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Two Tātācāryas at the Court of Virūpākṣa II
A Socio-Historical Study of Anantārya's *Prapannāmṛtam* 123–125

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Note on Transliteration

Where the Devanagari script reads:

पुरा यमाह तातेति भगवान्वेकटेश्वरः ।
श्रीमद्रामायणस्यार्थाश्चतुर्विंशतिवर्त्मना ॥

Other would print:

purā ayam āha tāteti bhagavān veṅkaṭeśvaraḥ |
śrīmad rāmāyaṇasyārthāś caturviṃśati vartmanā ||

We print as the text reads, inserting an horizontal line to separate the words which are written together in the verse:

purā ayam-āha tāta-iti bhagavān veṅkaṭeśvaraḥ |
śrīmad rāmāyaṇasya-arthāś-caturviṃśati-vartmanā ||

Introduction

*Ab re non facimus, si per visibilia invisibilia demonstramus.*¹

This work involves a socio-historical study of a Sanskrit text named *Prapannāmṛtam*² (literally ‘nectar for those who surrender [to God]’³). The work is an hagiography composed, most probably, in the second half of the 17th century by Anantārya - or Anantasūri -, a member of the Tātācārya family, a powerful socio-political group in the 14th to 16th century Vijayanagara. So far, the only available editions of the *Prapannāmṛtam* are two: the first, used for the present study, was published in the 1907 CE (*śaka* year 1829) by Śrīniwasanṛsiṃhācārya from the Śrīvenkateśvara Steam Press (Mumbai). The second, published in 1966 (*vikram samvat* 2023) was compiled by Swāmī Rāmanarāyanācārya by the same publishing house, this time in Vārāṇasī.

The foremost purpose of this thesis is to remind the reader of the broad approaches that can be used to study and interpret hagiographic works, of which the Indian literary production is so rich. Too often, hagiographies in general - and the *Prapannāmṛtam* in particular - have been discarded in light of their ‘lack of historicity’ and abundance of fabulous facts on the life of specific religious figures⁴. Through the study of PA 123–125⁵, we would like to pave the way for a re-evaluation of a forgotten chapter of the Indian religious history: political as well as cultural elements of 16th–17th century South India can certainly be gathered from a proper analysis of the text, as has been recently suggested by A. Rao (2015). By the same token, a historical contextualization of Anantārya’s *Prapannāmṛtam* can help in understanding the developments of late Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

While reading the *Prapannāmṛtam*, we should imagine its author as a photographer in the act

¹“We will not err if we show invisible things by means of visible ones”. Found in a letter written by Gregory I to the hermit Secundinus. The theme is that of paintings as an adjunct to prayers (Raw 1997:58).

²The text will be, most of the times, referred to as PA, or PA 123–125 when specifically referring the chapters under analysis.

³The *prapanna*, ‘the one who surrenders’, as we shall see later, is in this context a person who surrenders to God (i.e. Viṣṇu), without seeking for any other means of salvation.

⁴The strongest criticism against the reading of the *Prapannāmṛtam* as a historical source was put forth, as we shall see, by B. A. Saletore (1940).

⁵The first English translation of these chapters is provided as an appendix.

of taking a picture: the resulting photo is not necessarily representative of the instantaneous reality it claims to have photographed. Rather, and more often, a photo incorporates the photographer's *perspective* of that precise moment. In the same way, the portray sketched in PA 123–125 does not necessarily include the historical reality - maybe not even a historical reality - but rather, and more often, leads the reader into the author's gaze on the reality portrayed (Bulke 2001). Therefore, we may conceive of the three *adhyāyas* ('chapters') here under analysis as giving Anantārya's gaze on a specific period of Vijayanagara's history: *adhyāyas* 123–125 introduce the figure of a certain king Virūpākṣa, presumably Virūpākṣa II (ca 1465 CE–1485 CE), one of the last representatives of the Saṅgama dynasty (1336 CE–1485 CE).

Anantārya connects to this king a very meaningful event, i.e. the conversion of the monarch, of his subjects and of the whole Vijayanagara area, from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism. This alleged conversion, according to Anantārya, is strictly related to the recitation of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa*: in fact, it is told that king Virūpākṣa is persuaded to conversion by two brothers, members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava family of the Tātācārya who, being part of Rāmānuja's lineage, were instructed in the special meanings of this epic text. However, the facts narrated in chapters 123–125 have never been read as historically reliable. The Indian historian B.A. Saletore, in his 'Vaiṣṇavism in Vijayanagara' (1940) completely denies the potential authenticity of facts exposed in the hagiography, and so does the majority of other scholars. However, as recently A. Rao wrote:

The status of *Prapannāmṛtam* as a historical document may be more indirect and, in fact, deeper: this account, whatever its accuracy may be, provides valuable insight into Śrīvaiṣṇava conceptions of the role of the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative as a powerful means for promulgating theology and securing the support of Vijayanagara rulers.⁶

Chapters 123 to 125, all set at the court of king Virūpākṣa in Vijayanagara, explicitly refer to the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a source of salvation, redemption and, most importantly, a means for religious conversion. Writing in the epoch after the fall of the Vijayanagara empire, Anantārya consciously selects the reign of king Virūpākṣa as the setting for his PA 123–125. The act of ascribing the very meaningful theological shift from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism to the period of Virūpākṣa's rule also suggests the author's interest in promoting the long-back mark of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in South India. Focusing on the three mentioned chapters (123–125), this study aims at gathering relevant information on: (i) the issue of authorship: information about Anantārya in secondary literature

⁶Rao (2015:102).

is scarce and non-homogeneous, mostly derived from the closing verses of the *Prapannāmṛtam* itself; (ii) the relation between the court of Vijayanagara and the Śrīvaiṣṇava community during and after Virūpākṣa’s reign. We believe that, although being part of an hagiography, the motifs presented by *adhyāyas* 123–125 will display a strong affinity with *praśastis*⁷: disguised as a fable-like, purāṇic narration, we are actually reading the praise of the forgotten glory of the Tātācārya family.

The topics covered in the following sections are two. First, the state of the art: all the scholarly works dealing with and referring to the *Prapannāmṛtam* will be presented in a chronological order. Second, the approaches and goals of this study: introducing various concepts such as that of *mnemo-history*, I will delineate the theoretical background on which the research is based.

1.1 Literary Review

The *Prapannāmṛtam* narrates, in its 126 *adhyāyas*, the life of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya* Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE) and his disciples. Being a hagiographic work, it was never studied as a historical document; therefore, the number of studies providing an in depth analysis is limited.

The absence of an English translation and of text-focused studies, however, has not prevented scholars from referring to the *Prapannāmṛtam* in their production. The first major study to refer to it, is ‘Sources of Vijayanagara History’ (Krishnaswami Aiyangar 1919): here, various *adhyāyas* of the text are presented as semi-historical sources or, at least, as indicators of the more general historical panorama of Vijayanagara. Beside the three chapters presented in the current study, Krishnaswami Aiyangar reports, for example, some facts which took place during the reign of Rāma Rāya. He describes the struggles for power not only between kings,

⁷The term *praśasti*, literally meaning ‘praise’, commonly indicates the literary genre peculiar to inscriptions. However, as R. Gould (2015:260) put it:

Originally inscribed in stone, the *praśasti* was in later periods carved on copperplate, until it attained its final and, from the point of view of literary history, most significant stage when it was transposed from a material object into a courtly aesthetic that acquired a new life in manuscripts.

Therefore, one can correctly use the term *praśasti* to define any praise contained, for instance, in a *kāvya* composition. With regard to the goals of a *praśasti*, according to S. Pollock, the main one was that of “creating the fame and virtue of the king through a celebration of his value and fame” (Pollock 2006:147). He adds that “what [a *praśasti*] expressed was, to its core, central to the domain of power” (Ibid.:148).

but also between religious representatives, engaging in hostilities to promote Vaiṣṇavism over Śaivism, or viceversa⁸.

B.A. Saletore's article 'Vaiṣṇavism in Vijayanagara' (1940) and S. Das Gupta's 'A History of Indian Philosophy (Vol. II)' (1940) also provide information on the contemporary interpretation of *Prapannāmṛtam*. The latter deals with the philosophical context of the Śrīvaiṣṇava movement at large: it provides much information especially regarding the *Ālvārs*⁹ and, although only partially, regarding Anantārya's origins. On the other hand, B.A. Saletore focuses on criticizing the historical veracity of one of the main events narrated in the text, namely the religious switch from Vaiṣṇavism to Śaivism at the court of Virūpākṣa II (1465–1685 CE). He gives two main reasons for this. One claim is that 'his [Virūpākṣa's] reign was not only short but uneventful'¹⁰. The other, based on the travels' accounts of the Jesuit F. Nuñez, which B. A. Saletore describes as an 'uncritical foreign traveler', asserts that, as long as Virūpākṣa reigned:

He was given over to vice, caring for nothing but women, and to fuddle himself with drink and amuse himself, and never showed himself either to his captains or to his people; so that in a short time he lost that which his forefathers had won and left to him¹¹.

The critiques that B. A. Saletore puts forth are not completely valid: in fact, the author does not succeed in reading *Prapannāmṛtam* (especially *adhyāyas* 123–125) as a source of knowledge about the 17th century Śrīvaiṣṇava reality, but rather persists in affirming that hagiographies cannot contain real historical information.

Conversely, B.V. Ramanujam (1973) is one of the first to contextualize the *Prapannāmṛtam* in its historical setting. The author believes the *Prapannāmṛtam* to be a literal translation of the Tamil *Ārāyirappadi*, or *Guruparamparā Prabhāvam*¹² composed by Pinbaḷagiya Perumāl Jīyar¹³. This suggests that the facts treated in the work do not completely come from

⁸Ibid.: 202.

⁹The title literally means 'those immersed in God (or in meditation)'. The *Ālvārs* are 12 Tamil poet-saints, supposed to have lived in South India between the 5th and the 9th century CE, although scholars disagree on the exact dating. Fervent Viṣṇu-*bhaktas*, 'devotees of Viṣṇu', they become central figures in the Śrīvaiṣṇava doctrine. In particular, *Ālvārs* assume a relevant position in the Ubhaya-vedānta doctrine: in fact, their poetical production dedicated to Viṣṇu represent one of the two sides of this holistic system of beliefs.

¹⁰Ibid.: 184.

¹¹Ibid.: 184.

¹²The earliest extant work on the lives of the *Ālvārs* and *Ācāryas*, which is said to have been composed at the latest during the first half of the 13th century CE (Ramanujam 1973).

¹³Disciple of Nampillai (ca. 1147–1252 BCE), fourth *ācārya* in the apostolic succession of Rāmānuja. He is

Anantārya’s literary imagination, but are partly taken from an authoritative source within the *Ālvār*’s tradition. B. V. Ramanujam interestingly adds that, if the first 120 chapters are a translation of the *Ārāyirappaḍi*, the last chapters (121-126) seem to present ‘stray topics’. Chapters 123–125, thus, presenting two members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava family of the Tātācārya, would be Anantārya’s deliberate addition.

F. Hardy too, in the fourth part of his ‘Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India’ (1983) put this 17th century author in relation to the past scene of the Tamil *Ālvār* community of poet-mystics. The author believes that hagiographical works such as the *Prapannāmṛtam* should not be considered to be giving *prima facie* historical evidence: they can provide scholars with information on how *Ālvārs* were regarded and interpreted by the post-Rāmānuja Vaiṣṇavas, but cannot give proper historical notions on the life of these poet-saints.

Two years later, P. Granoff uses the *Prapannāmṛtam* as *exemplum* of ‘the role of the supernatural in the philosophical contexts in Vedānta hagiographies’ (1985:184). The author analyses the ‘singular lack of interest [of the *Prapannāmṛtam*] in the philosophical debate’¹⁴. Although P. Granoff does not refer specifically to PA 123-125, this statement is relevant for the present research. The lack of interest in the philosophical debate, in fact, is perfectly represented by the three chapters here under analysis: the supernatural and demonic elements in the story¹⁵ are annihilated not through logical or philosophical discussion, but by the simple hearing of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, performed by two Śrīvaiṣṇava brothers remotely descending from Rāmānuja.

S. D. Konduri (1990) studies in depth the religious panorama of Vijayanagara, reading the *Prapannāmṛtam* as a Vaiṣṇava work narrating the story of the *Ālvārs* and of Rāmānuja. She assumes the text to be written in the later half of the 16th century, which is most probably wrong. Although generally skeptical about the historical relevance of the text, the author claims it to be “particularly useful for the present day study since it reflects the contemporary religious practices of the Vaiṣṇavas, and worship and ritual in the celebrated shrines of Raṅganāta at Śrīraṅgam”¹⁶.

‘Warrior-King, Śīva-Bhakta, Deity: Reconsidering Rāma at Vijanagara’ (Evensen 2007) is a particularly useful source to decipher the socio-political construction of the Vaiṣṇava cults,

also known as Piḷḷān or Keśava, and he is said to be one of the closest disciples of Rāmānuja.

¹⁴Ibid.: 463.

¹⁵In adhyāyas 123–125 we will encounter the concept of *paśācyam*, ‘demoniacal nature’.

¹⁶Konduri (1990:30).

especially that of Rāma. This dissertation briefly includes *Prapannāmṛtam*'s chapters 123–125, but the information on the author, on the text and its dating remain quite vague and general. The author, however, confirms the hypothesis of a late composition (17th century CE).

A brief reference to the text appears in L. Sudyka (2013), as a source of information on the victory over Muslims thanks to Gopana, Kampana's officer. Most recently, A. Rao (2015) refers to the text as a source which, although not 'historical' in the Western sense, might provide engaging details on the socio-cultural environment of Anantārya and, more generally, of the later developments of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

As shown here, the *Prapannāmṛtam* has been referred to by several scholars. Various among the studies mentioned above are, however, unconditionally based on the short summaries given by Aiyangar Krishnaswami's book 'Sources of Vijayanagara History' (1919)¹⁷.

