

# Sacred Kingship in World History: Between Immanence and Transcendence

25-26 May 2019

Amersi Lecture Theatre, Brasenose College

## Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May

- 9:30am Registration and tea/coffee
- 10:00am **Introduction** by Alan Strathern and Azfar Moin
- 10:30am **Session 1**  
Jan Assmann (Konstanz), 'Pharaonic Kingship and its Biblical Deconstruction'  
  
Nicole Brisch (Copenhagen), 'The Heroic and the Cosmic: Rethinking the Origins of Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia'
- 12:10pm Lunch - *Medieval Kitchen*
- 1:10pm **Session 2**  
David Graeber (LSE), 'Kings, Measures, and Money – Some Observations on the Transformation of Sacred Kingship since the Axial Age'
- 2:00pm Break
- 2:20pm **Session 3**  
Lynette G. Mitchell (Exeter), 'Between Immanence and Transcendence: God, King and Law in Ancient Greece'  
  
Michael Puett (Harvard), 'The Humanization of the Divine in Early China: Comparative Reflections on Sacred Kingship'
- 4:00pm Tea/coffee break
- 4:30pm **Session 4**  
Peter Gose (Carleton), 'Immanence, Seclusion and Loss in Andean Divine Kingship (1000-1700 CE)'
- 5:20pm **Discussion of pre-circulated paper by Marshall Sahlins**
- 6:00pm Drinks reception – *Antechapel* (all welcome)
- 7:15pm Dinner in college for speakers – *Medieval Kitchen*



## Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May

- 9:50am      **Opening remarks** by Alan Strathern and Azfar Moin
- 10:00am      **Session 5**  
Aziz Al-Azmeh (CEU, Budapest), 'Caliphal Sovereignty or the Immanence of Transcendence'  
  
Jos Gommans (Leiden), 'The Frontier in the Making of Immanent Kingship, 1200-1700'
- 11:40am      Tea/coffee break
- 12:10am      **Session 6**  
Faisal Devji (Oxford), 'The King is Dead: Republican Islam and the Sovereignty of God'
- 1:00pm      Lunch - *Medieval Kitchen*
- 2:00pm      **Session 7**  
Nicole Jerr (USAFA), 'Ancient Apostasy, Modern Drama: Henrik Ibsen's *Emperor and Galilean*'  
  
Robert Yelle (Munich), 'A Farewell to Kings? Representing the Body Politic after the Death of Monarchy in Western Europe'
- 3:40pm      Tea/coffee break
- 4:15pm      **Final discussion**
- 5:15pm      Close
- 7:15pm      Dinner for all participants – *Al-Shami Restaurant* (please RSVP)

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## Speaker Biographies

**Aziz Al-Azmeh** is University Professor emeritus and distinguished visiting professor at the Central European University. His latest book in English is *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity* (CUP).

**Jan Assmann**, Dr. phil., taught Egyptology at Heidelberg University from 1972 to 2003 and since 2005 has been Honorary Professor of Cultural and Religious Theory at Constance. He has published on ancient Egyptian religion, literature and history, on cultural theory (“cultural memory”), history of religion (“monotheism and cosmotheism”), the reception of Egypt in European tradition, literary theory and historical anthropology. Assmann taught as visiting professor in Paris, Oxford, Jerusalem and in various universities in the USA (Rice, Yale, Chicago). He received honorary degrees from Münster, Yale and Jerusalem (Hebrew University) and is member of various German and foreign Academies. Recent Books in English include *The Invention of Religion. Covenant and Faith in the Book of Exodus* (2018); *From Akhenaten to Moses* (2014); *The Price of Monotheism*, trans. (2009); *Of God and Gods* (2008); *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (2003).

**Nicole Brisch** is an Associate Professor of Assyriology at the University of Copenhagen. Her research interests include Mesopotamian literature, socio-economic history, and Mesopotamian religion. She is the author of *Tradition and the Poetics of Innovation: Sumerian Court Literature of the Larsa Dynasty (c. 2003-1763 BCE)* (2007) and the editor of *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (2008, 2nd printing 2012). Her current research is concerned with ritual and divinity in early Mesopotamia and economic aspects of religion.

