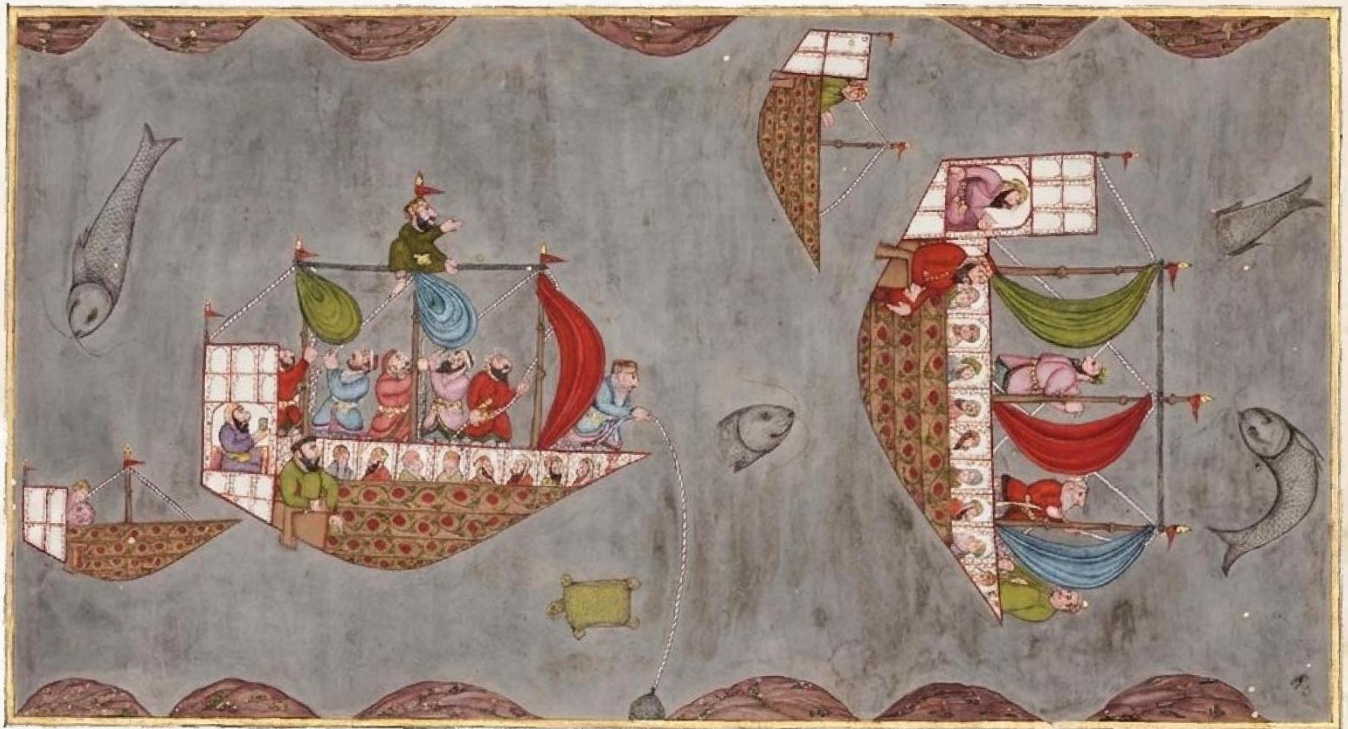


REMAPPING MANUSCRIPTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Textual Cultures, Knowledge Practices,
and Alternative Epistemologies



Pilgrims crossing the Sea of Oman towards Arabia. From “Anis al-Hujjaj” (Pilgrims’ Companion), 1677-1680. Courtesy of the Khalili Collection of Hajj and Arts of Pilgrimage, MSS 1025, f. 3b.

DATE

6-7 August
2026

PROGRAMME

Launch of Archives
Presentations
Public Lecture
Roundtable Discussion

FORMAT

Hybrid
*In-person at NUS
& Online via Zoom*

This conference is organized by the Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

With a focus on manuscripts produced or circulated in the Islamic Indian Ocean, this conference revisits the cultures, knowledge practices, and social lives of texts by highlighting neglected and indigenous sources and reflecting on the larger epistemological breaks they may provide. As a major corridor of global trade, the Indian Ocean has long served as an artery of intellectual exchange among Asian societies through which handwritten sources were produced and transported across regions as well as reproduced and reworked locally. The conference approaches such manuscripts not only as sources capable of challenging dominant narratives and reshaping historiographical and sociological understandings of human and non-human lives. It also treats manuscripts—in their material, ritual, oral, and immaterial forms—as entities with social lives that were shaped and sustained through interactions with the communities and individuals who produced, transmitted, and engaged with them (Olly Akkerman, 2024). In examining these textual and knowledge practices, the conference explores the socio-historical dimensions of knowledge practices in the Indian Ocean and considers how Islamic and Asian epistemological traditions may broaden, negotiate with, or diversify our approaches to knowledge production.

Growing global geopolitical and environmental challenges today are also the byproducts of epistemological practices associated with modernity and its Enlightenment origins and have often been averse to ethical religious traditions of knowledge (Wael Hallaq, 2018). In the service of capitalist, colonial, and imperial agendas, these practices have also long sidelined Asian knowledge traditions as remnants of a supposedly obsolete past and dismissed textual sources as lacking real historiographical and intellectual agency. The emerging crisis surrounding artificial intelligence—whose development some fear could become existentially catastrophic—alongside the destructive militarisation of knowledge and harmful uses of science and technology underscore the urgency of broadening our epistemological concerns.

Large bodies of handwritten documents and texts produced by Asian communities have long offered their own readings of history along with valuable insights into knowledge, culture, and society. Owing to the geopolitical and imperial contexts of the past few centuries, colonial official sources often travelled easily to metropolitan capitals, while Asian manuscript cultures were consigned to scholarly obscurity—effectively denying these textual traditions and indigenous knowledge systems a wider public. Nonetheless, diverse efforts to digitise manuscripts in the region have brought renewed attention to materials preserved in family collections and in the libraries of religious and educational centres such as mosques, madrasas, and other local institutions.

