTD 2 no. 31) and the Swing Festival was arranged for the deity (1473; TTD 2 no. 50).

1496), a disciple of Aḷakiyamaṇavāla Jīyar, who was a renunciate traditionally linked with Maṇavāḷamāmuni (1370–1445). This cooperation chiefly focused on constructing and managing the feeding houses for pilgrims built to honour Rāmānuja (*rāmānujakūtaṃ*) and administrated by Aiyengar's disciples or the non-Brahmin Śrīvaiṣṇava devotees, the so-called Sāttāda Ekāki Śrīvaiṣṇavas (Lester 1994: 47).

Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's close links with Tirumala-Tirupati, so important for building his image as a king, are also emphasised in the SA. The theme of his visit to the Tirumala temple occupies the SA's entire ninth canto. In its first stanza, Rājanātha depicts Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as visiting the Veṅkaṭa mountain while attended by the defeated rulers.[28] Overtly, such a picture seems to express the seeking of divine authorisation for the freshly acquired power. However, throughout the canto, Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima frequently addresses his patron as Varāha/Mahīvarāha, which refers to Viṣṇu's incarnation as Boar. In this way the poet amplifies the *avatāra*-like nature of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, but also, by means of allusion to the insignia of the Saṅgamas, shows him as a proper Vijayanagara ruler.[29] In addition, in Tirumala-Tirupati, the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu connotes the deity which was worshipped in Tirumala as the first.[30] Noteworthy, in the third verse of the same canto of SA, the poet identifies the god to whom Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, denoted as Mahīvarāha (the Boar with the Earth), made obeisance after reaching the Veṅkata mountain, with Narasiṃha.[31]

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28 *atha kṣitīśair vijitair aśeṣair āsevyamāno dharaṇīvarāhaḥ*
vilaṅghya mārgaṃ bahubhiḥ pravāṇaiḥ viṣṇoḥ priyaṃ veṅkataśailam āgāt ||SA 9.1||
Then, attended by all defeated rulers,
the Dharaṇīvarāha traversed the path with many steep slopes,
and approached the mountain of Veṅkata
which is dear to Viṣṇu.
(I read *pravāṇaiḥ* as *pravaṇaiḥ*).

29 The boar was probably taken over from the Kākātīyas and maintained as the symbol of royal power (Ramanayya 1933: 102–103; cf. Sudyka 2013: 122)

30 An episode of Varāha's and Viṣṇu's encounter in Tirupati occurs in the local Sanskrit *puraṇā*s, according to which Viṣṇu rented a room on the Veṅkata hill from Varāha while his was searching for Lakṣmī. The contract between the two forms of Viṣṇu is to date commemorated by pilgrims who before a visit to the Veṅkateśvara shrine are supposed to visit the shrine of Varāha (Shulman and Rao 2005: 119–120).

31 The stanza is incomplete:
mahīvarāho 'tha varāhamūrtir jayaśriyāpto dayitaṃ ramāyāḥ
sa prāṇamat prāṇamayaṃ pumāṃsaṃ nṛsiṃharūpaṃ narasiṃ... ||SA 9.3||
In the form of Varāha,
moreover, as Varāha along with Mahī (Earth),
who was approached by the Goddess of victory,
he made obeisance to a husband of Ramā,
a living man in the form of Nṛsiṃha…

A separate shrine of Narasiṃha was built within the premises of the Tirumala complex as early as the first half of the 14th century. Viraraghavacharya suggests that it was constructed with the never fulfilled purpose of storing the idol either of Sholinghur or Ahobilam in case of a raid by sultanate forces. Besides, Narasiṃha along with Varāha, were especially popular among local *arcaka*s (Viraraghavacharya 1953: 231–232). However, because of the rule followed in the Tirumala temple according to which no other *mūrti* except Veṅkatanaṭha could receive *pūjā* and food offerings, they did not gain individual recognition even though both had separate shrines (Viraraghavacharya 1953: 215–216). First endowments for food offerings to Narasiṃha, practically offered only in his honour to Veṅkateśvara, were not made until 1469, by the already mentioned Kantāṭai Rāmānuja Iyengar, who was a close associate of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha (Viraraghavacharya 1953: 231–232). It is hard not to notice that this period coincides with Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's patronage over the temple. In addition, in 1485 Sāḷuva Narasiṃha consecrated the temple of Śrī Narasiṃha in Alipiri, that is at the foot of the Tirumala hill, on the path leading to Tirumala (TTD 2 no. 82). The time of its construction suggests that its purpose was to commemorate his assuming of the title of *sarvabhauma*, the emperor. Situated outside Tirumala, its presiding deity could be worshipped on its own and thus receive respect proper to the emperor's namesake.

Even if in accordance with the rules of Tirumala temple the Narasiṃha deity could not be treated on the same terms as Veṅkateśvara, the content of the ninth chapter reveals both the poet's endeavors to homologise Sāḷuva Narasiṃha with his divine namesake and account for his growing interest towards the Narasiṃha cult,[32] already then, as we can presume, associated in this particular region with the religious centre in Ahobilam.

