

ABSTRACTS

Ben Arps

Bernard Arps is fascinated by worldmaking through performance, texts, and media, particularly in religious contexts in Southeast Asia. His most recent book is *Tall Tree, Nest of the Wind: The Javanese Shadow-Play Dewa Ruci Performed by Ki Anom Soeroto; A Study in Performance Philology* (Singapore 2016). He is Professor (Chair) of Indonesian and Javanese Language and Culture at Leiden University.

A Devil and an Apostate Give Balance to Islam: *The Indian Epics as Necessary Knowledge in a Javanese Theory*

In eighteenth-century Java, too, India was thought to have played a major role in the formulation of Javanese Hindu-Buddhist esoteric wisdom, but not as its source. Ideas circulated that amounted to a theory of religions (Arps, "The Power of the Heart That Blazes in the World" [2019]). This theory, itself Islamic, distinguished a left-sided tradition – basically Hindu-Buddhism – and a right-sided one, Islam, which should be in equilibrium. Probably at the Sultan's court in Yogyakarta in or before the 1780s or 1790s, an unknown author joined these elements with the legend of Aji Saka, the bringer of Javanese script to Java. The new narrative was set against the historical background of Prophet Muhammad and his companions in Mecca, and a journey to Java, passing through India and Sri Lanka. The result was a theory-cum-history of the beginnings of Old Javanese religious knowledge and literature.

Joel Bordeaux

Joel Bordeaux is an instructor in Religious Studies at Leiden University. He is a specialist in South Asian religions and received his PhD in the same from Columbia University in 2015. He has published on Hindu goddess traditions, Tibetan Buddhism in Anglophone popular culture, and the 'Yogi' castes of Bengal; with forthcoming articles on early modern Indian statecraft and the relationships between Hindu and Buddhist tantra. He is also a member of the research group *Body and Embodiment in the Middle Bengali Imaginary* based at Jagiellonian University (Kraków).

The Witch-Cult in Southern Asia: a study in backcrossed hybridization

From its beginnings in mid-twentieth century Britain, there were indications that the initiatory neopagan tradition now widely known as Wicca had also incorporated elements of Hindu tantra into its popular hybrid of *fin de siècle* occultism and nature religion. Scholars have recently begun to more directly consider the role of Indian esotericism in the early development of Wicca, but less attention has been paid to ongoing dynamics involving this new religious movement, characterized memorably by the BBC as 'A Very British Witchcraft,' and Hindu traditions in contemporary India. This presentation examines such a case in the work of Indian Wiccan priestess Ipsita Roy Chakraverti (b. 1950), whose celebrity as a self-identified witch and advocacy on behalf of local women accused of witchcraft, draw Wiccan and Hindu concepts and perspectives into ever-tightening hermeneutic circles.

Julia Byl

Julia Byl is Associate Professor in ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta. Her monograph, *Antiphonal Histories*, was published in 2014, and Fall 2023 will see the publication of *Sounding the Indian Ocean*, co-edited with Jim Sykes. Julia's newest project, "Civic Modulations," explores public music, the individual, and the transnational institution in East Timor.

Upstream of India: Sumatran Indigeneity and Local Hindu-Buddhism

In the histories of "Greater India," Sumatra was a crucial node. The links between Srivijaya and Nalanda burnished elite transmissions, while "Indian" *marga* (clan names) amongst interior trading families suggested more informal relations with Tamil merchants. Yet our understanding of what is called "Hindu-Buddhism" in Southeast Asia is conditioned by the temples and manuscripts of Java--a tradition so strong that even the scholarly shift to "the local" has not eroded the prestige conferred

by the Indic. In Sumatra's vast mountainous interior regions, things feel different: on the one hand, the study of Tantric statuary and Sanskrit inscriptions are necessary to assert Sumatra's overlooked place within the Sanskrit cosmopolis; on the other, we need to take as seriously the ways that indigenous Sumatran groups asserted agency in controlling the commodities they allowed out and the religious influences they allowed in. This paper rereads the "Indic" rituals of interior North Sumatra by considering how they were embedded within land-based practices--ritual and musical performances in which "the energy of the soil" (Holt 2009) was as important as the prestige of the foreign. In effect, I show what happens when Shaivite powers are seated alongside local ancestors and nature spirits, in a mutual transfer of religious power.

