BOOK REVIEWS

Steiner, Karin and Heidrun Brückner (eds.). 2010. *Indisches Theater – Text, Theorie, Praxis*. (Drama und Theater in Südasien 8). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. ISBN 978-3-447-06186-5.

In this publication, Heidrun Brückner and Karin Steiner in Würzburg have collected a number of articles, and while most of the contributions are papers which have been presented in the panel *Drama und Theater in Indien* of the 29th German Congress of Oriental Studies (Deutscher Orientalistentag) 2004 in Halle, articles by Brückner, Leclère and Roland Steiner have also been included in this volume. The articles by Leclère and Tieken are written in English and the others are in German. The book has appeared as number eight in the series *Drama und Theater in Südasien* edited by Prof. Brückner, and presents a broad spectrum of contemporary research on the texts and performance of the traditional Indian theatre.

In the first article Angelika Malinar (Zürich) deals with the *sāttvikāḥ*, a group of eight psychophysical reactions of the human body like paralysis (*stambha*) or sweating (*sveda*), which have to be in a skilled actor's repertoire and which are collected together with the constant (*sthāyī*) and alternating (*vyabhicāri*) ones to make up a total of 49 *bhāvāḥ* in the sixth chapter of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Malinar rejects the general interpretation of these acting elements as spontaneous expressions of emotion which are generally deprived from conscious control, which goes back to H.H. Wilson.¹ She first

¹ In the introduction of the *Select Specimen* (the full reference of the original publication is: *Select Speciment of the Theatre of the Hindus*. Vol. 1. Calcutta: Asiatic

raises the nature of the *bhāvāḥ* as they – being mostly inadequately translated as “emotions” or “moods” – are able to assume either the role of *vibhāva* (dramatic situation) or *anubhāva* (acting device). A *sāttvikābhāva* like lacrimation (*asrupralaya*) for example, is able to express the emotions of a specific dramatic situation, but is also capable of represent smoke. Consequently, it is not justifiable to explain these elements of acting as evoked by the actor through the total internalization of his role, depending on the need, they are also used in dramatic situations which would have a different emotional content. The *sattva* which determines the group of psychophysical reactions is said in the text to be the product of concentration (*samādhi*) of the imagination (*manas*), and Malinar – also taking into consideration the preserved relevant passages of Abhinavagupta’s *Bhāratī* – comes to the conclusion that in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* the term *sattva* refers to the sensitive apparatus of the body which is to be manipulated by the actor through individual imagination in a highly skilled manner.

Basil Leclère (Lyon) deals with medieval Sanskrit plays from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the period between the 11th and 13th century, such as those by Rāmāncandra and Yaśāścandra, and using a very rich compilation of textual evidence for them actually having being staged, the author rejects the virulent notion that after the climax of the Sanskrit theater in the first century AD those plays remained pieces merely for reading or recitation. From the prologues and stage directions in the texts, but also from relevant chronicles like the *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* and the *Prandhakośa*, as well as from inscriptions, the author at first puts together passages which express the nature of the plays as being visually performed (1). In the texts there is evidence for stage performance (2), such as instructions for hand gestures and postures (2.1), and there are also references to costumes, makeup and props (2.2). But a large part of this rich contribution takes up the issue of the places of performance (3). The author claims that also in this area of South Asia, not only the premieres of plays did take place in temples (3.1), and presents three theses: “plays were not performed inside any architectural structure but in an open area like a courtyard or a field adjacent to the temple”

Press 1827): “The *Sātwika Bhāvas* are the involuntary expressions of emotion, natural to a living being” (p. 46).

(p. 42), “that a temporary pavilion was built for once and only once performance, and removed afterwards” (p. 44), and “that a permanent wooden or stone building (or even constructed from these two materials) was built within the temple precincts for staging plays”. In a lengthy passage, the author then follows the question of the meaning of the terms *nṛtyamaṇḍapa* and *raṅgamaṇḍapa* as they appear to designate certain halls in the architectural vocabulary of Jaina temples in the prevailing Māru-Gurjara style, and compares his results with the preserved theatre temples in Kerala. It follows a chapter of collected evidence for the staging of plays in palaces (3.2), in streets and other places of open access (3.3). Finally, he considers the occasion for performing plays (4), and from the fact that these performances were “rituals or festivals in honour of Hindu gods or Jain holy men” (p. 54) Leclère concludes: “thus, it did not matter that Sanskrit was no longer understood by most of the human audience” (p. 59).²

