



JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI
QUARTERLY

APRIL - JUNE 2025

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Director's Note

As we inch towards the closure of the current academic year on April 30th, there is a sense of deep satisfaction of having achieved our goals of crossing frontiers, charting new territory, and expanding audiences by exploring topics hitherto unaddressed. Our well-entrenched paradigm of constant seeking has kept us, expectedly, out of our comfort zone, pushing us into realms outside our own specialisations, and challenging us into constant research mode. All of us at Jnanapravaha Mumbai are deeply privileged to be inhabiting this world of enquiry and sharing it globally with seekers filled with curiosity.

The last quarter took us through Central-Asian Buddhist monasteries of Kucha, the crucible of Mathura sculpture, the murals and paintings of Bundi, Kota and allied Indergarh, late medieval to early modern Indian Ocean trade, and the earliest extant Indo-Tibetan monastery of Tabo in the Spiti valley. We have just embarked on our 8-session journey of the 10th-12th-century Islamic dynasty of the Fatimids, founders of al-Qahira, better known as Cairo, and will be ending our year with this series as well as with one of our signature rubrics, 'Creative Processes', with artist Sumakshi Singh sharing her practice with our Indian Aesthetics students and the wider public. Most of the writeups can be found in the inner pages. Some will be carried in the next *Quarterly*. We are perennially grateful to our vast and continuously growing community of scholars who have generously and unhesitatingly shared their knowledge whenever asked. We salute them!

There is palpable excitement about our plans for the next academic year which kicks off on July 18th, when our flagship Indian Aesthetics course begins its 19th iteration at our institute's current location. The course is made still more robust through strategic additions of subject matter usually not covered. The announcement can be found inside the *Quarterly*, but the details need to be perused on our website www.jp-india.org.

On the anvil is a semester-long course on the Material Culture of the Byzantines, a 2-day seminar on a close reading of the Buddhist *stupa* of Amaravati, looking at the Tamil Alwar saint Andal of Srivilliputhur, and a deep dive into the Archaeology of Textiles. So please stay tuned in and look out for our announcements as they come your way.

In the meantime, enjoy the season's bounty of mangoes as summer creeps in steadily and surely. For those fleeing to cooler climes, happy holidays.

With my warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rashmi Poddar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and 'P'.

Rashmi Poddar Ph.D.
Director

AESTHETICS



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

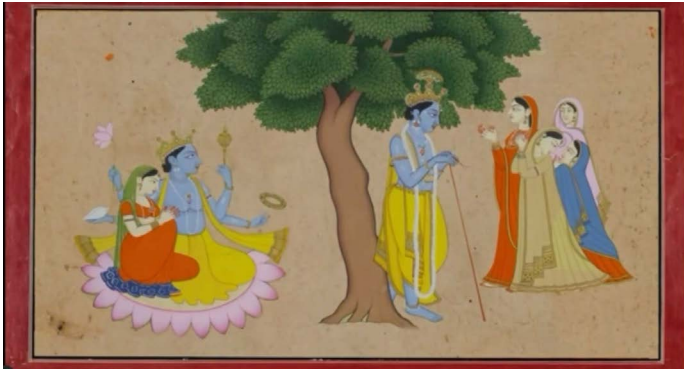
JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:

- (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

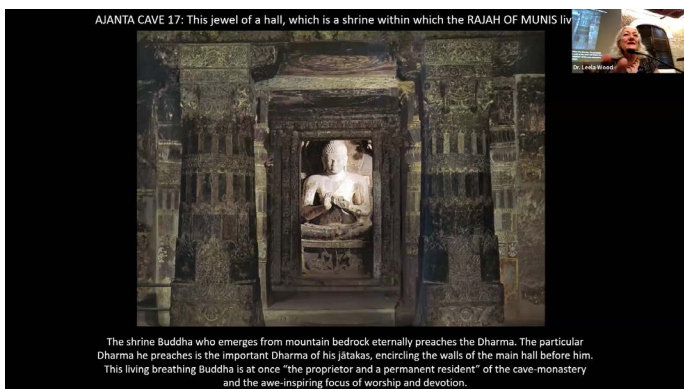


In January this year, the Indian Aesthetics course dipped into the river of Krishna *shringara* which encompasses the many moods of passionate love generated by the divine persona of Krishna. Dr. Harsha Dehejia gave students a glimpse into a world where *bhaktas* or devotees of Krishna longed for him assuming the feminine personality of *gopis*. This resulted in a dualistic or *dvaita* philosophy and parallel art immersed in *shringara bhakti*, emphasising poetic truth. Jayadeva's seminal *Gita Govinda*, written in the 12th century CE, is a text of Krishna *shringara*. The *bhakta* submerges the self in aesthesis or *rasa*: enjoyment comes from the senses. The *Bhagavata Purana*, an earlier text that synthesised many Indic threads of *bhakti*, begins with *dvaita* but ends in *advaita* or monism; here, *viraha* or physical separation and acute longing make Krishna omnipresent in the minds of the *gopis* or cowherdesses of Braj. Krishna *shringara* is seen in the mannered courtly poetry called *riti kavya* and in popular *baramasa* poetry. The metaphorical strands of this longing for the godhead loosen in the *baramasa* because the



oeuvre can be read simply as presenting worldly desire in each of the twelve months. Krishna *shringara* is present in Pahari paintings and in the painted *havelis* and palaces of Rajasthan; however, at sacred centres such as Jagannath Puri, where Krishna is worshipped, aesthetic devotion such as song and dance, allied with *bhoga* or food offerings become the means of *bhakti*.

Dr. Leela Wood began the Indian Aesthetics module on the poetics of painting by bringing to life the exquisite murals of Ajanta through her superb photographs of the site, and by reading the visual *Jataka* stories of Ajanta Cave 17. Her primary research on this site enabled her to point out that the codification of painting in the *Chitrasutra* of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* is not applicable to the fluid line, intuitive expression and freedom of composition found at Ajanta. Decoding the innovative use of space that enabled artists to render multiple *Jataka* stories in the architecturally bounded spaces in the caves of Ajanta, she also read the signs that convey the philosophy and emotion inherent in the unique murals of Cave 17.



AJANTA CAVE 17: This jewel of a hall, which is a shrine within which the RAJAH OF MUNIS liv

The shrine Buddha who emerges from mountain bedrock eternally preaches the Dharma. The particular Dharma he preaches is the important Dharma of his *jātakas*, encircling the walls of the main hall before him. This living breathing Buddha is at once "the proprietor and a permanent resident" of the cave-monastery and the awe-inspiring focus of worship and devotion.

Dr. Shailka Mishra explored examples of delicate painting found in early Buddhist manuscripts and the celebratory illustrations of the *Vasanta Vilas* scroll before moving to an examination of Jain manuscript painting. Jain manuscripts stored in the *bhandaras* (libraries) of Jain temples and used in ritual are still commissioned in enormous

numbers to gain religious merit. Multiple copies of texts such as the *Kalakacharya Katha* and the *Kalpasutra* are always available in Jain temple precincts. 14th-to-16th-century Western Indian Jain manuscript paintings have characteristic angular figures with three-quarter faces marked by an extended eye. Paper manuscripts continued the design of earlier palm-leaf manuscripts: the paintings were rendered in narrow, horizontal registers, and a dot of paint marked the spot where the binding cords passed in the manuscripts designed before the advent of paper. Many manuscripts were destroyed in the 12th-and-13th-century Islamic sultanates of the subcontinent. They were also destroyed due to the Ghurid attacks in North India. Extant examples allow scholars to roughly estimate the Jain art of Northern India, but many Western Indian manuscripts made from the 14th century to the 16th century CE have been preserved and provide an excellent corpus for study. The scholar explored the *Chaurapanchashika* style which is named after a work composed by Bilhana and rendered in the illustrations of a unique manuscript of his poem. Elements of the *Chaurapanchashika* style are seen in many subsequent North Indian manuscripts; the style seems to have been widespread. Additionally, Dr. Mishra explored unusual illustrated manuscripts such as the *Nimatnama*, a recipe book produced in the late 15th century for Ghiyath Shah, ruler of Malwa and completed during the reign of his son, Nasir Shah. Several manuscripts of the *Chandayana*, a Sufi romance drawn from a popular indigenous oral narrative rendered in song and tale, show that multiple styles were used in different regions for illustrating such works.

Roda Ahluwalia's two afternoons on Mughal, Rajput, Pahari and Deccani painting familiarised students with the manuscripts and *muraqqas* (bound albums) that became ubiquitous in courtly culture and were commissioned in enormous numbers by the elite and royalty of the Mughal and subsequent periods. Akbar's remarkable atelier comprised of almost a hundred and thirty painters and produced many refined manuscripts. Yael Rice, a scholar who has mapped the working of this atelier, showed that collaboration between artists of varied abilities using diverse styles was a vital component of its functioning. This collaboration was most likely responsible for creating the famed 'Mughal' style of painting

which combines Indic, Persian, and European elements. During Jahangir's reign, even finer painting with innovative subject matter was produced by a select thirty artists. The remaining artists from Akbar's atelier dispersed far and wide, watering the metaphorical plants of the Rajput and Pahari schools of painting with their talent. Art was used for political purposes throughout the Mughal and subsequent periods: the schematic, symmetrical *Durbar* scenes painted for Jahangir and Shah Jahan radiate the power of their courts and display prevalent political hierarchies. The painters at smaller courts conveyed power with greater informality. Ibrahim Adil Shah II, the Deccani ruler of Bijapur, who was both a poet and musician, was a noteworthy patron of painting. His eclectic syncretism led to the production of many exceptional works such as the *Nujum-ul-Ulum* manuscript which focussed on the occult, divination and astrology.

Mrinalini Sil's exploration of 18th-century Murshidabad painting showed its 'infinite variety' which resists compartmentalisation; her exposition of the paintings of this court certainly made participants 'hungry' for more insight into these heteroglot works where it most 'satisfied'. Dr. Parul Singh's analysis of early-19th-century Awadhi painting showed how politics and power on one hand, and society and culture on the other, collide and merge in these paintings in intriguing ways. As the Mughal grip on the north of the subcontinent slipped, artists made their way to flourishing courts such as Awadh and Murshidabad to create works for various patrons. They were *nawabs*, Jain merchants, as well as Europeans and Indian elite who altered equations in both polity and society. Inter-regional and transregional artistic networks were available to such patrons: this encounter between patrons and artists produced fine, though hybrid, styles with characteristics unique to each region and location.

In a completely new session added to the IA course this year, Professor Elizabeth Lambourn explored trade networks in the Indian Ocean world before the year 1500. The scholar pointed out that craft communities are assumed to be fundamentally static; if they travelled, it was usually because they were forced to do so by ruling elites. In the absence of substantial documentary evidence, Professor Lambourn turned to some objects of



Birth of a Prince,
probably intended for the
Jahangirnama,
Attributed to Bishndas,
1620

trade for some insight: a solitary surviving letter documents craftspeople from Aden travelling to Sri Lanka to gain work of their own free will in the 12th century CE. The speaker discussed the many exquisite marble tombs carved at Khambhat, in present-day Gujarat, and shipped as far west as Oman and eastwards to Java and Indonesia between the 13th and 15th centuries CE. Since several of these tombs were made of multiple parts and probably finished at these far-flung sites, Professor Lambourn suggested that a craftsperson or overseer from Khambhat may have travelled to assemble them correctly. Similarly, Hindu remains of granite icons and carvings in Quanzhou, China, where Tamil communities established themselves and commissioned temples, show parallels to the Khambhat material. Stone carvers were probably moved by merchant patrons who commissioned luxury items in this period. In the second half of her session, Professor Lambourn discussed the workings of a metal workshop on the Malabar coast owned by the Jewish merchant Ben Yiju. Trade documents show that metals, such as copper, copper alloys and lead in the form of objects and cullet, were sent from Aden to this workshop. There, they were melted and refashioned to fulfil particular commissions. The import was most likely required because copper was scarce in Kerala, and Chola kings monopolised the copper production of Sri Lanka while the elite of the North used all the copper produced in the mines of Rajasthan. The documents pertaining to the trans-oceanic international operation of Ben Yiju's workshop are among the 500 documents pertaining to Jewish trade with India salvaged from the Cairo Geniza. The session gave the Indian Aesthetics course a fresh dimension that showed the value of looking outwards to gain a wider understanding of the art of the subcontinent.



The analysis of the visual culture of the colonial period in the subcontinent profits enormously from Edward Said's critical theories, presented in his seminal work, *Orientalism*. Dr. Jaya Kanoria's session on Orientalism examined European painting, as well as paintings produced in colonial India. European painters, such as Zoffany, the Daniells, Hodges and Kettle, created works that display the Western characteristics of the Romantic, the Picturesque and the Sublime, despite their Indian subject matter and the fact of colonisation. Said's insights are no less useful in analysing the art of Raja Ravi Varma and the Company school of painting in which European patrons commissioned paintings from Indian artists. These works map the subcontinent through its flora and fauna, its culture and people, consciously or unconsciously enlarging the colonising Self and diminishing the colonised Other through the portrayal of 'difference'. Dr. Suryanandini Narain presented an incisive

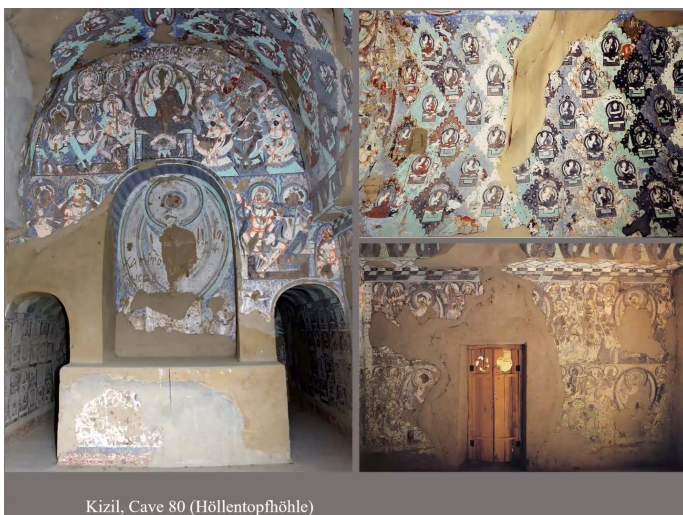
analysis of colonial photography which came into its own in the subcontinent on a global timescale due to colonial contact. Coloniser and colonised used this versatile medium to fulfil very different ends: surveillance, political control and racialised voyeurism on one hand and self-documentation on the other. Nevertheless, some mirroring in methods and use is visible. These sessions brought to a close a varied and colourful quarter of the Indian Aesthetics course 2024-25.

The colonial period also threw up the need for a new type of architecture which will be explored by Dr. Pushkar Sohoni in April. He will provide both a sweeping overview of such constructed spaces and engagement with a specific colonial type of architecture: the colonial market hall. We look forward to this session and to others that will dwell on Indian nationalism, 20th-century Indian Aesthetics, modern Indian architecture and contemporary painting in India. – **J.K.**

PAST PROGRAMMES

The Tocharians of Kucha

February 7th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Monika Zin (Research Head of 'Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road' at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig)



Kucha, a Tocharian kingdom in eastern Central Asia, named after its capital city, was a significant

trade centre between the 2nd and 11th centuries CE. Ideally located on the Silk Road passing along the northern fringes of the Taklamakan Desert, it functioned as a node for ancient caravan routes between the Mediterranean and the Far East, facilitating trade between East and West, and an encounter between diverse peoples. The Silk Road is understood to be an overland trade route between ancient Rome and China. Ironically, today special permission is required to visit Kucha, where Buddhism became the dominant religion by the 3rd century CE. Narratives mention Mahayanist Buddhist monks who were from Kucha and others who travelled to Kucha at this time. Ten cave complexes partially decorated with superb wall paintings, the largest of which

is Kizil with 400 caves, were built here, becoming the centre of Buddhist community life, and the only source of Buddhist remains in the region. The site ceased to function in the 10th century; the reason for this is unclear since Islam arrived here even later. About one-third of the caves display wall paintings related to Indian art, with Buddhist narratives or devotional themes. Others have decorative depictions. While the paintings largely reflect Indian prototypes, their style blends elements from the Mediterranean and Syro-Iranian area, and later from East Asia.

Kucha's cave paintings date approximately from the 5th to 10th centuries. The wooden cave exteriors have collapsed and disappeared, but the interiors are preserved, displaying a unique process of adoption, adaptation and transformation. Early-20th-century archaeological expeditions resulted in hundreds of metres of murals being removed from the walls of the caves (to 'salvage' them) and housed in over thirty institutions across twelve countries. The largest collection is in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin. Approximately 200 painted caves remain in situ, but pieces of their wall paintings have been cut away. Collections of copies and historical photographs document now-destroyed paintings. Since most caves are small, they were probably for elite families and may have been used for mortuary rituals. In a hundred caves fashioned over nearly 200 years in which the painting programme rarely varies, there are depictions of donors on particular walls of caves. These are not portraits, but of a generic type with the figures wearing boots and standing on tiptoe. A cartouche above was inscribed with names, now largely destroyed. A few monumental caves are likely to have had royal patronage.

