CHAPTER 7

The Neoplatonic Renaissance from the Thames to the Ganges

Jos Gommans

Abstract

This unabashedly intuitive essay introduces Neoplatonism as a new category in global intellectual history. It highlights one particular moment in time when Neoplatonism became the cutting-edge, avant-garde intellectual force in both the Latinate West and the Persianate East. More specifically, by comparing Stuart England and Mughal India the essay uncovers a hitherto silent cord of commensurable royal courts stretching from the Thames to the Ganges. During a long sixteenth century (c. 1450-1650), this courtly continuum was the dazzling stage of a global Neoplatonic Renaissance. Whereas in Stuart England it showed primarily in emblematic fiction, in Mughal India it was an imperial dream come true.

Keywords: Neoplatonism; Global History; Renaissance; Mughals; Stuarts

When the sea breathes, this is called steam.
When the steam condenses, this is called a cloud.
When drops begin to fall, the cloud becomes rain,
and the rain becomes the river, and the river finally returns to the sea.[1]

Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492)

In this essay I would like to introduce Neoplatonism as a new category in global intellectual history. The term Neoplatonism was coined in the eighteenth century to make a distinction between Platonic thought and the ideas of a group of philosophers who followed the lead of the third-century philosopher Plotinus; the group included his student and biographer Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, to name only its four main representatives. More than the earlier Platonists, and even more so than the great philosopher himself, these late-Hellenic followers of Plato commented on his thinking, further systemised it, and aligned it to mystical cults oriented towards Pythagoras, Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistus. From the third to

the fifth century, all these elements together generated a seething Neoplatonic juncture which was to have a tremendous impact on the post-Classical world of Europe, the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world. Although an almost Alexandrian library has been written on Neoplatonism, so far, no comprehensive connective or comparative analysis has been made of these three geographical branches. In this essay, I will pinpoint one particular moment in time when, after centuries of more hidden influences, Neoplatonism once again, and for about one long sixteenth century, became the cutting-edge, avant-garde intellectual force in both the Latinate West and the Persianate East. As we will see, as a sophisticated system of thought, Neoplatonism was primarily an intellectual and elite preoccupation that was centred at the royal courts. Hence, we are dealing with a Neoplatonic Renaissance that strongly affected a courtly continuum stretching at least from the Thames to the Ganges.[2]

Obviously, I am all too aware that discussing a Renaissance of such global proportions within the limits of a brief essay is very much a bold, if not imprudent attempt at the impossible. Yet it must be attempted. There is no other way for the global historian than to naively brave the borders of the ever-expanding fields and subfields that one way or the other have dealt with Neoplatonic thought. Almost by necessity, the result will be about its shifting definitions and meanings: an *histoire croisée* through time and space, from its ancient beginnings to the Renaissance, from the Latinate West to the Persianate East. Lacking any specific philosophical or philological expertise on the topic, I cannot claim that one or the other version of Neoplatonism is more or less authentic or true. For the present purpose, the discursive dimension is more important than authenticity. It is my contention that the ongoing argumentation about Neoplatonism throughout time and space has been constitutive of its meaning.[3]

The universal, cosmographical claim of Neoplatonism makes it an important topic for the premodern history of globalization in the widest sense of that term, encompassing both global history and global literary studies, the two main disciplinary perspectives of the present volume. It will show, though, that Neoplatonism has been more thoroughly studied as a literary than as a historical influence. Beyond these literary studies, which often take a national-linguistic perspective, this essay aims to contribute to what should one day become a *long-durée* history of world literature that goes beyond the modern nation-state to uncover coevalness between diverse literary cultures in eras prior to our own, sometimes even creating new *ecumenes* or *cosmopoleis* due to intensive moments of imperial conquest, global interaction and/or translation. What is more, by studying Neoplatonism, the invitation is not only to *compare* but to *connect* world literature in its local and global historical context. In my view, we need to recognize that for many centuries Neoplatonism, in all its different avatars, was a dominant world-making force,

which as a silent cord connected the Latinate and Persianate courts.[4] Despite the obvious differences between Stuart England and Mughal India, we should be able to read authors from both regions not only in relation to their specific locality but also in an awareness that they shared "a common ancestry as cousins springing from the same classical sources and shaped by mutual contact with Islamicate societies."[5]

Opting for the term Neoplatonism instead of Platonism is to reflect the overwhelming dominance of the Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato's thinking both in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and both in the Latinate and the Persianate world.[6] In this hypothetical essay, I will therefore basically discuss the main characteristics and manifestations of what I see as a so far ignored, global Renaissance of Neoplatonic thought.[7] What was it all about? Is there any unity behind all the diversity? How did it manifest itself at its two geographical extremes: later Tudor and early Stuart England and Mughal India? And to start with: why has it been ignored for so long?

Schwärmerei against Modernity

There is no single, all-encompassing field of Neoplatonic studies. The topic is divided, first of all, along the lines of the three main "civilizational" regions of Europe, the Byzantine Empire, and the Islamic world. Especially for the European and Islamic cases, there is further fragmentation due to disciplinary and regional specialization. In the West, philosophical studies focus on the Classical, Medieval or Renaissance periods. Classical scholars in particular enjoy a splendid isolation from other fields that they consider to be either beyond their philological grasp or too far removed from what they perceive as the original canon. There are many other disciplines that show some very intense engagement with Neoplatonism but apply the term much more widely to describe a combination of philosophical and cultural phenomena which, indeed, do not necessarily refer to the original works of the founders.

Apart from the various regional and temporal specializations, the main fields are art history, literary studies, religious history, intellectual history and, more recently, the history of Western esotericism. Of course, this raises the question of what the term actually implies when, for example, art historians, literary scholars or scholars of the Islamic world use it beyond the Classical paradigm. If the connection with the Classical texts is watered down, what else makes Neoplatonism tick as a useful category for those fields beyond late Classical philosophy and to what extent is the term transferable at all from one field to the other? Obviously, this important question can hardly be answered as long as the various sub-fields

do not engage with each other. To take up this issue in earnest would require an in-depth analysis of the use of the term Neoplatonism in all these fields. Although this would certainly be a worthwhile exercise, it is also far beyond the format of the present essay. All that I will attempt here is to test whether the term can be fruitfully applied to two apparently very distant cases—England and India—at one particular moment in time: the long sixteenth century. First, let me explain what gives me the confidence to suggest that it will.

It was about a decade ago that I became interested in Neoplatonic thought. Until then I had primarily worked on the early modern history of South Asia and was in particular looking at that region's long-neglected connections with the outside world, in particular with Central Asia and Southeast Asia. In doing so, and being a decent child of my time, I obviously wanted to avoid the trap of Orientalism, or any other essentialism of that kind, and tended to highlight the "surprisingly" modern features of an *early modern* South Asia, in particular in a more *material* sense. Hence, thanks to the contributions of many of my colleagues, we have arrived at a stage where South Asia is part of a much wider world typified by sophisticated *multiple modernities*. The understandable urge to take South Asia's history out of its former historiographical isolation made revisionist historians stress South Asia's part in what seemed to be a shared experience of modernity characterized by specific South Asian avatars of, for example, growing individualism, secularization, nationalism, capitalism, empiricism or secularization. As the discussion on the Great Divergence shows most emphatically, such a derivative search for a modernity package in non-Western societies tends to reduce the history of these societies to the issue of what went wrong with them.

One other disadvantage of the modernization agenda, and one that is of more immediate concern for the present essay, is that it tended to downplay the "non-modern" ingredients of South Asian and other non-Western societies. Topics that were considered typically "premodern"—in particular of a religious or philosophical nature—became neglected by historians and were seen as rather essentialist, sometimes romantic preoccupations of an outdated, naïve generation of orientalist, colonial and nationalist scholars. What made it worse in the South Asian scenario was that contemporary politics were—and still are—deeply affected by communal tensions which made religion such an explosive topic. Besides, since many of the post-Independence South Asian historians were grounded in Marxist thinking, religion and ideas were often considered to be of secondary, merely legitimizing importance—"opium for the people" as a good Marxist would have it—or, at least, the outcome of material life.

