

*Devyāmata*, chapter 81: the laying of the cords (sūtras), translation.

81.1 Next hear as I describe the proper worship of the site (vāstuyāga) and laying of the cords (sūtrapāta) in due sequence.

81.2-3 In the bright half of the month, under a good lunar mansion, on a good lunar day, during the northward passage of the sun, under a good sign of the zodiac, at an auspicious moment, with all equipment assembled, the chief officiant (ācārya) or architect (sthapati) should set out the cords of the temple (prāsādaṃ sūtrayet) in due sequence, to the accompaniment of the sounds of the conch and musical instruments, with the auspicious utterance of prayers from the vedas.

81.4-5b Having collected all the equipment, that learned, wise, pure man should level the ground to the extent of the temple and pavilion (maṇḍapa), up to the edges of the temple base (jagati), removing dips and elevations.

81.5cd He should ascertain the eastern direction and apply cow dung.

81.6ab The wise man should make the area well-guarded and free from danger.

81.6c-7 Having bathed and sipped according to the rules, dressed in white, focused, he should bathe his feet and sip. As is suited to the site (vāstubhūmi), well assisted, he should assemble the peg (kīlakā) and cord (sūtra), and apply the cords.

81.6c susnātācamya: Aiśa compounding.

81.7c kīlakā: One might expect either kīlaka or kīlikā. Kīlaka is seen at verse 34; and the shorter kīla at verses 33 and 35. Elsewhere in this text, as here, the term kīlakā is used. From verse 24 onward, the term śaṅku is also seen. At verse 33 on, both terms – śaṅku and kīla – are used for the same item.

These terms stand for the pegs that position and anchor the cord in mapping the building plan, and mark the cardinal and intermediate points along the outer edge of the plan. There is a switching back and forth from singular to plural for these pegs. So, for example, at verse 25 kīlakā is clearly set in the singular, as a single peg; while at verse 24 we see śaṅkūni, pegs plural.

81.8-9 He who knows the mantras, well concentrated, should, for the sake of wellbeing, establish in the region between the north and northeast an auspicious, fine, new, strong pot full of water, with recommended flowers, well smeared in sandal, to the accompaniment of the sounds of the vedas and musical instruments.

81.10 To the north of the pot, he should assemble and establish the axe (paraśu) and chalk (maṣṭilā), cord (sūtra), with the peg (kīlakā) and marks (lakṣaṇa).

81.11 He should properly venerate Viśvakarman, with perfumes and flowers, etc. Then the mantrin should worship the axe, etc., and the peg (kīla) in turn.

81.12 Having correctly worshipped them all, he should bow and make a declaration to Viśvakarman, take them and, facing east, commence the application of the cords.

81.13 The [procedure for] determining the eastern direction has been described. The cord in the cardinal directions (diksūtra) is two-fold. Having made the ground level with the cords, he should then apply the cords for the temple.

81.10a maṣṭilā: working from the root maṣ to crush, powder, I take maṣṭilā to be chalk in this context. The term is repeated below, at 81.25 and 81.27.

81.10b lakṣaṇānvitam: MW notes that the term lakṣaṇa is used for the lines drawn on the sacrificial ground at ŚBr. and GṛŚrS.

81.11b viśvakarmaṇam: Viśvakarman is the divine architect.

81.13a pūrvadiksādhanaṃ proktam: The procedure for finding the east-west line is given in DM chapter 73: devyāmate diksādhanalakṣaṇaṃ trisaptatimapāṭalaḥ.

81.13b diksūtraṃ dvigataṃ tathā: There are two principal cords: east-west and north-south. At verse 17 they are termed the mūlasūtras. Each of them has two parts, running from the centre of the plan out to its edge. It is in this sense that they are twofold (dvigata). At verse 17 we are told that each half of each mūlasūtra is termed a jīvasūtra.

81.14 Establishing the cord behind the temple, beyond the temple base (jagati), he should extend the cord as far as the extent within.

81.15 Stretching it well from that point, he should [draw two arcs,] carefully set down the cord between the two fish figures (matsyas) [at the intersections of those arcs], and mark the path of the [north-south] cord.

81.16 [That cord extends along] the midpoint between the two sides, as far as the edge of the temple base (jagati). He should shake [the chalked cord] between the two fish figures (matsyas) and apply the temple cords from there.

81.17 The cord that runs east-west, and that which runs north-south, are the principal cord[s] (mūlasūtra). That which runs through the centre is the jīvasūtra.

81.18 Securing the principal cord[s] (mūlasūtras), one should apply the temple cords from there. One should proceed according to the number of hastas intended [for the building].

81.14 – 17: Here we have an account of the use of cords to map the plan, once the east-west line has been established. See figure 2 for a presentation of the use of cords to map the plan.

81.14 and 15: What appears to be described in verses 14 and 15 is the determination of the north-south line. The procedure is shown in figure 2: circles c2 and c3 are drawn at the ends of the east-west line, with a radius equal to the length of that line. The fish-shaped intersections of those two circles (matsyas) are used to draw a north-south line.

81.16c āsphālya: The chalked cord is anchored at each end, then shaken to leave a chalk mark on the ground along the cord's path.

