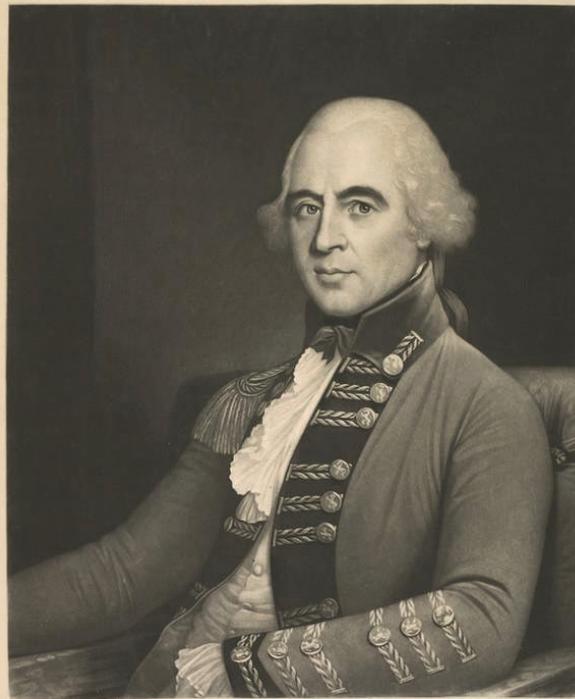


# John MacGregor Murray (1745-1822): Persianate and Indic Cultures in British South Asia



SIR JOHN MACGREGOR MURRAY, OF LANRICK CASTLE, BARONET.



10.00 | Introduction: Fabrizio Speziale - Jean Arzoumanov

**SESSION 1: PERSIAN TEXTS IN THE BRITISH COLONIAL ENVIRONMENT OF SOUTH ASIA**

Chairman: Pascal Buresi (EHESS)

10.15 | CARL ERNST (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill): Anglo-Persian Texts and the Colonial Understanding of religion

10.45 | FABRIZIO SPEZIALE (EHESS): Colonial Readers of Indo-Persian Scientific Texts

11.15 | Discussant: Ines G. Županov (CNRS - CEIAS)

11.30 | General Discussion

11.40 Coffee Break

**SESSION 2: JOHN MACGREGOR MURRAY AND THE PRESERVATION OF INDIAN AND SCOTTISH HERITAGE**

Chairman: Cécile Vidal (EHESS)

12.00 | ANNE-JULIE ETTER (Université de Cergy-Pontoise): John Macgregor Murray and the preservation of Indian architectural heritage: the case of the Taj Mahal

12.30 | KAREN MCAULEY (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow): Bagpipes, Ossian, Gaelic and Tartan: Sir John MacGregor Murray as a Mediator of Highland Culture

13.00 | Discussant: Alessandro Stanziani (EHESS)

13.15 | General Discussion

13.25 - 15.15 Lunch Break

**SESSION 3: JOHN MACGREGOR MURRAY AS A COMMISSIONER OF INDO-PERSIAN TEXTS : THREE CASE STUDIES**

Chairman: Ogura Satoshi (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

15.15 | JEAN ARZOUMANOV (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3): Atmaram and the emergence of Anglo-Persian ethnography: the *Ḍaḥīra al-fī'ād*, an account of Hindu festivals, castes and sects

15.45 | PARISA GANJI (EHESS): *Risāla-yi zirā'at*, an agrarian treatise on Bengal

16.15 | THIBAUT D'HUBERT (The University of Chicago): *Mahjūr al-waṭan*: Notes on Persian and the British Experience of North India

16.45 | Discussant: Bernard Heyberger (EHESS)

17.00 | General Discussion

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Perso-Indica Workshop**

Organized by Fabrizio Speziale and Jean Arzoumanov

**Tuesday May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

Centre Alexandre Koyré - 27 rue Damesme, 75013 Paris  
Metro station: Maison Blanche, Line 7



