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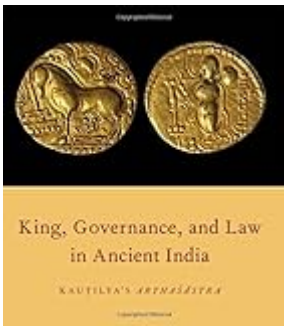

Patrick Olivelle, trans. *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. xxvii + 753 pp. $160.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-989182-5.

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Ancient Indian Political Thought

The *ArthaÅÄstra* attributed to Kauá¹ilya is one of the most important, and least read, of all Sanskrit works for the reconstruction of Indiaâs classical past. Widely known and cited through the time of Daá¹áiṇ, in the early eighth century CE, the work seems to have fallen into abeyance starting in the ninth century. It resurfaced in about 1905. A single manuscript of the work was found in Tanjore, and it was gradually published by Rudrapatna Shamasastry at the Mysore Government Oriental Library. Since then, a few more manuscripts of the *ArthaÅÄstra* have been uncovered, along with fragmentary commentaries, and a dedicated lineage of scholars have tackled this lengthy, intricate, and historically rich work.

Patrick Olivelle joins this *parampara* (a succession of teachers and disciples) with his complete annotated translation of the *ArthaÅÄstra*. His title indicates the principal concerns of the work: *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India*. Olivelle bases the translation on the critical edition revised in 1969 by R. P. Kangle. This new translation clearly supplants all other translations of this work into English, including those of Kangle (1977) and L. N. Rangarajan (1992). For many years, those of us who teach the *ArthaÅÄstra* in our classes have had to make do with these adequate but unsatisfactory translations. Olivelleâs new translation, therefore, is a major contribution to the study of classical South Asia, and deserves to reach a wide audience of historians, Indologists, and teachers of South Asian studies. It will also provide a valuable resource for all scholars who study premodern state organization.

The *ArthaÅÄstra* sets out a strong vision of kingship and governance, in the form of prescriptive guidelines for the king and his advisers. The work presupposes the rule of an absolute monarch who seeks to enact his will through an elaborate bureaucratic apparatus. The range of topics treated by the author is immense. Kauá¹ilya has often been referred to as the âIndian Machiavelli,â to point to his practical and non-moralistic outlook on statecraft. But this comparison does not do justice to the comprehensiveness of Kauá¹ilyaâs investigation and prescriptive explication of all matters within a polity. The

ArthaÅÄstra provides far more details of nitty-gritty concerns in the world of an absolute prince than Machiavelli would do centuries later.

The author Kauá¹ilya has long been identified with CÄá¹akya, the Brahmin prime minister of Candragupta Maurya, founding monarch of the Mauryan Empire. CÄá¹akyaâs shrewd machinations became legendary in later Indian dramas and story literature. This would suggest that the *ArthaÅÄstra*, or some core parts of it, date from the fourth century BCE, and record the views of this extraordinary royal adviser. Kangle held to this position. Enticing as it may seem, this identification has been substantially disproven by subsequent scholarship.

Olivelle reviews the scholarly question, and presents a convincing account of the complex authorship and dating of the *ArthaÅÄstra.* There were, he argues, three phases in the composition of the text that we now have: the composition of an early expert on the topic of *artha*, dating to the mid-first century BCE; the âKauá¹ilya recension,â which integrates that earlier work with various other expert bodies of literature to create a broad vision of royal conduct and governance, dated to 50-125 CE; and the âÅÄstric recension,â a further expansion dating to 175-300 CE, the recension that has been preserved in the manuscripts available to us.

Techniques of governance and the exercise of political power, *artha*, formed an important discipline of knowledge in classical India. The *ArthaÅÄstra* of Kauá¹ilya refers to numerous other experts in the discipline, though it is not certain how many of them composed autonomous texts. Kauá¹ilyaâs work so successfully synthesized much of this discipline, evidently, that other previous works in the field failed to be transmitted. In his recension, Kauá¹ilya drew on earlier works in *artha*, and integrated into it other expert traditions of knowledge as well. In this way, the *ArthaÅÄstra* is able to provide detailed guidance in such matters as fort construction, metal working, jewelry making, masonry, and many other areas of specialist knowledge. Kauá¹ilya even refers to an independent work on methods of torture, the *Kharapaá¹á¹a.* Presumably the king, as lord of the entire domain, needed to have knowledge sufficient to supervise and evaluate the many state activities carried out under his sovereign rule. The *ArthaÅÄstra* provided the most serious textual effort in classical India to meet this royal need.

If Kauá¹ilya the author of the *ArthaÅÄstra* was not CÄá¹akya the Mauryan minister, as Olivelle and others have persuasively argued, then when and why did that identification come about? Following historian Thomas Trautmann, Olivelle accepts the historical existence of CÄá¹akya, and he goes on to postulate that the identification of the erudite author of the *ArthaÅÄstra* with the famously astute Mauryan minister was first established after the ÅÄstric recension of the text had been completed, in Gupta times. Olivelle suggests this was one of the many ways that the Gupta dynasty sought to link themselves as successors to the great Mauryan Empire centuries earlier. ViÅÄkhadatta, the Gupta period playwright, had the ÅÄstric recension of the *ArthaÅÄstra* available to him when he composed his drama portraying the political intrigues of CÄá¹akya in the *MudrÄrÄká¹£asa.*

Olivelle is among the most prolific of all modern translators of classical Sanskrit, and has now demonstrated great mastery in his work on many of the most central compositions in Sanskritic literature: the *Upaniá¹£ads* (1996, 1998), *PaÃ±catantra* (1997), *DharmasÅ«tras* (1999), *Manusmá¹ti* (2004, 2005), *Buddhacarita* (2008), and *Viá¹£á¹usmá¹ti* (2009). So when he says that the *ArthaÅÄstra* has been his most difficult translation project, and that he has devoted five years to the translation, it should give a strong indication of the scope, difficulty, and importance of this work. The *ArthaÅÄstra* is difficult because of the technical vocabulary throughout much of the text, and the lack of an existing apparatus of commentaries and other aids in the genre of *arthaÅÄstra* that could provide assistance. In his âNote to the Translation,â Olivelle provides some intriguing indications of how he has dealt with some of these problems. One hears of Inuit with their proverbial twenty words for snow. Olivelle had to deal with Kauá¹ilyaâs equally expansive lexicon of words for various categories of spies and secret agents. Topics like bookkeeping, taxes, tariffs, fines, and other sources of royal revenue all had their extensive sets of technical terms. The many specialized members of the royal bureaucracy had individual titles that had to be rendered in English. Olivelle also provides extensive and valuable endnotes that explain his translational choices.

The *ArthaÅÄstra* is a work of exceptional importance for understanding the history of classical India. Olivelleâs careful, painstaking, and transparent translation of Kauá¹ilyaâs great treatise is an exceptional work as well, and an outstanding contribution to the field of Indian studies.

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