81.17cd: Mūlasūtra is given as a term for the two principal sūtras that are the first to be laid down: one running east-west through the centre of the plan; the other running north-south through the centre.

We are also told that the term jīvasūtra is given to each half of each mūlasūtra, running to the centre from the outer edge in each cardinal direction.

81.19 Having established the temple base (jagadi) and dimensions all around, he should measure out the cella (garbha), the prāgrīva wall projection, and pavilion (maṇḍapa), using the principal cord (mūlasūtra).

81.20 He should mark out each of their borders (paridhi) in the four cardinal directions, and their corners in the intermediate directions, along the corner cord (karṇasūtra).

81.21 The wise man, knowing their correct length and breadth, may shape the temple in accordance with the central cord (madhyasūtra).

81.22 One should prepare the temple according to the number of hastas intended. He should mark the jīvasūtra in the four cardinal directions with half that measure.

81.19a jagadis: The term usually seen is jagati.

81.19c mūlasūtreṇa: The emendation is made on the grounds of sense.

81.23 Beyond the central cords, using that measurement from the centre, he who knows the measurements should set the carefully measured temple corners in the intermediate directions.

81.24 Having thus made the temple, carefully measured, up to the boundaries (paridhi), he should then install the pegs (śaṅkus) there in the intermediate directions in turn, at the head (mastake).

81.25 Then, bowing and addressing Viśvakarman at the pot, he should collect up the peg (kīlakā), chalk (maṣṭilā) and axe (paraśu).

81.26abc They are smeared with white sandal, decorated with white flowers, and ornamented. He gathers them up.

81.26d-27 He should smear the base of the peg (śaṅkumūla), which is thrice wrapped in cord, with honey, ghee, curd, and milk. He should carefully take hold of the peg, and then the axe, and chalk.

81.28 With the utterance "ūṃ", greetings, and the sounds of song and instrumental music, he should go to the southeast, with all equipment assembled.

81.29 There he should set a throne (āśana) covered in a white cloth. Knowledgeable in the śāstras and composed, the architect (sthapati) sits there, facing east.

81.30 Taking the peg (śaṅku) in his right hand, then in his left, he carefully fixes it in the ground and correctly demonstrates the mudrā.

81.24d mastake: The mastaka could refer to either the head of the vāstunara, in the northeast corner, or the head of each śaṅku. At verse 33b below the word mastake appears again. This time it seems clear that the head of the śaṅku is intended. But here at verse 24d, in the context of the intermediate directions, the head of the vāstunara can't be ruled out.

81.31 "May the serpent-beings (nāgas) and wish-granting deities of the directions (lokapālas) inhabit [this] surface. May they reside in this house, ever bringing life and strength".

81.32 There may be a general mantra, or the beneficial praṇava. Establishing the peg (śaṅku) with the mantra, he should fetch the axe.

81.33 He should present the peg (śaṅku) so that the eight [mūrtipas] may strike [it] on the head (mastake). And as the eight strike [it they say]: "Let the peg (kīla) be well positioned for us."

81.34 While the peg (kīlaka) is being struck, he should observe signs. Cows or birds, passing carts, and girls are the three best [signs].

81.35-36b If there is the sound of a conch, drum, flute or song while the peg (kīla) is being struck, the householder will always rejoice, along with his wife, sons and dependants.

81.36cd Having observed good omens, he should insert the peg (śaṅku).

81.37 Then, going to the southwest, the wise man should establish a peg (śaṅku) there. He should set up a peg (śaṅku) in the northwest and then northeast, in turn.

81.38 Establishing the site (kṣetra) in the cardinal and intermediate directions with the cord, approaching with flowers, etc., the pūjā peg (kīlakā) is well placed, level and stable.

81.33a aṣṭau: I am assuming that the eight who strike the peg are the eight mūrtipas.

81.35a śaṅkha: The reading śaṅku at N does not fit here and is clearly influenced by the repeated references to the śaṅku in the passage.

81.39 The peg (śaṅku) is [positioned] according to the cord. From it he should extend the cord. He should take the peg (śaṅku), twice wrapped (dviguṇaveṣṭitam) [in cord], in a clockwise direction.

81.40 He who knows the śāstras should use the cord to make [the site] square. He should offer a bali offering at the pegs (kīla) in the southeast, etc. in turn.

81.41-42 In the southeast, facing southeast, he should make the offering with the balimantra: "Ūṃ to the Agnis and to all who dwell here. I offer to them a domestic bali offering (gṛhya bali) with a mantra ending in the sound svāhā and the best, pure rice."

81.43-44b Then, going to the southwest, he stands facing southwest: "The lord of the southwest and the rākṣasas in the southwest; I offer to them a gṛhya bali with a mantra."

81.44c-45 Going to the northwest, he stands facing northwest: "Ūṃ, hail to the nāgarājas and all those who dwell here; I offer to them a gṛhya bali and pure boiled rice."

81.46-47 Going to the northeast, he stands facing northeast: "Ūṃ to the Rudras and to all who dwell here; I offer to those benevolent beings a gṛhya bali." Thus satisfied, the deities will grant wishes.

Chapter 81: The features of the laying of the sūtras.

81.42, 81.44 and 81.47 prayatsāmi for prayacchāmi: The unconventional spelling reflects pronunciation.