In conjunction with the launch of the Alagil Arabia Asia Archives at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, the conference proposes moving beyond familiar decolonial critiques in manuscript studies and textual cultures to seek methodologically grounded approaches that draw on traditions of knowledge practices in Asia. In this spirit, we invite scholars across disciplinary boundaries who share a strong interest in Indian Ocean manuscript cultures and epistemological questions to submit research papers. We seek contributions that address (but are not limited to) the following key questions on indigenous handwritten sources and the circulation of knowledge traditions:

- What new socio-historical insights and reappraisals emerge from studying knowledge practices, textual traditions, and scholarly networks across the Islamic Indian Ocean, particularly when situated within broader transregional frameworks of study such as Arabia Asia?
- What might more inclusive approaches to manuscript studies—especially in light of expanding digital infrastructures—offer for reshaping our understanding of textual cultures, knowledge practices, and broader historiographical and epistemological questions in Asian societies, past and present?
- How might we understand the historical and epistemological implications of Islamic knowledge practices in the context of contemporary global challenges in knowledge production and usage?

By drawing on the scholarly potential of manuscripts produced in the region, the conference proposes to remap Indian Ocean knowledge cultures, enrich manuscript studies, and advance scholarship in Arabia Asia studies.

6 AUGUST 2026 • THURSDAY

11:30 – 12:00	WELCOME REMARKS
	VINEETA SINHA , National University of Singapore MUHAMMAD ALAGIL , Jarir Investment and Alagil Foundation SUMIT MANDAL , National University of Singapore
12:00 – 13:00	LAUNCH OF ARABIA ASIA ARCHIVES AND DISCUSSION
	SUMIT MANDAL , National University of Singapore P. K. M. ABDUL JALEEL , National University of Singapore
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 1 • REMAPPING MANUSCRIPTS: KNOWLEDGE POTENTIALS
Chairperson	ISLAM DAYEH , Ghent University
14:00	Fact, Fiction, or Argument? Native Manuscripts from Nodal Ports at Historical Turning Points ENGSENG HO , Duke University
14:15	Rethinking Knowledge through <i>ʿIlm</i> : Manuscripts in a Transregional Islamic Littoral World P. K. M. ABDUL JALEEL , National University of Singapore
14:30	Digitalized Ocean: Emergent Patterns in Manuscript Cultures of the Indian Ocean World MAHMOOD KOORIA , University of Edinburgh
14:45	Questions & Answers
15:30 – 16:00	AFTERNOON TEA
16:00 – 17:30	PANEL 2 • MEDICINE, HEALING AND PROTECTION
Chairperson	FAIZAH ZAKARIA , National University of Singapore
16:00	Muslim <i>Bomohs</i> , Buddhist Healers, and a Neglected Tropical Disease: The Making of Medical Knowledge on Yaws (<i>Puru</i>) in <i>Kitab Tibb</i> SITI MARINA MOHD MAIDIN , Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, and Independent Researcher
16:15	Manuscripts, in Ruins: Textual Cultures and Sainly Landscapes along the Straits TEREN SEVEA , Harvard Divinity School
16:30	Qurans and Shaytāns: Apotropaic Properties of Manuscripts from Malabar and Lakshadweep MOHAMMED SALIH CHOLAKKALAKATH , New York University
16:45	Questions & Answers
17:45 – 18:15	BUS TRANSFER TO ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM
18:15 – 19:00	REFRESHMENTS
19:00 – 20:30	PUBLIC LECTURE
Chairperson	SUMIT MANDAL , National University of Singapore
19:00	The Voyage of the <i>Crooked</i> : A Global Microhistory FAHAD AHMAD BISHARA , University of Virginia, and Doha Institute for Graduate Studies
20:00	Questions & Answers
20:30	END OF DAY 1

7 AUGUST 2026 • FRIDAY

10:00 – 11:30	PANEL 3 • MALAY WORLD TEXTUAL CULTURES
<i>Chairperson</i>	SUMIT MANDAL , National University of Singapore
10:00	From Page to Screen: Making Mecca and Medina Present in Southeast Asian Manuscripts
<i>Online</i>	VERENA MEYER , Leiden University
10:15	The Problem of Beginnings: The World-Making Project of Islamic-Malay Storytelling
	FARIS BIN JORAIMI , New York University
10:30	<i>Hikayat Prang Sabi</i> : Colonial Custody and the Remaking of Aceh's Sacred Verse
	MYRA MENTARI ABUBAKAR , International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies
10:45	Questions & Answers
11:30 – 12:00	MORNING TEA
12:00 – 13:00	PANEL 4 • SONIC TO CUSTODIAL ARCHIVES: DYNAMICS AND TRANSFORMATION
<i>Chairperson</i>	ENGSENG HO , Duke University
12:00	Listening to the Archive: A Drum and its Arab-African Continuities from the Hyderabad State
	KHADEEJA AMENDA , Independent Researcher
12:15	From Imperial Permit to Corporate License: Manuscripts, Custodial Knowledge, and the Governance of Zamzam Water
	HAYTHAM ALTHUBAITI , National University of Singapore, and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals
12:30	Questions & Answers
13:00 – 14:15	LUNCH
14:15 – 15:45	PANEL 5 • MANUSCRIPT CIRCULATIONS: PERSIA-INDIA-THE MALAY WORLD
<i>Chairperson</i>	EMMA JANE FLATT , Nanyang Technological University
14:15	Circuits of a Transregional Search for Persian Manuscripts: Towards an <i>Adab</i> of Decolonial Knowledge Production
<i>Online</i>	MANA KIA , Columbia University
14:30	Bengal, the Sea, and Southeast Asia in the Persianate Age: Reading <i>Rauzat-ul-Tahirin</i>
<i>Online</i>	UMANG KOCHHAR , National University of Singapore
14:45	Al-Burhānpūrī's (d. 1029/1620) <i>al-Ḥaqqīqah</i> and its Vernacularization in Southeast Asia: Introducing an Unknown Auto-Commentary on <i>al-Tuḥfah al-Mursalah ilā al-Nabī</i>
	HALIM M. KHOIRI , Georgetown University
15:00	Questions & Answers
15:45 – 16:15	AFTERNOON TEA
16:15 – 17:30	ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION • REFLECTIONS
<i>Chairperson</i>	SUMIT MANDAL , National University of Singapore
<i>Speakers</i>	EMMA JANE FLATT , Nanyang Technological University ISLAM DAYEH , Ghent University MAHMOOD KOORIA , University of Edinburgh TEREN SEVEA , Harvard Divinity School
17:30 – 17:45	CLOSING REMARKS
	P. K. M. ABDUL JALEEL , National University of Singapore SUMIT MANDAL , National University of Singapore
17:45	END OF CONFERENCE
18:00 – 20:00	CONFERENCE DINNER (<i>For Presenters, Chairpersons and Invited Guests Only</i>)

