

Kūrma Vibhaga

“Divisions of the World”

Chapter 14 of Brihat-Samhita

by Varāhamihira (540 CE)

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With reference to our Puranas, it can be ascertained that Jambūdvīpa (one of the seven continents surrounding the mountain Meru) was divided into nine sub continents each being termed a Varsha. These nine divisions are (1) Kuru (2) Hiraṇmaya (3) Ramyaka (4) Ilāvṛta (5) Hari (6) Ketumāla (7) Bhadrāśva (8) Kinnara and (9) Bhārata. The name of the chapter suggests in itself that the word Kurma instead of being literally translated as ‘tortoise’ should be construed to mean ‘Globe.’ This is further supported by the first sloka of the chapter which starts with nine divisions of the 27 lunar

mansions - each division consisting of 3 stars commencing from Krittika. The reader will note that the original divisions of the zodiac started from the first quarter of Krittika, the star owned by the Sun, the lord of the nine planets.

That our ancient authors went hand in hand with a thorough knowledge of the 18 Puranas is another reason for us to interpret 'kurma' as Globe. For Jayadeva, the poet, in his Gita-Govinda, while describing the 10 incarnations of Vishnu, observes as Kurma, this "one who carries the Globe on his back" and this interpretation is now taken advantage of.

The following remarks of Dr. H. Kern on the subject will also be of interest:

"The word Kūrma is the specific Sanskrit form of a word once common to all Indo-European tongues, viz, Kūrma, Lat. culmus, Teuton: holm, etc. It does not originally denote the 'tortoise' itself, but its back, for the proper meaning is "mound, buckle, half-globe, holm" Even in Sanskrit, in such compounds as Kurmonnata, the word signifies the form of the back of the tortoise. At the time when the word Kūrma Vibhaga became current, Kūrma was taken in its proper sense. Yet in later times, they wholly mistook the meaning and made an absurd drawing, representing a tortoise, as if Kūrma could denote a level. The rendering by 'Globe' is not wholly exact, since properly only a half-globe, a halm is supposed to be raised above the waters."

Sloka 1—To the nine triads of stars commencing from Krittika belong the nine regions of the earth having Bhārata Varsha as its centre and proceeding thence to the East, South-east, etc

Slokas 2-4—To the central region belong the following: - Bhadra, Arimeda, Mandavya, Salwa, Neepa, Ujjihana, Sankhyata, Marwar, Vatsa, Ghosha, those of the Yamuna and the Saraswati, Mathsya, Madhyamika, Mathura, Upajyotisha, Dharmaranya, Surasena, Goura- griva, Uddehika, Pandu, Guda, Aswattha, Panchala, Ayodhya, Kanka, Kuru, Kalakoti, Kukura, Pariyatra mountain, Udumbara, Kapisthala and Hastinapura.

Slokas 5-7—To the east are situated the four mountains, viz. Anjana, Vrishabhadvaja, Padma and Malyavan ; then the Vyaghramukhas, Suhma, Karvatas, Chandrapura, the Surpakarnas, Khasas, Magadha, Mount Sibira, Mithila, Samathata, Orissa, the Aswavadanas, the Danturakas, Pragjyotisha, river Lauhitya, the milky ocean, cannibals, mountain of Sunrise, the Bhadras, Gaudas, Paundras, Utkala, Kasi, Mekala, the Ambashthas, the one- footed people, Tamraliptakas, Kosala and Burdwan.

Slokas 8-10—In the South east are situated Kosala, Kalinga, Vanga, Upavanga, Jatharanga, Saulikas, Vidarbha, the Vatsas, Andhra, Chedi, the Urdhvakanthas, the island of Vrisha, Nalikera Charmadweepa, the inhabitants of the Vindhya range, Tripuri, Smasrudharas, Hemakudya, the Vyalagreevas,

the Mahagreevas, Kishkindha, Katakasthala, the territory of the aborigines, the Purikas, the Dasarnas, naked Sabaras and Parna Sabaras (Sabaras clothed in leaves). These are the regions standing under the group commencing with Aslesha.

