

KNUT A. JACOBSEN (ed.):

Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained through Meditation and Concentration.

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Yoga Powers is a collection of cutting-edge articles by seventeen authors on (the interpretation of) yogic – and in general, supernatural, superhuman – powers or *siddhis* (Sanskrit and Prakrit synonyms: *aiśvarya*, *vibhūti*, *guṇa*, *bala*, *jñāna*, *iddhi*, *ṛddhi*, *abhiññā*, *labdhi*, *bhukti*, etc.). This volume seeks to change the apparent situation whereby *siddhis* in yoga are often treated as marginal in the secondary literature, and “many scholars have been uncomfortable with the yoga powers” (p. 14). Two of the authors (Angelika Malinar and David Gordon White) focus on the early yogic tradition of the *Mahābhārata*, three on powers in Buddhism (Bradley S. Clough, David V. Fiordalis, Ryan Richard Overbey), one on Jaina *ṛddhis/labdhis* (Kristi L. Wiley), three on classical/Pātañjala yoga (Stuart Ray Sarbacker, Christopher Key Chapple and Lloyd W. Pflueger), one on the Śaiva tantric traditions (Somadeva Vasudeva), two on *hathayoga* (Sthaneshwar Timalina, James Mallinson), two on yoga powers in Sufi and *bhakti* hagiographies (Patton Burchett, Antonio Rigopoulos), two on contemporary views of yogic powers in India (Ramdas Lamb, Knut A. Jacobsen) and one on teachings about miraculous powers as exported to the West (Jeffrey J. Kripal). Each one of these articles, including those not touched on below, is a valuable contribution to the field.

Jacobsen's informative introduction attempts to distinguish between yogic *siddhis*, i.e. powers reached as a result of yogic concentration (the main topic of the book), which are mostly unintentional (*akalpita*) and are only signposts on the *yogin's* way to the final goal, and magical or tantric ones, which usually result from ritual activity and are thus intentional (*kalpita*). A struggle to mark the boundaries between these two categories runs through the book, but this struggle is of a high standard and enjoyable. It is indeed very difficult to tell where magical rituals end and yogic mental attainments begin.

A typical example of this search for clear-cut distinctions between magic and yoga is Vasudeva's analysis of the three-fold classification of *siddhis* (minor, middling, superior) and related problems recurring in (Bhairava-)tantras. He himself raises the question as to what extent and in what context powers arising from tantric/magical rituals and tantric *dhyāna* (“visualization” rather than “meditation”) can be called “yogic” (p. 282), and shows that yogic powers in early tantras tend to be labelled as the “eight *guṇas*” (*guṇāṣṭaka*). This article stands out from the rest through its use of a vast number of unpublished manuscripts and is a treasure-house for data on tantric *siddhis*.

Mallinson, a leading researcher of *hathayoga* and the Nāth *sampradāya*, examines the distinction between *kalpita* and *akalpita siddhis* in two texts from what he identifies as the earliest stratum of *hathayoga*, the *Datātreyayogaśāstra* and the *Yogabīja*, and draws also on his experiences from fieldwork among Indian *yogins*. His main conclusion is that *hathayoga* usually focuses on unintentional (*akalpita*) powers if any. He emphasizes the ambiguity of the term *siddhi* in *hathayogic* texts: it often designates the mundane benefits of practice rather than superhuman powers. He also contrasts *akalpita siddhis* of the *Amṛtasiddhi*, which

may well be the oldest surviving *hathayoga* text (12th c.), and the often Kaula-type *siddhis* of the *Śivasamhitā*.

Malinar demonstrates that yogic powers in the *Mahābhārata* (12.309–320, 228, 289), and especially in *Bhagavadgītā* chapter 5, are often related to the notion of the Sāṃkhya's *prakṛti* and can be “explained as resulting from gradually gaining access to powers of the cosmic cause...”, i.e. *prakṛti* (= *brahman* here, p. 56). David Gordon White rightly challenges the general assumption of historians of yoga philosophy that the *vibhūti*s of the *Yogasūtra* are marginal to yoga. Half of his article centres around his interpretation of *vibhūti* in the *Mahābhārata* as “omnipresencing” (instead of perhaps “glorious manifestation[s]?”), which does not always seem to work perfectly. Some of his translations are also disputable, e.g. *yogims* [*yogin*] is a vocative in *Bhagavadgītā* 10.17a (see p. 62) and *vibhūti* and *yoga* in 10.7 and 10.18 are probably two concepts (*ibid.*). He emphasizes the importance of the ability to assume new bodily forms and to enter others' bodies as crucial elements in early yoga. Chapple appends a new translation of *Yogasūtra* ch. 3 to his analysis of Pātañjala *siddhis* with some doubtful choices of words, see e.g. “extension of one's intention” for *pratyayaikatānatā* in *sūtra* 3.2 and “purpose” for *artha* in 3.3.

Jacobsen discusses the practice of a Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition revived by Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947), who was mostly critical of yoga powers although he himself is said to have experienced them. A fascinating description of manifestations of *kaivalya* (isolation) by the gurus of this tradition who confine themselves to caves for decades can be found here.

Clough focuses on *samatha-bhāvanā* in Pali Buddhist sources, and clearly defines what he means by “yoga powers”: “extraordinary abilities directly gained from meditation” (p. 78). Fiordalis' treatment of the dichotomy of Mahāyāna miracles vs. magic (as supernatural vs. natural) reminds us again of the thin dividing lines between intentional and unintentional yogic powers, magical rituals and trickery. Wiley's detailed essay focuses on supernatural powers in Jainism attained through austerities, especially fasting, and also on *labdhi/ṛddhi*-related gender issues.

The volume contains a considerable number of minor typos, e.g. read a corrected *dhīmān* on p. 37 n. 12, *svapañ* on p. 48 n. 34, *ahaṃ* and *matsthāni* on p. 51 n. 42, *buddhavacana* on p. 77, *-veśana* on p. 288, Saiddhāntika on p. 292, Dyczkowski on p. 298, *janmauṣadhi-* on p. 327 n. 4, etc. Nevertheless this book is definitely a fresh, colourful and thought-provoking overview of exciting questions on one aspect of yoga that has often been neglected or treated unfairly in research.

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VINCENT LEFÈVRE:

Portraiture in Early India: Between Transience and Eternity.

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At the start of this innovative survey the author cautions the reader that he will not be pursuing a “classical art historical approach”, but will be viewing portraits in “early India” – that is, in the centuries prior to the Mughal period – within a