Something similar happened in the case of Islamic studies, where the topic of religion has been captured by a coalition of orthodox normative believers and defensive secular progressives aimed at stripping Islam of its apparently

non-modern, "superstitious" and "magic" elements. The latter would include such very Neoplatonic "pseudo-sciences" as lettrism, astrology or geomancy; all those elements that were, on the one hand, considered outside the normative discourse of creed, scripture and law, and on the other hand, had served so well in that "othering" Orientalist discourse against a more modern West. As a result, in both South Asian and Islamic historiographies, the overall tendency has been to either neglect religion and philosophy, or to render it more acceptable by making it more modern.[8]

Interestingly, this seemed to repeat a much earlier development that had happened to religious studies in the West and had led to the emergence of a new discipline focussing on a tradition of Western esotericism, which studied "rejected", non-modern knowledge in Western culture. The scholarly emancipation of all this occult knowledge had already started in the 1920s encouraged by art historians attached to the Warburg Institute. This was followed in the 1960s and '70s by a new wave of cultural historians who followed the lead of another Warburgian scholar, Dame Frances Yates, to study the forgotten "Hermetic tradition" of the Renaissance. As stressed by the major spokesperson of the budding field of Western esotericism, Wouter Hanegraaff, Yates' work caught the *Zeitgeist* and continued to ride the wave of countercultural dissent within the academy and outside it.[9] Unfortunately, despite the efforts of Yates and later in particular Faivre and Hanegraaff himself, the field remains relatively marginal to the Humanities as a whole as it continues to be associated with the *Schwärmerei* of overly romantic, if not religionist, scholars looking for alternatives to a predominantly rationalistic modernity.[10] Once again, it seems that the only way to make this "esotericism" more relevant is to associate it with modernity, either presenting it as its essential "other", or as a crucial precursor to it, as in the case of the so-called Yates thesis.[11]

Very much part of this scholarly disenchantment myself, I became more aware of these so-called esoteric ingredients of Western and Islamic societies when studying the seventeenth-century artistic interactions between the Netherlands and India.[12] In the context of my research I was struck by the appearance of Plato in a sixteenth-century Mughal miniature. In fact, he showed up, not as the distinguished, serious philosopher of the Dutch gymnasium, but as a rather weird magician, charming the animals in the wilderness by playing the organ.

It took a while before I came to realize that the European image of a more "serious" Plato was the result of the Western disenchantment described above. Was it the outcome of a related process in which Greek civilization had been claimed by the West and thus had to be separated from its Egyptian and perhaps also Indian ingredients?[13] Would it be conceivable that, as a result of the one or the other, I was no longer able to see the connections between the European and the Indian Plato? In any event, what was "my" Plato doing in the midst of these very "exotic"

Illustration 1: Madhu Khanazad (attr.), “Plato charms the wild animals with music” in Akbar’s *Khamsa of Nizami*, British Library

Indian surroundings? What or who brought him there? What happened to him that caused him to become depicted as a magician? It also raised the question of what happened to the legacy of Plato in the West, in other words, what happened to Neoplatonism, the philosophical tradition that had claimed his legacy so emphatically? These questions brought me to the main objective of this essay: to what extent Plato's legacy of Neoplatonism can be seen as a transcultural phenomenon, a global category that encompasses both the European and the Indian images of Plato? Before dealing with this question, though, we should first ask ourselves how Neoplatonism became part of the European and Indian worlds.

The Neoplatonic Cosmopolis

At the risk of being too rash here, one could say that in various guises Neoplatonism was still strong in the early European Middle Ages but that it was gradually replaced by Aristotelean thought after about 1200, then revived during the early Renaissance, when it gave rise to and became part of what can be seen more broadly as an "Emblematic Worldview."[14] Neoplatonism was undermined again in the seventeenth century due to the disenchantment engendered by growing rationalism and empiricism, after which it disappeared from the courts and the universities but managed to live on in the arts. A crucial moment for European Neoplatonism is the Quattrocento, when, under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, Marsilio Ficino translated a wide range of Platonic, Neoplatonic and Hermetic texts from Greek into Latin. Ficino and his many followers considered themselves revivalists of a lost ancient wisdom tradition that centred around Plato. According to Hanegraaff, Ficino is at the origin of a non-institutional current of religious speculation, the development of which can be traced in European culture through the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century, where "Plato" serves as a general label for a much wider complex of practices and speculations largely inherited from the Hellenistic culture of Late Antiquity.[15] Following John Walbridge, a scholar of Islamic Neoplatonism, Hanegraaff coins the latter "Platonic Orientalism" as it fittingly indicates how these Hellenic thinkers highlighted the oriental ancestry of their wisdom, preserved in a so-called *philosophia perennis* going back to epic figures like the Persian Zoroaster and the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus.

In the entirely different, but equally sophisticated, context of Spenser Studies, William Junker has recently described sixteenth-century European Platonism as a doctrinally elastic programme that stretched backwards to encompass the various ancient and medieval strands of Platonisms ranging from Plato himself, the Neoplatonists, to (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite, the Christian fathers, and the School of Chartres, and including Pythagorean and Orphic rites, Kabbala and the

ancient Egyptian wisdom of the Corpus Hermeticum.[16] This extravagant lineage is itself part of the Platonic ecumenical practice of creating unity, not by reducing its many elements to one type, but by synthesizing its many kinds of elements into one whole.

Although Junker calls the synthesis Platonic, I would prefer to use the term Neoplatonic. Despite the fact that more and more intellectuals at this stage were able to read Plato's original oeuvre, it was not Platonism in general but Neoplatonism in particular—i.e. the systemic and inclusivist Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato—that was revived in the Quattrocento and via Ficino c.s. spread across Europe, more in particular across it's royal courts. In other words, the revival of various occult traditions in the long sixteenth century can and should be labelled for what it was: a Neoplatonic Renaissance that went back to the legacy of Hanegraaff's and Walbridge's late-Hellenic Platonic Orientalism which had dominated the Eastern Mediterranean of the early centuries CE.

Moving to the East, it makes even more sense to stress the Neoplatonic characteristic of Plato's legacy: it was not Plato's original work, but the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato as well as the Neoplatonists' own works that had the greatest influence in the Islamic world. As in its European branch, Neoplatonism was scattered but also found some new inspiration in the works of Islamic philosophers, the most important being al-Kindi (c. 801-c. 873) and al-Farabi (c. 872-c. 950). Also similar to the West, they could profit from a wave of translations, which in the Islamic case happened much earlier, during the ninth century under the patronage of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, in particular under al-Ma'mun (r. 833-842), to whom the great Aristotle had appeared in a dream. Indeed, this wave of Greek-Arabic translations primarily opened up the Aristotelian oeuvre and it is quite telling that the two most important Neoplatonic works that became widely available—the *Enneads* of Plotinus and the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus—were also attributed to Aristotle.[17] As much as in the European Middle Ages, it was far from crystal clear whether a text had an Aristotelian or a Platonic origin, in either case it attracted primarily Neoplatonic comments and interpretations.

After these promising Arabic beginnings, around the end of the first millennium Islamic Neoplatonism continued to have a fairly dispersed existence until it really started to thrive in the late twelfth century under the impetus of Sufism and, more directly, through Illuminationism, the novel but also distinctly Neoplatonic philosophy of the Persian philosopher Suhrawardi (1154-1191). Neoplatonism became really big in the fourteenth- to sixteenth-century eastern Islamic world under Turco-Mongolian and Timurid rule.[18] As had happened already in the earlier stages of Hellenic Neoplatonism, but was now happening much more intensively, these most eastern branches of Neoplatonism were stimulated even further by Indic monist philosophy, the latter becoming more accessible through another

wave of translations, this time not from Greek into Arabic under the Abbasids, or from Greek into Latin under the De' Medicis, but from Sanskrit into Persian under the Mughals.[19] As I will argue in the latter part of the essay, for the first generation of Mughal conquerors, the Neoplatonist philosopher-king was not just a literary ideal but became an immanent reality!

Meanwhile, the intellectual connections with Latinate Europe were both vertical and horizontal; the first building on the same Neoplatonic founding fathers of Late Antiquity, the second through direct Byzantine linkages. In fact, fifteenth-century Byzantine scholars such as Manuel Crysoloras and the "new" Plato, Gemistos Pletho, had brought almost the entire Neoplatonic corpus to Italy.[20] In Florence, using the words of the novelist E. M. Forster, Pletho "explained Plato with great success, discoursing for hours upon the Beautiful to men who were then filling the world with beauty."[21] Also in Florence, it was Marsilio Ficino who managed to translate much of the Neoplatonic corpus, including the works of Plato, Plotinus and Hermes Trismegistus.

