

# Garga's Knowledge of the Crow (*vāyasavidyā*) and the Dawn of South Asian Ornithology

Public Talk by Prof. Dr. Kenneth G. Zysk

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2024

10:30–12:30

MAIN CONFERENCE HALL (& ONLINE)

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR  
THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE |

BOLTZMANNSTRASSE 22 |  
14195 BERLIN

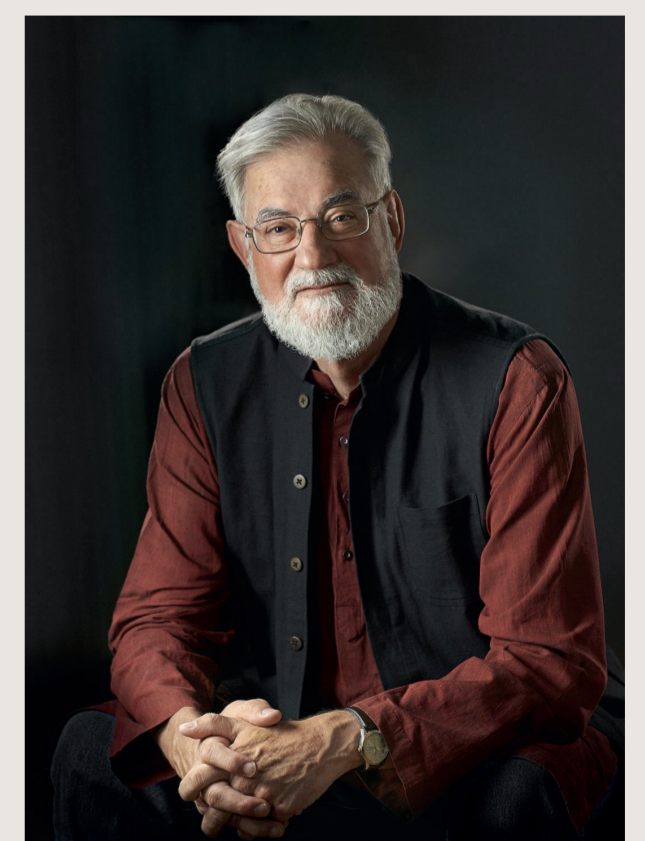


This talk explores a collection of crow omens from South Asia, aiming to elucidate the epistemological underpinnings of their understanding. The content reveals a fascinating blend of empirically based knowledge and religious ritual, both rooted in empirical observation. When this rational approach is applied to bird omens, particularly those associated with corvids, the collection can be interpreted as representing an early form of “ornithology” within the South Asian context.

In this talk, we will delve into the *Gārgīyajyotisa* texts, the earliest extant collection of Brahmanic Astral Science, compiled by a certain Garga likely in the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent around the beginning of the Common Era. Through these texts, we will illustrate the mode of thought that underpins the knowledge of the crow, or *vāyasavidyā*, as presented by Garga.

TO REGISTER FOR THE EVENT, PLEASE EMAIL [ASTRA@MPIWG-BERLIN.MPG.DE](mailto:ASTRA@MPIWG-BERLIN.MPG.DE), PROVIDING YOUR NAME AND AFFILIATION BY MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2024.

SINCE PLACES MAY BE LIMITED, PLEASE INDICATE IF YOU WISH TO ATTEND IN PERSON OR REMOTELY.



Professor Emeritus Kenneth G. Zysk (University of Copenhagen) is a renowned scholar of traditional Indian medicine and science. He began his academic journey in the field of traditional Indian medicine (*Āyurveda*), subsequently expanding his research into the realms of sexology (*Kāmaśāstra*) and the astral sciences (*Jyotiḥśāstra*). Professor Zysk's scholarly interests extend beyond the sciences to encompass the broader cultural contexts in which these disciplines emerged and the intercultural exchanges that contributed to their development. In recent years, he has focused on exploring the connections between ancient Mesopotamian, Greek, and Indian traditions of physiognomy and omenology.

Image credits: Dhūmavati and Śiva in a cremation ground surrounded by crows, c. 19th century.  
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