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J. A. B. Hegewald

Representations of the Jina's Birth and Enlightenment in Jaina Art, Architecture and Ritual

When researching an article on the representation of various aspects of Jaina cosmology in art and architecture (Hegewald 2000), I was surprised to note strong visual similarities between several Jaina cosmological, mythical and ritual paraphernalia, venerated and employed by members of both Śvetāmbara and Digambara sects. The recurrent shape is that of a pyramidal structure consisting of several tapering tiers, usually three, crowned by a throne-like seat or platform accommodating either one or multiple Jaina images. The three major components in this visual relationship of the three-tiered structures are: *meru*, *samavasaraṇa* and the *śimbāsana* ritual stand. The present paper will set out to demonstrate that the three components are not only connected on a visual or structural level but also on a deeper religio-philosophical plane which is activated and invoked during ritual performances. Whilst the image of the *meru* is representative of the Jina's birth, the *samavasaraṇa* is symbolic of his enlightenment. The *śimbāsana* ritual stand forms a link between the two and can take on either meaning depending on the ritual context.

The first component I would like to discuss is the *meru* which is associated with and symbolic of the birth of a Tirthaṅkara. The term *meru* occurs in Jaina cosmological literature as well as in the mythological life stories of the Tirthaṅkaras. Its literal translation is 'mountain', 'peak' or 'hill.' There are also many visual representations of the *meru* in art and architecture. In a Jaina religious context it primarily refers to the cosmic Mount Meru, the tall tower-like mountain located at the centre of the middle world of the Jaina cosmos¹. The *meru* plays an important role in Jaina mythology and the lives of the Tirthaṅkaras because this is where the god Indra is believed to take every baby Jina immediately after their birth. At the summit of the cosmic mountain, the infant is worshipped and receives his first sacred bath, representing his birth ablutions. Because of the close association of this popular story with the

mountain, the image of the *meru* has become representative of the Jina's birth. After the miraculous conception, his delivery is the second core event in the life of a Tirthaṅkara.

In paintings, sculpture and architecture, representations of the *meru* usually follow a simplified and schematised formula. According to the standard version it consists of three truncated cones, each one smaller than the one below, placed one on top of the other². At the apex is a pavilion, a small shrine or a tree, sheltering a Jina image seated on a throne³. The upper part of the arrangement, referred to as the *cūlikā*, is sometimes raised on an additional projection or terrace. In some cases this additional part leads the arrangement to appear four-tiered. Painted representations of *merus* are preserved in manuscript collections and on larger sheets of paper. We also have many examples of cosmic mural paintings adorning the walls of temple complexes. The Śvetāmbara temple compound in the fort at Mandu (Māndū), Madhya Pradesh, for example, has a cosmological hall with modern wall paintings depicting, amongst others, various aspects of the *meru*⁴. We also find three-dimensional images of the subject. Such sculptural *meru* representations can either be relatively small, about 1 m high and made of bronze, or they can be larger arrangements, usually fashioned in white marble. Whilst small metal sculptures are com-

¹ For a detailed discussion of Jaina cosmic geography and the representation of cosmological structures in Jaina art and architecture, see Hegewald (2000).

² There are also standardised representations of Mount Kailāsa and Mount Aṣṭāpada. As these, however, do not follow the three-tiered arrangement, they will not be discussed in this article.

³ For textual descriptions of the *meru* see for example Caillat/Kumar (1981, 30, 130, 156, 160). The same monograph also contains reproductions of *meru* paintings, as may be seen on pp. 131, 141 and 161.

⁴ For a photographic reproduction of one of the *meru* paintings at Mandu see Hegewald (2000, 18, fig. 10).