Now, comparing the dissemination of Neoplatonism in the East and the West, we can observe a major divergence that happened during the twelfth century when Latinate Europe turned away from, and Persianate Islam embraced Neoplatonism. Hence, although both experienced a long sixteenth-century Neoplatonic Renaissance, in the West this signified a clear break with the past, in the East it was rather the climax of an already existing development.

Obviously, bringing the various western and eastern branches under one label suggests a great deal of commensurability. For the global historian keen to detect such commensurabilities, I would suggest that the notion of multiple Neoplatonisms may prove to be much more fruitful than that of multiple Modernities. Apart from the fact that Neoplatonism is obviously less teleological than Modernity, the main reason for this is that many philosophers in both the Latinate and the Persianate world themselves recognized Plato as their main starting point. In my view, this common Platonic background may help us to better grasp such apparently strange parallels as sixteenth-century millenarianism, which is in fact more of a late-Platonic phenomenon than an early-modern one.[22] Indeed, if we accept that both the Latinate and the Persianate world were part of one Neoplatonic cosmopolis and that both experienced a revival of Neoplatonic ideas during the long sixteenth century, it becomes all the more urgent to (a) more specifically locate its main centres and (b) to investigate to what extent we are actually dealing with one grand philosophical legacy. In other words, what characterizes an idea or a practice to make it Neoplatonic? The two questions converge because each regional centre has produced its own brand of Neoplatonism. It thus makes sense to start thinking about this issue from a historical and historiographical point of view. How have contemporary actors themselves, and historians studying them afterwards, described or defined Neoplatonism?

Although it would be worthwhile to highlight on each and every regional case, in this all too brief essay I will discuss more broadly primarily the unity and to a lesser extent the diversity of Neoplatonism by comparing some of its sixteenth-century manifestations at the two extremes of the Platonic cosmopolis: England under Elizabeth and the early Stuart kings James I and Charles I, and Mughal India under Akbar and Jahangir.

Table 1: The English and Mughal rulers of the Platonic Cosmopolis

Elizabeth I: 1558-1603	Akbar: 1556-1605
James I: 1603-1625	Jahangir: 1605-1627
Charles I: 1625-1649	Shah Jahan: 1627-1658

Since Neoplatonism was primarily a courtly phenomenon, we will not be dealing with the usual agent of globalization—cities and trade—but with a world connected by royal courts and their intellectual entanglements with a common Neoplatonic legacy. In the remainder of the essay, I will discuss the main commonalities of this Neoplatonic cosmopolis on the basis of the three so-called Platonic transcendentals: truth, beauty and justice, and will try to find more concrete manifestations of these values at the two farthest termini of the cosmopolis: England and India. But since all this has a deep past, I will start with a more general, fairly encyclopaedic description of Neoplatonism that goes back to the phenomenological, Neoplatonist beginnings in Late Antiquity.

Platonism as a Meta-Discourse

For the present purpose, I take Neoplatonism as a broad meta-discourse that as a result of its elastic, layered hierarchical structure was able to absorb, appropriate and creatively harmonize the various other philosophical and religious traditions that it encountered. It is only in the West during and after our Neoplatonic Renaissance that we can witness an increasing tendency to revert to the original Platonic text. It was only much later and as a result of eighteenth-century German scholarship that a clear-cut distinction between Platonism and Neoplatonism became fashionable.[23] This essay discusses Neoplatonism because the overwhelming majority of those who called themselves Platonists in the long sixteenth century were in fact what today we would call Neoplatonists.[24] It is due to the systemic approach of these Neoplatonists that the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* is able to identify Neoplatonism by four philosophical-cosmological features: idealism, monism, emanationism, and the human potential for divinization.[25] In order

to recognize Neoplatonism, not only as a philosophy but as a wider meta-discourse with a long history of its own, it will be good to bear these more general ramifications in mind before elaborating on the specific sixteenth-century manifestations of that discourse.

Firstly, Neoplatonists assume that Intellect (*nous*, Mind or Mindful Consciousness) is in an important sense ontologically prior to the physical realm which is itself typically taken as being the ultimate reality. Neoplatonists agree with Plato (against Aristotle) that the objects of the Intellect (abstract concepts) are also ontologically prior. And so, Neoplatonism inevitably proved to be an idealist type of philosophy. Secondly, Neoplatonists assume that reality, in all its cognitive and physical manifestations, depends on the highest principle of conscience, which is unitary and singular. Neoplatonic philosophy is a strict form of principle-monism which strives to understand everything on the basis of a single cause that adherents consider divine, and indiscriminately refer to as "the First", "the One", or "the Good". From this follows the third Neoplatonist assumption, emanationism: that the universe was created in a great chain of being; that reality emanates from "the First" in coherent stages, in such a way that one stage functions as the creative principle for the next; and that every activity in the world is in some sense double because it possesses both an inner and an outer aspect. Neoplatonists insist that there is nothing at the lower ontological levels within the chains of causality that is not somehow prefigured at the corresponding higher levels. In general, no property emerges unless it is already, in some way, preformed and pre-existent in its cause. This thinking in terms of top-down emanation—often compared to light radiating out from the sun—creates various levels of being. Hence, the derivative outer activity of the first principle, Intellect, becomes a second "hypostasis". In turn, the inner active life of the Intellect produces further outer effect, the Soul (*psychê*). In the same way—whether or not with the help of a Demiurge or a divine craftsman—the Soul facilitates the manifestation of form in matter. Further distinctions are drawn between the hypostases in order to articulate the transitions from one level of Being to another. As a result, every aspect of the natural world, even the meanest piece of inorganic and apparently useless matter, has an eternal and divine moment. From this, it follows that human existence is a striking representation of the cosmos as a whole, a microcosm in which all levels of being are combined into one organic individual. This leads to the fourth—moral—Neoplatonic assumption, which is targeted at individual deification through a sincere and arduous effort to return to the One and forever abrogate any concerns for the body.

During the long sixteenth century, these four defining characteristics were more or less retained. What is perhaps more important for the development of Platonism is to once again stress that all four features were immensely instrumental in facilitating the incorporation of various other philosophical and religious

traditions. It is not so much the specific outcome but the process of assimilation itself that most strikes me as thoroughly Neoplatonic. And although Neoplatonism was certainly not the only intellectual tradition at the sixteenth-century Latinate and Persianate courts, its highly flexible and all-encompassing metaphysics made it into such a very powerful assimilative force that absorbed many of these other traditions. How convenient for rulers living in an age of political expansion, increasing confessional conflict and increasing globalization! Not surprisingly, the result often looks eclectic and too often scholars have wasted too much time in precisely dissecting the various intellectual origins of Neoplatonism, without realizing that (a) Neoplatonism itself is an eclectic bunch of different ideas, and (b) Neoplatonism has been crucial in bringing all these elements together. In the words of the Belgian historian Peter van Nuffelen, "Neoplatonism presents itself as a religion transcending all religions."[26] This argument links up rather well with that of the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann about cosmotheism. Indeed, during the Neoplatonic Renaissance we find philosophers, scientists, artists and kings alike longing for a pristine, cosmotheistic past that was still unaffected by the Mosaic distinction which had brought forth the monotheistic counter-religions Christianity and Islam. Whereas counter-religions blocked intercultural translatability, cosmotheism rendered different cultures mutually transparent and compatible. In counter-religion, the other religion—take, for example, that of Egypt or India—is false; in cosmotheism, the other religion is encompassed within the whole, and may even become perceived as its origin.[27]

Keeping the extraordinary assimilative power of Neoplatonism in mind, what can be said more specifically about its sixteenth-century English and Mughal manifestations in the fields of the science, arts, and politics? Of course, the following is by no means intended as an exhaustive list but offers just a few examples to suggest the value of a scholarly exercise that obviously needs to be far more elaborate and detailed than what is offered here as just an appetizer.[28]

The Truth of the Philosopher-Scientist: Mathematization

Truth in Neoplatonism is not about the sensory experience of the Material World but about the higher Forms that dwell in the Intellect. Although the Material World is just an image of the Intellect, the Forms have myriad hidden correspondences with material objects. These correspondences are mediated through an animate World Soul, which can be perceived by philosophers, scientists, artists and rulers alike, by conceiving images or ideas in their souls, possibly with the help of their memory. This enables them to link these images to their origin in the Intellect, and as such their souls may achieve a reunion with the higher Forms.

