Introduction

Numerous gods and goddesses are worshipped in India. Many of them, like humans, are married, and this is a reason to celebrate. Especially in South India, the association of god and goddess is celebrated in festivals that re-enact the deities' marriage year by year. Male gods, who have more than one wife, may have several marriage festivals a year. Mythological narratives are often linked to the festivals, and serve to explain the circumstances in which the divine marriage came to occur at that particular place.

This book focuses on the annual re-enactment of the divine marriage at one particular place: the Śaivite Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram, in the South Indian state Tamil Nadu. On the tenth day of the temple's major annual festival (*mahotsava*), under the auspicious star *uttiram* in the Tamil month of Paṅkuṉi (mid-March to mid-April), the marriage of the god Ekāmranātha (a form of Śiva) and the goddess Kāmākṣī from the neighboring Kāmākṣī temple is celebrated—at least this is what is described in written sources. Kāmākṣī is venerated as an independent, powerful goddess, representing the most prominent 'seat of the Goddess' (*śaktipīṭha*) of South India. She is recognized as a manifestation of the goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī of the Tantric Śrīvidyā cult, and has her own ritual tradition and temple in Kanchipuram. Her role, as independent goddess and consort of Ekāmranātha, is continuously negotiated. This is reflected in the myths of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, which allude to alternate roles and to a wide-ranging conceptualization of the deities' relationship dependent upon texts and sectarian identities.

Decisively influenced by Fuller's (1980) analysis of the divine couple's relationship in Madurai, my initial objective was to examine the implications and effects of this complex relation of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram, as expressed in myths and rituals, especially in the ritual re-enactment of the deities' marriage during the annual temple festival at the Ekāmranātha temple. Rituals both reflect and create hierarchies, therefore, I enquired whether the sacred marriage presents an 'ideal relation' from a Śaivite point of view, or if there are breaks and/or inconsistencies in the ritual process. If so, these might indicate tensions and asymmetries in the relation of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, and between the human actors connected to the two temples, in particular, their priests.

However, after my first field trip and festival participation I learned that in the contemporary marriage rituals, Ekāmranātha is married to Ēlavārkuḻali, his consort housed in a shrine at the Ekāmranātha temple, and not to Kāmākṣī. Kāmākṣī attends the wedding celebrations as bridesmaid, together with the goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḻikāmpāḷ. Moreover, the expected interactions and negotiations between the priests of the two temples were nonexistent. These discoveries brought new dimensions to my research project. I realized that my previous knowledge, gained from textual studies, transmitted a picture of the events different to that which I experienced while being at the place. Further, it showed me the importance of setting the temple's written tradition in relation to contemporary ritual practices.

I now had to rethink my initial research questions. Instead of focusing on the relationship between Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, I placed more emphasis on the relation of the three goddesses—Ēlavārkuḻali, Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpaḷ—to each other and also to Ekāmranātha. I tried to find out as much as possible about each goddess from a historical perspective, looking into their identities and contemporary roles, and aiming both to understand the present situation and find explanations for the difference of representation found in the rituals.

Furthermore, a participant's remark towards the end of my first two-week festival participation made me reconsider my research questions and perspectives. A man in his fifties approached me and told me in broken English that he was now observing me every day, and remarked: "You only watch the deities, but never the people." This statement provided food for thought and I realized how preoccupied I had been with the deities' relationship, and that of their priests, paying comparatively little attention to the participants' relations to the deities and the festival. From that point onwards, my research interest was also directed towards various participants. I explored their perceptions of the events and how they perceived their roles in the festival. Speaking with them showed me that, for them, the deities' relationship was not in the foreground; rather the personal relationship of the participants and their social groups to the deities and the temple was of paramount importance.

Research Questions

The study's investigation is twofold. First, I describe and analyze the re-enactment of the deities' marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple festival in Kanchipuram, which so far has not been studied in any detail. How is the marriage integrated in the broader framework of the *mahotsava*? What is the relation of the contemporary ritual performance and normative descriptions in the ritual handbook? How is the associated myth related to the ritual re-enactments and to oral narratives? How is the relationship among those deities involved in the marriage celebrations defined?

Second, I consider the social dimensions of the divine marriage. Questions addressed include: How do participants celebrate and partake in the festival's rituals? How do they perceive their roles? What does the deities' marriage mean and communicate to them? How do participants interpret the present situation of three goddesses, and the disagreement in the textual and performative representation of the divine bride? Does it matter that Kāmākṣī is not the bride, and if yes, in what sense?

Answering these questions provides an opportunity to better understand how a tradition that exists and lives both through the remote past and the continuous re-enactment of this past, adapts to changing circumstances while maintaining continuity with the past, and thus to interrogate what are the very conditions of survival for a tradition existing within the rapid globalization, modernization and economic development of South Asia.