Fact, Fiction, or Argument? Native Manuscripts from Nodal Ports at Historical Turning Points

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This paper examines the after-lives and arguments of two classic, non-European manuscript texts: Zayn al-Din al-Malibari's *Tuhfat al-Mujāhidīn* from 16th-century Calicut, Malabar, and the *Sejarah Melayu/Sulalatus Salatin* from 17th-century Malacca. These texts have been translated, analyzed, published, used in colonial and post-colonial governmental practice, interpreted and re-interpreted by colonial scholar-administrators, nationalists, post-independence anti-feudalists, communalists, university-based professional historians, cartoonists and moviemakers.

Textual traditions from before the 19th Century—European and non-European equally—have been showered with loving and brutal attention by Rankean scientific history: lovingly worked-through recensions and editions; and brutal source-criticism, cross-referencing and sifting for factual kernels, throwing out fables. Perhaps that is what tough love means. The problem with Orientalists criticized by Said was not power but positivism. Through the afterlives of interpretation and reinterpretation of our Malabar Arabic and Malay texts, two consequences stand out and endure: 1) the persistence of Rankean rigour in the consensus practice of professional historians; 2) the corresponding loss of expansive narratives/knowledges of a larger world by non-Europeans. Calicut and Malacca subsisted as contemporaneous nodal emporium port-cities in the Indian Ocean-South China transregion, between Arabia and China. This watery world is very much alive in our texts, whether as fable or fact.

These two works were written in response to dramatic, disruptive events which turned out to be historical turning points: Portuguese defeat of the Malacca sultanate and takeover of its seat Malacca; eight decades of damage to Calicut's transregional trade and the erosion of its primacy as a transregional port of the Indian subcontinent.

The late-19th/early-20th century sifting of fact from fiction, the nationalist and post-nationalist interpretations, all picked and chose parts of the manuscripts, neglecting others, and indeed the whole. In contrast, this paper attempts to understand what the whole was about. We work from the idea that the dramatic effects of encounter with the Portuguese focussed Malabari and Malay minds, and that our classic texts evince such focus. We ask the questions: Are these texts reflections on what made such improbable social organisms – port-polities bringing together Arabs and Indians, Muslims and Hindus, Malays and Indians, Chinese emperors – tick, thrive, survive, revive, or disappear? Are the authors making arguments about these questions?

Our efforts are guided by some organizing principles, such as: establishing genre forms before facts; looking to see if genre choices are motivated by the logic of a larger argument; understanding the whole in order to understand the part.

Engseng Ho is Professor of Anthropology at Duke University and formerly Distinguished Professor in Arabia Asia Studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He is the author of *Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: 2006) and a leading scholar of transnational anthropology, history and Muslim societies, Arab diasporas, and the Indian Ocean. His research expertise is in Arabia, coastal South Asia and maritime Southeast Asia, and he maintains active collaborations with scholars in these regions. He is a co-editor of Asian Connections book series at Cambridge University Press. He previously worked as Professor of Anthropology, Harvard University; Senior Scholar, Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies; Country and Profile Writer, The Economist Group; International Economist, Government of Singapore Investment Corporation/Monetary Authority of Singapore; and Director, Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore.

Rethinking Knowledge through 'Ilm: Manuscripts in a Transregional Islamic Littoral World

P. K. M. Abdul Jaleel

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This paper examines how knowledge and intellectual responsibility are articulated in the Sufi text *Adhkiyā'* and its commentary, *Maslak*, manuscripts produced in sixteenth-century Malabar aimed mainly at seekers of knowledge. Makhdūm al-Kabīr's (d. 1522) *Adhkiyā'* and its commentary were part of a long textual tradition that not only connected a transregional Islamic littoral world across the Indian Ocean but also rekindled 'ilm as a living repository of conceptual and interpretative resources for imagining a responsible practice of learning in the service of public welfare and God's favour. Building on the works of Muhammad al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) and Abd Allah bin As'ad al-Yāfi'ī (d. 1367), these texts advance a knowledge tradition grounded in Islamic values in which public welfare (*maṣāliḥ al-khalq*) in this world and the hereafter is articulated as one of the highest aims of knowledge. They also develop a hierarchy of knowledge based on its outcomes and public utility with the aim of enhancing human productivity for the public good. In a time of planetary crisis, extractive development, and the militarization of science and technology research, this paper argues that the epistemological traditions preserved in the manuscript traditions of the Islamic Indian Ocean, as represented in *Adhkiyā'*, should be approached as sites of conceptual production in their own right, capable of actively reshaping current debates about epistemology, ethics, ecology, and the socio-political life of human knowledge.

