

Gardens in Classical Sanskrit Court Plays

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Nel teatro di corte sanscrito i giardini, dei palazzi reali o di altra collocazione, sono una presenza molto frequente e di notevole importanza. In queste pagine si vuole da una parte mettere in luce il ruolo che rivestono nel dipanarsi dell'azione scenica, e dall'altra desumere dai testi notizie sulle forme che questi luoghi avevano nella realtà concreta, pur tenendo conto dell'idealizzazione e della convenzionalità che pervadono questa forma di letteratura *kāvya*. Il lavoro si fonda sull'analisi delle seguenti opere: *Svapnavāsavadatta* attribuito a Bhāsa; *Mālavikāgnimitra*, *Vikramorvaśīya* e *Abhijñānaśākuntala* di Kālidāsa; *Priyadarśikā* e *Ratnāvalī* di Harṣa; e *Mālatīmādhava* di Bhavabhūti. Altre osservazioni riguardano le innovazioni apportate dai singoli autori a questo *topos* letterario e scenico, e l'immaginario condiviso dai poeti e dal pubblico.

In classical Sanskrit court plays, gardens of royal palaces or in other locations are a frequent and extremely important presence. In these pages an attempt will be made on one hand to highlight the role they play in the unfolding of the dramatic action, and on the other to deduce information from the texts regarding the forms that these places actually possessed—always taking into account the idealisation and conventionality that pervade this and the other forms of *kāvya* literature. This work is based on the analysis of the following plays: *Svapnavāsavadatta* (abbreviated to *S*) attributed to Bhāsa, of uncertain date: possibly pre-Kālidāsa;¹ Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitra* (*M*), *Vikramorvaśīya* (*V*) and *Abhijñānaśākuntala* (*A*), 4th-5th century; *Priyadarśikā* (*P*) and *Ratnāvalī* (*R*) by Harṣa, first half of the 7th century; and Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava* (*MM*), first half of the 8th century.² It is also intended as a continuation of the author's study of the gardens of ancient India illustrated in a series of earlier articles, some of which will be referred to.

The Dramatic Role

The plots and general characteristics of each of these famous plays are well known, and it is certainly not the case to summarise them here; some details will how-

¹ The *Svapnavāsavadatta* is one of the thirteen so-called Trivandrum Plays, named after the place of their first publication, whose manuscripts were discovered and published by Gaṇapati Śāstrī at the beginning of the 20th century. Their dating and authorship are notoriously a matter of great debate; see Tiekens 1993 for an analysis that suggests that they might instead have been composed in the Pallava milieu around the year 700.

² For this dating, see Mirashi 1996 [1974]: 1-11. The passages from the plays are quoted here according to the editions listed in the Bibliography, with some normalisation and graphic intervention as