In the third article Hermann Tieken (Leiden) examines the *bhaṇitāḥ*, being songs ending with the mentioning of their supposed author, and he observes that their apparently somewhat random insertion into plays mostly elicits a jarr effect. The author puts the *Gorakṣavijaya* from the Mithila tradition of the 14th century into the center of the inquiry, being attributed to Vidyāpati solely on the grounds of the extant *bhānitāḥ*. He compares collections of songs of similar nature, the *Padāvalī* of the same author, Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* as well as the Old Tamil Caṅkam *Kalittokai*. Tieken refers to previous contributions in which he showed that the *Kalittokai* consists of *lāsyāḥ* – minor dance scenes as defined by the *Nāṭyaśāstra* – and comes to the conclusion that the *bhānitāḥ* in the *Gorakṣavijaya*, as vernacular songs, differ from them as much as from the *catuspādāḥ*, as found for example in Kalidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitra*. Because the *bhānitāḥ* could not be reconciled even with the *dhruvāḥ* as songs which are generally not part of the text, Tieken concludes that the *Gorakṣavijaya* with its *bhaṇitāḥ* should be considered an innovation at peak of the song genre, which had subsequently affected the Newari tradition, and the development could be summarized as: “drama had become musical” (p. 74).

² The lacking reference for “Dundas 2002” is: Paul Dundas: *The Jains*. 2nd edition. London, New York: Routledge 2002 (Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices).

For the next contribution Roland Steiner (Marburg and Halle) has collected the philological notes from the team in Marburg which has translated *Bhavadajjuka/īya*, a short comedy (*prahasana*) from the 6th or 7th century which is transmitted in South India and which is next to the *Mattavilāsa* of Mahendravarman the oldest representative of this genre.³ The translation appeared together with its original text in 2006 as affordable paperback, and this philologically high quality publication with its appeal to a broader audience may well be compared to the volumes of the Clay Sanskrit Library.⁴ The rich and detailed notes are very useful for a comprehensive examination of the text, which could be improved compared to the previous editions, and the publisher kindly makes the article together with additional corrigenda available as an offprint its homepage.⁵ A great deal could be learned from paragraph 53, with its mentioning of *guliā/gulikā* as an antidote for snake bite, which is quite interesting for the history of Indian medicine, and the translators in Marburg come to the conclusion that this refers to the so-called “snake stones”.

In the next article Katrin Binder (Würzburg) discusses the theoretical foundations of her research on the recent *Yakṣagāna* dance theatre tradition in Karnataka⁶, in which field research and textual research complement each other. After a brief introduction and a survey of the state of research and translations, Binder deals first with the philological approach and the subject here is the so-called *prasāṅga* (episode). The early examples of these songs, which are in verse, can be traced back to medieval Kanarese adaptations of the epics. However, Binder explains that it is not possible to penetrate the *Yakṣagāna* completely on the basis of textual research, because, for example the performances contain elements which are orally

³ Towards the ascription of this text to Śāṇḍilya cf. Roland Steiner: *Untersuchungen zur Harṣadevas Nāgānanda und zum indischen Schauspiel*. Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag 1997 (Indica et Tibetica 31), p. 255 sq.

⁴ Ulrike Roesler, Jayandra und Luitgard Soni, Roland Steiner, Martin Straube: *Die Heiligen-Hetäre. Bhagavadajjukam. Eine indische Yoga-Komödie*. München: P. Kirchheim 2006.

⁵ <http://www.kirchheimverlag.de/belletristik/die%20heiligen-hetaere.htm> (accessed 05.12.2011).

⁶ Dr. Binder (formerly Fischer) has written already her Magister thesis on that issue, which has been published: *Yakṣagāna: eine Einführung in eine südindische Theatertradition. Mit Übersetzung und Text von „Abhimanyu Kāḷaga“*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz 2004 (Drama und Theater in Südasien 3).

transmitted and certain parts are to be improvised. Thus she argues for a method of complementary text-based field research, “Textarbeit alleine misst dem geschriebenen Text zuviel Bedeutung bei, Feldforschung allein zu wenig [textual work alone attaches too much importance to the text, field research alone too little]” (p. 125).

The following articles deal all with the so called “Trivandrum plays”, a corpus of 13 Sanskrit plays from Kerala which have been named after the place of their first publication. They have been attributed by their discoverer Gaṇapati Śāstrī to Bhāsa, as that name is mentioned by Kālidāsa as one of his predecessors in the prologue of the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, which would of course give them a fairly advanced age.⁷ Those plays and their performances in the still existing *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* (“acting together”) tradition of theatre in Kerala⁸ have been the subject of research projects at the University of Würzburg funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). First, in the period from 1994 to 2000, there was a comprehensive collecting of manuscripts alongside video documentation of performances⁹, and after that in another project spanning 2003-2008 a multimedia database has been created from the collected materials.¹⁰ The employment of XML markup techniques for the creation of electronic texts of the plays has already been explained by Mathias Ahlborn (Würzburg) extensively in his dissertation on the *Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa*¹¹, and in this volume he sketches the technical background of the creation of that database of the Trivandrum plays. From 2010 onwards, textual criticism, aesthetics and the performance of the plays are the subject of another DFG-funded research project in Würzburg.