P. K. M. Abdul Jaleel is Research Fellow associated with the Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Over the last few years, he has been documenting historical as well as intellectual traditions and cultural expressions of Arab societies across the Indian Ocean. Previously, he taught West Asian Studies at the University of Kerala, India and was a visiting research fellow at Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies. Jaleel is currently working on a book titled "Sacred Sailors: Islam in the Sufi Cosmopolis of the Indian Ocean", which is a transregional study of Sufism and how it shaped the cosmopolitan nature of Islam in the region by examining the case of the 'Alawī Ṭarīqa.

Digitalized Ocean: Emergent Patterns in Manuscript Cultures of the Indian Ocean World

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Over the past three decades, numerous digitisation efforts in Asia, Europe and North America have made many Islamic manuscripts from the Indian Ocean littoral accessible in the public domain. These projects have identified and digitised manuscripts located in a variety of settings including public institutions, private residences, libraries, madrasas, maqams and mosques, many of which were beyond the reach of even local Muslim communities. Much of this material was previously unknown or inaccessible to earlier generations of scholars who instead primarily depended on limited collections within Europe and North America to study Africa, Asia, and the connecting Indian Ocean. Now, these resources make it possible to explore the rich past and present of the diverse Islamic communities of maritime Asia and Africa, enabling a better understanding of their cultures on their own terms. They provide a crucial counterpoint to the longstanding lament about the scarcity of indigenous historical sources in the Afrasian regions, and challenge the long-standing justification for heavy reliance on European archives to write about their histories. Particularly striking, even at a preliminary stage of analysis, is the remarkable similarity between manuscript collections from locations as distant as Tanzania and Indonesia. This resemblance might be puzzling from the perspectives of the present-day national or continental frameworks, but it reinforces the connected histories of the Indian Ocean, which facilitated extensive exchanges of people, commodities, and ideas between these regions across several centuries. Despite these notable features, scholars have yet to take any large-scale steps to assess the implications of these collections on public domains. This paper proposes a broader project along these lines to examine digitised Islamic manuscripts and introduces some potential reading strategies, ranging from connected and comparative approaches to paratextual, socio-codicological, and microanalytical readings, especially with attention to the indigenous methods of producing and circulating kitabs in the oceanic littoral.

Mahmood Kooria is Lecturer in the History of the Indian Ocean World at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, and Director of the Edinburgh Centre for Global History. Earlier he held teaching and research positions at Leiden University (the Netherlands), University of Bergen (Norway), Ashoka University (India), State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (Indonesia), International Institute for Asian Studies and African Studies Centre, Leiden (the Netherlands), Dutch Institute in Rabat (Morocco). He did his PhD in Global History at the Institute for History at Leiden University in 2016, authored *Indians in the Ocean: Cultures of Trade and Travel* (Penguin RandomHouse, 2026) and *Islamic Law in Circulation: Shāfiʿī Texts across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and co-edited *Malabar in the Indian Ocean World: Cosmopolitanism in a Maritime Historical Region* (Oxford University Press, 2018) and *Islamic Law in the Indian Ocean: Texts, Ideas and Practices* (Routledge, 2022). In 2024 he won the Infosys Prize in Humanities and Social Sciences for his contributions to the study of Islam and Malabar in the Indian Ocean world.

Muslim *Bomohs*, Buddhist Healers, and a Neglected Tropical Disease: The Making of Medical Knowledge on Yaws (*Puru*) in *Kitab Tibb*

Siti Marina Mohd MAIDIN

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The Malay *kitab tibb* is a medical manuscript written in Jawi script composed by Malay-speaking traditional healers. It preserves a complex body of healing knowledge that combines Islamic-based healing methods, occult sciences and local therapeutic practices. One especially significant aspect of *kitab tibb* is their attention to tropical diseases specific to Southeast Asia. One of the diseases that became endemic in this region was yaws—locally known as *puru*—as reflected in numerous medical manuscripts scattered across the Malay Peninsula. It is a chronic infectious disease affecting the skin and bones, afflicting both adults and children and often leaving permanent scars on its sufferers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, outbreaks of yaws along the northeastern coast of the Malay Peninsula, particularly in Kelantan, drew the attention of colonial physicians, who sought to study the disease and implement measures for its eradication. At the same time, Malay *bomoh* (healers) possessed a comprehensive understanding of the disease, recording remedies and observations in *kitab tibb*. Interestingly, these texts on yaws also reveal the transmission of knowledge from Thai Buddhist healers, who composed Thai medical manuscripts, to Malay *bomoh*. By situating *kitab tibb* within broader manuscript and healing networks, this paper highlights the interconnected nature of medical knowledge production in Southeast Asia. Focusing on the Malay Peninsula during the colonial period, the paper examines the absorption of the Thai naming system for yaws in *kitab tibb*. It also explores the Malay *bomoh*'s understanding of the disease and the traditional methods used to treat it, which incorporate Islamic beliefs. In addition, it discusses how the attention that Malay *bomoh* devoted to yaws attracted the interest of colonial physicians, prompting them to understand the disease from a Malay point of view.

Siti Marina Mohd Maidin is a curator at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia and an independent researcher. She obtained a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and a master's degree in pharmacology from Universiti Sains Malaysia. She has written several articles on the Malay world and Islamic art, including: "A Short Perspective on the Dissemination of Malay Medical Knowledge in the Light of 'Al-Tibb: Healing Traditions in Islamic Medical Manuscripts' Exhibition" (2020), "Escaping the Captive Mind: Rethinking Colonial Narratives, Preserving Heritage, and Curating the Malay World" (2022), "Of Faith and Identity: Ornaments, Calligraphy and Illuminations in Chinese Qur'an" (2022), "Samudera Berbicara: Menelusuri Seni Islam, Era Kolonialisme, dan Dunia Melayu" [Oceans that Speak: Exploring Islamic Art, the Era of Colonialism, and the Malay World] (2025) and "Catatan Pengalaman di Tanah Suci" [Notes on Experiences in the Holy Land] (2025).