Patton Burchett

Patton Burchett is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. He earned his Ph.D. (2012) in South Asian Religions from Columbia University. His research focuses on (a) early modern devotional (bhakti) and tantric/yogic religiosity in north India and (b) the interrelations of magic, science, and religion in the rise of Indian and Western modernities. His first book is titled *A Genealogy of Devotion: Bhakti, Tantra, Yoga, and Sufism in North India* (Columbia University Press, 2019). Burchett's current research project explores how 19th and early 20th century discourse on, debates about, and representations of the figure of the Indian yogi-fakir reflected and helped to constitute distinctively 'modern' cognitive modes, ethical sensibilities, and conceptual understandings, particularly in relation to rationality, enchantment, and authenticity.

The Figure of the Indian Yogi between Science and Magic: On Rationality, Authenticity, and the Value of Yoga in Modernity

If India has historically occupied a special place in the "global esoteric," then the figure of the yogi has been perhaps *the* quintessential emblem of India's occult wisdom and power. Acknowledging the varying roles and perceptions of the yogi in India's pre-modern history, this paper focuses on the way the figure of the yogi stood at the center of constitutively "modern" negotiations regarding the boundaries of "religion," "science," and "magic" in the 19th and early-20th century, debates which were inextricably tied to the development of capitalism, scientism, and liberal political thought (e.g. "possessive individualism"). With an eye to the intersections of popular culture, science, and occultism-esotericism, the paper examines representations of the yogi by (a) Western stage magicians, (b) writers in the vibrant subcultures of New Thought and the occult-esoteric (spiritualism, mesmerism, theosophy, etc.), and (c) modern Hindu reformers, in order to compare and contrast their respective values and visions of modernity. A comparative study of 19th and early 20th century discourse on the figure of the yogi offers a window onto the contested development of Western modernity's normative ontology, but more than this, it reveals a distinctively modern preoccupation with the question of authenticity, on one hand, and the question of rationality, on the other.

Richard Davis

Richard H. Davis is Research Professor of Religion at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. His most recent publication is *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (2014). He is author of four other books, edited two volumes, and wrote the text for a catalogue of Indian religious prints, *Gods in Print: Masterpieces of India's Mythological Art* (2012). Currently he is working on a history of religious cultures of early South Asia.

Journey to the Golden Land: Merchant Tales of Danger, Wealth, and Wonder

In the first millennium CE, abundant Indian story literature tells of merchants making dangerous journeys to a place somewhere to the east of the subcontinent, called *Suvarnabhumi*, *suvarnadvipa*, or *suvarnanagara* (the land, island, or city of gold). None of the stories provide a precise geographical location for this place; it is more apt to regard it as a tantalizing place of wealth and wonder. These

stories allow us a lens into the ethos of the seafaring merchants of pre-modern India, and into the way the faraway lands of Southeast Asia were refracted in the story literature of India.

Supriya Gandhi

Supriya Gandhi is Assistant Professor in the department of Religious Studies at Yale University. She grew up in India and received her PhD from Harvard University. She is the author of *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Harvard University Press, 2020). Her current work explores the making of modern Hinduism through a Persianate lens.

Ocean of Gnosis: Divination and Self-Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century Delhi

In the mid-eighteenth-century, a disciple of Sant Charandas (d. 1782) authored a Persian work titled *Muhit-i ma'rifat* (Ocean of Gnosis). This work was a creative translation of Charandas's *Gyanswarodaya*, a Hindavi treatise on breath divination and devotion. Charandas promoted disdain for the material world, moderation in food and drink, yoga, and self-mastery. Why then would he and his disciples prescribe methods for the prediction and control of worldly affairs? While this tension is not unique to the oeuvres of Charandas and his disciples, I locate the *Gyanswarodaya* and the *Muhit-i ma'rifat* within the specific context of their production in late-Mughal Delhi. I also explore the competing claims to authorship of the *Muhit-i ma'rifat*, and their significance, while reading the work diachronically against a longer history of Persianate engagements with Indic breathing practices.