**Perso-INDICA**  
An Analytical Survey of Persian Works  
on Indian Learned Traditions



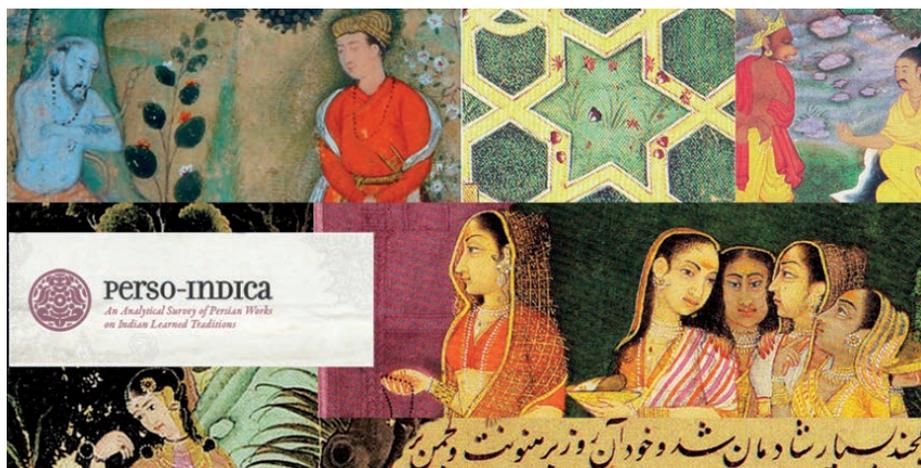
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Centre for South Asian studies

# John MacGregor Murray (1745-1822):

## Persianate and Indic Cultures in British South Asia

This workshop proposes to examine European engagement with Persian language and textual culture in South Asia. In Mughal India (1526-1857) and in the Princely States emerging with the decline of Mughal central power, Persian language established itself as a lingua franca used by a large number of Muslim and Hindu literati, as well as by European adventurers and officials. During this period, Persian emerged as an important idiom for the expression and reception of Hindu knowledge and traditions. Persian was the official language of the Mughal government and remained so under the British rule until the late 1830s, and even until the last decades of the century in some Princely States. During the colonial period, British officials commissioned a considerable number of Persian works dealing with Indian religions, sciences, history and society. These studies and translations composed by Hindu and Muslim scholars and secretaries (*munshi*) played a key role in early British understanding of South Asian cultural and natural environment. However, these texts have never been perceived as a coherent corpus by researchers. Some of these texts were translated into English and contributed to the emergence of the field of Indian studies and Orientalism. The texts and the translations produced for the British appear chiefly over an eighty-year period, going roughly from the 1770s until the 1850s. These texts were written for members of the British administration, such as Warren Hastings, Governor-General of Bengal (1772-1785). They were also compiled for other Europeans, such as the French General Claude Martin (d. 1800), who served in the East India Company and under the Nawab of Lucknow.

This workshop will look at an emblematic and little-known figure, that of John MacGregor Murray (1745-1822). Born into a Scottish military family, John MacGregor Murray was educated in Scottish Law at Edinburgh University. Unable to make a living as a lawyer, John MacGregor Murray turned to India and obtained a commission as a cadet in the Bengal Army in 1770. He rose steadily through the ranks of the Bengal establishment until being named colonel and was conferred a baronetcy in 1795 as a reward for his service before leaving India in 1797. In the meantime, he had succeeded his father as head of the MacGregor clan. John MacGregor Murray was an avid commissioner and collector of Persian literature. From the late 1770s onwards, he gathered a vast collection of manuscripts, many of which were original texts. These manuscripts, mostly held at the Berliner Staatsbibliothek, have drawn very little attention but are exceptional in their span. Compiled by Hindu and Muslim *munshis*, they deal with matters such as Indian religions, customs, law, botany, medicine, agronomy, etc. These texts were based on written and oral sources in vernacular languages and Persian. Most strikingly, John MacGregor Murray was able to assemble a collection of Persian volumes dealing with the religion, law and ethnography of Buddhist Arakan, a region nowadays divided between Myanmar and Bangladesh. While in India he developed a keen interest for the Gaelic and Scottish historical and cultural heritage and was active in the foundation of the Highland Society of Scotland at Edinburgh in 1784. Standing on the threshold of different cultures, he was described by a contemporary as “a Highland Chieftain elevated by Oriental ideas”.



