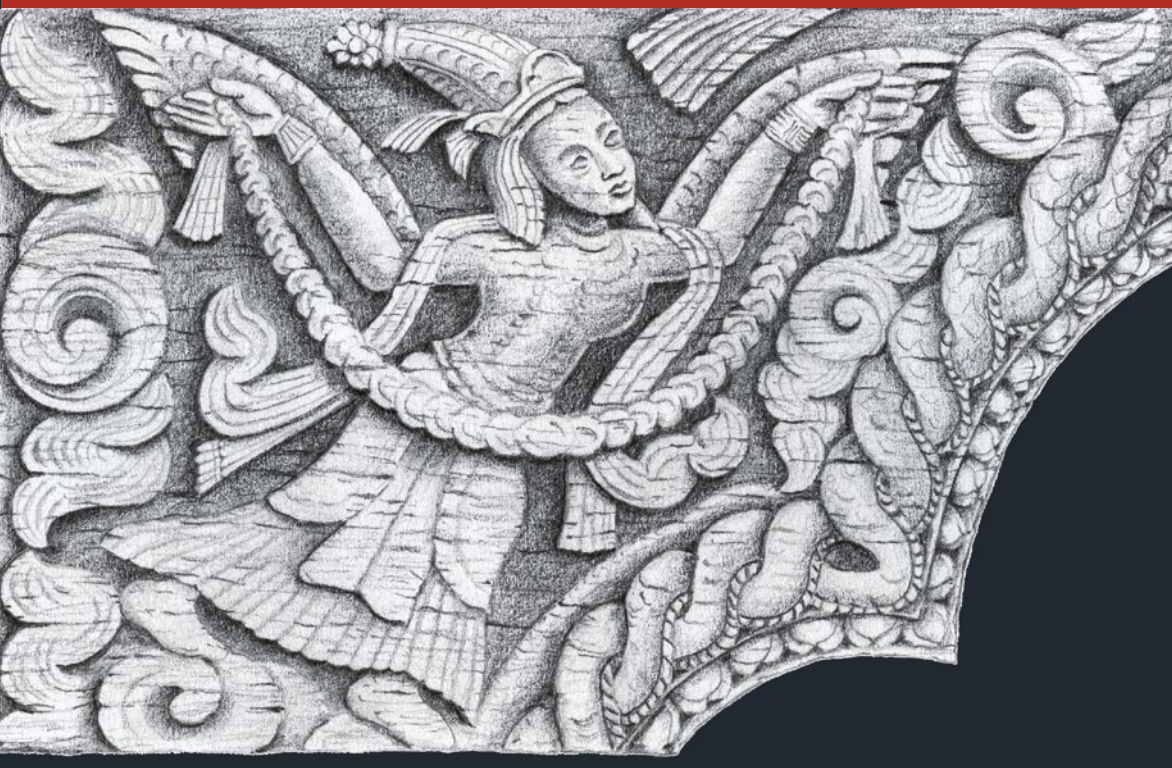
Spirits in Transcultural Skies

Auspicious and Protective Spirits in Artefacts and Architecture Between East and West

Niels Gutschow · Katharina Weiler *Editors*



Springer

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ISSN 2191-656X ISSN 2191-6578 (electronic)
ISBN 978-3-319-11631-0 ISBN 978-3-319-11632-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-11632-7
Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014956659

Cover illustration: The cover illustration is a detail from a drawing of the uppermost panel of a trefoil central window in the Hindu monastic institution Kuthumaṭh in Bhaktapur, Nepal, which was established in 1749. The detail shows one of two garland bearers that flank the window of the eastern wing. The figure is a representative example of winged wisdom-bearers that can be found on most spandrels of windows and doors in the Kathmandu Valley as of the early eighteenth century. The figure is surrounded by scrolled cloud motifs in the Chinese fashion and its clothing shows how new iconographic conventions entered the depictions of wisdom-bearers at the time. Drawing by Axel Weller (2009)

Printed on acid-free paper

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Introduction

Transcultural Journeys

Art history has long been one of the disciplines most firmly rooted in hermetic and regionally limited analytical frameworks. Since the nineteenth century, art and its historiography have been intimately bound to a whole range of projects dedicated to identity formation. Only recently have scholars in the field of art history begun to look for new frameworks (Bruhn et al. 2012) that focus attention on the creation of a new historical mind map, and the growing tendency to transcend and query a hitherto Western-dominated historical perspective. In this regard, "transculturality" is a major keyword for defining such a new approach, as it addresses issues of processuality and the consistent networks of cultural relations that are understood to constitute a culture. "Cultures" are in turn not understood as hermetic and regionally limited by fixed boundaries. Instead, a transcultural approach aims at gaining insights into cultural dynamics and the entanglements that lie beyond those transmitted through discourses of cultural purity and originality and the forms of cultural essentialism they stand for and sustain. This approach inquires into reciprocal effects and aspects of interwovenness in art and architecture with a view to reconceptualizing given realms (Juneja 2012). A project of this nature may begin by reconstituting art-historical units of analysis, replacing fixed regions with mobile contact zones featuring shifting frontiers (spaces of transition), and considering nonlinear and palimpsestic aspects of time.

