The *Samarāṅganasūtradhāra*

Mattia Salvini, Mahidol University

The text

The *Samarāṅganasūtradhāra* is an encyclopedic work, attributed by tradition to the Paramāra king Bhojadeva (11th century), and collecting a vast number of subject matters under the general heading of *Vāstu*.[1] Although probably incomplete in the available manuscripts, its size remains impressive: including the 'interpolated section' it runs for almost 7500 Sanskrit verses.[2] The different portions resemble, in turn, a Purāṇa, a treatise on architecture, a disquisition into dramaturgic detail, and more.[3] It also includes a chapter on flying machines that has elicited a certain amount of curiosity in recent times.

Sections of the text have been studied and referred to by a number of modern scholars. Shukla's extensive study of Indian architecture uses the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra as its basic source. Otter's more recent analysis of the chapters dealing with residential architecture (besides providing a careful translation of relevant sections) offers a detailed account of important features defining the entirety of the text.[4]

---

[1] *Vāstu* refers to a dwelling, or dwelling place, and by inclusion comes to treat of the many activities connected with dwellings and construction sites. For a discussion of the terms *vāstu* and *vastu*, see Dagens, B. (ed. and tr.), *Mayamatam*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, Introduction (especially xxxix – xlv). The Amarakośa explains Vāstu as *veśmabhūḥ* (3.19), which Bhānujīdīkṣita explains as *veśmano bhūḥ*, i.e. the ground of a dwelling, and etymologizes as *vasanty atra*, '(people) live herein', hence from the root √*vas* in the sense of 'to dwell'. The *Matsyapurāṇa* also seems to connect Vāstu with the activity of setting up dwellings: 'Please explain in detail the laying out of temples, palaces, and so forth; by which method should one do that? And what is explained as Vāstu?' (*prāsādabhāvanādīnāṁ niveśaṁ vistarād vada | kuryāt kena vidhānena kaś ca vāstur udāhṛthaḥ* ‖115.1‖).

[2] 'Interpolated section' refers to a large number of verses on temple architecture that do not seem to perfectly fit into any of the chapters, although they are found in the manuscript traditions (pages 369 – 432 of Agrawala's edition). Whether they should really be deemed an 'interpolation' is another matter, considering that either the manuscripts we have are incomplete, or else the work itself was never brought to a closure.

[3] Chapter 3 effectively offers an index of many topics that will be dealt with in the rest of the work. If it represents the initial plan of the text, this would indicate that it was conceived as a much smaller work, not dealing with temple architecture, nor with several other topics only 'accidental' to Vāstu.

[4] I must thank Felix Otter for kindly and readily making his text available, and for prompt communication whenever needed. Much of this article is indebted to his precious study, arguably the most important to date on the *Samarāṅganasūtradhāra*.

Bhoja's work can be classified as belonging to the 'Northern' Vāstu tradition; the text presents itself as such, by tracing its own origin to the divine architect Viśvakarman, rather than Maya, as a Southern text would do.[5] Nevertheless, the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra contains an extensive treatment of Southern temple types.

The title

Samara-aṅgana-sūtra-dhāra is a compound word that offers several possible interpretive alternatives. Otter has offered a good case for his translation as 'the stage manager (*sūtradhāra*) of battlefields (*samarāṅgaṇa*)', proposing it as a plausible *biruda* (epithet) of King Bhoja.[6]

The compound has also been translated as 'architect of human dwellings',[7] resting on a different understanding of its etymology. A classical Sanskrit author would in any case have been aware of the possibility of multiple exegeses (*sūtradhāra*, in the very first verse, is again used in reference to Śiva), and would certainly not have considered this a flaw.

Authorship and date

The text has been attributed to King Bhoja, but it would be difficult to assess the precise role he might have had in its compilation: the possibilities range from inspiration and patronage, to full authorship. Otter has offered a lengthy analysis of the inconsistencies, both in terms of style and of content, which would make it hard to support the idea of the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra being the work of a single author. As Otter himself acknowledges, though, his statement is far from being conclusive. After all, most

---

A complete translation of the text is available. See: Sharma, K.S. (tr.), *Samarangana Sutradhara of Bhojadeva: An Ancient Treatise on Architecture (With An Introduction, Sanskrit Text, Verse by Verse English Translation and Notes in Two Volumes)*, Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2007. Although I cannot quite agree with Sharma's choices on a number of occasions, many sections offer valuable insights and information.