The significance of the wall paintings of Kucha as derivatives of Indian art and culture was recognised by the German scholars Grünwedel, von Le Coq, and Waldschmidt, who interpreted them with the help of Sanskrit texts. Sanskrit manuscripts, including texts on medicine, occult practices and Buddhist manuscripts, were discovered in Kucha. The *Jataka* tales found in them are illustrated here and at Indian sites. In Kucha, local versions of the stories unknown in India are present in vernacular-language texts and in the writings of Kumarajiva, a 4th-century Buddhist monk who belonged here. For instance, Kumarajiva displays his knowledge of local lore

when he records the *Sutasoma Jataka*. Saudasa, the kidnapper of good king Sutasoma, has wings as seen in Central-Asian tales.

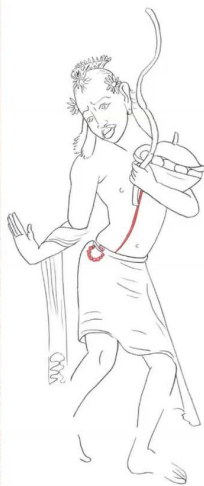
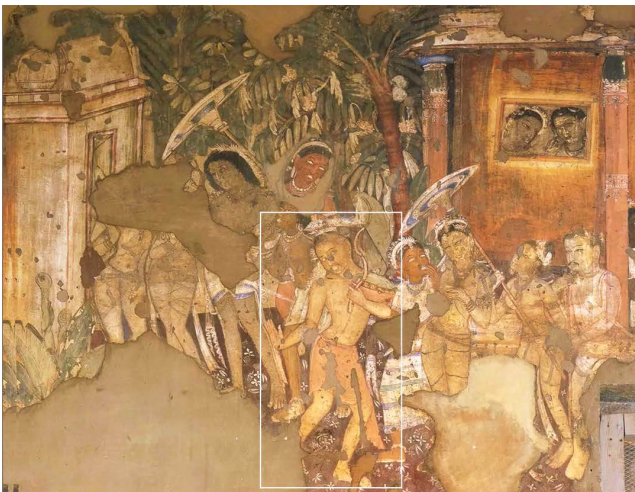
The father of the 4th-century scion of Kucha was an Indian Prince of Kashmir, Kumarajiva was a Mahayanist and in the middle of the 7th century, Tang immigrants built several temples, bringing Mahayana Buddhism to the region. Despite this, there is no evidence of Mahayana Buddhism in Kucha's caves. Instead, there are instances of Chinese texts being glued together, cut into *pustaka* books and reinscribed with Hinayana narratives over the original *Saddharma Pundarika*. Tocharian texts mention only Siddhartha, Buddha Shakyamuni and Maitreya, referring to all others as 'Mahayana and other *bodhisattvas*' without mentioning specific names. Yet, in Kucha, King Shibi and Mahakaruna are depicted with heads like those of *bodhisattvas*. Perhaps the Buddhists of Kucha clung to Sarvastivada Buddhism to differentiate themselves from their neighbours. Kucha may also have set itself apart from the nearby Kumtura caves where there is evidence of Mahayana Buddhism. To explain the difficulties in studying Kucha paintings, Professor Zin described how a scattered cave painting was digitally reassembled using a description by Grünwedel: one section of the painting came from Berlin, and two from Washington, DC.

Archaeologists discovered numerous manuscript fragments written in different languages and scripts here; in 1969, Dieter Schlingloff's study of a Kushana-period philosophical manuscript from Kucha revealed the oldest *parvan*-list of the *Mahabharata* noted on the verso of its pages, while the text of the epic was still developing. Other manuscripts found here include the oldest Rama story in the Buddhist world, and a prose version of the *Manaviya Agama*, precursor of the metrical *Manaviya Dharmashastra*. The biggest group of manuscripts are in a variety of hybrid Sanskrit particular to Buddhist texts. Other religious writings and inscriptions are composed either in Indian Sanskrit or in Tocharian B, which was indigenous at the time and is now extinct. There are also bilingual texts in Sanskrit and Tocharian where Tocharian (which belongs to the Indo-European group of languages) was rendered in Brahmi Script and the Sanskrit alphabet.

The name of a queen – Swayam Prabha – and

the title taken by King Tottika - Kuchi Maharaja - reveal the prestige associated with Sanskrit names. The name 'Kucha', ancient Kuchi, may come from the Indic Kushinagara, created here so that the region's Buddhists could visit the place of the Buddha's *parinirvana* locally. Sanskrit loan words in Tocharian preserved words lost to Indian Sanskrit. The countless fragments of Sanskrit scripture found in Kucha include palm-leaf manuscripts; palm leaves seem to have been procured from India as they did not grow here, establishing India's importance on the Silk Road from at least the year 500 CE. Furthermore, large hoards of Roman coins have been found in India, whereas very few have surfaced in China; India may have been central to the Silk Road. Considering the finds at Kucha, the region's significance to trade seems greater than other parts of Central Asia. Favourable climatic conditions have ensured that paintings and documents preserved in Kucha are of importance for Indic studies.

Waldschmidt convincingly dates the beginning of the first Indo-Iranian style at Kucha, which uses wonderful brown colours and no lapis lazuli, to 480 CE, the second blue-dominated Indo-Iranian style to 550 CE and the Chinese Buddhist style to 647-648 CE after the Tang conquest of the region. However, Chinese scholars date early paintings to the 3rd century CE. Painted figures clad in wool coats and boots are in keeping with climatic conditions in Kucha. Yet there are also barefoot figures clad like Indian deities and ascetics. The source of this iconographic inspiration is somewhat debated: Ajanta, Kashmir, as well as Gandhara (which is the origin of the nimbus around the Buddha's head within the mandorla) come to mind. The Buddha's clinging robe and mandorla come from 5th-century Gupta art. These elements help in dating the paintings, as do echoes of the now-destroyed Bamiyan paintings in the jewellery and fabrics. In the 9th and 10th centuries, the mixed Uyghur style prevailed in the region.



Ajanta XVII, veranda, left rear wall, narrative of Udāyin, Schlingloff 2000/2013, no. 69 (4)

Local knowledge of Sanskrit is illustrated literally in Kucha's paintings. For instance, *goshirshachandana* is represented through images of cows with sandalwood paste on their heads; Kumbhakarna of the *Ramayana* is not a particular individual, but a group of demons with pots instead of ears (Sanskrit: *kumbha* - pot, *karna* - ear); Panchashikha is always depicted with *pancha* (five) *shikhas* (tufts of hair) on top of his head; paintings play on the word *naga* - Sanskrit for elephant, snake, or the name of a flower - using one or all these images. This manner of illustration of Sanskrit terms is absent in Indic art. Neither is it connected to Tocharian, affirming that Sanskrit was well-understood in Kucha.

Early caves are usually square with a dome; the four kings of the directions are placed in the four corner triangles. The caves with the second Indo-Iranian style have a central 'pillar' or niche, which probably housed a sculpted meditating Buddha, with three corridors behind it. The closely spaced and prolific examples of the second cave type enable fruitful comparison. There are square paintings on the walls and diamond-shaped paintings on the barrel vaults. Mountains are represented as elongated scallops at the edges of each diamond. Large numbers of repeated *Jataka* stories and Buddha figures, reminiscent of *avadanas*, alternate in these diamond-shaped compartments. Typically, each interior contains roughly a hundred narratives.

There are many preaching scenes on the walls. A particular crowded scene is set outdoors: there are leaf-like patterns representing the Bodhi tree above the Buddha's head. There are monks, showing the *sangha* had been formed, and the figures of Vajrapani, Indra, Brahma and musicians. The Buddha's gaze rests on his most important visitor: a king, evidenced by regalia (a *chhatra*, sword and crown) around him and a jester or

vidushaka below him. A monk in a *panchakula* robe fallen at the Buddha's feet is presented above him a second time with four heads. Elsewhere at Kucha, the latter is a 'telegraphic' sign for this entire narrative. Waldschmidt and Mori recognised that the scene represents the monk Kashyapa with King Bimbisara of Magadha. The story of Bimbisara going to his *guru* Kashyapa in the Urubilva forest is repeatedly illustrated in Kucha. On seeing Bimbisara, Kashyapa flies into the air, and multiplies himself so that he is standing in the four corners of the universe, before prostrating before the Buddha. Bimbisara understood his *guru's* display of Buddhism's superiority and became a follower of the Buddha.

The presence of the *Natyashastra's vidushaka* carrying a crooked staff or *kutula*, with a crow's foot or *kakapada* on top of his head, reveals that along with Buddhism, other cultural aspects from India, such as this trope from Sanskrit drama, came to Kucha. The *vidushaka* is seen in the art of Ajanta with the Brahmanical *upavita*, and repeatedly in Amaravati and in Nagarjunakonda near the figures of kings. In Gandhara, he has hair curled like a *kakapada* or a round object on his head. In Tumshuk, Central India, we find several tiny pods on his head as seen in Kucha. There are both Sanskrit dramas and dramas in Tocharian in Kucha. The *vidushaka* is represented more than thirty times; the cave paintings were probably a backdrop for performance, recitation and singing of stories of the Buddha. Texts mention the name of the metron.

The future Buddha Maitreya is usually placed above the doors of cave interiors to be viewed as the visitor departed. Indra and Panchashikha are seen on the main wall of caves on either side of the main niche, with the *parinirvana* space in the corridors behind it. Particular episodes of the *parinirvana* cycle are repeated in specific spaces. One example (of the roughly 100 *parinirvana* representations in Kucha) is found on the right walls of the left corridors of many caves. Here, Mount Sumeru has fallen, and the sun and the moon are depicted in the ocean; the world is upended because the Buddha has died. King Ajatashatru of Magadha is consulting with his minister Varshakara whose hair has characteristic locks. Another pair of these very figures shows Varshakara standing before Ajatashatru sitting in a pot. Varshakara has prepared pots of oil,

and warm and cold water to heal the sick king. The minister shows him four scenes on a cloth painting: the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, first sermon and his death, breaking the terrible news indirectly.

The iconography of Brahmanical deities is seen in depictions of Shiva, Uma Maheshwara, and Vishnu on Garuda holding the wheel, all subservient to the Buddha. A particular Shiva Parvati seated on a bull can be dated as post-Gupta. A Vishnu icon has a mask-like crescent moon not seen in India represented beside the face, or independently. In another painting, the sun and the moon are attributes, as they are in Kashmir, of attendant Vishnu, Shiva and Uma Maheshwara representations, showing that these mighty gods rule the heavenly bodies. However, the figures, some of which mirror characteristics of Mathura art, have coverings resembling calf warmers on the lower legs which in Kucha characterise demonic iconography. Since Mara and cosmological Buddhas also hold the sun and the moon in Kucha, Shiva and Vishnu were seemingly seen as demons in the region. The iconography comes from India, but its meaning has changed; Kumarajiva mentions by name an *asura* standing in water. Gradually, in Central Asia and the Far East, arose the concept of a single mighty *Asura*, like the Persian Ahura Mazda, and unlike the multiple *asuras* of India.

The four kings of directions are always represented above the dying Buddha in Kucha, perhaps because the *Ashoka Avadana* mentions that the Buddha gives these deities the *dharma* to preserve. The *chaturmaharajas*, *dharmapalas* and other protective deities including Vajrapani (sometimes with a third eye) are presented in the fierce iconography of tantric Buddhism not found in India, even though there is no trace of tantric religion in Kucha. The geographical direction of the flow of this iconography is not known; Tibetans occupied Kucha for seventy years in the 7th century CE. The resolution of the disputed dating of Kucha's caves may be critical in understanding how this transformation occurred, and Kucha's role in taking Indian culture, religion and iconography to the Far East and other regions.

There are many figures of *brahmins* with iconography resembling that of Gandhara and Kashmir with Gupta features. The *brahmin* Drona,

with long hair piled into a top knot, two additional small knots and lotus flowers, is represented distributing the relics of the Buddha after his cremation in Kushinagara. The long-haired figure of Brahma has an additional halo, enabling a differentiation from *brahmin* representations. Brahma, along with Indra, who has a third eye and a particular crown, is found hundreds of times in Kucha witnessing every sermon of the Buddha. This iconography is directly from India, perhaps without the accompanying understanding of it; no Brahmanical temples have been found in Kucha.

In India, mountains have long been considered sacred spaces conducive to meditation. Apart from the scalloped mountains with *Jataka* and *Avadana* narratives in the barrel vaults, diamond-shaped three-dimensional mountains are found in a niche in the main wall of a cave, and in a similarly shaped clay tablet currently in Berlin. The scalloped shapes of painted mountain depictions at Kucha have been closely analysed, and there are differences between early and late representations. On-site and photographic evidence shows that the mountains of the first Indo-Iranian styles do not contain *jatakas*. Instead, they are dotted with trees, Brahmanical deities, white birds of prey and numerous meditating monks and *brahmins*, who belong to this landscape. *Brahmin* iconography includes Indian attributes such as amphora-like bottles or flasks and long *pustaka* books. Principally Indian *Jataka* stories, including those of evil *brahmins* such as the one who insisted on having King Chandraprabha's head and another of a furious *brahmin*, are depicted. Many *brahmins*, old and young, are prostrating to the Buddha and in attendance to him. In the well-preserved paintings in the Kizil caves 114 and 80, several ascetics wear jewellery on their legs; Indian *brahmins* do not, though

Brahma representations may be bejewelled. Leg jewellery is also seen in the Kizil cave 97 painting of the Shravasti miracle where the Buddha multiplied himself, defeating Brahmanical, Jaina and Ajivika ascetics; Vajrapani is shown battling against them. The narrative of the burning palace with a snake where the Buddha chooses to rest, and *brahmins* pouring water on the fire is also present. These depictions, also found at Sanchi and Bodh Gaya, create a mesh of stories that are repeated in Kucha. The purpose of this repetition is worth considering.

An ascetic performs *panchagni sadhana* in the mountains with four surrounding bowls of fire under the blazing sun in Simsim cave 26. This is not popular imagery in India: single Brahmanical visual representations of this *sadhana* are seen in the Bihar Museum and in Nagarjunakonda. Yet the iconography is repeated in Kucha: a naked blue ascetic with the paint scratched away below his penis and wearing something unrecognisable on top of his head performs *panchagni sadhana* on one leg. This *sadhana* is criticised in Buddhist literature as being too extreme; the middle path is advocated by the Buddha. However, narratives of undesirable actions are also depicted adjacent to the *Jatakas* and *Avadanas* in Kucha, such as Ajivika Upaga who departs, declining to listen to the Buddha's sermon after his enlightenment. Other Kucha depictions of blue ascetics, sometimes with a ring hanging from the penis, are identified with certainty as Ajivikas. The blue colour may represent dark skin, as Ajivikas were from South India.

The speaker stressed the importance of decoding the Buddhist view of *brahmins*. A study of Indian Buddhism reveals a rivalry between Buddhists and *brahmins*, but there is also respect for *brahmin* penance, unlike the criticism of Ajivikas,



who actively rejected the Buddha. In the Bharhut railing, there are three Brahmanical flying figures, with bottles and *jatila* heads, above a bowl of fire (*tejas*) on a seat, which indicates the Buddha's presence in aniconic representations. Meditation conferred the ability to fly. In a representation of Siddhartha meditating at the Lahore Museum found at the Sikri *stupa*, flying *brahmins* have to come down due to the power of his *dhyana*. There are Buddhist stories about evil *brahmins* which reveal a negative view, but also many positive stories of the conversion of *brahmins* to Buddhism. The fascination for *brahmins* came to Kucha from India. A *pranidhi* story seen in India is the narrative of the *brahmin* Sumati formulating a wish (*pranidhana*) to become a future Buddha before the Buddha Dipankara, who grants it with a *vyakarana*. At Kucha, a young *brahmin*, who was the Buddha Shakyamuni in a previous life, chants on one leg in front of the Buddha Pushya's cave. After a week of chanting, the Buddha prophesies the fulfilment of the *brahmin's pranidhana*. This narrative, and other *pranidhana* narratives are repeated in several cave paintings at Kucha.

The narrative of a unique painting with an intact left side in Kizil cave 175 has not yet been identified, perhaps due to the missing right side. Inauspicious auguries such as animals, a pot with fire below, and poor people or *pretas* from hell occupy the left side. Above the central figure of the Buddha are six figures identified as Buddhas, on either side of a larger central figure. However, since they lack the *bodhi* nimbus, they are neither Buddhas, nor *brahmins*: they can be correctly identified as six *Brahma* deities, identified by the presence of nimbi and lotus seats. This is a depiction of *Brahmaloka* with six *Brahma kayika* deities, known from Buddhist scriptures such as the *Mahasamaja Sutra* (twenty-six copies of which were discovered on the Northern Silk Road) and from inscriptions at Kucha. The *Sutra* recounts the stories of different gods and deities visiting the Buddha from all four directions to sing a song of praise and then disappear, beginning with the *Brahma kayika* deities with a flaming fire around them. The term *kayika* seems related to *kaya* or body. These figures do not represent Maha Brahma but less important deities, which may have become part of the Buddhist texts to minimise the importance of Brahma, the highest god of Brahmanical religion. Since references to *Brahma Kayika* deities are in old Buddhist texts

possibly dating to the 3rd century BCE, the term could refer to an earlier time when important *brahmins* may have been referred to as Brahma. There are seventy-two eternal Brahmas in Buddhist literature, with names such as Brahma Baka, Brahma Sahampati and Brahma Sanat Kumara. The latter is also in the *Mahabharata*.