Although the need for a complete translation and analysis of the text is indisputable, for the present thesis three chapters, viz. 123 to 125, have been singled out for detailed study. The reason for selecting them lies in their originality: if B.V. Ramanujam (1973) is correct in seeing these three last chapters as Anantārya's own addition, a deeper study can definitely add new perspectives on the social, religious and political conditions of the time of composition.

1.2 Approaches and Goals

As a starting point, we will follow the distinction made by F. Reynolds and D. Capps (1976) between 'sacred biography' and 'hagiography'¹⁸: while the first kind of texts deals with "those accounts written by followers or devotees of a founder or religious savior", the second reports "the lives of saints, mystics, prophets, kings and other charismatic religious figures" (Reynolds & Capps 1976:3f), as in the case of the *Prapannāmṛtam*, which narrates Rāmānuja's life but includes as well the entire *paramparā* derived from him.

Once this perspective is chosen, we must face the issue of how to use hagiographic material as a historical source. The main concern derived from the encounter with hagiographic texts is explained by R. Rinehart as follows:

¹⁷Exceptions are provided by the works of Granoff (1985), Konduri (1900) and Ramanujan (1973), whose analyses are based on the Sanskrit text.

¹⁸Although the term 'hagiography' was initially referred to the Christian tradition of 'sacred writings', it is now used in a wider context (Barz 2012:237).

Many of the negative associations with the genre of hagiography in fact results from the application of the standards of critical historical biographies to hagiographical texts (...) which would not fare well if judged by the variously conceived standards of critical historical biographies (...) as they are not based on extensive research or investigation, and often include historically inaccurate reports and stories of fantastic miracles.¹⁹

We must, therefore, consider the issues related to the concept of history and historiography with regard to the Indian context: a text such as that of Anantārya, a hagiographic work on the life of Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE) and his *paramparā*, might not fit the ‘Western’ historiographic standards. In fact, to the widespread belief that Indian civilization is an a-historical entity as a whole (Thapar 2012:2), one should add the fact that hagiographies were for long seen as dubious historical sources (Narayana Rao et al. 2001:24). The *Prapannāmṛtam* itself was never regarded as a reliable source of history on the Vijayanagara Empire, and more specifically on the reign of Virūpākṣa II - central to the plot’s developments - because the narration did not provide ascertainable historical facts for scholars.

This focus on a ‘*histoire evenementielle*’²⁰ (Bloch 1949) was in vogue until the 1970s: the aim of the historians of this branch was that of collecting events, dates and facts without taking into account the social and cultural processes underlying them. Since already the 1960, however, various new ways of intending ‘history’ were developed.

According to J. Topolski (1997), a valuable approach to follow for the studies of historical sources consists of two main elements: (a) the account not only of the logical and informative aspects of a historical narration, but also of the narrative, rhetorical and cultural perspectives; (b) the abandonment of the belief that the aim of the historical research lies in the reconstruction of a *unique* and *true* past.

An orientation towards the socio-cultural context of a written work, rather than towards the truth of the facts narrated in it, can be very productive for the study of texts such as the *Prapannāmṛtam*, whose purpose is certainly not that of giving an account of an ‘*histoire evenementielle*’. As M. Bloch aptly states in his ‘Apologie pour l’Histoire ou Métier d’Historien’ (1949), these kind of sources should be approached from a different angle:

Parmi les vies des saints du haut moyen âge, les trois quarts au moins sont incapables de rien nous apprendre de solide sur les pieux personnages dont elles prétendent retracer

¹⁹Rinehart (1999:5).

²⁰Literally ‘eventemential history’.

le desti. Interrogeons-les, au contraire, sur les façons de vivre ou de penser particulières aux époques où elles furent écrites, toutes choses que l'hagiographe n'avait pas le moindre désir de nous exposer: nous les trouverons d'un prix inestimable.²¹

Hagiographies, thus, can be read as a useful source of information on the political, social and religious aspects of the community who produced and read the hagiography itself (Rinehart 1999:8). As D. N. Lorenzen put it, they should be seen as “reflexive commentaries that define the imagined shared past of a community, its historical identity, as well as normalize its religious, social, moral, political and even economic values” (Lorenzen 1991:4).

The concept of *mnemo-history* (Assmann 2006), for instance, might be an interesting approach for the study of PA 123–125: it implies a way of remembering the past that is concerned “not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered”²², which is exactly the process at work in PA 123–125. This study will, therefore, necessarily be centered on the study of the historical and social context in which Anantārya, the author, operates: it aims at integrating the *Prapannāmṛtam*, and more specifically PA 123–125, into the context of a 15th century family linked with the Śrīvaiṣṇava community of Vijayanagara, i.e. the Tātācārya family.

The present work is divided into three main sections: the first provides information on the author and collects some basic data on the Vijayanagara Empire, concentrating on its religious landscape. The focus will especially be the Śrīvaiṣṇava movement, and particularly the Śrīvaiṣṇava family of *rāja-gurus* known as the Tātācārya, operating at the court of Vijayanagara between the 14th and the 15th century. The second deals with PA 123–125, giving the summaries of chapters 123–125. The third and last chapter aims at analyzing the characters, the plot and three selected motifs derived from the text, in order to show that Anantārya's main purpose in composing these ending chapters is to glorify the Tātācārya family, rather to write a mere hagiography on Rāmānuja and his followers.

²¹“At least three-quarters of the lives of saints, in the Early Middle Ages, do not tell us anything solid about the lives of the pious saints they claim to describe. We should rather interrogate them [hagiographies] on the ways of living and thinking typical of the epochs in which they were written - elements which the hagiographer did not aim at exposing in any manner: we will find this information to be invaluable”. My translation of M. Bloch (1949:39).

²²Assmann (2006).

Contextualizing Anantārya and the *Prapannāmṛtam*

Despite the relevance of Anantārya’s text for the scholarly debate on Vaiṣṇavism and Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the only actual information we have on the author derives from the *Prapannāmṛtam* itself: Anantārya introduces his own figure at the end of chapter 126. In the very last verse of the adhyāya, we read a first, sketchy, introduction:

The *Prapannāmṛta*, composed by the venerable Anantārya, sprung from the good family of the venerable Āndhrapūrṇa [...]¹

The compound ‘sprung from the good family of the venerable Āndhrapūrṇa’² clarifies the lineage to which Anantārya belongs. Āndhrapūrṇa, in fact, was a very close disciple of Rāmānuja.

It is, however, in the concluding section of the text that Anantārya provides a more precise description of himself:

The special Anantasūri, great one, disciple of the utmost teacher Śrīsailara ṅgeśa, composed a book named *Prapannāmṛtam* through a small glance of Raṅgeśa [...]³

From this short extract, we learn that Anantārya and Anantasūri are equally used to indicate the author. B.V. Ramanujam, who dedicated much of his research to Vaiṣṇavism, reads the name ‘Śrīsailaraṅgeśa’ as ‘Raṅganātha’, identifying this figure as the grandson of Lakṣmīkumāra Tātācārya⁴. He writes that “allowing for three generations of father, son and grand-son, we won’t be far wrong if we assign Ranganātha to circa 1650 CE (...) we can also assign his disciple Anantārya to about the same period” (Ramanujam 1973:72). Therefore, although no certain

¹In the verse: *iti śrīmad-āndhrapūrṇa-kulotpanna-śrīmad-anantārya-viracite prapannāmṛte* [...] || 126

²The Sanskrit reads: ‘*śrīmad-āndhrapūrṇa-kulotpanna*’.

³In the verse:

śrīsailaraṅgeśa-guru-uttamasya śiṣyo mahān kaścīd anantasūriḥ||

grantham prapannāmṛtam-nāmadheyaṃ cakāra raṅgeśa-kathākṣa leśāt||

⁴This *ācārya* is considered to be a contemporary of the Vijayanagara King Venkaṭapati II (1586–1616 CE) by Ramanujam (1973:72), but T. A. Gopinātha Rao considers Lakṣmīkumāra Tātācārya to be contemporary to Venkaṭapati I (1542) (Gopinātha Rao 1915-1916:2).

information on Anantārya’s life is available at this point of the research, he seems to have been born in the second half of the 16th century CE, and have composed the *Prapannāmṛtam* in the second half of the 17th century CE. We shall see how the historical background in which Anantārya writes his *Prapannāmṛtam* witnesses the loss of power of the Tātācārya family, however no actual royal affiliation nor royal sponsoring is mentioned.

The following paragraphs will provide a general overview of the scholarly studies on Vijayanagara, a brief history of the Vijayanagara Empire with a focus on the developments of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, and a final reference to the above mentioned Tātācārya family, so central to Anantārya’s narration.

2.1 On Vijayanagara

The studies on Vijayanagara have mainly been done from the historical and archaeological points of view. One focus has been the figure of Rāma, together with its political and religious function in Vijayanagara: works such as those of John M. Fritz and G. Michell (2001, 2009, 2011), together with N. Rao (1984) and J. Gollings (1991), mostly concerned with the archaeological aspects, are important resources on the matter. Alongside, the work of Anna L. Dallapiccola (2011), Carla M. Sinopoli (2000, 2003, 2007), A. Verghese (1995, 2000, 2004, 2013) and P. Wagoner (1996a, 2000) helps in having a composite panorama of the religious developments with references to the artistic and, once again, the archaeological production. The historical and political sides are well-covered in works such as those of R. Sewell (1900), Sakkottai Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1919), Nilakanta Sastri & N. Venkataramanayya (1946) and N. Karashima (1992, 2001, 2002). More recently, two young scholars have especially taken into account the socio-religious scenario at Vijayanagara, resulting in two extensive works in which they provide a global perspective rather than a sectoral one, joining archaeological, artistic, historical, political and textual resources into unique and comprehensive investigations. Anthony J. Evensen (2007) maintains the emphasis on the figure of Rāma, critically re-evaluating the religious and political power it held in Vijayanagara. He supports and expands D. Eck’s idea on the religious proximity between the cults of Rāma and Śīva (Eck 1991): although their figures were for long considered religiously antithetical, their cults present more similarities than was previously thought. L. Stoker (2016) treats in depth the religious landscape of the 16th

century Vijayanagara, bringing into focus religious patronages and sectarianism, and providing an interesting overview of the social status of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas at the court. Based on some of this research, the following sections will introduce Vijayanagara from a historical and religious point of view, specifically addressing the issues of ‘Rāma-at-Vijayanagara’ (Evensens 2007:54) and of the Śrīvaiṣṇava movement in the Vijayanagara context.

2.2 A Brief History of the Empire

On the history of Vijayanagara, J. Davison-Jenkins writes:

(...) a summary glance through the corpus of available literature on Vijayanagara indicates that archaeological and historical research has drawn heavily from contemporary written accounts and compiled histories.⁵

However, although these accounts might present some questions especially with regard to the first period of the Vijayanagara Empire, there is no doubt about its dates: covering approximately 310 years (ca. 1336–1646 CE), the area is ruled by four dynasties, namely the Saṅgama (1336/1346–1485), the Saḷuva (1485–1505), the Tuḷuva (1505–1570) and the Arāvīḍu (1579–1646).

Traditional accounts tell that the formation of the Saṅgama dynasty happened thanks to Harihara and Bukka, two Telugu noblemen who, after being converted from Hinduism to Islam, were willing to help the army of the Sultanate in Delhi. They were sent to replace governor Malik Muhammad in Kampli. It was 1336 (or 1346) when Harihara and Bukka renounced the Muslim faith and created their own kingdom: some kilometers away from Kampli, on the south bank of the river Tungabhadra, the two founded Vijayanagara. After the foundation of the city, the royal association to the Śaivite deity Virūpākṣa is made manifest. Virūpākṣa maintained the role of official deity in Vijayanagara at least until the end of the Saṅgama dynasty, around 1485 CE (Saletore 1940:185).

The first rulers, including Harihara II who succeeded his father Harihara, witnessed a very fast growth of the city and an expansion of its political power even south of the Kṛṣṇa river (Verghese 1995:1). Some disputes over the throne led to the reign of Dēvarāya II (1424–1446

⁵In particular, the author refers to accounts of Portuguese, Arab, Italian and even Russian travelers (Davison-Jenkins 1997:8).

CE), who permitted a continuous cultural and economical advancement of the area. However, once again, succession-related issues led to the decline of the first dynasty, and to the rise of the Saḷuvas. It is in this setting that the figure of Virūpākṣa II (1466–1485), the king ruling the Vijayanagara empire described by Anantārya, should be placed. Nowhere in the few textual sources, is he considered to be a good ruler: on the contrary, he is seen as one of the kings under whose rule Vijayanagara heavily declines. His reign, considered by the Portuguese Jesuit traveler F. Nuñiz to be short and unproductive, does not find much space in chronicles and historical documents. In the latest publication ‘Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara rulers - Volume VI - Sanskrit Inscription’ (2017) S. Ritti collects three inscriptions written under Virūpākṣa II’s rule⁶, but his figure never acquires significance within the dynasty.

Chapters 123–125 of the *Prapannāmṛtam* seem to be the only ones in which Virūpākṣa is described as a positive entity rather than a negative one. The important religious turn from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism that Anantārya collocates in this period is generally believed to have taken place in a later moment, namely under Kṛṣṇa Dēva Rāya’s rule (1509–1529 CE). This historical understanding is supported by the fact that many scholars believe that Kṛṣṇa Dēva Rāya’s reign was productive and fruitful in various ways: A. Verghese claims that Dēva Rāya was “not only the greatest king in Vijayanagara history, but also one of the most brilliant monarchs in medieval India” (Verghese 1995:2), great captain of the army and man of literature, concerned with the renovation and construction of new temples.

After this great ruler, however, the Empire reaches its final stage: the battle of Tālikōṭa (1565 CE) marks the end of Vijayanagara as the royal center. The capital is moved further South during the Arāvīḍu’s ruling period (1570–1646 CE). Vellore, close to Kañchipuram in today’s Tamil Nadu, was chosen as the last capital city of the Empire in 1606 (Verghese 1995:3).

