# Review

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*The Indian System of Human Marks* is an exhaustive edition, translation, and study of the major texts of what is often referred to by modern scholars as Indian 'physiognomy', but referred to in the tradition as the 'marks' of 'men' and 'women' (*puruṣa-* and *strī-lakṣaṇa*). It traces this system of Indian knowledge from its inception in the Jyotiḥśāstra literature around the turn of the era through to its much later establishment as an independent science (Sāmudrikaśāstra). Given the exhaustiveness of the study, including texts that have never before been published, Zysk's work represents a landmark achievement in advancing our understanding of Indian physiognomy in particular and traditional Indian science in general.

Zysk's work is divided into three parts, which due to their overall length are published in two separate volumes. The bulk of the nearly 1000-page text is taken up by parts 2 and 3, with part 2 taking up most of the first volume and part 3 taking up the entire second volume. Part 2 is a series of editions and translations of the major texts pertaining to Indian physiognomy, beginning with the relevant chapter of the never-before-published *Gārgīyajyotiśa*, which is the earliest extant text of Jyotiḥśāstra. It also includes the relevant chapters of Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, verses from a lost treatise by Samudra quoted in Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary on the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, a relevant section on physiognomy found in the Buddhist *Divyāvadāna*, as well as numerous chapters on physiognomy found in Purāṇic and Kāmaśāstra literature. Part 3 then provides extensive notes on these editions and translations.

The editions, translations, and notes found in parts 2 and 3 alone represent an impressive scholarly achievement, but they are supplemented by an extensive study found in part 1 that is by itself a monograph-length contribution to scholarship. In a lengthy introduction, Zysk outlines the general features of Indian physiognomic literature and compares it to Mesopotamian and Greek physiognomy, suggesting in the process possible directions of

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influence between them. Then, over the course of four chapters, Zysk examines the development of Indian physiognomic literature, beginning (1) in the context of Jyotiḥśāstra literature, continuing in (2) the Purāṇas and (3) *nibandha*s and Kāmaśāstra literature, and finally emerging as an independent discipline in the (4) Sāmudrikaśāstra literature. The fifth and final chapter is a closer analysis of a particular physiognomic method found within the Indian literature that Zysk calls 'numerological'. This consists of organizing marks into a set number, usually 32 or another number close to that, that characterize a 'great man' (*mahāpuruṣa*).

Zysk's study represents a revolutionary advance in our understanding of Indian physiognomy and thus a significant advance in our understanding of Indian divination beyond the earlier work of David Pingree. In particular, Zysk traces the overall development of the discipline and shows that Indian physiognomy, like its Mesopotamian counterpart, is divided into separate divisions for men and women (pp. 39-40), which originally had separate functions. Physiognomy of men (*puruṣa-lakṣaṇa*) was oriented toward discerning suitability for kingship, while physiognomy of women (*strī-lakṣaṇa*) was oriented toward discerning suitability for marriage (p. 21). Indian physiognomical texts are generally organized toe-to-head, which appears to be a feature shared only with very early Greek works; other systems are generally organized head-to-toe (pp. 46-48). In addition to this general directional scheme, Zysk also shows that two major systematizations are found in the literature: a system of 'basic marks' and a 'numerological' system (p. 6).

Nearly all scholars of South Asian religions will find this study to be of interest. Zysk argues that Indian physiognomy probably had its origins among the ruling elite, but it was adopted by Brahmans and thus made a significant contribution to Hindu literature, particularly the Purāṇas. It was so highly respected that it was used for education in the Mughal court (p. 24), and in its latter-day emergence as an independent discipline, it was preserved and transmitted in large part by Jain communities (p. 114). Finally, scholars of Buddhism will in particular be interested in Zysk's study of the 'numerological' system of human marks in chapter 5 of part 1. In this chapter, Zysk shows that the '32 marks of a great man' attributed to the Buddha are part of a larger tradition of systematizing human marks according to a certain number (often 32 or thereabouts) throughout the Indian physiognomic literature.

Given the monumental nature of this study, there is little at this time to criticize about *The Indian System of Human Marks*; rather, if anything it lays the groundwork for an entirely new field of study that will over the course of the next century build upon and inevitably critique at times Zysk's work. One small complaint is that the text contains a fair number of typographical errors; in a similar vein, there are certain small inconsistencies in what Zysk says in different parts of the book. For example, in the preface, he makes the point that the Greek-derived word 'physiognomy' is not adequate for referring to the Indian system of human marks, which has a different purpose (p.

ix), but over the course of the book proper, he frequently refers to 'Indian physiognomy'. Given the length of the work and years of labour it must have entailed, however, these small errors and inconsistencies are understandable.