Brahma is a deity who is treated with respect in Buddhism and depicted as such in Kucha. The gods and Indra rise in his honour. He is beautiful like the Buddha and has his own heavens; in the highest heavens, there are Brahmas without bodies, but also Rupa Brahmas which still have form. In the Buddhist world it is desirable to be reborn in *Brahmaloka* or Brahma heaven; *Brahmapunya* or Brahma merit enables rebirth there. In *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-five Sutras*, Peter Skilling notes that Buddha mentions *Brahmapunya* on several occasions in the context of *pratitya samutpada* or dependent origination, which is the crux of Buddhist teaching according to several Gandhari inscriptions, the *Mulasarvastivadin* texts, fragments of texts by Vasubandhu known in Kucha, and in Tocharian texts. For Tocharian donors, the primary attraction of commissioning a cave or monastery may have been the possibility of gathering *Brahmapunya*, for the texts describe one of the four ways that merit could be earned was "to offer a residence to the monastic order where previously there was none". This may explain the proliferation of caves in new areas of the mountains and the repeated references to donations of tiny *stupas* to the Buddha.

Finally, Professor Zin focussed on several images resembling *Brahma Kayika* deities flying on a squinch, in a strip of ceiling below the *Jatakas* in the barrel vaults of caves, or in a strip of wall just above the flooring of caves. The deities fly above water with black bubbles against the backdrop of mountains. There are heads showing people floating or swimming, sitting in bubbles, and trying to escape demons in the water. In Buddhism, crossing the ocean of *samsara* is the goal of adherents. In Kucha, these paintings suggest the belief that *Brahma Kayika* deities would take dead people who had earned *Brahmapunya* across the ocean to *Brahmaloka* and towards *nirvana*, offering a key to understanding the purpose of these magnificent caves. - J.K.

Kings and Commoners:

Mobility and Identity in the Art of Early Mathura (2nd C. BCE - 5th C. CE)

February 13th & 14th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Chandreyi Basu (Associate Professor at St. Lawrence University, USA)

Professor Basu's initial exposition of the art of early Mathura explored examples made there but found at other sacred Buddhist sites, revealing an incomplete and intriguing picture of large-scale icons with curious elements that demand interpretation, many monastic patrons, and itinerant artists such as Shivamitra of Mathura, a sculptor mentioned in the inscription of a seated *bodhisattva* figure gifted to the Jetavana of Shravasti by residents of Mathura. If not the sculptor, at least the stone or the icon itself must have been transported to Shravasti at considerable cost. The scholar drew inferences regarding the people who were involved in the creation of such objects. The introduction of the image into Buddhism is not fully understood to this day but Schopen's research points to the central role played by monks and nuns, especially in the making of the earliest images.

The speaker mapped the geographical outward movement of standing images that were sculpted in Mathura at the time when the Kushans and the Guptas were in power. Inscriptions reveal that

this movement was made possible by networks that comprised of workshops and artists, elite monks and nuns as well as ordinary monastics. A standing image more than nine feet tall is of the monk Bala, who was connected with the ruling elite, knew the *tripitaka*, and travelled extensively in Northern India, particularly to the east of Mathura. The image has four inscriptions and a post with a large umbrella, connected by scholars to the concept of the *axis mundi*. Mythical animal reliefs on the umbrella may have represented the zodiac. Large Mathura images associated with the influential Bala have been found at other Buddhist sacred centres such as Kaushambi, Shravasti and Sarnath. The speaker mentioned an inscribed, 2nd-century-CE Mathura red sandstone *bodhisattva* image donated by the knowledgeable nun Buddhmitra, possibly a student of Bala. Found in Kaushambi, this is one of the many images commissioned for the *cankarama* or walking path of the Buddha, to be placed in the open, outside the city or in the forest.

Prof. Basu noted that researchers focus on



Post- Kuṣāna / Pre-Gupta ,
4th c. Buddha. 70 cm ht.
Govindnagar. Government
Museum, Mathura 76.26.
Courtesy: Biswarup
Ganguly.

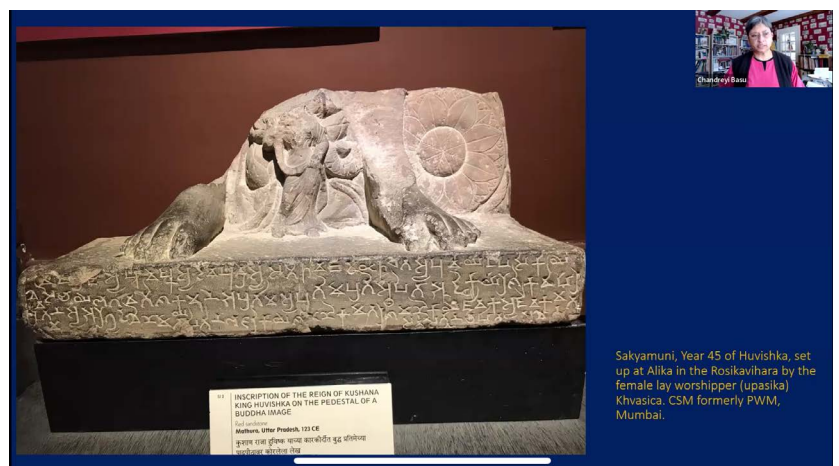
Post- Kuṣāna / Pre-Gupta , 4th c.
Buddha. Katra. State Museum,
Lucknow B 10. Religious gift of
Śākya nun Jayabhatta.
Government Museum, Mathura
76.

inscribed images because information about them is available, neglecting the thousands of images without inscriptions. She also noted that the bases of the numerous standing sculptures of this period and the chisel marks on them are revealing; several workshops may have produced the variations found in these images using stone from different quarries. By the 4th century, a transitional period between the Kushans and the Guptas, there was a shift to Buddha images identified as Shakyamuni in different, sometimes experimental forms, culminating in a style depicting robes with many folds and large haloes. A large, standing, red sandstone Buddha figure from Govindnagar is an example; the inscription confirms that the peripatetic artist Dinna, who may have been an innovator, an overseer, a financier, or all of these, collaborated with a *bhikshu* named Sanghavarman in the making of this icon with a webbed hand, a *mahapurusha lakshana*. For the first time in a Buddhist icon, small, kneeling figures dressed like monks, with *anjali mudra*, are placed facing the Buddha's feet at the same level on either side. This highly skilled image belongs to a genre which resulted in many particularised examples. The pedestal of a broken image has small female and male kneeling worshippers on either side of the feet. Sometimes these kneeling figures make offerings and look upwards at the central figure. Until the 3rd century, small figures of lay devotees were placed facing outward towards the viewer at a lower level on either side of the feet. This is seen in Jain and Buddhist images, including those from Gandhara. Dinna's name appears in inscriptions as the maker of two images from Kushinagar, one of a *parinirvana* figure, with a Gandhara-type back view in the small figure of a worshipper, and the other of a standing figure. The inscription of a standing image from Bhita with kneeling worshippers and a transparent robe without folds mentions that the donor is a Shakya *bhikshu*.

Mathura was a site that also saw inward flows of people and culture in this period. The base of a Shakyamuni image donated by the *upasika* Khvasica during the Kushan ruler Huvishka's reign has the frontal representation of a female worshipper holding a streamer between the feet of the Buddha, with lotus flowers in the

background, as seen in images from the latter years of Kanishka's reign.

Inscriptions prove that many sculptures from Huvishka's reign were placed at a large monastery named after the king in present-day Jamalpur where monks remained the most prominent donors of images and architecture. The Kushan rulers were not Buddhists or patrons of Buddhism, but the king's name would have provided legitimation and prestige to a monastery. Pillars with donor figures were found here; one shows a female figure with a lamp. Her dress has been identified as coming from the region northwest of Mathura. A curious male figure in the Central-Asian Kushan dress with a headdress, trousers and boots, holding a streamer as an offering, is presented with a halo. A figure on a pillar, the upper and lower parts of which were found broken, seems to have an iconographic mismatch as the upper garment is a Central-Asian tunic while the lower garment is the Indic *dhoti*. The headdress depicts a bird. The base of a figure in mottled red sandstone has a broken figure on one side and depicts a genuflecting figure, wearing sandals strung up to the knee, on the other side of the Buddha's feet. The posture of genuflection is predominantly found in the figures of devotees in Gandharan sculpture. The sandals may be a sign that the figure is that of a pilgrim; there are Chinese representations of Xuanzang with this iconography which, though not directly related, may be used to interpret this image.



The Jamalpur site also yielded fairly large, flat, round *asanas* or seats, some with a hole to enable the insertion of a post. According to Falk, the laity were encouraged to donate such *asanas*, some with lotus petals inscribed around them and animals such as bulls or lions at the corners; lay

devotees could place images on these *asanas* in the small-scale Buddhism practiced outside urban centres. The bases are inscribed with the names of monks from various places. This changed when the Buddhist monastery became important during Huvishka's reign (153-187 CE) as images were donated for Buddhist *viharas* rather than for open areas such as those where *cankarama* figures were placed. A stone slab now in the State Museum, Lucknow, was donated by a group of actors (often itinerant) from Mathura to the shrine of the *Naga* Dadhikarna. A tiny, inscribed image of the same *naga* has been found in the river at the Huvishka *vihara*, and it shows the interaction between Buddhism and autochthonous worship such as that of popular *naga* cults, widespread in the northwest of Mathura, that is, in present-day Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan. Such absorption is plausible and is seen, for instance, at Ajanta.

The animals and highly popular animal-headed deities found in the sculpture of ancient Mathura have been interpreted in various ways. The function of such deities and depictions have been related to health, especially childbirth and protection of pregnant women, to the mentoring of male children, and to fertility and abundance. Large numbers of coping stones, rarely inscribed, from Kankali Tila and other sites near Mathura, show animals as well as the vegetative forms, also seen on ring stones found in the region, which are linked to fertility. Kankali Tila's identification as a purely Jain site was problematised by the scholar as she questions that a clear-cut religious affiliation can be deduced for a set of images of livestock and cow-headed, goat-headed and ram-headed deities in the early period since they have been found all over Mathura. Pastoral nomadic groups that frequented the Mathura region in the Kushan period worshipped a male goat-headed or ram-headed, frontally presented deity who is accompanied by young boys in numerous extant depictions – in terracotta, in small, portable stone tablets recovered in large numbers from water bodies, and in larger stone icons – none inscribed. This representation has been identified as Naigamesha, who was absorbed by the 5th and 6th centuries CE by Jain and Brahmanical cults in Central and Western India. Naigamesha, found as an independent deity on small stelae, with children playing on his shoulders and beside him, in toys, and in extant sculpted ram heads,

or a human head with ram horns and a turban, functions as a male mentor and carer for young boys. This maps on to the practices of pastoral communities where an elder male would have taught young boys about herding and protecting themselves from wild animals. A double-sided lintel panel from Mathura has been read by Quintanilla as showing the role of Naigamesha in the birth of the *tirthankara* Rishabha.

Multiple images of usually goat-headed (and occasionally human-headed) goddesses, with their right hand raised in *abhaya mudra*, cradle an inert male child with splayed legs and hands folded on the chest in a swaddling cloth or basket. This representation has been identified by Doris Srinivasan as that of a foetus that has not survived. The same iconography (emphasising fertility and the nurture of babies) can be seen in Mathura representations of the birth of Rishyashringa, a character in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and that of the Buddha, raising questions about Srinivasan's interpretation. Perhaps the splayed legs and folded hands simply indicate a newborn child.

Some images of cow-headed deities have small figures with the palms touching or healthy children placed between the feet (and sometimes on the pedestal) of the goddess. The latter type of goddess, referred to as Bahuputrika or the goddess with many sons, appears to play a dual role as protector during pregnancies and childbirth, and as a *graha* who could cause harm to mother, foetus and newborn child, and required propitiation. Only one Naigamesha representation currently in the Government Museum, Mathura, reflects this threatening role as it holds inert babies. Plaques with a lotus-bearing, squatting goddess with the right hand raised in *abhaya mudra*, and sometimes holding a child in the hand, have been speculatively identified as early representations of Lakshmi, as has a goddess on a plaque being lustrated by elephants holding a child. The representations are related to progeny, well-being and protection, but with varied iconography. Other images have goddesses, perhaps of the wilderness, with the heads of various animals, such as dogs, tigers and lions. Five squatting goddesses on coping stones, lintels or plaques are accompanied by a male warrior god, usually Skanda, and may be precursors to Gupta-period goddesses and



the later *saptamatrikas*. Other goddesses in stone, terracotta and in a rare case, metal, were depicted with male figures and with children in a protective, nurturing stance.

Deities venerated by farming communities and pastoralists often display traits that betray a two-way exchange. The speaker accordingly interpreted pastoral elements in Mathura sculpture as multivalent forms with wide appeal. Legends recount the association of Abhira pastoral nomads with Mathura. The Ahiras were associated with Krishna Gopala, a cowherder deity who later became fused with Vasudeva, the warrior hero of the Vrishni clan of Mathura. Since pastoralists seem to have intermittently followed itinerant, semi-nomadic and settled ways of life in pursuing their livelihoods, the scholar interpreted the imagery as expressing this lived reality and interdependence of pastures, forests and village settlements. She also read repetition of livestock imagery as the symbolic representation or measure of wealth and prosperity. Multiple terracotta figurines of animals and human forms have been excavated from the habitation sites of Katra and Sonkh, where bulls and protective, nurturing goddesses were favoured subjects. A ram figurine has been found at each site. Several coping stones with animal imagery have also been recovered. A large, late-Kushan goddess image has a halo and cradles a child protectively. There are many small stone plaques of a goddess squatting with a child, and a pot-bellied, squatting male god holding a beaker and flowers, identified as Hariti and Kubera. Another plaque with a squatting goddess holding a swaddling cloth may represent the birth of Skanda. Texts recount many narratives of goddesses; in one story, Skanda plays with both Naigamesha and such goddesses.

The site of Kankali Tila was successively excavated between 1888 and 1896 CE by

Cunningham, Burgess and Führer. Professor Basu expressed the view that the archaeologists' desire to find the origin of Jainism resulted in the identification of the site of Kankali Tila and its *stupa* as Jain. While many Jain images were found, the site was not scientifically excavated. Perhaps the syncretic imagery common in the Mathura region was not considered as carefully as required.

The inscription of an eroded 1st-century-CE stone slab depicting a shrine with a *stupa*, pillars and railings mentions the *arhat* Vardhamana belonging to the *nirgrantha arhats* (Jains) and records the name of the donor, a courtesan who was a female disciple of the ascetics (*sramana sravika*); she gave an assembly hall for an object of worship (*ayagasabha*), a cistern (*prapa*) and a stone slab (*silapata*). In the Jain context, shrines were not relic monuments but reminders of the exemplary lives of the *tirthankaras*. In the bottom register of the slab, Naigamesha and a *yakshi* stand under two ogee arches placed on either side, proving the integration of *laukika devatas* into Jainism at this very early date. Another early-1st-century-CE red sandstone slab associated with the Jains has an independent goddess in *samapada*. She has a frontal, assertive, hieratic stance and four female attendants holding an umbrella, a garland and flowers; stone railings and a background festooned with garlands point to worship. The inscription dedicates the slab to the *arhat* Vardhamana, mentions the term '*ayavati*', which may refer to the slab or the goddess, and names the donor, her husband and her sons.

Many such slabs are found; inscriptions reveal that several were requested by female disciples (*sisinis*) of male *arhats* among whom there appears to be a hierarchy. The Thaniya Kula, a group of Jain ascetics associated with image worship, was popular in Mathura at this time. One such slab has four *tirthankaras* and a central *stupa* image in the upper register; a pot-bellied ascetic in the lower register carries a broom and a cloth draped over his left forearm. This identifies him as an *ardha-phalaka* ascetic, who used such a cloth to cover their genitalia, often represented in Mathura's Jain sculpture and not recorded at other Jain centres. Beside this ascetic, whose name is recorded as Sramana Kana, stands a goddess with her right hand raised in *abhaya mudra*. On the other side, the figure of a *naga* with a snakehood in *anjali*



Professor Chandreyi Basu

mudra, a representation of Balarama, worships the ascetic. The small figure of a nun or disciple, with a broom and in full robes, stands below Balarama with two female attendants. The outdoor setting depicted in the background indicates that ascetics frequented non-urban spaces at this time. The slab seems to be one instance of the frequent visual representation of itinerant Jain monks and nuns found in religious images from the Kushan and Gupta periods. Curiously, the title *sramana* mentioned in the inscription had fallen out of use by this time, leading to the speculation that Kana was no longer alive and was being remembered in the slab. A variety of professions are recorded among the donors of such slabs. A well-preserved tablet donated by a merchant and referred to as an *ayagapata* in the inscription has auspicious symbols, such as pillars with a wheel and an elephant atop them, and the *nandyavarta*. The *tirthankara*, with umbrella and garlands, is seated at the centre. Images of people worshipping such *ayagapatas* and *silapatas*, just as they would have worshipped a *stupa* as a reminder of ascetic penance, have been found.