If Appadurai 1977: 69–70 is right, activities of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha in Tirupati indirectly led to establishment of the Ahobila *maṭha*, the monastery institution which became an important partner of the successive Vijayanagara dynasties and fostered the development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the region of Andhra. As he claims, as a result of Kantāṭai support, the importance of the Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava school in Tirupati grew significantly towards the end of the 15th cent. Just after 1500 ce, the *jīyar*s of Tirupati Vān Saṭakopan

[32] As in the case of other gods associated with attributes of warriors and protectors, who were usually drawn from the marginal inland societies of hunters and pastoralists, Narasiṃha's cult happened to play an important role in the military and political structure of the empire; more so, as it allowed for the integration of such communities into the state (Sinopoli 2000: 376). It seems, however, that the cult of Narasiṃha was the earliest Vaiṣṇava cult in the city of Vijayanagara. The worship of the Man-Lion reached its peak at the turn of the 15th and 16th century as suggested by a huge sculpture of Narasiṃha with Lakṣmī commissioned by Kṛṣṇadevarāya in 1528 and found in the capital city (Verghese 2004: 424).

maṭha, who preferred the Sanskrit tradition, left the place to look for new opportunities in Tamil and Telugu speaking zones. They moved their headquarters to Ahobilam and within several decades gained control over local Narasiṃha temples as well as involved themselves in various transactions controlled by the Vijayanagara kings.

The importance of communicating a ruler's ability to control and expand the empire by showcasing the extension of influences over Ahobilam is implied by the site's treatment by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, the great king of the Tuḷuva dynasty, whose reign started in 1509, that is just eighteen years after Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's demise. As shown by Stoker, in contrast to the sites in the region of Karnataka, which were under Kṛṣṇadevarāya's stable patronage, Ahobilam and other sites located along the Empire's northern border, both in Andhra and Tamil countries, regularly appear in the *praśasti* (panegyric) portions of his inscriptions (Stoker 2016: 158, fn. 94). Given that inscriptions provide not only historical data but also, being a literary genre, through the usage of conventions they reveal inspirations for how a ruler wanted to self-represent (Stoker 2016: 32), what transpires from these *praśasti*s is, as Stoker observes, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's 'double-sided stewardship as being rooted in both military might and constructive donations to religious institutions' (Stoker 2016: 33). Listing temples and religious donations in inscriptions was a strategy to voice the king's engagements both in conquests and supporting religious institutions – namely the true character of royal activities – and publicise his control over freshly annexed or rebellious areas. Particularly useful for this purpose were royal donations to sectarian leaders to support a *maṭha* or to establish it where a temple was already built (Stoker 2016: 34). Contrary to Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, however, inscriptions corroborate that Kṛṣṇadevarāya visited Ahobilam in 1515, which in turn confirms the site's importance for the state. Perhaps it was even him who contributed to the establishment of the Ahobila *maṭha*: whereas traditional claims date this event 14th cent., according to Rajagopalan 2005 its first pontiff was appointed by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, which in turn seems to be supported by Raman 1975: 80–81. Surely, Kṛṣṇadevarāya continued Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's policy of patronising the area of Tirumala-Tirupati, including Ahobilam, for this area was important to him as well to monitor local communities and indocile *nāyaka*s (Stoker 2016: 39).

5. Conclusions

The poem/s of Rājanatha Ḍiṇḍima is/are most likely the earliest Vijayanagara Sanskrit composition/s which refer to Ahobilam. However, it seems justified to assume that the myths associated with the site had been known to the poet's

contemporaries to such an extent that he had no doubts as to his eulogies' proper, intended, reception. At the root of these myths lay old beliefs in view of which Viṣṇu in his wrathful (*ugra*) aspect of Narasiṃha was incarnated exactly there to kill Hiraṇyakaśipu. Another set of local myths – with time passing repurposed from the tribal oral traditions as *Vāsantikāpariṇaya*, a Sanskrit drama attributed to Śaṭhakopa Yatīndra Mahādeśika, the 7th superior of the *maṭha* in Ahobilam (ca. 16th cent.) – focuses upon marriage of Narasiṃha, both the deity and the king of Ahobilam, to a girl from a local hunter-gatherer Chenchu tribe, and thus figuratively reveals reconciliation of both traditions at the site (Dębicka-Borek 2016). Given how powerful a literary tool the *avatāra* myths were in their 'classic' variants in terms of metaphorically expressing ruler's victorious deeds, identifying Sāḷuva Narasiṃha with the deity believed to have descended to the exact spot situated on the borders of the Vijayanagara to defeat the demon certainly contributed to highlighting his kingly merits for the framing of the Empire.

