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Einladung zum Vortrag

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Benares Beginnings:

**Print modernity,
book entrepreneurs,
and cross-cultural ventures
in a colonial metropolis**

Scholars of Indian book history, as Nile Green has recently argued, have tended to privilege the study of texts, reading, and ideas over materiality and technology. In the focus on “*print culture*” questions of global technology transfer, the circulation of material commodities, and the economics of book production have often been overlooked. Taking a cue from Green, this paper, in two parts, explores the early decades of printing and publishing in Benares through the dual lens of textuality and technology. The first part charts the activities of early European and Indian print entrepreneurs in the city. Printing in Benares, I argue, was more variegated than the conventional insistence on the city’s Hindu character might suggest. As new technologies opened up print to Indian agency, print also became a site of cross-cultural interaction between traditional pandits, Western-educated Indians, European Orientalists, and colonial officials. The second part traces the rise of the famous Medical Hall Press, owned by E.J. Lazarus, a British surgeon-turned-publisher. Firmly embedded in a network of modern urban institutions, the Medical Hall Press successfully combined commerce and culture.

In proposing an approach that integrates the local and the global, accounting for both the specificity of place and the entangled history of technology, the paper situates itself within recent scholarship that foregrounds the concept of “geographies of the book” (Ogborn/Withers 2010).