2.3 Religion in the Empire

The religious landscape familiar to Anantārya, that of the 17th century, has an ancient and heterogeneous background, which goes back to pre-Vijayanagara times. As A. Verghese clearly sums up, the first important cult in the area seems to be that of the goddess Pampa (ca 7th century CE), which soon after was ‘Sanskritized’ and ‘Hinduized’ into Pārvatī (Verghese

⁶Ritti (2017:281-294).

2004). An inscription and the temple on the Hemakuta hill (ca 1199 CE) also suggest a pre-Vijayanagara cult of Bhairava, the terrifying form of Śiva.

Vijayanagara is considered to be predominantly Śaiva in pre-Vijayanagara times, but scholars believe that some relations with the *Rāmāyaṇa* were probably already there. These claims are controversial because, if on the one side Hampi and surroundings are considered to be part of the epic's mythical landscape, there is no textual or epigraphic evidence of a Rāma worship before the Empire (ibid.:420f). The author claims that religion became an especially important resource during the Vijayanagara Empire period:

The Vijayanagara rulers [...] fostered institutions associated with Hinduism through the promotion of Vedic and other studies, support of brahmans, generous grants to temples and maṭhas, pilgrimages to religious places and celebration of public rituals.⁷

Beside a number of popular and folk deities, Jainism was a dominant cult for a long time. By the 14th century, it had nonetheless declined and lost power in the area. In the same historical period, Islam starts to spread within the area. Notwithstanding, the two Brahmanical religious traditions which flourished the most in Vijayanagara are Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.

Śaivism enjoyed the support of kings and was accepted in various forms, including the Pāśupata, the Vīra Śaiva, and the Śaiva Siddhānta. One of the main deities was Virūpākṣa, who “was adopted as the patron deity of the kings, their capital and kingdom as long as Vijayanagara remained the capital, not only by the Śaiva Saṅgama but also by later dynasties which were Vaiṣṇava in affiliation” (Verghese 2004:422). This name was often found at the end of inscriptions: it took the place of the signature of the king and it was used in royal grants given to religious institutions, in forms such as ‘in the presence of Virūpākṣa’⁸.

Vaiṣṇavism became powerful during the Vijayanagara empire. Especially after the end of the Saṅgama dynasty, which mainly fostered the Śaiva cults, the royal patronage towards Vaiṣṇavism became strong: for instance, Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, the founder of the second dynasty, was considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the form of Narasiṃha (Sarojini Devi 1990:80). The cult of Narasiṃha, the ‘man-lion’, was the first Vaiṣṇava tradition to develop in the area, followed by a later addition of Rāma and Viṭṭhala to the local pantheon (Verghese 2004:424).

⁷Ibid.: 421.

⁸The Sanskrit reads ‘*virūpākṣa samnidhau*’, as found in many inscriptions. See, for instance: Ritti (2017:282, line 46).

The spread of Vaiṣṇavism during the Empire was made possible also thanks to the works of two important figures: Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE) and Madhva (1238–1317 CE) who promoted the diffusion respectively of the Viśiṣṭādvaita and the Dvaita philosophies. Particularly relevant to our research is the figure of the Tamil brahmin named Rāmānuja⁹: the *Prapannāmṛtam* is, in fact, dedicated to this *ācārya*, who is said to have lived more than 100 years, and his lineage. In the next sections we will briefly explain what Viśiṣṭādvaita is, focusing on its circulation during the 16th and 17th century in Vijayanagara, in order to have a grasp of the *intelligentsia* and of the socio-religious background in which Anantārya was educated and in which the hagiography authored by him was composed.

2.3.1 Śrīvaiṣṇavism at a Glance

While Viśiṣṭādvaita (“non dualism of what is qualified”) refers to a certain doctrine, the term Śrīvaiṣṇavism (to be differentiated from the more general word Vaiṣṇavism) could be said to refer to the socio-religious manifestation of this doctrine as it was integrated and promoted by Viśiṣṭādvaita in South India.¹⁰

These are the words employed by G. Colas to explain “the school of Viśiṣṭādvaita”, which found its greater representatives in South India. This definition also offers a brief explanation of what Śrīvaiṣṇavism is perceived to be in the scholarly debate, namely a social manifestation of Viśiṣṭādvaita. This paragraph will provide an overview of the history of Śrīvaiṣṇavism by laying a particular stress on the concept of *paramparā*, or ‘lineage’. The succession within a *guruparamparā* is, in fact, central to *Prapannāmṛtam* as a whole, and to the chapters here under analysis: Anantārya himself, at the beginning of *adhyāya* 123 (vv. 1–6), introduces the protagonists of the narration by embedding them in the important *paramparā* of Rāmānuja.

⁹Rāmānuja (in PA 123–125 also called yatirāja, ‘king of ascetics’, and bhāṣyakāra, ‘commentator’) is for sure the most famous *ācārya* within the lineage. He was born in Śrīperumbudur, close to Kañchipuram, from a Brahmin family, and was then instructed with the *Divya Prabhandam*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *rahasya*, ‘true meaning’, of *mantras*. Once he chose the renouncer’s path, he started managing the activities of the Śrīraṅgam temple. He is said to have established the Pāñcarātra system of worship in many Vaiṣṇava temples and, among other things, to have converted king Biṭṭideva (or Viṣṇuvardhana - Hoysala dynasty, 1108–1152 CE) from Jainism to Vaiṣṇavism. Rāmānuja’s most famous work is the Śrībhāṣya, a commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra, which helped in establishing Viśiṣṭādvaita as a philosophical school (Colas 2003:248).

¹⁰Colas (2003:248).

According to G. Colas, since the very first beginning of the Śrīvaiṣṇava movement, the adepts of Śrīvaiṣṇavism lay a particular emphasis on the concept of *paramparā*, ‘lineage’ or ‘preceptors’ line’:

The notion of *paramparā* has a special importance in Śrīvaiṣṇavism, [a doctrine] in which various currents continuously tried to define themselves through distinct lines of affiliation.¹¹

Traditionally, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas have two kinds of lineage: one is the so-called *ācārya-paramparā*, based on the figure of the *ācārya* who initiates the disciple through the *pañca saṃskāras*¹². The other, known as *grantha-paramparā*, is based on the presence of a preceptor- commentator teaching about three *granthas*, ‘books’: the *Śrībhāṣya* of Rāmānuja, the *Nālāyira Divya Prabhandam* of Nāthamuni and various sacred *mantras* (Colas 2003:250; Jagadeesan 1977:40).

Although not explicitly mentioned, the presence of an *ācārya-paramparā* is unraveled also in the *Prapannāmṛtam*: in fact, already in the starting verses of PA 123, the brothers Nṛsiṃhārya and Śrīraṅgācārya are referred to as ‘*ācārya*’. The connection between this title, which in itself might be adopted in different religious background, and the specific belonging to the Śrīvaiṣṇava’s *ācārya-paramparā* is made explicit towards the end of the narrative: Nṛsiṃhārya is described as performing the *pañca saṃskāra*, the initiatory practice specific to the Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya* lineage, on king Virūpākṣa.

This element is particularly significant in light of the relevance attributed to the *ācāryas* in the Śrīvaiṣṇava theology. N. A. Nayar, in fact, explains:

By the late 13th century, the earlier notions of the *ācārya* as a teacher and imparter of the ritual initiation of *pañca saṃskāra* had been supplemented by the distinctive Śrīvaiṣṇava doctrine of *ācāryābhimāna*, ‘the love or affection of an *ācārya* [towards his disciple] (...).¹³

¹¹Colas (2003:250).

¹²These five initiatory steps, mandatory to all Śrīvaiṣṇavas, include the *tāpa*, i.e. wearing the attributes of Viṣṇu, of discus and the conch ; the (*ūrdhava*-)*puṇḍra*, i.e. wearing on the forehead the symbolic mark in the shape of the feet of Viṣṇu; *nāma*, i.e. the naming of the disciple, generally as ‘Viṣṇu-*dāsa*’, servant of Viṣṇu, or as ‘Rāmānuja-*dāsa*’, servant of Rāmānuja; the recitation of the *mantras*, imparted esoterically from teacher to pupil; and *ijyā*, or *yāga*, i.e. the worship of God through the *sālagrāma*, a sacred stone which is supposed to be pervaded by the essence of Viṣṇu (Chari 1997:307).

¹³Nayar (1992:92).

The author shows how, in later times, the liberation of a devotee became possible through the intercession of the *ācārya*, and specifically through the salvific power of Rāmānuja, derived from the fact that “Rāmānuja’s own surrender to God was effective for the salvation of all future generations of Śrīvaiṣṇava”¹⁴. Also in PA 123–125, the intercession of the *ācārya* is fundamental: Nṛsiṃhārya, thanks to his religious role, is not only able to release the demonic essences hunting king Virūpākṣa, but even to convert king Virūpākṣa himself to Śrīvaiṣṇavism. The link with Rāmānuja is put forth in PA 125.32–33, when Anantārya attaches his own lineage to that of Rāmānuja, suggesting the religious significance of this figure.

Beside emphasizing the important role of the *ācārya*, Anantārya singles out some close disciples of Rāmānuja. Because they are mentioned in various parts of the story, three are especially relevant for the study of PA 123–125: Śrīśailapūrṇa, Andhrapūrṇa and Piḷḷān. Śrīśailapūrṇa, also known as or Periya Tirumali Nambi/Nampi, is Rāmānuja’s maternal uncle and disciple of Yāmunācārya. He became an authority in the exposition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and is the first member of the Tātācārya family. Andhrapūrṇa, also known as Vaḍuka Nambi or Vaṭapūrṇa, is said to have passed to Rāmānuja the religious knowledge acquired from Yamunācārya. He also composed a biographical poem on Rāmānuja, the Yatirāja-vaibhava, in which he describes himself as a disciple of this *ācārya*. Anantārya will draw his lineage from this figure.

Piḷḷān, also known as Tirukkurugaippirān Piḷḷān and Kurukeśava, is the son of Śrīśailapūrṇa. According to various sources, PA 123–125 included¹⁵, Piḷḷān became the *jñānaputra*, ‘spiritual son’, of Rāmānuja and was chosen by him to write the commentary on the *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār¹⁶. Thus, Piḷḷān’s commentary on the *Tiruvāymoli*, named *Ārāyirappaḍi*, literally meaning ‘6000 *granthas*’¹⁷, written in *maṇipravāla*¹⁸, is the first one to be known. The use of *maṇipravāla*, still not very common at the time, determines this text as the earliest to suggest

¹⁴Nayar (1992:92).

¹⁵Adhyāya 123, vv. 1–3.

¹⁶A Vaiṣṇava Kṛṣṇa devotee, he is the the most prolific *Ālvār*. His work, the *Tiruvāymoli*, also known as the Tamil Veda, collects his own hymns and verses and is designed to provide to everybody the messages exposed by the Vedas.

¹⁷The word *grantha*, here meaning ‘verse’, indicates a unit of 32 letters. Traditionally, the length of the *maṇipravāla* commentaries on the *Tiruvāymoli* was indicated through the number of their units, which might have been 6,000, 9,000, 12,000, 24,000 or 36,000. According to S. M. S. Chari “It is also believed that these commentaries correspond in terms of units, to the Sanskrit works such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Śrī-bhāṣya*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Śrutaprakāśika*” (Chari 1997:33).

¹⁸A mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil.

the forthcoming developments of Viśiṣṭādvaita into Ubhayavedānta, the ‘twofold Vedānta’. This doctrine, whose codification started with Nathāmuni (ca. 10th century), is based on the validity of both Sanskrit and Tamil.

Ubhayavedānta is a doctrine which only after Piḷḷai Locācārya and Vedānta Deśika (ca. 13th century CE): the inclusive dualism of the doctrine manifests itself in the schism between Vaṭagaḷai, or ‘Northern division’, whose origins trace back to Vedānta Deśika, and the Teṅgaḷai, or ‘Southern division’, whose origins are attributed to Piḷḷai (Colas 2003:248f)¹⁹. One of the doctrinal discrepancies between the two branches, namely the meaning attributed to the concept of prapatti, appears to be subtly manifested in PA 123–125, and helps in collocating this work within the Teṅgaḷai branch of Ubhayavedānta. In fact, for the Teṅgaḷais *prapatti*, literally ‘pious resignation’, is based on the cognition that God alone decides whom to save and, therefore, the *prapanna*, i.e. the surrendered [to God]’, should abandon all the efforts. The sense given to the term *prapanna* in the Teṅgaḷai perspective, thus, is that of ‘one who has surrendered to God’ and who does not seek for any other means of salvation (Carman 1974:222). Hints of Anantārya’s Teṅgaḷai affiliation become clear in his description of the initially unresolvable condition of *paiśācyam* (PA 123.19-20), which is not stopped by the various rites performed by king Vīrūpakṣa, but only after the recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by a Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya*: this is an evident reference to the fact that individual’s deeds have no meaning because it is god himself who, through its own *avatāra*, decides whom to save.

If this is the religious background we can suppose to be at the basis of the description in PA 123–125, the socio-political background in which the author of PA writes is also reflected in the text: the patronage of the Tātācārya family, to which Anantārya himself belongs, in Vijayanagara, entwines the whole narration.

2.3.2 Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the late Empire: the Tātācārya Family

The explicit association of the Vijayanagara rulers with the Śrīvaiṣṇava order steadily grew since the Sāḷuva dynasty (1485–1505 CE), and further strengthened with the Tuḷuvas (1491–1570 CE) and Aravīḍus (1542–1646 CE). In fact, during the 15th and 16th centuries, “almost all

¹⁹Generally speaking, the main diversity between the two branches is seen in the linguistic preference of the first towards Sanskrit texts (especially Vedas), and of the latter towards Tamil texts (especially the mystic songs of the *Ālvārs*), but the presence of doctrinal discrepancies is unquestionable.

new temples were Śrīvaiṣṇava, often bearing Teṅgaḷai or Vaṭagaḷai insignia [...] several dedicated to Śrīvaiṣṇava deities [...] along with images of the *Ālvārs*” (Rao 2016:31).

