

ON THE GENESIS OF THE NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA RITUALS.

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The rituals described in the Nāṭyaśāstra for a long time suffered the lack of a thorough scholarly attention. One of the rare exceptions is perhaps F.B.J. Kuiper's monograph *Varuṇa and Vidūṣaka. On the Origin of the Sanskrit Drama*. Analyses of the ritual-mythological complex of the Nāṭyaśāstra led Kuiper to conclude that drama was at its inception a scenic incarnation of the Vedic cosmogonic myth, while rituals related to drama were nothing else but the varieties of the Vedic sacrifice – yajña. In his study, Kuiper skipped over the fact that the Nāṭyaśāstra rituals are never referred to as “yajña” but are termed “pūjā”. In this case the name of the ritual is of essential importance as in the Vedic tradition the religious practice was never defined as pūjā, and no ritual of that name is mentioned nor described in Vedic texts. Yajña and pūjā are known to have been mutually counterpoised in the Indian tradition, and were topical in different periods of its evolution. Yajña held pride of place as a solemn rite in the Vedic time, while pūjā became widespread in the post-Vedic era to become the central ritual of Hinduism.

In this paper I intend to analyse one of the earliest extant description of the pūjā-type ritual – the Brahmayāga, that came down to us in a source of the late/post-Vedic period – Atharvaveda-pariśiṣṭa XIXb of Śaunaka school. My main point is to demonstrate that the Brahmayāga ritual represents the closest and direct counterpart of the consecration rite of the new templar theatre known from the Chapter III of the Nāṭyaśāstra. Both rituals were performed in order to consecrate a newly built ritual space, which in both texts is referred to as the maṇḍapa. The interior of maṇḍapa was arranged similarly in both cases: the centre was designated by an image of lotus, symbolizing the presence of the supreme deity Brahmā; big circle called maṇḍala was made around it with four cardinal and intermediary points. Moreover, in the Brahmayāga it is possible to single out even the principal stages the of Nāṭyaśāstra ritual.

It is hard to imagine that the striking resemblance of the symbolism, as well as of the structure of both rituals is casual. Coincidences are so great that allow conjecture not only typological but also direct genetic links between the Brahmayāga and the analysed Nāṭyaśāstra ritual. This assumption becomes even more plausible if we take it into consideration the fact that the Atharvaveda-pariśiṣṭa XIXb supplements the Atharvaveda-pariśiṣṭa XIX, where the Indra festival is described, during which according to the mythological testimony of the Nāṭyaśāstra the first divine drama was performed.