[5] Some texts consider Viśvakarman and Maya as contiguous teachers of Vāstu within the same lineage: see for example the list of eighteen preceptors in the *Matsyapurāṇa*: *bhṛgur atrir vaśiṣṭhaś ca **viśvakarmā mayas** tathā* [...] | 115.2ab |.

[6] Otter, page 33.

[7] Shukla, D.N., *Vāstu-Śāstra (Vol. I & II)*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998, page 307. Shukla offers an etymology in traditional style, consisting in the usual splitting of a compounds by specific glosses on its constitutive members. Agrawala (following Ganapati Shastri) agrees with this basic interpretation, but adds that it could also mean 'the architect of the fortunes on the battlefields' (Agrawala, V.S. (Ed.), *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, Baroda: Gaekwad's Oriental Series, 1966, xii, also quoted in Otter, page 30). The alternative interpretations rely on understanding *samara* as *sa* + *mara*, 'endowed with death', 'mortals'. Although Otter points out that this usage would have hardly any precedents, it is, I believe, a grammatically sound reading.

reasoning based on style and content expects a level of coherence that not all authors may be able (or even aspiring) to achieve. Whether the work of a single author or the final compilation of a collective endeavor, the text is likely to have drawn and reworked prior materials – comprehensiveness, rather than stylistic uniformity, appears to be the goal. Adam Hardy has also remarked that the architectural sections show significant differences amongst each other.[8]

Dating the text directly depends on one's view about authorship. If we accept a strong role of Bhoja himself, the initial strata, at least, should be taken to be coeval with his kingdom. Nevertheless, Otter proposes that its present form may have been reached only around the 15th century.

The initial section of the text: the frame story

In terms of style and content, the initial chapters resemble a Purāṇa.[9] They offer an origin story, imaginary by the very inner logic of the text: the colophons ascribe the composition to Bhoja, while the narration presents it as the words of Viśvakarman to his sons.

The narrative involves a righteous king intent upon improving the conditions of the Earth for the benefit of his subjects, quite fittingly for a work ascribed to a successful monarch (whose activities as a builder left a legacy that goes from temple complexes, to Hindī proverbs). The story of king Pṛthu appears in the Mahābhārata, in a somewhat condensed form that is related to various chapters of the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra.[10]

The very title of the first chapter offers an interesting ambiguity. The Sanskrit *Mahāsamāgama* can be interpreted in at least three ways. The common one is to split the compound as the coming (*āgama*) of the Great Even One (*mahā* + *samā*), the last term referring to the Earth. On the other hand, the compound could be also interpreted as meaning 'the coming of the Great Uneven One' (*mahā* + *asamā*), and this would make good sense, if we consider that when the Earth arrives on the scene, she has not yet been 'evened out'. Lastly, the compound could also mean 'the great meeting' (*mahā* + *samāgama*), referring to the crucial meeting between Brahma, the Earth and King Pṛthu. It is not impossible that the ambiguity is, in fact, an intended pun.

---

[8] Personal communication, but see also: Hardy, A.,'Drāviḍa Temples in the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra'*, in: *South Asian Studies* vol. 25, 2009.

[9] Even the proper architectural chapters are quite close to similar material found in the Purāṇas, in terms of style and terms employed. Compare, for example, the sections of temple architecture with the 42nd chapter of the Agnipurāṇa, on *Prāsādalakṣaṇam*.

[10] In fact it appears twice, once in the *Droṇaparvan*, and once more (even more brief) in the *Śāntiparvan*.

The importance of evenness

> [...] and he perfectly accomplished the evenness of the Earth;
> we heard that in fact, the Earth was supremely uneven.
>
> In all the *manvantara*s, the Earth is born uneven;
> Therefore Vainya (Pṛthu) uprooted the rock-webs from all sides.
> (*Mahābhārata, Śāntiparvan*[11])

The first two interpretations of the compound, presented in the previous section, suggest that evenness may be regarded as a desirable quality. One of Pṛthu's foremost tasks is to make flat what is uneven. By extension, we may understand the same as a crucial purpose of *Vāstu*: the *Sūtradhāra* holds a *sūtra* (a string), in order to set out the building on site. The fact that 'evenness' was considered a desirable quality is corroborated, for example, by the descriptions of the Buddhist Pure Lands, where the ground is 'perfectly even'.[12]

Such preference may be due do a variety of diverse, context-bound rationales. In the specific instance of Vāstu, though, since one of its main purposes is to make the Earth more orderly and comfortable, it is understandable how an even ground is (construction-wise) more manageable and less arduous. Let us also remark that the word *viṣama*, although etymologically translatable as 'uneven', also carries the extended sense of inconvenient or even *dangerous*.