Roland Lardinois

Roland Lardinois is sociologist, Directeur de Recherche emeritus at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. His research focuses on, first, the history of Indian studies in France and, second, the sociology of Indian engineers. His publications include: *Scholars and Prophets. Sociology of India from France 19th-20th centuries*, Delhi: Social Science Press, 2013 (transl. from French); *Sylvain Lévi et l'entrée du Sanskrit au Collège de France*, Paris: EFEO, 2018; *Les mondes de l'ingénieur en Inde (19^e-21^e siècle)*, co-ed. with Charles Gadea, Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022.

Prophets, Mystics and Scholars in Indian Studies in France (19th-20th century)

In 1900, the Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy published *Des Indes à la planète Mars. Étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie*, a book that was soon followed in 1901 by the study of the French Sanskritist Victor Henry, *Le langage martien. Étude analytique de la genèse d'une langue dans un cas de glossolalie somnambulique*. What do these two publications, among others, tell us about the intellectual connections that Indian scholars, in France and in the French-speaking world, have with authors and works conducted on the margins of the academic space of Indian studies or those of their discipline? And what position does India occupy in the imagination of these circles? To answer these questions, we focus on two case studies, that of the Swiss medium Hélène Smith, whose hypnotic states were analysed by Théodore Flournoy, and that of the Sanskritist Lilian Silburn, whose work on the mysticism of Abhinavagupta (10th century), a prominent figure of non-dualist Kashmiri Shivaism, has found an audience in a variety of Indophile milieus interested in Yoga, Christian mysticism and inter-religious dialogue. The questions we ask are: how do these encounters take place? How do mystical themes circulate between the different groups active in Indian studies in twentieth-century France? And what do these different cases tell us about India?

Matt Melvin-Koushki

Matthew Melvin-Koushki is Associate Professor of Islamic History at the University of South Carolina. He specializes in early modern Islamic intellectual and imperial history, with a philological focus on the theory and practice of the occult sciences in Timurid-Safavid Iran and the broader Persianate world to the nineteenth century, and a disciplinary focus on history of science, history of philosophy and history of the book. His several forthcoming books include *The Occult Science of Empire in Aqqayunlu-*

Safavid Iran: Two Shirazi Lettrists and Their Manuals of Magic, and he is co-editor of the volumes *Islamicate Occultism: New Perspectives* (2017) and *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (2021). He is also cofounder of the international working group Islamic Occult Studies on the Rise (IOSOTR), at islamicoccult.org, which showcases the newest work in this now burgeoning interdisciplinary field.

India Is Magic: Orientalism and Occidentalism in Safavid and Mughal Imperial Occultism

For Safavid and Mughal scholars alike, India, not Iran, is the ultimate bastion of magic. Orientalizing, puritan authorities demonized the Subcontinent as source of sorcery—yet counterposed Islamic occult science as antidote. Occidentalizing, pro-occultist authors lionized it as source for the latter, and through adoption and translation strove to make Indian magic Western; they were far more successful in their objective. Pivoting on this Islamo-Indic, West-East tension, this paper provides a preliminary survey of the various early modern Persianate imperial and scholarly strategies for incorporating Indian magic into Islam.

Shankar Nair

Shankar Nair is associate professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. His research centers on Hindu and Muslim philosophical and theological traditions, with a particular focus on Hindu-Muslim interactions and the encounter between Arabic, Sanskrit, and Persian intellectual cultures in Mughal South Asia.

The World within a Verse: The Yogavāsiṣṭha in Global Perspective

In the year 1597 CE, the Mughal court commissioned a team of Muslim and Hindu scholars to translate a popular Sanskrit treatise, the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*, into the Persian language. This talk aims to put just a few brief sentences from this Sanskrit text (6:12:7-9) into global perspective. The long, complex textual and philosophical history of these three short verses – from their first composition in the tenth-century Kashmir Valley until their Persian rendition in the late sixteenth-century Mughal court – unveils a global tale that spans classical Greece, Anatolia, Persia, the Middle East, and Central Asia to numerous regions stretched across South Asia.

