Jnanapravaha

JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI

QUARTERLY

APRIL - JUNE 2022

CONTENTS

Director's Note

With our 2021–22 academic year coming to a close next month, we are busy at our drawing boards, critically brainstorming, questioning, rephrasing, replenishing, and adding fresh content as we always do. True to our dictum, subject matter not addressed so far is being examined for possible inclusion in all that we are offering in 2022–23, whether they be courses, seminars, lecture series or workshops. Our horizons continue to widen and deepen as we focus on the latest research in all our rubrics that straddle the worlds of Aesthetics and Critical Theory.

Technology has enabled us to collapse time and space – not only is our participating audience literally global but we are also extremely fortunate to have the support of scholars worldwide who share their knowledge magnanimously. The challenge now lies in marrying the physical with the virtual – our goal for the upcoming academic year.

We begin with our yearlong Indian Aesthetics course in July, tweaked as always with new inclusions, followed by a fresh semester-long iteration, 'Yoga & Tantra – The Mind Meeting the Body in Transformation', in August. Those who have been following this particular rubric closely will note that this curation is replete with the latest scholarship and insights of an endless and fascinating topic. Because of public demand, ACT (Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory) is back, starting September, this time structured with an equal emphasis on Theory and Praxis.

The last quarter witnessed several public lecture series of varying durations. Southasian Painting remained a focus twice. The first introduced the pre-eminent mood of erotic love during the Mughal period and demonstrated how the theme of Eros, by transcending religion, ethnicity, political and intellectual affiliation, also fostered social cohesion. The second explored why text and writing were so inextricably joined to painting in the 16th–18th-century murals of the Tamil region.

Through eight sessions, international specialists of the Mamluks (13th–15th centuries CE) created a dazzling tapestry of their architecture in both Cairo and Damascus, weaving in prized metalware, glass, ceramics, manuscripts, and bookbinding, placing them in the forefront of Indian Ocean maritime trade.

In the field of Critical Theory, a set of three interrelating seminars explored the generative force of 'urban imaginaries' in transforming spaces, conditions, and communities in contemporary cities.

As I end this note, we are in the midst of what some scholars now call the Pala Empire (8th–13th centuries CE), whose monasteries, temples, sculptures, manuscripts, objects et al. are

testimonies to an unmatched Indic legacy.

Looking forward to staying in touch and hopefully meeting soon.

With my warmest wishes,

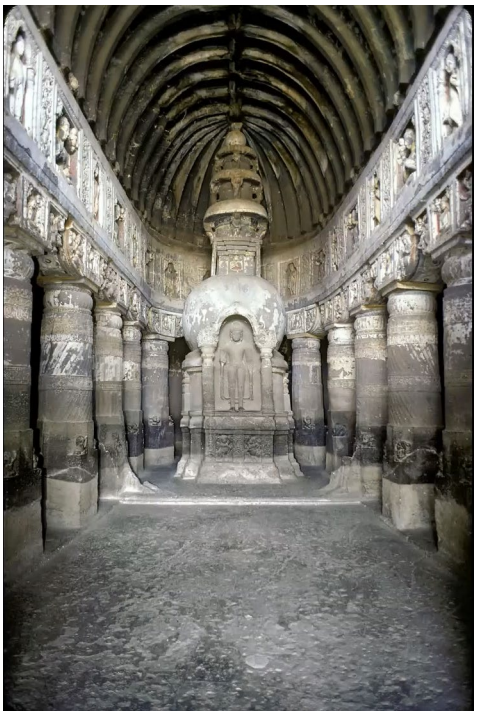
Rashmi Poddar PhD.
Director

AESTHETICS

A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacarya Katha: Jaina Tirthankara Enshrined (upper panel), Celestial Dancers (lower panel). c.1475

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:
(1) an academic yearlong Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Yoga & Tantra, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (3) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Southeast Asian Art and Architecture, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (4) a fortnight of public seminars and lectures in Islamic Aesthetics; (5) an ongoing series of public seminars in Buddhist Aesthetics; (6) an ongoing series of public seminars in Southasian Painting; and (7) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Indian Aesthetics



Mid-January brought the rich poetics of painting into the Indian Aesthetics course. The sessions on Indic painting began with an afternoon session by Dr. Leela Wood, who gave our students an overview of the magnificent Ajanta caves, aided by extraordinary photographs taken by the scholar during her research on the superb painted murals of Cave 17. The scholar connected the Ajanta murals with the 'Chitrasutra' of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, which describes the rules of painting in what is probably a codification of a mature practice of art, illuminating details of line, colour, rapid or careful execution, and typology through logic as well as intuition. Her examination of stylistic and pictorial conventions and modes of expression in the narrative murals which illustrate various *Jataka* stories in Cave 17 was adept, revealing the complexity of the site. In her understanding, the seemingly random placement of the *Jataka* stories assumes a pattern related to subject matter.

Dr. Kavita Singh's rich sessions threw light on Indic manuscript painting which came before the Mughal era. In making students familiar

with the portable images created for manuscripts illustrated between the 14th and 16th centuries, the scholar began with images of the fragile palm leaf manuscripts in which Jain and Buddhist literature of the early era was recorded. She considered the materials, structure, design, subject matter, illustrations, style and script of these manuscripts, as well as the Jain, Sultanate and Deccani paper manuscripts that followed them. Much of the North Indian corpus of Buddhist manuscripts was destroyed in the 12th and 13th centuries due to an attack by Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, a general of the Ghurid empire. The scholar pieced together evidence from extant material which tells an incomplete but intriguing story. She also explored the illustrations of the unique *Chaurapanchashika* after which this style of painting is named and delved into the distinctive oeuvre of Deccani painting, examining the Bijapuri manuscript *Nujum-ul-Ulum* in some detail.

The IA course this year forayed into the painted temple murals of South India through two evening lectures by Dr. Anna Lise Seastrand who presented her primary research on the subject. The first lecture titled 'Writing the self in Nayaka-period paintings' explored the connection of portraiture and related texts with the murals from the Ramalinga Vilasam Palace, Ramanathapuram, Sri Sabanayagar Temple, Chidambaram and Sri Athmanathar Temple, Avudaiyarkoil. The second lecture titled 'Picturing place, composing a landscape' moved towards the *Sthalapuranams*, site-specific sacred lore which delineates and validates pilgrimage sites.

Roda Ahluwalia's lectures introduced students to Mughal painting which, under Akbar's patronage, brought together the distinctive compositional style and vibrant colours of Indic painting with Persian sophistication, delicacy and sensitivity. In addition, European prints and paintings provided impetus and inspiration, resulting in the creation of a fresh, innovative style that relied on the collaborative

Submitting to the Beauteous One
Folio from a *Devi Mahatmya* manuscript
Jaisinghpur, Kangra, 1552

endeavours of artists in Akbar's large atelier. Though this painting workshop shrank considerably during Jahangir's reign, the art of painting continued to trace a journey of extreme refinement, exploited to political advantage in the allegorical paintings and hierarchical *durbar* scenes created under the ruler and his successor Shah Jahan. By the time of the latter, the style became static, and subsequent painting does not show the innovative brilliance seen at its inception. Both Pahari and Rajput painting selectively drew on the Mughal style while including local characteristics; scholars, relying on historical and biographical details of patrons and painters, have posited that artists probably trained in the Mughal ateliers painted to suit the tastes of these rulers of Northern India. Lyrically beautiful Pahari paintings and Rajput paintings such as *Ragamalas* were not merely aesthetic expressions but were also deeply concerned with political reality.

This year, the IA course for the first time focussed exclusively on sub-imperial Mughal painting in a pair of freshly curated lectures. Mrinalini Sil's talk on Murshidabad painting shed light on the somewhat neglected field of early modern Bengal painting. A study of the painting output of 18th-and-early-19th-century Murshidabad reveals a phenomenon that was multiple, polyvalent and discontinuous. Patrons such as the *nawabs* of Murshidabad and their courtiers, French and English East India Company officers, and Jain mercantile communities forged inter-regional and trans-regional artistic networks and aesthetic sensibilities in Murshidabad at this time. The lecture examined lesser-known manuscripts which reveal extraordinarily cosmopolitan styles and themes born of a complex, variegated society, itself a product of the layering of classes and sweeping historical change. Dr. Parul Singh's lecture illuminated the art that emerged in Faizabad and later Lucknow, which were important cultural centres, eclipsing the Mughal capital and Delhi from the mid-18th century until the establishment of formal British rule in India

in 1858. Paintings produced during the reigns of Shuja-ud-Daula, Ghazi-ud-din Haider and Wajid Ali Shah reveal the effect of the political on cultural production. These paintings reflect issues of space, territoriality, sovereignty, control, identity, hybridity and memory specific to their period and the regimes under which they were produced.

Dr. Harsha Dehejia's sessions on Krishna *shringara* explored paintings, *pichhwais* and popular forms through the lens of *dvaita* (dualistic) and *advaita* (monistic) philosophy, delving into the *Bhagavata Purana*, a text that brought together several Indic devotional strands. The *bhakti* tradition inclined towards *dvaita* belief as apparent in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. Krishna *shringara* is manifest in poetry, painting, dance and devotional practices, where the *bhakta* or devotee submits wholeheartedly to her chosen deity while the aesthete or *rasika* enjoys Krishna *shringara* primarily through the senses. Such aesthetic worship is still in evidence at Nathdwara, the seat of Vallabhacharya's Pushti *marga* sect, at Pandharpur where *Vitthala* is worshipped, and at Jagannatha Puri where Krishna is venerated with his brother Balarama and his sister Subhadra. At these centres the devotee is immersed in aesthetic *bhakti* or Krishna *shringara* through song, dance, and *bhoga* or food offerings.

The IA course then moved into trade and the littoral in a freshly introduced session with Dr. Himanshu Prabha Ray. The speaker showed how India with its long coastline was very far form insular prior to the arrival of the Europeans in the 15th century. Sharing of ideas occurred due to travels across the Indian Ocean in the pre-modern period. Some narrative panels of the 8th-century Buddhist temple of Borobudur in central Java underscore this travel through the depiction of ships and boats. While other scholars have commented on the 'Indianisation' of Southeast Asia, Dr. Ray emphasised that the lens of difference is as important as the lens of similarity in understanding these cultures. The speaker then turned to coastal shrines and their audiences, focussing on Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, and showed how temples built on their coasts are outward facing. This encourages the re-examination of the archaeological context of coastal temples in view of their maritime orientation.

As an introduction to the colonialist and nationalist period, Dr. Jaya Kanoria turned to Edward Said's seminal text, *Orientalism*, showing the development of Orientalist themes in European painting before moving to paintings of the colonial period in India. The Orientalist mindset is apparent in paintings of the Company School, which mapped the land as well as its people, flora, fauna and culture for European patrons in a manner that enlarged the coloniser and diminished the colonised. Fascinatingly, the Western categories of Romantic, Picturesque and Sublime can be discerned in Company School landscape painting, showing how these tropes were adapted to Indian subject matter by both Western and Indian artists painting for European patrons. By applying Said's insights, which were drawn from a study of texts, to the visual, the speaker illustrated how critical paradigms can be adapted to analyse artistic production.

Dr. Suryanandini Narain showed how photography occupied two distinct positions under the colonial framework: the camera was used as a device for surveillance, racial derivations, voyeurism and political control during the Raj, yet also 'democratised' through self-documentation by the local population as it emulated but also challenged modes of colonial representation. The speaker elaborated on the major figures of Indian photography during the colonial period and the disjunctive visual time frames, publics, spaces and media in which the photography of the time appears. She also established continued co-existences.

The last three months have traversed a wide swathe of time and topics. The course is now poised to enter the areas of architecture and philosophy in the colonialist-nationalist-modernist period in April. – ***J.K.***

PAST PROGRAMMES

Murals and the Written Word in Early Modern Southeast India

February 04th & 11th, 2022, 7:00 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Anna Lise Seastrand (Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota, USA)

Dr. Anna Lise Seastrand speaks during 'Murals and the Written World in Early Modern Southeast India'

The Tamil words '*ezhutu*' and '*varai*' could interchangeably mean 'to write' and 'to sketch.' In Tamil Nadu, both these actions have influenced each other, especially after the dawn of the Tamil Bhakti tradition. In its organic evolution, this process of mutual influence culminated in a special interest in portraiture, of both personalities and sacred spaces, in early modern South India (circa 1500-1800 CE). By this time, portraiture became an important genre in sculptures, paintings, and texts (as biographies and *sthalapuranas*), reflecting a renewed interest in individuality. This period accounts for most of the better preserved murals in Tamil Nadu. These murals inspired by the portrait-literature have frequent expressions of the written word in representations of books, manuscripts and acts like reading, reciting, teaching, etc. Being an intrinsic part of the space that they define, murals are not merely paintings. Intertwined with words, they acquire fascinatingly complex meanings which enliven the subjects they depict. In her seminar, Dr. Anna Lise Seastrand took the participants through an enthralling visual journey of Nayaka-period murals in Tamil Nadu and threw light on the complex messages that they convey.

In the first lecture titled 'Writing the self in Nayaka-period paintings,' the portraiture of personalities acting as the mimetic double of the texts was discussed. The lecture analysed the murals from the Ramalinga Vilasam Palace, Ramanathapuram, Sri Sabhanayakar Temple, Chidambaram, and Sri Atmanathar Temple, Avudaiyarkoil on the strength of the texts that they narrate. In all three places, the murals, while depicting historical personalities in association with deities and their manifestations, seem to consciously employ a celadon green background, seen extensively in Mughal portraits. This inspiration drawn from Mughal painting seeped into both the Deccani and Vijayanagar courtly traditions. However, in the Nayaka murals, the colour goes beyond its stylistic value. The portraits framed in green, though stationed in a historical time, are interacting with the timeless divinities of the mythology, as narrated in the associated texts. In this way, King Raghunatha Sethupathi finds a place in the mural depicting the coronation of Lord Rama. Painted strategically on the wall behind the space for the throne, the divine sanction of royal authority is visibly expressed. The message becomes clearer in the panel, painted in the storey directly above, depicting the tutelary deity Rajarajeshwari. The bluish-green background would have framed the king seated on the throne, making him an integral part of and a completing element in the murals. In the inner chambers, the king is depicted as a legendary hero, the *kavya nayaka*, indulging in the refined pleasures of royalty. The king would have seen himself reflected in those elegant depictions, simultaneously living, and visually relishing the extravagant manner of living glorified in literature.

In the Chidambaram temple, an enviable position of eminence amidst mythological figures is occupied by Ambalavana Tampiran, the head of a non-*brahmanical* Saivite *mutt* (monastery). He is depicted in a size twice as large as other figures in the mural amidst visuals of temple myths and festivities. The *mutts* were significant donors who supported literary, artistic and architectural activities of the period under discussion, and the pontiff has been elevated to the plane of gods despite not being a part of the recounting of these myths in the texts. A prominent treatment is accorded to Manikkavachakar in the Avudaiyarkoil murals. Here, the significance of the written word is doubly emphasised in the legend and

its depiction. The *Sthalapuranam* conveys that Lord Shiva, in the form of an old man, not only writes down the text as dictated by Manikkavachakar, but also makes his unique signature as a mark of authenticity. Dr. Seastrand opined that by labelling even the known articles in almost all these murals, the artists seem to have vociferously asserted that they are not mere pictorial representations but reality manifesting itself on the plane of the walls.

The second and final part of the seminar titled 'Picturing place, composing a landscape' moved towards the *Sthalapuranams*, site-specific sacred lore which delineated and validated the pilgrimage site to which it pertained. The paintings of such sites facilitated the near-equivalent of an actual pilgrimage through a visual experience. A Srikalahasti Kalamkari work on Thiruparankundram was discussed as an example. The panels demarcate the extent of the temple, the *prakarams* within and even the hillock that forms part of it. While acts of pilgrimage are depicted outside the temple, the scenes from the *Sthalapuranam* are depicted inside with captions. Here again, the site transcends the confines of time with mundane and mythical activities depicted simultaneously, thereby vouching for the eternal sacredness of the site.