Methods

My training in Indian philology and enthusiasm for Sanskrit inclines me to first consult textual sources as an approach to the study of Indian culture and Hindu religious traditions. However, the study of the living tradition in India is equally fascinating and provides a deeper understanding of cultural processes as they intersect with religious practices. Both

interests can be pursued through a combination of philological and anthropological methods; that is textual studies and fieldwork. In recent decades, this combination—Indian philology and anthropology—has become increasingly utilized within Indian studies. For example, Michaels (2005a: 11) coined the term 'Ethno-Indology' to describe the confluence of philology, anthropology and historical studies. My study is based in the present and focused on contemporary performance, yet, in my analysis, I rely on historical perspectives, too. The Ekāmranātha temple festival has been shaped over centuries and historical incidents have changed the nature of its performance. Donors often recount the history of their endowments, an occasion in which "the past is a conscious element of contemporary interactions" (Appadurai 1981: 216).

Textual studies

My first objective was to identify those texts that give accounts of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī's marriage in Kanchipuram, which for convenience I call the 'marriage myth'. I confined my textual analysis to printed sources. The analysis began with localized texts (Māhātmyas and Sthalapurāṇas) that deal with Kanchipuram's sanctuaries and their related myths. My original plan was to limit the analysis to textual sources I can read myself: Sanskrit texts. However, in the research process it became clear to me that I needed to include some Tamil texts in the analysis, too. These texts also give accounts of the 'marriage myth' and are extremely valuable in that their authorship and approximate date are known. Moreover, some of them constitute text genres other than Sthalapurāṇas, which I found particularly interesting in terms of how this may influence their representation of the 'marriage myth'. In total, I identified versions of the 'marriage myth' in nine textual sources of various genres, which have been produced across a time period spanning over a millennium (ca. seventh to eighteenth century). Some of these texts have been accessible through library catalogues and online databases. Others, such as the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* and the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, have been provided to me by Ute Hüsken. The Tamil *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* poem was provided by David Shulman. I found the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* in the library of the French Institute of Pondicherry, and obtained the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* as a photocopy from a priest of the Ekāmranātha temple.

Sthalapurāṇas can be extremely bulky texts, which often makes the detection of specific thematic passages difficult. I benefited greatly from a French synopsis of the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Porcher 1985), and a French synopsis of the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* and its concordance with the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Dessigane et al. 1964). Further, Moßner (2008) translated parts of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* to German in an unpublished master's thesis. These works helped me to identify relevant passages in the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas that recount the 'marriage myth' of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī. English renderings were available for two of the Tamil texts (*Tēvaram* and *Periyapurāṇam*), and these proved useful in the initial stages. However, upon closer inspection it became clear that the translations depart from the original, and require revision. Moreover, two other important Tamil texts (*Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* and *Kāñcippurāṇam*), have not yet been translated to English. Therefore, it was necessary to work with Tamil scholars in order to translate them.[1]

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1 I am extremely grateful to David Shulman for a revision of *Tēvaram* hymns and passages in the

After the translations of the 'marriage myth' in the Sanskrit sources were done by myself, and in the Tamil sources with the help of others, I analyzed their narrative themes and motifs. I compared and contrasted the narrative themes in each source, and identified core themes that are significant to all or most versions of the 'marriage myth', and themes or elements that are rather source specific. I was aiming to interpret the different themes against the backdrop of the text's context, considering the author's background or religious affiliation, and the textual genre in general, since "texts are not only passive store-houses of information but are also generated for reasons of power, influence, honour or prestige" (Michaels 2005a: 9).

In addition to the analysis of the 'marriage myth', I planned to study the ritual handbook *Mahotsavavidhi*, which is used as a reference for the conduct of the Ekāmranātha temple festival. After I obtained a photocopy of the ritual handbook from a priest during my first stay in Kanchipuram, I worked my way into Grantha script and began translating parts of it. By this time I came to know that Richard Davis was preparing a translation of the *Mahotsavavidhi*, and I therefore refer to his work.[2] Primary sources used also include temple brochures, leaflets and festival invitation letters,[3] and inscriptions. My use of inscriptions was however limited to the summaries and translations given in the ARE volumes.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken between 2009 and 2011, and comprised a total of six months, divided into three periods of roughly two months each. These periods were timed in accordance with the Ekāmranātha temple festival, which takes place annually in the Tamil month Paṅkuṉi (mid-March to mid-April). In addition, I stayed in Pondicherry in July/August 2009 to attend a six-week course in spoken Tamil, and to conduct literary research at the libraries of the École française d'Extrême-Orient and the French Institute of Pondicherry.