From time immemorial, objects of art, migrant artists, and traveling visual regimes have invariably created an open public sphere of shared meanings and forms of articulation. Because of this tendency, the present volume investigates the visualization of both ritual and decorative aspects of auspiciousness and protection in the form of celestial characters in art and architecture. Their iconography proves a useful tool for investigating and conceptualizing transculturality as a form of relationality. Presented here are the proceedings of the workshop "Spirits in Transcultural Skies," held at the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global

Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows" at Heidelberg University from 30 June to 2 July, 2011. The workshop set out to approach the issue of "protection" from a primarily art-historical perspective and was devoted to spirits or goddesses and gods, that is to say essentially auspicious and protective figures "populating" architecture on their travels between the East and West.

A vivid account of buildings inhabited by spirits is to be found in Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* (1972) (translated into English as *Invisible Cities*, in 1974), a compilation of fragmentary, fictitious urban images. The author conjures up cities through imaginary conversations between the thirteenth-century Venetian traveler to Asia Marco Polo (ca. 1254–1324) and his host, the Great Khan of the Mongol Empire (r. 1260–1294) and Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty in China, Kublai Khan (1215–1294). "Gods of two species protect the city of Leandra," says Marco Polo of one of these legendary cities. "Both are too tiny to be seen and too numerous to be counted" (Calvino 1974). Invariably, however, these gods inhabit the houses. When families move house, the Penates (guardians of the provisions) follow them. The Lares (guardians of certain places or families) "belong to the house, and when the family that has lived there goes away, they remain with the new tenants; perhaps they were already there before the house existed, among the weeds of the vacant lot, concealed in a rusty can." These house gods like to intermingle in a house: "they visit one another, they stroll together on the stucco cornices, on the radiator pipes; they comment on family events; not infrequently they quarrel; but they can also get along peacefully for years." Marco Polo continues his description of the encounters and relationships between the two kinds of gods: "The Lares have seen Penates of the most varied origins and customs pass through their walls; the Penates have to make a place for themselves, rubbing elbows with Lares of illustrious, but decaying palaces, full of hauteur, or with Lares from tin shacks, susceptible and distrustful."—"If you listen carefully, especially at night, you can hear them in the houses of Leandra murmuring steadily, interrupting one another, huffing, bantering, amid ironic, stifled laughter."

What Calvino conjures up in his tale is the notion of Roman *genii*, the idea of gods connected to places, landscapes (rivers, mountains, and valleys), buildings, or even entire cities. Aside from those related to particular persons, such places were guarded by a *genius loci*. In his descriptions, Calvino hints at the contacts and encounters and at the dynamic and culturally productive practices that are associated with auspicious and protective deities as soon as they are personalized.

The nine articles in the present volume deliberate further on the relationships between ethereal creatures and the symbolism found in pictorial programs. The authors come from different fields of research, including art history, architecture, and classical archaeology. They detect the different ways and situations in which aspects of protection, power, and salvation find their expression, for example, when painted or carved in stone or wood in art and architecture, or on ritual implements, covering a wide geographical area between Tyrol and Japan. The examples presented do not claim to provide a comprehensive overview. The collection rather opens a window on a phenomenon in the history of art and architecture that has never been looked at from this vantage before. The time frame ranges from Greek

and Roman antiquity to the twentieth century. Though they are individual examples, the objects of investigation discussed here can be analyzed in terms of specific fields of tension that have evidently evolved from situational shifts in meaning. With the help of a range of different instances, the authors detect multiple identities in some of these figures, identities that have taken shape as a result of their multipolar genesis. The philosophies present in the art and architecture featured here are primarily religious (though some are also political) and communicate distinctive notions of protection. In descriptive terms, they find expression in the pictorial programs of temples, churches, palaces, triumphal arches, and houses where goddesses, gods, or heavenly spirits, e.g., *genii*, *victoriae*, angels, *paris*, *apsaras*, *vidyādharīs*, *shenren*, *yuren*, *hiten*, or *tennin*, as well as winged dragons may "dwell" in reliefs, murals, or carvings on façades, arches, spandrels, vaults, niches, cantilevers, composite capitals, tympana, door and window lintels, or roof struts. The scholars delineate the spirits' diverse trajectories and histories, inquire into the periods and situations in which they came about or were created, and ask what these beings—both winged and wingless—can tell us about the power of exchange.