Such stone slabs were less commissioned after the

Kushan period due to the increasing popularity of images. The inscription on the pedestal of an *arhat's* image probably from the 1st quarter of the 2nd century CE records that it was made for a sacred enclosure such as a temple, or perhaps a smaller *devakula*. Lay women are often recorded as donors and therefore supporters of itinerant ascetics. In a broken base, images of a monk with a cloth over his wrist, nuns in full robes, and lay women wearing jewellery are found on either side of the central *chakra*. In another pedestal, *vachakas* (preachers), nuns, *sisinis* and lay worshippers are present. The lions at the edge of such pedestals are also seen in Buddhist material; the same workshops would have made images for people of different religious affiliations.

A well-known headless Saraswati image from Mathura is dated to the 3rd century CE and was donated by a metal worker at the request of the Kotya Gana, one of the most prominent ascetic lineages documented in Kushan Mathura. On either side of the figure, seated in a deep squat on a dais, are two small adoring figures at a lower level. One figure depicts an ascetic with a water pot and a cloth over the wrist and the other a lay male worshipper. The name 'Saraswati' is mentioned in the inscription. The figure holds a scroll in the left hand and has an ornament on the right wrist. This hand holds a beaded rosary, also found in the hand of a colossal ascetic figure found at Mathura. Particular *vachakas* are recorded as having periodically requested several such images. The distance created by time gives rise to the somewhat speculative and partial nature of the understanding of the corpus of sculptural images and objects from early Mathura. - *J.K.*

Mobile Objects, Mobile People - South Asia in Indian Ocean World Circulation before 1500 CE

March 13th & 14th, 2025, 1:30 - 5:30 PM IST | Prof. Elizabeth Lambourn (Historian of South Asia and the Indian Ocean world & newly elected Fellow of the British Academy)

Detailed reportage will be carried in the next *JPM Quarterly* (Jul - Sep '25)

Southasian Painting

PAST PROGRAMMES

Kota - Facets of A Royal Painter's Studio

March 4th, 5th & 6th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:45 PM IST | Prof. Joachim. K. Bautze (Art Historian & Curator)

Prof. Joachim Bautze's lecture series provided a visually stunning exploration of Bundi and Kota's artistic traditions, based upon years of meticulous fieldwork and extensive research into private and museum collections worldwide.

Session 1: From Rao Surjan of Bundi (r. 1555–1585) to his grandson, Rao Ratan (r. 1607–1631)

The first session commenced with a discussion of Mughal folios depicting Emperor Akbar's desperate attempt to shell Ranthambore Fort, culminating in a painting of the surrender of Rao Surjan Singh (r. 1555–1585). Prof. Bautze critically examined the portrayal of Bundi's rulers in contemporary artworks, addressing the misidentification of some patrons in museum records.

A striking observation was the exceptional detail in Bundi's paintings which depict nature with remarkable precision – featuring scorpions, bumblebees, and other intricate natural elements.

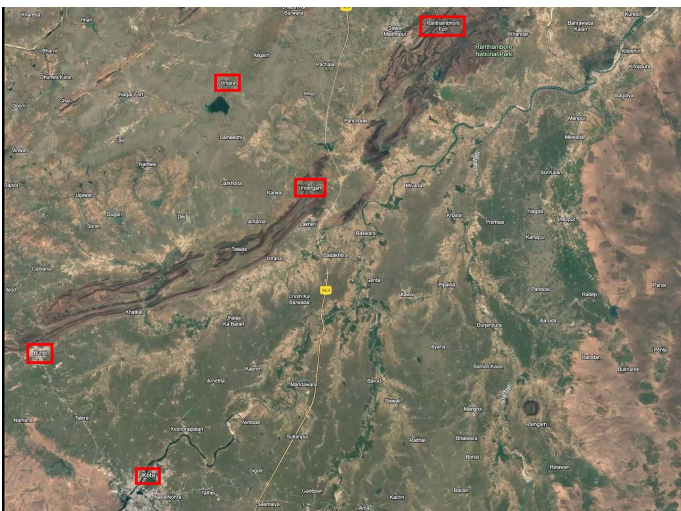
The lecture also touched upon Rao Ratan Singh (r. 1607–1631) and his artistic patronage, notably his depiction wielding a *Farangi* (European) sword, likely acquired from the Deccan. Murals in the Badal Mahal of Bundi illustrate a '*darikhana*' (*darbar*), where Rao Ratan Singh is portrayed surrounded by courtiers, musicians, and dancers, receiving a painting of an elephant – underscoring the importance of art in Kota's courtly culture.

Session 2: The elephants of Rao Ratan and the development of the ceiling frescoes in Bundi, Indargarh and Kota

The second session focused on Bundi's renowned elephant paintings. Prof. Bautze traced their evolution, beginning with early Bundi sketches in charcoal, which later transitioned to black ink. He described how artists documented the role of *charkhis* – men responsible for separating aggressive elephants during fights – and the iron wheel placed on elephants' backs to prevent them from fleeing.

The discussion also covered the artistic exchange between Bundi, Kota, and the Mughals, particularly the ceiling frescoes painted for Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) at Agra's Ram Bagh (also known as Aram Bagh or Bagh-i-Nur Afshan). These frescoes likely inspired murals in the Badal Mahal (Bundi), Supari Mahal (Indargarh), and Chhattar Mahal (Kota). Sadly, many of these frescoes have been lost over time.

Prof. Bautze made a compelling connection between Mughal and Rajput artistic traditions, noting how motifs such as the *Simurgh* (a mythical



bird) fighting a dragon, as well as swan-like birds, appeared in Mughal manuscripts before being incorporated into Kota frescoes.

Session 3: Early Kota painting under Raos Jagat Singh (r. 1658–1683), Kishor Singh (r. 1684–1696) and Ram Singh (r. 1696–1707)

Prof. Joachim Bautze's third session in the lecture series explored the early development of Kota painting under Raos Jagat Singh, Kishor Singh, and Ram Singh. Through a presentation of murals from the Chhattar Mahal in the Garh of Kota and miniature paintings from various collections, Prof. Bautze examined how artists adapted their work to meet the aesthetic and political demands of their royal patrons.

A key highlight of this session was the introduction of a European engraving from *Atlas Historique*, which provides an early published view of the Kota palace. Prof. Bautze argued that this engraving – featured in *View and Description of the Great Moghul, his Mosque, his Entertainments, his Women, his Way of Life, and Other Things* – was almost certainly based on a large mural within the Chhattar Mahal of Kota's Garh. Furthermore, he suggested that a battle scene engraving from the same volume may have also been inspiration from a large-scale painting originating in Kota. This comparison became increasingly plausible when juxtaposed with images from Prof. Bautze's extensive photographic archive, which includes documentation of Kota palace murals from the

1970s.

Prof. Bautze described Kota's Palace as "the most important [resource] for art historians", emphasising the richness of its surviving visual record. He presented images from various sections of the palace, showing how murals have been preserved, altered, or lost over time. The western room of the palace, in particular, was heavily varnished and revamped, leading to significant changes in the appearance of its murals. Despite these alterations, the palace remains a vital resource for understanding the evolution of early Kota painting.

By the end of the lecture, the focus shifted to the depiction of patrons. One of the distinguishing features of Rao Jagat Singh (r. 1658–1683), for example, was his curved moustache. Rao Ram Singh (r. 1696–1707), on the other hand, emerges in paintings as both a battlefield hero and a romantic figure. Notably, he is the subject of erotic poems that celebrate not only his military prowess but also his legendary height and amorous exploits. This dual image of Ram Singh – both as a warrior and a lover – adds another layer of complexity to the visual culture of the Kota court.

Session 4: Maharao Bhim Singh (r. 1707–1720), and the tutelary deity of Kota/Nandgaon, Shri Brijnathji, under his successors

Prof. Bautze's fourth lecture focused on Maharao Bhim Singh, the first ruler to bear the title 'Maharao' and regarded as the 'father' of Kota State. His reign not only shaped Kota's political identity but also played a crucial role in defining its religious and artistic traditions. Prof. Bautze gave an overview of the change in Kota's religious inclination in the 18th century. In 1719, Maharao Bhim Singh became a devotee of the Vallabha Sampradaya, a sect dedicated to Krishna worship, and elevated the deity Shri Brijnathji to the status of Kota's state deity. From 1720, Kota began to be referred to as 'Nandgaon', the village where Krishna spent his early years. This shift in religious patronage placed Kota within the sacred geography of Krishna worship and aligned its courtly traditions with the *Nidhi Svarupas*, the revered Krishna images of the Vallabha sect, such as Shri Nathji and Shri



Mathureshji.

Prof. Bautze then progressed to showcase murals, drawings, and miniature paintings illustrating the worship of Shri Brijnathji, particularly from the Chhattar Mahal. These artworks span the reigns of several Kota rulers, including Maharao Arjun Singh (r. 1720–1723), Maharao Chhattar Sal / Shatru Sal (r. 1758–1764), Maharao Umed Singh (r. 1771–1819), Maharao Kishor Singh (r. 1819–1827), and Maharao Ram Singh (r. 1827–1866). A distinctive feature of Kota painting is the seating posture of Maharao Bhim Singh, which mirrors that of Shri Brijnathji. Both figures are adorned with peacock feathers, further reinforcing the visual and symbolic connection between the ruler and the deity. One striking painting depicts Bhim Singh decapitating Kalicharan, an image emphasising his heroic stature. Though historical accounts record his heroic death in battle, Kota artists immortalised him as a warrior-king akin to Krishna. This Krishna-like visual identity extended beyond Bhim Singh to later rulers. Maharao Arjun Singh (r. 1720–1723) was frequently depicted with blue skin, directly associating him with Krishna / Brijnathji. Such portrayals emphasised divine kingship and the ruler's role as Krishna's earthly representative, a theme deeply embedded in Kota's court culture.

Session 5: Two Kota *Ragamalas*

In his fifth session, Prof. Bautze introduced two *Ragamala* sets from Kota:

1. **The 1768 Kota *Ragamala*** – Originally consisting of 251 folios, this set was lauded by Klaus Ebeling in *Ragamala Painting* (1973) for its artistic brilliance, prolific compositions, and imaginative imagery. Ebeling described it as unparalleled in the world of *Ragamala* painting, with no other school rivalling its depth of artistic expression.
2. **The Boston-Bundi *Ragamala*** (a term coined by Ebeling in the 1970s, though Bautze prefers 'Kota-Narayan *Ragamala*') – This dispersed set once had at least 117 folios, distinguished by its rare inclusion of pictorial representations of the seven musical notes (*svaras*), each associated with specific animals. Many folios remain unidentified or unexamined, making it a significant area for future research.

Prof. Bautze first gave a preview of the terminologies typically associated with *Ragamalas*. '*Ragamala*' itself refers to a sequence consisting of 36 paintings grouped into 'families' (*parivar*), which includes: six male *ragas* with each *raga* associated with five *raginis* (wives). Each *ragini* has sons (*ragaputras*), daughters (*ragaputris*), and additional relatives, culminating in a vast pictorial genealogy. The Kota *Ragamalas*, however, exhibited unique variations. By 1800, for instance, *Raga Sri* replaced *Raga Pancham*, reflecting evolving musical and aesthetic traditions. Additionally, some folios in the Kota *Ragamalas* contain text called *Kavit* – which, Prof. Bautze noted, frequently albeit erroneously used '*ragas*' and '*putras*' interchangeably.

A key aspect of this lecture was the analysis of artistic details: the small dots on the margins of the folios, Prof. Bautze explained, indicate serial numbers, while each 'family' carries distinctive marks to help differentiate them. However, the most exciting aspect was the Kota's '**Clamshell Eye**' – a recurring stylistic trait in Kota paintings – a characteristic eye shape, outlined with a line beneath, giving it a clamshell-like appearance. Prof. Bautze demonstrated this through multiple case studies, showing how this unique stylistic feature distinguishes Kota paintings from those of Bundi.

The session ended with a comparison of paintings from Bundi and Kota, revealing that Bundi artists had access to Kota folios but did not create close imitations. Instead, later copies from Bundi are easily distinguishable from the original Kota works.

Session 6: The hunting-scenes

Prof. Joachim Bautze's final lecture in the series provided a detailed study of hunting scenes in Bundi and Kota paintings, tracing their evolution from grand murals to paintings on paper. The discussion began with the Badal Mahal murals in Bundi, which Milo C. Beach described as "the earliest and most important royal wall paintings in Rajasthan". From there, he explored the murals of mid-17th-century Indargarh, the first room's wall paintings in Kota's Chhattar Mahal, and the now-lost frescoes of Jhala-ki Haveli from the late 18th century. The survey concluded with an examination of hunting scenes on paper from the

reign of Maharao Umed Singh (r. 1771–1819).

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, hunting imagery transitioned from wall paintings to paper paintings, particularly during Maharao Umed Singh's reign. While many Kota hunting scenes remain unpublished, Prof. Bautze showed several to the JPM audience, expanding the understanding of the genre.

Despite their similarities, Bundi and Kota hunting scenes exhibit notable differences. In Bundi, the depiction of animals in camouflage adds realism to the composition. Some landscapes, at first glance appearing Timurid or Deccani, are true to Bundi's rugged terrain. The inclusion of regional wildlife, such as rhinoceroses, aligns with the area's historical fauna. Remarkably, some paintings feature now-extinct animals, such as a fox-squirrel-like animal, providing rare visual documentation of lost species.



One of the most striking aspects of Bundi murals is the way they subtly evoke empathy for the hunted. In one example, blade-like grass shields a lioness and her cubs from hunters, making the viewer sympathise with the prey rather than the royal patrons who commissioned the artwork. The largest hunting mural in Bundi, a grand depiction of a ring hunt, captures the spectacle of the chase on an unparalleled scale. Prof. Bautze also highlighted an unusual feature of Bundi's hunting paintings – the presence of women hunters. While Bundi offers numerous examples of women actively participating in the hunt, Kota paintings rarely even depict women accompanying men on hunting expeditions. This

contrast underscores a fundamental difference in how each court envisioned the role of women in royal pastimes.

Conclusion

Through his sessions, Prof. Joachim Bautze traced the transformation of Bundi and Kota painting traditions from their Mughal-influenced origins under Rao Surjan and Rao Ratan to the development of distinct regional styles under Raos Jagat Singh, Kishor Singh, and Ram Singh. His discussions on the role of Maharao Bhim Singh in establishing Shri Brijnathji as Kota's state deity illuminated the intersection of art and religious patronage. His study of the Kota *Ragamalas* highlighted innovations in musical iconography, while his final session on hunting scenes revealed fascinating contrasts between Bundi and Kota's representations of nature, the hunt, and gender roles in royal pastimes. Perhaps most compelling

was Prof. Bautze's ability to connect visual details – whether in murals, miniature paintings, or dispersed folios – with broader historical narratives. His insights into the symbolism of peacock feathers, the clamshell-shaped eyes of Kota miniatures, and the adaptation of Mughal motifs, showcased the extraordinary depth of Rajasthani painting traditions. His exploration of now-lost murals, unpublished hunting scenes, and overlooked pictorial sources also underscored the urgent need for continued documentation and

preservation efforts. – **C.J.**

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

The Age of Illumination: Philosophical Thought from Late Antiquity to the Islamic Golden Age

Since its inception, the Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory (ACT) course at Jnanapravaha Mumbai has examined the history and relevance of philosophical thought, particularly the roles that philosophy can play in interpreting art and culture. And while every iteration of ACT has brought fresh perspectives into this historical study and the contemporary developments in aesthetic thought, in 2024, ACT took a radical new path into a philosophical world that has received little attention in wider discourse. This new approach began with the seemingly simple question – what happened in philosophy between Aristotle and Descartes, and why is the period of over a millennium and a half that separated these giants studied so little?

From August to December of 2024, the ACT course decisively focussed on this period, tracing the history of philosophy as it developed from the period known to historians as Late Antiquity in the 1st century CE through to the close of the 13th century – an era of remarkable advancements in science, art and culture that has come to be called the Islamic Golden Age. While philosophical thought as such took many directions within this vast period, the ACT course followed one thread as it wound its way through intellectual discourse – the complex dance of philosophy with theology that particularly captured the imaginations of thinkers in this period as they witnessed the emergence of two of the world's great religions, Christianity and Islam.

The series began with the figure of Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish Egyptian Platonist, contemporary of Jesus Christ and one of the earliest scholars in the Western tradition to attempt to reconcile Platonist thought with the revealed text of the Bible. Following Philo, the 3rd-century Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus's conceptualisation of *The One* – a being that is simple, perfect and unattainable – formed a critical

early pillar of the series. Whether this *One* could be equated to divinity and especially to monotheistic religion was a question that would be central to both philosophers and theologians for the next thousand years. While ancient Greek thought was thus being reshaped in the late Roman world, further east, in the Sassanian empire, a prophet-like figure called Mani emerged with a radical new philosophy, one that combined Zoroastrianism and Christianity with Judaism, Buddhism, and Jain thought to propose a complete restructuring of society. While Manichaeism – the fledgling religion that arose in the wake of Mani – grew to some prominence over the next few centuries before being crushed in the early decades of Islam, its syncretic philosophy displayed the deep influence of the intellectual and religious traditions of the Indian subcontinent on the intellectual developments of the time. A figure of particular interest in this period was Augustine of Hippo, known to later Christian theologians as Saint Augustine, and to modern historians as Augustine the African. Augustine's journey from Manichaeism to Christianity, chronicled in one of history's earliest written memoirs called *The Confessions*, was deeply significant to the development of Christian thought in its early period.