My initial access to the field was greatly assisted by my affiliation with the Kanchipuram Research Project[4], which conducted research in Kanchipuram since 2002. When I arrived in Chennai in March 2009, the long-term field assistant of the Kanchipuram Research Project, Narayan Subramanian, had made practical arrangements to pick me up, and had informed Nagaswamy Aiyyer, an influential priest of the Ekāmranātha temple, that a researcher would be coming to study the temple festival. It was advantageous that the first and essential contacts at the temple had already been established. Moreover, I benefited from an existing research permit of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department (HR&CE), which manages and controls the temples in Tamil Nadu. Nagaswamy Aiyyer, my first contact at the Ekāmranātha temple, proved to be invaluable.

Periyapurāṇam; A.K. Selvadurai and Narayanan Subramanian for an English rendering of the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* poem; and my Tamil teacher Arokinathan for a translation of relevant sections in the *Kāñcippurāṇam*.

2   I am very grateful to Richard Davis for sharing his introduction with me before the book was published in 2010.

3   My field assistant Narayanan Subramanian translated these texts from Tamil to English.

4   http://www.kanchi-project.sai.uni-heidelberg.de (accessed 19.01.2018).

He introduced me to other priests, donors and temple officials, and supported me throughout the research period.

During the first field trip in March/April 2009, I remained in Kanchipuram to get acquainted with the town, the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples, and their priests. Since I had arrived more than two weeks before the festival started, I spent time at the Ekāmranātha temple, followed the preparatory works that turned the temple into a festival space, and visited temples and *maṇḍapas* on the processional routes. I had hoped to begin interviewing priests at this time, but all of them seemed to be too busy or reluctant towards a newcomer and postponed my query to 'after the festival.' However, my field assistant Subramanian introduced me to one priestly family of the Kāmākṣī temple, who we visited regularly and with whom we conducted our first interviews.

During the festival itself I first tried to figure out 'what was going on.' Although I had some previous knowledge of temple rituals and festivals from scholarly literature and my own experience of previous field trips to other parts of India, I had never participated in a festival so closely and intensely over such a sustained period. I tried to absorb as much as possible of the festival, observing the rituals in the temple and joining all processions through town. The field assistant Narayanan Subramanian accompanied me throughout. By the end of the two weeks of participation, I felt well acquainted with the festival's structure and its daily routines, and had many more questions than before. I assume that through this intense participation I became a familiar face to the priests involved; at least they were now willing to make time for interviews. Thus, most interviews with priests of the Ekāmranātha temple were conducted in the period after the festival.

In July/August 2009 I returned to India for the course in spoken Tamil and literary research at the libraries in Pondicherry. Initially, I had planned to spend at least a weekend in Kanchipuram, but did not have the time. Instead, I prioritized some extra days in Chennai to visit people of the Āgama Academy and the National Folklore Support Centre, with whom I had inspiring discussions about my work.

My second field trip in March/April 2010 was interspersed with travels to Pondicherry, Chennai and Thanjavur. In Chennai I worked in the Tamil Nadu Archives Library, hoping to find documents about the Ekāmranātha temple festival, and in particular, references to the relocation of the festival statues from Kanchipuram to Udayarpalayam. In Thanjavur I spent time at the Saraswathi Mahal Library for documentary research. Most fruitful, however, was my visit to the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur and the interviews I conducted with two of the temple's priests, with the assistance of Dr. Sudarshan, the librarian of the Saraswathi Mahal Library. In Pondicherry I continued to work at the libraries of the École française d'Extrême-Orient and the French Institute of Pondicherry.

In Kanchipuram I was fully occupied with the festival. Observing and participating in the Ekāmranātha temple festival for the second time enabled me to elucidate further details while broadening my perspective on the festival in its entirety. I still joined almost all ritual activities and processions, but shifted focus from the structural aspect of the rituals to the events around them and the involvement of participants. I explored the marriage ceremony and the role of its donors in some depth. A very important aspect of this fieldwork was my acquaintance with two of the main donors for the marriage rituals, who warmheartedly and generously invited me to their homes and were willing to let me join and observe their ritual activities on the marriage day.

The third and final field trip to Kanchipuram in March/April 2011 was the shortest, lasting just one month. I focused on details that I had overlooked during my previous visits and used the time to clarify doubts and questions which had arisen from former interviews. Still, I joined daily the morning and evening processions, but for shorter periods. Only important rituals such as the 'hoisting of the flag', special processions such as *māvaṭi cēvai* and, obviously, the marriage day and night, were observed and covered fully. Invaluable was contact with the priest and the trustee of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, which for several reasons had not materialized in the previous years. A large part of this stay in Kanchipuram was also used to translate the Tamil poem *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* with the help of A.K. Selvadurai and N. Subramanian.