Dr. Seastrand took the participants on a virtual temple visit from the *gopuram* to the sanctum while appreciating the murals that adorn each part of the sacred structure. Paintings on the interior of the *gopurams* carry the pilgrim through a devotional journey as one moves vertically. Using the example of the magnificent Thiruppudaimaruthur *gopuram* murals, Dr. Seastrand explained the tiered journey starting from the imagery of pilgrimage sites at the base to the principal deities on the top-most level. Through the precise depiction of the site-specific sacred tree, the *sthala vriksham*, the panels imply the in-situ presence. In some paintings, this approach is qualified further by the use of '*ivvidam*' (this place), a noun form rather than '*ivvidattil*' (at this place), its locative counterpart. Going further inward to the *mantapam*, ceiling murals can be seen arranged as per the original geographical distribution of sacred sites. The example of *thalamurai* murals in Avudaiyarkovil temple was highlighted where the Shiva temple praised by Nayanmar saints in their hymns are arranged in locational groups. Since the individual temple depictions are barely distinguishable from each other, their labelling is an important device which establishes their uniqueness. Based on her interactions with pilgrims, the speaker stated that the devotees might not be taking note of individual depictions but considering the veneration of the panel as a whole as having the ability to bestow the benefits of pilgrimage to all the temples displayed. In the murals around the sanctum of Thirukkurungudi and Azhwar Thirunagari temples, the significance of paintings as extensions of the actual pilgrimage site was demonstrated by the exact depiction of Kanchipuram Devarajaswamy temple in one of the panels and also by the marks left behind by devotees touching the lizard drawn within it, as they do in the original temple. Thus, the murals take the pilgrims on a mental journey to the displayed places of worship and a spiritual journey inward.

By dwelling elaborately on portraiture of individuals and institutionalised sites, the lecture demonstrated that the paintings in their close association with the written texts go beyond a mere representational and informative purpose. They are an essential element of experiencing the spaces they adorn. If the subtle message of the paintings alone is not sufficient, their labelling makes it clearer that they are not just images but an extension of a reality that overcomes spatial and temporal boundaries. The viewer and the pilgrim sense them with their eyes, perceive them with their inner-self and become connected to the moments they depict while firmly rooted in the present. **– *S.K.***

Islamic Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Mamluk Cairo: An Architectural Panorama

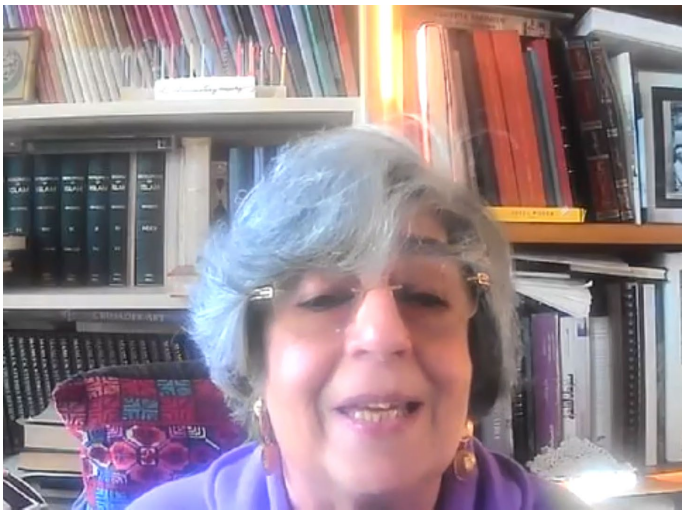
January 28th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Professor (Emerita), SOAS, University of London)

David Roberts 1840

In her opening remarks to an enlightening talk on the architecture of Mamluk Cairo, Prof. Doris Behrens-Abouseif stressed that before we could really delve into this period in history, we must first take a close look at the term 'Mamluk' itself. The most predominant (mis)translation of the word is *slave*, and it is precisely here that we hit the first stumbling block in our understanding. So deeply has our modern imagination been influenced by the brutal legacies of the Euro-American slave trade and the impact of colonialism that the word *slave* obfuscates our ability to more realistically comprehend the intricate world of the Mamluks. If, however, we were to approach this history with more nuance, we would see that Mamluks were in fact a largely military class of highly trained soldiers who held important positions of power in the Muslim world for over a thousand years, stretching from the 9th to the 19th centuries. Mamluks were drawn from across Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and although purchased as adolescents and brought to be trained in great medieval cities like Cairo, Mamluks had many opportunities in the world they entered. Many rose through the ranks and served as elite warriors, powerful mercenaries, politicians, statesmen as well as rulers in their own right. Through the time of the Mamluk Sultanate which lasted from 1250 to 1517, the Mamluks were more akin to a powerful aristocratic oligarchy, and Cairo under their influence grew to be the largest city on Earth, and a 'crossroad of embassies' as described by a Mamluk scholar.

Prof. Behrens-Abouseif's presentation began with a series of panoramic images of Cairo in the late 16th century through to the close of the 20th century, and

it was immediately evident how, even until a few decades ago, Cairo had retained a distinctly Mamluk profile in its built environment, despite the centuries of Ottoman rule and the modern Egyptian state which followed. This scale of religious as well as civil building projects overseen by the Mamluks had as much to do with their love for architecture as it did with a need to prove their allegiance to their Muslim subjects. Being of non-Muslim origin, the Mamluk sultans earned their legitimacy to rule largely through their military endeavours, by evicting the Crusaders and the Mongols in the early 13th century, following which they cemented their presence through their patronage of religious schools, mosques as well as civil endeavours like hospitals and charitable foundations. Although the Mamluks ruled over a territory which stretched from Egypt, encompassed modern-day Syria, the Levant as well as the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and cemented their presence in all these sites through architectural patronage, it was in Cairo that the magnitude of their building projects was manifested most profusely.



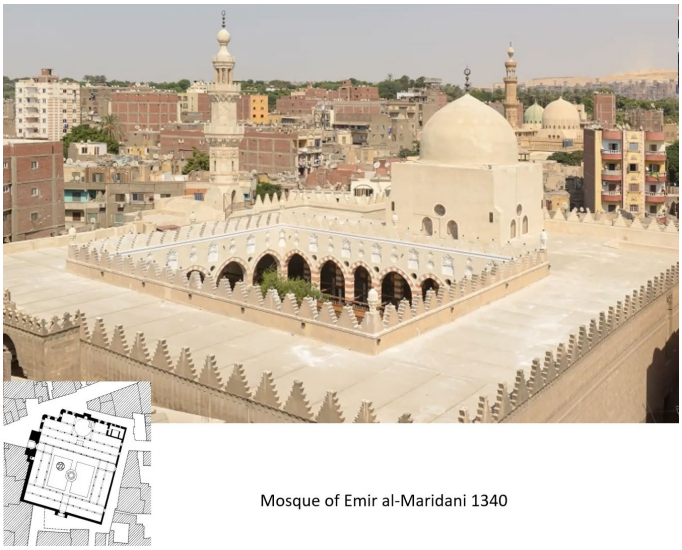
Prof. Doris Behrens-Abouseif speaks during 'Mamluk Cairo: An Architectural Panorama'

A particularly characteristic aspect of Mamluk Cairo that Prof. Behrens-Abouseif raised through her seminar was the collective nature of the built environment that emerged under the Mamluks over the three centuries of their rule. This emergence of a cityscape characterised by the density of monuments, domes, and minarets, reveals to us a directed effort to create a distinct urban identity. Another peculiarity of the built landscape of Mamluk Cairo is the lack of free-standing and symmetrical monuments of a grand scale. One of the rare exceptions to this pattern is also one of the earliest Mamluk mosques in Cairo – that of al-Zahir Baybars which was built by the founder of the Mamluk Sultanate. Almost all later Mamluk architectural projects, however, largely conformed to pre-existing street layouts and accommodated the peculiarities of existing urban space within their architecture, resulting in rather unconventional and often unique structures which gave Mamluk Cairo its definitive characteristic.

Although it would be impossible to elaborate on all of the monuments and building projects Prof. Behrens-Abouseif presented in her talk, I focus here on five structures which trace the trajectory of Mamluk architecture, beginning with the complex of Sultan Qalawun, the ruler often credited with defining the look of Mamluk Cairo. The complex of Qalawun lies at the heart of what was once the Fatimid city, and this location was especially important given the area's rich history as a centre of religious learning. The complex itself is built facing the mausoleum of the last Ayyubid ruler of Cairo, Sultan al-Salih, and an adjacent *madrasa* built by Sultan al-Zahir Baybars, two of Sultan Qalawun's immediate predecessors. Comprising of a mosque, a mausoleum and a hospital, the complex itself is sizeable, but the innovativeness of its design is most apparent on its external façade, which has been carefully laid out to follow the existing street layout, rather than that of the building itself. In what would become a feature typical of Mamluk architecture, the façade and the interior thus have two different orientations, with the interior spaces oriented towards Mecca as per Islamic custom, while the outside prioritises a harmonious interaction with the street. The precisely decorated exterior view of the complex with its cascading windows, dome and minaret shows off the building in its most elaborate fashion without interfering with the aesthetic balance of the street it sits on.

This intentionality of Mamluk architecture in facilitating a harmonious street layout and alignment with the neighbouring buildings becomes all the more interesting when examined through the example of the mosque of Emir al-Maridani, built in the 1340s. An important Emir in the Mamluk court, as well as a son-in-law to the reigning Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad, al-Maridani was exemplary of the sort of aristocratic class who flourished through the 14th century, in the wake of the Crusades ending and the ushering in of a period of relative economic and political stability. The mosque of al-Maridani acknowledges the patronage of Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad with its design echoing the sultan's own mosque in the Citadel; however, it does make a significant concession to the street, with a cutting away of its top left corner as well as the shifting of its minaret to be adjacent to its entrance facing

the street. Inside, the mosque seems perfectly symmetrical at first glance and is a beautiful example of 14th-century style, but a closer examination of its array of columns reveals that this symmetry is not absolute. A significant number of these columns were in fact sourced from ancient temple sites from across upper Egypt, while others were also brought as spoils of war from the Crusades, then adjusted in height to fit the design of the mosque. Symmetry, therefore, was not an unshakable rule to finesse over both in the exterior as well as inside for Mamluk architects; rather, it was a harmonious integration with the larger plan that was far more important.



Mosque of Emir al-Maridani 1340

One of the most noteworthy buildings of Mamluk Cairo is the mosque of Sultan Hasan, built between 1356 - 62, in a striking departure from the more accommodative style of his predecessors. Facing the Citadel where the sultan's palaces were located, the mosque was designed to be spectacular, and in another departure from his predecessors, Sultan Hasan brazenly razed a series of palaces built by his father Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad as residences for his Emirs in order to clear out the site for his own mosque. Although much damaged through the centuries and in somewhat poor form today, contemporary and later sources describe it as featuring an elaborate bulbous dome as well as a double-headed minaret. The mosque was as spectacular inside as on the outside, with a *madrasa* accommodating more students, with more room for prayers and more spectacular architectural details than most previous Mamluk buildings. Its most outstanding feature is its vaulted arch reminiscent of the ancient Sasanian arch at Ctesiphon, whose construction continues to intrigue scholars of Mamluk architecture. Yet another unique feature of this mosque and *madrasa* complex is in the layout of its mausoleum, which is positioned such that the prayer hall is directly in front of it, and prayers are made facing the mausoleum. Although it is not known whether this unconventional layout was actually breaking an Islamic architectural rule, this mosque seems to be a unique example of such a design. As Prof. Behrens-Abouseif pointed out, this mosque is truly in a class of its own, with innovative design choices made at every turn. Its outer façade too is strikingly similar to Modernist architecture of the 20th century, especially in the design of its student quarters, which was an unprecedented style not seen before or after in Cairo for many centuries.

As the city expanded further through the early 15th century, Mamluk mausoleums began to move further towards the eastern edges of the city, where larger swathes of unoccupied space were still available for building. An especially beautiful and unique example of a mausoleum from this time is the funerary Khanqah of Faraj Ibn Barquq built between 1400 and 1411. One of the few examples of a mausoleum with mirroring male and female wings, the complex is perfectly symmetrical with two identical minarets and two of the largest masonry domes in Cairo, which have withstood the ravages of time without damage to the present day. The complex also contained rooms and accommodation for Sufi monks on its upper floor, which have not survived.

The reign of Sultan Qaytbay through the last quarter of the 15th century was yet another important period in the history of Mamluk architecture. Like his predecessor from the early 14th century, Sultan Al-Nasir Muhammad, who ruled for close to forty years, Sultan Qaytbay too enjoyed a long reign of close to twenty-five years, allowing him to really cement his presence in the built environment of Cairo. However, unlike the early 14th century, which was a time of stability and prosperity, the reign of Sultan Qaytbay was marked by continuing wars and deep economic hardship. Despite this harsh reality, the late 15th century was also a time of revival in art, craft and architectural patronage, marking it as an especially formative period in Mamluk history. The complex of Sultan Qaytbay, built in 1475, exemplifies the complexities of this period both in its modest scale compared to earlier structures, as well as through the richness and complexity of its decoration, especially its densely carved stone dome and minaret. The interior of the mosque is designed in a style reminiscent of more domestic architecture, specifically with its hall-like space resembling the inside of a home. As Prof. Behrens-Abouseif pointed out, this domestication of the mausoleum both in its

scale and its rich decoration makes this complex very emblematic of late-Mamluk architecture.

The final mosque Prof. Behrens-Abouseif showed was that of Sultan Al-Ghawi built in 1504. One of the last significant building projects undertaken by the Mamluk Sultanate, this mosque complex is innovatively split in half to allow for the important Bayn al-Qasrayn road to flow uninterrupted, with the mosque and *madrasa* complex straddling it on either side. Although richly decorated in tilework, with an impressive dome and soaring minaret, the complex sustained serious damage over the centuries, and the original dome no longer survives, while the minaret has been significantly altered. The section of road running through this complex has continued to remain an important market area, with bustling shops and stalls, especially dealing in textiles, creating a trading hub that has flourished largely unchanged since the mosque's inception. The collective nature of Mamluk urban projects is once again made evident in the harmonious interaction between religious institution, mausoleum complex, trading hub and residential quarters all coexisting within the same area.

In the concluding section of her talk, Prof. Behrens-Abouseif drew our attention to two other intriguing Mamluk interventions in Islamic architectural design, one of which was their careful attention to the placement of the mausoleum dome and the minaret to always be in conjunction with each other, in order to achieve a balanced and picturesque urban vista for the city's inhabitants and viewers. This panorama, which from a distance appeared to be in gentle harmony across the cityscape, would, however, reveal itself to also be shaped by distinctly individual styles as well, which is most evident in the carved designs on the stone minarets and domes. No two patterns on domes and minarets are alike. Although architecturally often similar, they range from simply decorated brick domes of the early Mamluk period through to the richly patterned masonry domes and minarets of the late 14th century.

This first lecture by Prof. Behrens-Abouseif on the art and architecture of the Mamluks laid out for us the true scale of the incredible contributions made by the Mamluks to the urban fabric of Cairo. As we now move through more specific aspects of art, craft, manuscript design, glassware, and trade through the Mamluk Sultanate, we do so with a deep sense of appreciation of and heightened interest in the rich and ongoing legacy of this innovative and cosmopolitan history which had a lasting impact across the medieval world. **– *A.T.***

Building the Sultanate: Mamluk Architecture in Bilad al-Sham

February 03rd, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Ellen Kenney (Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Director of Graduate Studies, Unit Head, Islamic Art and Architecture Program Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations (ARIC), The American University, Cairo)

Jerusalem, Andrew Shiva (Wikipedia)

Expanding from Prof. Doris Behrens-Abouseif's lecture on the architectural splendour that was Mamluk Cairo, Dr. Ellen Kenney opened up the realm of the Mamluk Sultanate in a journey through the Bilad al-Sham region. Encompassing the modern-day. states of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel, the Bilad al-Sham was critically important to the Mamluk Sultanate both in terms of its trading and economic links, as well as the symbolic importance it held for housing a number of Islam's holiest sites. The region has had a long and rich cultural and architectural history spanning from classical antiquity, which by the era of the Mamluks had much within its own past to draw from for its own architectural projects.

