Edito

The Centre for Social Sciences in Karachi (CSSK) was established in July 2011, thanks to the support of the Consul-General of France, Christian Ramage, and to the director of the Alliance Française de Karachi (AFK or French Cultural Centre). The CSSK is hosted by the AFK, with an independent office, and it benefits from the AFK logistics, as for instance the Conference Hall where the CSSK has already organized seminars and conferences.

The CSSK aim is to promote scholarship and learning on issues related to the diverse, multi-faceted societies and cultures of South Asia, with a main focus on Karachi and Pakistan. Belonging to different fields of expertise, CSSK members are already engaged in number of projects. They include students from different institutions who wish to study in this field. CSSK is able to provide support for supervising their works, discussing their projects, organizing seminars for them to expose their researches etc. Finally it aims at building a partnership with department of Social Sciences belonging to colleges and universities of Karachi, and Pakistan. Additionally, CSSK publishes the 'CSSK Series' with Oxford University Press. Two books have already been published and three more books should be published in 2014.

The BCSSK (Bulletin of the Centre of Social Sciences Karachi) will be published several times a year in order to foster research in Social Sciences in Karachi, and in Pakistan at large. One of its main purposes is to spread data regarding new achievements in Social Sciences, in and on Karachi and beyond, as well as studies devoted to Karachi and Pakistan from other countries. The BCSSK is in line with the newsletter published by the MI FS (Mission Interdisciplinaire Francaise du Sindh), otherwise known as the French Interdisciplinary Study Group on Sindh. The BCSSK will start with the interview of a renowned scholar. Then reports on fieldwork or workshops, seminars or others will follow. The bulletin will also include books reviews as well as Ph. D. and M. A. reviews. It will end with an agenda informing of the main events on the issue.

Michel Boivin

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About us
1. What is your educational background?

I received my Ph.D. and M.Phil. degrees in anthropology from Columbia University, where my research focused on the history and historiography of South Asia, colonialism and historical anthropology. I worked on language, nationalism and politics for my M.A. in Asian Studies at the University of Texas, Austin. I specialized in political anthropology, linguistic anthropology and South Asia for my B.A. from University of California, Santa Cruz.

2. Can you please inform us about your ongoing projects?

My recent publications focus on events associated with Sindh’s annexation by the British in 1843 to illuminate the socio-cultural consequences of direct colonial rule in South Asia. Analyses of annexations usually assume an isomorphism between what occurs in a specific place and its socio-historical analysis. My interdisciplinary research adopts a more revealing multi-sited approach that analyzes annexation through locations that are physically discontiguous (e.g., Sindh, Bombay, Calcutta, and London) but contextually interconnected. This type of historical analysis recognizes Sindh (and South Asia) as part of an integrated imperial system that not only circulated commodities and capital, but people, politics and cultural ideas. By weakening the bond between the location of an annexation and its analysis, it looks to dislodge contextually relevant historicities and socio-political debates from conventionally ignored locations. In the process, it seeks to bring the historical study of colonialism in South Asia (as well as Sindh) more in-line with contemporary anthropological approaches that interconnect local, regional and global spaces.

My publications on Sindh’s annexation presage my current research on the standardization of South Asian writing systems by the British colonial state. This work addresses the 1856 British declaration that an Arabic-style script would be the writing system for the Sindhi language. Prior to this point in time, Sindhi speakers from different communities wrote their language in a variety of scripts. This interdisciplinary research combines history, anthropology and linguistics to explore questions of how language under-wrote imperial dominance in, what is today, a key world region. Rather than examine scripts as forms (i.e., orthography), the project focuses on how writing systems can be discursive strategies for establishing and maintaining power. By elaborating a common and coherent language community, it argues that the Sindhi writing system was a key point of application through which British colonialism inserted itself into people’s daily lives. It analyzes the colonial history of the Sindhi script as a map that delineates how old socio-cultural identities were displaced to produce new linguistic paths for the construction of a distinctive modern Sindhi identity.

3. What is your research perspective?

My research perspective combines anthropology and history. Anthropologically informed histories often bracket off trans-local connections to reconstruct the “native’s viewpoint.” Not limited to the recovery of local socio-cultural points of view, my approach toward studying Sindh’s colonial past not only traces how people manipulate and bargain to gain power through alignments and allegiances, but also addresses the behavior, strategies, decisions and rules that inform, enable and restrict agents’ actions. It spotlights socially dramatic relationships between actors to frame the human experience as a cultural field of forces that incessantly push and pull in dynamic tension. By interconnecting such tensions between dis-contiguous spaces, my research perspective situates histories of colonialism (both in Sindh and South Asia) against a wider historical and anthropological backslash. It represents, in the context of analyzing Sindh’s past, one way to move two different fields of study (i.e., anthropology and history) toward a more interdisciplinary relationship.