The universe of a ruler: cosmogony, cosmology, and the role of the king

Chapter 4 offers an account of the origin of the universe, from its undifferentiated beginnings to the unfolding of the subtlest distinctions, in accordance with basic principles of Sāṁkhya philosophy. It could be read more precisely as a theistic form of Sāṁkhya, sources for which might have been scant even in Medieval India.[13]

---

[11] *samatāṃ vasudhāyāś ca sa samyag upapādayat |vaiṣamyaṃ hi paraṃ bhūmer āsīd iti ha naḥ śrutam || manvantareṣu sarveṣu viṣamā jāyate mahī | ujjahāra tato vainyaḥ śilājālān samantataḥ || Śāntiparvan*, 12,059.119a-119d*1032_02

[12] See the large *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, in *Mahāyānasūtrasaṁgraha*, especially page 137.

[13] When commenting on Śāntarakṣita's exposition of the Seśvarasāṁkhya view, Kamalaśīla does not quote from any seminal or philosophical source, but instead quotes from the *maṅgalācaraṇa* of the Kādambarī, the long prose poem by Bāṇa. Of course, Sāṁkhya flavored cosmology is omnipresent in Purāṇic literature, and our text is emulating the style of a Purāṇa.

In the overall economy of topics delineated by the questions of Viśvakarman's sons, the evolution and shape of the cosmos carry remarkable weight. Wide erudition is a mark of most works attributed to King Boja, and so is the tendency to interrelate different branches of knowledge: in this sense, it is not entirely surprising to find a short treatise on Sāṁkhya in the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra.

Chapters 4 to 7 perform the crucial function of locating the activity of Vāstu (the main topic) within a larger framework of time and space. The text starts by describing a cosmic time, which repeats itself in the cyclical unfolding of the same structure (Chapter 4); then it describes the space we inhabit now, with continents, mountains and so forth (Chapter 5); and finally, it gradually approaches events coeval to King Pṛthu and hence, to the disclosure of Vāstu (Chapters 6 and 7). The latter became desirable due to a fall in the condition of humans, originally living along with the gods.

We may say that these portions offer a very broad ideological rationale for the necessity of this branch of knowledge. Pṛhu is anointed by Brahmā himself as the ruler of all humans, entrusted with the daunting tasks of assisting them, now that their state of effortless living has become impossible due to the loss of the wish-fulfilling tree. The King, true to his call, wishes to even out the Earth and make it more livable for the social groups he has just created – a flashback in time from the temporal location of the initial section of the text. The birth of Vāstu as a whole can be seen in its similarity to the birth of this specific Vāstuśāstra, the Samarāṇganasūtradhāra. Both (it is implicitly suggested[14]) come from the righteous wishes of a benevolent king: the analogy between Pṛthu and Bhoja is inescapable. Let us also remember that Pṛthu is *the* Primordial King (*ādirāja*), the origin of the very words *kṣatriya* and *rājan* – and that his first task was, after all, to milk the Earth by making it 'even.'[15]

The grid of Vāstu

The sections on the basic grid of the Vāstupuruṣa, and the deities that inhabit it, are relatively short and schematic. The fundamental idea is quite clear: a construction site is like a person (*puruṣa*, also perhaps a 'soul') with weak and strong points laid out at precise junctures of his organism. The builder should take careful account of this fact if the building is to 'live' a healthy life. Similarly, a map of deities signifies that different areas will be more or less appropriate for specific purposes.

---

[14] Not so implicitly, in fact: see for example Chapter 1, verse 5.