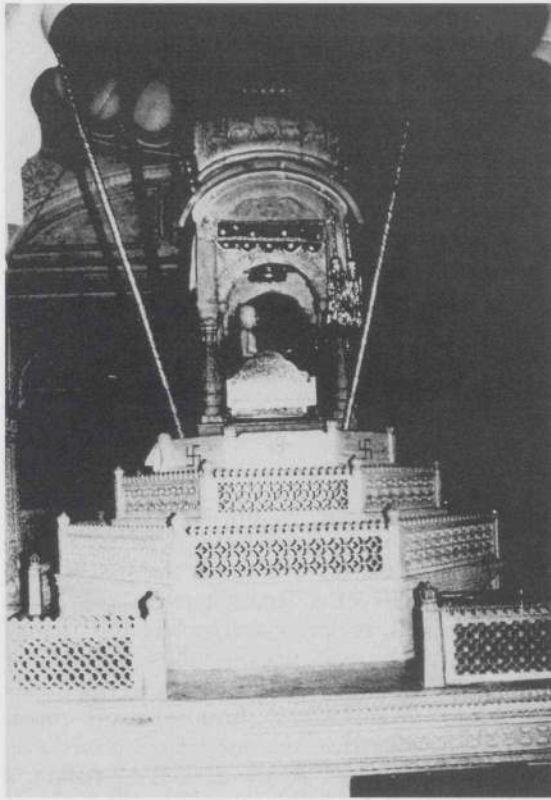


Fig. 1. The *meru* of Ajitanātha, Pāraśnātha Jaina Temple, Allahabad (U.P.). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

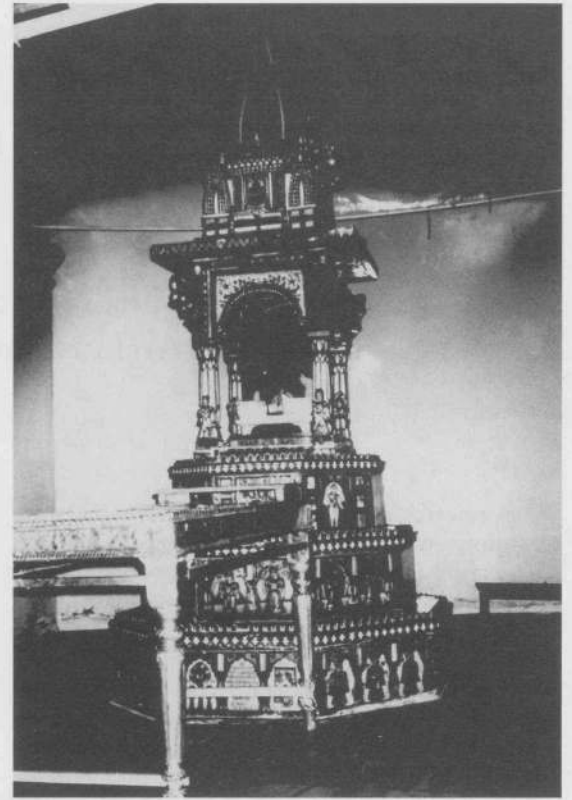


Fig. 2. The *meru* of Pārśvanātha, Dīgambara Baṛā Jaina Mandir, Jabalpur (M.P.). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

monly kept in side chapels, antechambers and the *mandapas* immediately outside the main *garbhagrha*, larger stone representations are usually housed in the central shrine room and venerated as the main object of worship in a Jaina temple. A beautiful small bronze sculpture of a *meru* topped by a Jina image kept under a protective glass dome is venerated in the south-eastern shrine on the first floor of the Mahāvira Dīgambara Jaina Temple at Seoni (Sivani) in Madhya Pradesh. Larger stone representations, housed in the main *garbhagrha* of Jaina temples, are particularly common in the north of India and exhibit a large range of variations. Most examples are made of white marble and have three octagonal terraces frequently delineated by low *jāli* screen-like balustrades of the same material. They usually support the *mūlnāyaka*, the main ritual image of the temple. Whilst in most *meru* paintings and small bronzes, the *meru* itself is the main object of veneration, in the larger stone arrangements the pyramidal *meru* bases are usually somewhat subordinated and are reduced to the function of providing an elaborate pedestal displaying the main image above. The presence and importance of the *meru* form in such sculptural constellations is, however, clearly acknowledged in the name given to such formations. They are usually referred to as "the *meru* of . . ." followed