Slokas 11-16— In the south are situated Lanka, the Kalajinas, Saurikeernas, Talikatas, Girinagara, the Malaya, Dardura, Mahendra and Malindya hills, the Bharukachchas, the Kankatas, Kankanas, Vanavasi, the Sibikas, Phanikaras, Konkans, Abheeras, the nine-region, the Vena river, the Avartakas, Dasapura, the Gonardas, Kerala, Karnatic, the Great forest, Chitrakuta hill, Nasik, Kolia-giri, the Cholas, the Krauncha island, Jatadharas, the Kaveri, the Rishyamukha (mountain), the mines of Vaidurya, conch shells, and pearls, Atri's hermitage, the mariners, Dharmapattana, the islands, Ganarajya, Krishna Velluru, the Pisikas, the Surpa mountain, mount Kusuma, Tarmbavana, the Karmaneyakas, the southern ocean, the hermitages, the Risheekas, Kinchi, Maruchipattana, Cheryaryakas, the Simhalese, the Rishibhas, Baladeva-pattana, Dandaka forest, the whale-eaters, Bhadras, Kachchas, elephant caves and the Tamraparni river.

Slokas 17-19 —In the southwest, lie the following tracts : of the Pallavas, Kambojas, Sindhu-Sauveeras, Vadavamukhas, Aravas, Ambashthas, Kapilas, Nareemukhas, Anartas, the Phenagiri, Yavanas, Margaras, Karnapraveyas, Parasavas, Sudras, Barbaras, Kiratas, Khandas, Kravyadas (raw-meat-eaters), Abheeras; Chanchukas, the Hemagiri, the Indus, the Kalakas, the Raivatakas, the Sourashtras, the

Badaras and the Dravidas. These and the great ocean stand under the group of asterisms headed by Swati.

Slokas 20-21—In the west are the Manimath and Meghavat hills, Vanaugha, Mount Kshurarpana, Asthagiri, the Aparanthakas, Santikas, Haihayas, Mount Prasasta, the Vokkanas, the Punjab, Ramathas, Paratas, Tarakshiti, the Jringas, Vaisyas, Gold-Scythians and all the lawless hordes of barbarians living in the west.

Slokas 22-23—In the northwest are the Mandavyas, Tusharas, Talas, Halas, Madras, Asmakas, Kulutas, Haladas, the kingdom of Women, Nrisimha forest, the Khashtthas, the river Venumatee, the Phalgulukas, Guluhas, Marukuchchas, Charmarangas, the one-eyed men, Sulikas, Deerghagreevas, Deerghasyas and Deerghakosas.

Slokas 24-28— In the north, lie the mountains known as Kailasa, Himalaya, Vasumat, Dhanushmat, Krauncha and Meru, the Kuru country (north and south), the Kshudra meenas, Kaikayas, Vasatis, Yamunas, Bhogaprasttha, the Arjunayanas, Agneedhras, Adarsas, Antardweepa, Trigartha, the Turagananas, the Svamukhas, Kesadharas, Chipitanasikas (flat noses), Daserakas, Vātadhanas, Saradhanas, Taxila, Pushkalavata, Kailavata, the Kanthadhanas, Ambaravata, Madrakas, Malwa, Pauravas, Kachcharas, Dandapingalakas, Manahalas, Huns, Kohalas, Seetakas, Mandavyas, Bhutapura, Gandhara, Yasovatee, the Hematalas, Kshatriyas, the Khacharas, the Gavyas, the Yaudheyas, Dasamcyas, Syamakas

and Kshemadhurtas.

Slokas 29-31—In the north east are situated Meruka, Nashtarajya, Pasupala, Keera, Kashmir, the Abhitaras, Daradas, Tangams, Kulutas, Sairindhras, Vanarashtras, Brahmapura, the Darvas, Damaras, Vanarajya, Kiratas, China, the Kaunindas, Bhallas, Patolas, Jatasuras, Kunatas, Khasas, Ghoshas, Kuchikas, one-footed men, the Anuviddhas, gold-regions, Vasudhanas, Divishtas, Pauravas, people clad in bark, Trinetras, Mount Munja and the Gandharvas.

Slokas 32-33—When these groups of asterisms beginning with Krittika are hurt by malefic planets, the kings of the following countries will in their order be destroyed; —Panchala, Magadha, Kalinga, Avantee, Anarta, Sindhusauveera, Haraheura, Madra and Kuninda.

Thus ends the 14th Adhyaya [chapter] on the 'Divisions of the Globe' [the Nine Divisions of Kurma, or, the World]