The seven oceans in the Purāṇas and elsewhere

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Abstract

It is unclear when the notion of seven oceans originated. The Vedas have only four oceans. However, the seven oceans are present in the much later Purāṇas. The oceans seem to represent a fantasy about the good things in life, such as milk, curd, ghee, wine, and sugar cane juice. The same picture is present in the Mahābhārata with the exception of the sugar cane ocean. These oceans also represent a transition from cattle-herding nomadic society to a settled agricultural society. Although there is a description of a ritual called the saptasāgaramahādāna in the Matsyapurāṇa, performed by merchants before sailing out on a trading expedition, the Purāṇas were written by Brahmins for Brahmins.

The seven oceans in the Buddhist literature are very different, even though they share the same names to a certain extent. Here we are clearly dealing with merchants crossing dangerous oceans in pursuit of riches, which in its own way corroborates the fact that Buddhism was an anti-brahminical sect with its main following among vaiśyas and kṣatriyas.

1 This article is a considerably extended version of a paper presented at the XIIIth World Sanskrit Conference in Edinburgh in 2006.
The much later 16th century Avadhī poem Padumāvat by Mālik Muhammad Jāyasī reverts back to the purāṇic oceans, but here the oceans represent the trials and tribulations the hero, king Ratan Sen of Chittaur has to go through in his search for Princess Padmāvatī, whose enticing beauty had been described by a parrot brought all the way from Sinhaladvīpa to Chittaur by a poor Brahmin.

In the two latter cases the oceans differ from the purāṇic ones insofar that there are no islands separating each ocean. It would be impossible to sail from one ocean to another in the purāṇic versions, since one will have to traverse an island to reach another ocean.

Keywords: fantasy oceans, trade, dangers, riches, nomadic society to agricultural society to trading society, quest for love and beauty.

“Just imagine the oceans were vodka, and the brooks all Bavarian beer, and our springs would pour forth Chianti, with cognac in pond, lake and mere.”

“This is the beginning of a Swedish drinking song. Its relevance for this paper is not as obscure as it seems – as will be made clear later.

It might seem odd that the ancient Aryans – whether they came from the North-West or were always there – had anything to say about oceans at all. However, the word samudra is well documented already in the Rgveda, and, more interestingly, the Vedic Aryans seemed to have believed that there were four oceans. However, the Vedic Aryans seemed to be landlocked and nomadic, so there cannot have been any trade over oceans. It seems, as we shall develop further below, that the notion of seven oceans was connected with trade on dangerous waters. There are, however, seven rishis, seven rivers, seven sins etc.

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2 This is a more poetic but slightly inexact rendering of the Swedish original.
3 See chapter III.3 “Der Weltozean im Veda” and III.4 “samudra der Indische Ozean” (pp. 92–111) in Lüders, Heinrich: Varuṇa I. Varuṇa und die Wasser, Göttingen 1951.
in the Vedas, so the number seven carried some symbolic meaning which was not extended to oceans.

The concept of seven oceans is, however, well established in the much later Purāṇas. They are enumerated in practically all of them, but not always in the same order. This is how Kirfel\(^5\) arranges them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st group</th>
<th>2nd group</th>
<th>3rd group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lavaṇoda, Kṣāroda</td>
<td>1. Lavaṇoda</td>
<td>1. Lavaṇoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ikṣurasaoda</td>
<td>2. Kṣāroda</td>
<td>2. Kṣāroda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dadhimaṇḍodaka, Dadhi</td>
<td>5. Suroda</td>
<td>5. Suroda</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Kirfel’s first group comprises most Purāṇas and the second group comprises the Bhaviṣya-, the Matsya- and the Varāha-Purāṇa. Kirfel’s third group, which consists of only the Padma Purāṇa and the Mahābhārata, has only six oceans, the missing seventh (or sixth, since all the lists seem to end with the sweet-water ocean) being the ikṣurasa ocean.\(^6\) The six oceans mentioned in the critical edition of the Mahābhārata are the salt ocean in Mah. 6.6.14 (lāvaṇena samudreṇa samantāt parivāritaḥ), the milk ocean in 6.12.9 (sāgaro pi vibhāgaśaḥ kṣīrodo bharaṭaśreṣṭha yena samparivāritaḥ) and then, in Mah. 6.13.2 we find the clarified butter ocean, the wine ocean, and the buttermilk, not curd, ocean. The last one which Kirfel labels jalasāgara is not mentioned by that term. Instead we find a mysterious heat-ocean (gharmasāgara)\(^7\) which we presumably have to understand as the sweet water ocean. Or else, is it the missing ikṣurasa ocean?

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\(^6\) Ibid. p.56.
\(^7\) Ghṛtatoyah samudro 'tra dadhimaṇḍodaka 'paraḥ / surodah sāgaraś caiva tathānyo gharmanasāgaraḥ Mah. 6.13.2.
The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* tells us that the seven oceans were created when Priyavrata rode his chariot around the earth seven times, and the ruts left by the wheels became the beds of the oceans, separating the large continent into seven *dvīpas*. Only one of these oceans is what is ordinarily understood to be an ocean, namely a vast expanse of salt water.