[15] All of this, according to the Mahābhārata: 'Pṛthu, Vainya, is the Primordial King' *ādirājaḥ pṛthur vainyo* (*Anuśāsanaparvan*, 13,151.046c*0705_02); 'He may become famous (*prathayiṣyeta*) among all of us – this he was '*Pṛthu*'; He will protect us (*trāsyate*) all when we are hurt (*kṣata*) – thus he was the '*Kṣatriya*'; Having seen Pṛthu Vainya, the subjects would say 'we have affection (towards him) (*raktāḥ*)'-thus his name as '*Rāja*' (king) was born due to affection (*anurāga*).' *ayaṃ naḥ prathayiṣyeta sarvān ity abhavat pṛthuḥ |kṣatān nas trāsyate sarvān ity evaṃ kṣatriyo 'bhavat || pṛthuṃ vainyaṃ prajā dṛṣṭvā raktāḥ smeti yad abruvan | tato rājeti nāmāsya anurāgād ajāyata ||* (*Droṇaparvan*, 07, 049.021d@008_0765-0768). See also above, note 10.

One would expect the grid to be very important for the entire theoretical edifice of Vāstu, but in fact what is somewhat striking is the lack of theorization in these sections.[16] Like most of the text, the primary concern here seems to be with giving a complete list, enclosing all the possible (and all the necessary) topics related to the wide science of Vāstu.

Residential architecture

In the list of topics represented by the questions of Viśvakarman's son, the chapters on residential architecture appear prominently. They have been translated and studied in great detail by Felix Otter.[17] His careful comments point to a basic difficulty in translating the text: the exact meaning of technical terms is disputable and perhaps often shifting.[18]

---

[16] This lack of emphasis on the philosophy behind the Vāstupuruṣa is conspicuous when compared to modern (especially, popular) presentations of Vāstuśāstra. As noticed by Adam Hardy (personal communication), the Vāstupuruṣa is *never* referred to in the temple chapters.

[17] Otter, F., *Residential Architecture in Bhoja's Samarāṅganasūtradhāra*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, (2009)

[18] The problem is not only with Vāstu, but with many branches of knowledge which refer to material culture. In Āyurveda, for example, names of plants seem to refer to different species altogether according to regional usage. Similar difficulties are found when translating Buddhist Vinaya texts, wherein the objects referred to may have been out of use for centuries. Vāstu is in a slightly better position, inasmuch as architectural remains are far better preserved than remains of daily, easily degradable objects (but that does not quite include wooden buildings).

When I say that the sense of the terms may be shifting, this includes even fundamental terminology: in particular, words for measurements like *bhāga*, *pāda* and so forth, are not used with perfect consistency. The standard manner in which Felix Otter has translated compounds including *-bhāga* and a numeral, for example, would not work in some sections. More specifically, Otter takes *bhāga* to signify a fraction, while Shukla understands it as a term of absolute measure. Either solutions do not work in case of, for example, 14.24, where *bhāga* has to be taken as a synonym of *pada*: *paścimottarabhāgasthāṁ vāpīm api ca kārayet |vā(yau?yu)sugrīvapadayor gandharvasya ca bāhyataḥ ||* Both *pada* and *bhāga* here refer to a square in a grid.

These considerations bear upon a basic issue: to what extent was the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra linked to actual building practices? If a medieval reader would have been able to determine the sense of its technical terms with precision in each instance, it must have depended on a good deal of instruction from an expert.

See also Hardy, A.,'Drāviḍa Temples in the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*', in: *South Asian Studies* vol. 25, 2009: '[...] the term for a given element may vary not only from chapter to chapter, but almost from verse to verse, often giving the impression that elegant linguistic variation is more important than precision, that from time to time the reader is treated to riddles, and above all that meanings are conveyed as much by the contexts of words as by the actual words used.'

Samarāṅganasūtradhāra, though, is the inclusion of a wide range of topics, some of which are perhaps not exactly central to the usual concerns of Vāstu.

There are, predictably, some chapters on the *sthapati* (architect) and his desirable good qualities; on rituals for various remedial purposes; on the choice of building materials, and so forth. In other words, there are several more sections dealing with matters that may clearly have relevance to the process of building a secular or sacred structure.

Machines, and flying machines

In 1959, a text attributed to no less than sage Bharadhvaja, and obtained as a revelation (allegedly traced back to sage Bharadhvaja) in the late 19th century, was published in South India. Its subject matter was flying machines, constructed in a variety of materials, including donkey's, cow's, and elephant urine; a delicious sweet dish called *pañcāmṛta*; and of course, several different metals. One of the machines (the *śakunavimāna*) was shaped like a wedding cake resting on the side of a giant fish; another would fly at a speed of at least 8000 mph (never achieved by any modern aircraft within the atmosphere). Pandit Subbaraya Shastri had drawings of these planes made, and even tried to construct models: but they did not fly.[20]

Such a discouraging account may tempt one to group the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra's treatment of flying vehicles in the same category of disappointing fancy. Yet, it would be a rather unfair comparison.