Festival participation

The *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is a highly complex festival, extending over thirteen days and involving a multitude of festivities and ritual activities. How is one to study such an enormous cultural event? It is, as Janaki (1988: 203) remarks, "almost impossible for a single person to follow the entire 'scenario' as many things happen at the same time in different locations as well as on different levels of cultural understanding." Even when observing only 'one' event it is difficult to figure out 'where to look first', since an event often comprises the interplay of simultaneous rituals and the deep sensory exposure of the performance can be overwhelming. At the same time, there are often long waiting periods during which 'nothing' happens, or ritual events which seem to be of no interest to those other than priests. Thus, modes of participation vary from person to person and across interest groups. The festival provides a setting for a wide range of activities and modes of participation.

I was lucky to witness the festival three times, thus it was possible to focus on different elements in each year, and I could recheck things that had eluded me before. Further, I placed an emphasis on the events taking place on the tenth festival day, which celebrates the divine marriage. Still, the ritual activities comprise almost twenty-four hours, and many things are happening simultaneously at different locations.

In the first year, I was seeking an overview of the ritual activities and structural aspects of the entire festival. I mainly followed the deities and their priests. Thus, I stayed close to the priests to observe the rituals they perform for the god Ekāmranātha and goddess Ēlavārkuḻali.

In the second year, I concentrated on the donors for the marriage rituals and began interviewing participants in the streets. For the marriage day I was supported by Dhivya Murugaiyan and M. Shanthini Sarah from the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), with whom I conducted several interviews in the streets of Okkapiranthan Kulam and the temple area.

In the third year, I pursued a slightly different strategy during the marriage rituals. Rather than basing myself near the donors and priests, I stayed with 'ordinary' participants who enjoyed no special status, in order to grasp their perspective on the rituals. With the help of Sarah from NFSC, random interviews were conducted on the streets and at the temple area during *māvaṭi cēvai* and Paṅkuṉi Uttiram.

Simply put, I was following the deities in the first year, the donors in the second, and diverse participants in the third year. This method helped me to observe various (ritual)

activities and gain multiple perspectives on the events, which would not have been possible with only one period of fieldwork.

My role as researcher

Unlike the Kumbh Melā or other popular Indian festivals, the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is not typically visited by foreigners. Most foreigners only make a brief stopover in Kanchipuram to see the temples on their way to or from Chennai. I only saw a group of foreign tourists three times, who had rather accidently come across the *mahotsava* while visiting the temple, and once a Japanese camera team taking shots for a documentary on Indian marriages. Thus, most of the time I was the only foreigner and white woman participating in the Ekāmranātha temple festival. Through my constant presence, the festival's main actors, such as priests, assistants and carriers of the deities, knew me after the first year, and participants who had seen me before asked if I came each year for the festival. I believe my returns and repeated participation increased my credibility. I also found myself often in a privileged position, since often participants stepped aside or pushed me to the front to ensure that I had a better view. Having a camera and taking photographs certainly had a positive effect, and I often heard the word "press" when passing by.

Already in the first year, I found myself partaking not only in the festival, but also in the temple's 'redistributive process' (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976). As suggested by my field assistant, I donated silk garments for Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali as wedding gifts to the divine couple. Two days later the goddess was wearing 'my' sari on one of the big evening processions, to which several priests drew my attention. I considered this as a kind gesture, but was not fully aware of the significance of this fact. Only after some time and explanations from my field assistant, did I realize that this was a great honor, which was discussed among the priests. The next year, I was honored through the gift of one of Ekāmranātha's garments during the marriage ceremony. This was publicly enacted and noticed by a broader audience. Partaking in the temple's 'redistributive process' was essential for establishing relationships with priests and others affiliated to the temple. However, at the same time, I felt that expectations had been set on me which I could not always meet. Especially in the last year, when I was participating less, or only in selected events, it happened that priests or other people closely affiliated to the temple complained that I was not showing up. The explanation that I am now focusing on other aspects of my research was not really approved, and I felt that many people preferred to perceive me as foreign devotee and sponsor rather than as a researcher.