4. What role do you play in the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS)?

As currently an AIPS institutional trustee, the organization’s members elected me to be an individual trustee. It is a very exciting time to be involved with AIPS. It spearheads a wide variety of initiatives. Some of these initiatives bring Pakistani scholars to the United States while others help fund research in Pakistan by U.S. based academics. AIPS’ current involvement with Sindh is not extensive. Nonetheless, AIPS is eager to pursue more areas of cooperation with scholars in the region.

5. What books have you published?

The conference included five participants. After the Welcome address by the Director of the Alliance Française de Karachi, Jean-François Chênin, the consul general of France, Christian Ramage, outlined the works achieved by French scholars in Pakistan since independence, as well as the partnership in academic field since decades. He pointed out that French scholars are still the most numerous who are working presently in Pakistan among foreign countries. With Pakistani colleagues, they work in archaeology, paleontology, history and anthropology. He announced that a seminar will be organized in February for introducing the main achievements of this cooperation.

Michel Boivin’s presentation was devoted to the French Orientalist Garcin de Tassy (1794-1878), who was a pioneer in the study of Hindustani language and literature. Among the numerous books he has published, one is the particular interest: the memoir on the peculiarities of Muslim religion in India, published in 1832. Garcin de Tassy, using exclusively Hindustani sources, gave detailed descriptions of a number of fairs where he gave a main role to the processions. According to him, Shah Madar’s fair is the most popular in India. The second part provides short biographical notices of Muslim saints.

Dr Mohan Devraj Thontya’s lecture was about the Maheshvari tradition in Sindh, based on his recent book published in 2012 Maheshvari Meghwar Saints in Sindh (Karachi, Sindh Archives). He focused on the four main pilgrimages (char dham) which are performed by this Shivaite sect. The temples are located in Southern Sindh where the pilgrims use to visit and they are devoted to the main gurus of the Mahesvaris: Shree Dhanl Matang Dev, Shree Lurang Dev, Shree Matai Dev and Shree Mamei Dev. Dr Devraj provides a detailed depiction of some rituals which are performed during the pilgrimages (jatar). He also highlighted the role played by community organisations.

Imrana Tanveer’s presentation titled, "Contemporary Practices of Mazar Chador" was an attempt to make awareness and talk on the possibility of the folk objects and arts into contemporary art practices. The mainstream idea is to highlight the importance of the Mazar culture and its specific ritual of Mazar Chadors, its uses and practice along the lines of modern or contemporary times. Popular culture has already blurred the very thin line between arts, culture and craft. The use of cultural, ritual, folk and mythical objects and conceptions is not new to the present day art practices which ultimately are resulting in the new and diverse hybrid art form. Examples of work include Parastou Forouhar, Majida Khattan, Amber Sami and Imrana Tanveer’s work as attempt to create a dialogue.

Aly Naqvī’s presentation titled, "From Bazar to Mazar- A Morphological Approach" focused to understand the development of Bazar around Mazar through Bibi Pak Daman in Lahore as case study. The aim of presentation was to accentuate the fundamentals of urban, ritualistic and culture aspects of Bazar’s morphological generations interpolated with Mazar. The reason of the analysed organic densification was prominently due to the supply and demand conditions; while climate, devotee influx, annual commemoration, urge of getting buried near saint, short period residencies, prevailing ideology of the region and sacred days marked in religious calendar also impact as main anchor points. The Bazar acts like a living organ which supports the Mazar’s integrated identity.

Before a session of questions-answers, former Secretary of Antiquities, Government of Sindh, Dr Kaleemullah Lashari, provided concluding comments on the workshop.
The Department of Culture, Government of Sindh, is implementing an impressive policy of publications in Sindhi, Urdu and English. The main features include both new reprints of old books which are untraceable, and publication of brand new books on a number of topics. The catalogue of the bookshop provides a good sample of the policy since one can count more than two hundred books which are all available. Although the majority of the books are in Sindhi (134), it also proposes translations in Urdu and English of the most important pieces of poetry, first of all stands the Shah jo risal by Shah Abd al-Latif. Among the first category, there is a forgotten book reprinted in 2012 which was published for the first time in 1904 by Hakim Fateh Muhammad Sehwan. The book is titled Qalandar Namo, and the reprint is based on the second edition completed in 1972. It was the first monography devoted to the famous Sufi saint of Sehwan Sharif, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar.

