



## EDITORIAL: *Mṛtyuñjaya*, the Conqueror of Death, in the year of Covid-19.

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Senior Editor and Production Editor

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present the third volume of the *Journal of Yoga Studies* (JoYS).

This year's cover image, a representation of Śiva as *mṛtyuñjaya*, the conqueror of death, seems especially apt for 2020.<sup>1</sup> The many epidemic episodes<sup>2</sup> of SARS-CoV-2 we have experienced, and are still witnessing worldwide, have powerfully brought to the fore the themes of illness, death, and therapeutics. Also, the extensive and academically significant article we are pleased to publish in this volume is concerned with a yoga text that contains several references to Śiva, even though its ideological leanings seem ultimately to be more non-denominationally yogic than devotional (see JoYS, vol. 3: 30 and *passim*). Furthermore, this article has been written in the context of the AyurYog project ([ayuryog.org](http://ayuryog.org)), a research effort that includes work on many medical and health-related themes. Hence, the threefold relevance of our cover.

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<sup>1</sup> This form of Śiva is often invoked for healing and liberation. For example, Gilles Tarabout points out while discussing the *Praśnamārggam* (*sic*) that: "[...] the panacea for any type of disease is the performance of the *Mṛtyuñjaya hōmam* (XIII. 36–39), offerings into a ritual fire accompanied by the repetition of the *Mṛtyuñjaya mantra* ..." (See Tarabout, G. 2012: 314–15. "Sin and Flaws in Kerala Temple Astrology." In *Sin and Sinners. Perspectives from Asian Religions*, Granoff, P. and Shinohara, K. Eds, 309–23. Leiden: Brill. Retrieved from: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00870206>. Accessed on: December 25, 2020.)

<sup>2</sup> That is, due to different viral mutations; for schematic representations see [here](https://nextstrain.org/ncov/global). (Retrieved from: <https://nextstrain.org/ncov/global>. Accessed on: December 25, 2020.)



Being in our third year means a little stocktaking is in order, and it is also time to announce some changes at the administrative level. To start with the latter, we are pleased to announce that Matthew Clark will be stepping into the position of Senior Editor and Administration Manager following Elizabeth De Michelis' retirement from the post at the end of this year. She will remain part of JoYS in her new role as member of the Advisory Board, but obviously with substantially reduced responsibilities. The next two paragraphs, on stocktaking, are hers.

It is good to see that, three years on, JoYS remains outstanding in its yoga-related expertise: our management team, Advisory Board, and Editorial Board remain second to none in this context and, indeed, there is no journal that can compare with JoYS from this point of view—at least not in the languages to which the JoYS management team have access. I am, however, aware of some limits vis-à-vis what we were hoping to achieve to start with (see my Editorial in volume 1), especially so in relation to publishing research authored by non-anglophone scholars and to showcasing a wide range of methodological approaches. Regarding the latter, it would be good to receive original submissions (including review articles) offering critical discussions of methodological approaches in relation to yoga studies: for example, with regard to problems of working with texts, or which translation techniques and models of historical reconstruction may be most apt, how may material artefacts be used as evidence, how may the interpretative grids of social sciences be best applied to yoga studies, and so forth. Given that yoga studies is a relatively novel field in its own right, it can certainly benefit from theoretical approaches and expertise that have been developed for the study of other fields, but it would also gain greatly from *ad hoc* discussions of how its specific research problems may be faced and resolved.

As for publishing yoga-related research authored by non-anglophone scholars, while there is quite a lot of work being done in various parts of the world, in term of the submissions received by JoYS, we have often been faced with problems of English language and style. Now, JoYS upholds very high standards not only of research content but also of overall quality of writing and, as many readers will know, having a good command of English does not guarantee proficiency in writing academic English. Thus, the research content of a submission may be excellent, good, or at least promising, but the written form and style of the article may not be up to standard. Still, all the editors have been tackling these problems to the best of their abilities including, at times, doing a sizeable amount of work to improve the submissions—but such extra work is not always possible or justifiable, and unfortunately because of this non-anglophone authors may find themselves at some disadvantage. A possible solution would be for such work to be published in their authors' native language at first. Then the articles

that match JoYS' standards—already improved and 'stabilised,' as it were, by a first round of peer reviews in their original language—could be selected for translation and potential publication in JoYS. Personally, I would love to see more articles on the localised adaptations of modern yoga worldwide, along the lines of the article by Philip Deslippe, which we published in volume 1. In any case, I am very proud of the elegant and solidly researched articles we have published so far. All of JoYS' collaborators, reviewers, and advisors have done a sterling job. Not only do we keep receiving excellent feedback on the quality and presentation of JoYS' articles and book reviews, but I am convinced that our volumes will serve as reference material for years to come.

Turning now to a review of what has recently happened in the field of yoga studies, we are pleased to report that academic enthusiasm for the subject has been growing despite the current pandemic. Although two large ERC-funded projects have come to an end—one on the history of *haṭhayoga* (the Hatha Yoga Project, [hyp.soas.ac.uk](http://hyp.soas.ac.uk)) and the other on yoga and Āyurveda or Indian medicine (the AyurYog project, [ayuryog.org](http://ayuryog.org))—the fruits of these research projects are already coming to fruition, with one publication appearing in volume 2 of JoYS, another publication in the current volume, several forthcoming contributions due to be published as a special issue in the next JoYS volume, and many critical editions due to appear in 2021. Following current trends and needs, the AyurYog project quickly adapted their final conference to a virtual format entitled *Untangling Traditions* ([ayuryog.org/content/untangling-traditions](http://ayuryog.org/content/untangling-traditions)). This innovative programme included a series of interviews with team members, discussions with key researchers in the field, and the multi-faceted reconstruction of premodern Indian alchemy, *rasaśāstra* ([ayuryog.org/content/alchemy-reconstruction](http://ayuryog.org/content/alchemy-reconstruction)). The Hatha Yoga Project final contributions (apart from the publications still to come) were an [online conference](#) at which each team member presented their most notable research discoveries and, last but far from least, the rich *Embodied Liberation* exhibition at the London Brunei Gallery, gathering all of the project's threads together by showcasing artefacts, textual sources, anthropological materials, and explicative notes in ways both artistic and informative.

Institutional support for academic research on yoga will continue in 2021. The 'Light on Hatha Yoga' project, due to start in January 2021, is jointly funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). The project will bring together top researchers based in Germany, India, and the UK. The aim of this three-year project is to produce a critical edition and English translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which is arguably one of the most widely cited and influential premodern Sanskrit texts, placing a strong emphasis on the physical aspects of yoga. Research on yoga-based interventions in medical and



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therapeutic contexts (an area not treated by JoYS) remains strong: an orientative overview of such trends may be found [here](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know) ([www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know)). However, one would wish to see more interest (and investments) in yoga-related Humanities and Social Sciences research projects, not just in English-speaking countries, but across the globe.

While collaborative, international research projects on yoga and yoga-related topics may be relatively few, research on these subjects by individual scholars remains thankfully rich and productive. Some stimulating stocktaking and commenting will be found in the four book reviews included in this volume, but other enticing titles should also be noted, which we hope to review in future issues. A (not necessarily comprehensive) list of titles published in 2020 may run as follows: *Hindu Practice* (Flood, ed.); *Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality* (Jain); *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation* (Newcombe and O'Brien-Kop, eds); *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga* (Foxen); *Post-Lineage Yoga: From Guru to #Metoo* (Wildcroft), and *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals* (Lucia).

May we follow the recently established fashion of pointedly wishing everyone the best of health for 2021 and beyond, as well as every success in all their academic endeavours.

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