Field notes, photography and video

Taking notes while observing and participating in a festival is rather impractical, disturbing, and often not feasible in the crowd. Instead, I have made extensive use of photography and video recording. At the beginning I tried to operate the video camera myself, but quickly felt distanced from what was happening. Therefore, my field assistant Subramanian and I distributed the work; he usually took the video footage, while I took photos and observed. In addition, I intended to write field notes about each procession and the events after returning to the hotel at noon and in the evening. But two weeks of partaking in the festival routine can be extremely exhausting. In practice, the time between

two processions was mainly used to eat and rest before the next procession started. Especially towards the end of the festival my field notes were mere scribbles. However, the huge amount of video and photo material was to prove invaluable.[5] After the festival I was able to go over the events and performances repeatedly. I discovered details which would have evaded my attention in a single observation. The photographs enriched and partly replaced my field notes. They depict the events and help me to remember chronologies, but more important is that I took the pictures myself, and so reviewing them awakens memories of my own observations.

Language issues, interviews and the work with interpreters

Many researchers face language problems in India, a country with twenty-two scheduled languages and numerous non-scheduled languages and dialects. Trained in Sanskrit and Hindi, it was obvious that I would have to work with an interpreter for conducting fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravidian language Tamil is the official language. In the initial stage of the research I had hoped to use some simple sentences in spoken Sanskrit when approaching priests, as I have had positive experiences with it during the fieldwork for my M.A. thesis in Karnataka. However, at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram only very few priests I met had studied Sanskrit to such an extent that they were able to read Sanskrit texts or speak. Those who did were the same few priests who had higher education and command of English. Without any knowledge of Tamil I felt a huge distance between myself and the people around me. Therefore, after my first field trip, I attended a six-week course in spoken Tamil in Pondicherry, which provided me with some basic knowledge of the language. The command of a few sentences in Tamil was very helpful, not only to open doors, but also to better follow interview situations. The will to communicate in the local language was highly appreciated and the use of a Tamil word often gave me a smile. I never managed to converse in Tamil, which was for me most frustrating when I tried to talk with participants in the streets and our communication usually came to an end after three sentences.

However, during formal interview situations and conversations with priests I felt rather comfortable with not knowing the language well and having my field assistant Subramanian with me. He usually established the first contact with people I wanted to talk with and never gave up with the tedious work of calling people to make appointments for an interview. In India it is the proper conduct to let the man speak first and questions are often directed to the man, even when they actually address the woman. Thus, it felt appropriate to first let Subramanian explain the matter, introduce me, and have him as a facilitator between the interviewee and me. At the beginning of an interview, he often chatted with the interviewee and thus created a relaxed atmosphere.

The interviews were generally semi-structured. I followed interview guides, which I prepared beforehand. Interviews with priests usually lasted between one and two hours, and less with others. This difference in time was partly because I had more questions for the priests, but also because priests were often more talkative when discussing topics, which

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5   Moreover, through the affiliation with the Kanchipuram Research Project I had access to video and photo material taken during the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple in the years 2007 and 2008.

then raised new questions I followed up. During all interviews I used an MP3 recorder, and with priests, sometimes a video camera. My field assistant Subramanian continuously translated the basic message and I sometimes took notes in addition. After the interviews we talked about main points and important observations. Later, Subramanian prepared an English translation for almost all interviews on the basis of the recordings. Subramanian is not a trained interpreter, but he has a good command of English.

Subramanian's interpersonal skills in dealing with priests were most valuable. He is a Brahmin himself, and I believe this had an impact on the relationships I/we established with the temple's priests and donors. Berreman's (1962) essay, about his experiences with research assistants of different castes and religious affiliations, has shown that in a highly stratified society like India the social class of an assistant must be considered, since it inevitably influences the self-presentation and responses of people interviewed. I cannot know whether, or in what ways, another field assistant would have changed the response of the priests, but I assume that priests met us with more openness and trust because Subramanian, as a male Brahmin, was 'one of them' and he was familiar with temple hierarchies and etiquettes through previous working experiences. In contrast, I noticed that his social class was rather disadvantageous when talking with people in the streets. On the one hand, it was not easy for him to play the role of a novice asking simple questions, which was further complicated by the fact that he was an inhabitant of Kanchipuram. On the other hand, people in the streets often felt unqualified to answer the questions, or did not understand why he was asking them when he could simply explain these things to me himself. Thus, when interviewing people in the streets I was working with M. Shanthini Sarah and Dhivya Murugaiyan from the National Folklore Support Centre, which gave me the opportunity to interact with a wider range of informants. Both are women in their mid-twenties from Chennai, and Sarah is Christian, which proved to be invaluable. I think it was much easier for the people to respond to questions from a group of young women, all of us not locals and more or less novices. Often, they were very keen to explain to us what was happening and to share with us their views and opinions about the events.