Prof. Ellen Kenney speaks during 'Building the Sultanate: Mamluk Architecture in Bilad al-Sham'

In setting the context of the Mamluk architecture of Bilad al-Sham, Dr. Kenney stressed that there were a few key features of the history of this region which were important to keep in mind in order to understand its evolution. The architectural legacies of classical antiquity, as well as that of the Umayyads were never far from the eyes and minds of both citizens and builders in the Mamluk period. Another important aspect of the built legacy that preceded the Mamluks and continued through their rule is the heavy presence of military establishments, including forts and fortified castles through the region which came up as a response to the long and troubled times of the Crusades. War thus distinctly shaped the architecture of the region in a way that it did not in Mamluk Egypt. Added fortifications as well as more austere external façade thus became key distinguishing features of the built environment of the Bilad al-Sham from the more ornate styles of Egypt. The Ayyubid Adiliyya *madrasa* in Damascus, Syria, built in the early transition period between Ayyubid rule and Mamluk dominance thus becomes an interesting building to reflect on how style and intent both diverged and came together to reflect the ethos of Mamluk architecture. Dialogue between the built facade and the street, which was crucial in the buildings of Mamluk Cairo, does carry forward here too, albeit in a more subdued and restrained way. A common thread which runs through the major architectural commissions of the early Mamluk period across the Bilad al-Sham region is made visible in the ways in which Mamluk patrons tended to pay architectural homage to the earlier built legacies of the regions in which they were stationed. Thus local techniques, forms, styles and traditions made their way into Mamluk architecture.

One of the several lines that link Mamluk architecture in the Bilad al-Sham to Ayyubid antecedents as well as the contemporary landscape of Mamluk Cairo is evident in the use of blazons or heraldic emblems of office on architectural facades. Corresponding to ceremonial offices held in the Mamluk court, these emblems proclaimed the direct patronage and influence of Mamluk power and influence in the region. Over the course of Mamluk rule, heraldic blazons came to transcend the architectural, and came to be found on all manner of surfaces including leatherware, illustrated manuscripts, metalware and other examples of its rich material culture.

Another interesting line connecting Mamluk architecture across the Sultanate was the almost canonical use of set-design motifs to the point that they almost came to represent Mamluk style. As Dr. Kenney elaborated, these template-like motifs were available to builders and architects across the Mamluk world, and through the centuries gradually grew more elaborate. By the late Mamluk rule of the 15th and 16th centuries, however, they came to be only loosely identified as common motifs. Epigraphic inscriptions on architectural façades are yet another key feature of Mamluk style, as Dr. Kenney illustrated through three very different examples of epigraphic inscriptions found in a fortress town in Jordan, a bridge in Israel and a funerary *madrasa* in Damascus, Syria, all commissioned by the first Mamluk sultan, Baybars, and completed by his son.

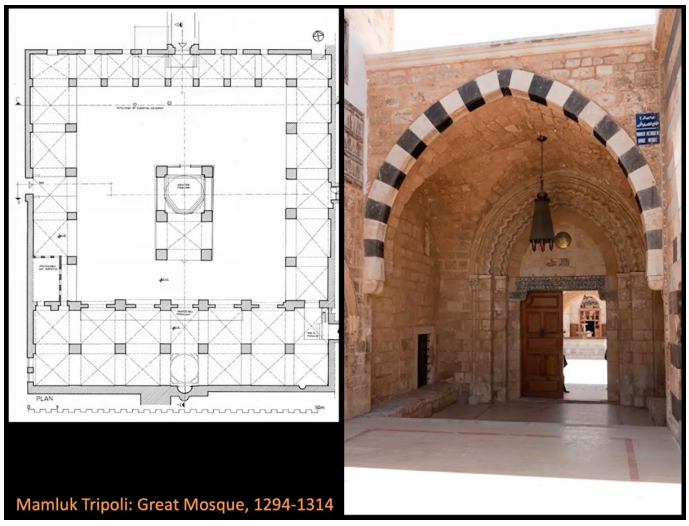
In many ways, it was under the reign of Sultan Baybars that the role of the Mamluks as unifiers of the region and custodians of the immensely important religious sites across Mamluk territory was properly consolidated. And a particularly interesting aspect of this consolidation comes from the kind of building

projects initiated and overseen by Baybars. Broadly falling into two categories, they consisted either of the renovation of city walls, aqueducts, gates, citadels and other civic and military infrastructure, or the restoration of major and minor religious shrines across the realm. As noted by the prominent Mamluk historian Nasser Rabbat, Baybars's focus on restoration and renovation projects not only in the major citadels of Cairo and Damascus but also in smaller towns and provincial capitals points to the consolidation of a triumphal image, and the beginning of an age of relative stability in the region.

The consolidation of Damascus as the capital of the Bilad al-Sham and its transformation into the most important urban centre after Cairo was illustrated by Dr. Kenney through a fascinating array of architectural projects, both civic and religious. As the city grew through the early decades of Mamluk rule, it evolved from a small and heavily fortified ancient town to a sprawling metropolis with settlements radiating from the old walled city, subsuming outlying neighbourhoods and satellite towns up to the foot of the Qalamun mountains, flanking the north. Over the course of three-and-a-half centuries of Mamluk rule, a distinct architectural style also evolved among the extensive building projects undertaken by its rulers. The influence of older architectural styles as pointed out by Dr. Kenney earlier in her lecture was now made more evident as we saw examples of Mamluk mosques borrowing glass mosaic techniques used in the famous Umayyad Mosque (the Great Mosque), in the city. Mamluk architecture in Damascus also tended to be smaller scaled than its counterpart in Cairo, as well as more austere in its exterior façades. One of the most striking aspects of the Mamluk style in Damascus was the extensive use of *ablaq* or striped masonry, generally with alternating light and dark stone on both the exterior as well as the interior of buildings.

The Bilad al-Sham, through the time of the Mamluks, saw the emergence of both Damascus as well as the more northerly city of Aleppo as major centres of political and cultural influence. As the subtitle to Dr. Kenney's talk demonstrated, it was Aleppo's transformation from a fortified citadel to a cultural powerhouse that was among the most remarkable aspects of the Mamluk urban project. Its remarkable growth notwithstanding, it is also important to note that Aleppo's strategic location and its influence in trading networks had already established it as an important centre before the Mamluks, and that its growth was perhaps not as specifically related to regime change in Cairo as it was to the flourishing of the Euro-Asian trading links between the 13th and 16th centuries. Aleppo was also already well known as a centre for craft and architecture before the emergence of the Mamluks, and master craftsmen and builders from the city worked on many famous construction projects across Egypt and the Bilad al-Sham.

As we went through images of Aleppo's rich architectural legacy, it was with deep poignancy that Dr. Kenney reflected on the uncertain circumstances of much of this material history today. In over a decade of brutal war, much has already been lost across Syria, with the cities of Aleppo and Damascus continuing to endure its brunt. As we looked at the beautiful details of a Mamluk hospital building constructed in 1354, which was fully funded and staffed for the benefit of its people, the long history of both war and healing, destruction and reconstruction that has characterised this region for centuries struck deeper. The Bimaristan al-Arghuni hospital is a remarkable example of the scale and seriousness with which healthcare was prioritised in the Islamic world at this time, as well as the importance given to scientific research. Converted from a luxurious palace into a public hospital, the building retained a serene atmosphere replete with an airy central courtyard and fountains, while also providing for patient rooms, areas designated for surgeries and specialist treatments, and even a quarantine facility for isolating and treating patients who were contagious.



Mamluk Tripoli: Great Mosque, 1294-1314

As we moved from city to city through the Mamluk Sultanate, from Damascus to Aleppo and finally to the coastal city of Tripoli, the true scale of the impact the Mamluks had on the built landscape of the region became more evident. Tripoli was an especially interesting city in the context of the Mamluks as it

was under their rule that the city came to be more definitively consolidated as an urban centre. Despite a long history of continuous habitation, much of the city's ancient structures had fallen to ruin by the medieval period, and destruction from the Crusades had left rubble and masonry which the Mamluks came to reuse and repurpose for their own projects. It is also in Tripoli that we can see some of the most spectacular examples of distinctly Mamluk elements such as the intricate use of the *ablaq* technique and the innovative use of vaulted arches, including the famous Tripoli vault.

The final city that we came to in our foray across the vast terrain of the Bilad al-Sham was Mamluk Jerusalem. A city that has perhaps received the least amount of attention as a prominent Mamluk city, while at the same time being revered as the holiest of city of three major religions, and infamous for the long and bloody history it has witnessed, Jerusalem had an intriguing political role during the age of the Mamluks. Sometimes considered as a punishment outpost, disobedient Mamluk officials were often sent to Jerusalem to serve periods of exile. Drawing from Michael Burgoyne's exhaustive study of Mamluk Jerusalem's built landscape, Dr. Kenney led us through some of the details of buildings from this time, including details of vaulted arches that had similarities to structures in Damascus, implying once again the movement of craftsmen across this region.

For a region that has been at the centre of civilisation and war, that has been home to the holiest of holy sites for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and that continues to witness untold bloodshed, religious strife and instability as a result of colonial intrigue, and political gridlock, the Mamluk history of the region often gets overlooked, especially when compared to the more illustrious capital of Cairo. And yet it was in the time of the Mamluks that the Bilad al-Sham witnessed relative peace and stability, allowing for networks of trade and economic development to be repaired and strengthened, and for culture, craft, art, architecture and science to truly thrive in a manner that feels devastatingly remote once again within its present circumstances. In traversing through this remarkable history, we were witness not simply to the splendours of architecture, but also to the resilience and courage of a people who repair, heal and rebuild, creating in the process remarkable sites of human ingenuity. **– *A.T.***

Splendour and Might: The World of Mamluk Manuscripts

February 17th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Noha Abou-Khatwa (Adjunct Assistant Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, The American University, Cairo)

When we consider the phrase, 'a splendid and marvellous endowment', we may typically imagine a hoard of riches in gold and silver, jewels, or rare textiles, even a magnificent building, but rarely does our imagination allow us to think that such an endowment could be a book. For the Mamluks of Egypt and Greater Syria however, books and manuscripts were at par with, and often surpassed other material riches in the prestige and honour they brought, and the reverence with which they were commissioned, executed, and maintained in the court, religious establishments, institutions and in private hands.

In a fascinating and expansive survey of Mamluk manuscripts, Dr. Noha Abou-Khatwa took us through an aspect of intellectual and cultural life that for the people of the time was easily at par with its most valuable material riches. For modern eyes invested with a Western hierarchical gaze prioritising the permanent built landscape over the 'humble' book, this talk was an important and critical opportunity to put down our hegemonic blinders and attempt to understand the wealth of a cultural space where knowledge and the written word was so highly prized. Although largely remembered by history as a military class of rulers, the Mamluk's immense contributions as patrons, commissioners, producers, and custodians of the intellectual wealth of its people were of such singular importance that

the Mamluk Sultanate came to be known across the medieval world as a cultural powerhouse.

Given that this was an introductory survey lecture, Dr. Abou-Khatwa first led us through a close examination of the physical manuscripts themselves, familiarising us with the vocabulary and language used in understanding them as material objects. It was thus that the first term we came upon was *codex*. Handwritten and bound documents, Mamluk manuscripts were stored in the form of the codex, made up of folio sheets stitched to form *quires* (each consisting of 20 pages) with the manuscript itself consisting of numerous quires bound together within the codex. On opening a Mamluk codex, one is first greeted with a frontispiece, which in Quran manuscripts especially, but also in other genres, were decorated with *illumination*, or decorative calligraphy in gold or silver pigments. The richly ornamented frontispiece was usually followed by an ornamented title page, although there are also instances where either the frontispiece or title page are absent. The title page was generally either accompanied by or followed by a *colophon*, – a decorative emblem containing information on the manuscript's producer. The colophon in Mamluk manuscripts is therefore of singular importance to scholars and others studying the manuscript as it holds important details as to who commissioned, produced, and illuminated the manuscript, and so giving crucial contexts around the political, cultural, and economic conditions of its production. Most manuscripts also contained a *waqf* statement, which was essentially a declaration statement providing details of the endowment provided and the reasoning or intent underlying the commission. A final detail that Dr. Abou-Khatwa pointed out were the illustrated medallions often found on the marginalia of Quran manuscripts, which performed both a functional and a decorative purpose. The functional purpose of these medallions were to guide its reader through the pauses in between verses, sections and chapters, while its decorative role was to balance out the negative space generated within the layout of the text and margins across the page.

Of primary importance to Mamluk illuminators working on manuscripts was achieving perfection in the script. Style was very carefully chosen, and seven different styles of Arabic calligraphy were generally applied within Mamluk documents as well as architectural façades. These included the *Thuluth*, a clear and distinct style primarily used for titles as well as on buildings given its adaptability to monumental scale; the *Naskh*, one of the most easily legible of calligraphic scripts which found itself used widely as a body script, which through the Mamluk and later Ottoman period grew in popularity to the point it was considered a script par excellence. The *Muhaqqaq*, which was immensely popular in both the Mamluk as well as the Persianate world of Iran for its striking beauty, was used within manuscripts both as titles and sometimes even in the body text. *Raiham* was a smaller version of the *Muhaqqaq*, and both scripts employed characteristic wave-like sweeping descenders, allowing for texts to have an animated quality. The two scripts of *Tawqi* and *Riqah* were both derivatives of the monumental *Thuluth* style, and could also be found in titles, chapter headings, *waqfs*, and colophons within documents. Finally, the significantly older style of *Kufi*, which had been one of the earliest calligraphic scripts of the Islamic

world, found place within Mamluk manuscripts in the form of *Sura* titles especially, and also encountered a heightened popularity towards the end of Mamluk rule in the 16th century.

What was especially and abundantly clear as we moved in detail through the calligraphic arts of the Mamluks was the seriousness with which each script was considered and applied. Mamluk calligraphers and illuminators were firmly a part of the intellectual elite of society and were well versed not only in the fields of religious studies, but were also historians, scholars, art historians, cultural critics, literary theorists, writers and artists in their own right. The choices they made within each manuscript thus emerged from intense conversation, debate and collaboration, and reflected the care with which every detail was considered. As Dr. Abou-Khatwa pointed out early in her presentation, a large portion of the most fabulous of Mamluk manuscripts were produced in Cairo, and this was not too surprising given the city's place as both the political and military capital of the Mamluk Sultanate, as well as its location as a primary centre of Islamic learning, especially after the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols just as the Mamluks came to power in Egypt. Many intellectuals and civilians fleeing the siege of the eastern peninsula thus came to settle in Mamluk Cairo, and over the next few centuries the intellectual atmosphere in the city thrived.

The first manuscript that we looked at in detail was an intriguing example from the late 13th century, produced by a Sufi calligrapher named Mansur ibn Ibrahim. A polymath of his time, Mansur ibn Ibrahim was a calligrapher, scholar on jurisprudence as well as a reciter of the Quran. Residing in the Egyptian port city of Damietta, then at the heart of many battles of the Crusades, his world would certainly have encountered a great degree of turmoil. A further interesting aspect of the manuscript is the fact that it was dedicated to his Sufi master rather than a royal patron or an Emir, thus revealing that exquisite manuscripts were not exclusively the domain of the elite or powerful. The extent of the overlapping and intersecting worlds of scholarship and art were further revealed to us through two especially rare manuscript examples from the late 13th century, both of which were produced by the singular legal and religious scholar al-Maydani. The manuscript's authorship was only revealed by the presence of al-Maydani's name in the colophon where he is listed as both the author/calligrapher and where he dedicates the manuscript to himself. A difference of 28 years sets apart the two manuscripts in the collection, and we see how al-Maydani's style of *Muhaqqaq* calligraphy improved through the intervening years, indicating his training under masters.