Manuscripts, in Ruins: Textual Cultures and Sainly Landscapes along the Straits

Teren SEVEA

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This paper traces how Malay, Tamil, and Arabic textual traditions thrive within saintly landscapes amid physical displacement and redevelopment. Hagiographies, epistles, pilgrimage booklets, maps, fatwas, notices, and digital circulations record saintly genealogies, miracle stories, interspecies relationships, and cartographies of shrines that have been removed, hidden, or transformed. Ruination, it suggests, generates new textual practices that contest claims over space and orthodoxy, and entrench the presence of Islamic saints along the Melaka and Singapore Straits.

Teren Sevea is Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard Divinity School, studying Islamic societies across the Indian Ocean world. He is the author of *Miracles and Material Life: Rice, Ore, Traps, and Guns in Islamic Malaya*, which received the 2022 Harry J. Benda Prize from the Association for Asian Studies. He is also in Singapore as Lee Kong Chian NUS–Stanford Fellow in Contemporary Southeast Asia.

Qurans and Shaytāns: Apotropaic Properties of Manuscripts from Malabar and Lakshadweep

Mohammed Salih CHOLAKKALAKATH

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This paper explores the apotropaic properties (*khawāṣ*) of Quran manuscripts from Malabar and Lakshadweep in Southwest India. Scholarship on *khawāṣ* has largely focused on the Quran as text; this paper instead examines *khawāṣ al-muṣḥaf*—the apotropaic properties residing in the manuscript as object and codex—thereby shifting attention to the codicological dimensions of *khawāṣ* that text-centered approaches have overlooked. Attending to the manuscript as object rather than text allows us to recover oral and craft traditions that the codex embodies. In its pursuit of the idea, the paper focuses on a Quran manuscript from Mithqāl Mosque in Calicut to examine knots in its frontispiece as apotropaic devices, tracing the transmedial visibility of these devices across manuscripts, architecture, and tombstones in Malabar and the Lakshadweep Islands. It argues that knots in the Quran can be interpreted through their transmedial filiations, which also speak to the transregional connections of the Indian Ocean world. Traveling across media through shared craft traditions, knot devices enjoyed wide distribution as apotropaic devices in architecture and Quran manuscripts alike; they are even invoked in the Quran itself in association with offensive magic. Their concentration at iconographically sensitive liminal locations—on frontispieces, thresholds, and portals—reflects their perceived efficacy as apotropaic devices. This paper, therefore, argues that knots and related strapwork, rooted in the oral and craft traditions of artisans who moved across media, were intended to function as traps for shaytāns, as a web catches insects, protecting the spaces they marked—whether books or buildings—and their users.

Mohammed Salih Cholakkalakath is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He completed his earlier studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Darul Huda Islamic University. His research sits at the intersection of Islamic, South Asian, and Indian Ocean art and material histories, with a particular focus on manuscripts from Malabar and Lakshadweep from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His doctoral dissertation examines the circulation and temporality of talismanic diagrams and figures in Arabic and Arabi-Malayalam grimoires from Southwest coastal India.

PUBLIC LECTURE

**The Voyage of the *Crooked*:
A Global Microhistory**

Fahad Ahmad BISHARA

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This talk tells the story of the voyage of the *Crooked*, a Kuwaiti dhow, as it sailed in 1924 from Kuwait to Basra and from there to Calicut and back. Drawing on the materials of the nakhoda 'Abdalmajeed Al-Failakawi and his contemporaries, it charts out a transoceanic exchange of goods, people, and ideas that bound the Gulf to the Indian Ocean. Through Al-Failakawi's logbooks, we see the process by which actors around the region actively engaged in economic thinking as they sought to transform the natural world around them into forms that could circulate around the oceanic arena. Through the voyage of the *Crooked* and the writings of those who worked on and around it, we can see the active constitution of a maritime bazaar – a connected world of commercial practice and thinking that extended from the Gulf to South Asia and beyond.

Fahad Ahmad Bishara is Associate Professor of History at the University of Virginia and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He specializes in the economic and legal history of the Gulf, Indian Ocean and Islamic world and is the author of two books: *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950* (Cambridge: 2017) and *Monsoon Voyagers: An Indian Ocean History* (California: 2025). He is committed to writing the history of the Gulf and Indian Ocean world from the inside out — to asking new questions from new perspectives, and to think with sources from the region. This is, in large part, why he spends considerable time thinking about law; legal materials are among the richest sources for writing about this part of the world. Through law, he is able to think more deeply about the ways in which people engaged with one another and with the state, and the well of concepts and ideas they drew on along the way.

From Page to Screen: Making Mecca and Medina Present in Southeast Asian Manuscripts

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The *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, a prayer book written by the Moroccan Sufi al-Jazūlī (d. c. 1465), has long enjoyed widespread use across the Islamic world, with extant copies spread from the Maghrib to Southeast Asia. Organized as a manual for devotion to the Prophet Muhammad, the book features a description of the Prophet's burial chamber in the mosque of Medina, an especially significant site in Islamic devotional traditions, where the faithful are called upon to invoke the Prophet's presence. Beginning in the fifteenth century, copyists of the text inserted a schematic drawing of the tombs, which over time became increasingly elaborate, culminating in a rich iconography of Medina with wide geographic distribution and distinct regional characteristics. These images offered readers a schematic yet extremely close-up view of the tombs, thus providing a visual and mnemonic path for an intimate relationship between the reader and the Prophet Muhammad. Such depictions were also widespread in Islamic Southeast Asia, peaking in the 18th century, at a time when the journey to the Hejaz became increasingly common but was still out of reach for most people.