In a short period of time, the narrative crafted by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima with the aim of identifying Sāḷuva Narasiṃha with Ahobilanarasiṃha became part of Sāḷuvas' dynastic legends. These were also preserved in a couple of Sanskrit inscriptions issued by Immadi Narasiṃha (r. 1491–1505), Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's son, shortly after the Emperor's death. However, it seems plausible that as political conditions rapidly changed, both the poet responsible for integrating the motif into the genealogical list commissioned by Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's successor, and the readers, might have interpreted it as rendering something else, or rather something more, than Rājanātha originally intended. After the murder of Virūpākṣa by his eldest son in 1485, which was followed by the coronation of his younger son, Praudharāya (r. 1485), Sāḷuva Narasiṃha commanded Tuḷuva Īśvara's son Narasa Nāyaka, to take the city of Vijayanagara. As Praudharāya appeared to be disinterested in the affairs of the state, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha usurped the throne. Clearly, he might have been seen as saving the Vijayanagara from disruption (Shastri 1996: 272–275) in the manner gods were believed to save the earth. The way he was depicted by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima must have been helpful in the public reassessment of the coup Sāḷuva Narasiṃha led and his status as a usurper. As the divine incarnate connected to Ahobilam, the site of a religious but, most of all, strategic value on the northern border of the Empire, for many he must have appeared a better choice to rule than the true yet incapable and feud successors of Devarāya II, Mallikārjuna and Virūpākṣa II. With the already earned position of the trusted and powerful generalissimo whose military forces protect the border zones and successively expand the territory, it was not difficult to present and perceive him as Narasiṃha the god.

Two records of donations commissioned by Immadi Narasiṃha, when his father was already gone and he himself was controlled by the Tuḷuvas who now laid claims to the throne they earlier helped Sāḷuva Narasiṃha to obtain, include long genealogical passages. In both cases, the list of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's titles and deeds is preceded by an allusion to Ahobilanarasiṃha's role in his conception.

The Chakenahalli (Demasamudra) copper-plate *śāsana* dated to 1492 literally calls the son of Guṇḍa 'the eleventh incarnation' of Hari, who descended to earth to fight enemies:

tataḥ kālāt bahos taptvā tapāṃsi sa mahīpatiḥ
narasiṃhamahārāyam lebhe naraharer varam |
chāpakoṭisamutkhātasakalārātibhūbhṛtā |
nitā daśām aviṣamām pṛthunā yena med[corr.medi]nī |
samahartum iha niśśeṣam kaṇṭakān sa haris svayam |
yāj janmacchadmanā sākṣād iyeṣaikādaśam januḥ |
ahobalaśrīnṛsiṃhād āvirbhūtāt tapobalāt |
narasiṃhamahārāyam putram lebhe sa bhūpatiḥ |[33]

After a long period of performing austerities,
the king [Guṇḍa] obtained the boon from Narasiṃha – the great king Narasiṃha.
This great king, all of whose adversaries' tips of the bows were destroyed/drawn,
brought the Earth to convenient conditions.
In order to entirely annihilate enemies on this world, Hari himself strived for an eleventh descent in a bodily form in as much as under the pretext of birth.
Due to powerful austerities, the king obtained from manifested Ahobalaśrīnṛsiṃha
a son, the great king Narasiṃha.

The Devulapalli copper-plate, dated 1505, that is the year of Iṃmadi Narasiṃha's murder, concisely refers to Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's birth using wording similar to that of the previous inscription. Remarkably, however, it praises Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as the one who became the emperor after fighting, and hence most likely alludes to an event of capturing the throne by him:

[33] See *Annual Report of the Mysore Archeological Department for 1924*, pp. 96–102; plate II a, lines 48–55. I adjusted the transcript to the IAST norms.

guṇāṃbudher guṇḍavibhos tato 'bhūn mallāṃbikāyāṃ mahanīyakīrtiḥ |
nṛsihvarāyo 'yam ahovaḷasrīnṛsihvadevasya varaprasādā[t] |
mīsaragaṃḍakaṭhārīsāḷuvadharaṇīvarāhabirudāṁkaḥ |
yaḥ khaḍgasahāyaḥ sarvān nirjitya sārvabhaumo 'bhūt |[34]

Thus, as the result of god Ahobalaśrīnṛsiṃha's gracious boon,
Mallāmbikā conceived by Mighty Guṇḍa, the Ocean of Virtues,
the king Nṛsiṃha of illustrious fame,
given the title of Mīsaragaṃḍa-kaṭhārī-sāḷuva-dharaṇīvarāha,
who, after defeating everyone with a sword, became the Emperor.

Although, on the one hand, the rapid changes that took place in Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's turbulent life meant that the same motif of a king as a divine incarnation might have been used to underwrite various events, on the other, its focal point, that is confirmation of power, seems to remain the same. As I hoped to demonstrate, in the poems which were composed ca. 1480, that is before the eventual seizing of throne by Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, the narrative primarily rendered his military might and projected the expanding range of his influences by means of referring to a religious center in the border zone he was already able to control from the fort in Candragiri. Through equating him with Narasiṃha of that place, Ahobilanarasiṃha, the same narrative justified his decision to forcefully overtake the throne when it eventually happened, the deed hinted at in inscriptions issued by his (threatened) successor, for, if seen from such a perspective, this is what must have been done to protect the subjects.

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[34] See *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 7 (1902–1903), pp. 80–85, plate I, lines 21–25 (all instances of *nṛsihva* I read as *nṛsiṃha*).

Abbreviations

GOML Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai

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