SOME REMARKS ON THE SĪTĀDHYA KṢAPRAKRĀNAṆA
OF THE ARTHĀŚĀSTRA

The economy of the Mauryas similarly to the neighbouring Seleucids was mostly based on agrarian revenue, and the private estate of the king (sītā) represented a very important category of land in this economic system\(^1\). Accordingly a sound interpretation of the relevant chapter the Arthāśāstra (sītādhya kṣaprakaranaḥ: ArthĀŚā II, 24.) the most important source of Maurya economy is a very urgent task\(^2\). Although this chapter has been frequently cited in the secondary literature there is much confusion surrounding the technical terms in it.

Fortunately since the appearance of Kangle's translation\(^3\) many scholars have discussed and explained a great deal of terms of economic and social nature\(^4\).

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Technical terms concerning technical issues in the practice of agriculture that form part of duties of the sītādhikṣaṇa as well as the evaluation of the level of technical development described in this chanter hitherto resisted to a prompt treatment. Even M.S. Randhawa a too rank expert in husbandry uncritically records the data taken from R. Shamastra’s outdated translation⁵. Altogether a meticulous research in these terms and in the possible sources of the contents of this chapter cannot be postponed.

The later problem is particularly intrinsic therefore it is touched upon by some eminent researchers. Johnston says that the Arthasastra is in essence the work of a practical administrator⁶. Breloer opines that Kauṭilya took help of assistants who collected the material and he himself edited it⁷. According to Kangle “he probably derived material from manuals... written before his days that have not come down to us”⁸.

We are caught on the horn of dilemmas just in the first sentence: sītādhikṣaṇa kṛṣītaṁraśulbavṛksāyurvedajñānas tajjñasakho vā sarvadābhāyanapuspaphalasākakandamūlāvālikyakṣaumakārpās bijāni yathākālaṁ grhṇīyāt.

It is translated by Meyer thus: “Der Ackeraufseher kundig des Ackerbaues und der Pflege der Bäumen und Sträuchern oder mit solchen verbunden, die sich auf diese Dinge verstehen, soll die Samen von allen Getreidearten, Blumen, Früchten, Gemüsen, Knollen, Wurzeln, Rauengewächsen, Flachs und Baumwolle, je nach ihrer Zeit, einsammeln”⁹. Kangle renders it so: “The Director of Agriculture, himself conversant with the practice of agriculture, water divining and the science of rearing plants, or assisted by

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⁶ E.H. JOHNSTON, op. cit., p. 89.

SAMOZVANTSEV, Arthashastra. Problemi sotsial’noy strukturi i prava, Moskva, 1984, p. 161; R. THAPAR, Interpreting Early India, Delhi, 1993, p. 121 etc.
experts in these should collect, in the proper seasons, seeds of all kinds of grains, flowers, fruits, vegetables, bulbous roots, creeper fruits, flax and cotton”\textsuperscript{10}.

It is striking that both translators fall short in rendering the term \textit{sītādhyaśa} in a satisfactory manner. The correct meaning of the word can be “superintendent of agriculture (of crown lands )”\textsuperscript{11}, “officer in charge of the king’s Khās Mahāl”\textsuperscript{12}, “Aufseher über das königliche Landeigentum”\textsuperscript{13}, “nadzirat el tsarikh pol”\textsuperscript{14}. Both Meyer and Kangle fail to grasp the proper meaning of the term \textit{krśitantra} a word hard to explain indeed. The only known attestation reads thus: \textit{kaccitte krśitantrace gośu puspaphalesu ca dharmārtham ca dvijātibhya diyate madhusarpīṣi}. (MahaBha II, 5, 106.) The Sanskrit lexicons correctly give the meaning of the compound in this context as “the fruits of the field”\textsuperscript{15} or “Feldfrüchte”\textsuperscript{16}. Unfortunately this interpretation does not help us at all. J. C. Roy is also in error in taking it as a synonym of the proper names Kiśiparāśara or Kiśisamgraha because not any extant manuscript of this agricultural treatise bears that title. It looks like better to take \textit{tantra} as “system, theory, scientific work”\textsuperscript{17} and then translate the whole compound either as “the system of agricultural science” or as “a scientific work on agriculture”. R.P. Das happily puts it as “das wissenschaftliche System (mit seinen Fachtexten) der Landwirtschaft”\textsuperscript{18}. We can but wonder why Kangle who is stuck to Bhāṭasvamin’s commentary in most cases does not follow it here. The explanation of the commentary is plain: \textit{krśitantraṃ}