Jessica Namakkal

Jessica Namakkal is Associate Professor of the Practice in International Comparative Studies, History, and Gender, Feminist, and Sexuality Studies at Duke University. She is the author of *Unsettling Utopia: The Making and Unmaking of French India* (Columbia University Press, 2021). She is an editorial member of the *Radical History Review* and co-edits *the Abusable Past*.

The Hippie Trail Goes West : Settler Utopianism and the project of Rajneeshpuram

In the Spring of 1981, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (today better known as Osho), walked out of his ashram in Pune and went straight to the airport to board a plane bound for the United States. Within the next 6 months, Rajneesh had purchased almost 15,000 acres of land in central Oregon, which he intended to use to expand his ashram and following. Rajneesh, who has started to attract followers in the late 1960s when he lived in Bombay and regularly gave lectures from his apartment there, was interested in using his “Eastern” Hindu persona to attract Western acolytes. Once he had amassed a significant following, he took his project West, not to the United Kingdom or France, the former seats of imperial dominance, but to the United States, where he believed he could build on a history of Westward expansion. The result was Rajneeshpuram, a heavily securitized Hindu-ish community that was home to thousands of White westerners who wore mala beads with a portrait of Rajneesh on them, loose clothing in shades of pink, red, and orange, and took on Sanskritized names provided by Rajneesh. In this paper, I ask: What happens when ideas that are associated with a specific place (the esoteric grounding of India) are embodied by people and travel to new places? The arrival of people in Oregon, directly from India who, though not brown skinned, came to represent India to the local

population of white folks, who were more provincial and less well traveled than these newcomers. Though most of the initial residents of Rajneeshpuram were also (White) Americans, locals equated them with Indians because of the clothes and accessories they wore, the Sanskritized names they adopted, the non-Christian beliefs they espoused, and because of Rajneesh himself. These sannyasins left their homes looking for exoticism, and when they returned, became embodied representatives of this other culture they never actually fit into while in India.

Occultists and New Age spiritualists have long been engaged in world-making projects that share a settler-colonial ethos that circulates throughout the world, within and beyond actual settler colonial states. In this paper, I argue that South Asian guru-led settlement projects, in this case specifically Rajneeshpuram, have relied on what I call “settler utopianism,” a type of utopian thinking based in spiritual discourse that instrumentalizes the tools of settler colonialism. The mobility or transit of these narratives allow what is a very localized structure and practice to move throughout the world, asking us to understand the project of settler colonialism to not be an exclusive question about state power.

Eva Orthmann

Eva Orthmann is Professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Göttingen. She obtained her MA degree in Islamic and Iranian Studies at the University of Tübingen in 1995, followed by a PhD in 2000 at the University of Halle-Wittenberg. She has afterwards worked as assistant professor in Zurich and spent two years as research fellow in Yale. In 2007, Orthmann has been appointed professor of Islamic studies in Bonn where she has also served as director of the Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies at the University. Since 2018, she is the director of the Institute of Iranian studies at the University in Göttingen. In her research, Eva Orthmann’s special interest is in subjects related to the Mughal Empire, occult sciences, especially astrology, and Indo-Persian transfer of knowledge and culture.

The subjugation of spirits: *taskhīr* at the Mughal Court

In the early Mughal period, the two Shaṭṭārī Shaikhs Muḥammad Ghauth Gwāliyarī and Shaikh Phūl were famous for their knowledge of the subjugation of spiritual beings, *taskhīr*. Most famous was their subjugation of the planetary spirits, the *taskhīr al-kawākib*. This knowledge was based on old traditions and can be traced back to Mesopotamia and Egypt, but also India. Searching for the sources of their specific practices, the writings of Sirāj ad-Dīn as-Sakākī, a Persian Muslim scholar from Khwarazm have recently come to light. The mere number of copies of his *kitāb at-taskhīr* in Indian manuscript departments testifies to the influence of his thought. The interest in *taskhīr* continued after the death of the two eminent Shaṭṭārī Shaikhs. Newly discovered manuscript copies produced for the Mughal court testify to the continuing interest in the writings of as-Sakākī and Muḥammad Ghauth. In one of these texts, the practices going back to Greek scholars are compared with those of India, and both Arabic and Indic invocations of the spiritual beings are placed side by side. Even the Indic names of the spirits and their appearances are described. The lecture will analyze some of the material related to the *taskhīr* practices, especially the *taskhīr al-kawākib*, and will ask for the political interest in these practices and their relevance at the Mughal court.