All Kirfel’s groups agree that the first ocean surrounding Jambudvīpa is the *kṣāra* or *lavaṇa* ocean, i.e. the salt ocean. Then follows pure fantasy: the sugarcane juice ocean, the liquor ocean, the clarified butter ocean, the curd or buttermilk ocean, the milk ocean and the sweet water ocean, the *svādūdaka samudra*, which is sometimes said to consist of pure holy water from *tīrthas*.

All these liquids, with the exception of the salt ocean, are very precious substances, something one could not indulge in except on festive occasions, just as the Swedish drinking song fantasy quoted in the beginning, although what was precious for the old Indians is of course somewhat, but not entirely, different from what is precious for the contemporary Swedes and other Scandinavians.

The milk, curd and ghee go back to a cattle-rearing possibly nomadic tribal society which we call the early Aryans. The sugarcane requires a settled, agricultural society. Sugarcane did not exist in the Western world until the Arabs brought it from India into the Mediterranean around the 8th century A.D. So the ancient Aryans who are said to have migrated into India did not know about sugarcane, which originated in southeast Asia, in Papua New Guinea. The word *‘kauśara’* in *Ṛgveda* I.191.3, claimed by some to mean sugarcane is glossed by MW as ‘a kind of reed’ (and under *ku* which might mean it was a bad weed) and not at all found in Āpte. However, the word *ikṣu* is attested in *Atharvaveda* 1.34.5 and the much later Kautilya

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8 Bh. P. 8.4.
mentions a whole range of sugar products from sugarcane. So sugarcane must have been cultivated at an early stage, maybe by the non-Aryan peoples of India. The Vedic Aryans used honey, *madhu*, as sweetener.

The *surā samudra*, which follows the *ikṣurasā samudra* in most of the Purāṇas, should perhaps not be translated as wine ocean, since wine from grapes has only been made in India in recent years. Grapes are said to have been grown by the Aryans in “lands which were frequently flooded,” a somewhat strange statement. They were likely brought in by the Greeks, but there is no conclusive evidence that wine was made from grapes. *Surā* is usually liquor made from distilled, fermented barley, or wild paddy, flowers, or just about anything that can be fermented. Of course, it could even be fermented distilled *ikṣurasā*, in other words rhum. Drinking was always popular, although it is considered one of the seven transgressions, *sapta maryādāḥ* – another group of seven! – in Rgveda X.5.6.

The three oceans made from milk are curiously in inverted order. The normal order is that one makes *dadhi* from milk, and then *ghṛta* from *dadhi*. Not the other way around. The last ocean, the *svādādaka samudra*, the tasty water ocean, is of course also very precious, especially if it consists of water from holy tīrthas.

The only really remarkable thing about the seven oceans in the Purāṇas is that, apart from the enumerations, nothing at all is said about them, whereas the islands *dvīpas* are described in lengthy details, their rivers, mountains, fauna and flora, inhabitants, etc. The purāṇic oceans are a pure fantasy which deliberately conceals the fact that the real ocean is very threatening indeed. Maybe by imagining the oceans as consisting of desirable liquids it was a way of averting its terrible force. This would explain the ritual of the *saptasāgaramahādāna*, a sacrifice described in detail in the *Matsya Purāṇa* chapter 287. V.S. Agrawala has written an illuminating article about this very sacrifice in an article published in the journal *Purāṇa*.

14 Cf. Om Prakash, *op. cit.* pp. 404–405 and p. 438 under *mārdvīka* with ref. to Kautilya, the *Suśruta saṃhitā* and the *Viṣṇudharmasūtra*.
1960. The sacrifice consists of putting salt (lavaṇa), milk (payas), clarified butter (sarpis), molasses (guḍa), curd (dadhi), sugar (śarkara), and finally holy water (tīrthavāri) in seven different basins or bowls (kuṇḍas) along with figures of Brahmā, which should be of gold, in the bowl with salt, Keśava/Viṣṇu in the milk bowl (kṣīramadhye), Maheśvara/Śiva in the ghee bowl (ghṛtamadhye), Bhāskara (i.e.: Sūrya) in the molasses (guḍamadhye), Niśādhipa (i.e. the Moon/Chandra) in the curd (dadhimadhye), Lakṣmī in the bowl with sugar (śarkarāyām) and finally Pārvatī in the pure water bowl (jalamadhye). Then the sacrificer should put gems and grain also in each bowl. All this is presumably poured or thrown into a well with the appropriate rites. Note that in this passage (Matsyapurāṇa 287:5–9) have here two kinds of sweet, guḍa and śarkara, but no liquor. A little later in the same chapter the list reads: ksīrodakā́jya-dadhi-mādhura-lāvaneksurasārāmṛtam (ikṣusāra could be a misprint for ikṣurasā). However, ikṣusāra is molasses, raw sugar, i.e. the same as guḍa. Here ikṣusāra and mādhera replace the guḍa and śarkarā from the earlier verses (287. 6 and 7). Mādhura is glossed by Āpte as the flower of the mallikā creeper (Jasminum sambac). This does not make much sense here – I suspect we should actually read either madhura, red sugar cane or molasses, same as guḍa, or maybe even madhūka, in other words the familiar spirit made of mahuā blossoms which I’ll discuss later. Agrawala says that this rite was performed for tradesmen about to undertake or returning from an arduous sea voyage. The Matsya Purāṇa contents itself by saying that this ritual, like all costly rituals, increases the wealth of the sacrificer and sends him to “the realm of Viṣṇu” and he “also liberates his sons, wife, father, grandfather etc. from sins and sends them to heaven from hell” – and fattens the Brahmins, the latter of course not said.