In its attempts to conceptualize transculturality and transcultural flows, this volume contributes to charting the motif of the aerial spirit in architecture and art objects and examines the eagerness displayed in adopting certain concepts and artistic ideas. Moreover, varied as their approaches and analyses may be, the authors all apply methods that examine the diverse and often contradictory processes of relationality, keeping in mind the fact that transculturality may be described not only in terms of the empathy required to accept foreign forms and practices but also of the desire to domesticate them. Perusal of the "migration" of the motif of airborne or winged auspicious beings reveals clearly defined instances of experiences of cultural entanglement and multiple ways in which both homogeneity and difference are negotiated within contacts and encounters through the selective appropriation, translation, and rereading of signs. In this case, "translation," rooted in the Latin cognate *translatio*, stands for a form of border crossing, a space where different cultures engage with each other. The term can be used to define a series of relationships across boundaries of genre, language, and cultural formation. In this sense, translation provides a comprehensive and productive basis for reconsidering what, in cultural and artistic practice, is referred to as "influence." With respect to transculturality, "translation" can be read as a dynamic and culturally productive practice through which the circulation, mediation, reception, and transformation—in short, the representation—of specific cultural forms, codes, and practices are affected. In highly transformative processes, certain artistic prototypes are revived and consciously imitated, copied, and amalgamated.

As is characteristic of transcultural entanglements, the way beliefs "travel" and translate into symbolic motifs, fashioned in a two- or three-dimensional form, is never linear. The routes are complex and unexpected. The belief in auspicious goddesses and gods or in spirits related to people, places, or victories can be found in many regions and throughout different time periods, thus making such notions of protection universal. These deities materialized in local contexts and were altered in

the course of extended contacts and cultural, political, and religious relationships. In this respect, the motif of the auspicious, airborne spirit persistently guaranteed prosperity and victory, and could also pay homage to an emperor. Furthermore, notions of protection and auspiciousness are often linked to metaphysical concepts of eternity, immortality, or the life cycle.

Messengers and Protectors

In ancient Greek and Roman belief, goddesses and gods had the power to dispatch winged messengers, and a number of sculpted airborne figures of transcultural genesis from those periods are familiar today. The most important and influential of these was the goddess of victory (called *Nike* in the Greek and *Victoria* in the Roman world), who announced forthcoming victories. Kai Töpfer tells us that, in the sixth century BCE, Nike was a "relatively new goddess and was, in fact, more a personification of an abstract concept than a real goddess." She was a winged "messenger" between the realm of the gods and the world of human beings, her garments fluttering behind her as she moved through the skies. Töpfer shows that though both Nike and Victoria were depicted in a very similar way, there are clear conceptional differences between them. This fact reveals the figure's identity as located in a specific field of tension. Against the background of such shifts in meaning, Töpfer discusses the depictions of Victoria in Roman Syria. Due to the significant role of the Levantine region in forming cross-cultural contacts and developments throughout antiquity, the question of the beliefs and concepts represented by these figures is of special interest from a transcultural perspective.

For more than four centuries prior to the latter stages of late antiquity, two great world powers, the Roman Empire and the Sasanian Empire (the last pre-Islamic Persian Empire), ruled over the Near East and the Mediterranean. In this transitional period between antiquity and the middle ages, these empires were sometimes well-disposed partners, sometimes rivals. Shervin Farridnejad studies significant examples from the religious canon of Sasanian iconography by referring to angels that are investigated for their cross-cultural entanglement. The Sasanian canon contains some iconographical elements borrowed from previous or neighboring cultures, which the Sasanian artists translated and domesticated into a genuinely Zoroastrian mode. The transformation of Victoria in Roman Syria, acting as protector of specific individuals, turns up again in the context of Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Sasanian empire: *amәšа spәnta* ("beneficent immortals" or "immortal holy ones") relates to Ahura Mazdā and to all the divine beings he has brought into existence, including *frauuašis* (guardian angels) and *yazatas* ("adorable ones," angels). The "*frauuašis* are the only anthropomorphic winged deities to have been identified in Sasanian religious art to date" (Farridnejad).

