

Vincent Eltschinger

### **Aśvaghōṣa on kings and kingship**

In both the *Buddhacarita* and the *Saundarananda*, Aśvaghōṣa dedicates several passages to kings and kingship. As most Buddhist writers after him, Aśvaghōṣa or, at least, the Bodhisattva/Buddha, is quite pessimistic about kingship, said to frontally contradict *dharma*—a deliberately polysemic notion. His Sarvārthasiddha is thus perfectly in line with Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Rājadharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*'s twelfth book, a fact that has been analysed in detail by Alf Hildebeitel and Patrick Olivelle. Another aspect of the poet's treatment of kings and kingship is his portrayal of Śuddhodana. In this talk, I shall try to demonstrate that each and every trait of Aśvaghōṣa's description of the king and his realm finds literal correspondences in epic descriptions of the Brahmanical *dharma* king.