Being the only unequivocal ancient Indian source on building aeroplanes, Bhoja's work has attracted considerable attention in recent times (a casual internet search will make this clear). However, I would like to shift the query from the obvious, but strictly speaking unanswerable questions (*did they try? did they work?*) to another set of considerations, that bear upon the entirety of the text.

The author states something that should not pass unobserved: the instructions to make flying machines are, purposely, *incomplete*. Due to ethical considerations, the descriptions are not enough to effectively make any real aeroplane:

> The construction of the machines has not been explained,
> For the sake of secrecy, and not due to lack of knowledge,
> In that respect, that should be known as the reason –

---

[20] See Mukunda, H.S., at. Al., 'A critical study of the work "Vymanika Shastra"', http://cgpl.iisc.ernet.in/site/Portals/0/Publications/ReferedJournal/ACriticalStudyOfTheWorkVaimanikaShastra.pdf .

The authors conclude their article in a less than complimentary manner: 'None of the planes has properties or capabilities of being flown; the geometries are unimaginably horrendous from the point of view of flying; and the principles of propulsion make then [them?] resist rather than assist flying' (page 7).

One interesting section describes the king's palace, commending a specific type of location, shape, and distribution of inner sections. What makes this portion particularly worthy of attention is that recently Michael Willis has located a likely candidate for Bhoja's own actual palace site – which opens up a good possibility of comparative analysis between textual practices and their application 'on the ground'.

Temple architecture

In terms of sheer bulk, the chapters on temples occupy the largest part of the work. Although this is not particularly at odds with Vāstu treatises in general, what is here worth noticing is that the topic is *not* quite included in the list at the beginning of the treatise. Hence, it is not impossible that some, or much, of the material included in these sections may be a later (perhaps gradual) addition.

What is rather striking about the temple chapters is how, in terms of temple types, they are all-inclusive. Despite being a text of the Northern tradition, and associated to a ruler of Central India, we find here a lengthy discussion of Drāviḍa structures, up to twelve storey temples.

A large part of the temple descriptions are extremely schematic and would allow for remarkable variation in terms of how one may fill that scheme. No precise picture of the decorative elements comes through (some are barely mentioned, in fact), and in several cases we find the repetition of the very same scheme, with minor permutations when applied to a different type. The process is quite mechanical, to the extent that some architectural elements appear not even to have been listed explicitly, when context would made their repetition understood.[19] If these chapters were indeed intended to have a linking with actual building practices, it is likely that a good deal of oral explanation would have been necessarily attached to the text. This feature is not at all an oddity in the context of traditional Indian *śāstras*.

Other topics related to buildings

I have only touched on some broadly defined sections of the text, taken to be (perhaps arbitrarily) particularly relevant. One of the most interesting features of the

---

[19] For these observations, I am heavily indebted to Adam Hardy. His understanding of the architectural logic implied in the temple chapters took me by surprise, as he was on occasion able to (successfully) predict what would appear in sections we yet had to read.

The 'computational' quality of some of the temple sections is not a unique feature of the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra. For the Mayamatam, Dagens notices that 'Temples with more than five storeys are presented as mere extrapolations of five storeyed buildings [...]' and that a similar process is 'used to describe gateways' (Dagens, B. (ed. and tr.), *Mayamatam*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007, page 377 note 20). About the number of storeys, both texts describe only up to twelve storeyed temples; the Mayamatam, though, refers to temples between thirteen to sixteen storeys (Chapter 11, verse 19), without describing them.

They are not fruitful when disclosed.[21]

Nonetheless, the lengthy chapter was felt worth including in this large Vāstu treatise. If at all one wished to put it into practice, extra information (perhaps to be provided in person) would have to be acquired. Although this may be the case due to the esoteric nature of the knowledge involved in the specific chapter, what bears upon the entirety of the work is that a gap between textual and extra-textual knowledge is explicitly mentioned (and nowhere seen as a flaw). The list of qualifications of someone who would be able to actually make the machines is worth mentioning:

> Connection to a traditional lineage, skill, direct instructions,
> Practice of the *śāstra*, exertion in the activities of Vāstu, and intelligence [...][22]

At least two of the requirements, it will be noticed, indicate the necessity of additional information compared to what is found in the text.