by the name of the Jina seated at the apex. A simple example of this type is the *meru* of Ṛṣabhdeva in the Dīgambara Jaina Baddhī Mandir at Nāmdev Cauk in Sanganer (Sāṅgāner, Saṅgrāmapura), Rajasthan. The black image of the Tirthaṅkara Ṛṣabhdeva is supported on a lotus pedestal. The three octagonal layers of the *meru* of Vāsupūjyasvāmi in the Śrī Vāsupūjya Bhagvan Temple at the foot of the sacred Mount Cūlagiri at Khaniya (Khāniyā), outside Jaipur in Rajasthan, is elaborately decorated with trees and other vegetal designs. Because the platform supporting the image is relatively high it appears almost like a fourth terrace. Like the other three layers below, it is surrounded by a low filigree-like stone balustrade. The *meru* of Ajitanātha in the Pāraśnātha Temple in Allahabad (Allahabād), Uttar Pradesh, is similar in most respects, but its lowest terrace is square and not octagonal (fig. 1). The image above is raised on an elaborate throne seat which is furnished with a back rest. Two unusual examples are the stepped *meru* of Ādinātha in the Śrī Dīgambara Baṛā Jaina Mandir in Old Delhi (Purānā Dillī) which is made of black and not white marble and bears golden decorations, and the smaller three-tiered *meru* of Pārśvanātha in the Dīgambara Baṛā Jaina Mandir at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh as it is elaborately painted and crowned by a *śikhara*

roof (fig. 2). Most *merus* are topped by bent *baṅgla* roof shapes or rounded domes typical of temple forms influenced by Islamic design features. In the following section it will be shown that *meru* and *samavasaraṇa* are visually closely related and in many cases almost indistinguishable. From the available material it seems, however, that it is more common for *meru* sculptures to be octagonal, and in rare instances to have a square base, whilst three-dimensional *samavasaraṇas* tend to be mostly round. The fact that this means of differentiation does, however, not work in every instance is attested to by the large circular *meru*, called the Meru Mandir, located immediately to the north of the Digambara Jaina Temple at Ahar (Ahār) in Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, however, *merus* are usually topped by a single main figural representation, whilst it is an important aspect of the *samavasaraṇa* to support a four-fold image. The next paragraph on *samavasaraṇas* will explain the religious and mythological background for having a quadruple image.

The second element in this group of triple-tiered structures is the *samavasaraṇa*. Visually it is closely related to the *meru* structures discussed in the previous section. In this context it is noteworthy that in many texts on architecture, such as the *Vāstuvidyā* of Viśvakarmā, *merus* and *samavasaraṇas* are discussed in the same passages⁵. *Samavasaraṇa* literally means 'assemblage' and refers to the mythical preaching auditorium the gods create for the delivery of the first sermon of a Jina after his attainment of omniscience (*kevalajñāna*). Consequently, *samavasaraṇas* are primarily mythical structures related to the legendary life stories of the Jinās. Detailed descriptions of the mythical assembly halls of the Tirthaṅkaras are provided in the Jaina *Purāṇas*. The *samavasaraṇa* is described as a complex amphitheatre-like pyramidal structure consisting of three terraces or fortifications to seat the audience of gods, humans and animals. A *samavasaraṇa* can either be round or square in plan, although they seem more commonly to have a circular ground plan⁶. The pyramidal preaching hall is topped by a square platform, either referred to as *pīṭha*, *gandha-kuṭi* or *devachchhanda*, on which the enlightened Jina takes his seat. The gods then create three more identical images of the Tirthaṅkara seated on similar stools to address the listeners in the remaining three directions. This part of the story provides the rationale for having a quadruple image at the summit of the amphitheatre. The four-fold image is protected by a pavilion (*śrī-maṇḍapa*) or sheltered under a tree growing atop the three-tiered structure. The latter is either referred to as a *caitya-vṛkṣa* or more specifically as an *aśoka* tree. Because of the close connection between the Jina's attainment of omniscience and the structure of the *samavasaraṇa* which provides the venue for his first sermon,

representations of the mythical preaching auditorium are seen as a celebration of the Tirthaṅkara's *kevalajñāna* and are therefore considered symbolic of the Jina's enlightenment.

