

IIC – Mausam Project Monthly Lecture Series
Friday, May 16, 2014, 6.30 P.M, Conference Room I
India International Centre

Commerce and the Cult of Khizr: The Sacred Geography of Healing in the Indian Ocean World

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This talk invites discussion on the theoretical and methodological promises and challenges of global histories of science, technology, and medicine that are written outside of conventional geopolitical spatial categories (civilizations, empires, colonies, nations, area studies), particularly with respect to ongoing efforts to better appreciate the agency of non-elites and non-Europeans during the early modern and modern periods. The talk specifically focuses on the spaces of long-standing commercial production and trade in the wider Indian Ocean world to illuminate the presence of an expansive healing cult dedicated to Khizr, an enigmatic water saint and patron of the Sufis. The talk considers how Khizr's cult suggests possible ways to rethink the global rise of scientific medicine by foregrounding a vast trans-regional network of institutions that prompted empirically-grounded knowledge about the body and the environment, and that aimed to set the ritual conditions necessary for ensuring the health of those engaged in commercial activities for production and exchange.