The Neoplatonic ambition to detect hidden Intellectual unity in a Material World of increasing diversity is clearly apparent in the increasing fascination for the occult sciences at the Renaissance courts of Europe and in the eastern Islamic world. In Europe, it was in particular alchemy and astrology that became fashionable. Not all of this was necessarily Neoplatonic in nature but both contributed significantly to the Neoplatonic agenda of cosmic reunion. The alchemist, for example, was believed to possess the power to link earthly objects with their archetypal Forms. Indeed, alchemy was aimed to "restore the entire Natural World to its pristine state, when humanity and nature were still in perfect harmony."[29]

In its unifying sense the same was true of astrology. The radiance of the sun, the stars and the planets was seen as an emanation flowing from the One into the Intellect, the World Soul, the Material World and the individual soul. For Neoplatonists, the celestial world of planets and stars was part of an animated cosmos that can be known because the individual soul is drawn by means of a spiritual desire for reunion with the World Soul. With the help of talismans, this may even lead to the acquisition of magical power. Ficino himself formulated it as follows:

> By the application of our spirit to the spirit of the cosmos, achieved by physical science and our affect, celestial goods pass to our soul and body. This happens down here through our spirit within us which is a mediator, strengthened then by spirit of the cosmos, and from above by way of the rays of the stars acting favourably on our spirit, which not only is similar to the rays by nature but also then makes itself more like celestial things.[30]

The very same Neoplatonic agenda of cosmic reunion drove the occult sciences at the Islamic courts under the patronage of Turco-Mongolian Persianate rulers, even giving rise to a kind of supernatural arms race. Apart from astrology and, to a lesser extent, alchemy, the most popular sciences were lettrism and geomancy.[31] Both in the Latinate and Persianate courts there was an increasing fascination with Pythagoras and, with this, a longing to understand the cosmos through the figures and basic geometric forms that united manifest Nature with occult Forms. All this fitted the Neoplatonic quest to mathematize the universe. Whether at the fifteenth-century courts of the De' Medici in Florence or the Timurids in Samarkand, or at the sixteenth-century courts of the Stuarts in London or the Mughals in Agra, all grasped the epistemological, magical force of Platonic-Pythagorean mathematics which not only impacted science but also deeply affected the arts and the politics at these courts.[32]

The Beauty of the Philosopher-Artist: Platonic Love

So, it was not just Neoplatonic scientists, but also Neoplatonic artists who longed for cosmic reunion. For them, it was beauty as divine love that could make this happen.[33] On the basis of Plato's *Symposium*, Ficino had defined love as the desire for beauty:

> As a ray which emanated from God and progressively penetrated the created world, moving downwards from the angelic mind to the material substance of bodies. All beauty in the universe was therefore the radiance of the divine countenance.[34]

From the bottom up, thanks to the divine *furor* of the artist, love ascended the ladder, from the beauty of the body to that of the soul, from the soul's beauty to the Intellect, and from there finally to God. This was the famous Platonic love so poetically expressed in Giralomo Benivieni's *Canzone Amor della cui* but given its widest circulation through the rhetoric of Pietro Bembo in Castiglioni's seminal *Il libro del cortegiano*. After the latter appeared in an English translation in 1561, it had a pervasive impact on the imagination of courtiers in Elizabethan England.

More than anything else, the Neoplatonist artist emphasized the imagination and believed in a world of higher realities, beyond the fallible realm of sense perception. His soul belonged to a higher world and could actually find its way back there. It was an inspired, inner imagination that assisted the soul in its return to its true home.[35] With this goal in mind, the artist often imagined the soul as a clean mirror: receptive, willing and ready to respond to divine radiation. It requires contemplation and training oriented towards the highest level, in which the artist becomes progressively more attuned to and even participates in the divine.[36] Perceiving this radiated beauty enables philosopher-artists, like philosopher-scientists through mathematization, to perceive the hidden meanings and correspondences beyond the visible. Indeed, by using abstracted images such as allegories, emblems, signs or hieroglyphs, artists can attempt to comprehend as many of these as possible. What is more, the artist's creation of painting, poetry and music represents his attempt to transform the lower, Material World into the higher world of the Intellect. Using the words of Ann Sheppard, Neoplatonic artists were not admired for "any ability to create new worlds but rather for an inspired capacity to reveal what is always there for those whose souls can rise to apprehend it."[37] Or as John Hendrix has it: "beauty is always in the eyes of the beholder: the beauty of the perceived object is a shadow of the beauty in the soul of the artist."[38] To continue with Sheppard, the Neoplatonic artist, unlike the scientist, does not report metaphysical truth directly but he has a habit of concealing the truth behind a veil of allegory. In fact, the veil becomes an instrument to achieve knowledge of

the Forms, the latter shining through the veil. Hence, we need to see through the veil and let ourselves be directed by the veil's beauty to ascend to the Intellect to ultimately find assimilation and identification with the One.[39]

It is exactly this distinction between the seen and unseen, that visible things have not only a visible form but also an invisible higher one, that makes for an interesting parallel between the predominant Mannerist painting at the European courts and Mughal miniature painting.[40] According to Akbar, the best painting was the one that showed the hidden meaning behind the visible. The latter was often called *ṣūra* in Arabic, which means "picture" or "image". Interestingly, early Islamic Neoplatonists had used the same word to refer to Neoplatonic Form, which implies that objects were depicted in an abstracted, essentialized form.[41] Later, apparently in contrast to this earlier practice, the Mughals used the term *ṣūrat* in Persian to refer to the visible images of the material word against *maʿnī* which instead referred to the higher, invisible, essential meaning of things.[42] For the art historian David Roxburgh, the use of the ubiquitous veiling image in Persian painting also invokes the mystical concept of the interior (*bāṭin*) and exterior (*zāhir*) of esoteric and exoteric knowledge. The idea of transforming the seen into its abstracted absolute, and so to make it point back towards some hidden essential reality, permeates the Persianate arts as a whole and once again suggests the importance of the Neoplatonic imagination for the Islamic world.[43]

Likewise, for the Mannerist painters of the European Renaissance the highest form of painting was not about the perception of real life, but about innate, spiritual imagination. Or, to the use the words of the Dutch Mannerist thinker Karel van Mander, the highest form of painting was not painting *naer het leven* (from life) but *uyt den geest* (from the mind or spirit).[44] For Neoplatonists in East and West, the best artists were inspired artists who were capable of sensing beauty and translating it into a symbolic and allegorical manifestation of the cosmos. The symbol and allegories that they produced indicated truth, not through resemblance but through direct ontological connection.[45] Hence, their mimesis of the perceived natural world was a direct reflection of higher realities which directed viewers and readers towards the ultimate Beauty-*cum*-Truth.[46] For the Neoplatonist, there is no distinction between epistemology and aesthetics: what can be achieved by mathematics for the first, was allegory for the latter.

When considering the various muses, it was not only painting or poetry, but also music that appealed to the Neoplatonic courts in both England and Mughal India. Neoplatonic musicians at both courts were very much aware of the phenomenon that music could guide the soul to a reunion with the divine. They also knew very well that harmony was related to the medical equipoise of the body as well as to the inaudible harmony of the seven celestial bodies moving through the twelve houses of the Zodiac.[47]

Interestingly, it is only at the English court that we find drama plays a similar role, while it plays no role whatsoever at the Mughal court. At the Stuart court, the Neoplatonic fascination for concealment shows most dramatically in the so-called court masque where courtiers, as "embodied hieroglyphs", actuate the play's emblematic imagery and become refined versions of themselves.[48] One may even speculate that the grace and efficacy of the unseen is also conveyed in the well-known courtly phenomenon of *sprezzatura* in which the courtier fashioned himself in what can be interpreted as an emblematic persona. According to the English art historian Roy Strong, the highly prominent court masque was the ideal vehicle for the early Stuart kings to exhibit their divinity to their court in a series of emblematic tableaux, in which the masquers as various personifications of Neoplatonic ideas vanquished all opposition to the crown and its policies.[49] For example, in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* (1604) we find James symbolized by the sun casting a "sciential light" of knowledge over his empire. In another piece *Hymenaei* (1605) the sun's burning rays symbolised James' wisdom, which in turn was expressed through an alchemical union of the elements.[50]

Living slightly earlier than James, we know that Akbar also was an avid sun worshipper. In this he followed Suhrawardi's idea that the sun was not God but merely His image, His light. Hence the worship of the sun was actually the worship of God's light which would facilitate the ascent of the soul to the celestial realm. Interestingly, Akbar's sun worship was not conveyed in a court masque but in court, which bring us to the political manifestation of Neoplatonism at the two courts.