Another untraceable book published in English on Lal Shabaz Qalandar was recently reprinted in 2012: Hazrat Shahanshah Lal Shabaz Qalandar by Syed Dinal Shah Darbelvy, first published in 1948. It is a very comprehensive book. Interestingly, the author had collected many narratives and traditions about the saint and his darbar before independence. The organization of the pilgrimage is also depicted, as well as the names of the different Sufi lodges, locally known as kafis, with the name of the sajjadanashins (Sufi master of a kafi). Consequently, both these books are very useful for the historian of Sufism, as well as for anthropologist, since rituals and ceremonies are also depicted.

Besides, a particular endeavor was brought to publish books in English which are devoted to Sindhi literature, especially those in relation with Sufism. While on can find numerous translations of Shah jo risalo in English, and although it does exist some compilations where the poetry of Sachal and Sami is added, it is worthy to observe that there is no English anthology of Sindhi Sufi poetry yet. However, a new History of Sindhi Literature was published in 2008 by Shaikh Aziz. It starts with a chapter on Sindhi language but in fact, it studies the issue of the Indus civilization script and language, finally stating that "(...) the Indus Valley language was a proto-Draavidian language" (p. 27), and consequently "Sindhi language as the oldest language of the subcontinent has never been disputed by the scholars and linguists" (p. 29). It is followed by a chapter on the origin and evolution of Sindhi poetry, and another one on Persian poetry. Nonetheless, most of the book is divided into categories in which Sindhi literature is distributed, such as protest poetry, progressive movement, novel after independence, drama, travelogue etc.

Regarding Sufism, a new book was published in 2012 on Shah Latif by Agha Saleem with the title Introduction to the Poetry and Mystic Thought of Shah Abdul Lateef Bhitai. It provides a useful introduction to all the different chapters of the poetry. Also in 2012, the Department of Culture, Government of Sindh, decided to publish an English translation of late Rasheed Bhatti’s book which was first published in Urdu with the title Sufism and Classical Sindhi Poetry. Urdu edition was published in 2010 and it was translated into English by Saleem Noor Husain. The book started with a number of papers written in memory of Rasheed Bhatti, and with a paper by Martin Lings on the originality of Sufism. The book proper, which starts at page 47, first provides an introduction to the topic up to page 73, then proposes numerous notices on Sufi poets, including short biographies and excerpts of their Sufi poetry.

Michel Boivin

Establishment of the Chishti Sufi order cannot be seen in isolation from the political developments that were taking place in the sultanate of Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The book, an academic pursuit by Tanveer Anjum as her doctoral dissertation, looks into the relationship of the Chishti order with the state in Delhi. The book is divided into distinct chapters that deal with a particular period important in the history of development of the Chishti order, sultanate and their relationship. The book starts with the first couple of decades in the thirteenth century when Delhi Sultanate was first established under the rule of Sultan Iltumish which is also the time when Chishti Sufi order instituted itself in India under the guidance of Khwajah Moin al-Din Chishti.

As a result of this institutionalization and increasing widespread popularity, it was not possible for the Sufi order to operate without laying down some guiding principles and rules for dealing with the political powers in Delhi for whom winning over popular movements such as Chishti order was important to sustain their rule. The author traces the political dimensions and strategies of the Sufi order over two centuries during which its ideals underwent changes and transformations from extreme restraint to selective cooperation.

It is interesting to look at this relationship because the two forces represent two completely different lifestyles with almost all Sufi masters, known as Shaykhs, and their disciples following austere lifestyles in contrast to the grandeur and magnificence of the Sultans of Delhi. However, both underwent changes that are highlighted throughout the book as different rulers took reign of the sultanate while different Sufi masters guided the order. One instance of this can be seen in the chapter dealing with the expansion of the order between 1265 and 1325 describing how Nizam al-Din Awliya had to deal with the rule of nine different Sultans in Delhi within his lifetime. The book also gives brief biographical accounts of prominent Chishti Sufis such as Moin al-Din Chishti, Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, and Nizam al-Din Awliya. The book explains many historical events associated with each Sufi master in anecdotal forms making those accounts fascinating to read. Similarly, political intrigues of various rulers of Delhi sultanate during this period also provide interesting reading.