The Roman *victoriae* are companions of the ruler; the Zoroastrian *frauuašis* appear in the context of the king's investiture; in North India, *vidyādharas* ("wisdom bearers") flank the halo of the Buddha (possibly acting as

dharmacakravartin—the protector of teaching) who with the gesture of reassurance and safety (Skt. *abhayamudrā*) assures divine protection and bliss to the devotee and dispels fear (Fig. 4 in the chapter "Winged Immortals and Heavenly Beings Across the East Asian Skies"); and, in the Christian context, angels frame Christus Pantocrator (Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 in the chapter "Angels as Agents of Transfer between Hebrew Origins, Byzantium, and Western Europe: Marienberg in South Tyrol as a Case Study").

Angelika Konrad-Schineller's article deals with angels performing special functions in Christian religion in both Byzantium and Western Europe. Their functions are rooted in Hebrew traditions expressed in the Old Testament. Such functions were adapted and developed in the New Testament in both Byzantium and Western Europe. Within a framework like this, angels "functioned in the liturgical ceremonies of the funerals as psychopomps for the deceased, thus connecting heaven and earth, even after their earthly existence ends in the hour of death" (Konrad-Schineller). Konrad-Schineller examines the angelic function and the application of angelic figures in a Christian sacral space, with reference to the example of the crypt of Marienberg in South Tyrol, where angels figure as guardians of threshold spaces. Investigating the transcultural potential of the angels in situ by focusing on their relation to liturgical practices of Byzantine origin and their application in Western European rites, Konrad-Schineller presents the Tyrol as a zone of transfer wherein Byzantine art was adapted through trade and pilgrim routes extending to and passing through Sicily, Venice, and Salzburg. She examines how iconographical models of Byzantine origin, e.g., bands enmeshing the wings and heads, borders on the dresses, and the fluttering ends of the clothes (Fig. 15 in the chapter "Angels as Agents of Transfer between Hebrew Origins, Byzantium, and Western Europe: Marienberg in South Tyrol as a Case Study"), were adapted and transformed. The *taenia* on the heads "probably derived from the winged Roman *victoriae* and the clothes are reminiscent of antique robes" (Konrad-Schineller).

Cloud-Borne Beings and Controllers of Rain

In Syria, the Roman Victoria underwent a decisive change as of the second century CE, when the goddess became associated with fortune, resulting in wealth "which is in some cases expressed by the addition of a cornucopia to the established iconography of Victoria" (Töpfer). Equipped with a diadem, necklace, lobed earrings, and fluttering ribbons, Anāhitā is one of the major Zoroastrian *yazata*s in anthropomorphic form, standing for "water, vegetation, agriculture, and fertility" (Farridnejad). Most revealing is the description of the powers celebrated in one of the hymns to her cited in Farridnejad's article: "Some waters she made stand still, the others she (made) flow onward."

Apparently, Anāhitā is the controller of water, thus sharing the power of the beneficent, wingless aerial spirits of the Indian sky, the dancing *apsaras* associated with the clouds, the wisdom-bearers (*vidyādhara*), or celestial musicians

(*gandharva*) who act as the guardians of rain, the celestial *soma* (the juice that was the essential libation in all early Vedic sacrifices). These spirits appear in early Buddhist sculptures from the second century BCE, eventually frame the halo above the Buddha, and populate the lintels and jambs of Gupta-period Buddhist temples, as well as Hindu temples of the fifth century.

In South and Southeast Asian art, protection from transience is often associated with the sky and its rain clouds, which stand for both celestial and terrestrial water, and, in some belief systems, even amniotic water. Water symbolizes life. Chari Pradel surveys the pantheon of deities that arrived in Japan with the advent of Buddhism in the mid-sixth century. Her research is dedicated to the flying or heavenly beings assembled around Buddhas and bodhisattvas and their origins. By analyzing a range of visual and textual materials, Pradel demonstrates that the type of heavenly being that came to Japan was a composite created in China which combined the Indian prototype of flying beings with the Chinese ideas of immortal beings soaring through the skies on clouds. Kushan-style spirits with gently backward-bending legs made their way into the caves of China in painted form in Dunhuang (Fig. 5 in the chapter "Winged Immortals and Heavenly Beings Across the East Asian Skies"), or as polychrome stone carvings in Yungang (Fig. 6 in the chapter "Winged Immortals and Heavenly Beings Across the East Asian Skies"), inevitably enveloped by fluttering scarves. As Pradel says, these "sinuous scarves seem to suspend them in the air" (Fig. 6 in the chapter "Winged Immortals and Heavenly Beings Across the East Asian Skies"), to some extent replacing wings. The Indian-type heavenly beings of the caves in China are "praising the Buddha. . . to create a splendid Buddhist land," as Pradel writes, and thus seem to attain a specifically Chinese quality—that of the "winged immortals" already figuring as "feathered men" in the first century BCE (Fig. 2 in the chapter "Winged Immortals and Heavenly Beings Across the East Asian Skies") and "believed to live amid sacred mountains in a numinous realm" associated with "the search for longevity and immortality." With long skirts fusing with stylized clouds, these spirits landed in Korea and Japan from the fifth century CE and were always associated with the heavenly realm.