Focusing on two 18th/early 19th century illustrated copies of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* from Southeast Asia—one from Central Java (EAP1628/6/9), one from West Sumatra (Leiden Or. 1751)—, this paper reflects on the question of how the meaning and use of the illustrations in the manuscripts of Medina's holy sites has changed against the background of their digital mediation. It follows several interconnected queries: How do such illustrations in manuscripts compare to contemporary media, such as immersive apps or high resolution images, that likewise offer an avenue to connect with these sites and the sacred history they represent? How has the status of images in manuscripts changed through the emergence of these new media? And, given that both EAP1628/6/9 and Leiden Or. 1751 have been digitized, how does this new mediatization of a traditional form of writing refract and reorganize traditional and modern understandings and uses? By situating these images within both historical and modern regimes of visualization and representation, the paper invites us to rethink the role of manuscripts as vehicles of the sacred in shifting media environments.

Verena Meyer is Assistant Professor (Universitair Docent) of Islam in South and Southeast Asia at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies. In her work, she draws on ethnographic field research and literary studies in Javanese, Malay, and Arabic to investigate questions of Islamic identity, the role of memory and the formation of heritage, and the transmission of knowledge across time and space. Her first book, *Theologies of Remembering: Modernity, Ambiguity, and Transcendence in Islamic Indonesia*, will be published this August by University of California Press and discusses how Indonesia's two largest Muslim mass organizations—self-identifying respectively as traditionalist and modernist—actively engage memory as a framework for theological thought and practice. Her second project, funded by the Dutch Research Council, investigates the digitization of Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia, asking how digitization transforms understandings of the meaning and use of writing and textuality.

The Problem of Beginnings: The World-Making Project of Islamic-Malay Storytelling

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This paper thinks about how storytelling practice allows for the conception and formation of a moral and political community bridging together distant locations into a region. Departing from functionalist explanations of stories as mere modes of ideological legitimisation or justification, it engages with storytelling as both the production of a common discourse linking together socially-differentiated groups, and as the practical means for imagining and participating in moral-political relations. Drawing on recent studies of Islamic historiographic practices from multiple sites that engage with the concept of origins as a comparative problem, this presentation focuses on Malay narrative practice between the 17th-19th centuries. Entextualised in manuscripts, narratives recounting the emergence of Muslim sultanates in island Southeast Asia depict a process of spatial and temporal extension rather than creation ex nihilo, mirroring the medium of narrative itself as an intertextual product of oral tellings and retellings, inscriptions and reinscriptions. This paper also moves beyond the manuscript to examine how Islamic-Malay storytellers and audiences also drew on media, including letters, objects, and physical sites to render an emergent political geography that is effective and persistent.

Faris Bin Joraimi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. His research explores ethical practice, interpersonal politics, and the creation of regional coherence. Covering Island Southeast Asia between the 17th- and 19th-centuries, he focuses on practices of storytelling, habituation, and relation-making that make possible the emergence of the “Malay world” as an interlinked Islamic geography.

Hikayat Prang Sabi:
Colonial Custody and the Remaking of Aceh's Sacred Verse

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Roughly twenty substantial manuscripts of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* survive under a forty-eight item catalogue umbrella in Leiden University Library, a corpus assembled largely through colonial wartime confiscation. The text has been read closely for its ideological content; the condition of the corpus that carries it has not. Drawing on Akkerman's social codicology and on Stoler's reading of the colonial archive along its grain, this paper traces the text's custodial biography across four readings: Dutch counterinsurgency, colonial philology, Indonesian nationalist historiography, and provincial heritage-making. Examining the documents of custody, including H. T. Damsté's 1928 edition, colonial-era catalogues, and digital metadata, this analysis asks how each reading remade what kind of knowledge the text could produce. It shows how Damsté's philological operations remediated a performative, Quranically saturated, and communally addressed Islamic practice into a silent, stable, and domesticated Western documentary artifact. It argues that the *Hikayat's* original "triple life", wherein sounding, copying, and carrying were jointly an ethical and physical act, offers an emic, relational counter-model to Eurocentric archival practices. It closes by asking what the case adds to existing archival standards: metadata that records prosecution, because possession was itself the offence.

Myra Mentari Abubakar is Research Affiliate at the International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies. She previously served as an academic fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (2024-2025). She earned her PhD in Gender, Media and Cultural Studies from the Australian National University in 2024. Her interdisciplinary research examines Southeast Asian memory politics, cultural heritage, and female heroism, with a focus on Acehnese history and indigenous manuscript traditions. Her projects have received funding and institutional support from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Friends of Princeton University Library, the Linda Hall Library, and various international research fellowships.

Listening to the Archive: A Drum and its Arab-African Continuities from the Hyderabad State

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The Hadramis of Hadramawt and the Siddis of Abyssinia were a prominent diasporic community of Hyderabad State, the princely nation ruled by the Asaf Jahi dynasty in the Deccan region of southern India (1724-1948). Both communities were an integral part of the Nizam's irregular forces. Following the Indian annexation of Hyderabad in 1948, foreign-born Hadramis and Siddis were repatriated, while those locally born stayed back. Their fifth and sixth generations currently live in Hyderabad, navigating the outsider tag that continues to be ascribed to them.

In this paper, I listen back to the archives pertaining to *marfa baaja*, a band performance that both the Hadramis and the Siddis make claim to. This struggle for claim occurs from the community's efforts to prove their belongingness in the city. There are currently no recorded audio archives of *marfa* in Hyderabad. The scattered archives of the same are written either from the British colonial or Hyderabad's lettered elite's perspective. In such a context, I ask: what does it mean for these communities to encounter an archive of their own sound, at a time when their belonging to the city remains contested? To address this question, I rely on methods from sonic histories that recover unrecorded sounds from the past. This paper is a part of a larger historical ethnography of the afterlife of Hyderabad State in contemporary times. Through these discussions, I contribute to scholarship on sonic archives and their afterlives, while also arguing for expanding Indian Ocean studies beyond port cities to include landlocked spaces such as Hyderabad.