The Justice of the Philosopher-King: Wisdom

As much as the idioms of Neoplatonic science and arts are related to each other, both are related to the idiom of Neoplatonic politics. As far as science is concerned, it is most conspicuous in the importance kings attached to horoscopes; as far as the arts are concerned, it shows in the way mutual love dominates the rhetoric of the king's relationship with his followers. In all the three fields, it is the soul that can move between the spheres to achieve the highest Good, which can even encompass God. To achieve this, the soul requires, first of all, self-awareness. Only the soul's self-awareness will lead to responsible, correct action to make the soul participate in the World Soul.

For Plotinus, it is contemplation that exhorts us to become "a soul of the All", to shake off our material attachments, and, in various stages of ascent, to return to and find union with the ultimate cause, the One. Hence, Plotinus asks us to lead a contemplative life: "let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, body's turmoil stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the

very heavens."[51] However, Plotinus (*Enneads* VI, 8) is not only concerned with the metaphysical side of such contemplation but also points out that contemplation is a source of action and actually entails a civic form of engagement.[52] For the Anglo-Welsh Neoplatonist Edward Herbert (1583-1648), readiness to know oneself would make religious peace and confessional unity attainable.[53] This is also echoed by the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), who posits that human responsibility is grounded in the capacity for self-awareness.[54] It is this idea of personal self-improvement that made Neoplatonists, from the sixth-century Simplicius to the seventeenth-century Henry More, so keen to embrace Stoicism. Through Lipsius, the latter became the dominant moral basis for politicians in much of seventeenth-century Europe, although far less so in Stuart England.[55]

It is up to inspired philosopher-kings, as perfect human beings, to understand the cosmos in all its complicated correspondences, to bring human morality in tune with them, and lead humanity to the ultimate Good. But even a philosopher-king must be keen to know himself in order to achieve, firstly, divination and, secondly, peace and justice for his realm. In the words of Ficino, summarizing Plato, he must be ready "to know the divine and govern the human."[56]

In the first systematic study of Neoplatonic political philosophy, Dominic O'Meara argues against the still conventional idea that Neoplatonism failed to find a valid relation between its metaphysical and its practical philosophy. For O'Meara, the first step on the king's path to divinization involves the cultivation of the political virtues described by Plato in his *Republic*: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. These political virtues, although not godlike, mirror the divine. All this is mediated by the enlightened philosopher-king whose soul has been emancipated from preoccupation with the body to bring him nearer to the perfection of divine life.[57] In more prosaic terms, for Neoplatonists, following Plato, power was justified when combined with reason or wisdom.

In addition, for Neoplatonists, rule by a good man is preferable to rigid law codes or entrenched customs. Justice derives from the philosopher-king who, through divinization, becomes the *lex animata*, the living law, thereby overruling the authority of a hierocracy consisting of prophets, jurists and theologians. Thus, personal devotion to and love for the philosopher-king was more important than correctly adhering to any transcendent or scriptural law. The Neoplatonist kings—not forgetting queen Elizabeth—equipped themselves with the ancient, universal wisdom of a *philosophia perennis* to counter the doctrinal criticism of jurists and other keepers of a sacred law that derived from just one monotheist truth. To counter their wisdom, Neoplatonist kings often liked to challenge them in staged religious debates. In both East and West, Neoplatonic kings embraced models that stood above confessional denomination: heroes like Alexander or Solomon, or saintly sages like Orpheus, Hermes or Dionysius. In such situations, kings became

indistinguishable from thaumaturges, saints and messiahs. At the same time, the Neoplatonist sense of divine truth, provisionally veiled, with revelation imminent, appealed to apocalyptic and millenarian tempers, highly relevant at the turn of the century, and even of the millennium in the case of Islam. The authority of these millennial sovereigns was not determined by truth or dogma but by divine grace, often symbolized by light and demonstrated by heroic deeds.[58] The best result was not a separation of worldly and priestly realms but the Hobbesian ideal of placing the latter below the first.

As we can witness in the case of Elizabeth, the early Stuarts and the early Mughals, the adaptable, all-encompassing, characteristic of Neoplatonism suited kings who were in need of a universal ideology that could overcome cultural diversity and confessional conflict in both England and India. Both the English and Mughal rulers fit the picture extraordinarily well. They all envisioned themselves as philosopher-kings in the Platonic tradition, appealing to higher wisdom to counter the criticism of the religious establishment. Interestingly, both James and Jahangir embraced the figure of King Solomon as a universal model of wisdom and justice.[59] Within their own tradition, the early Stuarts referred to Henry VIII, the early Mughals to Chinggis Khan and Timur for providing the right examples of how to rein in their respective religious establishments.[60] To the frustration of orthodox clerics, both the English and the Mughal kings exploited eschatological expectations and presented themselves as millennial saviours, the latter more openly so than the first.

Indeed, it seems that in general the Neoplatonic ideals of political rule became more fully implemented in the Mughal Empire.[61] The Mughals built their imperial administration on the Hellenic but strongly Persianized principles of good rule called *a<u>kh</u>lāq*. *A<u>kh</u>lāq* started from the idea of the tripartite division of the soul, and envisioned that the soul should free itself from the influence of the body, and, as such, it is "reason" or "intellect" that should dominate the lower regions of the soul. It also carried over the Galenic medical analogy from ethics to politics, in which the ideal ruler was compared to a doctor who looks after the souls of his people. Hence, the state itself becomes compared to a body, with the ruler analogous to the heart.[62] As in Neoplatonism in general, psychology (i.e. the science of the soul) and politics (i.e. the science of the body politic) become deeply entangled. In other words, Neoplatonist thought can teach one to become a ruler of both the self and the state.[63]

The Neoplatonic prescription of personal self-improvement comes very close to the way the Neoplatonist ideologues of Mughal rule perceived *ṣulḥ-i kull* or "peace for all", a principle which in due course would become the central ethos of the Mughal administration; i.e. an Indian Neoplatonic counterpart of the Neostoic ethos that pervaded the administrations of so many European states at that time. At the early stages of its existence, Neoplatonists stressed how self-discipline and the

equipoise of the individual soul was linked to that of the state. Following Muzaffar Alam, justice in the ideal state is defined as social harmony and the coordination and balance of the conflicting claims of diverse interest groups that may comprise people of various religions. The ruler, like the good physician, must know the diseases that afflict society, their symptoms and the correct treatment. Since society is composed of groups of diverse interests and individuals of conflicting dispositions, the king must take all possible care to ensure that wisdom works smoothly, to maintain the health of society and the equipoise within it.[64] What is crucial in *akhlāq* is this linkage between micro- and macrocosms, also expressed in the idea of *siyāsat* or politics, denoting discipline, control and management in which the king is advised to discipline his own self first, thereby acquiring the moral authority to control and discipline others.[65]

The story of Elizabeth and the Stuarts is similar and different. More than the early Mughals, they had to deal with hardening confessional frontlines as a result of the Reformation. Also, much more so than the Mughals, they were embroiled in a conflict between episcopal and royal claims to divine rule. Protestant rulers especially required a politico-religious ideology that could bolster their position at the top of the Church. The Stuarts came under repeated pressure to demonstrate their religious orthodoxy and saw themselves besieged by religious fanatics. At the same time, there was the ongoing threat of resurgent papal authority. James, in particular, invested enormous efforts in an intellectual contest with the papacy over who was supreme in the *sacerdotium*. In these circumstances, Neoplatonist supporters of the crown like John Dee, Edmund Spenser, Inigo Jones and many others provided the means in courtly ceremony, architecture and liturgical worship to re-enchant royal authority.[66] All this was to stress the position of the sovereign as supreme priest-king—James, like Akbar, preferring the word; Charles, like Jahangir, preferred the image to propagate the message.[67]