The most well-known Quran manuscript of the Mamluk world also comes to us from the early years of the 14th century, dedicated to the short-lived Mamluk sultan Baybars al-Jashnakir a few years before he took the throne. Among its unique features is the use of a rare script derived from the more ubiquitous *Thuluq* using gold outlined with black which was not a very well-known practice of the time. Its calligrapher, Ibn al Wahid was a very well-known and colourful figure of the time, and much evidence of his life and work are available within archival sources. Holding many jobs and positions including as the Imam of the mosque of al Hakim where this manuscript was held, and even as a bureaucrat with varying degrees of success, he ultimately garnered fame and prestige for his work as a calligrapher and illuminator of Quran manuscripts.

Prof. Noha Abou-Khatwa speaks during 'Splendour and Might: The World of Mamluk Manuscripts'

As Dr. Abou-Khatwa proceeded through the examples of later Mamluk manuscripts, a fascinating detail began to emerge, that of marginalia added by later readers of the texts onto the pages themselves. These marginalia would prove to be especially important in the study of these manuscripts as it provided valuable details as to who was reading them, under whom, where, when, and how. To see that these manuscripts were actively used, handled, and studied by generations of students and scholars was especially fascinating given the distanced and reverential attitude with which commissioned pieces are treated in our own times – meant to only be passively consumed and not engaged

with as a tool or a source of intellectual learning. A further important detail to note was that Quran manuscripts were not the only genre that were commissioned by the Mamluk elite, and as Dr. Abou-Khatwa elucidated, there were numerous genres of illuminated manuscripts that were popular within the Mamluk world. Prayer books, such as the beautifully detailed *Kitab al-adhkar* of al-Nawawi were also widely circulated.

Although the Mamluk Sultanate is more widely known for the exquisite calligraphy of their illuminated manuscripts, they were not necessarily averse to having figurative illustrations within commissioned books. However, examples of manuscripts featuring figurative illustrations do tend to be rare in comparison to the multitude of text-based works that have survived to the present day. Unlike other contemporary courts of the Muslim world, the Mamluks did not have a tradition of employing court painters, and this lack of support meant that painters actively making a living in the Mamluk realms tended to be few and far between.

A notable exception to the overwhelmingly male world of Mamluk political, cultural and religious spheres was the example of Khawand Baraka, the mother of Sultan Shaban, who was one of the most powerful women in Egypt in the 14th century. Her patronage of calligraphy artists and workshops led to some of the most exquisite examples of Quran manuscripts from the time. Employing features including beautiful titles in *Kufi* script and well designed and proportioned texts through the manuscripts, books produced under her patronage were of a calibre that was rare even for the Mamluk world. As Dr. Abou-Khatwa demonstrated towards the close of her lecture, the impact of Khawand Baraka's influence and patronage on all successive schools of Mamluk calligraphy and illumination was so immense that the style popularised in her time was widely replicated upto the reign of Sultan Barquq into the 15th century. This reveals not only the legacy of her influence, but also the fact that it was particular families of artists who benefited from her commissions, thus carrying on the style for generations to come.

Although Dr. Abou-Khatwa's talk was exhaustive in its scope and thorough in its approach to the rich legacy of Mamluk manuscripts, the material was of such brilliance that it did not appear at any time to lose its thread. In fact, it was Dr. Abou-Khatwa's enthusiasm and engagement with this history that allowed us to be equally receptive in appreciating the vastness of the legacy of Mamluk manuscripts. As with each and every talk in the series, this too opened up a world of brilliant intellectual, cultural, and artistic interventions, without compromising all the complexities of a medieval court in the heart of the Islamic world. **– *A.T.***

Judging a Book by its Cover: An Introduction to the Ornament and Techniques used to Decorate Mamluk Bindings

February 24th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Alison Ohta (Director of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland)

Prof. Alison Ohta speaks during 'Judging a Book by its Cover: An Introduction to the Ornament and Techniques used to Decorate Mamluk Bindings'

Dr. Alison Ohta began her lecture on the development of bookbinding techniques and decoration throughout the Mamluk period (1250–1517) by tracing the challenges encountered while studying these objects. Such bindings can be dated by the colophon of the manuscripts, *waqf* inscriptions or dedications to a patron's library that they contain. However, pages are easily removable from the binding. Several such examples survive without a manuscript inside, making it difficult to ascertain their time and provenance as they can easily be reused for other books. The *waqf* or endowment dedication can be added later, and stylistic criteria can change very little over a century or more, compounding the

difficulty. Some signs that indicate the rebinding of the manuscript include the trimming of the text block, folios that are not placed in the correct order and the addition of end leaves to the manuscript.

The Moritz collection of Islamic bindings, mainly loose ones without the manuscript, collected when he was the librarian at Khedivial Library in Cairo, is distributed between the Oriental Institute in Chicago, The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and the Islamic Museum in Berlin. It is only from the Mamluk period that a substantial number of manuscripts with their original book bindings and a colophon survive. Other such examples are found in institutions at Istanbul. Each collection has a specific identity depending upon the circumstances under which the bindings were acquired. The Topkapi Palace has late Mamluk period specimens. Colophons include the name of the patron, a dedication or *waqf* note, the date of copying and the name of the copier. Gold tooled bindings with corner patterns repeated to form a central medallion are of typically Mamluk design. Gold tooling required a heated tool, attested to by scorch marks on some bindings. Most have a sparing use of gold, and some bindings were replaced in the 20th century.

Juz'1 of a Qur'an endowed to the madrasa of Khwand Baraka in 770/1369, DAK Rasid 80, 24.5 x 17cm.

In a very rare case, the names of the binder and illuminator are also recorded in a specimen at the Dar al-Kutub Library in Cairo, which has an exceptional collection that allows regional attributions and the dating of these objects, providing an understanding of the context in which they were produced. Many of these manuscripts had their bindings replaced some time in the 19th century, a common practice that does not reduce the importance of the Dar al-Kutub collection but nevertheless creates a problem for the researcher. The unique collection has a great number of thirty-part Qurans with most of the volumes extant. The earliest Mamluk bindings are from the 13th century and are tooled with profiles based on circles, rosettes with geometrical centres, densely tooled borders, pendants and all-over patterns of geometrical interlace with six or twelve-pointed star patterns based on triangular or square grids, part of a set repertoire with a long tradition. However, by the end of the 14th century, more geometrically complex designs based on ten-pointed stars appeared on bindings and continued to be used until the end of the Mamluk period. The method used to create these designs is not well-understood and has been attributed by the scholar Gulru Necipoglu to a geometry based on knots that developed during the Seljuk period and the Abbasid Caliphate. Recently, mathematicians have pointed out several shapes, such as the pentagon and bowtie which play a part in forming these designs involving polygonal tessellation and crystalline patterns. Some bindings use dark and light leather to distinguish shapes, the darkening probably the result of dampening followed by tooling, an instance that confirms that the time-consuming and labour-intensive production of Mamluk bindings required great skill.

Mamluk bindings drew inspiration from a wide range of sources, resulting in continuous artistic development. Some bindings carry on a decorative tradition found earlier at Marrakesh and echoed in architectural decoration seen in latticed windows at Cairo. The designs on Mamluk bindings have a close relationship to those produced in the Ilkhanid period and share the repertoire of 15th-century Persian binding decorations. Links to the older tradition of manuscript illumination are also apparent. The production of bindings with geometrical ornament continued in Mamluk Cairo long after the style had disappeared from the Persian and Ottoman world. Leather filigree mounted on textile reminiscent of an earlier Coptic tradition is also seen. Later, lobed profiles with arabesque patterns, knot-work and delicate floral patterns were introduced in the tooling. Along with the cloud-collar pattern, they were drawn from Chinese prototypes (probably inspired by designs on imported furniture) during the Ilkhanid period which had widespread influence in the Islamic world. Plain shapes are found in rare instances.

Islamic bindings have a distinctive pentagonal flap. The inner face of the cover, called a doublure, is often decorated leather or textile and covers the text block, with the flap folding over the edge to

protect the text further, a format established by the 11th century which used pasteboard, made by sticking together sheets of (often pre-used) paper. Pasteboard covers replaced the earlier box-binding format which had wooden covers. The doublures are plain, but there are also many examples of block-pressed leather (sometimes made of smaller pieces stuck carefully on a board) or textile with various designs such as vine scrolls, lotus patterns, vegetal patterns and sometimes names. Blocks seem to have been largely intaglio, but some used relief. Silk doublures made of Chinese material are found, but very few that use textile remain extant. Persian bindings sometimes have leather filigree or coloured pasteboard doublures with lobed profiles. Mamluk covers and doublures boast of similar fine filigree on plain backgrounds with lobed profile decoration. Pressure moulding or stamping allowed the pattern to stand out in relief in Persian bindings, later seen in Ottoman and Indian bindings, accompanied by extensive gilding including gold paint. Mamluk bindings have some Turkmen elements such as delicate floral meanders. There is evidence that Turkmen artists and craftsmen who moved to Cairo were responsible for the transfer of this new style into the Mamluk repertoire.

Portrait of Sultan Husayn Mirza, Iran, Herat, c. 1500, 34.3 x 32.7 cm, Harvard, 1958.59.

Cloud –Collar design, Pen on ink, Staatsbibliotek, Berlin

The tradition developed for 250 years showing vitality, eclecticism, and diversity. In the second part of her talk, the speaker showed how these designs and decorative elements, pasteboard covers, and techniques including gold tooling entered the repertoire of Italian bookbinders from the Islamic world in the 15th century, resulting in smaller and lighter European books with leather bindings which exhibit a relationship to Islamic covers and decorative doublures with similar ornamentation of medallions, corner designs, and polychromy. This appropriation of Islamic decorative elements and techniques eventually dispersed throughout Europe during the Renaissance. Along with elements drawn from classical antiquity, it replaced earlier books with metal clasps, haphazard decoration and tooling, and without doublures, changing the look of the European book. Additionally, the humanist script which was easier to read replaced Gothic script. However, the European book did not appropriate the flap, block-printed doublures or the sewing tradition of Islamic binding but continued to rely on the European tradition of attaching quires to the cover. By the 16th century, European bookbinding was closely inspired by the leather filigree, knotted patterns, rosettes, cloud-collar profiles, stamping, pressure moulding and gold tooling that make up the composite patterns of Islamic bindings. This debt to Islamic bindings is often forgotten.

Additionally, the imagination of Renaissance writers and artists including Leonardo Da Vinci was fired by exotic Islamic objects and decoration that were much admired and traded by travellers to the East including Mamluk Cairo at this time. This interaction began to first show its effects in Venetian artefacts and art and eventually became visible in the luxury artistic output in diverse artistic fields throughout Europe. **– *J.K.***

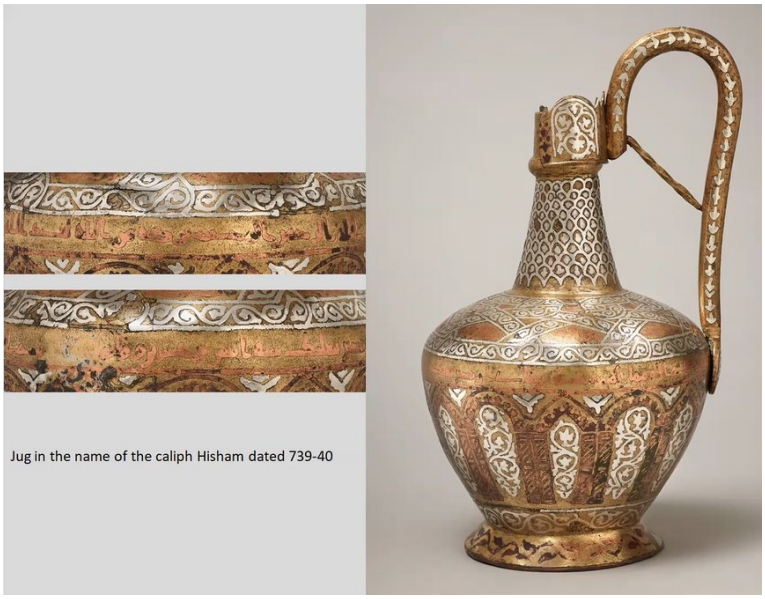
Mamluk Metalwork: Styles and Statements

March 03rd, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Professor (Emerita), SOAS, University of London)

In her lecture, Prof. Doris Behrens-Abouseif highlighted the splendour of metalwork from the Mamluk period (1250–1517) through inlaid and engraved metal objects. Prof. Abouseif also discussed the ceremonial and political significance of the imagery and inscriptions and demonstrated how the art evolved and changed during the Mamluk period.

Very few objects made from silver or gold survive today in Islamic art; what survives are objects made of mixed metal or alloys. The earliest dated piece of metal inlay work is a jug, with silver and copper inlay work, from the al-Sabah Collection (Kuwait), dated 739–40, with an inscription in the name of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham. Mosul in Iraq became

the centre of metal inlay production at the beginning of the 12th century and their tradition of elaborate silver inlay work continued into the Mamluk period until the early 14th century, when it branched into local and new traditions.



Jug in the name of the caliph Hisham dated 739-40

The period preceding Mamluk rule saw great production of metalwork. This was the time of the Crusades which continued till 1291 when the Mamluks defeated them. Contact with the Crusaders led to the production of objects with Christian-themed motifs. This imagery, which plays an important part for Christian European culture, stimulated Islamic metalwork to give it more narrative. For example, the Baptistère de St. Louis from the early Mamluk period has horsemen, military processions, as well as hunting and battle scenes comparable to medieval European depictions.

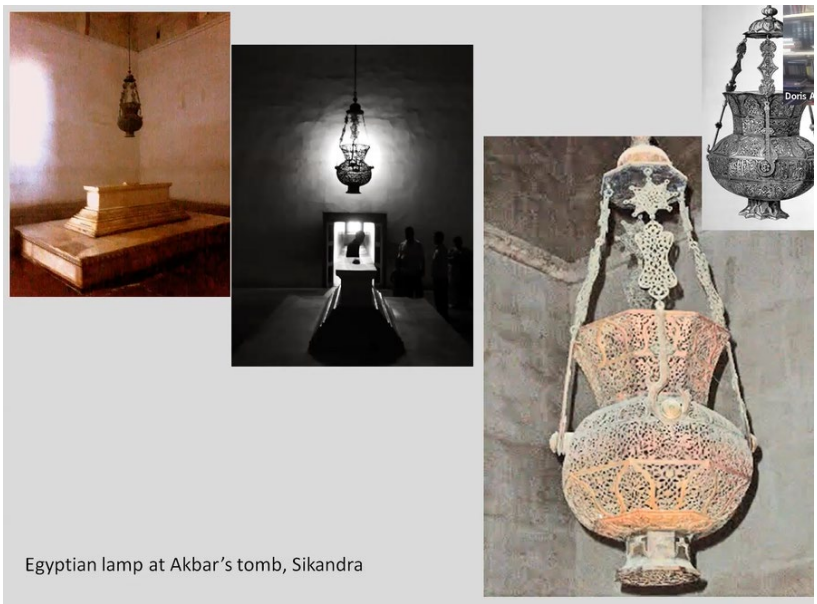
The use of images in Mamluk art disappeared towards the end of the Crusades, giving way to a new style that developed through the 14th century. This new style placed emphasis on inscriptions, almost as if to replace images. Decorative elements inspired by Chinese art also entered Mamluk art through the Mongols and trade around this time. A typical and signature Mamluk style is a very dense but fine pattern, almost like a weave, on metal objects. Such designs, which were from the 14th and 15th centuries, were not meant to be inlaid, but engraved.