In Jaina art we regularly find reliefs depicting the multi-tiered preaching hall of the Tirthaṅkaras. The rock carvings are amongst the earliest visual representations of the subject. Whilst images of the standardised three-tiered *samavasaraṇas* do not appear on the surviving 1st to 2nd century AD *Āyā-gaṇaṭas* from Mathura (Mathurā) in Uttar Pradesh (Shah 1955, 86), there are what seem to be early rock cut representations of it in the Jaina caves at Udayagiri in Orissa. The carvings have generally been dated to about the 1st century AD. Much clearer examples may be seen in the porch of the Mahāvira Temple at Kumbharia (Kumbhāriā, ancient Ārāsaṇa), and on the ceilings of shrines number fifteen and nineteen of the temple of Ādinātha, better known as the Vimala-Vasahī, at Mount Abu. Both temples are early to mid-11th century structures in Rajasthan. From this period we also have painted versions such as the c. 11th-century murals decorating the ceilings at Tirumalai in Tamil Nadu, and those in the open *maṇḍapa* of the Vardhamāna Temple at Kanchipuram (Kāñci), Tamil Nadu, dating from about the 12th century AD (Shah 1955, 94)⁷. From the 12th-13th centuries onwards painted versions of the *samavasaraṇa* do not remain confined to temple architecture and we also have examples painted on cloth and paper. In addition to stone reliefs and various kinds of paintings, there are also free-standing sculptural representations of the *samavasaraṇa* which again exist both in metal and in stone (fig. 3). Metal versions are usually relatively small but nevertheless can be very elaborate. A beautiful example from Surat (Sūrat) in Gujarat, dated to about 1065 AD, is illustrated in the study by U. P. Shah (1955, fig. 76). A further bronze, where more emphasis has been placed on the three tiers of the arrangement, is housed in the side chapel in the north-east of the Śrī Digamabara Jaina Bispañthī Baṛī Koṭhī Mahāvira Jaina Temple in the village

⁵ For further details see for example Somapura/Dhaky (in Shah/Dhaky 1975, 16). In this respect it is also worth noting that a temple on Mount Sonāgiri is both referred to as a Meru Temple and as a Samavasaraṇa Temple.

⁶ Verses five and six of the *Samavasaraṇa-stavana* for example give the dimensions of the various constituent parts of round and square *samavasaraṇas* (Bhandarkar 1911, 128f.).

⁷ In contemporary temple building and decoration such paintings are more likely to be positioned on the temple walls, as may be seen in the Nasīyan Temple at Ajmer (Ajmir), Rajasthan, or on the outer walls of a temple complex as is the case in the Baḍaga Basadi at Mudabidri (Mūṛabidri) in Karnataka. In these later examples, *samavasaraṇa* imagery is being used to advertise a clear Jaina identity on the outside of the temple structure.



Fig. 3. *Samavasaraṇa* sculpture, Ajitanātha Temple, Sirohi (Rajasthan). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