Celestial beings are often depicted using clouds as chariots. More than that, an aerial creature can be understood as a guardian of the rain. The cloud motif and wind aspect, often represented by a celestial figure's floating garment and scarf, became propelling agents for the mobility of these immortals and other ethereal beings. In this context, Niels Gutschow studies the celestial spirits figuring in the urban culture of the Newars in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. His investigation starts with the fifth century CE, when structural and decorative details, among them ethereal imagery, were borrowed from the plains of the Ganges and subsequently domesticated and transformed. For a period of some 1,000 years, wisdom bearers in particular appeared in flight, albeit without wings, as guardians of doors, windows, and thresholds. The representation of clouds involves not only water but also foliage motifs. Gutschow connects celestial water with the (cloud-) foliage motif and associates this combination with a rich repertoire of hybrid foliate creatures such as celestial spirits, birds, animals, and aquatic sea monsters, either with

foliated lotus-scroll tails or emerging from a foliage motif. One image of the wingless *vidhyādhara*—depicted with extremely flexed legs since the Gupta period (Fig. 2 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)")—survived in Indian art for centuries and arrived in Nepal in the sixth century (Fig. 3 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)"). This specific body posture remained unchanged for almost a millennium. To cover another full circle of transcultural journeys, one example of a very recent visualization of a wisdom bearer in Newar architecture, crafted in copper repoussé in the late nineteenth century, is winged, carries a traditional flower garland, and emerges from a puffy cloud (Fig. 14 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)"). This latter motif traveled from China to the court of the Il-Khans and from there to Tabriz, arriving at the court of the Mughals (the dynasty in power in India from 1526 to 1858) by the end of the sixteenth century, and was readily incorporated into the Newar context by the end of the seventeenth century. Last but not least, the deities were equipped with wings and clad in new attire to conform to representations of *paris*, angel-like spirits of Persian-Mughal provenance, in the mid-seventeenth century, thus successfully ousting the earlier spirits.

Preferably placed on door or window lintels or below small windows, the Nepalese spirits seem to be not necessarily associated with the heavenly realm of the immortals, but rather with the protection of thresholds. This aspect brings us to "the dragon in transcultural skies" presented by Sara Kuehn. The dragon's *ouroboros* aspect (i.e., the dragon eating its own tail, which it simultaneously swallows and disgorges, as shown in Fig. 1 in the chapter "The Dragon in Transcultural Skies: Its Celestial Aspect in the Medieval Islamic World") "marks the boundary between the ordered world and the chaos around it." It therefore appears around openings, serving as a "liminal marker and apotropaic device" (Figs. 7a, 8, 9, and 10b in the chapter "The Dragon in Transcultural Skies: Its Celestial Aspect in the Medieval Islamic World"). The pairing of serpent dragons on the arch of a building reinforces its power. In our context, the words of a thirteenth-century Spanish cabbalist (a disciple of the Jewish cabbala) quoted by Kuehn confirm an astonishing semantic continuity: "And without it [the Great Serpent] no creature in the sublunar world had life, and there would be no sowing and no growth and no motivation for the reproduction of all creatures." The dragon as another airborne and sometimes winged creature embodies both the preservation and destruction of life. It may represent protection or threat, and it also displays "chthonic, aquatic, and aerial aspects" (Kuehn), able to turn itself from a creature of the air into one of the sea or land. These aspects reflect the dichotomous nature of the dragon, with its capacity to move with equal ease in water, sky, and earth. Kuehn elaborates on the winged dragon and its astral-cosmological, alchemical, astrological, and metaphysical manifestations, glimpses of which are vouchsafed in Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian writings. As shown by Kuehn, the intrinsic and extrinsic ambiguity of the great beast also, and indeed necessarily, entails an element of transcendence,

since its mystery can only be explained as flowing from the juxtaposition of two or more levels of reality. Its inherent duality makes the dragon an embodiment par excellence of change and transformation.

In early seventeenth-century Newar architecture, the dragon effectively replaced the conventional wisdom bearers on the lintels of doors and windows. As the ultimate symbol of liminal guardianship, the dragon even started to populate pillars, capitals, friezes, and cornices, while gradually adopting details of Chinese and Mughal provenance. A generation passed before the wisdom bearers emerged in a new form, now equipped with wings, to reclaim their traditional place in the architecture of the day (Fig. 6 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)").