As indicated already by the sheer quantity of courtly masques, the early Stuarts may be seen as ruling over an almost Geertzian theatre state where it was not drama that legitimized power, but power that served drama. It was not without reason that contemporaries compared the court to a stage. Both James and Akbar had similar dreams of millennial rule but James's ideal was only realized in poetic and dramatic fiction, whereas Akbar's was realized in real life.[68] The same goes for their common identification with the sun, both Neoplatonically conceiving their rule as a vision of light, but whereas for James it was mere play, it was Akbar who dared to publicly support sun worship. As Neoplatonic kings, both James and Akbar aimed to marry the lower to the upper world and tried to impose a mathematical design of cosmic proportions on their capitals, this to prefigure a new age and the coming of the messiah. Whereas Akbar simply built his own harmonious Platonopolis from scratch in Fatehpur Sikri, James' New Jerusalem remained unrealized as he was

unable to dispose of the old capital city of London. It was the English Civil Wars (1642-1651) which dealt the final blow to the Neoplatonic dream of the early Stuarts. The only way the English managed to keep at least part of the dream alive was to separate the person and office of the king. In this way, the fall of the first would not affect the sanctity of the latter. It was no longer the king, but kingship and the abstracted, mystified state, which attracted devotion, ultimately not deriving top down from the One, but legitimized from the bottom up by the people.[69]

Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to unveil an ancient Neoplatonic cord that connected the long sixteenth-century Latinate and Persianate courts. Due to academic specialization and a teleological preoccupation with Modernity, it has for too long been hidden in silence. Obviously, the present exercise is just one of speculative intuition but it is my contention that by using a Neoplatonic perception of things, at least some apparently strange parallels in global history suddenly become pretty obvious. Not that all this is new. One of Plato's late disciples, Ralph Waldo Emerson—very much a Neoplatonist soul—had this to say about the old master:

> No wife, no children had he, and the thinkers of all civilized nations are his posterity and are tinged with his mind. How many great men Nature is incessantly sending up out of night, to be his *men*—Platonists! the Alexandrians, a constellation of genius; the Elizabethans, not less; Sir Thomas More, Henry More, John Hales, John Smith, Lord Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Ralph Cudworth, Sydenham, Thomas Taylor; Marcilius Ficinus and Picus Mirandola. Calvinism in his Phaedo: Christianity is in it. Mahometanism draws all its philosophy, in its hand-book of morals, the Akhlak-y-Jalaly, from him. Mysticism finds in Plato all its texts.[70]

With the Elizabethans and Akhlaq, we have already revisited two items on Emerson's longlist. There is much, if not almost everything, that still needs to be explored, if only for the long sixteenth century, if only for that Neoplatonic Cosmopolis that stretched from the Thames to the Ganges. What should we make of the many other knots in the cord, with almost every European and Islamic region having a Neoplatonic moment of its own? Why a Neoplatonic Renaissance at this moment of time? Was it the result of a global information explosion that accompanied European exploration? Did Neoplatonism provide a convenient, all-encompassing system to order an ever-expanding universe? Was it the result of a new age of empire since empires are in particular need of overarching ideologies, especially at a time of hardening religious boundaries, following the Reformation and resurgent orthodoxies?

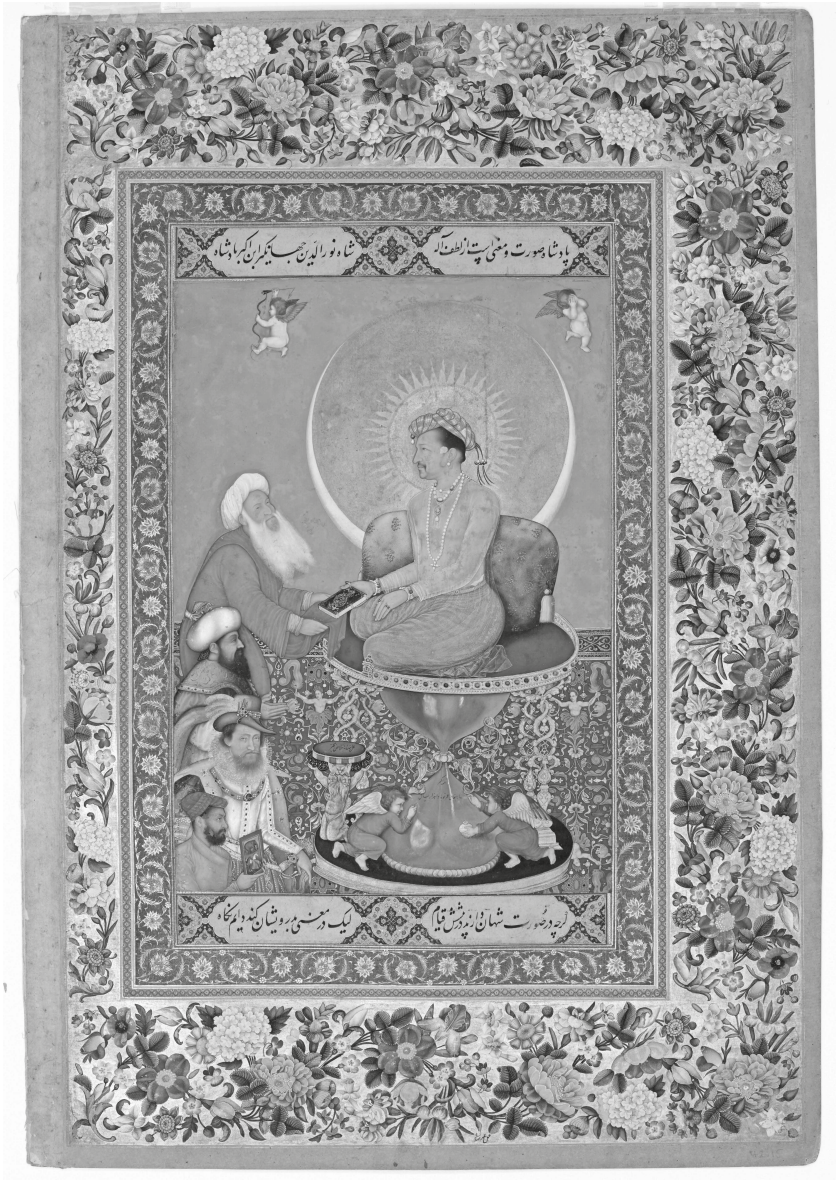

Illustration 2: Bichitr, "Jahangir enthroned on an hourglass," ca. 1618. From the *St. Petersburg Album*, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Apart from the many Neoplatonic commonalities between the English and Mughal courts, there are many differences, also within the Neoplatonic mould. The one difference that really stands out is the divergence of the political pathways: English kings realizing their Neoplatonic dreams in fiction, Mughal kings living these same dreams in real life; for the first it was all mere metaphor, for the latter it was at least meaningful metaphor if not more than that.[71] Hence, we arrive at a somewhat surprising image of early modern England as a failed state, certainly compared to the colossal wealth and power of the Mughal Empire, as was confirmed so often by the many English visitors to the Mughal court.

The distinction between the two courts is also shown in the only painting that features both a Mughal and a Stuart king. This is the well-known miniature by Bichitr where we find Jahangir as the King of the Age enthroned on an hourglass. The text in the cartouches that accompany the allegory elaborate on the distinction between *ṣūrat* and *maḥī*. As mentioned already, the dichotomy corresponds with the Neoplatonic distinction between the visible, material world and the invisible, spiritual world of deeper meaning. If we read the message written on the cartouches, it says (bottom right) that, although in the sphere of the *ṣūrat* kings stand before him, in the sphere of *maḥī* he looks at the dervishes (bottom left). So, next to the stereotypical persona of the Ottoman sultan, we find James, both kings ruling over the Material World. Jahangir himself, though, portrays himself as someone who rules over *ṣūrat and maḥī* (top right).[72] Indeed, very much like his father Akbar, he was the perfect man, the soul of the world, whose eyes and heart were with the origin of emanation, who made unity and multiplicity playmates: in other words, a true Neoplatonic philosopher-king.[73]

Notes

1 Cited in È. Feuillebois-Pierunek, *"Jāmī's Sharḥ-i rubāīyyāt dar vaḥdat-i vujūd*: Merging Akbarian Doctrine, Naqshbandī Practice, and Persian Mystical Quatrain," in T. d'Hubert and Alexandre Papas, eds., *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Jāmī's Works in the Islamicate World* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 355.

