

## THE HISTORY OF THE *ARTHAŚĀSTRA*

The *Arthaśāstra* is the foundational text of Indic political thought and ancient India's most important treatise on statecraft and governance. It is traditionally believed that politics in ancient India was ruled by religion; that kings strove to fulfil their sacred duty; and that sovereignty was circumscribed by the sacred law of *dharmā*. Mark McClish's systematic and thorough evaluation of the *Arthaśāstra*'s early history shows that these ideas only came to prominence in the statecraft tradition late in the classical period. With a thorough chronological exploration, he demonstrates that the text originally espoused a political philosophy characterized by empiricism and pragmatism, ignoring the mandate of *dharmā* altogether. The political theology of *dharmā* was incorporated when the text was redacted in the late classical period, which obscured the existence of an independent political tradition in ancient India altogether and reinforced the erroneous notion that ancient India was ruled by religion, not politics.

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THE HISTORY OF THE  
*ARTHAŚĀSTRA*

*Sovereignty and Sacred Law in Ancient India*

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*Northwestern University, Illinois*



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*für Alina*



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## *Preface and Acknowledgments*

No work is more important to understanding governance and society in ancient India than the *Arthaśāstra*, and in this volume I present a theory that makes novel claims as to its original form and its transformation over time. In this, I have endeavored to be as faithful as possible to the evidence at hand, although in giving shape to my conclusions I have often been reminded of something that the great *Arthaśāstra* scholar R. P. Kangle wrote in the preface to his 1965 study of the work: “. . . it cannot be expected that the opinions expressed or conclusions reached here will be found entirely acceptable. In fact, I shall be satisfied if they are regarded as worthy of serious consideration” (v). While I hope to have set *Arthaśāstra* studies on a firmer historical footing than before, I am acutely aware of the limitations of the present work and my indebtedness to the scholars whose names fill this book.

This study was born in Patrick Olivelle’s advanced Sanskrit course at The University of Texas at Austin in the early 2000s. It was there that I was first introduced to the *Arthaśāstra*, which we read in tandem with Viśākhadatta’s dramatic masterpiece, the *Mudrārāksasa*. They remain two of my favorite Sanskrit works. As I began to read the *Arthaśāstra*, I became aware of certain textual peculiarities that seemed to me most easily explained by the presence of multiple hands in the composition of the text. I was, through this, exposed to a body of critical work on the compositional history of the *Arthaśāstra*, and, with the encouragement of Olivelle, I began in fits and starts to attempt to explain the form of the text. This work consumed my years as a graduate student and resulted in my 2009 dissertation. The project was, unfortunately, set aside early in my career, when my focus shifted to the requirements of teaching-intensive appointments. I am grateful to have been able to return to it in the past few years and bring it to a degree of completion.

As I explored the composition of the *Arthaśāstra*, I came to see that many passages expressing orthodox Brāhmaṇical sentiments appeared to be

secondary additions to the text. Hours reading in and around the *Arthaśāstra* persuaded me, as I argue in this book, that nearly all of these passages were added during the early phase of an explosion in Brāhmaṇical intellectual and artistic culture that transformed Indian politics and society in the first half of the first millennium CE. This “Brāhmaṇical revival” has been the subject of numerous studies, most recently in an important series of books by Johannes Bronkhorst. The present volume seeks to portray the *Arthaśāstra* as an early important witness to the Brāhmaṇical revival, and I hope that it will provide a foundation for further work on what is to my mind the most important historical and religious transformation in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Although questions about the history of South Asian religion and culture were always before me, I realized from the beginning that it would be a mistake to allow assumptions about the ideological content of the *Arthaśāstra* to influence my theory of the text’s composition. The formal study of the text had to come first, and the historical conclusions had to emerge from and remain maximally responsive to it. Hence, I have striven to keep these two aspects separate and in the proper order. The result is that this book follows two different methods, one exploring the formal features of the text and aimed at developing a history of its development, and the other using that history to put its ideological content in chronological context. Early in the development of this project I had hoped to include a third section bringing my results into robust conversation with contemporary work on the Brāhmaṇical revival of the early centuries of the Common Era. This, however, proved too much, and I deemed it better left to its own study, one able to do justice to a far broader set of sources and historical circumstances.