During the Aravīḍu period (1542–1646 CE), which is most probably the epoch just preceding the birth of Anantārya, this doctrine reaches the maximum diffusion and the replacement of the Śaiva Virūpākṣa sign with the Vaiṣṇava sign of Venkaṭeśvara takes place. The formal change of the royal seal occurred during the reign of king Sadāśiva (1543–1567 CE), but the first hints of a stronger presence of the Vaiṣṇava creed trace back to the Tuḷuva King Kṛṣṇadevarāya (1509–1529)²⁰. Following the acme of the Vaiṣṇava cult, the Śrīvaiṣṇava community in Vijayanagara and surroundings partake to the rise of a precise family: the Tātācārya.

The origins of the family are attributed to Periya Tiurmalai Nambi (Śrīśailapūrṇa), maternal uncle of Rāmānuja. The legend says that he was taking care of the statue of Venkaṭeśa in Tirumala (today’s Andhra Pradesh), and he was doing it with so much care that, one day, Venkaṭeśa in person addressed him with the words “*mama tāta*”, ‘my son’. From this label, the family acquired the name ‘Tātācārya’. Most of the members of this family are found in the Vaḍagalai branch of Śrīvaiṣṇavism and were especially known for their authority in the explanation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Interestingly enough, the *Prapannāmṛtam* appears to be one of the few Sanskrit sources on the genealogical tree of the family. According to T. A. Gopinātha Rao, the genealogy found in *Prapannāmṛtam* includes: Eṭṭur Narasiṃhācārya - also known as Śrīraṅgarācārya - , Tātācārya, Śrīśailapūrṇa, Śrīnivāsa, Tātādēśika, Venkaṭārya, Sundaradēśika, Śrīnivāsa, Pañcamara-bhānjanam Tātācārya and Lakṣmīkumāra - also known as Kōṭi-Kanyakā-dānam Tātācārya (Gopinātha Rao 1915-1916:2).

The Tātācārya family maintained for long relevant positions in the society of Vijayanagara: its members often had the role of *rāja-gurus*, royal *gurus*, at the court. K. V. Raman (1934), who bases his research on the information extracted from Anantārya’s text, explains that this family appears to have moved from Tirupati (in today’s Southern Andhra Pradesh), where Śrīśailapūrṇa was first initiated, to a town called Eṭṭur²¹ and, only then, to Vijayanagara.

After the battle of Tālikōṭa (1565 CE, today’s North Karnataka)²², which led to the decay

²⁰B. A. Saltore (1940:187).

²¹The position of this town is nowhere specified. It might be identifiable with today’s Eturu, in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.

²²The battle fought between the Vijayanagara empire and the Deccan Sultantates, which saw the heavy defeat of Vijayanagara.

of Vijayanagara as the capital of the empire, the Tātācārya family lost its royal privileges and spread around, reaching the nearby areas. To mention just one example, an inscription found in Kañchi, dating 1576 CE, accounts for the presence of Eṭṭur Kumāra Tirumalai, a member of the Tātācāryas, in the administration of some temples in the area (Raman 1934:82).

Although the importance of the family lasted for at least 50 more years, the complete loss of their royal-religious patronage happened during the reign of Veṅkaṭa II (1586–1614 CE). Eṭṭur Kumāra Tirumalai, who for long holds the task of ‘*śrī-kārya*’, or ‘manager’, of various important Vaiṣṇava temples in Kañchi and other sacred cities, moved to Śrīraṅapatṇa, the capital of the Mysore kings, to look for better fortune. His successors had the chance to go back to Kañchi only around 1711 CE, but were never able to reach again the previous social status (Raman 1934:84-86).

Anantārya, who ascribes himself to this family, is the representative of an epoch in which the Tātācāryas were losing their supremacy: he thus wants to revitalize his family’s golden past, by praising them in his PA 121–126. PA 123–125, which will be presented in more detail in the next chapter, present an eulogy of two members of the 15th century Tātācārya family, to highlight its hegemonic role in the politics and religious life of 15th century Vijayanagara.

Prapannāmṛtam 123–125: Summary and Discussion

The *Prapannāmṛtam* has been studied extensively only by B.V. Ramanujam, who compares three sources: *Ārāyirappaḍi* (12th century), *Divya-surī-caritam* (ca. 13th century) and *Prapannāmṛtam* (17th century). The *Divya-surī-caritam* is considered to be a *kāvya*-style, “close adaptation”, of the *Ārāyirappaḍi*, while the *Prapannāmṛtam* is described as an “almost a literal translation of it” (Ramanujam 1973:70). According to B.V. Ramanujam, the 126 *adhyāyas* of the *Prapannāmṛtam* can be clustered into three sections: the first part starts with a conversation between Viṣṇu and the *nāga*, ‘snake’, Ādī Śeṣa on the earthly birth of Rāmānuja, followed by an in-depth description of Rāmānuja’s and his follower Bhaṭṭar’s life (ch. 1–68). This section also includes Āndrapūrṇa’s *Aṣṭottaranāma Stotram*, an eulogy of Rāmānuja (ch. 64). The second part covers the life-stories of the *Ālvārs* and the *Ācāryas*, exposed in a dialog between Bhaṭṭar and Vēdāntin¹ (ch. 75–116). The last part, in which the dialog between the two is discontinued, is also the least homogeneous: in fact, according to Ramanujam, in the last chapters (116-126) Anantārya only exposes stray topics, including the detailed account of the Tātācārya family and their life at the court of Vijayanagara (Ramanujam 1973:68).

The style of the *Prapannāmṛtam* is that of the Purāṇas: in chapters 123–125, the rhythm produced by the *anuṣṭubh* meter is corroborated by the periodic repetition of words, such as epithets like ‘*vaiṣṇava-uttama*’, ‘best among the Vaiṣṇavas’, or short compounds such as the very frequent ‘*sa-anuja*’, ‘with his younger brother’. As an overall, although such term reflect standard purāṇic Sanskrit, the stylistic and linguistic relative sophistication characterizes Anantārya as a learned writer. In fact, from time to time, the author employs refined and unusual terms such as ‘*rāja-vidvaram*’ (ch. 125, v. 22), ‘king’s servant’. This section presents a detailed synopsis of the three chapters. The complete translation is given in the appendix.

¹Vedanta Deśika.

3.1 Adhyāya 123

Teaching of the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the *piśācas* in Vijayanagara, in praise of the lineage of Kurukeśava, son of the wise Rāmānuja

This *adhyāya* consists of 52 verses of full narration and the colophon². At the very beginning, the summary of a *guruparamparā* is given: the genealogy starts when Rāmānuja performs the *putrasvīkāra*, the ‘adoption as a son’, of Kurukeśava³. Anantārya briefly tells about the relevance of Kurukeśava by referring to his literary production (vv. 2–3b): although Anantārya never mentions the work’s title, we learn that Kurukeśava, under the supervision of his teacher Rāmānuja, composes a six-thousand-verses commentary, namely the *Ārāyirappaḍi*.

The author, then, goes on with the lineage and uses the term ‘*putra*’ to indicate the relationship between the 6 mentioned *ācāryas*⁴. According to Anantārya, the members of the *paramparā* are: Padmanetra, Puṇḍarīka, Śrīnivaśa, Nṛsiṃhārya, Rāmānuja and Nṛsiṃhārya (vv. 1-6). The latter Nṛsiṃhārya is one of the leading characters of the three *adhyāyas* here taken into consideration. It is, thus, after his mention that the story actually begins. The *ācārya* is described as being ‘learned in all the *śāstras*’ (*sarva-śāstra-viśārada*) and as coming from a village called Etūru, or Eṭṭur (vv. 7-8b). The event triggering the whole narration, yet unconnected to the figure of Nṛsiṃhārya, is then put forth: the mighty king Virūpākṣa, ruling in Vijayanagara, is forced to leave his palace after having uncovered a conspiracy organized against him by his envious relatives. He takes with him some chosen servants and, secretly, sets up a powerful army (*caturāṅga*, literally meaning ‘composed of the four parts’ viz. elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry) through which he attacks his kin-enemies unexpectedly, at night-time, killing them all (vv. 11- 14). Due to the *adharmic* murder they experienced, these antagonists of Virūpākṣa become *piśācas*, ‘ghosts’⁵ (v. 15).

²Here partially reported as the title.

³Kurukeśava is another name for Piḷḷān (or Tirukkurugaippirān Piḷḷān), son of Śrī Śailapūrṇa, Rāmānuja’s maternal uncle.

⁴It is not completely clear whether these connections are based on real kinship or on spiritual closeness: Kurukeśa, the first follower of Rāmānuja, is in fact considered to be his *jñānaputra*, ‘spiritual son’. This metaphorical employment of the term sets the antecedent to believe that the designation of ‘son’ shall, in this context, be interpreted in a figurative sense.

⁵As variously stated in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, a *piśāca* is a spirit that, flared by hunger and thirst, desires to satisfy its own appetites. In order to do this, it must incarnate into a human being: this is easier when

In the meanwhile, king Virūpākṣa builds up a new palace and keeps his rule in Vijayanagara. However, every night, the ghosts' screams and shouts harass the king, who performs ritual donations of virgins, cows, territories and houses, in order to release them; None of these auspicious *vrata*, 'observances', is enough to break the spell of the *piśācas* (vv. 8c-20).

It is in such a setting that Nṛsiṃhārya, together with his younger brother, reaches Vijayanagara, driven by his desire for wealth ('*dhana-lobha*'), to have a meeting with the king. Carrying with him the *Rāmāyaṇa*, at night and without anyone knowing about it, he arrives at the old palace of the king, hunted by *piśācas*:

The ghosts were completely delighted by the gentle appearance. Then, by the sight of those two best among Vaiṣṇavas, [their, i.e. of the *piśācas*] actions were destroyed.⁶

The door-keepers, as if expecting them, friendly welcome the two and, in the middle of the night, the meeting with the king takes place (vv. 21–26). After the usual blessings and salutations, the king asks his minister about their arrival, and requests them to tell their story. The answer and explanation is given by Nṛsiṃhārya's younger brother, whose name - Śrīraṅgācārya - is never mentioned prior to verse 37 (vv. 27–35).

Śrīraṅgācārya, having introduced his wise and great-souled brother, who is '*sākṣāt-lakṣmī-nṛsiṃhaka*', 'the manifestation of Lakṣmī and Nṛsiṃhaka [i.e. Viṣṇu] together'⁷ (v.1 36b), reveals that their arrival is driven by the the desire for wealth ('*dhana-lobha*'). He then explains that the book they brought with them is the *Rāmāyaṇa*, defined as '*rāmābhiṣeka-paryantam*'⁸, 'ending with the coronation of Rāma', and adds that, through its listening, a lot of excellent things will happen (vv. 38–39).

After a consultation of the *piśācas*' king with his people and ministers, the decision is taken: the whole entourage of *piśācas* will listen to the recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, because this is the

humans are not vigilant, or completely relaxed, as in the case of extremely tired and sleeping creatures (Filippi 2010:103). This explains why the relatives of king Virūpākṣa, killed while sleeping, are transformed into these specific demonic essences.

⁶ *Piśācāḥ saumya-rūpeṇa samhr̥ṣṭās te 'khlās tadā ||*

darṣanāt kṣīṇa-karmāṇas tayoṛ vaiṣṇava-mukhyayoḥ || 25 ||

⁷The joint worship of Viṣṇu and Śrī, the goddess, is peculiar to Śrīvaiṣṇavism. The creed's denomination itself, containing the terms 'Śrī' and 'Viṣṇu', refers to this practice.

⁸'Culminating with the consecration of Rāma'. This qualification seems to imply that, for Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the seventh book of the epic, the 'Uttara Kāṇḍa' is not to be considered part of the corpus.

dr̥ṣṭānta, the ‘example’, to be used in order for them to get rid of their demonic nature (vv. 40-45).

In the conclusion of the *adhyāya*, the *piśācas* set the conditions for this exchange: the recitation must be performed once a day, at night, for the measure of one *yāma*⁹. Nṛsiṃhārya and his brother will be paid 2 gold coins every day, but the greatest amount of wealth will be given on the day of conclusion. Moreover, nobody must know about the secret recitation, otherwise some misfortune will damage them all (vv. 46–50).

The two closing verses briefly summarize the recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is secretly performed by Nṛsiṃhārya, everyday at night, as decided by the group (vv. 50–52).

3.2 Adhyāya 124

The *piśācas*’ obtainment of the Sāntānaloka, through the listening of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* [recited] by Nṛsiṃhārya from Śrīśaila

The *adhyāya* has 41 verses of full narration and the colophon. The recitation of the holy book has not reached its end in the previous *adhyāya*: in fact, the chapter begins by describing the events on the day prior to the consecration of Rāma¹⁰. Nṛsiṃhārya recommends the group of *piśācas* to perform a great festival (*mahotsava*)¹¹ which will bring them various excellent things (vv. 1-5b). The king of the ghosts confirms that a great festival will be performed, and it will be especially done in the village of the two teachers¹². He adds that, once the *paṭṭābhīṣeka*

⁹According to the Ayurvedic Medical Dictionary, the term *yāma* is a technical term corresponding to 3 hours. Four *yāmas* make a day, and four *yāmas* make a night (Ranganayakulu 2013).

¹⁰As stated by the *ācārya* in chapter 123, this is considered by Nṛsiṃhārya to be the event marking the very end of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

¹¹A possibility could be that of interpreting the term *mahotsava* as referring to the celebration of *mahānavamī* (‘great nine days’), or *navarātri* (‘nine nights’). The festival’s presence is for the first time attested in 1420 CE, in the travel’s accounts of Nicolò Conti, and later on by F. Nūniz and D. Paes accounts on 16th century Vijayanagara (Ikegame 2012:114). Moreover, S. Jagannathan (1994) shows that the festival was celebrated also by Śrīvaiṣṇava affiliates.