2 And perhaps even beyond to include those few royal courts of the New World and those of Southeast Asia. One could think, for example, of the "German" court of Johan Maurits of Nassau in Brazil. Although the Deccan sultanates are definitively part of the continuum, it remains to be seen whether, and to what extent, this is also true—perhaps without Plato—for the Malay courts of e.g. Aceh or Banten.

3 Here I follow Shahab Ahmad's approach to Islam: S. Ahmad, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

4 This ambition is taken from various contributions in *The Cambridge History of World Literature*, in particular from Debjani Ganguly's insightful introduction (D. Ganguly, *The Cambridge History of World Literature, Volume 1*, ed. Debjani Ganguly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021),

1–46). Nonetheless, the comparative chapter by Ayesha Ramachandran on "Worldmaking and Early Modernity: Cartographic Poesis in Europe and South Asia" (109–131) would have been even stronger if it had been more aware of the Graeco-Hellenic tradition that connected the two regions as exemplified in the chapter by Ahmed H. al-Rahim ("Arabic Literary Prose, Adab Literature, and the Formation of Islamicate Imperial Culture," 80–108).

5 S. F. Ng, *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia: Peripheral Empires in the Global Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3. It should be noted though that Ng does not mention Neoplatonism and reserves a more prominent role for the Ottomans as connecting the English and Malay literary worlds.

6 Cf. L. P. Gerson, "What is Platonism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43, 3 (2005): 253–76.

7 See also P. Burke, L. Clossey and F. Fernández-Armesto, "The Global Renaissance," *Journal of World History* 28, 1 (2017): 1–30, which, contrary to what the title suggests, offers a global view of the European Renaissance.

8 Although this analysis is entirely my own, for the general academic tendency to deprive the Islamic world of its occult elements, partly due to Orientalism, I also rely on the work of Matthew Melvin-Kouchki. See in particular M. Melvin-Kouchki, "Introduction: De-orienting the Study of Islamic Occultism," *Arabica* 64 (2017): 287–95.

9 W. J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 325.

10 Hanegraaf, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 257–368; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Globalization of Esotericism," *Correspondences* 3 (2015): 1–37. For an extremely critical review of what is often seen as a Neoplatonic craze of the Warburg school, see H. Bredekamp, "Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus," *Kritische Berichte* 14, 4 (1986): 39–48. For a more balanced review, see C. Ginzburg, "From Aby Warburg to E. H. Gombrich: A Problem of Method," in C. Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 17–60; C. Landauer, "Erwin Panofsky and the Renascence of the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, 2 (1994): 255–81. Most recently: E. J. Levine, *Dreamland of Humanists: Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky and the Hamburg School* (Chicago, MI: Chicago University Press, 2013).

11 The two most influential works: F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruni and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) and its companion F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966)

12 See J. Gommans, *The Unseen World: The Netherlands and India from 1550* (Amsterdam and Nijmegen: Rijksmuseum and Vantilt, 2018).

13 Despite the success of M. Bernal's *Black Athena, The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991) and a few follow-ups, Antiquity's Mediterranean is still seen too much as a closed Graeco-Roman world.

14 W. B. Ashworth Jr., "Natural History and the Emblematic Worldview," in R. S. Westman and D. C. Lindberg, eds., *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 303–32. Cf. Michel Foucault's Renaissance episteme based on resemblance and similitude, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974).

15 Hanegraaff, *Esotericism*, 53. For Walbridge, see his *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001). Interestingly, it was another scholar working on Islamic Neoplatonism, Henry Corbin, who had been *the* silent force behind the birth of Western Esotericism as an academic field (Hanegraaff, *Esotericism*, 277–310; 340–50).

16 W. Junker, "Plato and Platonism," in *Edmund Spenser in Context*, ed. A. Escobedo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 274. For another enlightening piece from the Spenser context,

see K. Borris, *Visionary Spenser and the Poetics of Early Modern Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For a recent survey of the developments of Platonism in the European Middle Ages, see W. Otten, "Christianity's Content: (Neo)Platonism in the Middle Ages, its Theoretical and Theological Appeal," *Numen* 63 (2016): 245–70.

17 Plato's work was also available in Arabic, most importantly his *Timaeus* and *Laws*.

18 M. Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy," in A. Salvatore and R. Tottoli, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* (Chichester: Wiley, 2018) 353–375; S. Kamola, *Making Mongol History: Rashid al-Din and the* Jamiʿ al-Tawarikh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

19 A. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

20 For suggesting a possible direct link between the Latinate and Persianate Renaissance through Pletho, see M. Mavroudi, "Pletho as Subversive and his Reception in the Islamic World," in D. Angelov and M. Saxby, eds., *Power and Subversion in Byzantium* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 177–203.

21 E. M. Forster, "Gemistus Pletho," in E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 183.

22 My own thinking about this started with a conversation with Sanjay Subrahmanyam in the mid-1990s. See S. Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 3 (1997): 735–62, who also refers to Lieberman's notion of strange parallels (V. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830,* 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)), but taking a different, cultural take on it.

23 E. N. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato: An Outline and Some Observations* (Helsinki/Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1974). In the search for further authenticity, some have even questioned whether Plato truly was a Platonist (L. P. Gerson, "Plotinus and Platonism," in H. Tarrant, *et al.*, eds., *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 317. Interestingly, although the Neoplatonist were aware of an ongoing tradition, at least Proklos seems to have been aware of some break as he referred to "all newer Platonists since Plotinus" (T. Lankila, "The Byzantine Reception of Neoplatonism," in A. Kaldellis and N. Siniossoglou, eds., *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 316); interestingly, the same author points out that 58 % of the nearly 11 million words of extant Greek philosophical texts were written by Neoplatonists, 318)

24 Gerson, "What is Platonism," 254.

25 C. Wildberg, "Neoplatonism," in E. N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/neoplatonism/.

26 P. van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religions in the Post-Hellenistic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 240.

27 J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3, 55. In a refreshingly bold stroke, Alan Strathern associates this tendency of encompassing subordination with Buddhism and contrasts it with monotheism (A. Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 135).

28 For a very different, book-length attempt to compare the Mughal court with a Renaissance court in Europe, see K. Rzehak, *Macht und Literatur bei Timuriden und Habsburgern: Politische Übergang und kulturelle Blüte in den Selbstzeugnissen Baburs und Maximilians I.* (Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag, 2019).

29 B. Janacek, *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early Modern England* (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 3; V. Hart, *Art and Magic in the Court of the Stuarts*

(London and New York, 1994), 12. As for the other occult sciences, the literature on alchemy is vast, but for a recent survey see K. Hunger Parshall, M. T. Walton and B. T. Moran, eds., *Bridging Traditions: Alchemy, Chemistry, and Paracelsian Practices in the Early Modern Era,* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2015).

30 L. Saif, *The Arabic Influence on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (London: Pallgrave, 2015), 40, 113.

31 M. Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism," *The Medieval History Journal* 19, 1 (2016): 142–50.

32 See e.g. F. Carter, "Number Symbolism and Renaissance Chroreography," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 10, 1 (1992): 21–39. The classic formulation is from Wittkower far back in 1949. See the first chapter in R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: St. Martin's Press: 1988); M. Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5 (2017): 127–99. Many more examples in J. Hendrix, *Platonic Architectonics: Platonic Philosophies & the Visual Arts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

33 For a fascinating homoerotic interpretation of courtly love poetry during the Ottoman Renaissance, including a plea for globalizing the Renaissance on the basis of some insightful comparisons with Europe, see W. G. Andrews and M. Kalpakli, *The Age of the Beloveds.: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). Although not mentioned in this essay, the homoerotic aspects of Neoplatonism are relevant, also for the Mughal case, and are definitively in need of more exploration.

34 J. Kraye, "Moral Philosophy," in C. Schmitt, ed., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 354.

35 A. Sheppard, "Plato and the Neoplatonists," in A. Baldwin and S. Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 18.

36 V. Olejniczak Lobsien, *Transparancy and Dissimulation: Configurations of Neoplatonism in Early English Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 13. For the mirror as a Neoplatonic symbol, see H. A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

37 Sheppard, "Plato and the Neoplatonists," 17.

38 J. S. Hendrix, "Plotinus and the Artistic Imagination," *School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation Faculty Publications*, Paper 31 (2015), 2, http://docs.rwu.edu/saahp_fp/31.