Khadeeja Amenda recently completed her PhD in Cultural Studies in Asia at the National University of Singapore. She is currently Managing Editor of *Current Sociology* journal.

From Imperial Permit to Corporate License: Manuscripts, Custodial Knowledge, and the Governance of Zamzam Water

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This paper examines the governance of Zamzam water—drawn from the sacred well adjacent to *al-Ka’ba* in Makkah—across two distinct but connected systems of custodial authority: Ottoman bureaucratic formalization and contemporary Saudi corporatization under Vision 2030. Drawing on overlooked Ottoman-era manuscripts preserved in private family collections in Makkah, including *taqrīr* permits, financial petitions, appointment decrees, and honorific badges, alongside ethnographic fieldwork and oral history conducted in Makkah between 2023 and 2024, the paper traces how hereditary custodial knowledge has been documented, authorized, and transformed across successive regimes of power.

The paper advances three comparative arguments. First, it shows how the Ottoman *taqrīr* system made sacred labor bureaucratically visible without displacing its religious foundations, producing a hybrid arrangement in which hereditary authority and documentary governance coexisted in productive tension. Second, it argues that Saudi corporatization—culminating in the transformation of al-Zamazimah into a closed joint-stock company under the wider infrastructure of the King Abdullah Zamzam Project—extends this logic by translating kinship-based legitimacy into institutional criteria, performance metrics, and market rationalities. Third, it reflects on the manuscript evidence itself as a neglected source for Islamic Indian Ocean historiography, arguing that private custodial archives preserve forms of knowledge underrepresented in official archives.

By tracing this long arc from imperial permit to corporate license, the paper illuminates how sacred knowledge is produced, governed, and reconfigured through changing documentary, bureaucratic, and corporate forms.

Haytham Althubaiti defended his PhD dissertation in Anthropology at the National University of Singapore in May 2026 and is Lecturer in the Department of Global Studies at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals. His research examines the intersections of religion, economy, and labor in contemporary Saudi Arabia, focusing on how sacred professions—particularly *al-Zamazimah*, the traditional providers of Zamzam water to pilgrims—have been reconfigured through bureaucratization and market rationalization. He holds a BA in Sociology from Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Riyadh) and an MA in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Virginia. His broader interests include business anthropology, the anthropology of Islam, ritual practice, and cultural identity in the Middle East.

Circuits of a Transregional Search for Persian Manuscripts: Towards an *Adab* of Decolonial Knowledge Production

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This paper offers methodological and theoretical reflections developed through research on Persian manuscript and text circulation between West and South Asia. Broadly speaking, the larger project examines the relationship of transregional circulation of people, texts, practices, and ideas between the material and imaginary realms. The reflections I offer grow out of research into two interrelated bodies of Persian manuscripts: the Salar Jang collection in Hyderabad and manuscripts collections in Iran with holdings written or copied in South Asia (including in the Deccan). Beginning from the premise that creating alternatives to colonial modernity's knowledge relations requires new methods and analytics, I offer a possible path of scholarly understanding and of producing knowledge via embrace of the logic of my sources. Since Persian texts were most often composed and manuscripts produced and circulated in the context of social relations -- too often reduced to capitalist economist transactions -- this paper asks: What does the sociality of textual production, and its structuring *adab* (proper aesthetic and ethical form), mean for how we should understand and produce knowledge about historical Persian texts and their practices? This paper argues for the importance of a research process inspired by this logic of relations, emphasizing the need to reflect on and account for the scholar's own relationship to the present of our historical subjects. I offer examples of this kind of learning from my two research sites, alongside what I learned from the manuscripts themselves, as preliminary thoughts on an *adab* of decolonial knowledge production. I engage with various methodological inventions from sense and sound studies, as well as debates on embodied epistemology and feminist decolonial thought to think about how early modern textual practices and manuscript circulation provide windows to social imaginaries (and are part of them).

Mana Kia is Associate Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. Her interests include the connected social, cultural, intellectual histories of early modern West, Central, and South Asia. Inspired by decolonial thought, feminist historiography, and critical philology, her work engages with the ideas and practices of Persianate *adab* (proper aesthetic and ethical form) as both historical subject and analytic method. She is the author of *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, 2020). She is working on a second book, which outlines how a shared sense of aesthetic and ethical form (*adab* as culture) was socially and politically enacted in the transregional circulation of people, texts, practices, and ideas across Persianate Asia.

Bengal, the Sea, and Southeast Asia in the Persianate Age: Reading *Rauzat-ul-Tahirin*

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This paper examines Mughal Bengal's connections with Southeast Asia during the Persianate age through a reading of *Rauzat al-Tahirin*. Rather than treating Bengal only as an eastern frontier of the Mughal Empire, the paper situates it within the wider maritime world of the Bay of Bengal, connected to Aceh, Pegu, and other neighbouring regions across the sea. It asks how Persianate historical writing imagined Bengal's sea-facing position and how such writing preserved forms of knowledge about Mughal contact with neighbouring polities and societies. The paper focuses especially on the idiom of '*ajā'ib-o-gharā'ib*'- wonders and marvels. In *Rauzat al-Tahirin*, the sea appears not merely as a route of commerce, travel, or diplomacy, but as a space of curiosity, danger, uncertainty, and knowledge. Descriptions of islands, coasts, maritime routes, unfamiliar peoples, and wondrous phenomena reveal how Bengal's eastern neighbourhood was understood through both political contact and inherited Persianate traditions of wonder. These accounts suggest that Mughal knowledge of Southeast Asia was shaped not only by warfare, diplomacy, and trade, but also by manuscript-based modes of imagining the maritime world. By placing Bengal at the centre of these textual and maritime narratives, this paper argues that *Rauzat al-Tahirin* allows us to remap the Bay of Bengal as a shared zone of movement, encounter, and knowledge production. The paper contributes to broader discussions on Islamic Indian Ocean manuscript cultures by showing how Persianate texts encoded alternative ways of knowing the sea, neighbouring regions, and human and non-human worlds. It therefore approaches the manuscript not only as a historical source, but as a site where geography, wonder, political intelligence, and maritime imagination converged.