Tanveer looks at historical records and provides evidence by relying on hagiographies, biographies, and accounts of different historians apart from other Sufi literature and treatises. The book’s strength lies in its analysis of different sources. All the incidents are analyzed in a systematic way looking at their authenticity or lack of it. For instance, the issue of Khwajah Muin al-Din accepting land grants from the state was discussed in detail highlighting inconsistencies in the sources (pp. 115 –119). In the process of analyzing the history of the relationship of the Chishti order with the Sultanate some other important events are also cited by the author that can be considered crucial not only to comprehend this relationship but also to understand the general cultural changes in the South Asian Muslim culture. Among these, the intricate relationship of the ulama, the religious scholars – including the theologians and jurists (p. 34), with both the rulers and Chishti masters comes under discussion in various chapters. The relationship of the religious scholars at times stood in contrast to the values enshrined in Chishti orders and the author has looked objectively into the religious as well as political dimensions of such conflicts. One example of such a conflict is when Nizam al-Din Awliya was asked to defend the practice of sama, listening to devotional music, in a public debate. Apart from the religious scholars, the role of another prominent Sufi order called Suhrawardi order also came into discussion because of their policy of maintaining cordial relationships with the rulers of the time. Another issue that the author discusses in the book is the participation of women in the Sufi order that was affected by the relationship with the state and ulama. The author briefly discusses these changes as the early Chishti Sufis allowed women in their lodges while in the last few decades of the fourteenth century women’s participation was discouraged. The author discusses these secondary themes without losing focus on the main subject at hand. Overall, the book provides a wealth of information for those who are academically interested in the political history of Muslim rule and the development of Chishti Sufi order in India in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Shehram Mokhtar, SZABIST

Once a child leaves the family home – for whatever reason – to live on the street, he is labeled as a street child. Despite the absence of authentic surveys, the number of street children in urban sindh is estimated to be no less than 50,000. Street children are the causalties of economic woes, war, poverty, loss of traditional values, domestic violence and physical and psychological abuses. They seldom have a choice in becoming a straw in the wind – and going to school is always out of question. For kicks, these young souls turn to narcotics or to sniffing rubber solvent. Many street children gather money by begging, selling flowers, washing cars, shoe-shining, working in small hotels, selling water and newspapers or other items or via prostitution, receiving only a small cut from the money that gets collected. The city police, especially the traffic police cops, also share their earnings. Then there are the Afghan kids, who pick plastic, glass, metal and other knick-knack from the garbage thrown out on the streets, and sell them to the shopkeepers. The street children usually conclude the day’s activity by indulging in sex in dark corners or other hidden places and then go back to their dera, where they eat and sleep. The street children usually form groups to secure themselves from exploitation and abuse, which is common. Several institutions, National and International organisations have conducted research on the street children of Pakistan. But Pakistan Government has not shown any significant progress in tackling the issue. The performance of Government shows that neither our legislators nor administrators have taken any effective or viable steps to root out the crimes linked to street children. Undoubtedly, the media can play a much greater role to help send street children to school, instead of leaving them to the vagaries of the crime world, and in the hands of abusers.

Shumaila Hemani, Representing Pakistan through Folk Music and Dance, Department of Dance, M. A. in Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, 2011.

Folk music is a site of contestation to define national culture and language amongst the cultural elites in Pakistan. The elites who established cultural institutions for the promotion of folk music represented Pakistan either as a cultural unit with Islam and the Urdu language as its unifying bond, or resisted this position by considering Pakistan as a culturally diverse unit, in which national culture could emerge only through a synthesis of regional cultures and not through the imposition of a single culture and language. I apply Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice to situate my informants within the policies of three institutions: national media, Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) and Lok Virea, in the period between 1965 and 1985. This period covers three major political regimes, when my informants participated in establishing and maintaining cultural institutions that were revived after 9/11 to showcase Pakistan in the international community


