

doi:10.1017/mdh.2017.17

Kenneth G. Zysk, *The Indian System of Human Marks* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. xvi, 954, 2 vols, €249,00, hardback and e-book, ISBN: 9789004299726.

Divination is the belief that it is possible to learn what the future holds or to know the will of the gods. It is a belief that has been prevalent in human society since time immemorial up to the present day. In the past, most scholars considered divination to be a system of superstition not worthy of study, and so generally avoided working on divination. However, this attitude has changed over the last couple of decades as scholars have become increasingly aware that divination provides significant insights into the fears and belief systems of a culture, and therefore had (and has) real effects on people's actions and behaviour. Furthermore, the study of divination in a given culture not only provides valuable information about the culture but can also illuminate interactions and transmissions of knowledge between two or more different cultures.

With the publication of the two-volume *The Indian System of Human Marks*, Kenneth G. Zysk, a respected Indologist and historian, presents a meticulous and informative study of physiognomy in ancient and medieval India based on textual sources.

Physiognomy is a type of divination that enables its user to assess another person's character and qualities from their outer appearance, for example from their face or hands. There are many reasons people would want to use physiognomy to understand another person's character. Is a potential business partner honest and reliable? Is a potential wife for one's son able to bear many children? In statesmanship, as well, physiognomy played an important role; for example, physiognomy was a significant part of the education of the princes of the Mughal Empire (p. 25). Conversely, an individual can use physiognomy to learn their future, for example via palmistry.

Zysk's work analyses the history and development of physiognomy in India based on the textual sources available from ancient and medieval times. In addition, Zysk's introduction includes a careful and fascinating comparison with the systems of physiognomy found in Mesopotamia and ancient Greece.

The first volume of Zysk's work contains an erudite introduction: a study of physiognomy in different types of Sanskrit texts, and in the Sanskrit text and the English translation of the material. In particular, the physiognomic sections from the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa* were edited from original manuscripts and translated into English by Zysk; significantly, this part of the work makes an important primary source available to the scholarly community. The second volume of the work is entirely dedicated to textual variants and philological notes for the Sanskrit text material found in the first volume.

Zysk's comparative study of physiognomy in India, Mesopotamia and ancient Greece shows complicated and fascinating interactions between the three cultures. There was not one line of transmission, but transmissions of forms of physiognomic knowledge in all directions.

The earliest Sanskrit examples of physiognomy are found as chapters in texts from the knowledge system known as Jyotiḥśāstra. Being the tradition of the astral sciences, Jyotiḥśāstra covers a range of topics, including astronomy, mathematics and various kinds of divination, including astrology, omens and physiognomy. In the Jyotiḥśāstra texts, marks of men and marks of women are treated separately. As noted by Zysk, the oldest Sanskrit material, namely, that found in the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*, shows evidence of a Prakrit (vernacular) origin. The inclusion of the material in Jyotiḥśāstra signifies that it, via the process of Sanskritisation, became a part of the Brahmanic world and its knowledge systems.

Physiognomy is also found in some of the Purāṇas, a group of sacred texts dealing with a wide range of topics, especially traditional lore. The inclusion of physiognomy in these texts further solidified the material as Brahmanic, and the wider distribution of the Purāṇas than Jyotiḥśāstra texts meant the knowledge was distributed more widely across the Hindu world in India. In fact, being essential in arranged marriages, physiognomy was seen as part of the Brahmanic tradition to law and customs.

Later, physiognomy was integrated into Sanskrit encyclopedias, as well as into some Kāmaśāstra (erotic literature) texts.

After the transmission and dissemination of physiognomy in the collections of Jyotiḥśāstra, the Purāṇas, encyclopedias, and Kāmaśāstra, the topic of physiognomy found expression in independent texts. As noted by Zysk, most of these independent physiognomy treatises only exist as unedited manuscripts. While the work does not contain a complete independent physiognomy treatise, Zysk's careful discussion of this type of literature describes a number of texts and includes direct citations with Sanskrit text.

Overall Zysk's work is a major contribution not only to the study of physiognomy in India but also to the study of divination and transmissions of knowledge in the ancient and medieval world. The work is a scholarly one and the bulk of it will not be easily accessible to a layman reader. That said, the educated reader will likely enjoy some parts of the work, since the story of physiognomy and its development in India is a fascinating one. The work is certainly a recommended work for scholars of India and her history and culture, as well as for scholars of divination in Mesopotamia and ancient Greece who are interested in the interactions of these cultures with other cultures, in this case that of India.

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