Unfortunately, Agrawala doesn’t say how he found out it was tradesmen who performed this sacrifice. It seems a logical conjecture, but it would be interesting to find the source for this information. It is a fact that overseas trade was well established during the Gupta
Empire (240–550 A.D.). A agrawala points out the existence of wells used for the purpose in Benares, Allahabad, Mathura, Ujjain and Patna. If those wells are still to be found, they are but decaying remnants of long forgotten anxieties.

The Purāṇas were written by Brahmins for Brahmins, so the oceans could easily be relegated to pure fantasy as the above-mentioned lists demonstrate. Brahmins did not sail the oceans. Vaiśyas, kṣatriyas and the lower orders did. When oceans are dealt with realistically, or sort of, it is the dangerous aspects that predominate. The famous example is the Supāraga jātaka or Suppāraka jātaka where one dangerous ocean follows another. But they all contain great treasures, another oceanic fantasy. In the Supāraga jātaka we are dealing with oceans for seafarers, waters to be traversed for trading purposes. There are no concentric dvīpas here. The ship simply sails into an ocean after another, most of them fraught with danger like the real ocean. However, some idea of concentric circles may be underlying, since the Jātaka oceans end with the word –māla or –mālin, that is a garland which usually encircles something. The Sanskrit and the Pāli version differ slightly, as seen from the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Jātakamālā oceans:</th>
<th>The Pāli canon oceans:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. mahāsamudra (14.3 ff)</td>
<td>1. mahāsamudda</td>
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<tr>
<td>also called pakatisamudda = the real/natural ocean</td>
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21 I visited the Mathura Museum on June 9, 2007. There is indeed a dried-up well 300 feet deep just outside the main museum building, but there is no way of knowing if that was the well used for the saptasṛgaramahādāna. Two murtis were fished up from the well in 1914 and 1915 resp. One is a five-faced Śivalīga from the Gupta period (acq. no.15.516) and the other a Kushana Vishnu (acq. no 14.392–395 – it consists of four joined pieces). Neither of these two could possibly have been part of the saptasāgara sacrifice, since they are too big to have been put in a bowl. There were no little gold murtis found, expectedly.
23 For illustration of this Jātaka see www.borobudur.tv/jataka_014.htm.
The story goes as follows: Suppāraka, who of course is the Buddha in an earlier incarnation, is an excellent navigator, although old and blind. He is urged to come aboard a ship by the tradesmen of a city called Bharukaccha. They think that his mere presence on board will bring luck and guarantee success. They sail from one terrifying ocean to another, but with Suppāraka, the Bodhisattva, on board it all ends well.

These oceans, full of silver, gold and gems, are very different from the purānic ones and seem to belong to an entirely different tradition: one where the ocean was feared. The troubles start immediately: the merchants traverse the mahāsāgara, the ordinary saltwater ocean, which the Pāli version calls the pakatisamudda, i.e. the real ordinary salt water ocean, encounter storms, hissing serpents, and all kinds of dangers. They spend some four months at sea. And it gets worse: after the mahāsāgara they then sail into the khuramāla-samudda, Pāli khūramāla-mamudda where fish looking like men (or vice versa) with razor-pointed noses dive up and down:

\[ \text{āmukta-rūpā-kavacā iva dāitya-yodhā ghoreksanāḥ khura-nikāśa-virūpā-ghonāḥ / ummajaṇāvatarāṇa-sphurāṇa-prasaṅgāt kṛdiṁ ivārṇavajale 'nubhavanti ke 'pi} / \]

Surprisingly, Speyer translates “ugly noses that resemble a quadruped’s hoof” when it is more likely that these creatures have noses that are like razors, Sanskrit kṣura, here transliterated to khura.

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24 Jātakamālā 14.12–13, Speyer tr, (see bibliography) p.128.
25 See Āpte Dict. p. 640. Thanks to Prof. Renate Soehnen-Thieme for drawing my attention to this.
The Pāli text reads: *ummujjanti nimujjanti manussa khuranāsikā* “men with razor-pointed noses dive up and down.” It is likely that the seafarers are seeing either dolphins or sharks.

After the razor-garland ocean they reach the milk ocean, *kṣīrāṇava*, also called the *dadhimāḷi* ocean, which in the *Jātakamāḷa* is followed by the *agnimāḷi samudra*. The Pāli order is inverted: first *aggimāḷi*, then *dadhimāḷi* (see list above). The interesting thing here is that there is no difference between milk and curd, the milk ocean simply gets a garland of curd!

Then they reach an ocean garlanded with *kuśa* grass, the *kuśamāḷi samudra* the *nīlavāṇṇakusamāḷa* in the Pāli version, then a mysterious *nalamāḷi sāgara*, Pāli *nalamāḷa samudda*, both further discussed below.