\textsuperscript{10} R.P. KANGLE, \textit{The Kauṭiliya Arthaśāstra, Part. II. An English Translation with Critical and Explanatory Notes}, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{11} V.S. AGRAWALA, \textit{India as Known to Pāṇini}, Varanasi, 1963, p. 196.


\textsuperscript{13} M. NJAMMASCH, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{14} A.A. VIGASIN, A. M. SAMOZVANTSEV, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35.


\textsuperscript{17} W. MONIER-WILLIAMS, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 436.

Vṛddhaparāśāradipraṇītaṁ kṛṣiśāstram: “kṛṣitāntra is the system of agricultural science represented by Vṛddhaparāśāra and others”. Kautilya might have used the term in this sense without the specification: this is represented by Vṛddhaparāśāra and others. Parāśara and his school belong to the mediaeval times falling in the scope of Bhāṭṭasvāmin’s knowledge.

The following passage of his commentary is rather turbulent. It can be due to the fact that he perhaps uncritically used the statement of previous commentators whose works had been lost. The passage reads thus: sīrājñānaṁ daśāśālādi vṛksāyurvedo ‘gniveśyādipraṇītaḥ. “The sīrājñāna is presented by Daśāśālā and others and the vṛksāyurveda by Agniveśa and others”. It is a pity that we do not know who Daśāśālā is and what the word sīrājñāna means. In this connection R.P. Das makes useful suggestions. In his view sīrājñāna is perhaps identical with sīrajñāna (?) or by a slip of the pen with sītājñāna (?) and occasionally sīra or sītā stands here as a variant of gulma or sūlba of the Arthaśāstra manuscripts. We subscribe to the first half of this hypothesis because sīrajñāna “the knowledge of the plough” or sītājñāna “the knowledge of the furrow” are meaningful. The problem with the remaining part of the hypothesis is that these meanings stand very close to the technical term already occupied by kṛṣitāntra. So this locus remains obscure until more evidence becomes available.

The items gulma and sūlba also pose problems here. Meyer chooses gulma while Kangle prefers to sūlba in his critical edition of the text. On the ground of the commentaries Cb and Cj Kangle renders it as “water divining”. His version is adopted by J. Laping, too. We consider this translation purely conjectural because there is no credible textual evidence from the period surely preceding the age of the composition of the Arthaśāstra or even from the following centuries that could prove it. Even in the early mediaeval

Vṛksāyurveda of Sūrapāla the word evidently denotes "land-measuring" "Messkunst in Bezug auf Feldmesserung".22 This kind of practical knowledge well fits one of normal duties of the sītādhyaṅka. On the other hand water-divining is a quasi-magical act performed by religious specialists. The normal term that signifies this activity dakārāgala (BrSam LIV, 125 with Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary and KKSū 150) is an unexplained word itself. Meyer's reading gulma also supported by manuscripts is clearly beside the point.

Adhering to Bhaṭṭasvamin Kangle ascribes vṛksāyurveda to Agniveśa but to our best knowledge not any text is extant under his name.23 The spurious work attributed to him by Raghunath Singh cannot be traced.24