Stefano Pellò

Stefano Pellò is Associate Professor of Persian literature and Indo-Persian studies at the “Ca’ Foscari” University of Venice. His wide research interests include the diffusion and reception of Persian linguistic and literary culture in Eurasia, and the related cosmopolitan processes of cultural and aesthetic interaction in the pre-colonial period, especially, but not exclusively, focusing on the poetic sphere. He has published extensively on the Indo-Persian world and the Persianate sphere in general, paying special attention both to intellectual exchanges and the textualization of non-hegemonic religious and cultural identities in Persian. Among his monographical works are *Tutiyan-i Hind: Specchi identitari e proiezioni cosmopolite indo-persiane (1680-1856)* (Florence, 2012), on Hindu writers of

Persian during the long 18th century, and *Le gemme della memoria: antologia del Jawami' al-hikayat wa lawami' al-riwayat* (Turin, 2019), the first Western critical translation of an important collection of moral anecdotes by Muhammad Sadid al-Din 'Awfi (13th century).

The Four Elements: Macrocosm, Microcosm and Matter between Naples and Delhi in the Long 17th Century

This paper traces and examines a net of connections linking 16th- and 17th-century Italian philosophy of nature and conceptions of matter with the Persian literary production of Mughal India, via the mediation of Safavid Iran. I explore the multiple ways through which Southern European ideas on cosmology, meteorology and the body interact, both directly and indirectly, with the Persianate textual dimensions of South Asia: more in detail, I show how several ideas usually linked to Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella and other less known authors can and should be read in association with the crucial themes of macrocosm, microcosm and magic found in important authors such as Mirza Abdulqadir Bedil (1644-1720). In this perspective, I will also examine the role played by translations, especially focusing on the 17th-century Persian version of the Ravennate physician Tomaso Tomai's *Idea del giardino del mondo*.

Blake Pye

Blake Pye is a PhD Candidate in Religious Studies at the University of Texas in Austin. His research interests include the late medieval and early modern Islamic world, the political history of Sufism and Islamic sainthood, and the dynamics of interreligious coexistence and conflict. His work has been published in the peer-reviewed journal *Modern Asian Studies*. His forthcoming dissertation, “The Caliphate of *Tahqiq*: Ibn ‘Arabi, Islamic Empires, and the Problem of Religious Difference,” charts the long history of *tahqiq*, or “realization,” a revolutionary approach to knowledge first devised by the famed Iberian Sufi master Ibn ‘Arabi.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Tahqiq* in Mughal India: An Esoteric Epistemology for All Religions

Starting in the late sixteenth century, Mughal emperors appealed to *tahqiq*, or “realization,” as a means to encompass both Islamic and Indic knowledge beneath their universal imperial authority. First developed by the Iberian Sufi master Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), *tahqiq* held that all things, at the *batini* or “esoteric” level, are manifestations of Divine Truth (*haqq*). In fifteenth-century Iran, the people of *tahqiq* declared that *haqq* transcends the boundaries of mystical practice, legal knowledge, rational sciences, and the occult. In India, however, the Mughals used *tahqiq* to manage religious diversity. It transformed Hindu knowledge into *haqq* that could perfect their society in a new age free of religious bigotry. This paper explores how the Indian context changed *tahqiq*, allowing it to supersede religious differences, not just disciplinary boundaries between the Islamic sciences.

Teren Sevea

Teren Sevea is the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard Divinity School. He is a scholar of Islam and Muslim societies in South and Southeast Asia and author of *Miracles and Material Life: Rice, Ore, Traps and Guns in Islamic Malaya*. He is also the co-editor of a volume entitled *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia*, and author of articles on Islamic textual traditions, Sufism, oceanic networks and spirituality.