Finally they reach the most terrifying ocean of them all, where the so called submarine fire resides, the *vadavāmukha samudra*, Pāli *vaḷabhā-mukhasamudda*. The Sanskrit/Pāli word literally means the mouth of the mare. The deceptively similar, maybe even cognate Swedish word *mareld* is defined as “the light given out from small fluorescent marine animals.” The submarine fire sometimes seen off the West coast of Sweden is described as

...Noctiluca scintillans and it is a single-celled animal 1–2 millimeter long belonging to the plankton group dinoflagellata. ... It lives all along the Swedish west coast and many other places in the world. But Noctiluca is not the only shining star neither in Swedish waters nor in foreign waters. In Sweden alone there are at least 35 [animals] related to *Noctiluca* that also can glow. Moreover, there are small crayfish (jumping crayfish) which [also] can get the sea to glow at night. ...The light is caused by a chemical process called bioluminescence. When *Noctiluca* is disturbed the chemical balance inside the animal

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26 Fausboll *Jātaka* Vol. IV, p. 139.
28 *Jātakamāḷa* 14.15.
changes so that two substances, luciferin and luciferas react to each other. An effective reaction gives light, but no warmth.

The submarine fire could be some kind of firefly squid, *Watasenia scintillans*, found in the Western Pacific Ocean. This depends on how far around the Pacific the ancient Indian merchants sailed. However, it is a fact that submarine bioluminescence exists. The remaining mystery is why this is called *vadavāmukha*. What does a mare have to do with the natural phenomenon of submarine fire? The seafarers actually do not reach this ocean in the *Jātakamālā*, and beat a hasty retreat from it in the Pāli version.

What are the significant traits of these Buddhist oceans, apart the fact that they are dangerous to traverse? All, except the first, the ordinary salt water ocean and the last, the dangerous mare-mouth ocean, contain jewels, silver and gold, and they all invoke a specific colour which is likely to reflect the colours of gems: *khuramālī* has diamonds, presumably because of the greyish-white colour of the dolphins or sharks, that *agnimālī* has gold, the *dadhimālī* silver.

The jewels of the *kuśamālī* ocean are more problematic. The Pāli version says *tasmin pana samudde nilamaniratanam ussannam ahosi*, reinforced by the term *nīlavannakusamālā nāma samuddam* which seems to indicate saphires. However, the Pāli Text Society translation settles for emeralds, not saphires. This is probably founded on the fact that *kuśa* grass is green, not blue. However, there is no real distinction between green and blue in Sanskrit, which makes it very difficult to know whether an emerald or a saphire is intended. So that must be true for Pāli also.

In the Sanskrit version Speyer translates *parinata-kuśa-parna-varna-tovāḥ salila-nidhiḥ katamo nv ayam vibhāti / sukusuma iva*

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33 Uppslagsbok för alla, Stockholm 1910, translation mine. My thanks to Colonel Per-Arne Persson of the Swedish Armed Forces for this information.
34 See www.seasky.org/monsters/sea7a1o.html.
35 The *vadavāmukha samudra* is also mentioned in *Mbh*. 12.290.68.
36 Fausboll IV, p. 140.
37 Jātaka translation IV, p. 89.
The Seven Oceans in the Purāṇas

*phena-bhakti-citrair anilajavākalitais taraṅgabhaṅgaiḥ* // as “‘Which of the seas now appear to us? Its waters have the colour of the blades of ripe kuśa-grass. The breaking of its wind-stirred billows crowns it a many-coloured foam-ornament, and makes it look as if it were overspread with flowers.’”

There is no real mention of jewels at all in the *Jātakamāla*, but one must assume that ripe, uncut kuśa grass is green, and the ocean is rather likely blue.

Then the merchants approach the sixth sea: *vaṃśarāga-vaidūrya-prabha-vyatikara-harita-salilam aparṣ samudram ālokya* rendered by Speyer as “perceiving another sea, the water of which had a greenish colour like that proceeding from the united brilliancy of emeralds and beryls.” The rendering of *vaṃśarāga* as ‘emerald’ comes from the following śloka:

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marakata-harita-prabhāra jñalair vahati navām āvām ṣādvala-śriyam / 
kumuda-ruciρa-phena-hūṣanah saliś-nidhiḥ katamo ‘yam ākṣyate //... 

naṃlamātyāṣa sāgarah //
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“The sea we now behold has yet another appearance. Its waters have a green shine of emeralds and resemble a splendid meadow; they are adorned with foam as lovely as waterlilies. Which sea is this again?” … This is the Nalamāla ocean.”

The Pāli version is much more problematic: *nāvā... nalavanaṃ viya ca veḷuvanamviya ca khāyamānaṃ Nalamaḷam nāma samuddaṃ pāpuni – “the ship came to a sea called Nalamaḷa, which had the aspect of an expanse of reeds or a grove of bamboos.”* Nala means some kind of reed, maybe bamboo. But the commentary insists it has to be some kind of reddish reed: *nalo ti vicchikanalo kakkaṭalopi so rattavanṇho hoti, veḷu ti pavāḷass’ etaṃ nāmaṃ, so samuddo pavāḷussanno rattobhaso ahosi – “Nala is scorpion-reed or crab-reed [which are] red in colour. Veḷu is the name for coral (pavāḷa), this ocean was red like coral.”

