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## General Introduction

‘The study of another culture must not be like the analysis and description of a piece of stone, but like listening in to a conversation.’ – F. Hardy

### Thinking research, delineating periods

This book brings together a revised selection of the papers given at the 12th International Conference on Early Modern Literatures in North India (ICEMLNI) held at the University of Lausanne in the summer of 2015. As such, it continues the series of proceedings previously named *Bhakti in Current Research* (1982–2006) now referred to as *Current Research on Early Modern Literatures in North India* (since 2013). We speak of early modern in the sense adopted by the editors of the previous volume (*Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India*, 2018, see Introduction, p. xxvii–xxix), as a period with distinct and specific characteristics.

Scholarship on the early modern period has emerged as one of the most astonishing fields of research in recent years. Research interests have expanded to include as a characteristic the increasing complexity of circulation, mobility, and transcultural fertilization, responding to the notion of ‘connected histories’ coined by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and others. Larger projects, such as Sheldon Pollock’s *Literary Cultures in History*, invite us to connect specific and specialized research situated in the period to larger pictures of the literary and intellectual histories of India in a dynamic and interactive process. Looking even briefly at the historiography of research in the field reveals many drastic changes over the years, some of which have turned out to be very productive and stimulating.

This volume, like the previous ones, is testimony to research conducted in a field best seen as a mosaic of cultures and languages. Between the ancient world and modern idioms, the early modern creates research perspectives by looking back at Sanskrit and previous literatures and constructing comparative issues, as well as looking forward into modern literary productions. This is, of course, not to introduce a mere historical development, since literatures relate past and pre-

sent in more intricate ways than linear development.<sup>1</sup> The research in the field has expanded to include more investigations into connected histories, especially, but not only, with Islamicate cultures. The expansion of the field's horizons, and the inclusion of new questions that go with that, account for the growing interest in the period and demand more collaboration among specialists.<sup>2</sup>

Bhakti, manuscript search, editing, and philology were among the keywords of the early publications of the research group (starting in 1979). Over the decades since, others have been added through inquiries related to the mobility, translational, and visual turns as new horizons of investigation have been defined and shaped at the level of epistemology and methodology. These inquiries demand that approaches are adjusted to correspond with the expansion of the field.

Since the mobility turn, the attention paid to connected histories and the circulation of cultures has provoked a shift of perception from more static views, more defined corpuses, to views that emphasize exchange and cultural flows. However, overprivileging questions of exchange and fluidity may, by going to another extreme, lead to a simplified picture; we view the continuous tension between dynamic processes and the more 'stable' elements as the texture of culture to be studied. Ideological constructs may hide the essentially composite character of the period under investigation. New research questions, maybe outside well-known boundaries inherited from previous scholarship and knowledge constructions, can emerge if the material is studied without the blinkers of pre-established categories. The necessity to transcend boundaries can be seen by those works that illustrate features of early modern India thus far ascribed only to Western modernity; for example, questions of individuality and authorship (Agrawal 2009) and the question of the public sphere and critical debates (Novetzke 2018).

To take account of the perspective of cultural circulation as a new paradigm through which to read this period of history results from the need to acknowledge the many different strands at work in the making of this period. This has led recent scholarship to address more interdisciplinary questions, and to pursue new research that reflects upon questions of translation (Part III of this volume) or on various intersemiotic transpositions (Part I).

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1 See Bayard (2009).

2 See Subrahmanyam (1997), (2004), (2014); Pollock (2003); Bertrand (2013); De Bruijn and Busch (2014); Orsini (2014); Williams (2018).

## Shaping a book

The book is divided into five parts, some of which are briefly introduced (Parts I, II, and III) in order to highlight a particular approach or to underline strands and methods. In spite of the fact that there is not an introduction to each section, we have maintained the divisions as they guide the reader to access with greater ease the various contributions. Parts IV and V take up issues and themes that can be related to other parts and introductions. We do not sum up here the various contributions; readers are referred instead to the introductions to the parts and the abstracts (with keywords) provided for each contribution at the beginning of each chapter.

Part I groups articles by John S. Hawley, Heidi Pauwels, and Raman Sinha, who analyze through different case studies how literary texts and visual media (miniature paintings, sculptures, TV series, etc.) interact on a same object and in which ways this interaction provides meaning for our understanding of a tradition. In the introduction to this part, Nadia Cattoni in ‘How to Think Pictures, How to Visualize texts’ articulates the need to problematize the relation between textuality and visuality and to discuss recent scholarship reflecting on the relation between image and text. The inclusion of visual material is one of the major changes of research as reflected in the Early Modern North Indian Literature Series, connecting textual production with a list of inquiries to textocentric approaches, which calls for elaborate and innovative methodological tools. What new stories do paintings tell that are maybe not in the text and how do paintings and texts relate to one another? What is their relative independence and specific history? Approaches from other disciplines may aid discussion about the intricate and complex relationship between image and text and their respective roles, however necessary, for our understanding of early modern India.