<http://www.perso-indica.net/>

**Carl Ernst** (*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*)

### **Anglo-Persian texts and the colonial understanding of religion**

The British conquest of India included a period (1750-1832) marked by a demand for explanations of the religions of India, leading to the commissioning of a number of original writings on this subject in Persian. Unlike the original works on Hinduism by Hindu authors, the “Anglo-Persian” writings were more explicitly shaped by European concepts of religion. This lecture will examine two Persian texts on Indian religions commissioned by British colonial officials, which H. H. Wilson used as sources for his *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus* (1828-32). The analysis will highlight the impact of European concepts of religion on the emerging notion of Hinduism.

**Fabrizio Speziale** (*EHESS, CEIAS*)

### **Colonial Readers of Indo-Persian Scientific Texts**

Historians of sciences have generally perceived the European scholars’ use of Muslim languages as a phenomenon limited to the Medieval period when Greco-Arabic scientific sources were translated into Latin. The translation of Paracelsus’ (d. 1541) ideas has often been considered the main innovation that circulates in post-medieval Arabic and Persian medical texts, while the contacts between European scholars and Persian scientific culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is frequently seen as an asymmetric interaction characterized by the Persian translation of modern scientific texts for the *Dar al-funūn* (1851), the Polytechnic school of Tehran. This paper attempts to re-examine this issue by looking at the interactions of the Colonial milieu with the Persianate and Hindu scientific cultures of South Asia, and by analyzing the hybrid forms of scientific studies that emerged from these contacts. I will look especially at the Persian scientific works which were written and translated for the Colonial elite before the establishment of the British Raj (1858), and at the uses and adaptations of these texts in the colonial environment. The first English translations of classical Sanskrit scientific works such as the *Bījagaṇita* (on arithmetic) and the *Śālihotra* (on the horse and its treatment) were not made from the Sanskrit text, but from their Persian translations dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, the Persian texts written for the Europeans dealt also with the medical and scientific learning of Muslim scholars. The medical texts produced for John MacGregor Murray (d.1822) are emblematic in this regard. He commissioned the translation into Persian of Arakanese medical texts. Moreover, at his request ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Buḥārī Qalandar wrote the *Tašrīḥ al-ašjār* (1792), a Persian dictionary (*farhang*) of drugs and foods that has been illustrated with over a hundred colored illustrations.

**Anne-Julie Etter** (*Université de Cergy-Pontoise*)

### **John Macgregor Murray and the preservation of Indian architectural heritage: the case of the Taj Mahal**

This communication deals with John Macgregor Murray’s concern with what is today called Indian architectural heritage, and more particularly with one edifice that was in his time already considered one of its greatest specimens: the Taj Mahal. In the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he meant to draw attention to the neglected state of the famous Mughal mausoleum and to promote its preservation. He turned to Benoît de Boigne, who commanded the army of Mahadji Shinde, to induce the Maratha ruler to adopt effective measures of protection, and he linked this endeavor to the fate of the Mughal dynasty. The exchanges between Murray and the French general reflect the political history of the subcontinent at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and notably the relationships between the Mughal Empire, the Maratha Confederation and the East India Company. They can also be considered part of the history of preservation of Indian monuments, in so far as they put forward arguments which permeated the way East India Company’s authorities handled Mughal remains in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Karen E. McAulay** (*Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow*)

### **Bagpipes, Ossian, Gaelic and Tartan: Sir John MacGregor Murray as a Mediator of Highland Culture**

Sir John MacGregor Murray of Lanrick Castle is perhaps primarily known by Scottish music historians as the man who brought Joseph Macdonald’s *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* back to his brother Patrick a few years after Joseph’s death. However, this act of transmitting a work about Highland culture was, in fact, just one instance of the Highland chieftain’s involvement in facilitating the artistic output of his native country. A founder member of the Highland Society of Scotland, we find him traversing the Highlands in pursuit of James Macpherson’s *Ossian* poetry, assisting song-collector Alexander Campbell in planning his own itinerary in the Highlands and Western Isles, and helping establish a piping competition in Edinburgh – to name but a few of the projects in which he was involved.