For religion to set its roots deep into the grounds of civilisation, it must employ the power of reason. As Islam rose in the 7th and 8th centuries, the Abbasid empire rose with it, and one of its most remarkable and lasting contributions to the history of thought was its patronage of a centuries-long translation movement of ancient Greek, Syriac, Sanskrit and Pahlavi texts into Arabic. The translation of the works of Plato and Aristotle in this period coincided with the rise of the *Kalam* movement in Islam, leading to a rich period of debate between theologians and philosophers. The next few centuries saw the rise of some of the greatest philosophers to have ever

lived, whose work fundamentally shaped Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and ushered in a period of scientific thinking that foresaw the European Renaissance. Beginning with the fascinating figure of al-Kindi, a philosopher, translator and mathematician who played a critical role in the translation movement in Baghdad, we traced the relevance of Aristotelian thought in the work of the philosopher al-Farabi and the Jewish legal scholar and leader Saadia Gaon in the 10th century, before confronting the colossal figure of Avicenna, or Ibn Sina, the Persian polymath who was arguably the single-most important philosopher in the Medieval world, and one who remains relevant to this day. Avicenna's reasoned proof of God is an innovative merging of Aristotelian logic and Plotinian Neo-Platonism alongside Islamic theology. Following Avicenna was yet another great Medieval thinker, the famous Averroes, or Ibn Rushd, who lived in Muslim Cordoba and challenged Avicenna while continuing to delicately marry Aristotelianism with Islam. The Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides, who lived in the last years of the Fatimid empire in Cairo – over a thousand years after Philo – too grappled with the place of philosophy and reason within a world shaped by religious ideologies that were regularly in conflict.

In a series such as this, tracing the movement of philosophical thought has also involved witnessing the rise and fall of the Roman, Byzantine, Sasanian and Abbasid empires. It has meant negotiating the journeys of thought as well as culture, as new religions emerged and grew. It has also involved comprehending the scale of the intellectual effort it took to accumulate and translate ancient texts to build the world's greatest libraries for the benefit of everyday people. This series has revealed that intellectual developments were facilitated not simply by brilliant scholarship but also by the arrival of radical new technologies of dissemination, like that of paper. While intellectual giants like Avicenna and Averroes are inescapable in such a journey, the series also paid special attention to the emergence and growth of alternative philosophies like Sufism. Ultimately, what was most striking was the syncretism of thought as it flowed across vast geographies and time – from the eastern edges of Persia, bordering the Indian subcontinent, through to Islamic Spain and Norman Sicily. Here, we left the series at the close

of another translation movement, that of Greek and Arabic texts to Latin, and their reception into the great monasteries of Europe. The heralding of the European Renaissance within decades of this endeavour is perhaps no real surprise and might have been unrecognisable without the figures we encountered in this series.



Ms. Adira Thekkuveettil

By intentionally looking outside the Classical and later European traditions of philosophy, this edition of the ACT course has opened a window into a remarkable world of debate and intellectual engagement that has reshaped how we understand the history of philosophy. The student response to this series has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are grateful to the Harish and Bina Shah Foundation for their generous support in bringing a global cohort of leading scholars across the disciplines of philosophy, theology and history together for this pioneering new direction for ACT. We look forward to bringing a new iteration of the ACT course very soon. – **A.T.**

PAST PROGRAMMES

Sufism: A Very Brief Introduction

October 22nd, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Alexander Knysh (Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Michigan, USA, and Director of an Islamic studies project at St. Petersburg State University)



Professor Alexander Knysh

In the lecture on Sufism, a very brief introduction by Professor Alexander Knysh led us to the world of ascetic mysticism within Islam. The ascetic mystical movement thrived in Baghdad, later to emanate its influences across the borders. Asceticism is renunciation of the world associated with mysticism. Yet, there are scholars against its resonance, who declare it to be distinctive. Traces of ascetic and mystical elements are found in many world traditions like Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism. The mystical elements are also present in Muslim scriptures like the *Quran*. They resemble Neo-Platonic Christian pre-Islamic mysticism. The famous 'Light Verse' of the *Quran* depicts God as an unfathomable light in a dark world, with people irresistibly attracted to that light. People become religious and embrace God as being light, while opposing darkness. This resembles the Zoroastrian idea of light and darkness, and the struggle of two gods. According

to this idea, there is a supreme god of light who is stronger, and a god of darkness who is similar to Satan. The *Quran* provides both pro-ascetic and mystical references or encouragement to lead an ascetic and mystical life with verses indicating that life in this world is also transient and one should focus on future life.

The Arabic word for 'Sufism' is most commonly derived from the word 'suf', meaning 'wool'. Historically, woollen garments symbolised humility, frugality and penitence in the Middle East during Late Antiquity, long before the advent of Islam. Figures such as Jesus and Cynics were noted for adorning woollen garments. The early monks in Egypt, Syria and Iraq adopted woollen attire as a mark of asceticism. After Islam's spread into these regions, local converts, influenced by these traditions, adopted similar woollen clothing, earning the designation 'sufiyya' or 'wool people.' By wearing woollen clothes, individuals signalled their commitment to an ascetic and mystical path of Islam. The 11th-century scholar and explorer of India, Al-Biruni, well-versed in Greek and having studied Sanskrit, offered an intriguing perspective on the origins of the term 'Sufism'. He suggested that Sufism might be derived from the Greek word 'sophia', meaning 'wisdom'.

Sufis define themselves by their goals and also set themselves apart from the rest of the Muslims through it. While many of their goals align with the broader objectives of Islam, seeking God's pleasure, Sufis take these pursuits to a heightened level. They strive not only to fulfil God's commands but also to exceed them by engaging in additional, non-canonical acts of piety. These acts, often referred to as supererogatory practices, include activities like night vigils, extended periods of prayer, or vows of silence. In Sufi thought, the human heart is regarded as the throne of God, a sacred space. However, this divine presence must be awakened through rites of purification and

an unwavering focus on God. Sufis emphasise the need for continuous spiritual awareness and devotion to maintain this connection. For most Muslims, however, such an intense level of focus is unattainable due to the practical realities of life. Responsibilities like providing for their families, managing daily affairs, and fulfilling worldly obligations make it physically, morally, and economically challenging to sustain constant attention to God, creating a nearly impossible standard for the average believer. Therefore, the earlier Sufis are not destitute, but rather, are merchants at the market space. Sufis believe they can achieve all their goals by rejecting material possessions, worldly pleasures, and by practising constant self-scrutiny and self-discipline by remembering God constantly, mortifying their flesh and taming their lower soul. Soul in Sufi literature is an arrestive donkey that should be beaten into submission through starving it of the rest of the world, therefore opening it to the outpouring of divine grace.

Later, Prof. Alexander Knysh went on to describe the founding fathers of Sufism. Hasan al-Basri is the founder of Sufism. His name, when translated, suggests 'hailing Basra city' in South Iraq, which is now the centre of Shii Islam. His parents were Zoroastrian and prisoners, but he was born a free man due to their parents' conversion to Islam. He spent considerable time in Arabia, where he studied the Prophet's practices, known as the *Sunnah* or customs of the Prophet. He began teaching the 'science of hearts and thoughts', emphasising the need for constant self-examination to uncover and address traces of hypocrisy. This introspection, he believed, would lead to acts that are genuinely sincere and selfless. In Basra, he gathered a circle of devoted followers who later dispersed to various regions like Iran, the Persian Gulf, Damascus, and possibly as far as Egypt. This circle became a focal point for the early ascetic and mystical movement. At that time, what would later be known as Sufism was not yet identified by that name; it was referred to as 'hard worship' or 'harsh worship', emphasising rigorous devotion and abstention. Several terms were used to describe practices of renunciation and self-denial; its Arabic translations are 'zugt' and 'tanask'.

Early mystical piety had female representatives, one of whom was Rabia, a member of an Arabic

tribe. The name 'Rabia' translates to 'fourth daughter'. Various accounts exist regarding her life; some suggest she was sold by her parents, while others claim she was a prostitute. Her owner eventually freed her after witnessing a halo surrounding her while she was praying. A poet and a deeply spiritual figure, Rabia emphasised devotion to God for His own sake rather than out of a desire for paradise or fear of hell. She is often depicted holding a torch in one hand, symbolising her wish to set fire to paradise, and a jug of water in the other, representing her intent to extinguish the flames. Her legacy was highly influential, and her poetry continued to resonate with female poets in Mamluk Egypt and Syria during the 15th and 16th centuries, prior to the Ottoman conquest.

Ascetic mysticism prevails in various forms within the Muslim community. One mystical ascetic practice is to renounce the world and refrain from greed, immorality, cruelty and so forth. This kind of piety is called 'anchorites piety', where hermits withdraw from the world. Urban middle-class individuals practiced a more moderate form of Sufism, avoiding extremism. They balanced their spiritual pursuits with their daily lives, maintaining family responsibilities and regular employment. The third group consists of warrior monks who demonstrate their piety through combat, defending the borders and fighting against external enemies.

An ascetic and mystical approach to life first emerged among *hadith* collectors, *Quran* reciters, and pious preachers. However, at a certain point, Sufis distanced themselves from *hadith* collectors, recognising that religion was turning into a profession, with *Quran* recitation becoming a means of income and a marker of social status. For true Sufis, faith could not be used as a source of livelihood.

Later, Professor Alexander Knysh talked about the emergence of Sufism in Baghdad. Initially, Damascus served as the centre of Sufism, as Baghdad was established later. However, by the mid-9th century CE, Baghdad, having been the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate since 762, became home to a distinct school of Sufism. This school eventually surpassed and absorbed other ascetic-mystical movements across the Caliphate's provinces. As the capital, Baghdad

attracted numerous entrepreneurs and skilled individuals, including Sufis, who produced many of their earliest works there and in the eastern regions of the Caliphate. This suggests that the Muslim West, apart from Egypt, was less influential in early Sufi developments. The key figures of the Baghdad school of Sufism include al-Harith, al-Muhasibi, Bishr al-Hafi, and al-Junaid. Al-Junaid, of Persian descent and a glassware merchant, successfully integrated his trade with a spiritual life. His writings centred on the fundamental Islamic principle of the Unity of God.

The Sufis of the Baghdad school embraced two main spiritual and social attitudes: sober and intoxicated. Al-Junaid, as the leader of the Baghdad Sufis, advocated for the sober path. In contrast, intoxicated Sufis, unable to restrain their emotions, displayed extreme and unconventional behaviour, with al-Shibli as a leading figure. Ultimately, sober mysticism prevailed over the intoxicated approach.

Sufis gradually developed the belief that certain individuals, repeatedly mentioned in the *Quran*, are friends of God, entrusted with divine protection. These friends of God act as custodians and transmitters of the inner, hidden dimensions of divine revelation, much like Shii or Ismaili imams, who interpret the deeper meanings of Muslim teachings for their followers. Ordinary Muslims attribute 'saintly miracles' to these figures, distinguishing them from prophetic miracles. The widespread reverence for saints enables them to play significant social, political, and educational roles.

The systematisation and classification of ascetic and mystical traditions occurred during the 10th and 11th centuries CE. Prominent Sufi teachers compiled manuals and textbooks that codified Sufi beliefs and practices, establishing a standardised model for Sufism to be followed by every master and disciple. While these writings allowed individuals to learn Sufism from books, Sufi leaders emphasised the importance of studying under an experienced teacher. In the Indian context, Sufi masters were referred to as '*gurus*', a term commonly used in Hindu traditions.

The Sufi tradition reached maturity under the guidance of Muhammad al-Ghazali, who undertook the task of integrating its spiritual and

practical dimensions with mainstream Sunni Islam. He viewed Sufism as a means to revitalise and strengthen Sunnism amid competition from rival schools of thought, particularly Shiism, Ismailism, and *falsafa*. Al-Ghazali's personal spiritual journey led him to champion Sufism as the ideal path for believers to serve God, avoid heresy, and attain both intellectual balance and spiritual tranquillity. Unlike the rationalist theology rooted in Greek philosophy, which he believed fostered doubt and unrest, Sufism, according to al-Ghazali, provided Muslims with the certainty necessary for inner peace in this life and ultimate salvation in the hereafter.

Over time, Sufi poetry became a favoured medium for expressing mystical experiences, with its literary contributions becoming part of the global spiritual heritage. Sufism also played a role in state-building. A defining feature of mystical poetry is its multiple layers of meaning, often employing allegories of erotic love and intoxication with wine. The aim is to spiritually awaken believers and redirect their thoughts toward God and the divine realm. For Sufis, this parallel, imagined universe is just as real as the physical world. Sufi verses are sometimes performed alongside musical instruments.

A pivotal shift in Sufism occurred with the institutionalisation of its organisational structure. Sufi training and communal life were built upon the close bond between a disciple and their master. Spiritual 'lineages' and 'pedigrees' became formalised within Sufi communities known as '*tariqa*' or '*tariqat*' (meaning 'way' or 'path' [to God]). What began as informal Sufi circles evolved into structured, hierarchical organisations, where lieutenants operated locally under the authority of the head.

In the 19th century, European writers and poets became captivated by the rich literary traditions of Sufism. Translations of Sufi poetry into European languages were enthusiastically received by artists and intellectuals, laying the foundation for Sufism's acceptance in Europe. Hazrat Inayat Khan, an Indian Muslim, introduced his interpretation of Eastern spirituality, paving the way for the emergence of Neo-Sufi associations in Western societies. In the West, Sufism, in its various forms, often functions as a 'New Age' religion, attracting intellectually refined, self-reflective individuals,

mainly artists and intellectuals, who have grown disillusioned with Western culture and are drawn to 'oriental wisdom'.

The professor concluded by emphasising that Sufism is highly complex, making it difficult to generalise its essence, role, and place in Muslim societies. While some Sufi groups have been politically active, others have deliberately avoided political involvement. The social and political engagement of Sufi communities is often pragmatic, largely influenced by the

personal inclinations of individual Sufi leaders. In the present day, many state authorities and Western politicians perceive Sufism as a more pacifist form of Islam, leading to state support and preferential treatment for Sufi institutions. Modern Sufis extensively use the internet and various communication technologies to spread their teachings and attract followers. Despite facing numerous critiques, Sufism continues to endure and spread spirituality around the world.
- **T.V.**

Al-Farabi - The Second Master

October 31st, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Nadja Germann (Professor of transcultural and Arabic philosophy at the University of Freiburg)



Professor Nadja Germann

The lecture provides historical context on Late Antiquity and introduces Abu Nasr al-Farabi, an early-10th-century thinker active in Baghdad, Damascus, and other locations. The central focus is on al-Farabi's social epistemology, which examines how knowledge ('ilm' in Arabic) is acquired. Primarily, this inquiry addresses an epistemological question, while secondarily, it relates to al-Farabi's views on anthropology, philosophy, and society. The lecturer explores

how al-Farabi's account of knowledge acquisition connects to broader philosophical and social concerns.

Al-Farabi's approach to the acquisition of knowledge is built upon several presuppositions. First, he addresses the 'why' – why is acquiring 'ilm' (knowledge) so crucial? According to him, it is essential because it serves as a prerequisite (*sine qua non*) for attaining happiness, particularly the ultimate happiness of the afterlife, which he sees as humanity's highest goal. Next is the 'what' – what does knowledge entail in al-Farabi's view, and what specific knowledge is required to achieve this happiness? Finally, there is the 'how' – how can one acquire knowledge, or what means and processes make this attainment possible?

In light of al-Farabi's anthropology, the question of knowledge acquisition is a central concern for him. He believes that everyone had the potential to attain the knowledge necessary for happiness. However, this poses a significant problem – since human intelligence varies, how can all individuals reach the same epistemic level without simplifying the concept of knowledge to a superficial degree? This question of *how* knowledge is acquired is at the heart of the lecture.

At the same time, due to al-Farabi's unique

approach, this inquiry leads to the issue of logic in his philosophy. Following the Aristotelian tradition, he viewed logic as the essential tool that enables one to move from the unknown to the known, facilitating understanding, discovery, and the acquisition of new knowledge. Thus, the professor explores two fundamental questions: what one needs to know in al-Farabi's philosophical framework, and how this knowledge is attained. It leads to exploring the ontology of knowledge, focussing on the *what* and *how* of knowledge acquisition. The core questions it addresses are: what knowledge is necessary to attain happiness, and how does one acquire it? This leads to an inquiry into the nature of logic – what exactly is logic in al-Farabi's framework?

The lecture situates al-Farabi's approach to logic within a broader historical context. The professor provides a brief introduction to the emergence of Islam in the 7th century and its rapid expansion, stretching from present-day Pakistan to the Iberian Peninsula through early Islamic conquests. This expansion facilitated cultural exchanges that shaped intellectual developments.

Philosophy in the Islamic world drew influences from Indian, Persian, Arabic, and Greek traditions, with a significant emphasis on *Corpus Aristotelicum*, the collected philosophical writings of Aristotle. This included the *Organon*, which comprised Aristotle's works on logic. These texts were translated during the late 9th and early 10th centuries, a formative period for the intellectual culture of the Islamic empire. Al-Farabi was well acquainted with Aristotle's works, which served as a foundational starting point for his own philosophical inquiries.