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39 *Jātakamāla* 14, 18, Speyer translation p. 130.
42 *Jātakamāla* tr. p. 130.
43 Fausboll IV, p.140, tr. IV, p. 89.
44 Must refer to a cooked crab, since uncooked crabs are greyish.
45 ibid. p. 141, translation mine.
The description of this ocean concludes with *tasmim pana samudde vaṃsāṛāga veḷuṛiyam ussannam* i.e. an ocean full of *vaṃsāṛāga* and *veḷuṛiya*. *Vaṃsāṛāga* is found in the PTS Dictionary and glossed as ‘the colour of bamboo, a term for the veḷuṛiya gem’, but not in any Sanskrit dictionary, which seems to indicate that the *Jātakamālā* is based on the Pāli *jātaka*, not the other way around. But the PTS Dictionary defines *veḷuṛiya* as lapis lazuli, which decidedly is blue, not at all the colour of bamboo. But scorpions and crabs can under no circumstances be blue (see note 41), so we must believe the commentator that we are talking about coral, i.e. we are dealing with a red colour. To add to the confusion *veḷuṛiya* is probably the same as Skt. *vaīḍurya*, i.e. cat’s eye, a chrysoberyl, which is yellowish, not at all lapis lazuli. Here again we have a confusion of colours: red and yellow are often confused, just as blue and green are.

Whatever kinds of gem were found in these Buddhist oceans, they all represent wealth and seem to reflect a mercantile culture far away from the brahminical purānic fantasies which mainly cater to gourmandise or gluttony. However, the gold and silver statuettes and the gems that went into the bowls in the *saptasāgaramahādāna* bridge the two cultures, and both castes get their due.

In later Sanskrit literature the seven oceans are merely a poetic convention. As such we meet all seven of them in the *Naiṣadhīyaacarita*. They appear in *sarga XI* during Damayanti’s *svayaṃvara*. Different candidates are pointed out to Damayanti by Sarasvatī. Among them are the kings of the seven *dvīpas* which the oceans surround, so both the islands and the oceans are mentioned. First comes the sweet-watered ocean in XI.27: *svādūke julanidhau savanena sārdham bhāvyā bhavantu tava vārī-vihāra-līlāḥ*, translated by K.K. Handiqui as “let the joys of thy water-sports with king Savannah prove charming in the sweet-watered ocean” with the curious, and entirely wrong, foot-note saying “the ‘sweet-watered ocean’, i.e. the ocean of milk.”

The milk-ocean (*kṣīrārṇava*) appears in

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46 Fausboll IV.141.
47 See note 32 above.
48 It would be interesting to know which gems went into which bowl, but, unfortunately, the *Matsyapurśa* doesn’t say.
49 Handiqui p. 160.
50 See earlier discussion of this ocean.
XI.40: kṣīrāṅnavas tava katāka-rauci-ecchaṭānāṃ anvetu tatra vikāṭayitam āyatākṣi, rendered as “long-eyed one, there let the ocean of milk imitate the play of the beams of lustre issuing from thy glances…” In the following verse (XI.41) it is made clear that Viṣṇu, here called Madhu-bhid, lives there.

The third ocean is thedadimāṇḍa, usually rendered as thebutter-milk ocean. In the Naiṣadhīyacarita we find dadhi-maṇḍapayodhi-pūrab “the lake from the dadimāṇḍa ocean” (XI.49). The commentator Nārāyaṇa explains dadimāṇḍa as marīca-sarkārdimśram mastu iti, i.e. sour cream or whey (mastu), mixed with pepper (marīca) and sugar (sarkara). What ādi (etc.) stands for one can only guess. Handiqui cleverly translates dadimāṇḍa as the “Ocean of Spiced Curds.” A.N. Jani renders marīca as red pepper, which is misleading, since red pepper usually means chilli pepper which had not reached India at the time the Naiṣadhīyacarita was composed.

The fourth ocean in XI.53 is the regular dadhi-mahodahi, the Ocean of Curds, and the fifth in XI.58 is the ghī ocean, ghṛtoda-tāṭiṣu “on the banks of the clarified butter ocean.” Then the liquor or wine ocean is mentioned in XI.67 dvīpasya sālmala iti prathitasya nāthah / pāṭhoḍinā valayitasya surāmbunāyam // – “He is the lord of the famous island called Śālmala, encircled by an ocean whose water is wine (surā); and finally the sugarcane juice ocean is mentioned in XI.75: pītvā tavādhara-sudhāṃ vasudhā-sudhāṃśv na śraddadhātus rasaṃ ikṣu-rasoda-vārām “having drunk the nectar of your lips the moon of the earth will not take to the juice of the waters of the sugarcane juice ocean.”

Curiously absent is the ordinary salt water ocean. This in itself proves the point that the seven oceans are pure fantasy meant to conjure up something pleasant and enjoyable as in the Swedish drinking song.