The term karṣaṇayantra is a hapax legomenon in Sanskrit literature. Meyer translates it as "Maschine", while Kangle boldly renders it as "ploughing machine". Gaṇapati Śāstri takes it as a collective term for the plough, various tools and the manpower employed in agricultural work.25 Raghunath Singh understands it as a plough together with its accessories.26 The later statement can be easily refuted: ploughs even the sophisticated ones consisting of several parts are called hala or lāṅgala (AmaK II, 9, 13-14; KṛṣīPa 112-113; MānaSā V, 56-57; BṛhatPaSm adhyāya 3; KṛṣīSā VII, 54-68 etc.) and never yantra. The name for the wholeness of the accessories of the plough is called sāmagrī (KṛṣīPa 112) and dravya (KKSū 246) denotes the plough and the other agricultural tools. In general Gaṇapati Śāstri's standpoint is feasible if we take karṣaṇa as

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22 R.P. Das, op. cit., p. 56.
“cultivated land” and yantra “instrument, implement etc.” in the broadest sense. In specialised meaning the word occurs in such compounds as karayantra “syringe” (KuṭṭiMa 684), ghaṭiyantra “water lifting device” (AmaK II,10,28 etc.) and srotyantra (ArthŚā II.24.18). The case of a late interpolation bringing a modern term also cannot be ruled out. Anyhow we must suspend our investigation until we get further linguistic material from technical texts.

Few reflections need to be added to the verse ten. It reads as follows: vātānātapayogam ca vibhajan yatra varṣati/trīn kariṣāmcā (karsakāṁśca) janayaṁstatra sasyāgamo dhruvaḥ. In Meyer’s rendering: “Wo (der Regengott)m Wind und Sonnenglut beigabe richtig verteild, regnet und drei Pflügungen ermöglicht, da gibt es sicheren Ernteertrag”. Kangle translates it thus: “Where it rains distributing wind and sunshine properly and creating three (periods for the drying of) cowdung cakes, there the growth of crops is certain”. The translation of the first line can be fully approved. The interpretation of the second depends on the reading accepted. Kangle’s choice can be grammatically justified, however, we feel here semantical problems. Having monitored Indian literature on weather forecast we have not found such symptoms of favourable season for good crops. On the contrary the information inherent in Meyer’s rendering is in agreement with living practice in India: in order to make sufficiently deep furrows three ploughings are recommended, (trigunākṛta etc.: AmaK II,9,9 and in modern times. At the same time it is regrettable that Meyer’s reading raises grammatical problems. Namely the terms for “ploughing” are karṣa (p IV,4,97; YājñāSm II,217; AmaK III,3,22) or karṣaṇa (ManuSm IV,5 ) but never karṣaka. It can be explained if we take the diminutive suffix -ka- without special meaning here or suppose it to stand for metrical reasons but we must confess that both ideas are

slightly strained. At present we support Meyer without excluding further discussions.

The mantra recited at the time of sowing is very remarkable for many aspects. It reads in the critical edition so: prajāpataye kāśyapāya devāya ca namaḥ sadā / sītā me ṛdhyātāṁ devi bijeṣu ca dhanesu ca. It should be noted that Meyer calls the verse defective. He amends prajāpataye for prajāpatye and on the basis of some manuscripts read devalāya namaḥ sadā. Kangle notices that the first line is hypermetric. Constituting the critical text as we have seen he rejects Meyer’s emendation of prajāpataye for prajāpatye. It is also not negligible circumstance that the origin of the mantra is unknown. Meyer tries two times to translate it. The first one reads thus: “Verehrung dem Prajāpati, dem Kāśyapa, dem Gottle! Möge immerdar Sītā (der Genie der Ackerfurche und des Ackerbaues) gedeihen in meinen Feldfrüchten und Gütern!” The second one is as follows: “Verehrung immerdar dem Prajāpati Kāśyapa Devala! Möge Sītā, die Göttin, gedeihen in meinen Saatfrüchten und Gütern!” Kangle renders it thus: “Salutation to Kāśyapa the lord of creation and to the god (of rain) always. May the divine Sītā prosper in my seeds and my grain.