The *Organon* was taught in Alexandria as it extended beyond Aristotle's core logical works like *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, which were also considered part of logical discourse. Another key aspect discussed was the *theory of context* or *discourse theory*, which categorised different forms of reasoning and argumentation. This included: Posterior Analytics (*Burhan*) – Demonstration, Topics (*Jadal*) – Dialectics, Rhetoric (*Iqna*) – Persuasion, Poetics (*Takhyil*) – Make-belief. Each of these followed specific logical rules, though *Poetics* had a loose structure compared to the others. It relied on metaphor and figurative language to present arguments in a more indirect

and imaginative manner.

Al-Farabi was, on one hand, a committed Aristotelian, teaching at the Aristotelian school in Baghdad and producing commentaries, paraphrases, and interpretations of Aristotle's works. However, in some of his writings, he goes beyond this framework, developing an anthropological and social theory of knowledge. Today, this non-Aristotelian aspect of his scholarship is often overlooked, as he is typically presented as a committed Aristotelian thinker.

For instance, his work *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*Ihsa al-Ulum*) has traditionally been interpreted within a conservative Aristotelian framework. In its second chapter, dedicated to logic, al-Farabi provides a conventional definition, describing logic as a *toolkit* – a set of structured rules ('*qawanin*' in Arabic) that function as an intellectual instrument. He defines the art of logic as a discipline that provides rules designed to ensure correct reasoning and lead to truth, particularly in areas where errors in reasoning are possible. These rules serve three key functions: 1. They correct reasoning to prevent mistakes. 2. They safeguard against errors that might arise in logical thinking. 3. They allow for reviewing reasoning processes where certainty is lacking, especially when errors have already been committed. This approach highlights al-Farabi's emphasis on *applied* logic rather than purely theoretical logic. He also identifies the objects of logic as thoughts themselves, considering how expressions denote them and, conversely, how expressions function in relation to objects of thought.

One key aspect of al-Farabi's unique approach to logic is his emphasis on the relationship between logic and language, particularly through analogy. He draws a parallel between logic and grammar, a comparison he makes on multiple occasions, both within and beyond *Enumeration of the Sciences*. In *Enumeration of the Sciences*, al-Farabi defends the necessity of logic for acquiring knowledge. He argues that dismissing logic as unnecessary is similar to rejecting grammar. He presents a hypothetical case: denying the need for logic on the grounds that some individuals possess an innate ability to always reach the truth (*al-haqq*) without formal logical training is comparable to claiming that grammar is unnecessary because some people never make linguistic errors

despite lacking formal grammatical knowledge. Through this analogy, al-Farabi underscores the indispensable role of logic, just as grammar is essential for ensuring linguistic accuracy, even if a few individuals might intuitively master it.

The professor then explored the linguistic tradition, emphasising the importance of understanding the historical development of Arabic linguistics. The Arabic linguistic tradition likely predates the translation movement, with its foundations laid in the 8th century by Sibawayhi, who is regarded as its founding figure. This tradition involved the systematic collection of linguistic data, which contributed to the formation of standard grammatical rules.

A central myth within this tradition was the idea that the Bedouins possessed an innate and flawless command of Arabic. Linguists of the time believed that, before the formal invention of grammar in the 9th century, the Bedouins spoke perfect Arabic, not because they had learned structured grammatical rules, but because they had an exceptionally refined natural intuition. Their inherent linguistic ability allowed them to construct grammatically correct sentences effortlessly. As a result, scholars considered the Bedouins as authoritative sources for linguistic correctness.

Abu Uthman al-Jahiz, a key figure in the Arabic rhetorical tradition known as *adab*, contributed significantly to the development and theories of language. In his philosophical reflections, he explored why Arabic, with its highly structured grammar and extensive vocabulary, was particularly distinguished. Central to his linguistic theory was the concept of *bayan*, which emphasises clarity, transparency, and eloquence in expression.

The argument of *Enumeration of the Sciences* emphasises the necessity of logic by drawing an analogy to grammar. Just as some claim grammar is unnecessary because certain individuals, like the Bedouins, may speak flawlessly without formal grammatical knowledge, others argue that logic is redundant since a person with an exceptional natural disposition (*qariha*) could always arrive at the truth without formal logical training. However, just as grammar is essential for most people to use language effectively, logic is

necessary for clear reasoning.

This analogy introduces the idea of *qariha*, as discussed by al-Farabi, which can be exceptionally strong but is rare. In grammar, Bedouins exemplify this natural linguistic ability, but the question arises: who holds this role in logic? By extending the parallel, the prophets emerge as the Bedouins of logic. Al-Farabi, in his writings on cosmology and social philosophy, positions Aristotle as a 'prophet of logic'. Aristotle not only perfected logical reasoning but also provided the *Organon*, a comprehensive toolkit that enables the study of logic from its foundations to its most advanced forms.

The second analogy draws a parallel between grammar and logic. In linguistics, Bedouins, who speak flawlessly, serve as models for linguistic correctness, and grammar was developed based on their speech. Applying this to logic, the reasoning of prophets — such as Aristotle, becomes the model for correct thinking. This implies an implicit norm of reasoning: attaining the truth (*al-haqq*). Just as Bedouins serve as the standard for grammar, logical prophets like Aristotle serve as models for correct reasoning.

A third point emphasises that grammar, as presented in the linguistic tradition, is not an innate faculty but a constructed discipline, a system of rules derived from an ideal form of language. Similarly, logic is not merely a natural way of thinking; rather, it is a discipline based on structured rules, formulated from an ideal model of reasoning. While prophets may possess natural reasoning abilities, logic as a field is systematically developed. Furthermore, the concept of these models extends beyond reasoning processes to include a cosmological dimension, shaping broader philosophical inquiries.

Towards logic, the understanding of logic is framed as an artificial instrument, a structured system derived from a set of rules. The model for this system is perfect reasoning. The discussion focusses on reasoning not as any general form of thinking but specifically as a means of acquiring knowledge and attaining truth, particularly within the realm of scientific inquiry. Logic is thus concerned with thoughts directed toward the pursuit of true knowledge.

This process consists of two key components.

First, it involves constituent elements such as concepts, which serve as the fundamental units or intangible content of thought. Second, it includes mental operations that facilitate understanding. These operations are divided into two categories: the first involves cognitive processes that guide comprehension, while the second pertains to belief – forming a mental stance in which one affirms something as true and another as false based on reasonable understanding.

These two mental operations correspond to the concepts of *tasawwur* (conceptualisation or understanding) and *tasdiq* (assent or belief), which are foundational to Arabic and Islamic philosophical traditions. In particular, al-Farabi emphasises their importance, and in later traditions, they become central topics in *madrasas* (institutions of higher learning), where logic and epistemology are structured around them. According to al-Farabi, *tasawwur* refers to the process of understanding or conceptualising something, while *tasdiq* is the subsequent mental act of believing or asserting its truth. He considers these purely mental processes, acts and attitudes rather than their resulting products. Furthermore, these processes can be applied in teaching as part of discourse theory, making them essential tools in both logic and pedagogy.

This mental framework is ultimately rooted in extra-mental reality, the domain of scientific knowledge which exists beyond mere imagination or fiction. It represents the fundamental elements of thought and their ontological structure, allowing for an understanding of causal dependency. Similarly, language is also grounded in extra-mental reality. However, within the linguistic tradition, language is seen as corresponding directly to this reality because God created the world through language.

In contrast, al-Farabi argues that language is grounded in extra-mental reality as it was understood by the original inventors of language. Through the processes of *tasawwur* (conceptualisation) and *tasdiq* (assent), these inventors, who were essentially prophets, formed the foundation of human culture. They coined names and linguistic expressions based on their understanding of reality at the time. For al-Farabi, language is thus a representation of extra-mental reality, shaped by the perception and reasoning

of its inventors. It functions as an 'image of an image', where the accuracy of the representation depends on the quality of human reasoning and comprehension.

This leads to a crucial question: what guarantees the truth of thoughts and the possibility of scientific knowledge? Here, the cosmological dimension becomes significant. There must be an additional factor that enables human beings to correctly discern the correspondence between thought and reality, ensuring the validity of knowledge and reasoning.

Some key aspects of al-Farabi's approach stand out. First, he views knowledge (*ilm*) as a coherent body that is fundamentally a social product. This applies to both theoretical and applied sciences, as he asserts that the development of science and knowledge is impossible without social cooperation.

Another essential point is that knowledge presupposes language; language is the only medium through which human beings can integrate knowledge into human existence. Moreover, knowledge is finite. Following Aristotle, al-Farabi argues that the ontological structure of the world has already been uncovered, and the corresponding logical language has been established. This means that knowledge is not an open-ended pursuit; there is no undiscovered knowledge waiting to be found. Instead, science functions as a social practice centred on the transmission of established knowledge.

Language plays a twofold role. First, it emerged in the formative period of human history, coinciding with the development of arts and sciences. This period involved both the invention of language and its initial dissemination; a task attributed to the prophets. Secondly, language's role in the formative period is tied to discovery and transmission. Prophets, in their capacity as discoverers, not only attained knowledge but also communicated it to their contemporaries. This transmission often took the form of poetic discourse, which served as a method for establishing religious foundations.

In concluding the discussion, the professor emphasises that happiness depends on understanding the fundamental elements and

ontological structure of reality, including its causal dependencies. This knowledge can be acquired through various methods, demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, or poetic, each shaped by

specific social contexts. However, regardless of the method, the careful use of language remains a *sine qua non* for acquiring and transmitting knowledge. – **T.V.**

Averroes - Metaphysics and a Response to Avicenna

November 19th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Jon McGinnis (Professor of Classical and Medieval Philosophy at the University of Missouri, St. Louis)



It is a rare phenomenon in our ACT courses to have a single scholar lead us through three consecutive lectures. Our last lecture with Professor Jon McGinnis was on the 12th-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd, and it laid down the foundations of one of the critical periods of philosophical thought in the Islamic Golden Age, along with Professor McGinnis's earlier lectures on Ibn Sina. These two iconic thinkers were well known and well read, both in their time as well as for centuries after their deaths, and in the case of Ibn Rushd, or Averroes as he was known in the Latin west, his work became the most important philosophical commentary on Aristotle for any scholar engaged in intellectual thought in Europe until the Enlightenment.

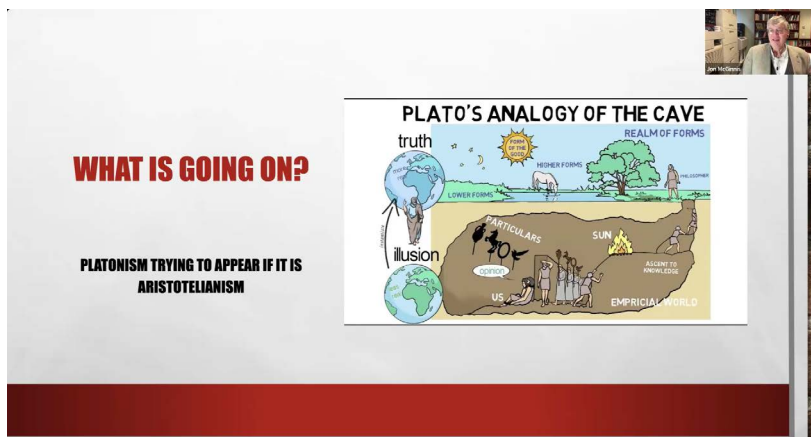
While Ibn Rushd's commentary and interpretations on Aristotle are in themselves immensely rich and worthy of its own lectures, for the purposes of our course on the movement of philosophical thought, Professor McGinnis focussed his talk on Ibn Rushd's intellectual disputes with the philosophical giant who had come before him and changed the course of thought in the Islamic world – Ibn Sina. The talk covered three primary issues of disagreement

that Ibn Rushd had with the work of Ibn Sina, that of the nature of the intellect, on the accidentality of existence, and the subject of the science of metaphysics.

On the nature of the intellect, Ibn Rushd differed quite significantly from Ibn Sina, and to adequately understand this difference, we returned to Aristotle, first via Ibn Sina. Prevailing interpretations of Aristotle's *De Anima*, his work on the soul, understood the soul as being both a form – in the sense of the formal cause from his theory of cause, as well as a completeness, or perfection. Ibn Sina was not particularly fond of Aristotle's definition of the soul as a form, as it tied the soul to the body, meaning that the soul's existence was relative to the body. Ibn Sina preferred to think of the soul as pure perfection, able to exist outside and without the body, as he demonstrated using his most famous thought experiment, that of the floating man. In the simplest terms, the experiment goes as follows – imagine God creating a perfectly complete, fully conscious adult floating in a void. This being cannot feel anything, cannot see, cannot touch and cannot even know if it has a body. In such a situation, could this being know anything? According to Ibn Sina, even in such a deprived state, this being would know two things – one, it would know itself (self-awareness), and two, know itself as an existing thing. And for Ibn Sina, this self-awareness is the locus for all subsequent experiences. Ibn Sina goes on to provide proof for his thought experiment where he shows that this existence is both immaterial and incorruptible. In essence, Ibn Sina subscribes to the notion of substance dualism, wherein humans are

composed of two parts, one being the immaterial 'true' self (also theorised as the potential intellect or a part of the soul) and the other being the material body which the self uses as a tool.

For Ibn Sina, the soul itself is only partly constituted of the potential intellect, which is our capacity to grasp the intelligible forms, while another part, the active intellect, a transcendent entity, is what is ultimately responsible for illuminating the potential intellect with the forms, thereby facilitating human knowledge. This theorisation is, of course, remarkably Platonist, although by combining the Platonic idea of the forms into the intellect – which according to Ibn Sina is tied to the body and therefore is not eternal or separate from the body – Ibn Sina manages to avoid the label of Platonism.



And this aspect of Ibn Sina's philosophy is where Ibn Rushd demonstrates his first disagreement. Ibn Rushd's own notion of the potential and active intellects were different to Ibn Sina's, in that for him, the potential intellect was not a partial component of the soul, but rather an immaterial thing in itself that was accessed by the human as they came into being. Ironically, although Ibn Rushd claimed to be an Aristotelian through and through, this idea was even more Platonist than that of Ibn Sina's in that it more closely resembled Plato's theory of emanation. But interestingly, as Professor McGinnis explained, the clear yet unacknowledged presence of Neo-Platonism within the intellectual world of the time wasn't an anomaly or a deception. Rather, the translations of Greek thought that were accessible to philosophers in the Islamic world were often filtered through the work of the Neo-Platonist intellectuals of Late Antiquity, and were being read as Aristotelian thought by and large, even when they were at odds with other works of Aristotle. Thus, Ibn Rushd's disagreement

with Ibn Sina is interesting not only for the philosophical argument it makes, but also for how it leads us back to Plato through a reasoning with Aristotelianism.

Ibn Rushd's second point of disagreement with Ibn Sina was on his opposition to his predecessor's idea of the accidentality of existence. Ibn Sina was supposedly of the view that existence is accidental to an essence, which is to say that existence was an (accidental) addition to the essence of a thing, and not an inherent part of the thing itself. This made no sense to Ibn Rushd, who, following Aristotle, reasoned that if existence is an accident of essence, then essence would be a subject of existence. In Aristotle's metaphysics, essence is understood as the 'thing in itself', while a subject is a qualifier to this thing.

For example, a human is a thing in itself, while 'Adira' is its qualifying subject, meaning that 'human' exists beyond, and even precedes 'Adira'. By this logic then, essence too must exist prior to existing itself to work with Ibn Sina's reasoning. But for Ibn Rushd, a thing cannot exist prior to existing, and thus essence cannot be a subject of existence. Thus, it would be impossible for existence to be an accident of essence. However, as Professor McGinnis pointed out, there

is no actual evidence that Ibn Sina claimed that existence is accidental. So why did Ibn Rushd believe this? A clue to this could be found in language and translation once again. According to Professor McGinnis, Ibn Rushd's reading of Ibn Sina, especially on this question, was largely via al-Ghazali, who had interpreted Ibn Sina's more nuanced reading of essence and existence through the language of Kalam, for it to be more accessible to Islamic theologians. Ibn Rushd could have used al-Ghazali's interpretation to read Ibn Sina in Aristotelian terms, leading to such an absurd position. What is also interesting is that it is likely that Ibn Rushd, who himself would have been well-enough versed in both Kalam and Aristotelian metaphysics to see through this translation error, chose instead to stay with this inaccurate reading, somewhat unfairly. The legacy of this misinterpretation carried on for centuries, particularly in the Latin west, where philosophers like Thomas Aquinas were largely reading Ibn Sina via Ibn Rushd, and whose views of Ibn Sina's metaphysics were distinctly coloured

by these misinterpretations of language as well as philosophy.

IBN RUSHD AGAINST THE ACCIDENTALITY OF EXISTENCE

1. IF EXISTENCE IS AN ACCIDENT OF ESSENCE, THEN ESSENCE IS A SUBJECT OF EXISTENCE
2. IF X IS A SUBJECT OF AN ACCIDENT, X MUST EXIST PRIOR TO THE ACCIDENT
3. THUS, ESSENCE MUST EXIST PRIOR TO EXISTING
4. A THING DOES NOT EXIST PRIOR TO ITS EXISTING
5. THUS, ESSENCE CANNOT BE A SUBJECT OF EXISTENCE
6. THUS, EXISTENCE CANNOT BE AN ACCIDENT OF AN ESSENCE



metaphysics as studying the existence as existence itself – containing both material as well as immaterial existence, while for Ibn Rushd, metaphysics could only deal with the immaterial, as all material existence was already being studied by the other sciences.