The section which contains a description of aeroplanes is part of a large treatment of machines in general (*yantra*). The philosophy behind the efficacy of the *yantra* depends upon a theory of elements and seeds (*bīja*) bearing some resemblance to the basic outline of Sāṁkhya – hence the cosmological bent of the text becomes once more relevant.[23] In the treatment of *yantra*s, an overall intellectual motive might be at play: an advanced theory about the elemental world is applied (perhaps only speculatively) to a branch of technological knowledge.

Visual arts, human types, Rasa and Abhinaya[24]

The section of sculpture and painting is fairly large and detailed, covering a variety of related topics: iconography (70, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80), painting proper (71, 72), clay and stucco (73), and lastly, an interesting section that is closely related to other types of *śāstra*s.

The three final chapters of the manuscript tradition fit the context of Vāstu due to their link with the visual representation of humans. However, their close connection to other branches of knowledge (and in one case, disproportionate length) makes them resemble independent works, perhaps attached in a collage-like fashion. As we shall see, the specific wording of the last chapter corroborates this view.

---

[21] *yantrāṇāṁ ghaṭanā noktā guptyarthaṁ nājñatāvaśāt | tatra hetur ayaṁ jñeyo vyaktā naite phalapradāḥ || 31.79cd-80ab.*

[22] *pāramparyaṁ kauśalaṁ sopadeśaṁ śāstrābhyāso vāstukarmopadeśo dhīḥ |* 31.87ab.

[23] The basic theory of elements implied in chapter 31 (on *yantra*s) has been nicely studied in a short article by Mira Roy. See Roy, Mira, "The concept of Yantra in the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra of Bhoja", in *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 19 (2): 118-124 (1984).

[24] Visual arts are the main topic of Vol.II in Shukla's study.

The subject matter of human typology is particularly important to Kāmaśāstra (erotic science), a branch of knowledge not so intuitively connected to temple architecture. However, the link is quite clear to anyone who may have observed the sculpture on the walls of a number of sacred structures throughout India, Khajuraho being a particularly well-known example. Chapter 81 shows remarkable terminological echoes of Kāmaśāstra treatises. Yet, an important set of depictions is lacking – that of the desirable and undesirable coupling of types. This in itself suggests a different field of application: the craft of representing humans, rather than that of love-making.

The chapter on 'Aesthetic Flavours and Gazes' (82) relates explicitly to paintings. Interestingly, it lists eleven *rasa*s (although one, due to the poor condition of the manuscript, is incomprehensible). The basic rationale is indeed identical to that of the Nāṭyaśāstra,[25] but is applied to paintings: certain *bhāva*s (emotive states, often visible as physical reactions) elicit the enjoyment of a specific *rasa*: and their visible reactions on the body can be visually depicted. In other words, this brief chapter tells us how to paint a certain *rasa* into the representation of a human figure:

> The edge of the forehead is rubbed, the eyes are reddened and wide open, the teeth bite the lower lip: that is called furious flavour.[26]

Chapter 83, by far the longest of the chapters related to visual arts, and the last (incomplete) section of the entire work, deals with what are, unmistakably, dance gestures. It is of course quite possible to employ these as guidelines for sculpture, relief, or even paintings – yet, much of the wording of the text strongly suggests that it was originally and primarily intended for dance performers themselves (much like the Abhinayadarpaṇa, which it resembles in terms of sentence structure and terminology). On occasion, it is explicitly stated that something is enjoined for 'dancers' (*nartaka*),[27] or that it is employed by the 'experts on dance' (*nṛttakovida*, *nṛttatattvajña*).[28] Perhaps more than any other chapter, it points at the heterogeneous nature of this text, and suggests its being a compilation of diverse sources.

Conclusions: the nature of the text

---

[25] I am referring in particular to Chapter 6, where it is explained how *rasa*s spring from the combination of proper *bhāva*s.

