

The boundary mountains (of the earth) are Himavant, Hemakūṭa, and Nishadha, which lie south of Meru; and Nīla, Ṣveta, and Ṣringī, which are situated to the north of it. The two central ranges (those next to Meru, or Nishadha and Nīla) extend for a hundred thousand (Yojanas, running east and west). Each of the others diminishes ten thousand Yojanas, as it lies more remote from the centre. They are two thousand Yojanas in height, and as many in breadth. The Varshas or countries between these ranges are Bhārata (India), south of the Himavānt mountains; etc. . . . There are also (near Meru) four great lakes, the waters of which are partaken of by the gods, called Aruṇoda, Mahābhadrā, Sītoda, and Mānasa. — The principal mountain ridges which project from the base of Meru, like filaments from the root of the lotus, are . . . (here follow several names).

On the summit of Meru is the vast city of Brahmā, extending fourteen thousand leagues, and renowned in heaven; and around it, in the cardinal points and the intermediate quarters, are situated the stately cities of Indra and the other regents of the spheres. The capital of Brahmā is enclosed by the river Ganges, which, issuing from the foot of Vishnu, and washing the lunar orb, falls here from the skies, and, after encircling the city, divides into four mighty rivers, flowing in opposite directions. These rivers are the Sītā, the Alakanandā, the Chakshu, and the Bhadrā. The first, falling upon the tops of the inferior mountains, on the east side of Meru, flows over their crests, and passes through the country of Bhadrāṣva to the ocean: the Alakanandā flows south, to the country of Bhārata, and, dividing into seven rivers on the way, falls into the sea: the Chakshu falls into the sea, after traversing all the western mountains, and passing through the country of Ketumāla: and the Bhadrā washes the country of the Uttara Kurus, and empties itself into the northern ocean.»¹

The Vishnu Purāṇa goes on: »Meru, then, is confined between the mountains Nīla and Nishadha (on the north and south), and between Mālyavant and Gandhamādāna (on the west and east); it lies between them like the pericarp of a lotus. The countries of Bhārata, Ketumāla, Bhadrāṣva, and Uttarakuru lie, like leaves of the lotus of the world, exterior to the boundary mountains. Jaṭhara and Devakūṭa

¹ The Vishnu Purāṇā, a system of Hindu Mythology and Tradition, translated from the original Sanscrit, and illustrated by notes derived chiefly from other Purāṇās, by H. H. Wilson. London 1840, p. 166 et seq. In a note to the passage quoted Wilson says that the Vāyu Purāṇa has the same account but also another which is found in the Matsya and Padma Purāṇas as well. In this, as related above, the Ganges is said, after escaping from Ṣiva to have formed the seven rivers: Nalinī, Hlādinī and Pavanī going eastwards, Chakshu, Sītā, and Sindhu westwards, and Bhāgirathī or Ganges to the south. Wilson finds some actual geography in the legend. The following supposition of Wilson, however, seems somewhat audacious; he says of the legend that »it seems not unlikely to have originated in some imperfect account of four great rivers flowing from the Himālaya, and the high lands north of that range, towards the cardinal points: the Bhadrā, to the north, representing the Oby of Siberia; and the Sītā, the river of China, or Hoangho. The Alakanandā is well known as a main branch of the Ganges, near its source; and the Chakshu is very possibly, as Major Wilford supposed, the Oxus.» For how would even the most vague account of any Siberian river ever have reached India! Only Alakanandā is certain, Oxus very likely; by the north-going river Yarkand-darya may have been meant and by the Sītā Tsangpo-Brahmaputra.