The shrine of Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is located in the rural city of Sehwan in Sindh, Pakistan. Sehwan is a site of pilgrimage for thousands of devotees at the annual festival known as urs, spanning three days to commemorate the death anniversary of the saint. Men, women, and transgender participants engage in many rituals at the urs among which the prominent is devotional dancing called dhamal. This thesis project relates sacredness of spaces and hyper-reality of the festival with the performances of rituals that involve diverse publics. At the urs and otherwise, the shrine space provides devotees, largely poor, a collective non-verbal expression in the form of dhamal. Dhamal gives expression to the body in a society that does not normally encourage such expressions in the public sphere. This thesis argues that the Sufi discourse in Sehwan makes the body of a devotee an expressive body.
This seminar spread over three days in February 2014 will consist in presenting and evaluating the research work done by French scholars in Pakistan, and more particularly in its southern region. French researchers started coming to Pakistan right after its independence in the framework of the DAFA project. At present, five French research teams belonging to the French National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS) are conducting research in different fields in Pakistan. France occupies a place of honor in the research done on Pakistan. French research teams have built a solid relationship with the Pakistani research organisms and universities.

The Themes

The five main themes will be covered in chronological order: Paleontology, proto-history of Baluchistan and the Indus Valley, Islamic archaeology, Colonial and Post-Colonial society and culture and lastly Contemporary Studies.

Theme 1 Paleontology: This theme will be divided into two parts (covered by the same team), representing two time periods, the two linked with the history of an insular continent, and then the collision and formation of the Himalays, and emergence of the waterways including the Indus basin: 1. ‘Bugti’ project in Baluchistan 9-30 to -10 Ma, initiated by Jean-Loup Welcombe in 1995 which continued till 2001. 2. ‘Ranikot’ project in Sind (-67 to -53 Ma) initiated in 2008 and still underway, conducted in collaboration with the University of Sind, Jamshoro.

Theme 2 Proto-history of Baluchistan and the Indus valley: This theme will also be divided into two parts covered by the same team: 1. Roland Besenval and Aurore Didier will present the results of twenty years French archaeological works conducted in Kech-Makran (1987-2007) under the guidance of Roland Besenval and in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan and the research carried out by the MAIFI Mission led by Aurore Didier on the development of the Indus civilization in Southern Baluchistan; Jean-François Jarrige will present the results of fifty years of arcaeoological research conducted by the Indus Mission in the Kech-Bolan region.

Theme 3 Islamic Archaeology: Monique Kervran will present the results of archaeological works that she is conducting since the last 25 years. Founded in 1989 under her guidance, the French Archaeological Mission of Sind started working on different siteson Indus Delta. Then in 1992 the team shifted to Sehwan Sharif for excavating the hills known under the name of “Alexander Fort”. In 2011, Monique Kervran started her third excavation work in Bhamore with a French Scholar Paul Wormser.

Theme 4 Colonial and Post-Colonial society and culture: Michel Boivin and Rémy Delage will present the results of the French inter-disciplinary Mission of Sind (MIFS). After having carried out historical and ethnoogical studies in Sind since 1995, Michel Boivin formed an interdisciplinary team for studying the pilgrimage city of Sehwan Sharif. Supported by the Department of Culture of the Government of Sind, many collective missions have been conducted for analyzing the multiple facets of the pilgrimage.

Theme 5 Contemporary studies: This group brings together different specialists like Mariam Abou Zahab and Alix Philippon. Centered on the political science as well as political sociological approach, they work on different themes such as politics and urbanism, sociology of groups involved in violence, politics and criminality.

The scientific interest

It is manifold. The main interest is double-fold: putting forth the importance of Pakistan as object of research, from the pre-historical to the contemporary period and to project the role of France in the international research activities. In other words, it is aimed at showing the continuity of the French research work in Pakistan over a long period of time as well as its diversity. At the same time it’s aimed at presenting Pakistan under a different light, as a region where the evolution of animal species, and humans, can be traced from the origins to this day. This seminar will present a complete panorama of the work done by French researchers in Pakistan before the Pakistani as well as the international scientific community. It will also lay emphasis on cooperation between Pakistani and European academic partners in different fields.
AGENDA

3/5-6 February 2014: "New European Contributions to the study of Pakistan", Organized by the French Embassy in Islamabad, the French Consulate in Karachi, the Alliance Française in Karachi (AFK), the Center for Social Studies in Karachi (CSSK), the Government of Sindh, ministry of Culture, Quai-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Oxford University Press of Pakistan (OUPP).


14-16 April 2014: 24th International Pakistan History Conference: History & Historiography of South Asia, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

6 June 2014: "Islam and Regional Cultures in Pakistan", workshop organized by the Centre for South Asian Studies (CNRS-EHIST) in Paris


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