

**Harald Wiese & Sadananda Das**

# The Charter of Viṣṇuṣeṇa





*The Charter of Viṣṇuṣeṇa*

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## **The Charter of Viṣṇuṣeṇa**

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The charter of king Viṣṇuṣeṇa is a Sanskrit inscription in *Brāhmī* script on two copper plates dated around 600 CE. Viṣṇuṣeṇa belonged to the Maitraka dynasty in Gujarat. Although the charter is not an endowment record, it shares many features with this kind of record. For example, Viṣṇuṣeṇa favours the merchants and informs future kings about the charter, he signs with his own hand, and he dates the document. The eternity clause is present as well as the *pādānudhyāta* and the *pañcamahāśabda* formulae.

The charter's main part consists of statutes for a community of merchants providing for their protection against escheat and threshold breaking, restricting confiscation and conscription, setting fines for violence against workers or animals, and regulating liquor production and bordercrossing fees, etc. In 1953–1954, Dines Chandra Sircar has provided a transliteration and detailed remarks approaching a translation. Building on this pathbreaking work and on that of some

other authors, this booklet engages in an in-depth philological discussion of the statutes, many of which still prove difficult to understand.

Among our findings, we like to highlight the following: The statutes can be grouped in a meaningful manner. Some Sanskrit words seem to be recorded in the charter for the first time: *paṇaka* and *ādāna* (“fee” or “tax”), *dhreṅka* (“lever for moving”), *pāda* (perhaps a hitherto unrecorded unit of volume), and others. Apparently, a royal official called *rājagraha* was responsible for the conscription of labourers and a *prapāpūra* was a person responsible for the filling of a cistern. Surprisingly (for an epigraphic record), the popular *anuṣṭubh* metre shows up once. Finally, two points for the history of economic policy: frontier duties concern only outgoing goods, and taxes were based on potential income, rather than actual income.

