

**Seminar SAW:
History of Science, History of text**

Abstract

January 23, 2014

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The Composition of the Arthaśāstra: On Kauṭilya's Use of Sources and the Evolution of the Text

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya (*ca.* 100 CE) is the only surviving treatise from classical South Asia devoted wholly to statecraft. It is a very valuable text for many reasons, but for the purposes of this talk, it is most important in that it preserves a number of technical discourses from the early classical period otherwise largely lost to us.

For, given the variety of individual practices and areas of expertise involved in the enterprise of statecraft, the composer of the *Arthaśāstra* needed to draw on a number of pre-existing discourses, some of them clearly quite technical in nature, to provide instruction on various aspects of governance. Such discourses include what we might think of as “applied knowledge” and often take the form of discrete “topics” (*prakaraṇas*) or “subjects” (*adhikaraṇas*) within the text: construction, state finance, agriculture, law, animal husbandry, autopsy, and so forth. As such, the *Arthaśāstra* can rightly be considered an important compendium of technical literatures from early classical South Asia found nowhere else.

My primary interest in the text has been the manner of its composition: how it came to the form in which we now receive it. That Kauṭilya used a number of sources has long been recognized, and a well-regarded study by Thomas Trautmann has attempted to prove this through statistical analysis of the frequency of certain lexemes. What has been lacking, and what I have tried to provide in my own work, is a comprehensive theory of the composition of the *Arthaśāstra* based on clear philological analysis.

In my talk, I will present the key features of the text and the methods of textual criticism that I have used to help bring to light the various “layers” or “strata” of the text. In this, I will seek to make clear the philological reasoning upon which my results depend. I will then turn to look at the various layers of the text themselves. Such analysis yields a variety of insights about the composition of the text as well as its sources, and it is in this regard that useful observations can be made about the presence of technical discourses in the text itself in respect of both their content and presentation.