¹²The logical meaning of the verse ‘*yuṣmad-grāme viśeṣeṇa bhaviṣyati mahotsavaḥ*’ is not completely clear. The festival should be performed in Vijayanagara, the current setting of the story. However, the presence of the locative ‘*yuṣmad-grāme*’, ‘in your town’ suggests that they will be performed in the town of the two *ācāryas*, i.e. Eṭṭur. There is no knowledge about festivals performed in the small town from which Nṛsiṃhārya, his brother

(‘supreme coronation of Rāma’s tiara’) takes place, a good deal of wealth will be given to the *ācāryas* (vv. 5c–11).

Nṛsiṃhārya and his brother, thus, leave and reach their house to sleep. The day after, the *ācārya* performs the morning rituals and the inauguration of Rāma (*rāma-abhiṣecana*) on a *mūrti* of Rāmacandra: the proper worship is executed with ‘some Vaiṣṇavas’ (*katibhir vaiṣṇavai*), through food offerings and the homage to the 108 names of Rāma (vv. 11–16). Having then reached, at night, the ghosts’ palace, Nṛsiṃhārya - seated on a very comfortable seat - recites the chapter on the coronation of Rāma: the *piśācas* are filled with joy and, at the end of the performance, they honor him.

The ghosts, then, donate to the brothers invaluable jewels, enjoyable for kings (*rāja-bhogyāni*), and ultimately deliver a speech (vv. 16–23). At first praising the two brothers, the king¹³ rapidly switches the focus on Nṛsiṃhārya, acclaimed as “descended from the sky with the bodily form of a portion of Lord Hari”¹⁴. He then explains the reason of their demonical nature, blaming Virūpākṣa and his evil decision of killing them ‘at the time of deep sleep’¹⁵. Despite the numerous oblations and rites performed by the king, nothing was of use to the freedom of these *piśācas*. It was only thanks to Nṛsiṃhārya’s recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that they could finally find peace. This is also the reason why the ghosts become fervent devotees of Rāma. Desirous to reach the Sāntānaloka¹⁶, they ask for Nṛsiṃhārya’s permission to go, while a group of divine chariots, ready to carry them to heaven, descends from the sky to a nearby place (vv. 24–35). Nṛsiṃhārya performs the usual blessings and grants them permission to leave: the *piśācas*, having left their ghostly bodies, assume a divine form and fly away on the divine chariot. The *adhyāya* ends with Nṛsiṃhārya and his brother, astonishingly observing the miracle, and finally reaching their abode, covered with riches:

Having quickly reached their own abode, the two events¹⁷ unknown to everybody, they were mutually praising the *Rāmāyaṇa* in several ways. Very satisfied by the acquisition

and various other members of the Tātācārya family come from.

¹³Although, in the Sanskrit, the speaker is not specified, the coral voice is most probably expressed by the king or his minister.

¹⁴‘(...) *avatīrṇāv iha aṃśena sāksāt-bhagavato hareh* ||’ (v. 24).

¹⁵In the text ‘*suṣupti-samayē*’ (v. 28). We have already discussed how a death while sleeping often leads the dead person to become a *piśāca*.

¹⁶I have not been able, until now, to find any other appearance of this term in Śrīvaiṣṇava literature prior or contemporary to Anantārya. Most probably it is used here as a synonym for Viṣṇu-*pada*, ‘Viṣṇu’s heaven’.

¹⁷The dual ‘*vṛttāntau*’, implying ‘two events’, refers to the whole recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which - as

of wealth, they happily fell asleep. Then, those two great-minded, who were approaching their own village, stood there, looking for proper company.¹⁸

The words *samīcīn sahāya*, ‘proper company’, allude to the fact that the amount of wealth earned by the brothers is too heavy to be transported by the two alone. Desiring to go back to Eṭṭūr, they are thus waiting for appropriate assistance (vv. 36–41).

3.3 Adhyāya 125

The teaching of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* to king Virūpākṣa during the conversation between king Virūpākṣa and Nṛsiṃhārya from Śrīśaila

Chapter 125 consists of 62 verses and the colophon. This last *adhyāya* starts with the citizens of Vijayanagara approaching the king’s new palace, to tell him that the noises of the *piśācas*, which were bothering them for long, are now over. They request king Virūpākṣa to find out more about it (vv. 1–3). The king, incredulous, remembering about all the religious acts he performed, wonders by which means the *piśācas* could have been released from their condition and, accompanied by the citizens, he reaches his old palace (vv. 4–8b).

There, he notices some footprints and he is quickly convinced by this sight that those footprints must belong to the two who freed the *piśācas*. Wanting to meet them, he decides to measure the extent of the footprints with a rope and gives it to the general of the army (vv. 8c–12). He orders to give samples of the rope to the four door-keepers of the city, in order to measure the footsteps of everybody in the area (vv. 14–15):

stated in various occasions - needs to be kept secret, and the miracle of the ascension of the ghosts in their divine bodies.

¹⁸ *kenāpy ajñāta-vṛttāntau svā-vāsamprāpya satvaram |*
rāmāyaṇaṃbahu-vidham ślāghayantau parasparam || 40 ||
dhana-lābhāt susamtuṣṭau sukhaṃnidrām avāsatuḥ. |
tataḥ sva-grāma-gamane yatamānau mahā-matī |
samīcīn sahāyaṃca vīkṣamāṇau tadā sthitau || 41 ||

We find here the term ‘*grama*’, ‘town, village’, suggesting that the two teachers did not reside in Vijayanagara during the whole event, but rather in a village nearby. However, no specific geographical indication is provided. The term might also imply that the two did not live in the sacred center of the city, where the king’s palace appears to be, but in its suburbs.

Having given those [samples of ropes] to all the door-keepers of the city, oh leader of soldiers, in this city quickly give the order to measure through these ropes the length of the feet of the great souls, of those who are coming and going those, those who are inside here and those who are outside.¹⁹

Once the two *ācārya* whose footprints correspond to the measure of the given rope are found, the order is to bring them in front of the king, in a respectful manner. The commander, thus, spreads the order around the whole region, revealing the secret nocturnal narration of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* and the miracle which followed (vv. 13–18).

The news that the king is in search for the two *ācāryas* reaches Nṛsiṃhārya and his younger brother who, very afraid, think that Virūpākṣa must for sure be Śiva embodied (vv. 19–20):

(...) This Virūpākṣa is for sure Śiva embodied. He is an enemy of Vaiṣṇavas, very powerful and [performing] fiery punishments. We do not know: what will this person do to us, having taken us? (...) ²⁰

They, thus, decide to leave their temporary abode and secretly go back to their village carrying all the wealth, left to the protection of Śrī Rāma. Although they leave at night, a servant of the king²¹ manages to see them: measuring their footprint, he recognizes them as ‘exactly the two’ (*tau eva*) and brings them in front of the king (vv. 21–26).

Receiving them with devotion, king Virūpākṣa asks about their provenance, about the reason of their arrival to Vijayanagara and, specifically, about their intrusion in the old king’s palace (vv. 27–29). Nṛsiṃhārya, at this point, encouraged by the reassuring speech of the king, narrates the whole story which, he says, is in itself a means of purification and destruction of wicked things (*‘pavitram pāpa-nāśanam’*). He, thus, starts from the very beginning, attributing to

¹⁹ *nagara-dvāra-pālebhyaḥ sarvebhyas tāni sainyapa |
dattvā asmin nagare tābhī rajjubhis sumahātmanām || 14
gata-āgatānāṃ sarveṣāṃ satāṃ caivāsātām api |*

pramāṇaṃ mātum aghrīṇāṃ śāsanaṃ kuru satvaram || 15

²⁰ (...) *sākṣād ayam virūpākṣo virūpākṣo na saṃśayah. || 19*

sutarām vaiṣṇava-dveṣī tīkṣṇa-dāṇḍo mahābalaḥ. |

na jānīmo grhītvā ’smān kim kariṣyati ayam khalah. (...) || 20

In verse 19, Anantārya nicely plays with words: Virūpākṣa is, in fact, both the name of the king and one of Śiva’s names.

²¹Indicated with the rare term *rāja-vidvara*.

Rāmānuja - and Śrīśailapūrṇa - his own ancestry, introducing his own figure as being a religious offspring of Rāmānuja (vv. 32–33):

Lord Venkaṭeśvara, a long time ago, imparted the meaning of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* through the 24 chapters to the one whom he called ‘oh son’, [namely] to the great commentator, great soul in the genealogy of that important Śrīśailapūrṇa.²²

He then presents his younger brother (whose name, Śrīraṅgācārya, appears here for the second and last time), described as a devotee of Rāma and a lover of Rāma’s story (vv. 30–35). Nṛsiṃhārya adds that the book they are carrying is the holy *Rāmāyaṇa*. He tells Virūpākṣa that, arriving from the town of Eṭṭūr and being poor, they reached Vijayanagara driven by the desire for wealth. At the old palace of the king they found an entire court of *piśācas*, having “the form of men, king, ministers, nobles etc”²³ who, despite their demonic essence, performed homages to the two *ācāryas* as prescribed (vv. 36–40). He narrates about the *piśācas*’ secret recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, paid to Nṛsiṃhārya with a large amount of wealth. When the recitation reached the time of the coronation of Rāma’s tiara, marking the end of the performance, the two brothers received an enormous amount of gold and other wealth. At that point, they witnessed a miracle: the *piśācas*’ ascension to the Sāntānaloka (vv. 41–48).

In the concluding section of the adhyāya the king, astonished by the whole story, honors the brothers - especially Nṛsiṃhārya - as follows (v. 51):

(And) he conferred the state of authority, the celestial state and the state of *ācārya*, respectively to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, to the auspicious Rāma and to the *guru* Nṛsiṃha, bull among men.²⁴

It is in the very last verses that king Virūpākṣa, “although belonging to the *vīraśaivas*”²⁵, recognizes in the two brothers the manifestation of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Thus, after Nṛsiṃhārya

²² *purā ayam-āha tāta-iti bhagavān venkaṭeśvaraḥ |*

śrīmad rāmāyaṇasya-arthāś-caturviṃśati-vartmanā | 32

mahate bhāṣyakārāya yati-rājāya yo ’diśat | bhūri śrī-śailapūrṇasya tasya vaṃśa mahātmanah. || 33

²³The half verse reads: “*rāja-mantri-pradhāna-ādi-rūpeṇa nara-mūrtayah.*” (v. 40a-b).

²⁴ *rāmāyaṇe rāma-badhre nṛsiṃha-guru-puṅgave |*

ācārya-daiva-prāmāṇya bhāvam cakre mahāmati || 51

²⁵In the verse: ‘*vīraśaiva-mato’pi*’ (v. 54).

had recited the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* and performed the 5 rites (*pañca saṃskāra*)²⁶, after the recitation of the *rāma-patṭābhīṣeka*, the ‘consecration of the tiara of Rāma’, Virūpākṣa completes the golden consecration (*svaṛṇa-abhīṣeka*) on the *ācārya*. In addition, the king - now so devoted to Rāma - abandons the Virūpākṣa [Śiva] seal, replacing it with the the seal of Rāma on the royal ring. All the subsequent kings become Vaiṣṇavas as well: (v. 62):

Before king Virūpākṣa all these kings were Śaivas. After him, they all became everywhere famous as Vaiṣṇavas.²⁷

Nṛsiṃhārya, his brother and their families²⁸ live happily in Vijayanagara, continuously protecting the world and making “all the people royal bees at the lotus feet of Rāmānuja”²⁹ (vv. 49–62).

²⁶The *pañca saṃskāra* is the Śrīvaiṣṇava initiatory rite, consisting of the five elements described in 2.3.1. (n. 15).

²⁷*virūpākṣa-nṛpāt pūrve śaivās sarve bhavan nṛpāḥ*||

tat-paścāt cābhavan sarve vikhyātā vaiṣṇavā nṛpāḥ ||62

²⁸The Śrīvaiṣṇava community is considered to be mostly non-monastic: many important members were householders with wives and children, and it was not considered necessary to abandon worldly-life to become a Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya* (Stoker 2016:145, n. 32).

²⁹In the verse: ‘*sarvalokān rāmānujārya-pāda-pankaja-bhṛṅga-rājān*’ (v. 63b).

Truth and Points of View: Interrogating the Source

Following the premise of chapter 1.2, regarding how to properly treat hagiographical sources, we can state with no doubt that PA 123–125 was not composed by Anantārya with the aim of producing an evenemential history. However, this does not mean that the source has no historical value. In fact, considering that *adhyāyas* 116–126 do not follow the general pattern of the *Prapannāmṛtam* because they appear to “present stray topics” (Ramanujam 1973), we should try to understand the *intentio auctoris* in composing PA 123–125 and the reason to put it at the end of his work.

The main hypothesis is that the last chapters, more specifically PA 123–125, aim at glorifying the Tātācārya family. This is supported by the information collected from Anantārya’s historical background: the deduction is that one of the main reasons which led the author to the composition of PA 123–125 almost certainly originates from the decay of the Tātācārya family. The memory of the family’s golden past may have directed Anantārya, as a member of the late Tātācāryas, towards the need and will of reviving the glorious history of his own *guruparamparā*. Following the decay of the family, this 17th century author provides us with an unusual description of the glorious past of the Tātācāryas, by narrating about the supernatural powers and the redeeming function of two members of the the family¹. The two *ācāryas* in PA 123–125 are Eṭṭur Nṛsiṃhārya’, or simply Nṛsiṃhārya, and his younger brother, generally addressed as ‘*anuja*’, only twice introduced with his proper name, Śrīraṅgācārya. Generally, a city name placed before the first name of an *ācārya* functions as a prefix (Raman 1934:82): in the case of Nṛsiṃhārya, the protagonist of *Prapannāmṛtam*, the name Eṭṭur indicates the place from where the family of the *ācārya* came from. As we have previously shown in 2.3.2², there are textual sources confirming that Eṭṭur is a town from which various members of the Tātācārya family came.