**Faisal Devji** is Professor of Indian History and Director of the Asian Studies Centre at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. He is a Fellow at New York University's Institute of Public Knowledge and Yves Otramane Chair at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. Devji's work ranges over Indian political thought, modern Islam, and the functioning of ethics and violence in a globalized world more generally. His works include *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (2013), and *The Impossible India: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (2012)

**Jos J.L. Gommans** is Professor of Colonial and Global History at Leiden University. He wrote extensively on the early modern history of South and Central Asia (*The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, 1710-1780*; *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire* and *Warhorse and Empire*) as well as on colonial and global history (*Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institution, 1600-2000*; *The Unseen World: The Netherlands and India from 1550* and forthcoming at CUP: *The Dutch Overseas Empire 1600-1800*). He also produced various Dutch source publications including one archival inventory and two historical VOC-atlases. He is also the leader of the Leiden-based Cosmopolis Programme which has trained more than 150 Asian and African students in the study of the Dutch colonial archives.

**Peter Gose** is a Full Professor of Anthropology at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. He began his career as an ethnographer of the Andes, then turned to Inca and colonial indigenous history. Most of his publications explore interrelations of agrarian livelihood, ritual and political power at different historical moments in the Andes, addressing broader issues in the human sciences through them.

**David Graeber** is Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics. His research interests include theories of value, money, debt, politics, manners, magic, class, social movements and social theory. Recent books include *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (Allen Lane/Penguin, 2018), *On Kings* (HAU, 2017), *Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (2015), *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Melville House, 2011), and *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar* (2007).



**Nicole Jerr** is Assistant Professor of English at the U.S. Air Force Academy where she specializes in Modern and Contemporary Drama. She earned her PhD in Comparative Literature from the Humanities Center at Johns Hopkins University. She is co-editor of *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept* (Columbia University Press, 2017). Her current book project is *Pretenders to the Throne: Sovereign Figures on the Modern Stage*.

**Lynette Mitchell** is the Professor of Greek History and Politics at Exeter University. Her monographs include: *Greeks Bearing Gifts: The Public Use of Private Relationships, 431-323 BC* (CUP, 1997); *Panhellenism and the Barbarian in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Classical Press of Wales, 2009); and *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* (Bloomsbury, 2013). She has also edited a number of volumes, including (with Charles Melville), *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Brill, 2013). Her current project is a monograph on Cyrus the Great of Persia.

**Azfar Moin** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Texas in Austin. He studies the history of the pre-modern Islamic world from comparative perspectives with a focus on concepts and practices of sovereignty. His book *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2012) won the Best First Book in the History of Religions Award from the American Academy of Religion, John F. Richards Prize in South Asian History from the American Historical Association, and Honorable Mention for the Bernard S. Cohn Book Prize (South Asia) from the Association for Asian Studies.

**Michael Puett** is the Walter C. Klein Professor of Chinese Anthropology and History at Harvard University. His interests are focused on the inter-relations between anthropology, history, philosophy, and religion, with the hope of bringing the study of China into larger historical and comparative frameworks. He is the author of *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* and *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China*, as well as the co-author, with Adam Seligman, Robert Weller, and Bennett Simon, of *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*.

**Marshall Sahlins** is the Charles F. Grey Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and of Social Sciences at the University of Chicago. His work has ranged very broadly over many areas of anthropology and history. He is the author of many books including *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976); *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (1995); *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (2004); and, with David Graeber, *On Kings* (2017)

**Alan Strathern** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Brasenose College. Much of his work has been on Sri Lankan history, including a monograph and an edited collection, but he now works on the global history of religious encounter and change. His most recent work, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019), has a broad theoretical remit, while a forthcoming companion volume, *Converting kings*, analyses ruler conversions in Kongo, Hawaii, Japan and Thailand 1450-1850.

**Robert A. Yelle** is Professor of Religious Studies at Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich. He was educated at Harvard, Berkeley, and Chicago. A former Guggenheim Fellow, Yelle is the author of several books, including most recently *Sovereignty and the Sacred: Secularism and the Political Economy of Religion* (Chicago, 2019).