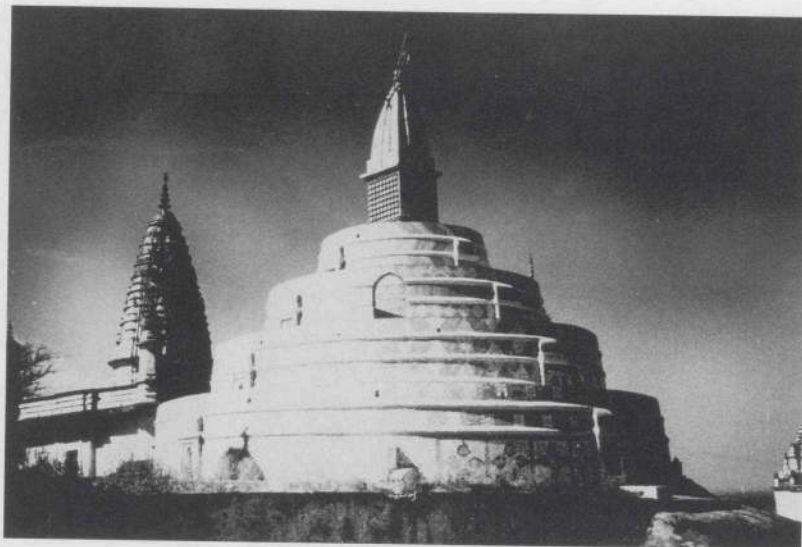
of Sonagiri (Sonāgiri) in Madhya Pradesh. Sculptural examples of *samavasaraṇas* made of stone are often very closely related to the three-dimensional stone *meru* images discussed above. The stone *samavasaraṇas* usually have a moulded base below supporting three circular tiers which are surmounted by a square pavilion accommodating a quadruple image of a Jina. Whilst most *merus* have angular terraces, it seems more common for *samavasaraṇa* representations to consist of circular rings. This difference seems, however, not to be based on textual prescriptions. Whilst *merus* have a single main image on the summit, however, the *samavasaraṇa* representations carry four-faced representations of Tirthankaras. Circular *samavasaraṇa* representations in white marble are enshrined in the subsidiary shrines of various Jaina temples in north-western India. Cell number twenty, in the south-west corner of the Vimala-Vasahī at Mount Abu (AD 1032 and later), for instance, houses a splendid example. Of a similar date is that in the southernmost chapel on the east side of the Mahāvira Temple at Kumbhariā (AD 1062), whilst the pyramidal *samavasaraṇa* representation in the north-eastern corner of the Caumukh Tuṅk at Palitana (Pālitānā) in Gujarāt



Fig. 4. Large-scale *samavasaraṇa* of Candraprabhu, Digambara temple complex, Ramtek (Maharashtra). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

dates from about the 16th or 17th century. Especially in recent centuries, *samavasaraṇa* representations are also venerated inside the main shrine rooms of temples. In these examples, the images at the summit of the structures are very small whilst the mythical preaching auditorium portrayed in great detail presents the main part of the arrangement. Consequently, it appears that in these later examples the architectural structures and not the figural images present the primary focus of worship. This expresses a general tendency in Jaina art to show an ever increasing interest in mythological and cosmological themes unique to Jainism. A clear example of such a large modern *samavasaraṇa* is housed on the first floor of the Pārśvanātha Basadi at Narasimharajapura (Narasimharājapura) in Karnataka. A further noteworthy position in which *samavasaraṇa* sculptures made of stone can be placed is typical of Jaina temples in north-western India. Especially in walled Jaina temples located in Rajasthan, which are usually raised on high terraces, *samavasaraṇa* representations are frequently positioned over the steps of the entrance to the temple (*nāla-maṇḍapa*) and face the main image in the central shrine. Religio-philosophical texts on architecture such as

Fig. 5. Monumental *samavasara*-*na* structure, Mount Sonāgiri (M.P.). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.