51 Ibid. p. 162.
52 Ibid. p. 164.
53 Jani p. 216.
54 There are, of course, many other instances where the seven oceans are mentioned in the vast Sanskrit literature. These are just a few examples, not an exhaustive list.
The final set of particularly interesting oceans to be found in the 16th century Avadhī poem *Padumāvatī* by Mālik Muhammad Jāyasī.55 The story is about king Ratan Sen of Chittaur, who, in the guise of a yogi in quest of love and beauty, sets out to Sinhaladvīpa to win princess Padumāvatī, here called Padumāvatī. Jāyasī’s oceans follow the purānic ones very closely. Just as Kirfel’s third group, Jāyasī does not mention an ikṣurasa, sugarcane juice ocean, although sugarcane would most likely have been grown in Avadh in his time. This seems to indicate that he follows either the *Mahābhārata* or the *Padmapurāṇa*, but he adds in a seventh ocean to make the magic number seven. Maybe as a Muslim he also knows about Sinbad the Sailor and the seven oceans in the Islamic narrative tradition. As in the *Supāraga jātaka*, there are no dvīpas separating the oceans, they just follow one after the other: mile samumda vai sātāum behara behara nīra (PA 150.8b) – “the seven oceans meet, [but] with separate waters.” These oceans are very different from the ones described in the *Supāragajātaka*, but also very unlike the dry purānic lists. Jāyasī describes each and every ocean, tying the description of the oceans into Ratan Sen’s arduous and burning quest. Jayasī’s oceans are as follows:

1. *khāra samumda* – the salt water ocean
2. *khīra samumda* – the milk ocean
3. *dadhi samumda* – the curd ocean
4. *udadhi samumda* – the ghee ocean
5. *surā samumda* – the liquor ocean
6. *kilakila samumda*?
7. *mānasara samumda* – the Mānasarovar ocean, i.e. the pure water ocean

The party sets out sailing the *khāra samumda*. Like *Supāraga*, Ratan Sen’s truthfulness guarantee that they hold out against storms with enormous waves, crocodiles and turtles.56 They then reach the milk ocean, which is – expectedly – white and contains pearls, rubies and

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55 There are several editions of this text. All my ref. are to V.S. Agrawala’s edition – see bibliography. I have also used Mātā Prasād Gupta’s edition for comparisons. There is only one English translation of this text: Shirreff, A.G.: *Padmāvatī*, Calcutta 1944, which predates both Agrawala’s and Gupta’s editions. It is based on Grierson’s and Shukla’s editions. I will use the abbreviation PA for the Agrawala ed. and Sh. for Shirreff’s translation.

56 PA. 150.1–6.
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diamonds,57 followed by the dadhi samumda. The first three do not require any explanation, but the remaining ones cry out for one. udadhī samumda cannot mean “the ocean ocean” or “the sea of ocean” as V.S. Agrawala, Mātā Prasād Gupta and Shirreff all interpret it,58 since that doesn’t make sense. Let’s first note that from milk we get curd, and the previous stanza seems to imply that the milk was first boiled before it was set to become curd. The curd is then churned to give butter, which in turn gives ghee. This is exactly what happens: udadhī samumda means the ghṛta ocean. Neither Agrawal nor Mātā Prasād Gupta, these two eminent Hindī scholars, make the slightest comment about the “ocean ocean”, they just repeat the text’s udadhī samumda/samudra, and Shirreff, with some bewilderment and in total rejection of common sense calls it “the sea of ocean.”59 It is possible that Shirreff understands udadhī samumda to mean the fresh water ocean, jala samumda.

The word udadhī is used a relatively limited number of times in the Padumāvat.60 Mathur has only two examples of udadhī: In the first example PA 583.4 udadhī surely means “ocean”: būṛati hauṃ dukha udadhī gambhīrā61 – “I am drowning in the deep ocean of grief”, but in the second udadhī is part of an enumeration of the seven oceans: khāra khāra dadhi udadhī surājala puni kilakilī akāta / ko cārhi bāmhāy samumda ye sātaum hai kākara asa būta //62 It is worth noting that the seventh, the Mānasarovar ocean is omitted here, despite the number seven spelt out. I have found one more example where udadhī must mean ‘ocean’: kayā udadhī citavaun piya pāhām – “In the ocean of [my] body I see [my] beloved near”63 but in udadhī

57 PA. 151.1–2.
59 Sh.15.4.1, see also Sh.13.2.8.
60 I have drawn on Mathur, Ramesh: Padmāvata. An Etymological Study, Delhi 1974, as much as possible. Mathur’s Index Verborum, which refers to Agrawala’s edition, useful as it is, is unfortunately incomplete, which may be explained by the fact that it was compiled before the computer age. So there may be some udadhī I have missed, although I have added four more instances to Mathur’s list: PA 401.1, 516.5, 522.2 and, of course, in the chapter under consideration, PA chap. 15 sāta samudra khaṇḍa stanzas 150–158, esp. PA153, which is not listed in Mathur’s index.
61 PA.583.4=Sh. 48.3.4. However, Shirreff has another reading here.
62 PA.141.8=Sh. 13.2.8.
63 PA 401.1.
samudra jēṁ laharāṁ it is not clear what udadhi actually stands for. This is corroborated with another example: duauṁ samumda dadhi udadhi apāra, which Shirreff translates as: “They were like the two boundless oceans of milk and of water.”65 In both these examples the udadhi refers to the armies. In PA 522.2 Alauddin Shah’s army is described, in PA 516.5 the two armies, Ratan Sen’s and Alauddin Shah’s. If my contention is right that udadhi actually means ghee, then these examples would allude to the colour of the soldier’s garments, which would imply that Alauddin’s soldier wore something yellowish and Ratan Sen’s pure white.