In the first line the possibility of variant readings deserves special deliberation. Meyer regards Devala Kāśyapa a genius of agriculture and makes attempt at the identification of it with Udālaka Kāśyapa an unknown god of agriculture invoked at the time of harnessing the plough (lāṅgalayojana: PāraskaraGS II,13). Meyer himself is not free from doubts and puts here a question mark. To make the conjecture plausible he is looking for more textual evidence. Doing so he quotes a passages from the Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa where the name Devala Kāśyapa can be

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31 J. LAPING, op. cit., p. 108.
33 Ibid., S. 137.
attested. (Viṣṇudhā UP II,82,24-25.) We can also refer to a passage of the Gṛhashtrakarnākara where at the commencement of ploughing Kāśyapa is invoked together with Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Parjanya and other deities.36 The eminent role of Kāśyapa as a cultural hero who made the Kashmir valley fertile (NīlamaP 300 ; RājTa V, 109 and V, 113) and the existence of a famous treatise on agriculture under the alleged authorship of Kāśyapa (Kāśyapiyakṣisūkī) bear the testimony of an old tradition about Kāśyapa god, or demi-god who presides over agriculture. The evidence for a Devala Kāśyapa is notwithstanding very feeble so Meyer’s reading and interpretation remain on the level of a thought-provoking conjecture. Kangle’s text also evokes feeling of uncertainty. He simply identifies Kāśyapa with the lord of creation (Prajāpati) and separates them from the word deva. The identification is theoretically possible.37 Of course it is not obligatory: in the list of gods in the Gṛhashtrakarnākara Brahmā (=Prajāpati), Kāśyapa, Parjanya (=Indra) evidently fulfil different “duties”. In the light of that Kangle's translation “god (of rain)” looks like too farfetched. The last word cannot be said unless the origin of the mantra will be found and the meaning assessed. It is another question what do the single names of gods in the time of this original source and how it changed by the age of the compilation of the Arthaśāstra.

Amazingly takes Meyer bijeśu as “in meinen Feldfrüchten” and later as “in meinen Saatfrüchten”. We are at a loss here all the more because among others the meaning “Saatkorn” is given for bija in the Petersburger Wörterbuch38 that perfectly fits the context. Not less surprisingly Kangle renders dhana as “grain”. The word has not this meaning in any Sanskrit text moreover there is the proper word dhānya in the beginning of this chapter. It is unnecessary to restrict Sītā’s functions to make seeds and grains prosper. She is also the

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37 O. Böhtlingk, Sanskrit Wörterbuch in kürzerer Fassung, St Petersburg, 1879-1889, II, p. 40.
38 Ibid. IV, p. 226.
goddess of general prosperity who bestowes goods and richness to men. Therefore dhaneṣu would simply mean “in goods”. Keeping all this in mind we tentatively render the mantra so: “Salutation to Prajāpati and the god (or: divine) Kāśyapa always. May goddess Śītā prosper in my seeds and goods!”. From the analysis of the relation between the basic text and that of Bhaṭṭasvāmin it comes that it is often wrong to view things through commentarial glasses because one might lose sight of the original meaning. It is also improper way of interpretation to read into Kauṭilya the opinions of those authorities who might have stood only at Bhaṭṭasvāmin’s disposal. With other words all translations in future should not cling to Bhaṭṭasvāmin as it Kangle does. Instead of that we have to do our utmost best to find out the correct usage of terms in texts that approximately date from the centuries around the time of editing the Arthaśāstra a date so much debated. This task is extremely difficult but perhaps not unsolvable. We think that it is conceivable that Kauṭilya mostly derived his knowledge from the practice of agriculture prevailing in his day. This way of compiling treatises is not uncommon in India. The excellent books called Kṛṣiparāśara and Kāśyapīyakṛṣisūkti reflect the deep knowledge of practice in the mediaeval times. A fine example is Daśarathaśāstri, the compiler of the twentieth century Kṛṣiśāsana who profoundly uses both classical Sanskrit sources and his own experiments gained from agricultural work combined with experiments of his co-villagers and neighbours. Bhaṭṭasvāmin’s commentary must be independently evaluated in the frame of mediaeval Indian agriculture in an age that witnessed a so-far unseen phenomenon the codifying of the existing practical knowledge in textbooks both in Sanskrit and in vernacular languages.