Ibn Sina's reasoning for arguing that metaphysics must be the study of existence as itself without concern for its materiality went back to the basic principles of Aristotelian science. If a science assumes the existence of its subject, then there must be a general science of the principles of the other

The third and final disagreement that Professor McGinnis discussed was on the subject of the science of metaphysics, which in many ways was an argument between two different readings of Aristotle rather than Ibn Sina versus Ibn Rushd. It is also a debate that arises from the way that Aristotle's work came through time to these thinkers. Aristotle's philosophy of science largely comes to us from a series of lecture notes that his students and others compiled. Known as the *Posterior Analytics*, these notes are confusing and often incomprehensible, and across the millennia and a half since Aristotle delivered his lectures, they have been interpreted, arranged, rearranged and translated in innumerable different ways. In the Islamic world, they were compiled in a collection called 'The Book of Letters', which Ibn Sina decided to reorder to make it more meaningful to his own understanding of the logic of Aristotle's thought. Ibn Rushd, however, did not consider these lecture notes to be a mess, and believed that they were perfectly in keeping with Aristotle's foundational logic, and that *Posterior Analytics* did not require any rearranging to be more meaningful. The other issue within Aristotle's categorisation of the sciences was about the science of metaphysics. For Aristotle, every science assumed the existence of its subject and was not under obligation to prove its subject's existence. For example, arithmetic studied numbers but did not need to prove that numbers exist. The sciences too were divided into the practical and the theoretical, with metaphysics falling in the category of a theoretical science that dealt with 'things insofar as they are not associated with matter and motion'. But here arose the debate, with Ibn Sina interpreting

sciences, otherwise the assumptions of the sciences will be on shaky ground. Ibn Sina believed that metaphysics was this general principle. Another critical aspect of metaphysics for Ibn Sina was the importance of metaphysics for theology. For Ibn Sina, there needed to be a science that proved the existence of God, i.e., there had to be an efficient cause of existence itself. This aspect of Ibn Sina's thought was covered in detail in our last session with Professor McGinnis on Ibn Sina's proof for the existence of God. (Do read our last *Quarterly* for a report on that lecture). For Ibn Rushd, however, metaphysics being general science was an unnecessary bloating of its logic. Aristotle had already covered all material existence within the other sciences, and had also proved the existence of God through his concept of the Unmoved Mover.

Through his lecture on Ibn Rushd's main disagreements with Ibn Sina, we also got a glimpse of Ibn Rushd's desire to read Aristotle more accurately, rather than interpret him to suit the purposes of the philosophies of his time. Accuracy, however, was not a guarantee, as was evident in the ways in which what was said to be Aristotle was often already adulterated by the work of other thinkers long before it reached Ibn Rushd. Despite this, Ibn Rushd's commentaries on Aristotle went on to be canonical texts for generations of philosophers, particularly in the Latin west, where he would achieve a fame far surpassing Ibn Sina for many centuries, until Ibn Sina once again emerged into prominence. – **A.T.**

Moses Maimonides: Why Does a Medieval Rationalist Matter?

November 26th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. James A. Diamond (The Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Waterloo)



Maimonides in Cordoba

One of the most interesting aspects of curating and moderating a series like 'The Age of Illumination' has been our engagement with thinkers from three major religious schools of thought in the Medieval world. The series began with the Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria, who lived in the 1st century CE, and through its course, we traced the emergence of both Christianity and Islam through philosophical and theological debate. After fourteen lectures that dealt with a millennium of advancements in intellectual thought, this lecture saw our return to the Jewish world, a very different one to what Philo would have lived in, and yet, one where it was still possible to trace a straight line from Philo's own work to that of the figure we looked at in this lecture – Moses Maimonides.

In what was a deeply revealing talk, Professor James Diamond led us through an intellectual biography of Maimonides that highlighted the volatile political and religious landscapes within which his scholarly work was produced. While he was born in Cordoba, Spain in 1138, and was a close contemporary of the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes), he spent his early years moving to more tolerant cities, first Morocco, before eventually settling in Fustat, a city adjacent to the newly developing Fatimid capital of Cairo. Here, Maimonides found a more tolerant and cosmopolitan atmosphere, and quickly rose to high-ranking positions in the Fatimid court. Incredibly, verifiable evidence of Maimonides's life, including autographed papers as well as letters and other documents have survived to the

modern day, thanks to the miraculous discovery of the Cairo Genizah collection, a collection of over 400,000 fragments of Jewish manuscripts and Fatimid administrative documents that had lain forgotten in a Cairo synagogue, to be rediscovered only in the late 19th century.

Returning to Maimonides himself, Professor Diamond emphasised that what made Maimonides such a revolutionary figure in the Jewish tradition was his dual importance as a rabbi as well as a philosopher. Until Maimonides, Judaism didn't really have a solidified credo like the Catechism of Christianity or the Shahada of Islam. Rather, Judaism was structured loosely around a series of oral and written laws as encompassed in the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*. Over the course of centuries since Antiquity, the Jewish Rabbinical tradition had formulated and debated tractates that covered various aspects of tradition, laws of daily life, rules of marriage, property, and so on in great detail, but also in confusing and often contradicting terms. For Maimonides, being a rationalist thinker in addition to being a rabbi, the lack of a defined credo of faith could not be ignored, and in what was his greatest contribution to Judaism, he set about formulating a set of thirteen core principles of the Jewish faith. But this was not all, for Maimonides also revolutionised the Jewish legal code, by organising the over seven thousand pages worth of laws and codes that had been formulated over the millennia into a structured legal code, known to us as the *Mishnah Torah*. This legal code has, since Maimonides, become canon law in Judaism, continuing to be followed and studied to this day.

While his formulation of a Jewish credo and his institutionalisation of a reliable legal code had already solidified Maimonides as a revolutionary figure in history, it was his work as a philosopher that made him a much-discussed figure in intellectual circles far beyond the Jewish world. His philosophical treatise, wonderfully titled '*The Guide of the Perplexed*', is a fascinating work that tackles the difficulty of squaring reason with

deep belief. Although written initially as a private letter to a student of his, the text was later made available by Maimonides to a wider public. Meant for those who, while religious, were unwilling to blindly accept religious teachings when it contradicted reason and logic, the book led its readers through a path in which their own intellect could still lead them to God.

As Professor Diamond highlighted, Maimonides was essentially dealing with an existential question within this work. And his method for resolving it was innovative in that he basically created a 'how to' guide for reading a religious text as a rational believer. Within his guide, he put together a helpful lexicon of terms from the *Bible* that could be confusing, one such example of which was the term 'see', as in God could see the deeds of humans. Of course, Maimonides acknowledges that God cannot literally see, as there is no anthropomorphic God in the Jewish tradition, but that here the term 'see' means he is perceiving, as in God is an intellect, a thinking being, which is a very Aristotelian reading.



Professor James A. Diamond

While helpful in these aspects, Maimonides's guide does also have its own puzzles within the text that generations of scholars have since debated, trying to arrive at singular opinions on what Maimonides really meant/himself believed. A prominent example of such a puzzle is on the question of creation within the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. On the one hand, Maimonides seemed to be a believer of the concept of *Creatio ex Nihilo*, the idea that God created the world out of nothing, and yet, there is also evidence that here too he was of the Aristotelian bent of mind, which proposed an eternal universe with no beginning or end. Another problem arises on the question of

prophecy. If we go by Maimonides's lexicon which stresses not to take God's anthropomorphism literally, then prophecies also become difficult to justify. Also, why would there be a need for prophecies if God is not a reactive being, but pure, unchanging thought itself? Ultimately, we arrive at a paradoxical portrayal of God within Maimonides's worldview, where God is seemingly both fully, and not at all, a person. And this too, is argued by scholars to be an intentional effort on the part of Maimonides, who purposely wrote in a contradictory fashion so that his text could be read by both an exoteric as well as an esoteric public, where the latter could interpret his more philosophical positions while the former could still find his text to be useful as a guide.

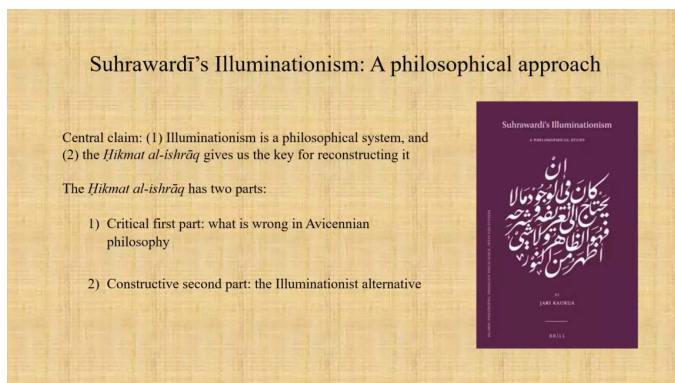
But why write such a controversial and seemingly dangerous text, especially when he lived in a world where people lived and died by religion? And here, Maimonides himself gives us his reasoning, as he says, "When I have a difficult subject before me – when I find the road narrow, and can see no other way of teaching a well-established truth except by pleasing one intelligent man and displeasing ten thousand fools – I prefer to address myself to the one man, and to take no notice whatever of the condemnation of the multitude; I prefer to extricate that intelligent man from his embarrassment and show him the cause of his perplexity, so that he may attain perfection and be at peace."

Perhaps what stood out for us most from Maimonides's life and work was his insistence on reaching out to the intellectually curious, who very often are perplexed and frustrated by blind belief. Despite this text being almost a thousand years old, Maimonides's dilemma remains a very contemporary issue, one that to this day causes controversy, and is even dangerous in many of the societies we inhabit. And in that way, Maimonides is a thinker who remains relevant despite his work primarily being addressed to Jewish intellectuals in the 12th century. – **A.T.**

Suhrawardi's Illuminationsim

December 6th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Jari Kaukua (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä)

The twelfth century was a period of intense intellectual engagement in the long tradition of Islamic philosophical thought, and Professor Jari Kaukua's lecture in the series 'The Age of Illumination' sheds light on the ensuing discourse through the enigmatic figure of Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, also known as Shaykh al-Ishraq (the Master of Illumination). Professor Jari Kaukua teaches philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä and has written the book *Suhrawardi's Illuminationism: A Philosophical Study*.



Suhrawardi was born in the present-day Iranian city of Sohrevard around 1154 CE. His early education involved studying Peripatetic thought, particularly Avicenna's philosophy, Neo-Platonism and *falasifa* of later philosophers who wrote in Arabic. He developed a deep interest in mysticism. After completing his education, Suhrawardi travelled extensively through Syria and Anatolia, encountering Sufi masters who influenced his mystical inclination. In 1183 CE, he came to live in Aleppo, where he gathered several devoted disciples, including the prince-governor son of Saladin, the conqueror of Aleppo from the Fatimid empire. Suhrawardi wrote several mystical and philosophical treatises, including *al-Talwihat* (Intimations), *al-Muqawamat* (Oppositions), and *al-Mashari wa al-Mutarahat* (Paths and Havens). His main exposition of ideas is presented in *Hikmat al-ishraq* (The Philosophy of Illumination), which was the primary reference for the lecture.

In the lecture, Kaukua discussed the foundational aspects of Suhrawardi's philosophy and

metaphysics, including his critical appraisal of Avicenna's philosophy. Suhrawardi is greatly indebted to Avicennian concepts, but his Illuminationism departs from them to develop a theory of 'presential' knowledge in *Hikmat al-ishraq* that goes beyond the Avicennian model. He proposes a new synthesis incorporating Platonic and Neo-Platonic notions and elements from mystical knowledge systems, which he believed were transferred through a chain of transmitters who possessed 'true' ancient knowledge. Suhrawardi structures the *Hikmat al-ishraq* into two parts to explain the reasoning behind his intuitive alternative. The first part of the *Hikmat al-ishraq* is a critique of Avicenna's metaphysics, while the second presents the illuminist approach, venturing into philosophical theology, cosmology, and other issues. Suhrawardi clarifies this approach in the introduction by positing that there are two ways of practising philosophy – a discursive method based on analysis and proof of conclusion (as followed by the Peripatetic thinkers), and another based on intuition (*dhawq*) and as a master philosopher, he uses both methods.

In the first part of the *Hikmat al-ishraq*, Suhrawardi challenges the Peripatetic concept of real definition, which is fundamental for knowledge formation according to Avicenna. Kaukua explains that in the Avicennian theory, definitions correspond to real constituents and constitutive relations in obtaining metaphysical essences. He elucidates with an Avicennian example. If the definition of 'human beings are rational animals' holds, then humanity would mean being constituted of the two metaphysical blocks of animality and rationality. Suhrawardi thinks a real definition of 'animality' (or rationality) cannot exist without referring to a specific animal. He rejects the Peripatetic concept that essences are *a priori* and real, and sees them as mere mental constructs. For Suhrawardi, real definitions or essences are epistemically problematic and impossible to access, and he is critical of Avicenna's Hylomorphism.

Platonic Forms (or Lords of Species)

Forms are the functional equivalent of Avicennian essences: grounds of


- 1) the synchronic identity of individual substances
- 2) the similarities between individuals of the same species

Forms are pure lights relatively low on the scale of emanation

Differences between Forms are due to their being unique combinations of emanations from higher lights

Causally constituted, but the contributions of the causes are inseparable in the effect

Forms are simple, and Suhrawardi avoids the problems due to the constitutive parts of essences



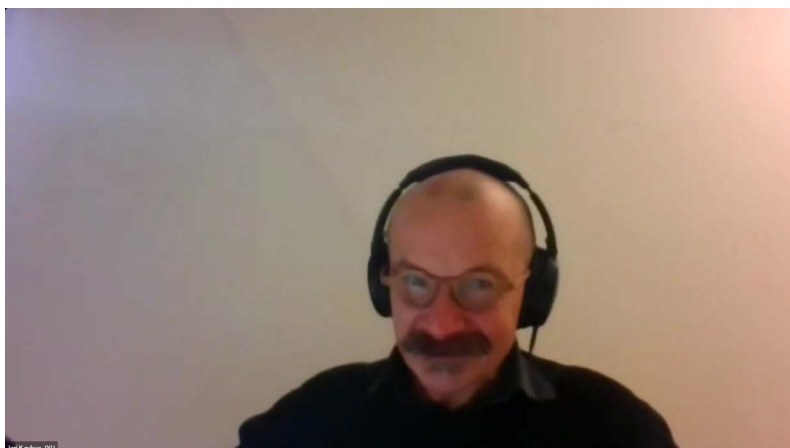
Suhrawardi describes his new hypothesis in the second part of *Hikmat al-ishraq* using an ontology of lights (*nur*) and their manifestation (*zuhur*). He begins with the axiom that the foundation of all metaphysical inquiry is an awareness of the self. He identifies this notion of self-awareness with light and likens self-awareness to incorporeal pure light that governs all metaphysical principles. He then introduces the second foundational concept: being conditioned or unconditioned. Using the Avicennian principle of sufficient reason, he argues that an unconditioned source is necessary for conditioned principles and the only absolute, unconditioned principle is the 'light of lights' (*Nur-al-Anwar* or the divine light). The multiplicity of reality witnessed in the world results from conditioned and unconditioned lights emerging from that One principle. Every pure light starting from the One goes forth through a series of emanations having two activities – intrinsic activity (appearance to self) and a corresponding extrinsic activity (appearance in another or to another). From the start, there is a multiplicity of intrinsic activity: the first emanation is aware of itself as distinct from the One yet being necessitated by it and dependent on it. The multiplicity increases exponentially as we progress in the series of emanations until we have an arena of innumerable lights. However, the

full details of the manifestation of emanations are inaccessible to humans, according to Suhrawardi.

Suhrawardi further alters the Avicennian emanation framework by introducing Platonic forms as the functional equivalent of Avicennian essences. To him, Platonic forms result from a distinct combination of emanations, which are relatively low on the scale of emanation. He uses the property of physical light to illustrate that Platonic forms do not have an internal structure like the Avicennian concept of a real constitution of essences but are degrees of light. This approach makes Suhrawardi's philosophy monist as he solely uses the principle of light to define the nature of all metaphysical principles.

The lecture highlighted how different academics interpret Suhrawardi's Illuminationism – whether they view him more as a mystic or a philosopher. According to Kaukua, Henry Corbin's translation of Suhrawardi's works and his portrayal of him as a mystical thinker has significantly influenced scholarship on Suhrawardi. However, recent studies challenge the Corbinian view and emphasise Suhrawardi's close relation with the Avicennian system despite his critiques. So, what are the possibilities for expanding the debate around Suhrawardi's works beyond the Avicennian and Western philosophical paradigms? Kaukua posits that there are many intriguing aspects of Illuminationism and how Suhrawardi engages with his predecessors and contemporaries, but understanding his work in a broader context requires further research.