To prove that udadhi can mean ghee, let’s return to the description of the udadhi samumda in PA 153. We first meet with the image of burning: āe udadhi samumda apārām / dharaṭī saraga jaraĩ tehi jhārām – “They reached the boundless/shoreless udadhi samudra. Its flame/heat burns [both] earth and heaven.”66 This is followed by āgi jo upani ohi samundā / lanāṅ jari ī eka bunda // – “from that ocean fire arose – one [single] drop of it could burn Lanka.”67 Thereafter the stanza resumes the theme of the narrative, namely Ratan Sen’s separation from his beloved, which of course also is a burning experience, the fire of separation,68 and then the concluding dohā says: talaphai tela karāha jimi imi talaphai tehi nīra – “as oil bubbles in the frying pan, in the same way the water of it [i.e. the udadhi samumda] bubbled.”69 This is a very down-to-earth and accurate picture of the actual melting or lightly frying of butter, which is extracted from curd, to separate the frothy impurities, i.e. the bubbles so that ghee is obtained. Jayasī himself says in the previous stanza about the dadhi samumda that ghī is extracted from dadhi: dahī māḫīṁ mathi kārāi ghīu – “having churned the curd, ghee is extracted.”70 Furthermore, the normal words for fresh water in

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64 PA 522.2=Sh. 43.7.2.
65 PA 516.5=Sh. 43.1.5.
66 PA 153.1= S 15.4.1.
67 PA 153.2=S.15.4.2.
68 Bíraha kai jhārā PA 153.5.
69 PA 153.8.
70 PA 152.2.
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Padumāvat are jala, nīra and pānī, not udadhi. Why, then, would fresh water be called udadhi here?

My next contention is that udadhi here actually stands for a hypothetical *avadadhi which would mean something like ‘coming out of dadhi’. *Avadadhi can become udadhi via audadhi. Au is undoubtedly a long vowel, but, as similar cases mentioned in Pischel show, a long vowel, in this case au can be abbreviated before a stressed syllable, and the stress in the word udadhi would fall on the second syllable /da/ distinguishing it from the udadhi meaning ‘ocean’, where the stress would normally fall on the first syllable /u/. So phonetically it is possible for *avadadhi to become udadhi. A further example of ava- transforming into a short /u/ is Hindi utarnā ‘descend’ from ava+Ti.

The patent disadvantage of this interpretation is that nowhere is a word *avadadhi found as such, much less meaning ghee. It could, however, be an invention of Jāyasi who is very fond of punning. By interpreting udadhi samuṇda to mean the clarified butter ocean, the stanza has the advantage of making sense.

From this ocean Ratan Sen proceeds to the surā samuṇda, which Shirreff of course translates as ‘wine ocean’, and Agrawala and Gupta just leave as surā sumuṇda. This stanza at least proves – as if that was necessary - that surā means liquor, not wine. Jayasi makes that crystal clear: surā sumuṇda puni rājā āvā / mahuā mad chāta dekharāvā // – “The king came to the liquor ocean, it looked like an intoxicating cover of mahuā flowers.”

Both Agrawala and Gupta translate mahuā as mahue ke phūl, i.e. the mahuā flowers which are still collected, fermented and distilled to make country liquor. Mahua liquor is very likely the kind of liquor Jāyasi would know about, since the tree grows all over the region

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71 See Mathur’s Padumāvat word index, p. 66, 107 and 118.
72 Pischel, Richard: Comparative grammar of the Prākṛt languages, Delhi 1965, § 81, p. 75.
73 PA 154.1. My translation follows Agrawal and Gupta, Shirreff 15.5 has a slightly different interpretation.
where he lived, namely Avadh. The tree in question is *Bassia latifolia*. It is a tall, wide tree with large flowers which grows all over India up to an altitude of 4,000 feet. That the *surā samuṇḍa* here means a distilled liquor, not wine made from grapes is further corroborated by the word *potī* in PA154.6. *Potī*, (or *potā* in the text used by Shirreff) “is the technical term for a water-cooling jacket used in distilling.”76 The word *mahuā* occurs several times in *Padumāvat*,77 but so does the word *dākha* ‘grapes,’78 of particular interest is the line: *tajai dākha mahuā rasa cākūhā* (PA 429.5) – “having abandoned the grapes [or wine] he tasted the mahuā [spirit].”

It is not likely that wine was made from grapes in Jāyasī’s days. First, grapes do not grow in Avadh, which seems to be the only country Jāyasī actually knew,79 and even if grapes were known, it is not sure wine was made, nor that they were distilled.80 So we can probably assume that Jāyasī’s *surā samuṇḍa* is an ocean of *mahua* spirit.