the *Vāstuśāstra* and the *Vāstuvidyā* of Viśvakarmā prescribe this arrangement and seem to imply that such *samavasara*nas act as the equivalents or Jaina replacements of the *vāhana* sculptures found in a Hindu context⁸. All the examples discussed so far are still of such relatively small dimensions that they are housed inside the temple buildings and represent sculptural approaches to the subject. *Samavasara*nas were, however, also created on a much larger scale, expressing the translation of this theme into monumental architecture. All architectural representations date from later periods, such as from the 18th to the 21st centuries, and express an unbroken continuity of the *samavasara*na theme in Jaina architecture. There are ample examples from all parts of India. It is noteworthy to observe, that in more monumental examples, the pavilion at the summit of the structure is frequently enclosed and remains locked on ordinary days, obscuring the multiple images inside. In these examples it seems to be more the celebration of *kevalajñāna*, the attainment of enlightenment in general, which ultimately is the aim of every Jaina, rather than the representation of the historical first sermon of a specific Tirthānkara which is indicated. Whilst the *samavasara*na in the south-west of the large temple complex at Pāpora (Pāporā), Madhya Pradesh, is specifically associated with Pārśvanātha's first sermon, the group of three *samavasara*nas in the north-east of the temple area, although they too must be topped by specific Jina images, are largely worshipped as representations of *kevalajñāna* as such. One of the most beautiful examples, possibly dating from as early as the 18th or 19th century, is the *samavasara*na of Candraprabhu in the Digambara temple complex at Rāmtek (Rāmṭek) in Maharashtra (fig. 4). On an even larger scale are those on Mount Sonāgiri in Mad-

hya Pradesh (fig. 5) and at Pavapuri in Bihar. The latter example is especially noteworthy as it is believed to mark the actual spot on which the historical Mahāvira delivered his first sermon. Probably the largest representation of its kind is to be found in Palitana, at the base of Mount Śatruñjaya. Whilst smaller examples of *samavasara*nas are usually solid, functioning as monumental sculptures and allowing the visitors to climb the structures, the latter example is a 'real' building in the sense that it encloses an internal space⁹. The translation of this mythical monumental symbol into a religious edifice which pilgrims can enter, seems to be a feature particularly of very recent structures in this style. The monumental *samavasara*na structures discussed here are large-scale architectural examples which represent a symbolic or commemorative temple type, a configuration not associated with other religions in South Asia.

The final element in this group of three multi-tiered pyramidal structures is the *simhāsana* ritual stand. *Simhāsana* literally means 'lion seat' or 'lion throne' and is used to describe any pedestal or platform adorned with lions at its extremities carrying an image of a Tirthānkara or other divine

⁸ For various discussions of this issue consult the publication by Shah/Dhaky 1975. Particularly useful in this respect is the joint paper by Sompura and Dhaky. Note particularly the sections on pages 15 and 16, and the discussion by Dhaky on pages 329 and 332. The latter also seems to imply that other symbolic representations can replace *vāhana* sculptures.

⁹ Inside the large Palitana *samavasara*na is an exhibition of Jaina cosmological and mythical themes.



Fig. 6. Square *simhāsana* ritual stand, Ādinātha Temple, Ranakpur (Rajasthan). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

being¹⁰. In its general sense, the term is also used to refer to the seat at the summit of the ritual stands, although it is more commonly applied to the entire three-tiered structure. The main purpose of the *simhāsana* is to carry and display a sculptural image of a Jina for the execution of religious rituals. Such ritual stands are found in most Jain temples throughout India and are used on a daily basis. Most *simhāsanas* are located in the main *maṇḍapa* in front of the *garbha-grha* housing the main image of a Jain temple. The pyramidal ritual stands are either made entirely out of metal or they consist of a wooden frame covered with sheets of silver. A few examples are also made of bronze or are gold plated. The tapering structures are composed of three either square or circular pedestals, although there are also examples with octagonal tiers (figs. 6–7). These are positioned one over the other culminating in a throne platform or seat. In addition to at least one large fixed (*pratiṣṭhit*) central image, usually made of stone and housed in the main shrine of a Jain temple, most places of Jain worship also have at least one, frequently even several, small metal images. These figures are relatively light and easily movable and are therefore used during the performance of rituals¹¹. Such small portable ritual images are referred to as *vidhi-nāyaka*. Whilst the larger



