Andreas Pohlus


When the first manuscript of the Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra (KAŚ) was discovered early in the last century, and the first edition and translation by Shama Sastry appeared (in 1909 [rev. 1919] and 1915, respectively), it attracted tremendous attention. Very little in the way of commentary has been found, however, and what there is seems to come mainly from the south. There are several fragments of commentary in Sanskrit. This volume combines what was known as the Jayamaṅgalā, on KAŚ 1.1.3–1.21.29, and the Cāṇakyaṭīkā of Bhikṣuprabhamati, on KAŚ 2.1.1–3.1.47. Harihara Sastri makes it clear (pp. 56–57) that these are actually fragments of a single longer pre-11th century commentary. Other extant bits of commentary are Nitinirṇīti of Yoggghama, on KAŚ 2.1.1–2.4.32 (the only one deriving from North India; published by Muni Jinavijaya in 1956); the Pratipadapañcikā of Bhaṭṭasvāmin on KAŚ 2.8–36; and the Nayacandrikā of Mādhavayajvan, on KAŚ 7.7–11 and 7.15–12.4 (published in Jolly & Schmidt’s 1923 edition of the KAŚ). There is also one in Old Malayalam, the c. 12th-century Bhaṣākauṭalīyam or Bhaṣāvyākhyānam which constitutes the earliest specimen of a text in that language, and covers the first seven books of the KAŚ.

In spite of the wide interest in the KAŚ, relatively few readers have had recourse to these materials. The first three parts of the Malayalam work were published from Trivandrum in three parts between 1930 and 1945, and the remainder from Madras in 1960, but the language has restricted its use, especially by Western scholars, though Gaṇapati Śāstrī drew on it for his edition and commentary (as does Olivelle in his new annotated translation of the KAŚ [Oxford, 2013]). However even the partial Sanskrit commentaries have not often been consulted, as Pohlus observes (p. 193). One of the reasons is that the Jayamaṅgalā and the Cāṇakyaṭīkā were published in numerous short fascicles as supplements to the Journal of Oriental Research, Madras by Harihara Sastri between 1953 and 1968. These supplements were subsequently reissued by the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute in Madras in two volumes (the Jayamaṅgalā in 1958, and the Cāṇakyaṭīkā in 1971). But tracking down the original fascicles can be quite a chore if one doesn’t have a complete run of this obscure journal at hand, and the KSRI volumes too are out of print and quite scarce. (Indeed, I was unable to obtain a copy of one fascicle, despite repeated attempts.) Hence, Pohlus has provided a useful service in republishing the whole, newly reset, in a single volume, so that it may be more easily and frequently read.
The resulting integral version of Harihara Sastri’s introductions and editions constitutes almost the whole of the book. Bhikṣuprabhamati’s commentary is probably the best of them all, despite being available to Harihara Sastri in only a single, incomplete, and inaccurately written manuscript. Bhikṣuprabhamati, as Olivelle points out (2013: 10–11), is the only commentator to explain the larger structure of the KAŚ. Noting (at the start of his comments on Book 2) that Book 1 laid the groundwork by prescribing the training of the king, Bhikṣuprabhamati divides the rest of the KAŚ into Books 2–5, treating the king’s duties within his own territory (svamanḍala), and Books 6–14, which concern his duties with respect to the enemy’s territory (paramaṇḍala), which are secondary since they presuppose the king’s successful management of internal affairs. The first section is further analyzed in terms of the old concept of yogakṣema, “enterprise and security.” Book 2 (the longest), he says, deals with how the king acquires property and wealth, and Books 3–5 prescribe how to preserve and secure those acquisitions.

Beyond these broader observations, the commentary displays erudition in analyses both grammatical and substantive, and explains the text with reference to other literature, including of course Manu’s code. This does not prevent his wrestling with the questions of principle or interpretation according to his own lights. For instance, in explaining the function of the dharmastha (‘justice’ or ‘judge’), Bhikṣuprabhamati takes pains to explain the judge’s authority in relation to that of the king. The commentator acknowledges that Kauṭilya himself had earlier specified that it is the king’s duty to “try cases brought by inhabitants of the cities and the countryside” (KAŚ 1.19.10). But, he continues, the king has the capacity to delegate authority (prayojakakartṛtva) to officials whose authority remains secondary and dependent (prayojyaka): “It is true that only the king has authority, but he may also have assistants for transactions transacted in different places. Accordingly, the king’s own capacity to commission others comes about [accepting Harihara Sastri’s emendation here], which means that agents thus commissioned should be installed for the purpose of countermanding any legal errors made during the hearing of cases.” In support of this interpretation, Bhikṣuprabhamati selectively quotes MDh 8.9ab and 10ab:

When the king does not try a case himself, however ...
Accompanied by three assessors (sabhya) he should try his cases.

Now Manu actually does envision a judge hearing a suit in the king’s stead, which is made clear in the half-stanza that Bhikṣuprabhamati omits (8.9cd): “... he should appoint a learned Brahmin to do so.” (The subject of the sec-