Umang Kochhar is a PhD candidate in Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore. His research explores Persianate linkages between India and the Malay World, with particular attention to the circulation of texts, objects, tastes, and cultural practices across the Indian Ocean. He has worked with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Hyderabad, where he documented the Nizam's archaeology collection. Umang holds an MA in Historical Studies from Nalanda University and an MA in Muslim Cultures from Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, London. His wider interests include the Deccan Sultanates, Bengal-Bihar, and the Malay World. He is especially curious about food cultures, material objects, and the movement of Islamic-world artefacts, ideas, and aesthetic forms across maritime and inland networks linking South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the broader Indian Ocean world.

Al-Burhānpūrī's (d. 1029/1620) *al-Ḥaqīqah* and its Vernacularization in Southeast Asia: Introducing an Unknown Auto-Commentary on *al-Tuḥfah al-Mursalāh ilā al-Nabī*

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Al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muwāfiqah li-l-Sharī'ah, Muḥammad b. Faḍlillāh al-Burhānpūrī's auto-commentary on his celebrated *al-Tuḥfah al-Mursalāh ilā al-Nabī*, remains virtually unknown in modern scholarship despite its significance for understanding the transmission of Akbarian Sufi thought in the Jawi Archipelago (Southeast Asia/Nusantara) across the Indian Ocean. This paper offers the first systematic study of the work based on six MSS we obtained—five originating from Southeast Asia and one housed in Tehran—out of nine identified. The structural and textual differences between these two versions, such as variations in sectional organization and the addition or omission of passages, could suggest that vernacularization was an active editorial process rather than passive reception, as the text migrated from its Persianate Mughal setting to the Malay world. In doing so, this paper also intends to introduce our critical edition of both the *matn* of *al-Tuḥfah* as well as its auto-commentary, *al-Ḥaqīqah*: the latter is edited in its two versions: Tehran and Sumatra. This material recovery enriches our understanding of early modern Malay Sufism and the Indian Ocean networks through which it was shaped.

Halim M. Khoiri completed his master's degree in Islamic Studies at George Washington University, under the supervision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Subsequently, he returned to Indonesia and worked as a consultant to the Minister of Education, and then to the Ministry of Religious Affairs through Palladium. Currently in the third year of his PhD program in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, his research focuses on the Indo-Malay Akbarian reception in the early modern period, primarily through the works of Yūsuf al-Maqāṣirī (d. 1110/1699), a well-known Jawi Sufi itinerant of the 17th century. For the past two and a half years, he has been examining the foundations of al-Maqāṣirī's thought through the works of his primary masters, including al-Rānirī, al-Khalwatī, al-Qushāshī, and al-Kūrānī. Upon discovering that one of the treatises central to al-Maqāṣirī's intellectual formation was *al-Tuḥfah* by al-Burhānpūrī (d. 1029/1620), Halim came across several copies of its auto-commentary, *al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muwāfiqah li-l-Sharī'ah*, hitherto unknown to modern scholarship. He has since completed an Arabic critical edition of both *al-Tuḥfah* and *al-Ḥaqīqah*—the latter containing several Persian passages—along with their translation into Indonesian, forthcoming in an Indonesian-Malay publication, with an English translation planned following the completion of his PhD. At this conference, he will present part of his manuscript analysis of *al-Ḥaqīqah*.

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS, CHAIRPERSONS & ROUNDTABLE SPEAKERS

Emma Jane Flatt is Associate Professor in the School of Humanities of Nanyang Technical University (NTU). She works on the social and cultural history of medieval and early modern South Asia (c.1300-1700), with a particular interest in the history of mentalities, emotions and senses. She is the author of *The Courts Of The Deccan Sultanates: Living Well In The Persian Cosmopolis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); the co-author (with Daud Ali) of *Garden and Landscape Practices in Precolonial India: Histories from the Deccan*, (Delhi: Routledge, 2011), as well as the author of various journal articles on the histories of astrology, wrestling, magic, friendship and perfumes. She received her PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2009. She also holds a BA in History and Italian from Cardiff University and an MA in Asian History from the School of Oriental and African Studies. Before joining NTU in 2023, Emma worked at the National University of Singapore (2018-2023); and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2012-2018) and NTU (2009-2011).

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Faizah Zakaria is Assistant Professor holding a joint appointment in the Departments of Southeast Asian Studies and Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests center on religion and ecology, environmental justice and indigenous movements in island Southeast Asia. She is the author of *The Camphor Tree and the Elephant: Religion and Ecological Change in Maritime Southeast Asia* (University of Washington Press, 2023), which was awarded the Harry J. Benda Prize (2025) and was shortlisted for the Euroseas Social Science Book Prize (2024). Her work has been published in various journals including *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *Journal of Social History* and *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society* and she has contributed to several field-defining edited volumes including the upcoming *New Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*.

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Sumit Mandal is Muhammad Alagil Chair in Arabia Asia Studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He is a historian who researches the outcome of longstanding inter-cultural and inter-religious interaction in the Malay World – understood as a flexible and expansive cultural geography. His book *Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World* (Cambridge, 2018) reconsiders colonial and national understandings of the indigenous and foreign by substantiating what were significantly intermixed societies. He is currently doing research on *keramat* (Muslims shrines) in the Malay world as inscriptions on the landscape of a sacred history that provoke a reimagination of the Islamic Indian Ocean.

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