Indic Divinities with Islamic Lineages: A Compendium of Malay-Islamic Esoteric Science

Writing in British Malaya, a number of European scholars and officials were intrigued by the esoteric science of ‘Malay magicians.’ They represented the esoteric traditions and texts of these men and women as jumbles of aboriginal shamanism, Saiva mysticism and Shi’i pantheism inherited from India. The Islamic nature of Malay esotericism was silenced, and its self-evidently Islamic content was often represented as an Indianized form of autochthonous magic. The opinions of these scholars on Malay esotericism were, however, informed by Muslim intellectuals and officials they interacted with, who relegated esoteric texts and rituals to the contested and putatively non-Islamic domains of *magic*, *superstition*, and *play*. This paper hopes to contribute to the conversation on ‘India in the Global Esoteric’ by focusing on a manuscript compendium of esoteric science (*‘ilmu*) copied in this world of British Malaya wherein Islamic esoteric science was being represented within select scholarly circles as un-Islamic and not-so-Islamic or shamanic and Indic. The manuscript this paper focusses on concerns Islamic esoteric science (*‘ilmu*) inherited from ‘Indic’ tutelary divinities (*batara*), Abrahamic prophets and Sufi masters—in it, Hindu divinities are assimilated into a distinctly Islamic cosmology, and *bataras*, prophets and masters are often confused. Moreover, the text serves as a window into a world wherein esoteric science was intimately entangled with social and economic authority.

Julian Strube

Julian Strube is Assistant Professor in Religious Studies at the University of Vienna. He works from a global historical perspective about the relationship between religion and politics since the eighteenth century, focusing on exchanges between India, Europe, and North America. His third monograph, *Global Tantra: Religion, Science, and Nationalism in Colonial Modernity*, was published in 2022 by Oxford University Press.

Aryanism and Esotericism between Europe, Persia, and India

Although research on Aryanism is not nearly as extensive as the relevance of the subject would suggest, there exist a number of valuable studies that allow for significant insights into its role in imagining and establishing cultural links between Europe, Persia/Iran, and India. However, this scholarship is either siloed into national and/or linguistic boundaries, or it focuses on British imperialism. On the basis of a combination of approaches from global historical and religious studies, this paper will present first steps to bridging these divisions and illustrate how significant lacunae can be filled by giving more attention to what orientalist scholarship has, since about the seventeenth century, identified as supposedly “esoteric” practices and traditions.

Yulianti

Yulianti earned her PhD from Leiden University/Universitas Gadjah Mada. Her dissertation entitled “The Making of Buddhism in Modern Indonesia: South and Southeast Asian Networks and Agencies, 1900-1959”. She is currently a faculty member at the History Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada. At the same time, she is also teaching at the Center for Religions and Cross-cultural Studies, Graduate School, UGM. Her research interest includes women history, transnational Buddhism and history of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, heritage and material culture.

Theosophy and the *kebatinan* among the Peranakan Chinese society in late colonial Indonesia.

From the late nineteenth century, colonial Indonesia witnessed the emergence of various strands of nationalism and new movements of religious revivalism. One important case in point is the Indonesian revival of Buddhism. Previous studies have shown already how vital the Peranakan Chinese have been in this process. Less well known, though, is the contribution of other religious and intellectual groups in the making of Peranakan Chinese identity. One fascinating example is provided by the so-called Sam Kauw Hwee (Three Religions Association) that was set up by Peranakan Chinese who combined membership of the Kong Kauw Hwee (Association of Confucianism) and the Theosophical Society (TS); i.e. very much a foreign organisation founded by Westerners and based in India. This paper will discuss the encounters between the Peranakan Chinese and TS. It will demonstrate that the latter inspired and validated the way the Peranakan Chinese started to perceive their identity in both past and present in Indonesia. This paper will use sources published by both the Peranakan Chinese and Theosophical Society as well as other relevant primary sources such as newspapers and magazines.