Although we cannot have any certainty on the historical reality of the characters pre-

¹The family name is never explicitly mentioned in the three chapters, but the affiliations of the two *ācāryas* to the Śrīśaila lineage as well as the epithet ‘Eṭṭūr’ are clear hints of their belonging to the Tātācārya family.

²See pp. 17f.

sented in PA 123–125 - as there is no known source specifically mentioning the names of these *ācāryas*³ - according to T. A. Gopanātha Rao, the *Periya Tiramaḍiyaḍaivu*⁴ mentions a certain Eṭṭur Śiṅgarācārya, who is described as a contemporary and disciple of Maṅavāḷa Māmuniḡal (1370–1450). T. A. Gopanātha Rao also presents the genealogy “as gathered from the *Prapannāmṛtam*”⁵, which includes an Eṭṭur Narasiḡācārya or Śiṅgarācārya, most probably the protagonist of PA 123–125. Even in this case, however, no historical background is provided. If we consider the *Periya Tiramaḍiyaḍaivu* to give a real, i.e. chronological, account of the Tātācārya family, we could place Eṭṭur Narasiḡācārya in a definite time-setting: as a disciple of Maṅavāḷa Māmuniḡal (1370–1450 CE), he might have been 10 to 15 years younger than him, thus he would have been born around 1385 CE.

As for his brother Śrīraṅgācārya, in none of the above-mentioned sources his name ever appears. This might suggest that, if Śrīraṅgācārya existed, he might have covered a less important role within the Tātācārya circle. The figure of Śrīraṅgācārya might have been a mere literary device, without any historical reality in the Tātācārya lineage. This finds support in the secondary roles played by this figure throughout the story: his presence is, in fact, ancillary to that of Nṛsiḡhārya, who always performs the significant rites and gets all the credits. On the other hand, Śrīraṅgācārya is comparable to Lakṣmaṅa, because he always follows him. The couple of brothers, in a certain way, resembles a simplified version of the Rāma-Lakṣmaṅa couple: like Rāma, Nṛsiḡhārya covers the main role and performs the main actions. On the other hand, Śrīraṅgācārya is comparable to Lakṣmaṅa, because he follows him. This meta-narrative relation is made clear in adhyāya 125, when Virūpākṣa “accepts them as Rāma and Lakṣmaṅa, born in the Śrīśaila lineage”⁶ (v. 54c-d.). Anantārya wants to create, within the narrative of adhyāyas 123–125, a web of images related to the *Rāmāyaṅa*, an unquestionably significant text for any Śrīvaiṣṅava reading the *Prapannāmṛtam*.

³Beside the absence of evidence outside PA 123–125 on the historical reality of the two *ācāryas*, the issue becomes harder due to the fact that, within the same *guruparamparā*, it is not uncommon to name a (spiritual) son with his grandfather’s name: this makes the temporal order of disciples in the paramparā not always easy to understand a posteriori.

⁴This text gives short and succinct accounts of all the Śrīvaiṣṅava *Ālvārs* and *Ācāryas*. Written in Tamil, it was composed by Āṅḡillai Kandāḍaiyappan, son of Kandāḍai Aṅṅan (one of the eight chief disciples of Maṅavāḷa Māmuniḡal). It presumably predates the *Prapannāmṛtam* (Gopanātha Rao 1973:15).

⁵Gopanātha Rao (1915–1916:2).

⁶In the Sanskrit: *śrīśaila-vaṅśa-sambhūtau jñātvā tau rāma-lakṣmaṅau* || 54

Even with regard to king Virūpākṣa’s historical collocation, we cannot be sure, although he the only certain historical figure of PA 123–125. The only element which might provide a temporal collocation for the story appears at the very beginning of chapter 123, when Anantārya describes the king’s plan against his family members who are plotting against his throne. This fact matches only partially the historical reality: Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, general of the army Virūpākṣarāya and governor of the region of Chandragiri⁷, was in fact able to usurp a throne, however not exactly that of king Virūpākṣa: he defeated Virūpākṣa’s successor Praudhra Rāya (1485), under whose very short reign Vijayanagara’s power started to collapse. The temporal setting is, nonetheless, the same and the image of usurpation might be of support to the hypothesis of identifying king Virūpākṣa of PA 123–125 as Virūpākṣa II (1465–1485 CE). However, Anantārya might also have chosen to name the protagonist ‘Virūpākṣa’ for the symbolism implied by this name: in fact, Virūpākṣa is a synonym for Śiva and the fact of depicting Virūpākṣa’s conversion to Vaiṣṇavism is charged with the metaphorical significance of a complete defeat of Śaivism.

4.1 The Plot

It is by now clear that Anantārya’s decision to extend the content of his work by adding stray topics derives from the will to praise his family of origin, and to do so within the sacred context of a hagiography. The strongest image employed by the author to picture the glorious past of the Tātācārya lies in the emphasis put on the time of the introduction of the Rāma cult in the Empire. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence proves this claim false: in fact, the passage from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism started gradually and became official, with the change of the royal seals, only later in time, roughly at the time of Kṛṣṇa Deva Rāya (1509–1529 CE)⁸. Further confirmation of this derives from the recent publication ‘Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers, Vol. VI - Sanskrit Inscriptions’, which collects three epigraphs ascribed to Virūpākṣa II, in which the royal sign is still that of Śrī Virūpākṣa, found in the usual form of ‘*virūpākṣa sanidhau*’ (Shrinivas Ritti 2017:281-294).

However, Anantārya aptly employs the historical freedom granted by hagiographies to ‘re-write’ the past of his own ancestors and, possibly, to revive the importance of Śrīvaiṣṇavism as a

⁷In today’s Andhra Pradesh, south of Tirupati-Tirumala.

⁸Saletore (1940), Verghese (1995, 2004).

whole. In this regard, although the three chapters mostly present the narration without giving much precise information on the Śrīvaiṣṇava practice, the author shares an important piece of information (v. 125.52):

To the *mantra*, to its deity and to the *guru* who bestows the *mantra*: devotion should always be done in [these] three ways. That is the primary method [to perform *bhakti*].⁹

The *śloka* informs us about the three ways of performing *bhakti*, ‘devotion’. Most probably, this tripartite way of performing *bhakti* represents the one common to the Śrīvaiṣṇavite communities contemporary to Anantārya, rather than to those of 14th–15th century Vijayanagara.

4.2 Reciting the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Other Motifs

4.2.1 The Recitation of *Rāmāyaṇa* as *pāpa-nāśana*

The importance credited to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, both in its physical state (i.e. as a book) and in its metaphorical state (i.e. as a narration), is stressed throughout the text. This narrative device recalls the motif, common to various purāṇic accounts, of attributing apotropaic magical powers to manuscripts and books. According to F. De Simini, granting this mystical powers to a physical object functioned as a sort of advertisement for the text itself and, above all, for the system of beliefs it wanted to diffuse (De Simini 2016:23). In this light, Anantārya’s decision to emphasize the ‘fruits of hearing’ (*śruti-phala*) of this specific text is not accidental: in fact, Śrīśailapūrṇa - Rāmānuja’s maternal uncle to whom the Tātācārya family members ascribes their own origins - is said to have had such a deep knowledge on the sacred meanings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to have taught them to Rāmānuja (Rao 2004:32).

Chapters 123–125 might be read as an extended *śruti-phala*, which shows its *phala*, ‘fruits’, while we read the text: the audience has an immediate demonstration of the fact that by hearing the recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even demonic essences are freed from their condition and reach the Viṣṇu-*pada*. In addition, the fact that the two teachers always carry the *Rāmāyaṇa* along confirms G. Schopen’s claims that the manuscript and, in this case, the book “is not just a

⁹ In the Sanskrit: *mantra tad-devatāyāṃ ca tathā mantra-prade gurau |*

triṣu bhaktis sadā kāryā sā hi prathama sādhanam || 52

sacred object but also a sacralizing presence”¹⁰. In fact, as we read in 125.31¹¹, the story “is a means of purification and destruction of guilts”.

Another theme recalled by the *Rāmāyaṇa*-expedient in the *Prapannāmṛtam* is for sure that of the ‘gift of knowledge’ (*vidyādāna*): in fact, as stated in various classical sources dealing with this practice¹², by doing *vidyādāna* - which consists in the public recitation and reading of a text “the donors are rewarded with merits that allow them to receive both mundane and ultra-mundane benefits”¹³: Nṛsiṃhārya seems to perfectly fit this scheme.

4.2.2 The Theme of *dhana-lobha*

The author presents two Śrīvaiṣṇava teachers whose characteristics do not match the usual *ācārya*’s imagery: in fact, although a Śrīvaiṣṇava devotee did not need to abandon the wordly-life to become an *ācārya*, the emphasis put on Nṛsiṃhārya’s *dhana-lobha*, or *dhana-kāṅkṣā* (‘desire for wealth’), is certainly unusual. If, in the chapters of *Prapannāmṛtam* prior to 125, *ācāryas* are generally described as having low living standards and as avoiding material possessions, in PA 123–125 the stress on the term *lobha* (‘desire, cupidity’) highlights Nṛsiṃhārya’s eagerness for money, repeatedly made clear throughout the narration.

However, the condition of *dhana-lobha* is never criticized in the text, neither by the author nor by the protagonists of the narration. The *piśācas* agree from the beginning to give the *ācāryas* a compensation for their job, while King Virūpākṣa does not pay any attention to this, first captured by the narration of the events happened at the old palace, and then by the narration of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Thus, we are led to think that an *ācārya*’s *dhana-lobha* might have been, at the time of Anantārya, an accepted cultural practice. More so, in the case of Nṛsiṃhārya: for a member of the Tātācārya family, whose ancestors held the relevant position of *rāja-gurus* in the administration of Vijayanagara’s *mathas* (‘temples’), it was customary to get paid for a job. This is made clear at the end of *adhyāya* 125, when Nṛsiṃhārya is depicted as covered with riches; His enrichment, however, is not only material but also social. In fact, beside having received a great amount of wealth from the *piśācas*, he is promoted by king Virūpākṣa to the highest social position for an *ācārya* at the court of Vijayanagara: he receives a coronation,

¹⁰Schopen (2010:25).

¹¹ (...) *vṛttāntam-etat-sakalaṃ pavitraṃ pāpa-nāśanam* || 31

¹²Such as the *Śivadharmottara*, the *Nandipurāṇa* and the *Devīpurāṇa* (De Simini 2016:25)

¹³Schopen (2010:27).

and becomes a *rāja-guru* ('king's minister'), as appropriate for a member of the Tātācāryas.

We should certainly take into account the possibility that the central role played by this theme, together with the poor condition of the *ācāryas* introduced at the beginning of the narration, might be a narrative expedient to express the situation of decadence undergone by the Tātācārya family around Anantārya's times.

4.2.3 The Theme of *abhiṣekas*

With regard to the royal patronage of Nṛsiṃhārya, we find some interesting details in 124.13-23 and in 125.52-58. The verses of *adhyāya* 124 show Nṛsiṃhārya keenly preparing himself for the recitation of Rāma's coronation (*rājyābhiṣeka*) at the *piśācas*'s court. Interestingly, the image described by Anantārya resembles to a certain degree the actual practice of *rājyābhiṣeka* as described in various sources¹⁴. However, in the peculiar situation pictured in *Prapannāmṛtam* 123–125, the ritual is somehow distorted: Nṛsiṃhārya seems to assume both the roles, namely that of *purohita* (the priest who performs the consecration) and that of *guru-king* (the person whom the consecration is directed to). In fact, Nṛsiṃhārya leaves the palace the night before the chosen day and, the morning after, he spends some time in a temple¹⁵, although nothing is mentioned about the place, and consecrates an image of Rāmacandra (vv. 13–14). This could be paralleled with the usual ritual, when the priest draws a *maṇḍala* which will then be worshiped. In fact, Nṛsiṃhārya himself, doing the *pūjā*, recites the 108 names of Rāma and makes food offerings, accompanied by 'several Vaiṣṇavas' (vv. 16), who recall the ritual entourage involved in a usual *rājyābhiṣeka*, namely the astrologer and the Vedic expert.

On the chosen day, Nṛsiṃhārya reaches the palace. Here, he is washed - as in the process of *puṣyasnāna*, when the future king is cleansed in various ways¹⁶- and seated on a throne: he becomes the object of the consecration (v. 18). The recitation of the *rājyābhiṣeka* of Rāma might be compared to the recitations of mantras and worship of deities which is done by the future king before the actual coronation. The *piśācas*, moreover, having listened to the exposition of the Rāma's *rājyābhiṣeka*, make *pūjā* to Nṛsiṃhārya and donate great amounts of wealths and

¹⁴See Geslani (2012) for complete references.

¹⁵According to Geslani (2012:341), the *purohita* should spend the night at the sacrificial site but, in the case of the *Prapannāmṛtam* (where most of the events happen at night) it is not particularly odd to be presented with an inverted setting.

¹⁶For a more detailed account see Geslani (2012).

ornament to the teacher, as it happens in the last phase of the pre-consecration (Geslani 2012).

In the other excerpt (125.51-58), we find Nṛsiṃhārya at Virūpākṣa’s court. This time, however, the king himself performs an *abhiṣeka* on the teacher (v. 51):

He [Virūpākṣa] conferred the state of authority, the celestial state and the state of *ācārya* respectively to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, to the auspicious figure of Rāma and to the *guru* Nṛsiha, bull among men.¹⁷

Nṛsiṃhārya, then, performs the king’s initiation to Śrīvaiṣṇavism, through the *pañca saṃskāra*, and reads the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s section about Rāma’s coronation. What is especially intriguing, here, is the fact that Virūpākṣa, now a Śrīvaiṣṇava devotee, performs a golden consecration (*svaṛṇa-abhiṣeka*) on Nṛsiṃhārya. This is probably the way by which an *ācārya* was raised up to the role of *rāja-guru*, literally ‘king’s minister’, a position which for long time held by members of the Tātācārya family in Vijayanagara. Nṛsiṃhārya, thus, undergoes a proper *abhiṣeka* (v. 58).