The 15th century has been described as a century of problems, beginning with Timur's invasion of Mamluk territory, which devastated Syria and the Sultanate. But art production continued and creativity flourished in different ways, and through a variety of objects. Though silver inlay work diminished and not many royal pieces were produced, many objects were produced for common use. These products used copper and were engraved in a new style with a network of Baroque-like curves and minimal decoration to fill the gaps.

The reign of Sultan Qaitbay in the 15th century saw a revival in creative decoration, styles and techniques. One of the styles had engravings and decorations made on the base or bottom of the object, which could not be seen unless it was hung. Silver inlay work also made a comeback with far more variety than was prevalent in the 14th century.

This was also the time when the Mamluks began exporting their metalware, mostly lidded boxes, to Europe. While the aesthetic was new, the interlaced Islamic geometric design was retained. Though these boxes had very few inscriptions, they were almost always signed. Other examples of Mamluk work in Europe are jugs, ewers and buckets in a European design. It is not clear if European customers sent the objects for decoration or if these objects were produced and decorated in Mamluk territory with European sensibilities.

The last object that Prof. Abouseif spoke of were the Mamluk metalwork lamps in mosques. These lamps had piercings to let out light, rather than inlay work or engravings. Among the many lamps created by the Mamluks was one that belonged to Sultan Barsbay. Though it is not known where the lamp is today, a copy of it exists in the Taj Mahal. This copy was commissioned by Lord Curzon during its restoration in the early 20th century. **– *S.G.***



Egyptian lamp at Akbar's tomb, Sikandra

Glazed Tiles under the Mamluks, their Origins and Successors

March 10th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Mr. Arthur Millner (Consultant in Islamic, Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Art, London)

After a fantastical journey through structural splendours in stone, luminous labours of the book and gilded opulence of the Mamluks, Arthur Millner steers us back into the grit arising out of their ruins. Once the clay dust settles, he shows us sensitivity and delicacy shining through the hazy glazes, in a revelation of the artisans' social awareness and connectedness. A seemingly simple object – ceramic tiles, reveals its complexities as layers are stripped off its dusty exterior. Why did they suddenly appear? Who made them? Where were they used? What sets them apart from other Islamic tiles? These are some questions that Mr. Miller tackles through this session.

The 'blue-and-white phase of the 15th century' did not start just there, but traces its origins to the 9th century. Before the enduring stone carving superseded fragile ceramic tile decoration, many historical monuments of the 14th century used blue, white and turquoise tiles as a form of architectural embellishment: the Khanqah of Princess Tughay, Cairo; the Mausoleum of Araq, Midan, Damascus; the Mosque of Sultan Barquq, Cairo, and even Idgah, near Rapri, Agra, India, to name a few.

Often called *chinoiserie* because of its blue-and-white palette, a typical Damascus hexagonal tile is a composite material of ancient origins, known as 'fritware' or 'stone paste'. Widely used in the Islamic Middle East, it uses just 10% of clay, the rest being a mixture of glass-like elements, mostly silica and ash. This composition was devised in order to retain the whiteness of the clay in a bid to replicate the quality of Chinese porcelain, a prominent influencer of this style. Their defining characteristics include an artistic spontaneity and lack of formality, showcasing a flowing and free-spirited drawing hand. Most scholars propose that the feathery fern-like leaves, "squiggly tendrils" and a top-heavy dominant central plant, were motifs borrowed from Yuan porcelain. However, there was also a flourishing ceramic trade in 13th-century Raqqa, Syria during the Ayyubid period. A similar underglaze decoration existed, proving that the Mamluk style was not a phenomenon new to the region. Tile manufacturing cultures existed in the Fatimid period, in Cairo as well. Mr. Millner thus showed us that the Chinese influence was only part of the story.

Following the sacking of the city by Timur in 1401, very few tiles exist in situ from the 15th century, while numerous examples rest in museums across the globe. A group of dado tiles in the Mausoleum at

Ghars al-Din Khalil al-Tawrizi, Damascus is the best display of tiles from this period in situ. Almost half the tiles that exist in the mosque take inspiration from Chinese Yuan vases, incorporating fluid motifs like central flowers, tendril leaves and swaying aquatic fronds, while navigating the awkwardness of the hexagonal format. Two very interesting panels exist, one of which contains a signature – Amal Ghaybi Tawrizi, matching the name of the patron of this mosque.

Mr. Arthur Millner speaks during 'Glazed Tiles under the Mamluks, their Origins and Successors'

The artist, whose signature also appears on many other ceramic pieces in museums, possibly originated from Tabriz. Tiles from the Green Mosque in Bursa, dated the same as the Tawrizi Mosque, include an inscription saying 'made by the masters of Tabriz'. Even though the technique, *cuerda seca*, is different, some tiles from a mosque in Edirne, Turkey (1435), are very similar in pattern and placement to the Tawrizi Mosque, but are more formal, more uniform, less organic, very symmetrical, finely painted and larger in size. If these craftsmen did come from Tabriz, then there should be some indication of it, but there apparently isn't enough. The question of where the hexagonal tiles originated remains an unanswered one.

On studying their usage, we see that rectangular tiles were often used as architectural embellishments on towers or minarets, while hexagonal tiles were used as interior dado tiles. Uniform designs were used as fillers within the pattern, but visually individual ones were strategically placed to grab attention. A concept taken perhaps from the "*baccini*" seen in Italy. The idea of using ceramic tiles as a visual focal is quite an old one, going back to the 9th-century Abbasid period, in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, Tunisia, and the Kazim Karabekir Mosque in Anatolia. Plain turquoise hexagonal tiles in the Gok Madrasa in 13th-century Tokat, Anatolia, set both ways – vertically and horizontally, set a precedent for the Damascus Tawrizi Mosque patterns.

Mr. Millner rounded off the lecture by comparing architectural tiles from the Indian subcontinent, the most similar being the tiles at Sheesh Gumbad, the Tomb of Bahlul Lodi in the heart of Delhi. The Tomb of Sultan Ibrahim, Pakistan, has both rectangular and hexagonal tiles in beautiful blue and turquoise colours, in patterns reminiscent of textile designs. Shards from the ruins of Fort Eliza in Goa mirror the freehand drawings of Damascus and those from the palace complex in Gaur, Bengal, reflect the Chinese influence. These blue and white tiles were the absolute defining characteristic of tiles from the Indus region. They primarily occur in 16 th and 17th-century Sindh, which was the main manufacturer and exporter of tiles across the Indian peninsula.

Why was there such an upsurge of tile production in the Mamluk period? It couldn't have only been for the one very modest Damascus mosque, since the Great Mosque (also known as the Umayyad Mosque) in Damascus should have demanded it more. This is a question that many scholars have addressed, especially John Carswell and Michael Meinecke. Another big debate is where the tiles were actually made. While many questions regarding the subject keep scholars occupied, one main aspect of this trade became clear through the lecture. Ancient art forms were connected, and they influenced each other through trade across the continent. Similar styles of painting or decoration were adopted by different cultures, absorbed, re-invented and made their own, by incorporating their own perceived socio-cultural and stylistic nuances. Blue and white ceramic tiles remain the same object across the continent, yet stay refreshingly different because of the individualistic inferences of the local maker's hand. As Mr. Millner says, "We should think of the Mamluk blue and white as a cosmopolitan fusion of all sorts of different influences feeding in." **– *S.S.***

Enamelled and Gilded Glass from Syria and Egypt

March 17th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Melanie Gibson (Editor of the Gingko Art Series and formerly Head of Art History at New College of the Humanities, London)

Dr. Melanie Gibson looked at the origins of enamelling on glass and the complex technical processes involved in this exacting art. Islamic glass, like its predecessor, Roman glass, is made of silica (from sand or quartz), lime (found in sand and plant-ash) and soda (from locally available natron, a mineral, or from a desert plant with the Arabic name *kali*, from which the term alkali originates) which lowers the melting point of silica. Broken glass or cullet can be added to the mixture. Glassmakers gathered melted glass from an intensely hot open furnace with a blow pipe through which they blew air into the bubble of glass, inflating and shaping it, before placing it in a special oven to cool gradually in a process called annealing which is necessary to prevent cracking. Glass can be decorated at the same time with pieces of transparent or coloured glass, but craftsmen also waited for the glass to cool before applying ground coloured glass to the object which had to be reheated to produce an enamelled surface. Glassmaking of this sort (with medieval pieces being a brownish colour because of minerals, and containing bubbles within as they were created by hand) is a conservative craft which has changed little over the centuries. Long before the Romans, the idea of adding colour in glass on a transparent glass object was developed in Pharaonic Egypt. However, the Romans were sophisticated glassmakers and enamellers, and many techniques used in the first and second centuries CE in the Syrian region of the Roman empire, where the raw materials for glassmaking were found, were adopted in the Islamic world. The Daphne ewer from this period is a famous artefact from Syria.

Enamelling was not common in the early period, though polychrome glass was made by the skilful painterly application of metallic compounds on glass in Egypt, using a technique also seen on ceramic objects where it produced lustre. Inscriptions rendered in colour on these artefacts may indicate when and where they were made. Glass containers decorated with fish were made for a long time, beginning in the Fatimid period. Perhaps their popularity stemmed from the idea that when filled with liquid, they gave a strong impression of fish swimming within the container. A Roman technique called gold sandwich glass, in which gold leaf in decorative patterns was applied to a glass object before dipping it into transparent molten glass, was practiced briefly, sometimes in combination with enamelling. The inspiration for patterned gilding may have come from illuminated manuscripts. A cross-fertilisation of mediums is apparent with glassworkers absorbing ideas from a wide variety of fields such as ceramics, textiles and works on paper.

The 'San Marco' cup from Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman empire, is now in Venice. It is a unique Roman object decorated with classical scenes illustrated in medallions framed in gilding and coloured enamel; around the inside rim is a Kufic inscription in silver stain, raising questions about whether these techniques were reintroduced into the Islamic world from the Byzantine world or whether they were independently reinvented. Techniques of applying gilding and polychrome enamels to glass evolved gradually in the pre-Mamluk period and resulted in the production of an extraordinary range of enamelled glass objects in the period from 1200-1400. Elaborate painting of gold on glass artefacts often had decorative elements such as a circular (pomegranate) tree and were inscribed with the name of a ruler, the latter a sure indicator of the value assigned to these objects. Glass, when buried, reacts with soil and becomes irreparably damaged as can be seen in many such pieces. Numerous beakers, of the type that were held by rulers in representations on some artefacts, may have been used for drinking by the elite. From the 13th century, gilded and enamelled sets of nested beakers and perhaps decanters became popular.

By the middle of the Mamluk period, large glass artefacts with complex compositions in a variety of colours, decorated with both Christian and Chinese-

inspired motifs were being made. Enamelled glass was perhaps first made in Raqqa, an important industrial centre in the Abbasid period. However, textual evidence points to the importance of Aleppo and Damascus. Cairo was also a centre where many astonishing glass objects were made. The medieval glassmaker, after blowing a glass object, would attach a red-hot metal rod known as a pontil to its base. This was used to rotate the object in the furnace to avoid overheating and left a distinctive mark. After annealing, the object would be painted with enamel and powdered gold leaf mixed with gum Arabic and water or vinegar. The glass for the enamel, with high lead content for faster melting, could be pre-fritted (a mixture of glass and pigment fired to make coloured glass, which was then crushed) or cold (a mixture of ground transparent glass with added pigment). In cold glass, red came from hematite and blue from lapis lazuli, whereas in pre-fritted glass, white and yellow came from tin and lead in varying proportions, green from an addition of copper to tin and lead, and black from chromite and lead. Enamelling was a difficult art and early objects had more gilding than coloured enamel. For a brief period, glass was blown into moulds as can be discerned from objects with distinctive fluting.

Glass was greatly appreciated in the kingdom of Jerusalem after the area was taken by Christian crusaders in 1099. Glass objects seem to have been made for many Christian patrons and some have been found as reliquaries in churches and listed in royal inventories. Many had figures of cowled monks, the Christian cross and Christian themes in their decoration. The fleur-de-lis, symbol of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, is also seen on objects of this period that were probably made for Europeans and do not have inscriptions. In France, gold mounts were made for glass objects, showing that they were greatly valued.

The Mamluk sultan Baybars, whose name means panther, commissioned architecture, coins and objects marked with a distinctive feline with a raised tail which marks them as specifically Mamluk. All those under his command also used this symbol. Royal emblems or ranks of officers such as a napkin (for the master of the robes), a cup (for the *saqi* or cup bearer), a pair of polo sticks (for the polo master), et cetera, help in the dating and identification of these objects. A wonderful ablution bucket bearing animal heads from Baybars's reign is quite unique. The most impressive objects from the Mamluk period are numerous lamps that are distinctively shaped, fabulously gilded and enamelled, with inscribed verses to be used in religious buildings such as mosques, *madrasas* and tombs which were commissioned by Mamluk *amirs* to ensure some inheritance through the *waqf* (a system by which finances for the upkeep of the buildings was put in place).

Mosque lamps were filled with oil and lit, hung from suspension hooks and chains attached to transparent glass handles on the rounded body. Above was the neck with a flared conical opening and below, a short or taller foot (the only point of difference in shape), the bottom of which was decorated as it was visible when the lamps hung in a mosque. Oval shaped decorated spheres through which the chain suspending the lamp was fed for the sake of stability also survive in small numbers. Many lamps survive in the National Museum of Cairo where they were placed by a group of collectors. The decoration on lamps differed greatly. Gold was painted on first, followed by red and blue. Enamel is more enduring than gold due to better fusing. Some lamps made during the reign of Barquq experiment with enamelling on the inside. Blazons, both epigraphic and symbolic, and sometimes inscribed titles, assist in the identification and dating of lamps. The red rosette was the blazon of the Rasulid family of Yemen who acknowledged the Mamluks as overlords, and many gifts including glass candlesticks and bowls were exchanged between these powers.

Some sophisticated objects were also made in the Mamluk period. A flask in the British Museum is decorated with exquisite gilding and scrolls with animal heads, unusual scenes of hunting on horses, trees, birds, a musician playing, and a figure drinking. The flat side of the flask is worn and bears a *shamsa*. The Cavour Vase in the Doha Museum of Islamic Art has enamel and gilding on blue glass, a rare survivor of coloured glass, showing signs of patching with a

dark glass to cover a hole probably created by the pontil during the process of decorating. The vase has a series of parrots on the side and a generic inscription with good wishes for the owner. A very tall vase, forty centimetres high, has an asymmetrical design of twenty-two different birds, probably illustrating a poem. A band representing water above the base has fishes and crabs. The luxurious 14th-century Beckford vase, with lavish enamelling, has a scene of polo players on white, red and black horses running around the bottom. Gilded glass added at the neck, as well as enamelled and gilded robes, saddle-cloth and manes show the painter's skill. A bottle in the Metropolitan Museum in New York has a band with a scene of riders and a series of large, exquisite medallions on the shoulders, gilded in blue, brown, and red, and a phoenix painted around the neck which proves that it comes from the later period, for it is only in the 14th century that influence from China filtered in through an intermediary, probably Iran. A curious bottle with added trails of glass in the form of handles, and lotus patterns in medallions also shows Chinese influence as do other pieces with phoenix representations. The speaker especially noted a virtuoso candlestick, covered in gold in a shape usually achieved only in metalwork. The surface is covered by an intricate geometric design.

The 1400s saw a decline of the industry in Egypt and Syria after Timur's sacking of Damascus.