Ethereal Escorts in Godly Realms

Coming to power in India in the early sixteenth century, the Mughals were highly successful in developing a syncretistic imperial rhetoric, which is described in this volume by Ebba Koch. Koch discusses the crucial function and hybrid identity of *paris* and angels in the art of the Mughals. Since they ruled as Muslim elite over a vast empire of peoples of different beliefs and cultures, they were concerned about addressing the widest possible audience. Koch emphasizes the Mughals' "unrivalled talent for visual articulation," their talent for universalizing various ideas and "successfully merging them with related features of other traditions." As Koch indicates, the ruler Jahangir associated himself with Solomon on his flying throne, a topic found in the paintings on the vault of the Kala Burj, a tower pavilion at Lahore fort, which forms part of the palace complex. Jahangir decided to place angels of Persian provenance on the outer fort wall (Fig. 7 in the chapter "Solomonic Angels in a Mughal Sky: The Wall Paintings of the Kala Burj at the Lahore Fort Revisited and Their Reception in Later South Asian and Qajar Art") and others of European design in the interior (Figs. 3 and 4 in the chapter "Solomonic Angels in a Mughal Sky: The Wall Paintings of the Kala Burj at the Lahore Fort Revisited and Their Reception in Later South Asian and Qajar Art"). Koch analyzes how Jahangir utilized the knowledge and skills of his local painters to produce European-inspired works in an unconventional setting, resulting in the adaptation of European prototypes to Mughal taste and symbolic functions. Christian iconography had been introduced into Mughal art through pictorial material such as engravings from the print shops of Antwerp, brought to the court by Jesuit missions around 1580. Koch explains how the "European adolescent angel" was "particularly suitable to fuse with or supplant the traditional Iranian–Mughal child angel" (which made its way to Nepal less than a generation later). In the early nineteenth century, the fact that protective angels were used to decorate the seat of an Islamic ruler—reminiscent in some respects of the tradition of Roman *victoriae* or Zoroastrian *yazata*s—even prompted the Qajar dynasty of Iran to look "to Mughal India for artistic inspiration" (Koch).

Later, ethereal deities such as wisdom bearers and celestial musicians joined angels for creative dialogues on the pilasters, corbels, lintels, cornices, and arches of neoclassical architecture, which had its heyday in India between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries and in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal between the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing upon selected examples from Ahmadabad's early nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, Rabindra Vasavada discusses the presence of ethereal winged half-divinities as an important aspect of architectural and sculptural detail in Indian religious architecture. His remarks are confined to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jain and Svāmināràyaṇa temples, where "images are seen as an inspiring extension of the human mind's ability to harbor thoughts about spiritual life as the highest level of human existence" (Vasavada). It is in the temple architecture that heavenly divine figures "are always shown with ethereal dispositions suggestive of their skyward movements and spiritual domains" (Figs. 6, 7, 8 and 9 in the chapter "Ethereal Imagery: Symbolic Attributes in the Art and Architecture of India"). In the second half of the nineteenth century, hybrid angelic figures carved in wood or molded in plaster after winged European prototypes emerged from the entanglement of local artistic tradition and imported Western art forms redolent of the taste and preferences of the colonial state. As Vasavada suggests, some female figures recall depictions of statues of the Virgin Mary, while others seem to depict Kṛṣṇa playing the flute (Fig. 3 in the chapter "Ethereal Imagery: Symbolic Attributes in the Art and Architecture of India"). The imagery is "stylized in a medley of both 'Western' and 'local' forms" (Vasavada).

It is here that Katharina Weiler's study of angelic figures in the stucco decoration of early twentieth-century houses in the Kathmandu Valley ties in. The twentieth-century spirits in neoclassical Newar architecture are a "transcultural, hybrid outcome engendered by artistic and architectural exchanges" (Weiler). Weiler's focus is on the interplay of local artistic forms and philosophies and a "neoclassical" formal idiom hitherto unknown in architectural forms. The study examines how certain paths of artistic appropriation and transformation are evident in the depictions of these winged celestial beings, i.e., their transformation from rather standardized versions dressed in Mughal costumes to canonical, yet individual images with elaborate hairstyles and Western-style attire. Weiler detects a canon of winged celestial figures that are frequently represented as holding garlands and appearing in pairs. She notes that such imagery is clearly rooted "in both the local mythological, artistic traditions and the neoclassical repertoire" (Weiler). In this respect, Weiler reflects on the conspicuously full-bosomed and scantily clad winged angels, which she refers to as "deities of the gaze" (Weiler). These figures present ornate cartouches (Fig. 5 in the chapter "Entangled Visualities: Celestial Beings in Early Twentieth Century Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal"), frame windows (Figs. 6 and 7 in the chapter "Entangled Visualities: Celestial Beings in Early Twentieth Century Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal"), or appear above window lintels, where they arrange themselves into triangular formations, often with outstretched arms as if to embrace the opening (Figs. 8 and 14 in the chapter "Entangled Visualities: Celestial Beings in Early Twentieth Century

Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal"). They are also found squeezed in between acanthus leaves on composite capitals of neoclassical pilasters. As Weiler concludes, the builders of Nepalese palaces and residences obviously positioned themselves in a world of globally valid images taken from a neoclassical architectural idiom that was "'spoken' on a global scale, however in different 'vernaculars'" (Weiler). Last but not least, the figures lost "their defined role as 'either' intermediaries between the almighty power of a Christian or Islamic pantheon and humans 'or' celestial beings mainly associated with rain and fertility in Hinduism and Buddhism" in this transformational process (Weiler).

Entangled Angelology

From the winged Nike of Greece dating from the sixth century BCE (Fig. 1b in the chapter "The Goddess of Victory in Greek and Roman Art") and the "feathered man" of China's first century BCE Western Han Dynasty (Fig. 2 in the chapter "Winged Immortals and Heavenly Beings Across the East Asian Skies"), to the angels that figure in Shahzia Sikander's 2003 paintings (Figs. 12 and 13 in the chapter "Solomonic Angels in a Mughal Sky: The Wall Paintings of the Kala Burj at the Lahore Fort Revisited and Their Reception in Later South Asian and Qajar Art"), more than two and a half millennia are covered in this volume, documenting an almost global practice from a transcultural perspective. We apologize for not having been able to present a more comprehensive (polycircular) journey, which might have included more dragon-snakes from Western cultural realms, ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as recent *paris*/angels from contemporary temples in India, and finally all kinds of hybrid winged animals combining the features of lions, horses, snakes, dragons, and seahorses (*hippocampi*, which in Etruscan belief originated from a sea voyage to the other world). The epilogue, however, establishes ties with the entangled visualities of *genii*, angels, *vidyādharīs,* and the like in the contemporary iconography of everyday matters. Evidently, auspicious and protective spirits have maintained (and maybe even enlarged) their potential to act as representatives of certain zones of transfer.

Across time and space, throughout cultures and religions, the belief in celestial beings, their appearance, and specific function was modified from time to time in the course of conquest and trade relations, and changes in artistic style. Indeed, one can vividly imagine spirits of different origins and time periods encountering each other, comparing their different customs, quarrelling, or getting along peaceably, as described in Calvino's story. One thing we need to add to our propaedeutic notes on "spirits in transcultural skies" is that, on closer inspection, the universalization of ideas about protection culminated in creative dialogues, merging related artistic features from various traditions that proved to be capable of constant adaptation and change.

For example, the flying goddess on a Boeotian cup (sixth century BCE), (Fig. 1b in the chapter "The Goddess of Victory in Greek and Roman Art") depicted in a lunging position prefigures the bent leg posture we encounter in India from the fifth