Research Ethics

A primary ethical concern for ethnographic research is responsibility for the individual. A major ethical dilemma of my research was deciding whether I should preserve the anonymity of my interviewees or not. At the beginning of my fieldwork I introduced myself to the temple's administration and the officiating priests. I gave them and other people I spoke with detailed information about the purpose of my research and the University I am affiliated with. All interviewees gave free and informed consent to participate in the interviews and were willing to be quoted under their own full names. Moreover, some talked to me because they wanted to make their opinions and their names known. But often it is difficult to assess possible harmful consequences of being identifiable, not only for interviewees, who gave their consent, but also for researchers, who cannot always predict how the data in their publication might be used, or misused, in future. However, the temple community I worked with is relatively small and most people I spoke with occupy certain positions, whether as priests, trustees or secretaries. Giving pseudonyms to the interviewees would not have protected their identity; at least within the community it is obvious who is speaking without naming the person, and obscuring their

positions would have led to loss of vital data. The only possibility would have been to anonymize the temple and the place, which was never an option, since this is a localized study of a place's specific myths and rituals.

As far as I can judge it, I was not touching sensitive issues in the interviews. In my experience, the interviewees were aware and certain about what and how much they wanted to let me know. It happened once that an interviewee gave me specific information requesting not to be quoted by his name, which I of course respected. In my opinion, it is also important to respect the interviewees' wishes to be quoted with their full names. Most people who were willing to share their knowledge with me would be disappointed by not finding their names in this book. Therefore, I refer to interviewees by their real name on the basis of their permission.

Another ethical issue I faced during my research is that the distribution of my video and photo material may cause potential future harm to individuals. As mentioned, to avoid any conflicts due to differing areas of accountability I obtained a research permit from the HR&CE Department of Tamil Nadu, which includes permission for photographing and filming. Many priests asked me to produce a DVD documenting the festival, and some also wanted to have photographs on CD, preferably with them in the pictures. Ideally, anthropological fieldwork is based on reciprocity, and I believe that every anthropologist is glad about an opportunity to give something back to the people who contributed to his or her research. However, providing the priests with videos and pictures was a sensitive issue. The material may attest to perceived shortcomings in the ritual performances, which might be used as evidence in the case of internal disputes. Thus, with the help of my research assistant, we carefully considered the choice of photographs, hoping not to cause any future harm to the people they depict.

Positioning my study

Kanchipuram is probably the most complex of Tamil temple towns. It is a place of religious pluralism with a rich festival culture, yet studies of Kanchipuram's ritual and festival traditions are few. Kanchipuram has been studied from historical and art historical perspectives, with a focus on Kanchipuram as the capital of the Pallava dynasty between the sixth and ninth centuries. In particular, the Pallavas' Kailāsanātha and Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ temples had been of interest to scholars in terms of their architecture and iconography (see, for example, Hudson and Case 2008). Further, there are publications dealing with Kanchipuram's architectural history (for example, Minakshi 1954) and one monograph about the Varadarāja temple, though also mainly from an art historical perspective (Raman 1975). A comprehensive study of the city's diverse ritual traditions is wanting. The Kanchipuram Research Project is filling this gap by focusing on rituals in Kanchipuram's three largest temples of classical Hindu traditions and temples of non-textual folk traditions. Outcomes of the project include several articles by Hüsken (2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2017, 2018) providing insights into Kanchipuram's festival and ritual traditions, in particular of the Varadarāja temple. Further, Ilkama (2018) is working on the Navarātri festival traditions in the Kāmākṣī temple, village goddesses' temples and homes in Kanchipuram. With this book I contribute to the limited extant literature on the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram. Scattered information about the temple's history can be found in publications on Kanchipuram in general. A valuable contribution is Stein's

doctoral dissertation (2017) on Kanchipuram's urban development between the eighth and twelfth centuries. A part of her study is concentrating on the evolution of the Ekāmranātha temple.[6] Further, Boulanger (1992) published a French monograph about the temple's priesthood and kinship system of one particular priestly family. Otherwise, research on the temple is in its infancy. I provide an in-depth study of the temple's *mahotsava* based on textual studies and anthropological fieldwork. My focus is on the contemporary ritual practice of one festival day, which celebrates the deities' marriage. I analyze its associated myth and oral narratives, and set the rituals and events in a wider historical and socio-cultural context. Because of this multidisciplinary approach, a broad range of studies has been relevant to my research.

Sources of inspiration have been studies on other temples and temple towns in Tamil Nadu. Most comprehensive is the five-volume publication on Tiruvannamalai and the Aruṇācaleśvara temple. A team of scholars affiliated with the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry investigated Tiruvannamalai in terms of its epigraphical records, architecture, sociology, rituals, demographics and economics. Volume three, dealing with the temple's rituals and festivals, provides a description of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival. However, as the volume deals with the festival cycle of an entire year, the section on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is only a few pages (L'Hernault et al. 1999: 132–36). It was interesting to see parallels between the Aruṇācaleśvara temple and Ekāmranātha temple in terms of the constellation of donors for the marriage. At both temples, three donors sponsor the marriage rituals and regard themselves as the representatives of the bride's side. However, L'Hernault does not elaborate on the socio-cultural implications these overlapping claims may have.