In a project that has taken this long to develop, there are naturally many people to thank for guidance. I have been particularly fortunate to have access to and generous support from several important *Arthaśāstra* scholars. Foremost among these is my own teacher, Patrick Olivelle, whose 2013 translation of the *Arthaśāstra* is a monument of scholarship. It is not possible to express my debt to him nor my admiration for his work. He is a model of collegiality and a generous interlocuter. His influence is to be found in every line of this book (though all shortcomings are my own), and it has been one of the great joys of my personal life for my family to have grown close to him and his wife, Suman, who have both done so much for us.

I am enormously grateful to Thomas Trautmann, with whom I spent three enjoyable days reviewing a draft of this manuscript. Professor

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Trautmann composed the only other major compositional study of the *Arthaśāstra*, entitled *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra* (1971), in which he showed that statistical evidence supported the conclusion that the text had been compiled from sources with different authors. He graciously accepted my request to review the manuscript, and our conversations here at Northwestern not only improved the manuscript considerably, but were also a master class in Indian history and historiography. His learning is remarkably broad, as is well known to South Asianists, and his insights helped to put my research in a broader context.

Professor Hartmut Scharfe, who wrote what remains the most penetrating monograph on the *Arthaśāstra* (*Untersuchungen zur Staatsrechtslehre des Kauṭilya*, 1968, revised and translated into English in 1993 as *Investigations into Kauṭilya's Manual of Statecraft*), also graciously agreed to review the manuscript and offered critical comment on all parts of my text. I consider his input invaluable, especially regarding those subjects on which we disagree. The great scholar of *dharmaśāstra* and *arthaśāstra*, Albrecht Wezler, sent me detailed comments on my dissertation completely unbidden along with the then newly published, reedited commentaries on the *Arthaśāstra* called *Jayamaṅgalā* and *Cāṇakyaṭīkā*. His generosity to a young scholar whom he did not know has meant a great deal to me. Such acts of kindness and collegiality lighten the burden of hours of isolated labor. I also wish to thank Wendy Doniger, who reviewed an earlier draft of the manuscript and shared with me her expertise on the fascinating and complex relationship between the *Arthaśāstra*, *Kāmasūtra*, and the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*.

Special mention is due of the American Oriental Society, which remains the most important forum for Indology in North America. Many of the arguments found in this book were presented in various forms at meetings of the AOS, where they received substantive comment and critique. I do not have space here to mention each of the scholars whose comments helped guide me along the way. I continue to be grateful for their expertise and dedication to the practice of philology. Some of my most important interlocutors at AOS and elsewhere have been Timothy Lubin, Donald R. Davis, Jr., David Brick, John Nemeč, Johannes Bronkhorst, Jarrod Whitaker, Adheesh Sathaye, Deven Patel, Neil Dalal, and Stephen Lindquist. Many of these people have a close relationship with the Department of Asian Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, which, through the efforts of Richard Lariviere, Patrick Olivelle, and, now, Donald R. Davis, Jr. has developed into a center of excellence for the study of *dharmaśāstra* and *arthaśāstra* in the United States.

I want to thank my colleagues and former colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies here at Northwestern. Mira Balberg has been a dear friend and important influence on my intellectual development. We miss her greatly and wish her the best in her new position. I also want to thank Cristie Traina and Richard Kieckhefer, who have both done so much to support me, as well as Sarah Jacoby, who gave valuable feedback on an early draft of this manuscript. Everyone should be as fortunate to have such generous colleagues. The growing strength in South Asia at Northwestern continues to enrich this place as an intellectual home. Much of that is due to the efforts of Laura Brueck, whose vision for South Asian studies here continues to unfold. I am lucky to have her as a mentor and a dear friend. I also want to thank Ryan Platte, Sarah Jacoby, Rajeev Kinra, David Boyk, Daniel Majchrowicz, Rob Linrothe, and Brannon Ingram, for many fascinating conversations and their support of my work.

I have received funding from a number of sources that allowed me to carry out this work, including a Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad award from Fulbright-Hays, a Post-doctoral Fellowship from the Mellon Foundation, a research award from Birmingham-Southern College, and research support from Birmingham-Southern College, the Department of Religious Studies at Northwestern, and the Office of the Dean of Weinberg College at Northwestern University. It goes without saying that none of this work is possible without the generous support of those dedicated to humanities research.

Two anonymous readers for the Press offered an uncommon degree of comment on the manuscript, which I found uniformly invaluable. They improved both the form and content of every page. I am grateful to these and other scholars who take the time to treat manuscripts with such great care. I wish to thank Liz Friend-Smith at Cambridge University Press for her enthusiasm for this project and to Ian McIver and Abigail Walkington for their care in shepherding the manuscript through the publication process. I was fortunate to have an excellent copy-editor in John Jacobs, who made many improvements to the manuscript. Tim DeBold did a marvellous job putting together the subject index and the index locorum, no mean feat in a book of this nature.