In this regard, Sir John can be regarded as one of a number of individuals who played such a mediatory role in the collecting and publication of Scottish music. Those who transcribed tunes, translated or wrote lyrics, compiled anthologies and wrote contextual notes owed a debt of obligation to these individuals, who might not have played an active role as editors or performers, but certainly 'oiled the wheels' for them.

In this paper, I shall outline Sir John's significant role in facilitating the codifying and promotion of Highland culture, which embraced literary endeavours every bit as much, if not more than in music; and I shall introduce some of the other individuals who were to play a similar role in Scottish song-collecting during the Georgian and Victorian eras.

**Jean Arzoumanov** (*Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3*)

### **Atmaram and the emergence of Anglo-Persian ethnography: the *Daḥīra al-fu'ād*, an account of Hindu festivals, castes and sects**

In the last decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Hindu literati, often from scribal castes, started to engage with Indo-Persian literature and historical writing, and began to expand its scope. Atmaram, a Hindu revenue officer who had intermittently worked for John Murray, stands in this tradition. As a writer of Persian, he was immersed in the *munšī* culture and engaged with both Islamic and Hindu literary and religious cultures and wrote books on Indian history, Muslim prophets, policy matters. Under the commission of John Macgregor Murray he wrote the *Daḥīra al-fu'ād* in 1796, a text, unusually for the time, entirely devoted to Indian society and Hindu religions. The text describes in great details Hindu festivals, the Indian caste system and Hindu sects. Atmaram's text seems to have been the first in a string of similar ethnographic and classificatory texts composed in Persian by Hindu scholars in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as such is a landmark in Anglo-Persian literary production.

**Parissa Ganji** (*EHESS*)

### ***Risāla-yi zirā'at*, an agrarian treatise on Bengal**

In 1765, the Mughals granted to the East India Company the administration of the Bengal region and revenue. To manage this huge revenue, the British heavily relied on the network of Indian officials who had worked in the fiscal administration under the Mughals. A large volume of Persian fiscal records and manuals continued to be churned out and proved crucial for the British. The *Risāla-yi zirā'at* is a short Persian treatise on agronomy commissioned by John Macgregor Murray and composed by an anonymous author. The text describes several topics including types of land, crops, categories of cultivators, methods of revenue and revenue officials. It offers a glimpse into the agrarian policy and the fiscal administration under the Mughal and the British rules. Moreover, it suggests solutions for current issues in agriculture production and revenue. Apart from its importance as a historical and economic source, it is a precious document for the study of the assimilation of Indian lexicon into Persian technical writing.

**Thibaut d'Hubert** (*The University of Chicago*)

### ***Mahjūr al-waṭān*: Notes on Persian and the British Experience of North India**

After he returned from Bengal to Scotland, John MacGregor Murray received a commentary on the first chapters of St Matthew's Gospel as a present. The text was written in Persian and contained a lengthy preface addressed to John Murray. The author of the preface was a Briton born in India who lived for some time in the then capital of Bengal, Murshidabad. In this text, the author refers to the carrier of his father at the service of Najaf Khan, and his departure for Bengal of the death of the Mughal general. There, he became physician and treated the dignitaries of the Nabab's court of Murshidabad before traveling to England where he seems to have copied the text. The text does not provide detailed information about his activities, but rather reflects on the state of Mughal India and ethical matters through anecdotes and verses. My presentation will review the autobiographical content of this preface written in ornate prose style and in which the author displays a deep familiarity with the conventions of Persian epistolography. My comments will then focus on the idea of a shared experience of India expressed by this companion of John Murray in a present that constitutes a peculiar account of acculturation in early colonial Bengal.