Another Tamil temple town that has been studied in great detail is Madurai, which holds the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple. Fuller (1984, 2003) studied the temple's priesthood and its changing socio-cultural environment. As mentioned, his article (1980) on the rituals and festivals of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple decisively influenced my initial approach to the festival at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram. Further, Hudson (1982) described and analyzed the Cittirai festival that celebrates the divine marriage of Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī. Harman (1989), too, investigated the divine marriage at the Madurai temple through an analysis of the attendant myth, rituals, and South Indian kinship patterns. These studies of the Madurai marriage, though valuable, often exclude the participants' voices.

A remarkable work that combines different perspectives is Younger's (1995) monograph on the temple of Naṭarāja in Chidambaram, which provides an ethnographic account of the temple's priest and worshiper communities, and the daily rituals and periodic festivals they perform. Younger investigates the temple's architecture, inscriptions and changing patterns of donors and patronage from a historical perspective. Further, he deals with information about the temple's myths and religious traditions found in the Sthalapurāṇas, and other references to Chidambaram from Śaiva poet saints and Śaiva Siddhanta thelogians. Good's (2004) monograph on the Kalugumalai temple focuses on the ritual, economic and social interactions of a large South Indian temple. The publications of

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6   I am very thankful to Emma Stein for sharing her unpublished doctoral thesis with me.

the last two authors have not directly provided material for comparison, but have inspired me in terms of their comprehensiveness and inclusion of various perspectives on the temples.

Descriptions of South Indian temple rituals can be found in books on Āgamas, or translations of it. For my research, Davis's (2010) translation of Aghoraśivācārya's *Mahotsavavidhi* was most valuable. Besides the translation, Davis provides many useful cross-references and explanations of the described rituals. Further, Davis's (2008) monograph on Śaiva Siddhānta rituals, and Good's (2001) ethnographic study on the daily *pūjā* in a South Indian temple, have enriched my knowledge of ritual and worship patterns.

In terms of the Ekāmranātha temple's myths, I am drawing on Shulman's (1980) structural analysis of a vast amount of late medieval Sthalapurāṇas. He has shown that the goddess's marriage to the god is a central structural element of many Tamil temple myths, and often, the major god is drawn to the site by the goddess, who has been at the place before (1980: 139). Shulman also includes some myths of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī in his analysis, however he seems not to take into account that the different Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram have also been composed with specific sectarian intentions. In contrast, I concentrate on one myth in its variations, and therefore extend my sources to various textual genres of different times. I aim to set the texts in their contexts and show that the choice of the myth's narrative themes was, and remains, driven by the motivations of the respective authors or their sectarian affiliations.

My understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of the 'redistributive process' in a South Indian temple and the significance of temple honors was informed by Appadurai and Breckenridge (1976). They argue that the "worship offered to a sovereign deity (…) permits the donor to enter into a transactional relationship with the deity. This transactional relationship, viewed in terms of honors and share, links deity–donor–temple staff and worshipper in a larger redistributive system" (1976: 200). A strong focus on a transactional relationship with the deity can be seen in the way participants perceive their role in the festival and how all actions and narratives related to the festival are directed towards the center, where the gods are situated.

Instead of approaching the re-enactment of the divine marriage from the perspective of myth and ritual theories, I found the concepts of cultural memory studies more helpful for understanding the local and historical dynamics. Connerton's (1989) book *How societies remember* inspired me to examine the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage as a commemorative ceremony that creates, sustains and transmits an image of the past. In addition, highly influential of my thinking was the scholarship of Erll, especially in understanding the production of cultural memory as a dynamic process to which different 'media of memory' contribute. 'Media of memory' have an inherent quality, an agent who produced them, and people who receive them (Erll and Nünning 2004, Erll 2009). Thus, I regard the ritual re-enactment of the divine marriage as one medium of memory that co-exists and communicates not only with the written myth, but also with oral narratives, visual images, and discourses during the festival.