century CE (albeit without wings) (Fig. 2 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)"; Figs. 3 and 10 in the chapter "Solomonic Angels in a Mughal Sky: The Wall Paintings of the Kala Burj at the Lahore Fort Revisited and Their Reception in Later South Asian and Qajar Art") and in Nepal at least since the tenth century (Figs. 4b, 5 and 9 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)"). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, ancient images of Nike/Victoria standing or flying (Figs. 2, 3 and 6 in the chapter "The Goddess of Victory in Greek and Roman Art") are recalled in the palace architecture of the Rana rulers in Nepal (Fig. 3 in the chapter "Entangled Visualities: Celestial Beings in Early Twentieth Century Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal"). In her paired shape, Victoria (Fig. 4a, b in the chapter "The Goddess of Victory in Greek and Roman Art"), the Roman version of the Greek Nike, seems to have been remodeled in the art of the Sasanian Empire (early third to mid-seventh century CE, extending from the Roman Empire to the Indian subcontinent) as a Zoroastrian archangel (Figs. 7 and 8 in the chapter "The Iconography of Zoroastrian Angelology in Sasanian Art and Architecture"), while also serving as "the dominating iconographic model for later depictions of angels and other winged spirits" (Töpfer) in the Christian context (Fig. 11 in the chapter "Angels as Agents of Transfer between Hebrew Origins, Byzantium, and Western Europe. Marienberg in South Tyrol as a Case Study"). After various detours, this model reemerges in the mid-thirteenth century, in the form of the winged figures above the portal of Susuz Han in southwestern Turkey (Fig. 9 in the chapter "The Dragon in Transcultural Skies: Its Celestial Aspect in the Medieval Islamic World"), on Lahore Fort as a Solomonic angel in the early sixteenth century (Fig. 7 in the chapter "Solomonic Angels in a Mughal Sky: The Wall Paintings of the Kala Burj at the Lahore Fort Revisited and Their Reception in Later South Asian and Qajar Art"), in seventeenth-century Nepalese art (Figs. 6, 7a, 8, 9, 10, and 11 in the chapter "How Celestial Spirits Became Winged in the Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sixth to Nineteenth Century)," and in the early twentieth-century architecture of the Kathmandu Valley (Figs. 4, 5, 6 and 7 in the chapter "Entangled Visualities: Celestial Beings in Early Twentieth Century Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal"). In this respect, the imagery of the winged figure has become a universal image traversing "transcultural skies," while the respective structural elements displayed by these celestial creatures took on the quality of contact zones negotiating different symbols, signs, and collective processes of consciousness.

Tracing the flow of the winged spirits motif from West to East, archaeologist Ingeborg Luschey-Schmeisser, who dedicated her research to seventeenth-century architecture in Iṣfahān (Iran), once suggested establishing a "line of ancestors" (Luschey-Schmeisser 1978, 47ff). This project recognizes the "movability of wings"—artistic concepts that traveled across time and space—generating the feeling that at least heaven comes without fixed boundaries, imaginary antipoles such as Asia and Europe, or notions of cultural isolation, and may even unhinge well-established frameworks such as European or East Asian art history, which

consolidate supposed cultural and political borders, and conceivably provide a basis for reconceptualizing art history. This understanding still needs to take into account that, though we are dealing with images associated with heaven and earth, with the skies, clouds, and water, those images were born in the minds of worldly artists, and that the latter (or at least some of the art objects they created) could have been itinerant or peripatetic.

Considered as a whole, the present volume focuses upon a transcultural iconography in art history, a methodologically innovative approach to redefine and develop the practice of identification and classification of motifs as a means to understanding meaning, and attempts to challenge academic disciplines. In this respect, the contributions examining the artistic flow in Nepal are new, because art history in Nepal has, to date, been the subject of little research. Close examination of the artwork discussed in this volume with recourse to well-established labels such as *Greek*, *Roman*, *Christian*, *Buddhist*, *Islamic*/*Mughal*, *Indian*, or *Chinese* calls for a constitution of innovative units of investigation more responsive to the logic of objects and artists on the move.

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The Goddess of Victory in Greek and Roman Art

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Abstract In Greek and Roman art, a number of winged characters attest a transcultural genesis. The most important and influential of these, the goddess of victory, was called Nike in the Greek and Victoria in the Roman world. Both goddesses were usually depicted in a very similar way, but in fact there are clear conceptional differences between them. Against the background of such shifts in meaning, a special phenomenon will be discussed, namely the unusal amount of depictions of Victoria in Roman Syria. Because of the significant role the Levantine region played in contact between the East and West in ancient times, the question of which beliefs and concepts these figures represented is of special interest with respect to a cross-cultural perspective.

The Greek Goddess: Nike

In order to better understand the nature and concept of the Greek goddess Nike, a closer look at the sources is useful. In the earliest Greek literary testimonials, the epics of Homer, Nike is not mentioned at all. The first known literal evidence is given instead in Hesiod's *Theogonia*, written in the sixth century BCE. There, Nike is described as the daughter of the river goddess Styx and the Titan Pallas (Schrinding 2007, 34–35).[1] Her only known involvement in a myth is her attendance at the fight of the Olympian gods against the Titans, in which she was supporting the party of Zeus and the Olympians (Schrinding 2007, 34–35).[2]

[1] Hesiod, "Theogonia," 382–385. Alternative genealogies can be found in Homer, "Hymnos" 8, 4, see West (2003, 188–189) (daughter of Ares), and in Himerios, *Orationes* (19) 65, 3, see Penella (2007, 94). A compilation of relevant sources can be found in Goulaki-Voutira (1992, 851) and Thöne (1999, 15–16).

[2] Hesiod, "Theogonia," 397–403.

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N. Gutschow, K. Weiler (eds.), *Spirits in Transcultural Skies*,
Transcultural Research – Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-11632-7_1