Fig. 7. Circular *simhāsana*, Śantinātha Temple, Sanderav (Rajasthan). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

stationary sculptures housed in the central *garbha-grha* of a temple will also be washed and anointed on a regular basis, the daily ritual morning bath as well as more complex rituals are more commonly performed on the *vidhi-nāyaka* (Jain/Fischer 1978 [I], 13). It is believed that the rituals conducted on the small metal image equally apply themselves to the main image, the *mūl-nāyaka*, housed in the main shrine¹². On these occasions

¹⁰ Consequently, the *simhāsana* is also part of the *samavasaraṇa*. According to textual descriptions there are four lion thrones at the summit of the *samavasaraṇa* structure on which the four Jina images are seated (Coomaraswamy 1994, 23; von Glasenapp 1999, 279). For a discussion of simple lion pedestals as part of Jain sculptural arrangements see for example the publication by Shah (1987, 10).

¹¹ In many temples, the portable metal images are also housed in the main shrine room but removed to the *simhāsana* stand in order to perform rituals.

¹² It is worth noting that also most *mūl-nāyakas* are seated on lion thrones in the more general sense. (Shah/Dhaky 1975, 168). This also applies to small ritual sculptures which usually also have an inherent pedestal adorned with lions. Consequently, the placing of the image and its inherent pedestal, on a larger throne sculpture constitutes a certain repetition. At the end of this paper,



Fig. 8. The *vidhi-nāyaka* on the *śimhāsana* stand, Nem-inātha Temple, Nadol (Rajasthan). Photo J. A. B. Hegewald.

the ritual image is placed at the summit of the *śimhāsana* stand and acts as a substitute for the *mūlnāyaka* (fig. 8). *Śimhāsana* ritual stands are structurally closely related to the other three-tiered structures, the *meru* and the *samavasaraṇa*, discussed above, and form an evident link between them. This has predominantly to do with the kind of rituals conducted on the tapering stools of the *śimhāsanas* and with the events portrayed and represented in these particular ceremonies.

In order to function ritually and to be potent religious objects, sacred images have to be formally installed and consecrated through the performance of a series of complex rituals. In a Jaina context, these installation and consecration rituals are commonly referred to as the *pañca-kalyāṇaka-pratiṣṭhā-mahotsava* or as the *Jina-bimba-pratiṣṭhā* (Babb 1998, 66; Jain 1983, 114; Fischer/Jain 1974/75, 35). These aim at re-enacting the five central events in the life of the Tirthaṅkara. At the end of the sequence the Jina has 'relieved' the five auspicious occasions of conception, birth, renunciation, attainment of omniscience, and *nirvāṇa*. In this state, as a fully enlightened and liberated being, he is enshrined in the temple. The consecration rites are usually conducted on a small replacement image made of metal (Fischer/Jain 1974/75, 35). The two aspects of the rituals re-enacting the five core

events, the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā* or *pañc-kalyāṇ pūjā*, which are particularly important with regard to our analysis and interpretation of three-tiered structures in Jaina art and architecture, are the birth (*janam kalyāṇaka*) and enlightenment (*nirvāṇ kalyāṇaka*) of the Tirthaṅkara. The climax of the birth celebrations (*janmotsava*) is represented by the re-enactment of the first bath (*janamābhiseka*) which the Jina received from the god Indra on a terrace at the peak of Mount Meru immediately following his birth¹³. The ritual bathing of the image is referred to as *snātra* or *snāpana pūjā* (Babb 1998, 69; Jaini 1990, 200) and either one or several worshippers take on the role of Indra and pour various kinds of liquids over the portable metal image placed on the *śimhāsana* (*abhiṣeka*)¹⁴. During the ritual, the *śimhāsana* stand, which is visually closely related to representations of the *meru* discussed earlier, becomes immediately associated with and symbolic of Mount Meru (Jaini 1990, 197, 200). This bathing ceremony is, however, not only performed as part of the lengthy and costly celebrations of the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā*. It should also be performed every morning for every Jina image housed in a shrine. As such it is part of the *pūjā* of eight substances (*aṣṭprakāri pūjā*), but is also a preliminary to any major ritual or veneration in general (Babb 1998, 69). When performed not as part of the sequence of rituals connected with the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā*, the bathing ceremony is more often referred to as *jal pūjā* (water worship) or *abhiṣeka* (Babb 1998, 85). Anybody conducting a lustration ceremony is meant to imagine himself or herself as Indra and any bathing ritual is symbolically regarded as representative of the birth of the Tirthaṅkara. As such the *śimhāsana* stand acts as a *meru* during bathing rituals. During other sacred temple rites it doubles as the *samavasaraṇa*¹⁵. Any temple housing an image is figuratively equated with the *samavasaraṇa*. The placing of the ritual image at