These acknowledgments are destined to exclude a great many people who helped this project come to fruition, either as conversation partners or in providing other kinds of support. I am grateful for all of it. I would be inexcusably remiss, however, if I did not thank my parents, who have supported me in the long process of graduate training and throughout my early career. I will be glad to be able to tell them, after many polite

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inquiries, that the book is finally finished. I save for last, but not because they are least, my family: Alina, Augustus, and Franziska. They have all sacrificed materially and emotionally for my career and for this project, and that is a debt that can only be repaid over the course of a lifetime. To Augustus and Franziska, the love I feel from you both truly sustains me. And to my wife, Alina, to whom this book is dedicated, it's been my turn for far too long. Now I hope it can be your turn.

## *Note on the Text*

All citations of the *Arthaśāstra* follow Kangle's critical edition (1969), unless otherwise noted. I provide the original Sanskrit of all translations, often in a footnote, except in the case of very long passages. The translations I have used are credited to their translators in text, but I have made a few systematic changes to them all. I have replaced the spelling "Brahmin" everywhere with "Brāhmaṇa," and important Sanskrit terms, such as *dharma*, *brahman*, and *kṣatra*, have sometimes been left untranslated in order to help illustrate their meaning in context. Any translation not credited to another is my own. For the *Arthaśāstra*, prose passages are given in normal typeface and verse passages in italics. Colophons are printed in small caps.

Passages from primary sources use the abbreviations given at the front of this book. I use them the first time a text is cited in a given paragraph. Subsequent citations of the same text in that paragraph do not repeat the abbreviation unless another text is cited in between.

When using a Sanskrit term for the first time in a chapter, I italicize it. All subsequent occurrences in that chapter are not italicized unless I am referring specifically to the term or concept itself. I translate most Sanskrit words throughout the book, but I do not translate *dharma*, *kṣatra*, and *varṇa*. They are technical terms, and presenting them in translation creates more problems than it solves. I also do not translate *varṇadharmā* or *rājadharmā*, because their English equivalents ("the Sacred Laws of the Social Classes" and "the Sacred Laws for Kings") are too cumbersome, particularly when they occur multiple times in a single paragraph. I trust that the meaning of each will be transparent in context. The most important Sanskrit terms used in the text are translated in the index. I distinguish between "sūtra," the term for a prose sentence in the *Arthaśāstra*, and "Sūtra," the Sanskrit genre characterized by an aphoristic prose style. When referring to a text or group of texts, I will capitalize and italicize



*Note on the Text*

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(e.g., *Dharmaśāstra*, *Dharmaśāstras*). When referring to a tradition, however, I neither capitalize nor italicize (e.g., *dharmaśāstra*).

I do not cite my dissertation (2009), on which this book is based. I have changed my mind on a few points and corrected others, so that this book supersedes everything written there. I cite Olivelle 2013 only where its account of the history of the text differs from mine.

## *Abbreviations*

A	<i>Aṣṭādhyāyī</i>
AB	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>
ABORI	<i>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute</i>
ĀpDh	<i>Āpastamba Dharmasūtra</i>
AV	<i>Atharvaveda</i>
BDh	<i>Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra</i>
CS	<i>Caraka Saṃhitā</i>
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
D	<i>Daśakumāracarita</i>
GDh	<i>Gautama Dharmasūtra</i>
IA	<i>Indian Antiquary</i>
IHQ	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i>
IJ	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JIP	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
KapS	<i>Kapila Saṃhitā</i>
KAS	<i>Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra</i>
KS	<i>Kāthaka Saṃhitā</i>
M	<i>Mudrārāksasa</i>
MDh	<i>Mānava Dharmasāstra</i>
N	<i>Nītisāra</i>
NSm	<i>Nāradasmṛti</i>
NV	<i>Nītivākyāmṛta</i>
P	<i>Pañcatantra</i>
PB	<i>Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa</i>
PMS	<i>Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtra</i>
RV	<i>Rgveda</i>
ŚB	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>

*List of Abbreviations*

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ŚP	<i>Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata</i>
TB	<i>Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīya Saṃhitā</i>
VDh	<i>Vaiṣṇava Dharmaśāstra</i>
VP	<i>Viṣṇu Purāna</i>
VS	<i>Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā</i>
YSm	<i>Yājñavalkyasmṛti</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZII	<i>Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik</i>