Outline of the book

After the introduction I proceed with two chapters that provide background information to the place and the festival. **Chapter One** is dedicated to the Ekāmranātha temple, its

location in Kanchipuram, and its physical appearance, from the perspective of a pilgrim entering the temple on his way to the sanctum. Places and structural elements that are important during the *mahotsava* are highlighted. Next, I present the two focal points of worship at the Ekāmranātha temple, the mango tree and the sand *liṅga*. Both are connected by a major myth, which is closely associated with the re-enactment of the divine marriage on the tenth day of the festival. Furthermore, the name of the temple and its presiding deity Ekāmranātha are discussed. Then, the perspective switches from the contemporary appearance of the Ekāmranātha temple to its history and architectural development. I point out distinctive structures and important periods in its formation to show that the Ekāmranātha temple has always been a monument in the making.

In **Chapter Two** I examine the history and structure of the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple to demonstrate how the marriage ceremony on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is related to and integrated in the *mahotsava*. I present historical references to the festival, comprising iconographic considerations, inscriptions, one poem, and travel reports. Then, I introduce Aghoraśivācārya's *Mahotsavavidhi*, a ritual text from the twelfth century, which is the reference work for the conduct of the festival. I describe the ritual structure of the *mahotsava* based on my observation of the contemporary festival at the Ekāmranātha temple, investigate the processional routes and special events that allude to local myths, and explain the relation of the ritual text and actual performance.

The major myth of the Ekāmranātha temple, which is closely associated with the re-enactment of the divine marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, is the topic of **Chapter Three**. For convenience I call it the 'marriage myth', although not all versions conclude with the re-marriage in Kanchipuram. I present the myth and its variations as found in nine textual sources of various genres, which have been produced over the span of a millennium (ca. seventh to eighteenth century). I introduce the respective source, briefly retell the myth, and identify its narrative themes, which are compared and contrasted with respect to each source. I demonstrate that a core storyline of *tapas/pūjā*, testing, flood, embrace, and revelation, runs through almost all versions. Each text features some motifs of the core story line more than others, or highlights different themes, which I discuss against the backdrop of the text's context.

Chapter Four analyzes the events and rituals taking place on the tenth day of the *mahotsava*, which culminates in the divine marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. Key scenes of the 'marriage myth', such as the goddess's penance, the establishment and worship of the sand *liṅga*, Śiva's revelation, and the marriage, are commemorated and re-enacted. I provide a detailed description of the events and rituals, presented in a chronological order. Accordingly the subchapters are: Ēlavārkuḻali's trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam, her penance and the worship of the sand *liṅga*, and the marriage ceremony. Some of the events were explained to me by festival participants, and I describe these oral narratives too, and analyze them in relation to the myth of the written sources I discussed in the preceding chapter. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the relation between the performed rituals, the written sources, and the oral tradition(s).

Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī are *the* divine couple of Kanchipuram. However, at present the marriage rituals are performed with the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali from the Ekāmranātha temple. Kāmākṣī joins the goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ for the bridal procession. They are recognized as Ēlavārkuḻali's female friends who take on the role as bridesmaids.

Chapter Five portrays each of the three goddesses from a historical perspective and analyzes their contemporary roles, identities and relations to each other. One reason for this constellation is the goddess Bangāru Kāmākṣī. Her festival image was used in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals up to the end of the seventeenth century, until she was moved to Thanjavur and possibly replaced by the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali.

In **Chapter Six** I focus on participants and how they perceive their participation in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival. First, I outline ways to participate and motivations of the diverse participants. After briefly discussing the priestly roles and issues at work during the festival, I concentrate on families or groups involved in ritual activities and describe the rituals they perform on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. I begin with the residents of Okkapiranthan Kulam, who celebrate their own neighborhood festival as part of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage celebrations. I then examine three donors for the marriage ceremony, who perform their community and family based customs and rituals, which at one point meet the ceremonies at the Ekāmranātha temple. Finally, I analyze the role of human couples, who are married at the Ekāmranātha temple at the same time as the gods. The ritual activities and objectives of the diverse participating groups vary, yet all of them put emphasis on the importance of their roles in the divine marriage.

Drawing on concepts of cultural memory studies, I examine in **Chapter Seven** in what ways we can interpret the divine marriage as a commemorative ceremony that forms and transmits a collective cultural memory.[7] I focus on the bride's identity, which is far from clear. The goddess Kāmākṣī from the neighboring temple is publicly presented as the bride, whereas the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali from the Ekāmranātha temple serves as the actual bride in the ritual performances, and is explicitly recognized as the bride by participants. Analyzing iconographic, textual, performative and oral media that represent the mythological wedding, I show that these media are in continuous dialogue with each other, which creates a specific form of cultural knowledge.

Finally, in the conclusion, I link the main findings, discuss further implications, and reflect on themes for future research.

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7   A version of this chapter has been published in *South Asian Festivals on the Move*, ed. Ute Hüsken and Axel Michaels. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013, 59–82.