Prof. Melanie Gibson speaks during 'Enamelled and Gilded Glass from Syria and Egypt'

Subsequently, mosque lamps were commissioned in Venice. In the 19th century, there was a revival of 'Mamluk glass' production in France and Austria, brought in by the industrial revolution which generated the technical prowess to copy Islamic glass which was much admired in Europe. However, the closeness of the copying varied, and 19th-century glass was often much more transparent. In Austria, the pontil was no longer used. Instead, the pieces were reheated in the annealing oven, a different method which produced more regular pieces of glass. Mamluk glassware was not only greatly admired and coveted by the indigenous populations of Egypt and Syria, but also generated enormous interest in its time among Europeans who collected it avidly. – ***J.K.***

Ports and Shores in An Age of Sultanates: Tracing the Structures of Western Indian Ocean Trade, 1250–1500.

February 10th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Roxani Eleni Margariti (Associate Professor, Department of Middle Eastern and Southasian Studies, Ancient Mediterranean Studies Program DGS, Islamic Civilizations Studies PhD Program, Emory University)

Aden as portrayed in Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, Civitates Orbis Terrarum, vol. 1 (1572/1612

More details will be made available in our next JPM Quarterly (Jul - Sep 2022).

Southasian Painting

PAST PROGRAMMES

Illustrating Jaina Religious Texts and Stories

December 01st, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Robert J. Del Bontà (Scholar – Jaina Art & Curator)

Art historical literary discourse on Jain painting has generally privileged early Jain painting of the so-called 'Western Indian style', cementing Jain painting to a specific style. This has also relegated Jain painting to a perfunctory and frozen category of 'pre-Mughal art' where, according to the logic of 'historical time', Jain painting stands as an intermediate stage between the 'Classical' style of Ajanta painting and the flowering of various painterly styles in the late 16th century.

Dispelling this perception, Prof. Robert J. Del Bontà in his fascinating lecture introduced students to a wide array of Jain illustrated texts in a variety of styles – from the widely known illustrations of the Western Indian style to the lesser-known Jain illustrated manuscripts painted in Northern Deccan, as well as the various Rajasthani idioms of the 18th century. The various places that these later manuscripts were produced, such as Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Kishangarh and Sirohi, suggest both multilinguistic and stylistic fluidity of the illustrated manuscripts, with pictorial expressions of the illustrations absorbing and modifying elements from various regional idioms.

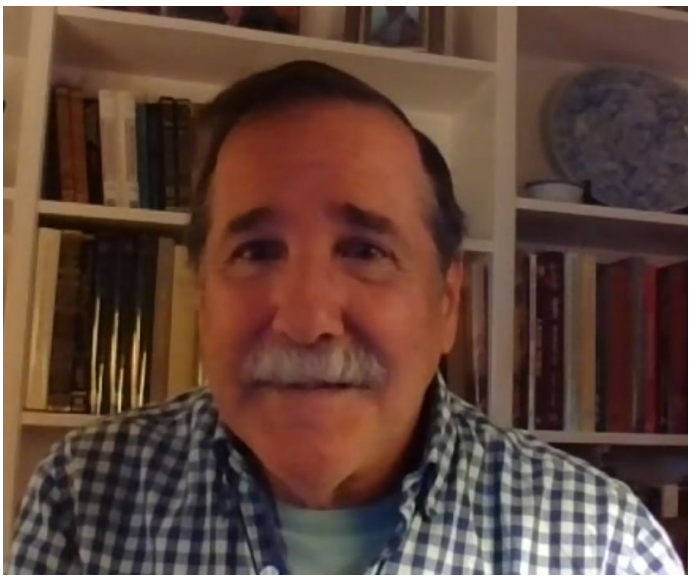
The lecture was expansive in the topics that it covered. Prof. Del Bontà began by describing specific scenes of the *Kalpasutra*, then went on to describe images from the *Kalakacharyakatha*, and several lesser-known Jain illustrated texts including cosmological manuals such as the *Sangrahani Sutras* or inspirational or cautionary tales such as the tale of Shalibhadra and Dhanya or *Yashodhara Carita*.

Using his thorough knowledge of the contents of the text, he offered a nuanced reading of the illustrations, often highlighting small variations in illustrations of the same scenes that were made for Svetambara or Digambara traditions as well as their interactions.

Prof. Del Bontà dealt with various questions regarding the relationship between the text and images in the various manuscripts, the choices made by artists in depicting specific scenes, and discussed them within the larger context of Jain worldviews and its communication with its readers and viewers, the mobility of the artists, and stylistic idioms and compositions. He also highlighted the discrepancy between text and images – cases where illustrations are not mentioned in the text but are elaborately described in other narratives included in the manuscripts.

Extra textual illustrations as well as interpolation from other textual traditions lead to larger questions about the role of illustrations serving as commentaries, similar to the textual commentaries that were written on the *Kalpasutra* manuscripts, for instance, or their role as visual cues, serving as mnemonic devices to help the narrator of the text or reader recall

other relevant narratives not described in the text.



Prof. Robert J. Del Bontà speaks during 'Illustrating Jaina Religious Texts and Stories'

Prof. Del Bontà demonstrated the considerable malleability of the circulating texts such as those dealing with the tale of Shalibhadra, which are not always direct retellings, but rather stress different values and virtues, often changing the names of the characters and even the thrust of the narrative in the various narrations. There is also variety in the titles of texts as well as the language used – versions can range from Prakrit and Sanskrit to Gujarati. While the scheme of the illustrations and their styles in these manuscripts vary immensely, many key compositions in the manuscripts are similar despite the fact that they were stylistically made by different artists adhering to the painterly styles of 18th-century Bikaner or Sirohi.

Prof. Del Bontà highlighted that despite the diversity of texts, the narratives and the content, certain narrative events or nodes were consistently chosen for illustration as they highlighted and resonated key values and virtues upheld by the Jains. According to him, these values which were visually embodied in the narratives, echoed depictions of the *Panchkalyanak* – the five chief auspicious events that are believed to occur in the life of an enlightened Jina, serving as aspirational tools for the laity to embark upon the path to becoming an enlightened Jina.

Such visual resonances also probably conjured up memories of common compositions in other stories, asserting a visual-moral hold over the viewer of these manuscripts through repetitive familiarity of visual language, helping the viewer imbibe values that encompassed the moral universe of contemporary Jain philosophy. **– *P.S.***

“We are the Mirror as well as the Face in it”;*
Classical Indic beauty in the Visual Arts of the Mughal World *Rumi

January 19th, 20th, & 21st, 2022, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Molly Emma Aitken (Associate Professor in the Art History Department at The Graduate Center, CUNY & the Art Department at CUNY’s City College of New York)

Classical Indic Eros: Sahibdin's Illustrated *Rasikapriya* of Keshavdas

Professor Aitken's seminar shed light on the pictorial dimension of the mood of erotic love or *shringara*, the preeminent *rasa* in the Southasian arts during the Mughal era. Two copies of the *Rasikapriya*, Brajbhasha poet Keshavdas's 1591 masterpiece for Raja Indrajit of Orchha, were superbly illustrated by the painter Sahibdin and his workshop at Udaipur for the Maharana of Mewar in the 1630s. Illustrations render already precious handmade books even more so, engendering complexities of meaning in the text. Despite earlier views to the contrary, the speaker opined that Sahibdin's manuscripts emerged from an exceptionally cosmopolitan world. Aesthetic experimentation in the 1600s brought together the Indic fine arts with other traditions. Well-versed in Sanskrit due to his family background and encouraged by the widespread devotional fervour of Krishna *bhakti*, Keshavdas classicised Brajbhasha poetry by translating into it the *rasa* (aesthetic delectation) of the Sanskrit tradition. Drawn from Bharata's *Natyashastra*, a treatise on dramaturgy, *rasa* has deep connections to passionate emotion and 'tasting'. The conception of *rasa* initially dwelt in characters but later, reception by *rasikas* – attuned readers, auditors and viewers of the arts – became central. There are two *rasikas* in the *Rasikapriya*: Krishna, referred to as *navarasamaya*, embodiment of the nine *rasas*; and the devotee or reader who relished the text, the primary reader being the patron. The courtly *rasika*, steeped in poetry, painting, music and dance, knew *shringara* through multiple senses. Sahibdin's illustrations and Keshavdas's poetry, canonical in Rajput circles and exotic for Persian-speaking elites, captivated both sets of connoisseurs through the exploration of *shringara*. 17th-century Hindi poetry strived to create deep feeling or *bhava*. Poets guarded against mistakes which would ruin the mood of *shringara*, designated *rasaraja* or 'king of emotions'. In turn, kings were expected to be connoisseurs of poetry and of love.

Heroes (*nayakas*) and heroines (*nayikas*), experiencers of passion, were classified, for instance, according to the type of love they embodied, creating the tropes of *nayaka-nayika bheda*. Eschewing the courtesans of Sanskrit poetry, Keshavdas's text inducted Krishna's beloved Radha as the *nayika* and gave the *sakhi* or female friend who brought the lovers together an important role. Recognising their expressive potential, Keshavdas made the *havas*, a series of erotic comportments in a lover, the centrepiece of his chapter on emotion. A verse about Radha's beauty emulates the tinkling of her anklets in ambling *kavitt* metre; the contrasting next verse, employing the swift-moving *savaiya* metre to mimic the sound of lightning reflected in Krishna's yellow upper cloth, is illustrated in a *Rasikapriya* manuscript possibly from Agra. The painting is *rasa*-laden: peacocks dance in the rain; peacock feather designs on Krishna's fanning lower garment create a visual beat across the page. The use of the epithet *ghanashyama*, or cloud-dark, compares Krishna's arrival to a stormy night, echoing *Raga* Megh and leading to a multi-sensorial experience of *rasa*.

The *uddipana vibhavas* or excitants of *shringara* (that arouse erotic feeling in the reader) explored by the poet are intensified by painters: the fragrance described in Keshavdas's poetry is rendered in a profusion of flowers, bees, and the aphrodisiacal *paan*. Painting itself is an *uddipana*, tactile brushwork stimulating the mood, the pigments enhancing meaning. Sahibdin uses the signature red (associated with sexuality) of classical Indic painting, disregarding naturalism. Poetry and painting use *uddipanas* to convey despair at being let down: when Krishna asks the *sakhi* to bring the *nayika* to a rendezvous but fails to arrive himself, thorns, a tiger and a burning fire on an arid chocolate-brown ground embody the *nayika's* mental state. The mature *nayika's* socially necessary outward welcome of the *nayaka* masks yet states her emotions, conveying her displeasure through a lack of *uddipanas* and intimacy. She fans the *nayaka* from a distance and offers *paan* in a box rather than by

hand. Separation is represented through a deadening compositional grid of four compartments. Sahibdin's Mughal training is revealed by the compositions, considered to hold the intelligence of the work in Mughal workshops. He shows different places and moments in time in the same frame, exploring the dynamic tensions of separation, longing, and union.

The *Rasikapriya* creates a distinctive zone of consciousness, showing how poetry could produce feeling. It established Orchha as a place where the aesthetics of refined love could be learnt and deeply felt, appealing to urbane *rasikas*. Lacking a narrative, Keshavdas's text is a teaching manual that elaborates two kinds of love: *samyoga* (togetherness) and *viyoga* (separation). The poet introduces a topic, such as *mana* (a *nayika's* anger) or its appeasement, and follows it with a masterful sample poem, transforming a textbook of love into fresh poetry, metre and music describing the evolution of the *nayika* from naïve to experienced. The poetic tradition is sensitive: in one verse, the *nayaka* is transported to the highest delight after persuading a shy, reluctant girl to just sleep in his arms. Most of the twenty-five illustrated copies of the hundred extant *Rasikapriya* manuscrips are now dispersed. Much is lost, resulting in the art-historical analysis of individual pages, rather than the whole manuscript where accretion would create logical progression, magnifying devotional power through *rasa* as *anubhavas* (transitory emotions) piled up to multiply effect.

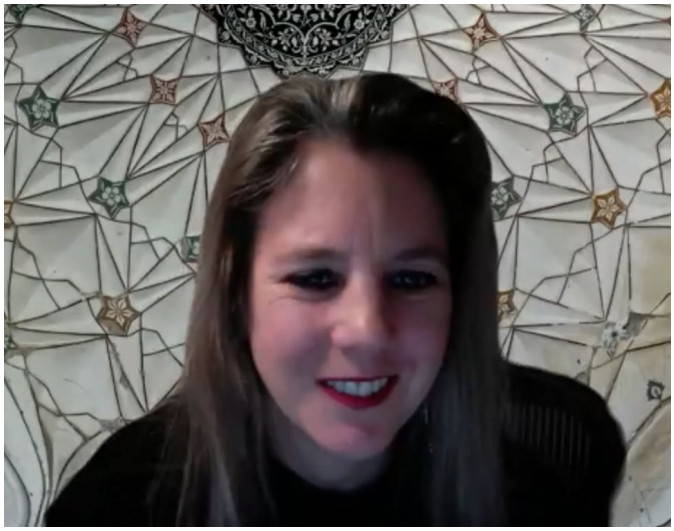
Three types of sight or *darshan* are explored in the *Rasikapriya*. The motif of painting illuminates *darshan*: the innocent *mugdha*, like a painted or *chitrini nayika*, once ravished is revealed as a spoilt picture. A deer in the foreground is a metaphor for the *nayika's* tenderness and vulnerability. The *nayaka* fails to realise connoisseurship because of poor self-control; the *sakhi* berates him for his ugly behaviour. The metaphor of painting emphasises the cultured, courtly, multi-sensorial and artful knowledge of the proper tasting of *rasa* through which one could become civilised. The second type of *darshan* involves looking at a picture of the beloved. Self-reflexively, Mughal and Rajput manuscripts depict pictures within the frame of the painting. Keshavdas describes the physical reaction of a trembling Radha, her hair standing on end, as she gazes upon Hari's picture, indirectly urging the *rasika* to 'taste' art in an embodied way. Fantasy obscures reality: immersed in Krishna's picture, Radha does not go to meet him. At the height of the *bhakti* tradition, seeing could also refer to the Hindu practice of *darshan*, or gazing with emotion at the temple deity. Here, courtly and *bhakti* contexts intertwine. The *sakhi* chastises the experienced *nayika* for her treatment of Krishna: he grants her every desire like a loving god, but she will not look straight at him, forcing his complete submission. The *nayika* will not worship him; she does not seek *darshan*. 'Seeing' can also be performed by hearing: a verse builds up suspense, revealing only in the last line that 'it', obliquely referred to throughout, is Radha's divine name, which Krishna hears. He is seen thrice in the painting of this verse, desperately wandering in search of Radha. As the *sakhi* describes this, Radha sees Krishna in her mind's eye, a form of *darshan*. Sahibdin's foregrounds are thresholds for the viewer to cross to gain *darshan*; shoes are pictured, removed before entering the sacred space of the picture by climbing a few steps. Water jugs offer refreshment, perhaps consecrating the picture space; characters occupy shrine-like structures. Yet what a painting illustrates is not for worship; all elements face the viewer except the characters, who are in profile even when presented in iconic poses, unlike icons, that are usually frontally presented.

The consistency of Sahibdin's compositions is balanced by his imaginative practice which movingly reflects the natural world and leisurely life of Udaipur, where the *nayaka* and *nayika*, idealised tropes and conventional types in Indic painting through which the *rasikas* of the time knew themselves, represent Radha and Krishna but also contemporary royals and nobles, conjuring up a recent present through architecture and costume. Taste also mattered: for instance, the style at Bundi differs from Sahibdin's,

which relies on colour, pattern and adornment for its emotive power. Other *Rasikapriya* manuscripts were illustrated in very different styles. A 1639 copy of the *Rasikapriya* patronised by a queen of Amber has a few drawings of Krishna, emphasising the work's devotional aspect. The Orchha ruler commissioned another manuscript, perhaps at the imperial capital Agra, in a Mughal idiom which had absorbed influences from European paintings and prints: paintings in such 'sub-imperial' manuscripts are far more naturalistic; colours are used descriptively; the *nayika* laughs heartily in one folio, displaying facial expression, absent in Sahibdin's paintings. Krishna is no longer blue, stripped of divinity, displaying the tension between different religious beliefs. Rather than relying on Keshavdas's text, the manuscript is clothed in the material tastes of its *rasikas*.