[26] *nirmārjitalalāṭāntaḥ saṁraktodvṛttalocanaḥ |dantadaṣṭādharoṣṭho yaḥ sa raudro rasa ucyate ‖ 7 ‖*

[27] *kaṭījaghanayoścābhinayastaddeśavartinā | asyāpyanugatā dṛṣṭiḥ kārśā(ryā)sarvatra nartakaiḥ ‖73‖ divyāḥ(pāpārdha?)ye cānye tānapyavikṛtānanaḥ | darśayedutratabhrūkṣca pāṇināṇena nartakaḥ ‖76‖*

[28] *tatpradeśe pra(vṛttena) pāṇinā nṛttakovidaiḥ |yoṣitāṁ viṣaye caiṣa (pāṇinā?) prāyeṇa yujyate ‖83‖ kartavyā vadanābhyāśe sā kuñcitavijṛmbhitā |aṅguli(liḥ)nṛttatattvajñair vākyārthasya nirūpaṇe ‖114‖*

I have provided a broad and selective overview of the Samarāṅganasūtradhāra, occasionally commenting on the nature of the chapters under consideration. Admittedly, this short article raises a series of questions without attempting any definite answer: I hope, however, that the questions will be found relevant in themselves.

The Samarāṅganasūtradhāra may appear rather surprising to someone who expects anything resembling a *manual* in the modern sense. The text does not include sufficiently detailed instructions for anyone wishing to put it into material practice: in other words, one cannot read the book and then build a temple. This is surely a simplistic statement, since it would also be inaccurate to say that the text provides no guidelines at all in that direction: what I intend to stress, though, is that the guidelines are given in a context and manner that differ substantially from modern cultural practices that may have similar concerns.[29]

What the text surely does is to place Vāstu within a wider context, and also, to locate a great variety of specialized topics and activities (such as choosing materials, building machines, identifying regional temple-styles, and so forth) within the broader framework of Vāstu, and within the intellectual world of its author(s). It subsumes Vāstu into the world, and at the same time the world into Vāstu.

Bibliography

Ācārya, Ś.Ś. (ed., tr.), *Matsyapurāṇa*, Bareli: Samskṛti Saṁsthān

Agrawala, V.S. (ed.), *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, Baroda: Gaekwad's Oriental Series, 1966

Dādhimatha, M.M.Pandit Sivadatta (ed.), *Nāmaliṅgānuśāsana alias Amarakośa of Amarasiṁha with the commentary Vyākhyāsudhā or Rāmāśramī of Bhānuji Dīkṣita*, Delhi: Chawkhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, 1995

Dagens, B. (ed. and tr.), *Mayamatam*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007

Dwarikadass, S. (ed.), *Tattvasaṁgraha*, Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968

Ghosh, M., (ed.), *Abhinayadarpanam*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957

[29] On this issue, though, see the work of Adam Hardy, especially, Hardy, A.,'Drāviḍa Temples in the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra'*, in: *South Asian Studies* vol. 25, 2009. My own article owes much to my collaboration with Adam Hardy, who has effectively made the sense of the text 'visible' in its architectural embodiments: in a sense, this is one of the first fruits of our collaborative efforts. I must thank him for the invaluable interaction over the past few years.

Hardy, A.,'Drāviḍa Temples in the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*', in: *South Asian Studies,* 25(2009): 41-62

Mahabharata: electronic text (C), Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1999 (On the basis of the text entered by Muneo Tokunaga et al., revised by John Smith, Cambridge, et al.),
http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gret_utf.htm#MBh

Mitra, R. (ed.), *Agnipurāṇam*, Calcutta : Asiatic Society of Bengal 1870-1879

Mukunda, H.S., at. Al., 'A critical study of the work "Vymanika Shastra"',
http://cgpl.iisc.ernet.in/site/Portals/0/Publications/ReferedJournal/ACriticalStudyOfTheWorkVaimanikaShastra.pdf

Otter, F., *Residential Architecture in Bhoja's Samarāṅganasūtradhāra*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, (2009)

Roy, Mira, "The concept of Yantra in the Samarāṇganasūtradhāra of Bhoja", in *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 19 (2) (1984):118-124

Sharma, K.S. (tr.), *Samarangana Sutradhara of Bhojadeva: An Ancient Treatise on Architecture (With An Introduction, Sanskrit Text, Verse by Verse English Translation and Notes in Two Volumes),* Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2007

Shukla, D.N., *Vāstu-Śāstra (Vol. I & II)*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998

Vaidya, P.L. (ed.), *Mahāyānasūtrasaṁgrahaḥ*, Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute, 1961