
Special Issue

Perfumery and Ritual in Asia

As readers of this Journal will appreciate, our remit is broad; both in regard to time (from before the Common Era to the closing decades of the twentieth century) and as far as place (from Baghdad to Beijing and beyond) is concerned. This gives us the opportunity to publish research on those elements of human activity that bind or separate cultures on the macro level both historically and geographically. Languages, for example, gather or divide populations. The challenges experienced by Asian language communities, engaged on the task of adopting the Roman script, were examined by a group of linguists in Vol. 20 (January 2010). Religion and kingship are other phenomena that make or break barriers and in Vol. 22 (January 2012) we published a series of complementary articles that looked at the Paramara dynasty, their religious involvements with Jainism, the Śaiva tradition of Hinduism and Buddhism in its initial homeland, North India.

Material production may seem less worthy, whether intellectually or spiritually, than either written language or religious belief, but, as this third special issue produced by the JRAS in recent years highlights, it is an undeniably powerful force shaping a huge range of human interactions. The following articles accordingly explore interconnected aspects of the perfume industry and its trade in pre-modern Asia: technical changes, cultural and ritual values and the physical properties of the products themselves. We are delighted that Dinah Jung has joined us as guest editor on this collection. She has worked with authors from various parts of Asia and invested enormous energy in putting together this issue. We are also grateful to the Collaborative Research Center at the University of Heidelberg which has provided encouragement and support for the study of this subject.

We will be following this issue shortly with another special issue, 'Silk on the Silk Road'.
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