Today, Suhrawardi is remembered as Shaykh al-Maqtul (the Murdered Master), as his popularity unnerved the establishment, and he was executed. – **U.M.**

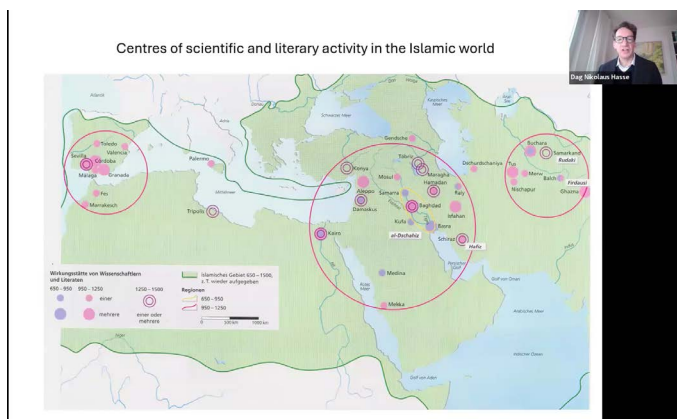


Professor Jari Kaukua

The Arabic-Latin Translation Movement and its influence in Latin Christian Europe (11th–16th centuries CE)

December 10th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Dag Nikolaus Hasse (Professor of the History of Philosophy at the University of Würzburg)

The last lecture of 'The Age of Illumination' series was delivered by Professor Dag Nikolaus Hasse, Professor of History of Philosophy at the University of Würzburg. His talk, although short, was sweeping in its scope. It looked at the historical backdrop, the philosophical underpinnings and the aesthetic surroundings within which the second significant translation movement of the period – where seminal Arabic texts as well as Greek and Syriac texts were translated into Latin. This translation movement, although not as vast in scope as the Greek-Arabic translation movement of the 8th–10th centuries, is still of immense significance to the history of intellectual thought, as it was through the transmission of scientific and philosophical achievements of the Arab world into Latin that the first seeds of the European Renaissance were sown.



Professor Hasse began his talk via a brief historical and geographical tour that took us from Sasanian Persia in the late 7th century into the burgeoning Islamic empires of the 7th–10th centuries. Here, we revisited the important translation centres of Gondishapur and Baghdad which we had focused on earlier in the series, to situate us as we came into the 11th century. Here, the next phase of translation took us closer to continental Europe via Toledo in southern Spain and Palermo in southern Italy. Toledo was of special significance, given that southern Spain had close to a thousand-year period of predominantly Muslim rule.

Professor Hasse first focused our attention to

the translator Gerard of Cremona, credited with at least seventy translations from Arabic into Latin, of texts ranging from philosophy, astronomy, mathematics and medicine to alchemy and divination. Moving from Italy to Toledo in the mid-12th century, Gerard of Cremona's own life is testament to the rich cultural and intellectual traditions that drew people from across the Mediterranean world, the Arab lands as well as Europe to Toledo, which had only been in Christian control since 1085, barely decades before the arrival of intellectuals like Gerard. As testified by his companions, Gerard "...came to Toledo, where he noticed the richness of books in Arabic in all disciplines and, distraught about the poverty of Latin books in these areas that he was very aware of, learned Arabic because of his desire to translate."¹

What was especially fascinating about Professor Hasse's talk was his highlighting that 'translation' is not merely the movement of texts from one language to another but also could be seen in almost every facet of culture at the time. From the melding of Roman, Latin Christian and Islamic styles in the architecture of prominent buildings such as the incredible mosque complex of Cordoba, to the legacy of our continued use of Arabic names in Latin translations for most stars and constellations, including Altair and Vega. The remnants of Arabic in star names are an interesting example of translation because they don't arise from textual translation but from the prominent use of Islamic astrolabes (both in Arabic and in later Latin versions) across the Medieval world. Another prominent method of cultural melding was trade, and here we see more examples of translation using both military power as well as the movements of goods and merchants. A word like 'admiral' comes to us from the Arabic word 'emir', 'magazine' comes from the

¹ Latin translated by Dag Nikolaus Hasse from: Charles Burnett, The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century, in *Science in Context* 12(2001), 249-288, here 275-276.

Arabic '*makhzan*', meaning 'storehouse', which in turn comes from '*khazana*', meaning 'to store'.

Trade not only facilitated the movement of riches but also lifestyles, and we see more evidence of how the Latin west adopted aspects of the luxuries they witnessed in the Arab world and North Africa. Commonly used English words like 'mattress' and 'sofa' both originate in Arabic, as well as the notion of the 'carafe', a wide-bottomed jar used for wine and water. The tradition of drinking coffee, an inescapable part of modern life, also comes from North Africa via the Red Sea through Yemen around this time, through a trading port known as Mocha on the Red Sea, a name and the memory of a route that has now forever been enshrined in our imagination.

The Book of Games of King Alfonso X of Castile, 13th century
(MS Escorial 1282)



A game that many of us know to have Indian routes, chess, also travels into the Latin west through Persian and Arab trade in this time. *The Book of Games* of King Alfonso X of Castile shows a beautifully illustrated game of chess being played between a Muslim man and his Christian opponent. Of course, of the exports from the Indian subcontinent into the Muslim and later Latin Christian world, none is more important than the concepts of Indian mathematics. While the Arabic numerals that are used across the world today themselves were influenced by Indian numerals, it was Indian arithmetic techniques that proved to be revolutionary for Arabic mathematicians. A fascinating example of the further transmission of Indian mathematics from

Arabic into Latin could be seen in the translation of the famous Arabic book by the Baghdad scholar Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, written in the mid-9th century: *al-Kitab al-mukhtasar fi hisab al-jabr wa-l-muqabala* (*The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing*) which was translated into Latin in the 12th century by Gerard of Cremona as '*Liber Maumeti filii Moysi Alchoarismi de Algebra et Almuchabala*'. It is from the name '*al-khwarizmi*' that we get the word 'algorithm', and from '*al-jabr*' that we get 'algebra'. The very concept of balancing and completion is essentially what modern equations rely on, a fundamental aspect of all mathematics.

Medicine was another area where the transmission of knowledge across cultures was essential. The hospitals in the Islamic world at the time were of a standard unseen anywhere else in the world, and invading European crusaders were so impressed by the neatness and organisation of Islamic hospitals that they took the idea with them back to Europe and thus laid the foundations of modern medicine in the European context. Alongside hospitals, the idea of the pharmacy, or the apothecary too came to Europe through the Islamic world, where the revolutionary use of sugar as a preservative, learnt from Islamic medicine, was imitated widely. Medical treatises were widely translated, particularly Avicenna (Ibn Sina)'s *The Canon of Medicine* (*Qanun dar Teb*) and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi's encyclopedia of medicine, *Kitab al-Hawi*. In fact, such was the demand for these texts that they were the bestsellers from western China to the Atlantic until the emergence of modern medicine in the 16th century.

In the translation of philosophy, Professor Hasse focussed on the Andalusian polymath Averroes (Ibn Rushd), whose intellectual contributions we had already dealt with in the series (see a report on the Averroes lecture earlier in this *Quarterly*). Professor Hasse focussed on Averroes's vast commentaries on Aristotle whose translations were widespread in Europe within decades of Averroes's own passing in 1198 CE. Prominent translators, including Michael Scot, William of Luna and Theodore of Antioch, all considered Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle to be canon text, resulting in their use as foundational texts in European universities in the centuries before the Renaissance. The Persian scholar Avicenna (Ibn

Aristotle, *Opera*, manuscript Venice 1483
(New York, Pierpont Morgan Library 21194/95)
depicting Averroes („the commentator“) and Aristotle



Sina), whose medical work was already in wide circulation in Europe, also found avid readers for his philosophical work, most famously in Thomas Aquinas, who adopts many of Avicenna's most important treatises, including his treatise on the necessary existence of God as well as his famous proof of God, which he learnt via the Jewish thinker Maimonides, also a figure discussed in detail earlier in this series.

Books by Averroes, for example, saw 114 reprints, Avicenna's saw 78 reprints among many Arabic works in healthy circulation through the European Renaissance. This shows us that to imagine Europe as a monolith without the influence of the Islamic world in its art, architecture, philosophy, science, medicine and nearly every other aspect of life is a failure not just of the imagination but also of reason. - **A.T.**

Creolisation, India, and the Indian Ocean World: The Case of Goa

December 11th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Ananya Jahanara Kabir (Professor of English Literature at King's College London)

What is creolisation? And why is it a term that is still valuable today? In her in-person public lecture at Jnanapravaha in December, titled 'Creolisation, India and the Indian Ocean World: The Case of Goa', Professor Ananya Jahanara Kabir sought to provide some illuminating ways of answering these questions. The talk began with the term 'creolisation'. According to Professor Kabir, creolisation is a theory that helps us to understand exchange, innovation, transformation, resistance, as well as materiality, embodiment and strategic memory work, that have historically or are continuing to take place *under duress*, between groups who wouldn't have normally come together were it not for specific conditions. But why use a term like creolisation

when other terms like hybridity, syncretism and transculturation have also been extensively used in academic discourse to describe a similar process? Professor Kabir emphasised that her decision to use creolisation came from an acknowledgement of the word Creole, a word that arose in a very particular historical context.

Etymologically, the word Creole is linked to the Latin verb *creare*, which means 'to be born' or 'to create'. By the 16th century, Portuguese, Spanish as well as French began seeing the common usage of words like Crioulo, Criollo and Creole respectively, until moving into English as Creole. But what did the word mean? Basically, by the 16th century, the European colonial project had begun



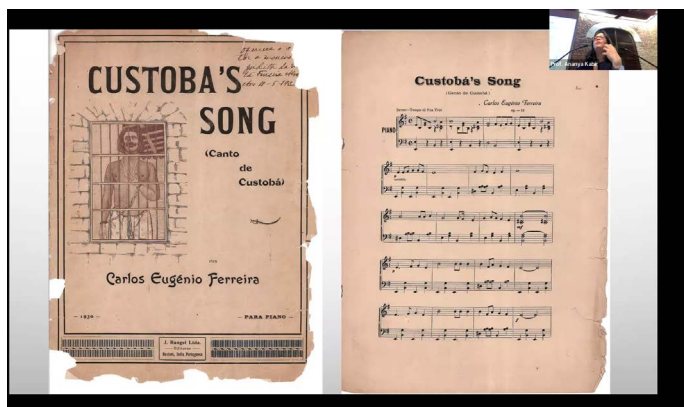
Professor Ananya Jahanara Kabir

in full swing, and European colonial and trading settlements had begun to come up along both the Atlantic as well as the Indian ocean worlds. Many of these settlements, particularly in the Atlantic, were run using the labour of enslaved Africans and that of the local populations. And as time went on, the settlements were further populated by the children of local and European alliances. It is well known that these children and the communities that grew from them are who came to be known as Creole. But the word quickly grew to have wider connotations as the new worlds these communities built also became Creole, including the new languages that grew, the new food, the new modes of dress, culture and modes of living that arose from the mingling of cultures, despite the often violent as well as extractive situations within which they emerged.

The next stage in the development of the word Creole emerged in the 19th century with schools of thought such as philology and linguistics, when language itself became a focus of a new scientific way of thinking about human creation. And so, the word Creole moved beyond being a label to a technical idea wherein a particular class of languages were called Creole. As we moved closer into the 20th century, the idea of being Creole also took on new political connotations. People understood that being Creole was both, something of a disadvantage as well as a badge of resistance. Thus, in many contexts, particularly in the French Caribbean, emerge manifestos of Creole-ness, where Creole is used as a framework to think about identity. Although by the mid-1990s, Homi Bhabha's term 'hybridity' – which also deals with the mixing of cultures within a colonial context – took on more academic weight within cultural studies. Professor Kabir argued that Creole remains a distinct and different framework which we can use, given that it is both

a linguistic term as well as an identity in itself that has a known history.

To emphasise this point further, Professor Kabir looked at the example of Goa, a state in the western peninsular Indian coast that had been a Portuguese colony for over 400 years, and whose language and culture are distinctly Creolised. We noticed the mixture of Portuguese words along with Indo-Persian, Sanskrit and local Konkani words in the language and in the style of the Goan musical dance form, the Mando, as well as in the connections between Goan Sao Joao (St. John) feast festivities in Goa and in the far-away Atlantic site of Cape Verde through the various examples we were presented. These made it evident that the creolisation Professor Kabir highlighted was not only locally infused but also global in how it manifested across contexts where cultures encountered a common force, in this case the Portuguese colonial empire.



In the final segment of her talk, Professor Kabir zoomed further into a specific example of what she called a 'Creolised cultural product' from Goa, that has gone through many different phases of incorporation into contemporary India, such that most Indians no longer think of it as Creolised anymore. We first heard the famous Bollywood song, *Na Mangu Sona Chandi* from the hit 1973-movie *Bobby*. Following this, we learned that "the general message of this song and its chorus comes from a famous Goan song called the *Dekni*", literally meaning 'Song of the Deccan'. However, the origin of the *Dekni* itself has an interesting history. First composed in 1926 (in print) by Indo-Portuguese composer Carlos Ferreira, the *Dekni* imagines a Hindu dancing girl, but is composed and meant to be danced in the style of a Konkani ballet. A dance meant to capture a localised 'native' imagination of coastal culture that is to be danced in a European style

reveals many layers of Creolisation within a single form. To end her lecture, Professor Kabir showed us a project where she attempted to reimagine a Creolised polka version of the *Dekni* with her colleague from Lisbon, the dancer Francesca Negro, to create a fusion of old and new forms of dance as well as Creolisation.

While Professor Kabir's lecture was astute and her points were well articulated, this writer was left at the end of the talk still considering the nuances of the differences between a term like creolisation and other terms like hybridity, transculturation

and even syncretism. Could we really draw a distinction for creolisation that separates it from other forms of cultural mixing? Is colonisation the major form of distinction for creolisation, and if not, how is it distinguished? India has had a long history of cultural intermixing, from Arabic and Persian influences to the colonial and beyond, but could the languages and identities produced by these other blends be Creole? The talk, while informative in many ways, did not seem to answer these more basic questions, and thus, the term remains somewhat vague, especially when applied within a broader context. - **A.T.**

Announcements

UNSEEING THE OBJECT

SUMAKSHI SINGH

April 19th, 2025 | Lecture: 5:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Free Online Public Lecture on ZOOM | Register: www.jp-india.org



Afterlife, 2022
Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Australia

Singh's immersive installations are invitations into worlds of shifting perceptions, fracturing illusions, slower rhythms of time and fluid figure-ground relationships, to explore the bases of how we assign attention, construct meaning and perceive our realities within and without. Our everyday 'givens' are questioned as her work dissolves familiar forms and intimate memories into insubstantial mirages using perspective, eroding surfaces or using gossamer, web-like skins of thread and lace. Join us, as Singh walks us through 23 years of her interdisciplinary, creative practice

- discussing the roles of accidents, inspiration, site, history, personal memory and metaphysics in making visual art.



Sumakshi Singh is an artist and an educator who taught at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and lectured at Oxford University, Columbia University among other museums and colleges. Her work has been presented in gallery and museum exhibitions in Australia, India, UK, China, USA, Canada, France, Italy, Serbia and Switzerland. Exhibition venues include *The Gallery of Modern Art: Queensland*, *Saatchi Gallery: London*, *Kochi Biennale: Kochi*, *Museum of Contemporary Art: Lyon*, *MAXXI Museum: Rome*, *The Mattress Factory Museum of Contemporary Art: Pittsburgh*, *Museum of Contemporary Art: Chicago*, *Kiran Nadar Museum of Art and (KNMA): India*. She has mentored residencies for the Victoria and Albert Museum, TheWhyNotPlace 2010 and 2011, and was a visiting artist advisor at KHOJ Delhi. Singh received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting, Drawing and Art History from MSU (Maharaja Sayajirao University), Baroda, India, in 2001 and her BFA in Painting and Drawing from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL in 2003. She is the recipient of several awards, including the Asia Arts Future Game Changer award by the Asia Society in 2022 and the YFLO award in 2019.

CONJURING EMPIRE: ART, FAITH AND POWER IN THE BYZANTINE WORLD

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July 14th – September 23rd, 2025 | Mainly Tuesdays | Lecture: 6:30 – 8:30 pm IST

FEE: Rs. 15,000 | Online Platform: Zoom | Register: www.jp-india.org



Byzantine Martyr
10th century, ceramic with glaze, Walters Art Museum

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The Byzantine empire stands as one of history's most enduring and influential civilisations, and has long been imagined as bridging a critical gap between the Classical world and the Medieval era. In this ten-part lecture series, we journey through the art and culture of a society marked by continual political turbulence and transformation as it fashioned itself into one of the most powerful and yet enigmatic empires in history. The series examines the lasting legacy of Classical Greece and Rome on Byzantine culture, as well as early Christianity and Islam's role in shaping its art, architecture, politics and society. The significance of events such as the Iconoclasm debates of the 8th-9th centuries and their impact on Byzantine material culture is also examined. Although it is one of history's longest continuous empires, the Byzantine empire is also remarkably little understood, and this series pays special attention to the Byzantine world conjured itself – from when it first established itself as a centre of power away from Rome, through the fifteen hundred years of its existence, and the long afterlife of Byzantium in the global imagination.

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

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July 2025 – April 2026 | Typically Saturdays, 1:30 – 5:30 pm IST | Hybrid Mode: Physical & Online* | Platform: Zoom



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 pre-modern, modern, and contemporary forms as well as popular traditions, to illuminate aesthetic trajectories in the subcontinent. 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.

Indra with vajra, Outer wall, Bajramath temple, Gyaspur, Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh. Photo credit: Jaya Kanoria

For admission, you are required to submit:

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Fee structure:

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For registration, click here: www.jp-india.org.

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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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