Anna Aurelia Esposito (Würzburg) in her contribution deals with some details of writing in the collected Malayalam manuscripts,

⁷ On that problematic issue cf. Ticken: *The so-called Trivandrum plays attribute to Bhāsa*. In: WZKS 37 (1993), p. 5-44, and Steiner, op.cit, p. 265 sq.

⁸ Cf. Farley R. Richmond: *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. In: Richmond/Swann/Zarrilli (eds.): *Indian theatre – tradition of performance*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1990, p. 87–117.

⁹ Brückner: *Manuscripts and performance traditions of the so-called “Trivandrum-Plays” ascribed to Bhāsa – a report on work in progress*. In: BEI 17–18 (1999–2000), p. 501–550.

¹⁰ <http://www.indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/bhasa/rahmen.html>.

¹¹ Dissertation. Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg 2007.

with which she dealt extensively in her dissertation.¹² Detailed discussions of the writing of the Trivandrum plays are generally interesting for people who deal with Malayalam script for any reason, but Esposito points to the fact that not at last the discussions of the features of the Prakrit of those plays must be grounded on that textual level. She explains that apparently much of what has been highlighted as being rather peculiar by Printz in his *Bhāsa's Prākṛit* from 1921 must be withdrawn on palaeographical grounds, which underlines again how crucial constant manuscriptological backreference is for philology.¹³

In the next article Karin Juliana Steiner deals with the *Pañcarātra*, which draws its theme like most of the other Trivandrum plays from the *Mahābhārata*, and which is mainly based on the *Virāṭaparvan*. The main issue under examination is the ritual which stands in the background of the story, and Steiner mainly argues against what has been brought forward by Tieken on that issue.¹⁴ It is undisputed that although some significant vocabulary of Śrauta ritual did not appear in the text, it could be concluded from certain details that a ritual following the paradigm of the Soma ritual takes place here. Steiner disputes Tieken's assertion that it is a Rājasūya which is portried, but rather a *Vaiṣṇavayajña*, like it suggested to Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata* as a replacement for the Rājasūya he is forbidden to execute (3.241.32). To support her notion she examines the abovementioned cattle raid and the arrow episode of the play, and finally the role of the period of five nights during the ritual (p. 163 sq.), which has given the play its name. Steiner comes to the conclusion that this doesn't refer to the *kṣatrasya dhṛti* ritual which is connected with the Rājasūya as suggested by Tieken, but refers to that Viṣṇuite school. The ritual allusions found in the play are all strict implementations of the epic, and Steiner argues that the thesis that the *Pañcarātra* together with others builds a special genre of plays

¹² *Cārudatta – ein indisches Schauspiel. Kritische Edition und Übersetzung mit einer Studie des Prakrits der 'Trivandrum-Dramen'*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2004 (Drama und Theater in Südasien 4).

¹³ The lacking reference for "Murthy 1996" is most probably: R.S. Murthy: *Introduction to manuscriptology*. Delhi: Sharada Publishing House 1996.

¹⁴ *Three men in a row – studies in the Trivandrum plays II*. In: WZKS 41 (1997), p. 17–52.

associated with the Śrauta ritual – as Tieken has claimed – cannot be maintained.

The concluding contribution of this volume is a German translation accompanying a new Sanskrit text¹⁵ of the one-act *Karṇabhāra*, being the shortest of the five one-acts of the Trivandrum plays, all of which are inspired by the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁶ The piece issues the bad destiny of the army commander of the Kauravas, who finally got his armor wheedled away next to his miracle ear rings on the way to his last battle, and issuing “Karṇa’s burden” the author artistically refers to widely separated parts of the epic. This really is a precious addition to the other chapters in the volume.

Indisches Theater is in my opinion a rewarding lecture, and a great number of rich and profound papers on the different aspects of recent research towards traditional Indian theatre have been collected here. Seeing how much of the current research is related to the name Würzburg it again shows again the importance of the impulses that come from third-party funded research projects like those which could be organised there. The book certainly could be used also as a broad introduction into this interesting topic, which is able to evoke an own engagement with matters already very close to the debates now taking place. The book, which could fortunately be made available as an affordable paperback, aims as said in the introduction at a wider interdisciplinary audience, which is no doubt generally a crucial approach for the welfare of German Indology. However, more of the articles could have been in English, so that a wider international audience could also be reached.

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¹⁵ It’s a improved version of the Sanskrit text which has been published before in the *Indologica Taurinensia* 28 (2004), p. 127–141.

¹⁶ In 2010 also appeared Esposito’s *Dūtavākya – die Worte des Boten. Ein Einakter aus dem „Trivandrum-Dramen“*. *Kritische Edition mit Anmerkungen und kommentierter Übersetzung*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2010 (Drama und Theater in Südasien).