

BOOK REVIEWS

HAVLÍČKOVÁ-KYSOVÁ, Šárka. *Hastábhinaja. Gesta rukou v tradičním divadelním umění Indie*. [Hastabhinaya. Hand Gestures in the Traditional Theatre Art of India.] Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2013. 238 p. ISBN 978-80-210-6406-5. In Czech.

The author has written several studies about Indian theatre art. This monograph is based on her thesis from 2010. The main subject is mudras – hand gestures, by means of which the actor/dancer communicates with the spectator. Communication through mudras is in some way trying to use the potential of connection of form or similarity of objects between gesture and its meaning, or the real original. The author is comparing two lines, which have a common origin, but during about two thousand years of development, they became two different streams representing two different traditions. On the one hand there is the bharatanatyam which is wide-spread globally nowadays, and on the other hand the kathakali and kūdiyāttam which are known in the area of Kerala.

The book is divided into five chapters. In the first one the reader becomes acquainted with theatre art in ancient India, the most important theatrical handbooks which are sources of knowledge about mudras and performing forms on which the author has focused in her study. The second chapter explains mudras in general, ascribes other fields where we can meet with the usage of mudras (such as religious tradition). The third and fourth chapters are the core of the book. In the third chapter the author informs the reader in detail about the topic of mudras in theatrical tradition, focuses on description and characteristics of specific mudras, deals with theatrical handbooks and theatrical practice in more detail and describes principles which apply in the process of expression of meaning through mudras. Following the third chapter, the fourth chapter focuses on linguistic aspects of communication through mudras. It asks a question whether the mudras of different theatrical forms differ on the level of language or dialect. The author inclines to the opinion that they are two different systems of language (the performer of bharatanatyam, who never studied kathakali, does not understand this language and vice-versa). In the fifth chapter the author suggests alternatives of theoretical conclusions on how to understand the mudras – either from the semiotic or theatrical-anthropological perspective.

The author comes to the conclusion that the language of mudras can be described as a distinct language system with the possibility to evolve like natural languages. It is of course possible to also find contradictory meanings of mudras and the real meaning can be determined only from the context. It is not only about transmission of information in expression using mudras, but an important thing is also to transmit the emotions – great emphasis is placed on the emotional-aesthetic function. Further, the author mentions the fact that communication between the performer and spectator through mudras does not occur in isolation from other elements of his expressions, but while transmitting the

information using mudras face mimicry and other gestures which the performer creates with his body are also very important. Verbal expression is important as well.

As well as the author's own experiences and knowledge, which she obtained during her survey of contemporary forms of traditional Indian theatre and dance, her research is also based on literature about theatre art in ancient and modern India in Sanskrit, English, and French, primarily on poetics and acting manuals.

The book contains rich attachment material. A glossary of terms, visual display of mudras with their titles (also in devanāgarī script) and meanings, whereby they are divided according to the type (asamyuta – mudras created with one hand and samyuta – mudras created with both hands) and the sorts of performing forms (bharatanatyam, kathakali, kūdiyāttam). These illustrations were taken from other manuals or the author uses her own photographs which ensue from cooperation with world-known bharatanatyam dancer Bhakti Devī only for the purpose of this book. Other attachments are photographic displays of sequences of mudras from a certain story performed by Bhakti Devī or other photographic attachments obtained by the author during her field research in India.

Small mistakes can be found in the transcription in devanāgarī script (for example, p. 180 – vardhamāna in Roman characters, but vardhamātha in devanāgarī, p. 188 – Nakula/Bharata in Roman characters, but Śatrughna/Nakula in devanāgarī, same page – pakṣin in Roman characters, but pākṣin in devanāgarī). However, these mistakes do not reduce the value of this monograph. This publication makes up for the lack of publications on this topic in Czech and Slovak literature and it is significant manual for everyone who is dealing with Indian theatre on the professional or non-professional level or from the position of the actor/dancer.

Helena Hadvigová