The Persian ruling elite, secure in its regnal power, could risk eclectic immersion in Indic traditions; absorbing the elite Mughal idiom associated with power became desirable for Rajput *mansabdars* who served the Mughals. The *maharanas* of Mewar provided logistical support to the Mughals but maintained a degree of independence from them. Perhaps they wished to sustain a long-standing aesthetics and tradition in asking painters to look back at the compartmentalised style of *Chaurapanchashika* painting while including contemporary details. Inclined towards Sanskrit, it is significant that they chose to patronise Keshavdas's Brajbhasha text. Hindi was more accessible than Sanskrit, especially to the Mughal emperors, and paintings were an important way to traverse language worlds. In this polyglot society, manuscripts sometimes have the Brajbhasha text in Nastaliq script, while Nastaliq and Devanagari are seen together in other instances. According to Professor Aitken, the already mixed painting traditions prevented codification. In the absence of treatises on painting in the Mughal world, the genre can be interpreted through the impulses that saw the classicising of Indian music knowledge and of the vernacular as in the poetry of Keshavdas, which employed traditional typologies and conventional tropes of emotional feeling to show intersections with the lives of his patrons.

The managing of difference and diversity was an important part of the Mughal empire. The eclectic use of Mughal compositional structures along with classical Indic *nayika bheda* was a compromise between the Rajput and Mughal styles as these diverse worlds intermeshed. The Mughal world valued Keshavdas's *Rasikapriya* as deep knowledge: the theme of Eros flowed across religious, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, geographic, political and intellectual boundaries, fostering a social cohesion into which the concept of difference was inbuilt. Both exalting and debasing to the human soul, the depth and width of Eros engendered meaningful art forms that expressed the yearning for urbane social cohesion and a spiritual desire for unification, allowing *rasikas* to discover sensibilities and knowledge other than their own.



Prof. Molly Emma Aitken speaks during "We are the Mirror as well as the Face in it": Classical Indic Beauty in the Visual Arts of the Mughal World *Rumi'*

The Hindu Idol: Mughal Receptions of Classical Indic Aesthetics

By the 18th century, Mughal painters were responding to classical Indic aesthetic tropes, especially the archetypes of female beauty, using Hindu feminine forms as beloveds in albums or *muraqqas* made for Mughal patrons. The erotic mood is both metaphor and potentiation in these hybrid visual representations. Paintings depicting *nayika bheda* show repeated, formalised gestures revealing the *nayika's* relationship with the *nayaka* which become part of the Mughal painter's repertoire. Mughal painting absorbs the composition and outline of these standard gestures, but multiplies them through dynamic deployment. An older set of uncodified bodily archetypes and expressions found in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu temples can be discovered in all forms of Mughal painting due to the repetition of 'aesthetic icons' such as *alasyakanya* (languorously stretching girl) or ancient icons designated as *surasundaris* by Stella Kramrisch. Sahibdin's representation of Radha as an *alasyakanya* in the *Rasikapriya* is accompanied by a verse describing a *yogini* warning her against stretching since it uncovers her, because "somebody's eyes are ready to cover" her in glances. The juxtaposition of the beauty with the ascetic to

present opposite worldviews is a common trope in the region that perhaps emerged from *tantrism*. Manuscripts such as the 18th-century *Sarasarasagrantha* of Jaipur repeatedly evoke these classical tropes that endured despite cultural change. Dismissed by Western scholars as lacking originality, the iconic female beauty, embodiment of the auspicious Shri, is found everywhere in Indic culture, represented on temple walls, on textiles, in dance, in music and carries a sacred charge even as a courtesan. The *Shilpaprakasha* states that a monument is of inferior quality without female figures and will not bring prosperity. An important example of Eros in visual culture, the *nayika* may variously gaze into a mirror, squeeze drops of water from her long hair into the beak of a bird, apply kohl, play a musical instrument, hold a parrot, or the branch of a tree in the classical *shalabhanjika* pose. The *Kumaraviharashataka*, 12th century, states that these icons have varying effects on different viewers, making young gallants feel desire, confirming the steadfast in their rejection of sensual delights, disgusting the pious, making old ladies embarrassed and young girls wonder.

Page from the
Sarasarasagrantha
Jaipur, c. 1740s
Potikhana, City Palace, Jaipur

The bather is an aesthetic icon that is widespread in the Mughal world. This female nude is found in paintings of the devotional Bhakti and Sufi spheres; it may have political resonance, convey *vilasa* or pleasure in a courtly context, adorning murals and railings in royal monuments. Poets rely on the bather, who maintains the political order through her beauty and ancient provenance, to convey a sense of a kingdom's plentiful water reservoirs. The *Rasikapriya* dwells on the sixteen ornaments of a woman, including the vital act of bathing, that complete her and unleash the power of her femininity. The bather's image is prominent in the *Ragamala* system of classification. The bather lies at the intersection of the intimate and the public, her skin touched by water and other women as they minister to her needs. The bath may be represented like the *abhisheka* ritual. The bather as an aesthetic icon is also seen in Deccani painting; it was a pan-Southasian phenomenon. The theme of Eros travelled through poetry and painting; pictorial mechanisms employed *nayika bheda*, relying on memory and artistic practices of copying. A 20th-century account of the rituals of a courtly bath proves that this ancient trope is a sustained and powerful experience of female beauty.

The Mughal *muraqqa* is a patchwork, like the Sufi's cloak; here, the aesthetic icon of the bather is repurposed for her sacred charge, finding resonance in Persian-speaking circles and Sufi poetry, though recognised as specifically Indic. In Sufism, a painting itself was considered a veil (*batin* or hidden) and was contrasted with nakedness (*zahir* or known); the bather becomes a provocation for questions, her figure referring to multiple realms; in *nakha-shikha* or head-to-toe descriptions, each feature of the body is tied to an aspect of God. Delectation or insightful viewing translates His qualities. Widely circulated in paintings facilitated by Mughal *mansabdars* and other sub-imperial patrons, tropes such as the empty bed of *nayika bheda* were also deployed in the Sufi context, where a pervasive metaphor sees God as a painter who has made the world so that he might be known. Pictures replay the creation of God, displaying his inventiveness; they signify God's creation to those who look with insight. In the Salim album, a beautiful boy with an ewer of wine reflects the metaphorical intoxication that brings to the Sufi realisation of the divine. This route passes through sensuality (as seen in the Sufi practice of *shahid baazi* or gazing at heart-stealing boys) or sexuality where *vilasa* or erotic play becomes the path to God. While Sufi poetry leans on the Persian preference for the beautiful boy as the beloved, Mughal painting exhibits the Indic preference for the heterosexual pair from a very early date. Faizi used the tale of *Nala-Damayanti* in a poem that is both courtly and Sufi where the Hindu heroine became an idol: fainting away was an appropriate response when viewing such beauty, akin to the beauty of God.

In Sufi romances or *masnavis*, the earliest of which is the 14th-century *Chandayana*, written in Hindavi, the heroine is often a Hindu beauty courted by a Hindu lover. Not an invention of the Mughal world, these already popular Indian love stories describing a difficult journey to find the beloved were drawn in by the Sufis for their own readers. The text of the *Chandayana* is replete with philosophical word play. Paintings from five sets of the *Chandayana* are extant:

the imagery reveals themes of visible and invisible, concealing and revealing, iconic and aniconic as seen in the depiction of an empty *jharokha* window in a manuscript now at Manchester. Perhaps pictures disappear in the *Chandayana* illustrations because idolatry is blasphemy in Islam. Lorik, the heroine's lover, resembles both a Nath *yogi* in search of God and a Majnun-like figure. Seeking *shringara rasa* in the beloved was a way to experience God: those coloured with *rasa* could experience it here and hereafter. The act of viewing a painting, metaphorically a mirror, can also be an act of finding oneself through the other, as seen in the complex layers of identity in the Indic *masnavi*. In the world of Eros which works through binaries, the lover is also the beloved. The description of the beloved in Sufi poetry shows that gender became unimportant; the positions of lover and beloved fold into each other.

According to Professor Aitken, Rajput painting is deeply Mughal: aesthetic icons return to this genre's repertoire deeply touched by their use in the Sufi and Mughal courtly world. The figure of the courtesan, absent in Keshavdas's *Rasikapriya*, reappears in the *Sarasarasagrantha*. Akbar's *Khan-i-Khana* Abdul Rahim, a sensitive connoisseur and poet with his own library and atelier of painters, commissioned simple albums far removed from lavish royal productions. Rahim had been in Bikaner, and his poetics show the comingling of Indic, Persian, Sufi, and courtly aesthetics. There is a poetic play on the representation of faces in profile: if the page is turned over, it is only paper. The picture is like the beloved or a woman in being unobtainable, unlike the frontal European portrait. Beautiful women may be tricky courtesans and have foul characteristics; the aesthetic icons both in poetry and in Mughal painting, bringing prosperity to the Mughal empire, are less themselves than indicators of the viewer's lust, love, connoisseurship or insight. They are not women, simply paintings.

Vasanta Vilasa

Scholarship considers the viewer of the paintings to be the *nayaka* or *rasika*, Mughal emperor or Mughal gentleman, a man of taste as was Rahim, or a seeker like a *yogi* or a Sufi. However, women as aesthetic icons travelled over enormous swathes of time. The Mughal historical context brought changes in the ideals of femininity and masculinity through mixture and masquerade. In the 18th century, the poetics of power altered as social hierarchy was upended, rendering the equation between masculine and feminine unclear. From being seen as objects that passed from man to man and did not garner respect, women went on to acquire enormous wealth and political power, and were respected for their connoisseurship, enjoying and patronising aesthetic icons for their eternally youthful, erotic yet auspicious charge. Courtesans were considered accomplished women, trained to be as beautiful as a picture, as music or as dance. Female friendship and a shifting, playful gender power play is reflected in painting; women's erotic desire for each other seems completely acceptable at the time. In *Ragamala* paintings, *raginis* such as Khambavati who were pictured as adjuncts to important gods eventually came to be portrayed as courtesans who occupied the page alone. In the 18th century, the *dakshina nayaka*, a man who had many women resulting in the dispersal of dyadic intensity such that he could never know love, became common; a number of poets gathered in Agra to rethink *nayika bheda*. The masculine was pictured as *nayaka*, *rasika* or the Persian *ahl-e-zauq*, or the Hindu or Islamic god who was the one or the centre, while the feminine was the *nayika*, the artwork (poetry or painting), the devotee (the Islamic bride of God), or the musician. Clearly, the feminine was peripheral and could slip into many roles: in a picture, she could create transformative experiences of *rasa* and insight.

The Multilingual, Poly-delighted World of the *Ragamala*

Music and the *Ragamala* system were known from ancient times in the subcontinent, However, this evolved into a richly mixed art form in the Mughal world with *kalavants* (experts in music) reconsidering its formulation. The musical identity of *ragas* and *raginis* include patterns of ascent and descent, as well as distinctive sound marks comprising patterns of notes, but in this era, they also had a poetic and visual form. The *dhyana* was the verse in which the musician would call to mind the deities of music. The iconography of such deities in the art of painting

was drawn in part from *nayaka-nayika bheda*. In the famous *Vasanta Vilasa* scroll of 1451, which is a celebration of *Kama* or love in Vasanta, the season of Spring, there is a depiction that prefigures the iconography of Todi *ragini* pictured with animals who came to listen, drawn by the power of her music.

Some of the earliest treatises on the subject and *Ragamala* paintings were created for Muslim rulers due to their shared connoisseurship of Indic music and dance. In the *Javahir al Musiqat* made for Mohammed Adil Shah of Bijapur in 1570, music is seen as transformative and healing for both the kingly body and for the kingdom. The presence of Devanagari as well as Persian Nastaliq in several manuscripts, along with *nayikas* in conventional poses, indicates that they were designed for mixed, multilingual audiences that were eager for the experience of *rasa* and music. The mood of the *nayika* is linked to the music associated with the page. Music and Eros became a preoccupation, engendering pleasure and curiosity, a site of cultural play creating a shared world, free of rigidities. Amir Khusrau had already invented new *ragas* and *raginis*, marrying Persian melodies with Indic *ragas* in 13th-century Sultanate Delhi; in Mughal times a *Tutinama* painting depicts a bird with holes in its beak, indicating the fluting sound of its call. Muslim and Rajput patronage is not neatly distinguishable for this seems fundamentally a shared artform and world: connoisseurs became equally familiar with the Sanskrit *dhyana* and the Persian notations of *ragas*; *Ragamala* paintings display Rajput iconography and colours and Persian detailing combined with perfectly executed Devanagari script seemingly inspired by the perfection of Persian calligraphy.

Tutinama, f. 110, tale XIV

Mansabdars were periodically stationed at various places and their social circles enabled sharing of various bodies of music knowledge, including accompanying painting and poetry, among friends who were in the service of the Mughal empire. The Badal Mahal at Bundi, for instance, has the same iconography and compositions as those in the Chunar *Ragamala*. These were later employed in the Boston *Ragamala*. A mural in the Badal Mahal displays the iconography of Todi *ragini*; a Persian *pari* sports an Iranian cap, similar to those seen in Deccani paintings, and is accompanied by a Persian wine bottle; the foreign celestial beloved of Mughal and Sufi manuscripts finds echoes in the Persian and European figures in Rajput painting. Even though *Ragamala* is understood to emerge from the union of Parvati and Shiva, the Vaishnava devotional fervour which was prevalent in North India ensured that the Badal Mahal murals are replete with Krishna's iconography. He is the *nayaka* in the *rasa mandala*.

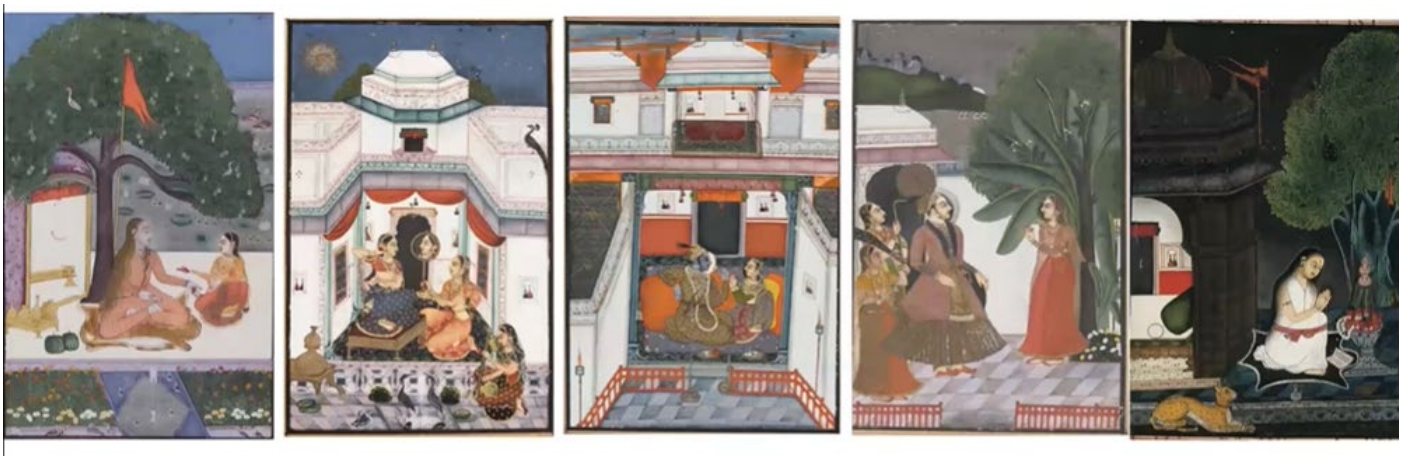
Writing for the Sharqi dynasty which loved music, the Sufi poet Qutban included a *Ragamala* in his *Mirigavati*. The most common formulation of the *Ragamala* with thirty-six *ragas* and *raginis* was crystallised in this mixed world. For the Sufis, three *rasas* were of primary importance: *viraha*, *shringara* and *yoga*, emphasised in the *masnavis* as well as their illustrated manuscripts. The *Ragamala* also has a relationship to the Mughal *muraqqa*, a patchwork but also a whole in which these *rasas* create a sense of completion. Abdul Rahim's particularly Indic *muraqqa*, the Laud *Ragamala*, includes saintly figures and poetry with many references to the mystic and the spiritual. The *charbas*, aids for reproduction, from this manuscript have been found in Bikaner showing the sharing of this aesthetic between friends; the Raja of Bikaner was with Rahim in the Deccan. The Chunar *Ragamala*, painted by three Muslim artists who came from Akbar's workshop, was commissioned by the Mughal *mansabdar* Rao Raja Bhoj Singh of Bundi, perhaps coincidentally in the year of the Islamic millennium when the *Rasikapriya* was also written. In this manuscript, *Ragini* Kedar is played for a Sufi *qalandar* by a *yogi* with a *vina*, showing a mixed iconography. Sources indicate that the quintessentially Indic knowledge of the *Ragamala* was loved but not fully understood by the Sufis.