however, it will become clear that during rituals the *śimhāsana* stand ceases primarily to represent the lion throne of the Jina and becomes equated with the *meru* and the *samavasaraṇa*.

¹³ For a detailed description of the sequence of Jaina bathing ceremonies see, for example, the discussion by Babb (1998, 72–84).

¹⁴ The consequently consecrated fluid is collected in a container. Worshippers conducting or observing the ritual dab it onto their eyes and foreheads. The remaining liquid is kept over the day and also offered to those who have not taken part in the ceremony.

¹⁵ Various writers have commented on aspects relating to the symbolic connections between the *śimhāsana* and either Mount Meru or the *samavasaraṇa*. See for example Jain/Fischer 1978 (I), 12f.; Jaini 1990, 201; Jain 1977, 38; Williams 1991, 216, 221. Particularly good with respect to the double symbolism encountered in this case are Babb 1998, 71 and Humphrey/Laidlaw 1994, 21.

the apex of the *simhāsana* stand, however, is interpreted more specifically as a representation of the Jina's attainment of omniscience and represents the final stage in his worldly life. As such this part of the *pañca-kalyāṇaka pūjā* is also performed on the ritual stand, which visually is closely related to the mythical preaching auditorium of the Jina. During this final part of the *pūjā* it is symbolically equated with the *samavasaraṇa*. Fascinating in this connection is also that a further common term to describe this ritual implement is '*samavasaraṇa*' or more colloquially '*samosaraṇ*' (Humphrey/Laidlaw 1994, 21, 25).

This paper has focused on the symbolic shapes of *meru*, *samavasaraṇa* and *simhāsana* because they follow a very similar design as well as being linked on a ritualistic level. Also other images in Jaina art, however, are invested with symbolic significance relating to the life stories of the Tirthankaras. The sacred dreams of Mahāvira's mother, fourteen in a Śvetāmbara and sixteen in a Digambara context, for example, are considered representative of the Jina's miraculous conception. Whilst figures of Jinās represented in the standing posture of abandonment (*kāyotsarga*) generally symbolise his enlightenment, sitting images in *padmāsana* are usually associated with the Tirthankara's teaching role after his attainment of omniscience (Norton n.d., 7).

To conclude, *Meru*, *samavasaraṇa* and *simhāsana* ritual stands are visually closely related. All consist of three tapering superimposed tiers topped by a single or quadruple Jina image. Despite the strong structural similarities all three have individual names and functions attributed to them, and are imbued with specific religious symbolism and significance. In sacred Jaina paintings, sculpture and architecture, the image of the *meru* is understood to be representative of the Jina's birth, whilst the *samavasaraṇa* is symbolic of his final enlightenment. The *simhāsana* ritual stand constitutes the essential link between the two cosmological and mythological structures. Depending on the specific rituals conducted on the ritual stand, the *simhāsana* can either take on the ritual function of the *meru* or the *samavasaraṇa* and be representative of either the birth or the enlightenment of the Tirthankara. This shows that there is not just a clear formal visual relationship between the three multi-tiered elements, *meru*, *samavasaraṇa* and *simhāsana*, but that also ritually and conceptually the three are interrelated.

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