4.3 Final Observations

As an overall, PA 123–125 uses various literary motifs to serve the purpose of glorifying the Tātācārya family.

The motif of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s recitation is an homage to the Tātācārya for the simple fact that Śrīśailapūrṇa, alleged founder of the family, is recognized as the highest authority on the explanation of the secret meanings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Additionally, granting so evident an importance to this specific text in the context of Vijayanagara makes the claim more powerful, maintaining that it is thanks to the Tātācārya family that Śrīvaiṣṇavism spread throughout the area. The motif of the *ācāryas*’ *dhana-lobha*’, ‘desire for wealth’, remains unprecedented: although Anantārya does not appear to be critical towards the teachers’ greed, as to imply a prior societal settlement of this characteristic, we have not been able to identify any prior source in which such kind of *lobha* is attributed to a good teacher. However, the historical context in which Anantārya operates may bear some implications: after the decay of the Tātācārya family in Vijayanagara - which, as we have previously seen, starts with the battle of Tālikōṭa (1565 CE) - *lobha* might have become a necessity for the impoverished Tātācāryas. The author might have

¹⁷ *rāmāyaṇe rāma-bhadre nṛsiṃha-guru-puṅgave |*
ācārya-daiva-prāmāṇya-bhāvaṃ cakre mahāmatiḥ || 51

just wanted to put forth in a very explicit and straightforward manner the difficult situation in which this important lineage of *rāja-guru* happened to find itself: the image of Nṛsiṃhārya in desperate search for wealth, thus, would have resonated with the targeted audience and should be read as consequence of the historical flow rather than as mere greed.

The apogee of the Tātācāryas' glorification in PA 123–125 is certainly expressed through the various descriptions and realizations of *abhiṣekas*, 'coronations'. The motif of the coronation is particularly significant with regard to this family, as the Tātācāryas were for long serving Vijayanagara kings in the role of *rāja-guru*, 'counselors': their religious duties were paralleled by more political powers, especially relating to the administration of the city's *mathas*, 'temples'. Anantārya's choice of ending his quite long narration, twice interpolated by the description of *rāma-abhiṣekas*, 'coronations of Rāma' (v. 124.13-23; 125.51-58), with another consecration, this time a golden one, is - once again - significant. In fact, the image of a poverty-stricken *ācārya* is, at the end of PA 125, transformed into that of a 'king among *gurus*' who 'makes all the people royal bees at the lotus feed of Rāmānuja' and who 'having conquered his enemies, performs the protection of the world continuously'¹⁸.

¹⁸The Sanskrit reads:

evam nṛsiṃhārya-guru-rāḍ iha sarvalokān rāmānuja-ārya-padapañkaja-bhṛṅga-rājān |
kurvan nirantaram anuṣṭhita-loka-rakṣas tasthau sukkena vijaye nagare jītāriḥ ||63

Conclusions

With this study I hope to have shed some light on a literary work, the *Prapannāmṛtam*, which has not received the attention it deserves. The present dissertation, although analyzing only three out of the 126 *adhyāyas* of the hagiography, provides an introduction and a first insight into the composition of this interesting work. Further research is still needed, and should start with a complete and comprehensive English translation of the remaining chapters.

In addition, I strongly believe that some interesting results can be gathered from a comparative study of the *Prapannāmṛtam*, the *Ārāyirappaḍi* and the *Divya-sūri-caritam*, the other hagiography-like sources mentioned in Ramanujam (1973)¹: the interconnection among the three sources should be investigated, and the approach to texts written in different historical periods and with diverse literary styles could be of use in understanding how hagiographies “take on a historical dimension as the portrayal of the saints changes over time” (Rinehart 1999:3).

My work aimed at emphasizing the possibility to gather historical information from hagiographic texts, for long considered non-historical documents. If, on the one hand, the fact that PA 123–125 makes use of literary devices such as ghosts and apotropaic books - which might bring the plot’s content far away from purely eventual history - is incontrovertible. On the other hand, however, we cannot stop at such a superficial level in our interpretation: in fact, as I hope to have demonstrated in these pages, even by digging into a hagiography we can gather important historical information. In the case of PA 123–125, we reached the conclusion that these three stray chapters were added on purpose by Anantārya with the aim of praising the golden past of the Tātācārya family, whose fortunes had waned.

The first introductory chapter provided some information on the cultural and religious background which most probably formed and influenced Anantārya (16th to 17th century). Beside, we presented some facts regarding the socio-religious panorama of the historical setting of PA 123–125 (circa second half of the 15th century).

After the summaries of the three chapters under analysis, the research focused on how to

¹Ramanujam does not carry out a comparative analysis of the three sources, but briefly explains about possible relations between them.

properly interrogate the source. The basic idea is that, in PA 123–125, there is no proper ‘truth’, but we are rather facing a specific ‘point of view’, namely that of Anantārya: from this perspective, we must be able to ask the right questions to the source. As C. R. Cheyney once said, a source behaves like an old-fashioned and well-educated child: it never speaks to strangers and it expresses itself only if addressed in the proper way (Corrao & Viola 2005:40). In this section, I tried to analyze PA 123–125 through a historical perspective related to the time of the author. The results, in brief, are the following: as a general pattern, the struggles endured by the Tātācāryas after the battle of Tālikōṭa (1565 CE) are throughout paralleled by the description of the poor condition of the two *ācārya*. Nṛsiṃhārya, who is explicitly said to come from a town named Eṭṭur, unmistakably alludes to the Tātācārya family - Eṭṭūr is, in fact, the town of origin of the family. There is however no historical confirmation that this teacher lived at the court of Virūpākṣa. Śrīraṅgācārya - although no source confirms his existence within the Tātācārya family - assumes an important role in the metaphor of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and is therefore certainly needed for narrative purposes. Virūpākṣa, on the other hand, is identifiable with Virūpākṣa II (1465–1485), although a religious conversion from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism in this period has no confirmation in any textual, historical or archaeological source. Rather, his name may have served the particular aim of the author, namely the glorification of the Tātācārya family. In fact, the narrative choice of granting to Nṛsiṃhārya, member of the Tātācāryas, the authority to convert a Vijayanagara ruler and the nearby populations from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism undoubtedly magnifies the grandeur of the Tātācāryas.

In the last section, we analyzed three narrative motifs of the story, namely that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s recitation as *pāpa-naśāna*, ‘destroying the guilts’, that of *dhana-lobha*, the teachers’ ‘desire for wealth’, and that of *abhīṣekas*, the ‘coronations’, to show how each of them is employed by Anantārya to praise the Tātācārya family.

In conclusion, we should consider what is represented in PA 123–125 not as the past, but as a construction of Anantārya: elements of an earlier period, such as the narrative setting of the events in the remote epoch of King Virūpākṣa II (1465–1485 CE), were consciously selected and adopted to describe issues relating to the present time of the author. As such, we should understand PA 123–125 as a *praśasti* for the decayed Tātācāryas by Anantārya, the Tātācārya author of the *Prapannāmṛtam*.

Appendix

This section contains the English translations of the three chapters selected for study, namely PA 123–125.

Adhyāya 123

1. At the beginning, the world's guide, the very illustrious commentator [i.e. Rāmānuja], very renowned, adopted that Kurukeśvara.
2. Having reached the compassion of the Yatirāja [i.e. Rāmānuja], refuge of the two-fold vedānta, and after the order of [his] teacher, Kurukeśava composed a commentary of thousands of songs.
3. Furnished with six thousand verses, that [commentary] forms the supreme beginning. The son of Kurukeśa is known as Padmanetra.
4. The son of Padmanetra is named Kurukeśvara. The son of that [Kurukeśvara] is Puṇḍarikākṣa, great and extraordinary.
5. The son of that Puṇḍarikākṣa is known as Śrīnivāsa. The son of Śrīnivāsa is known as Nṛsiṃhārya.
6. The later son of Nṛsiṃhārya is [called] like Rāmānuja. Nṛsiṃhārya is the offspring of that noble Rāmānuja.
7. Nṛsiṃhārya, of great splendor, learned in all the *śāstras*, reaching a town named Eṭṭūru, was very renowned.
8. He stayed in that town of Eṭṭūru for a short time. In that time King Virūpākṣa, mighty and full of splendor [was ruling].
9. The king ruled with righteousness in Vijayanagara. Having seen the power of Virūpākṣa, [his relatives] were all envious.
10. The father of bulls [Virūpākṣa] knew that [they] made an attempt to kill [him]. When Virūpākṣa had entirely understood that action of those,
11. After having departed from the town, he reached another location and he dwelt in some hidden place.
12. There, he assembled a huge army comprising elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry.

Through that then, the unexpected event [took place] at night, together with the great army.

13. Once Vijayanagara was reached, Virūpākṣa, greatest among the kings, [together with] that great power, completely destroyed all the enemies.
14. The king of the whole world [Virūpākṣa] stayed there in that city called 'Victory', as aforesaid, [and] ruled the kingdom.
15. Those kings killed by him at night were all his relatives. Those people, who were sons, grandsons etc, now became all ghosts.
16. They tormented that king Virūpākṣa day and night. Having abandoned the king's palace, the very wise Virūpākṣa,
17. Having quickly built again another palace, the very powerful one stayed there ruling the kingdom, together with all [his] people.
18. Every night, the tumultuous sounds of those ghosts and their loud chatting was heard there, in that [new] king's palace.
19. In order to release these great-minded kings from the demonic essence, donation of virgins, cows and territories, as well as several donations of houses [were done by him].
20. And those numerous auspicious observances [were] performed [by him] and those others [his people]. He could not cause their terrible, painful, condition of ghost to be freed through those [donations].
21. Then the great Nṛsiāhārya, coming from that Eṭūru city, wandered throughout the regions, driven by [his] desire for wealth.
22. Having not obtained wealth [during that journey], he, learned in śāstras, together with his younger brother, reached the the city of Vijaya, wishing to meet the king.
23. Having taken the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he went to the old palace of the king at night, without anyone knowing about the fact.
24. This Nṛsiāhārya, together with his younger brother, holding the *Rāmāyaṇa*, entered the king's palace, haunted by hundred of ghosts.
25. The ghosts were completely delighted with the gentle appearance. By the sight of these two best among Vaiṣṇavas, [their evil] actions were destroyed.
26. The door-guardians, seeing those two who were carrying a book in their hands, having bowed and having allowed them to pass, stood politely.

27. The two, their hearts satisfied by that, went close to the king. That king, having bowed down to them, quickly [offered] a great and excellent seat to both.
28. Having accommodated and honored them in a special way, and having thoroughly inquired after their health correctly, he reached supreme satisfaction.
29. Nṛsiṃhārya, together with his younger brother, having performed the blessings to the king, very delighted by him, then sat on the seat.
30. Being impelled by the king, the minister then said to those two: “Who are you two great souls? From which region have you arrived?”
31. What is that precious book? Which is the reason for your arrival? Please tell us the whole story, there is great curiosity to hear [it] all”.
32. Having said so in a state of devotion, he listened respectfully to the speech. The very wise Nṛsiṃhārya compelled his brother
33. To quickly tell their life-story to that king. The intelligent one [Nṛsiṃhārya ’s younger brother] being impelled by his [elder] brother Nṛsiṃhārya
34. Spoke an auspicious speech, having approached the king: “Listen, I will then explain our life-story.
35. This illustrious one, very intelligent, is the ornament of the family of Śrīśaila. He knows the true meaning of al the *śāstras*, is omniscient and is the highest among Vaiṣṇavas.
36. This great-souled one, Nṛsiṃhārya, is the manifestation of Nṛsiṃhaka and Lakṣmī together. He is just like Lord Vālmīki, learned in the true meaning of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
37. Oh king, I am his younger brother, and my name is Śrīraṅgācārya. With the purpose of gaining wealth, we both have come [here], because of the desire to see you.
38. Having approached the city of Vijayanagara, we approached you. Now, this book is the *Rāmāyaṇa*, oh undecaying leader.
39. This most excellent *Rāmāyaṇa* culminates with the consecration of Rāma. Hear it from us; By this [listening] instantly a lot of excellent [things] will happen”.
40. The king, together with the minister, was satisfied by that speech. The intelligent king deliberated about their ghostly nature.
41. “These two, best among Śrīvaiṣṇava [were] born in the great family, learned in the essence and meaning of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, devoted to Rāma and very powerful.
42. Now, because of the vision of these two, the great agony derived from our demonic essence

of ghosts is vanished in only an instant.

43. For us bad beings, always afflicted by hunger, thirst etc. and having evil essence; for us eaters of man's flesh, always engaged in awful deeds.
44. This [the *Rāmāyaṇa*] is indeed the example [to follow] in relation to the liberation of our demonic essence. Therefore, we must tamely listen to this completely.
45. Having consulted and decided so, that king, having bowed down with devotion many times, said this word with devotion: 46. "Please tell us that story thanks to the listening of which today we may be protected by you. Oh wise man, now please protect us.
47. Coming here always in the evening, you must tell us this story for the measure of a *yāma*¹. Indeed to your gratification [i.e. 'to pay you back'],
48. Every day, we will give you 2 golden coins with respect. [But] not even a small part of these events should ever become manifest.
49. If it happens to become manifest, then we will have trouble. We will give you the wealth especially on the day of the conclusion".
50. After having heard this speech and having discussed with his younger brother, that Nṛsiṃhārya narrated the beloved story of Rāma continually.
51. From then onwards, the great Nṛsiṃhārya together with his younger brother imparted the *Rāmāyaṇa* everyday at night, for the time of one *yāma*
52. To the king and that entourage in the king's abode. Not even a single person had knowledge of this, [whether] being there or in another place, in the coming and going of those two devotees of Lord Rāma.

So [says] chapter 123 of the *Prapannāmṛtam*, named: "The teaching of the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the ghosts in Vijayanagara, in praise of the lineage of Kuruśeśava, son of the wise Rāmānuja".