39 Sheppard, "Plato and the Neoplatonists," 17. See also Lobsien, *Transparancy and Dissimulation*, 1–29.

40 For one of the few comparative studies on the visual arts between Renaissance Europe and the Islamic Middle East, see H. Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2011). For a critical review, see G. Necipoğlu "The Scrutinizing Gaze in the Aesthetics of Islamic Visual Cultures: Sight, Insight, and Desire," *Muqarnas* 32, 1 (2015): 23–61. Here I agree with Necipoğlu. It is my contention that a more fitting comparison during the Renaissance period would, indeed, involve Florence but not Baghdad, neither Istanbul, nor Delhi, but Samarqand or perhaps Herat.

41 P. Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 42–43. For the Neoplatonic inspiration of Islamic visual arts, see also the important work of G. Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of the Art and Humanities, 1996) as well as P. Soucek, "The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 87–108 and Y. Porter, "From the 'Theory of the Two Qalams' to the 'Seven Principles of Painting': Theory, Terminology, and Practice in Persian Classical Painting," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 109–18. For exploring

some interesting Indic parallels, a good start would be P. Granoff, "Portraits, Likeness and Looking Glasses: Some Literary and Philosophical Reflections on Representation and Art in Medieval India,' in J. Assmann and A. I. Baumgarten, eds., *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 63–105.

[42] H. Franke, "Emperors of *Ṣūrat* and *Maʿnī*: Jahangir and Shah Jahan as Temporal and Spiritual Rulers," *Muqarnas* 31 (2014): 123–149. This apparent change of meaning of *ṣūrat* requires further investigation. It is possible that even depicting an object in the material world required essentializing that object (*ṣūrat*) in order to direct viewers to its essential reality (*maʿnī*).

[43] D. J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 193. See also the important works of Johann Christoph Bürgel: *The Feather of Simurgh: The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1988) and *Allmacht und Mächtigkeit: Religion und Welt in Islam* (München: Beck, 1991).

[44] See the works of Hessel Miedema: "Karel van Mander's Grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 653–68; "Over het realisme in de Nederlandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw naar aanleiding van een tekening van Jacques de Gheyn II (1565-1632)," *Oud Holland* 89 (1975): 2–16 and "On Mannerism and Maniera," *Simiolus* 10 (1978-1979): 19–45.

[45] P. T. Struck, "Allegory and Ascent in Neoplatonism," in R. Copeland and P. T. Struck, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69.

[46] T. Rockmore, *Art and Truth after Plato* (Chicago, MI: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[47] P. Gouk, "The Role of Harmonic in the Scientific Revolution," in T. Christensen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 223–45; K. Butler Schofield, "Musical Culture under Mughal Patronage: The Place of Pleasure," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Mughal World* (forthcoming). For an interesting French example, see J. Brooks, "Music as Erotic Magic in a Renaissance Romance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 1207–56. It would be fascinating to explore the interaction between these Neoplatonic ideas at the Mughal court with the efflorescence of Indic *rāgamālā* genre, i.e. illustrative paintings of musical modes or *rāgas*, around 1600, see M. E. Aitken, "The Laud *Rāgamālā* Album, Bikaner, and the Sociability of Subimperial Painting," *Archives of Asian Art* 63, no. 1 (2013): 27–58.

[48] See also J. Limon, "The Masque of Stuart Culture," in L. L. Peck, ed., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 209–30, and K. Shrieves, "Spiritual Alchemy through Embodied Hieroglyphs in Jonson's *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*," *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14, 3 (2014): 55–82.

[49] R. Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450-1650* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 59.

[50] Hart, *Art and Magic*, 156.

[51] Taken from the extremely elucidating *Philosophy in Late Antiquity* by Andrew Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

[52] R. J. Oosterhoff, "Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Charles de Bovelles on Platonism: Theurgy, and Intellectual Difficulty," in S. Gersh, ed., *Plotinus' Legacy: The Transformation of Platonism from the Renaissance to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 83.

[53] Lobsien, *Transparancy and Dissimulation*, 19.

[54] D. Hedley, "Ralph Cudworth as Interpreter of Plotinus," in S. Gersh, ed., *Plotinus' Legacy: The Transformation of Platonism from the Renaissance to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 154.

[55] J. H. M. Salmon, "Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England," in L. L. Peck *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 169–188; J. Sellars, "Henry More as Reader of Marcus Aurelius," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25, 5 (2017): 916–931; H.

Baltussen, "Simplicius of Cilicia," in L. P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 720.

[56] V. Rees, "Ficino's Advice to Princes," in M. Allen and V. Rees, eds., *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, his Philosophy, his Legacy*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 347.

[57] D. J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also A. Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence and Its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought," *The Journal of Modern History* 58, 2 (1986): 383–414.

[58] For the English side of this phenomenon, see, among others, D. Brooks-Davies, *The Mercurian Monarch: Magical Politics from Spenser to Pope* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983); for the Persianate side, see A. A. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[59] Hart, *Art and Magic*, infra; E. Koch, "The Mughal Emperors as Solomon, Majnun, and Orpheus, or the Album as a Think Tank for Allegory," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 277–311.

[60] The first is well known; for the latter, see J. Gommans and S. R. Huseini, "Neoplatonism and the Pax Mongolica in the Making of *Ṣulḥ-i Kull*: A View from Akbar's Millennial History," *Modern Asian Studies* 56, 3 (2022).

[61] J. Gommans and S. R. Huseini, "Neoplatonic Kingship in Islam: Akbar's Millennial History, " in A. A. Moin and A. Strathern, eds., *Sacred Kingship in Global History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022) and Gommans and Huseini, "Neoplatonism and the Pax Mongolica".

[62] R. Walzer and H. A. R. Gibb. "Akhlāḳ," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs; F. Rahman, "Aḵlāq," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/7, 719–723, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aklaq-ethics-plural-form-of-koloq-inborn-character-moral-character-moral-virtue.

[63] The last phrase taken from B. Boulet, "Chapter 30: The Philosopher-King," in M. Beck, ed., *Companion to Plutarch* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 459.

[64] M. Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (Chicago, MI: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 47 and 57–58.

[65] Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 69–72; R. Kinra, "Revisiting the History and Historiography of Mughal Pluralism," *ReOrient* 5, 2 (2020): 137–82; Gommans and Huseini, "Neoplatonism and the Pax Mongolica."

[66] Strathern discussed the same process as a "mechanism of immanentization" (Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, 212).

[67] R. G. Asch, *Sacral Kingship between Disenchantment and Re-enchantment: The French and English Monarchies 1587-1688* (New York: Berghahn, 2014); J. P. Sommerville, "James I and the Divine Right of Kings: English Politics and Continental Theory," in L. L. Peck *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55–71. See also Strong, *Art and Power* and D. Howarth, *Images of Rule: Art and Politics in the English Renaisscance, 1485-1649* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1997). For the best survey of Mughal ideology as expressed in art, see E. Koch, *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[68] For a somewhat similar argument, see A. A. Moin, "Akbar's 'Jesus' and Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine': Strange Parallels of Early Modern Sacredness," *Fragments* 3 (2013-2014): 1–21. As pointed out by Jesse Russell, these dreams are not even materialized in fiction (J. Russell, "Edmund Spenser's Ancient Hope: The Rise and Fall of the Dream of the Golden Age in The Faerie Queene," *Exploration in Renaissance Culture* 44 (2018): 73–103).

[69] This very close to the main thesis of E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[70] R. W. Emerson, "Plato; or, the Philosopher," in B. Atkinson, ed., *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*d (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 421. It is fascinating to read the many sharp connective insights in Emerson's essay, although the book is also full of Orientalist stereotypes.

[71] For the interpretation of metaphors in this sense, see Strathern, *Uneartly Powers*, 161–64.

[72] Franke, "Emperors of *Ṣūrat* and *Maʿnī*," 138–141. See also C. Hille, "Gems of Sacred Kingship: Faceting Anglo-Mughal Relations around 1600," in C. Göttler and M. Mochizuki, eds., *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious* Art (Leiden: Brill 2017), 291–318.

[73] Just a selection of the many qualities attributed to Akbar in Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, *Vol.1*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston, Murty Classical Library of India 2 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 13–27.

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