

TITLE AND PRESENTER OF PAPER:

The layout of the world according to the Nāṭyaśāstra. Some botanical considerations of purāṇic geography.

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of the division of the theatrical stage into compartments (*kakṣyāvibhāga*), Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra briefly dwells on the *kakṣyāvibhāga* of Jambūdvīpa. The latter is consistent with the division of Jambūdvīpa described in the cosmographic accounts of purāṇic literature where it consists of seven world regions (*varṣa*) marked off by six mountain ranges (*varṣaparvata*), all running in an east-western direction. The central *varṣa* Ilāvṛta is frequently divided into three *varṣas* by means of two additional mountain chains running from north to south. Several suggestions as to the origin of this layout have been proposed, yet no general consensus has been reached so far.

The purāṇic Jambūdvīpa is furthermore conceived as a giant lotus flower (*bhūpadma*), the flower's receptacle representing Mount Meru and four petals situated in the four cardinal directions corresponding to four of the nine *varṣas*. A comparison of the rotational symmetry of the World Lotus with the axial symmetry of Jambūdvīpa's *varṣa* layout, however, reveals that the two schemes only fit imperfectly and therefore may originally belong to two separate traditions which were merged at a later date.

In search for answers to the above questions, a look at the Vedic antecedents of the World Lotus is revealing. In the geogonic narratives of several works belonging to the Black Yajurveda, the world is not conceived as a lotus flower. Instead, the world's foundation is stated to be a lotus leaf floating on the Primordial Waters. The merits of both images (i.e. of a lotus leaf and a lotus flower respectively) in a cosmographic context are discussed from a botanical viewpoint and explanations for the substitution of the first by the second in purāṇic cosmography proposed. Finally, a specific feature of the lotus leaf is focused on, which may provide an answer to the purāṇic layout of Jambūdvīpa and thereby bridge the gap between the conception of the world as a lotus leaf and a lotus flower respectively.

The presentation of the paper will be supplemented by visual materials.