Adhyāya 124

1. Then, when several days had gone by, immediately after that, the time of Rāma's consecration occurred.
2. Then, on the day prior to the day of the consecration of Rāma, Nṛsiṃha of great splendor, the very venerable one, together with his younger brother, at night,

¹Three hours.

3. Spoke a speech to the king of ghosts, devotee of Rāma: “The entire story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was told to you by me.
4. But, oh utmost of kings, on the occasion which is going to happen tomorrow, oh Lord of the earth, during the consecration of Rāma, a great festival must be performed.
5. Thanks to this, for you all, the best things will certainly be produced”. Having heard this speech of him, the king, having consulted with his ministers,
6. Told this speech to the best among Vaiṣṇavas: “Oh holiness, if the consecration of Rāma is going to be tomorrow, oh very virtuous one, 7. No doubt I, being satisfied, will be freed from all the evil, as well as all these servants of mine, being completely accomplished.
8. Oh *guru*, having heard from you this auspicious celestial story of Rāma, freed from all the evils, we will reach the Vis.n.ava heaven.
9. Now, we will give you some good amount of money for the consecration of Rāma, oh noble Nṛsiṃhārya, best among the *gurus*. Please accept it!
10. By receiving this here, you shall do his homage. There will be a big festival especially in your village.
11. The supreme coronation of the tiara, which is indeed the utmost, [will take place] tomorrow at night. We’ll give [to you] indeed all the wealth, a lot [of wealth] without doubt”.
12. Satisfied by this speech, that *guru* who is roaring from his throat [Nṛsiṃhārya], performed the blessings with affection along with his younger brother.
13. Taking that wealth, being even more delighted, having then reached his own place together with his younger brother, that great wise one slept.
14. When that night passed away, having done the morning rituals, he performed the consecration of Rāma on that image of Rāmacandra.
15. Having worshiped in the proper way through the 108 celestial names of Lord Rāma, having offered food,
16. He himself, the illustrious one, ate together with some Vaiṣṇavas. Having done this and that [various] evening ritual in the proper way
17. At night, together with his younger brother, he who is glorious entered there [the palace of the ghosts]. All these ghosts, filled with joy, having seen that Vais.n.ava,
18. Performed the *pūjā* as before, by rising from the seat and through respectful salutation. The Vaiṣṇava, whose dirt was cleansed, comfortably sat on the splendid seat.

19. He who knows the *sāstras* recited the chapter about the coronation of Rāma. Looking at the mouth of the speaker, and being close [to him], filled with joy,
20. They were all listening to the coronation of Rāma, all of them standing there with devotion. Having listened to the consecration of Rāma, their mind filled with delight,
21. Then, they all made *pūjā* to that great soul, versed in the *Purāṇas*. Having given the wealth, including ornaments, [which were] in many thousands of hundreds,
22. Having quickly given all those invaluable jewels, which are suitable for kings, having bowed again and again,
23. To that excellent Nṛsiṃhārya, great soul, together with his younger brother, all of them, having joined the hollowed palms of the hands in a reverential gesture, they told a speech to him [Nṛsiṃhārya]:
24. “To you two who know the *śāstra*, omniscient, and with knowledge of the world! You have descended here with a portion of the lord in bodily form!
25. For the sake of protection of beings like me, delighting in evil deeds! We have been released thanks to your glance from the bonds of *karma*!
26. Immediately, we will go to the supreme heaven of Viṣṇu. We will tell all our story, let it be heard; You two should not fear at the narration of our story.
27. We are all relatives of king Virūpākṣa. By some kind of fraud of the king, at night, out of desire for the kingdom,
28. We have been killed by Virūpākṣa at the time of deep sleep. Therefore, all of us acquired the state of demonic essences, together with our families.
29. Virūpākṣa, being afraid of us, having quickly left behind this palace, that earth-ruler moved to another palace.
30. And for our sake, many various dharmic activities were carried out by that king Virūpākṣa with devotion, oh great soul.
31. By this [devotional activity] the ghost-state did not come to an end. Thanks to you two, devotees of Rāma, that ghost-state of us, which was extremely unbearable,
32. Whose effects were terrible, now has come to an end, through the nectar of the divine story of Rāma, which was dripping from your mouth.
33. Now we shall all be completely satisfied, no doubt! We, standing here, are desirous of going towards the Sāntānaloka.

34. Now quickly give us permission, oh brahman of all: a group of divine chariots is seen in the sky, resembling the sun.
35. Coming now from the Sāntānaloka, in a place which is not far from here”. After those ghosts had said so, then that master together with his younger brother,
36. Having given them rice with mantras, after performing the blessings, he who is the reservoir of compassion quickly gave them the permission for final liberation.
37. And then, while all those ghosts were visible for those two, quickly having abandoned their body of ghosts and carrying divine bodies, then,
38. Having mounted the celestial chariot, whose splendor is similar to that of Sūrya and Agni, they all quickly went to the eternal Sāntānaloka.
39. Having observed that miracle, the two reached supreme astonishment. Those two most excellent and very wise men, took all that wealth given by the ghosts.
40. Having quickly reached their own abode, the two events not known by anybody, they were mutually praising the *Rāmāyaṇa* in several ways.
41. Very satisfied by the acquisition of wealth, they happily fell asleep. Then those two great-minded ones, who were approaching their own village, stood there looking for the proper assistance.

So [says] chapter 124 of the *Prapannāmṛtam*, named: “The obtainment of the Sāntānaloka by the ghosts, through the hearing of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* [recited] by Nṛsiṃhārya from Śrīśaila” .

Adhyāya 125

1. Then, some of the citizens who were living in their own houses close to that [old palace], having reached the palace of the king, spoke to that Virūpākṣa:
2. “Today some miracle has happened for us, oh king, in this city: in the previous palace of the king, oh king, nights and days,
3. The cry and the great noise of the terrible ghosts was heard always and again. That great [noise] is not heard now, what a surprise! Please, investigate on this!”
4. Having heard the words of the citizens and having reached supreme astonishment, the great-minded Virūpākṣa, lord of the earth, told them:
5. “By which means was this demonic nature of them liberated? Here in order to get liberation

- from this, many religious acts were done [by me].
6. Not through those, [in fact] the liberation of the demonic essence, which is extremely hard to overcome, happened. Now, by which cause was their demonic essence set free?
 7. Indeed, we should for certain think about this wonder quickly”. Then, having said so, Virūpākṣa, went out along with the citizens.
 8. Having then reached the previous palace of the king, abode of the ghosts, he saw the footprints of those two excellent men.
 9. Having seen those footprints, Virūpākṣa spoke a speech: “Who are now these two who arrived, great souls, the most excellent of men?”
 10. The liberation of their ghost-ness happened thanks to those two, no doubt now! When you find them, those two bull-men, they should be taken quickly.
 11. By which means can these great souls be manifest to me now?” Having thought so, the Lord of kings, Virūpākṣa the great-minded,
 12. Measured the extent of the length of the footprint with a rope. Having properly taken the size of that rope, he [Virūpākṣa] said to the general of the army:
 13. “Oh commander of the army, great-knower, take this rope. Give these samples of rope, which have the measure of this rope [that I measured on the footsteps] quickly,
 14. To all the door-keepers of the city, oh leader of soldiers. By these ropes, in this city,
 15. Quickly give the order to measure the length of the feet of the great souls, of those who are coming and those who are going, of those who are inside here [the city] and of those who are outside.
 16. Those two people whose two feet have the same measure as the extent of this rope, certainly bring them to me with respect.”
 17. The intelligent commander of the army, having accepted his speech, announced the decision continuously without stop.
 18. And he accurately diffused in the whole area the complete story: about what happened at night [the recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*] and about the miracle [the liberation from the demonic essence], which was great, which happened in that king’s residence, during the night.
 19. Those two great souls, having heard their own story, thought: “This Virūpākṣa is no doubt Śiva embodied!”

20. He is an enemy of Vaiṣṇavas, very powerful and [performing] fiery punishments. We do not know: what will this wicked person do to us, having taken us? All the wealth of the king, indeed great, is in our power.
21. Now, because of this, it is not proper to stay at our palace here. Indeed we should now go towards our village, following the prescribed rules.
22. The king's servants stay still at all the first gateways. How will we quickly go, without being seen by anybody?
23. He alone is our protector, Śrī Rāma, Lord Hari". When those two Vaiṣṇavas, being very excellent, had pondered so, then,
24. Having deposited the wealth in Śrī Rāma's hands, [they] went out from the palace at night. However, the king's servant saw these two, best among the twice born, at the first gateways of the city.
25. They quickly measured their two feet through that rope and reached a state of satisfaction. The king's men, having thought "they are exactly those two", having quickly taken these two,
26. Offered them with respect to the great Virūpākṣa. King Virūpākṣa, with devotion, having seen these two, best among the twice born,
27. Being himself pleased, having bowed respectfully, he spoke this speech: "Who are you two, having the appearance of gods, learned in the Vedas, best among Vaiṣṇavas?"
28. Which is the purpose [of your arrival], oh knower of all the treaties? From which land exactly are you coming from? For which reason did you enter the previous palace of the king, [which was] crowded with ghosts?
29. Which great act was produced there by you? Please tell me everything true, there is certainly nothing for you to fear!
30. Having been addressed by the king, the man-teacher Nṛsiṃha, extremely joyful, spoke these words, free from fear, to that ruler of the earth:
31. "Oh Lord of the Earth Virūpākṣa, please listen, I will explain all [of] this story, which is a means of purification and disruption of the wicked.
32. Lord Venkaṭeśvara, a long time ago, imparted the meaning of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* through the 24 chapters
33. To the one whom he called 'oh son', [namely] to the great commentator, great soul in the

- genealogy of that important Śrīśailapūrṇa.
34. Oh very illustrious one, I was born in this lineage which is alone famous in this world, I am called Nṛsiṃhārya, learned in all the *śāstra*.
35. Devotee of Rāma especially, constantly devoted to the story of Rāma, is this wise younger brother of mine named Śrīraṅgācārya.
36. The best among the knower of all the *śāstras*, omniscient, best among the *sadhus*. Therefore, oh king, learn that this here is the book of the holy *Rāmāyaṇa*.
37. Staying in the city of Eṭūr, I was poor and profoundly learned in the Vedas. I myself, accompanied by him [younger brother], because of the desire of wealth,
38. Having arrived at this very best city called Vijaya, once at night, without knowing, [we arrived to] the very high palace of the king.
39. Having reached the supernatural palace of this king, I entered respectfully. Oh best among kings, I saw those ghosts dwelling there.
40. In the [solid] form of men, having the form of king, ministers, nobles etc, all of them, filled with joy performed suitably the *pūjā*.
41. Oh ruler of the earth, of me and of my younger brother who entered here, they then heard this whole story of me from my mouth.
42. They spoke to me a very auspicious speech, with devotion, oh earth-protector: “You, arriving to this place at night-time, every day,
43. Tell the *Rāmāyaṇa*; we will surely give gold to you! (But) do not make even a small part of this story manifest at any time”.
44. Oh king, this happened as it was told [by me] for the eager desire of wealth. In this way, oh king, three months were spent with the story of Lord Rāma.
45. At the time of the coronation of the tiara, a multitude of wealth was given by them. Oh utmost among kings, for us two, seeing all these ghosts,
46. Then, having quickly liberated the bodies from the demonic essence, they were allowed by me to take their divine form.
47. A wonderful celestial vehicle ascended while I was looking. They went in the direction of the Sāntānalokam, oh best among kings.
48. Oh best among kings, this is the truth, this is the truth as it is said by me! Look at the collection of wealth given by them and that ornament suitable for a king.

49. Having said so, the best *guru* Nṛsiṃhārya, great-minded, showed this wealth to king Virūpākṣa.
50. Having looked at all that wealth, which was an invaluable ornament for a king, and reaching supreme astonishment, Virūpākṣa rejoiced indeed.
51. [And] he conferred the state of authority, the celestial state and the state of ācārya, respectively to the *Rāmāyaḍa*, to the auspicious Rāma and to the *guru* Nṛsiṃha, bull among men.
52. Devotion should always be done in (these) three ways: to the *mantra*, to its deity and to the *guru* who bestows the mantra. That is the primary method [to perform *bhakti*].
53. Thus, devotion arose, as well as the wonder of king Virūpākṣa and perpetually of all his subjects staying there.
54. Then the intelligent Virūpākṣa, although being part of the vīraśaivas, accepted those two as Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, descending from the lineage of Śrīśaila.
55. Together with sons, friends, wives etc and the citizens, this world's *guru*, ornament of the Śrīśaila's lineage stayed there.
56. Once Nṛsiṃhārya had accomplished the 5 rites, the very glorious one [Virūpākṣa] hear to the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* from Nṛsiṃhārya, best among the *gurus*.
57. Virūpākṣa, [now] devotee of Rāma, being satisfied, rejoiced indeed. At the time of the consecration of the tiara, with devotion
58. The best among kings [Virūpākṣa] performed the golden consecration on *guru* Nṛsiṃhārya. Then Nṛsiṃhārya, satisfied by that, together with his younger brother,
59. Happily stayed exactly there, next to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas king Virūpākṣa, together with his wife, and ruled this earth.
60. As the king, so [his] people they all became Śrīvaiṣṇavas. After Virūpākṣa abandoned the Virūpākṣa [Śiva] seal,
61. He put up the very strong seal of Lord Rāma on the royal ring. Thenceforth, the seal of Lord Rāma became famous everywhere.
62. Before king Virūpākṣa these kings were all Śaivas; After him, they all became known as Vaiṣṇavas.
63. In this way, the king among *gurus* called Nṛsiṃhārya, making all the people royal bees, at the lotus feet of Rāmānuja, continuously protecting the world, stayed in Vijayanagara

happily, having conquered his enemies.

So [says] chapter 125 of the *Prapannāmṛtam*, named: “The teaching of the Holy *Rāmāyaṇa* to king Virūpākṣa during the conversation between king Virūpākṣa and Nṛsiṃhārya from Śrīśaila”.

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