Mughal paintings with their muted colours reflect the notion that colourlessness was a metaphor for a higher realm in Islamic thought, while in

Rajput painting strong colour is essential to realise *rasa*. However, Mughal painting retained the compartmentalisation favoured by Rajput painting as seen in a Mughal folio now in the Chester Beatty Library which brings together two music worlds. A centrally placed closed doorway at the rear divides a pictured mural with Persianate elements such as the *pari*, a border with birds, and Persianate male and female figures, the latter playing a musical instrument. Another door opens out on the right. Yet the ontology of the images in this painting is culturally mixed: an Indic *vasakasajja nayika* dominates, pictured in hieratic scale in an interior courtyard-like space with a peacock above her, ministered to by a servant. Another servant claps while a third plays the *vina*.

Ragamala images have a potency, as does the music itself. The Mughal world had a strong sense of the efficacy of images and considered them to have supernatural power. The Phool Mahal in Jodhpur which was made in the 19th century has complete *Ragamala* illustrations around the throne room, depicting the times of the day and seasons when the music would be highly efficacious in creating an appropriate mood and an auspicious sense of wholeness. Aesthetic icons, female beauty and *shringara rasa* shaped a person's most primal feelings; artfully expressed, they charged the room with their transformative presence. The iconic forms of *ragas* and *raginis* worked to create pictorial power, probably augmented by the sonic form of music. In the Mughal context, courtly women may have performed the roles of *raginis* while the viewer gazed on them, mirroring the *shahid baazi* of Sufis.

The Boston *Ragamala* 'sings' and 'dances', opening with an iconic invocation of music: six *ragas* emerge from the body of the deity Narayana, carefully linked to a particular part of his anatomy. This seems a quintessentially Rajput manuscript but has a fresh approach. There is an emphasis here on the link between the time of day and the intensity with which a mood could be evoked by a *raga*. In this and the Yale *Ragamala*, which exhibits the typical naturalism, muted colours and three-dimensional perspective of Mughal painting with Brajbhasha poetry (supposedly written by the then-music-loving Mughal prince Alamgir who later became extremely orthodox in his condemnation of the arts) in Nastaliq script, it is possible to discern that this is a shifting knowledge. The remaking of the *Ragamala* system at this time resulted in an expanded *raga* system that emerged after much debate and experimentation. Older, efficacious and meaningful compositions are retained from the 1591 Chunar *Ragamala* with its Bundi idiom but new iconography and marvellous, fresh colour make the Boston *Ragamala* even more multi-sensorial. For instance, Bangal *ragini* is presented in an incandescent folio with a white clad, gender-ambivalent figure of a *yogini* against a contrasting black ground. In the rear, a pavilion has a brightly lit interior with warm colours and the empty bed denoting *viraha*, adding to the dramatic effect. Todi is equally striking with colours and details presented as *uddipanas*, stimulating emotion and mood and arousing *rasa*, rather than naturalistically as in the Yale *Ragamala*. The Boston *Ragamala* contains iconic representations; in the Mughal idiom of the Yale *Ragamala* these icons are presented performatively. Sub-imperial manuscripts were incarnating Krishna as *Raga* Megh as in the Manley *Ragamala*, or in an Agra *Rasikapriya* where he is akin to lightning and thunder. In the Boston *Ragamala* too, a folio seems close to the *Rasikapriya* verse where Keshavdas writes about lovers playing games, performing one another: Radha impersonates Krishna and he Radha. The *Rasikapriya* plays with music, the Sufi romances with *ishq* in the context of Indic stories, and the *Ragamala* manuscripts with its aesthetic icons, mirroring and conflating difference through metaphor into a rich, efficacious experience of *rasa*. Layers of meaning bring deep insight and aesthetic experience through difference but do not resolve it, allowing Eros to rule. **– *J.K.***



Buddhist Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Art and Architecture in the Pala Period

March 23rd, 30th & April 06th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Pia Brancaccio (Associate Professor of Art History Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA)

Manjuvajra Mandala, Pala period, 11th century, Black stone,
Dimensions: H. 46 in. (116.8 cm); W. 24 in. (61 cm); D. 7 1/2 in. (19.1 cm),
Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956.
Metropolitan Museum of Art

More details will be made available in our next JPM Quarterly (Jul - Sep 2022).

CRITICISM & THEORY

Apnavi Makanji | Untitled - Significant Other | 2018 | Courtesy: Vadehra Art Gallery

JPM's Criticism & Theory offerings include (1) a Certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (3) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

PAST PROGRAMMES

Urban Imaginaries: Velocity, Aesthetics, Power

February 1st, 8th, & 15th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Christoph Lindner (Professor of Urban Studies and Dean of The Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, University College London)

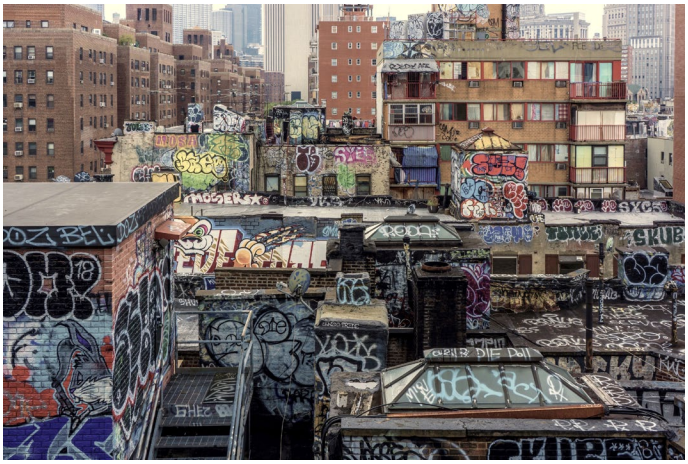
What is the *Urban Imaginary*? If we stop to think about this question, two responses may potentially come to the fore. The first would be that the urban imaginary is simply how we imagine cities; the ways in which we perceive the urban spaces we inhabit. The second understanding of the urban imaginary is that it is the cognitive or somatic image of urbanity which we carry within our mind – the image we have of what cities are supposed to look like, feel like, and embody. What is common within both these approaches is the value that is accorded to the imagination within an understanding of the urban, and the impact this imagination has on how we act in cities.

An interesting philosophical question now emerges from this space of perception and action – what in fact is a city, or rather, *where* is a city? Does a city exist out in the world of bricks and mortar, in roads and buildings, neighborhoods and public spaces, homes and offices that we can see and touch, or does it in fact reside in our shared consciousness or imagination of the urban? As we grapple with this dichotomy, we realise that such a binary is unstable; that of course the city is in both our imagination and in the concrete environments we navigate every day. There is a real city out there, but what gives it meaning is much determined by our own personal imaginations of it, supplemented by broader and more collective imaginations as well.

Over a three-session seminar series led by Prof. Christoph Lindner in a Zoom classroom connecting the megapolises of London and Mumbai to smaller cities and towns through participants across the country, we traversed the familiar-strange terrain of urban imaginaries, examining its complexities through the perspectives of velocity, visuality and power. Laying the theoretical groundwork for this foray early in the series, Prof. Lindner brought to the table the work of two theorists in particular – Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja. Drawing from Lefebvre's seminal book, *The Production of Space*, we considered a definition of urban imaginary as a negotiation between concrete, (often planned) physical space and the experience of space in the abstract; a definition we could further extend by applying Soja's notion of Third Space into the urban experience.

The series being especially discussion oriented, Prof. Lindner made room, after presenting each argument, for a dialogue with participants. Drawn from the fields of critical theory, architecture, urban planning, art management, and the fine arts, each participant brought their own experience as practitioners, thinkers as well as inhabitants of urban spaces into the discussion, allowing for theory to be tackled through diverse yet interconnected lenses. The analysis of multiple real-world examples was therefore a critical aspect of each of the seminar sessions. In drawing three examples from the numerous that were discussed through the series, I attempt to give a sense of the scope of the terrains we explored in our examination of the urban imaginary.

In the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam, an innovative new urban development project titled Schoonschip has been developing since 2010. Broadly translated to 'clean ship', the Schoonschip project so far comprises 48 floating urban dwellings and currently houses over a hundred residents. On the surface, this development checks all the boxes we perceive as necessary for an environmentally conscious and community-driven response to the urgent need for sustainable housing solutions. And yet, the closer we looked at the project and discussed details around its functioning, questions around performativity and its relation to capitalism began to emerge. Aspects like its circular economy model and its specifically tailored aesthetic stood out, with a participant pointing out that Schoonschip appeared to embody a form of capitalism that was hip and cool, but that ultimately remained driven by the interests of exploitative practices. Over an animated discussion on this project, we considered the inherent instability in its attempt to appease capitalist desire while also



appearing to genuinely be working towards creating an environmentally sustainable model of urban development.

The various instabilities underlying the urban imaginary were unraveled further in the second seminar of the series which focussed on the visuality of the urban, and its role in determining how we perceive and act in such spaces. Here, Prof. Lindner looked specifically at the process of gentrification, drawing from his recent edited volume, *Aesthetics of Gentrification: Seductive Spaces and Exclusive Communities in the Neoliberal City*. Among other sites, we considered the newly redeveloped district of Greenwich Peninsula, and specifically on a park named The Tide. Modelled on the famous High Line Park in New York City, and built by the same urban designers, the Tide features an elevated walkway that snakes around a meticulously manicured urban landscape. While the familiarity of this landscape to its sister in New York is intentional and meant to invoke a sense of shared open space that allows for cosmopolitan mingling, the very location of the Tide in one of the most exclusive and wealthy neighborhoods of London indicates other realities. Can an urban project which worked in one city really be transplanted whole cloth to another city without any consideration of specific context or nuance? This was a question that we discussed in detail as we engaged with the example of the Tide in London while also bringing forth examples from other cities and urban projects that attempt to replicate the 'look' of a successful and prosperous neoliberal city.

In his famous 1919 essay, *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud investigated the idea of the 'familiar strange', a phenomenon where an event or space or even a thing that is familiar to us suddenly becomes unsettling in a new and unexpected way. In the closing seminar of the series, Prof. Lindner foregrounded Freud's notion of the uncanny in leading us to look at and consider the phenomenon of the urban. Two years on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the virus continues to ebb and flow across the world, the threat of devastating waves always imminent, our relationships to space, distance and closeness are undergoing a continual process of being rendered uncanny. In a deeply engaged and personal discussion that centred our collective experiences from around the world on the pandemic and its impact on the urban, we reflected with Prof. Lindner on how urban imaginaries have been evolving through this time. Which aspects of the city came to a standstill and which parts were newly revealed through repeated lockdowns and restrictions? How have our understandings of terms like 'essential worker', 'working from home', 'accessibility' and 'social distancing' developed through this time, and how has this evolution impacted both our imagination and our actions within urban space? The more personal deliberations on these questions reflected the difficulty of theorising phenomena that continue to shape us and that have impacted every person both collectively and individually within the seminar room.

In his closing comments, Prof. Lindner reiterated once again the importance of building collaborative definitions of the term 'urban imaginary'. As the pandemic has made starkly visible, the discrepancies and inequalities defining the way different communities, genders, races, and individuals experience and negotiate space makes it all the more urgent that their voices and perspectives are included in both the theory as well as the practice of thinking about, building and living within the urban.
– A.T.

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Announcements

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

July 2022 – April 2023 | Typically Saturdays 2:00 to 6:00 pm

Hybrid mode: PHYSICAL & ONLINE | Online Platform: Zoom

Vasanta Ragini
From Ragamala series, folio 21
Kota, c. 1680, 25.5 x 17.5 cm
Opaque watercolour on paper

Introduced in 1999, Jnanapravaha Mumbai's academic, year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics (IA) examines the historical development of visual forms in context, employing the disciplines of art history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature and philosophy. The course traverses 5,000 years of Indian visual art, including premodern, modern, and contemporary forms as well as popular traditions, to illuminate aesthetic trajectories in the sub-continent. Internationally renowned scholars introduce students to this art, ensuring a material, geographical, historical, social and cultural base that is broad and extensively representative. In keeping with JPM's mission, the course has evolved over the years to include topics of current research.

For admission, you are required to submit:
A digital copy each of your last degree certificate, CV, short bio (100 words) and passport-size photograph.

Fee structure:
Diploma (subject to writing and attendance) – Rs. 50,000 | Certificate (subject to attendance) – Rs. 40,000

Registration: www.jp-india.org

YOGA & TANTRA - The Mind Meeting the Body in Transformation

A semester-long certificate course offering fresh insights based on latest research findings

August 16th – November 10th, 2022 | Mainly Tuesdays & Thursdays 5:30 to 8:00 pm

Online Platform: Zoom

Yogi with chakras depicted on the body.
Early 19th-century painting.
Add MS 24099, f. 118. British Library.

Ambitious in scope and interdisciplinary, the Yoga & Tantra (Y&T) semester-long certificate course offers a critical inquiry into the field of yoga and tantra. A unique introductory programme, emphasising current research and publishing in the field, Y&T brings renowned national and international scholars leading innovative research projects to deliver lectures and public seminars that trace the historical development of yoga and tantra.

It aims to locate historical antecedents to modern-day practice, exploring the relation between yoga and tantra, and offers a broad understanding of the development of *yogic* and *agamic/tantric* traditions in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain worldviews as well as syncretic interactions with Islam and vernacular *bhakti* traditions, including the sufis and the *nath yogis*.

Y&T is sensitive to the increasing popularity of yoga today, its globalised and modernised practices, and seeks to place these contemporary trends in rigorous historical context, from the premodern to the modern periods. The programme uses both academic and praxis-based approaches, presenting views from Sanskrit studies and philology, philosophy, literature, aesthetics, art history, religion, and anthropology.

For admission, you are required to submit:
A digital copy each of your last degree certificate, CV, short bio (100 words) and passport-size photograph.

Fee structure:
Certificate (subject to attendance) – Rs. 20,000

Registration: www.jp-india.org

Jnanapravaha Mumbai is deeply indebted to the following for their support:

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Jnanapravaha is a registered Trust. Contributions qualify for 80G benefits. We are eligible for CSR contributions, as specified in the Companies Act (2013), and have been awarded FCRA clearance from the Government of India. For further information, please contact our support team at support@jp-india.org

Image source: Unsplash

We know we have made a difference. Our endeavour to encourage and facilitate pedagogy meaningfully continues with the firm belief that the humanities are indispensable to the well-being of the community and the individual.

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