From the *surā* ocean Ratan Sen proceeds to the sixth ocean, the *kilakila samuṇḍa*, which gets two full stanzas.81 This is a terrifying sea with waves high as mountains whirling around like a potter’s wheel. In the middle of this ocean there is a path dividing it “like the blade of a sword” *khāṃḍai kai asi dhāra ninārā* (PA 156.5). This path stretches for thirty thousand leagues *tīsa sahasra kosa kai pāṭā* (PA 156.6), but is so narrow that an ant cannot walk on it: *asa sāmkar cali sakai na cāṃṭā* (PA 156.6). It is sharper than a sword, and thinner than a hair: *khāṃḍai cāhi paināi / bāra cāhi pāṭāri patarāī* (PA 156.7). The Kilakila ocean is the final test, here is the path of life and

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74 “In Oudh, four gallons of mahwa spirit, between 25° and 30°, can be made for Rs. 1.13, and from gur for Rs. 5 and 1/2.” Balfour, Edward: *The Cyclopaedia of India*, Vol. 2, p. 796.
76 Shirreff tr. p. 102, note (i).
77 PA 28.5; 201.5.6; 429.5 (from Mathur’s *Padumāvat* word index).
78 PA 34.4; 546.4; 553.5 (from Mathur’s *Padumāvat* word index). I have found four more instances: PA 154.4; 429.5; 436.3; 439.3. There may be others.
80 See above notes 9 and 10.
81 PA 155, 156 = Sh. 15.6, 7.
death, of hope and despair: marana jīnaḥ eḥi paṁth eḥi āśa nīrāsa / 
parā so gayā paṭārāhi tirā so gā kābilāsa // – “Death and life are on 
this path: on it are hope and despair. He who falls goes to hell: he who 
gets across goes to paradise.”82

This Jayasi’s sixth ocean is clearly not a purāṇic one. Its 
terrifying nature is closer to the oceans described in the 
Supāraga jātaka. Not even by the wildest stretch of imagination can it be made 
to correspond to the one missing purānic ocean, the ikṣurasa, the 
sugarcane ocean. Why Jāyasī has left out the sugarcane ocean is not 
known, nor are there any Sanskrit or Pāli sources that can explain the 
Kilakila ocean. The word exists in Sanskrit, and it means a ‘cry of joy’ 
which certainly doesn’t fit the context here. It is actually used in the 
Padumāvat once in that sense.83 Is it possible that we should read 
kalakala, usually glossed as ‘indistinct or confused noise’, but seems 
to also mean ‘uproar, tumult’84 here instead of kilakila? This is 
possible, especially if we assume that Jāyasī originally used the 
Persian script.85

The description of the mighty waves corresponds to similar 
descriptions of the sea in storm found in the Daśakumārakarita, the 
Kathāsārītisāgara, and many other places and the imagery is 
commonplace. The only thing that matters here is that this is the most 
dangerous ocean of them all, before they finally reach the last and 
seventh ocean, the mānasara samumda. It seems obvious to me that 
this is the ocean which corresponds to the purānic pure/sweet water 
ocean. The fresh water used in the saptasāgaramahādāna is water 
from a holy place, tīrthavāri. And what can be holier than the Mānasa 
sarovara? It may seem odd that Jāyasī chooses the famous lake in the 
Himalayas to be the last ocean to cross before the ships reach 
Sihaladvīpa, but Jāyasī the poet is not bothered by geographical 
exactitude: his Mānasarodaka is located in Sīhalaradvīpa! It is first 
mentioned in the Sīmhaladvīpa varṇana khaṇḍa,86 and further on 
receives a full chapter of its own, the Mānasarodaka khaṇḍa87 where

82 PA 156.9 = Sh. 15.7.
83 PA 638.6 = Sh. 54.1.
84 This seems to be the meaning in Mrčch. 2nd act p. 94 in the Kale ed.
85 This is discussed in Shirreff, A.G.: Padmāvatī, Calcutta 1944, p. v.
86 PA 31 = Sh.2.7. The whole description of Sīmhaladvīpa has 25 stanzas: PA 25–49 = Sh. 2.1–25.
87 PA59–65 = Sh. 4.1–8.
Padmāvatī and her friends go to swim and frolick. In the Sātaka sumudra khaṇḍa Jáyasī simply wants to suggest that the dangers are over and king Ratan Sen is sailing into a sea of bliss. So the choice of Mānasasarovara to represent fresh water is a logical one, in a poetic sense at least. The water from this lake must indeed be tīrthankāri par excellence.

These examples portray very different pictures of oceans from the brahminical fantasy about the good things in life to the dangerous oceans Supāraga leads his crew through in search of fabulous wealth, and finally the oceans king Ratan Sen as a penitent yogī has to traverse to win his Padmāvatī. Both Supāraga and Ratan Sen achieve their goals due to their truthfulness and purity of mind.

And whilst this paper was delivered all the rivers of Scotland became Scottish ale and the sea had turned into whisky. Talk about purity of purpose!

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