



20th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies

Plenary Lecture 2

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Sanskrit and Early Modern Knowledge Systems in South Asia

Convenor: Dr Nile Green

Abstract

This will be a report on two current projects that involve international teams: one on the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism, based at Columbia University, and the other on Early Modern South Asia, based at Oxford.

Before these projects Sanskrit scholars of the early modern period (roughly 1500-1750 CE) had been relatively unstudied, characterized as belonging to an undifferentiated “medieval” world and as intellectually decadent and disengaged from the changes occurring around them.

In fact there was an efflorescence of activity in all of the śāstras in this period. The first project set out to understand what the nature of that activity was and why it happened. The second project intends to map out the social setting of the śāstrīs, their collective practices, means of support, and networks of communication. I am particularly interested in the prominent center of the period, Banaras, and how intellectuals at this sub-continental hub involved themselves at the level of the (Mughal) state and at the level of the village, especially in the Deccan. Their involvements provide the context for understanding their re-theorization in this period of the types of people and of the political calendar.