Part II deals with examples linked to Persian culture, explicated in papers by Arthur Dudley and Marc Tiefenauer. In the preparation for the conference in 2015, emphasis was placed on the exchanges of various Islamicate cultures and the interferences with other traditions. During the conference, several papers showed how Islamicate culture was an integral part of the period, be it from political, historical, literary, or philological perspectives.<sup>3</sup> However, only two papers were retained for this publication. Allison Busch in ‘Reflections on Culture and

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<sup>3</sup> Blain Auer, ‘From the Mufarriḥ al-qulūb to the Akhlāq-i Hindī: Translation and the Literary Life of Wisdom in the *Hitopadeśa*’; Usman Hamid, ‘Making a Gift Suitable: Rhetorical Strategies in ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī’s *Risālah-i Nūrīyah-i Sulṭānīyah*’; Michal Hasson, ‘Laila’s Lotus Eyes: The Love Story of Laila and Majnun in *Dakani*’; Simon Leese, ‘Imagining India and the canon of Arabic poetry in al-Yamanī al-Shirwānī’s *Ḥadīqat al-afraḥli-izālat al-atrāḥ*’; Daniel Majchrowicz, ‘Imagining the Deccan in Early Urdu Poetry’; Shankar Nair, ‘Domesticating the Gods and Goddesses? Early Modern Muslim Strategies for Rendering the Hindu “Devas” in Persian Literature’. Abstracts for each paper are available

Circulation in Early Modern India' says a few words to introduce and situate the papers according to wider questions at stake, related to multilingualism and its consequences.

Part III comprises papers related to the Nāth and the Sant traditions by Imre Bangha, Minyu Zhang, Galina Rousseva-Sokolova, Susanne Kempe-Weber, Monika Horstmann, Daniel Gold. Maya Burger, in 'On the Nāth and Sant Traditions: Transmission, Yoga and Translationality', tackles questions related to translation, to yoga and its changes during the period, to modes of transmission and the mechanics to access authority. The important scholarship made over decades on the figure or traditions surrounding Kabīr bears fruits by allowing now for interpretations and recontextualization over time. Who is the perfect yogi? How to translate and explain the use of *rasa* in Kabīr? How are doctrines shared, used or opposed? How are followers shaped? Such questions are part of this more systematic introduction.

The papers forming Part IV by John E. Cort and Tillo Detige might well have been included in Part III since they discuss similar topics. But because they are both related to the Digambara Jaina tradition, they form their own unity, dealing with questions of the representation of authoritative and venerated figures such as the guru and the *bhaṭṭāraka*, as well as textual interrelation.

The book closes in Part V with two papers discussing circulation and exchanges through two specific examples. One, by Hiroko Nagasaki, analyzes the metre of the poetry of Tulsīdās, the illustrious poet also discussed in Part I, showing how diversity makes uniqueness; the second, by Anne Murphy, is related to the Sikh tradition and context, and discusses the place of Punjabi in the broader literary production of early modern India.

We are very thankful to the contributors, as well as to the reviewers who have invited the scholars to rethink parts of their work. Each contributor is, however, responsible for the content of their work and their methodological choices. The fact that the papers here form a book gives the impression of a 'concluded' process. Let us remember the provisional nature of the contributions. Since its inception, the Current Research on Early Modern Literatures in North India Series presents work in progress and this volume reflects and retains this characteristic. In spite of its book format, we wish to see this publication also as a forum of discussion. This was one of the reasons the editors opted for open access, as a format adequate to present scholarly work. Through open access this volume is made easily available around the world and facilitates knowledge-building as a dynamic process leading to new questions, links, and rethinking. However, the shape of the

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under the relevant menu at <<https://www.unil.ch/slas/fr/home/menuinst/recherche/asie-du-sud/colloques-et-conferences/icemlni.html>>. (Accessed 6 November 2018).

book has also been retained, primarily to document the history of the studies in the field and the building blocks of epistemological inquiries.

This edited volume is the fruit of a multicultural group of scholars with different academic habitus and backgrounds. We have accepted the individual characteristics of each paper, having tried to harmonize them through the editing process wherever possible. However, the content, the transliteration, and transcription of each paper remains the responsibility of its author. All the contributions have undergone a double review process, but the authors decided to which degree they accepted the comments and gave their final shape to their contribution.

While looking at the forty years of scholarship provided by this research group in the shape of the volumes in the series, we notice the expanding variety of subjects and approaches. We hope that this continues and that scholars from *around* the world with their own epistemological horizons may *freely* look into this period and bring forward their contributions and inquiries to shed new light on it.

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