



Kickstarter campaign leads to revelations about yoga's origins

# Roots of Yoga

The first compendium of yoga's core texts, translated, introduced and edited by two of the world's foremost yoga scholars

**James Mallinson and Mark Singleton**

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**There are over 2.5 million practitioners of yoga in Britain alone, but surprisingly little knowledge of yoga's roots amongst its practitioners. Full of postures and breathing practices, but also tales of extreme devotion and imagination, *Roots of Yoga* is a first stop for anyone curious to learn more than they are told at their yoga class, and an indispensable resource for serious yoga practitioners and teachers.**

Funded by a \$51,000 Kickstarter campaign (<http://tinyurl.com/RootsOfYoga>), this book collects together, for the first time, the core teachings of yoga in the words of their authors, rather than in the secondary versions of modern interpreters. Among the 100 original texts from 12 different languages are key passages from the *Upanishads*, the Buddhist and Jaina traditions, the Indian Tantras, and many other texts that are being translated for the first time.

Colourful characters and their stories abound: from Puran Puri, who spent the second half of the 18th century travelling with his arms in the air as far as Malaysia, Tibet, Moscow and the Gulf (pp.119-121); to Hari Das, who in 1837 was buried alive in front of the Maharaja and various British officials, and exhumed, still living, 40 days later, having remained in the highest state of yoga (pp. 343-5); via the famous philosopher, Shankaracharya, who used his yogic power to enter and reanimate the body of a recently dead king and make love with the king's wives (pp.424-5).

**James Mallinson** is Senior Lecturer in Sanskrit and Classical Indian Civilization at SOAS, University of London. **Mark Singleton** is Senior Research Fellow in the department of Languages and Cultures of South Asia, SOAS, University of London.

"*Roots of Yoga* provides a comprehensive and useable account of yoga's development through the ages: and all of it in the original words of the root texts themselves," say James Mallinson and Mark Singleton. "It seems to us that practitioners today have only been exposed to a small part of the spectrum of what yoga is and has been. The texts that we have compiled in *Roots of Yoga* will point to many new possibilities."

*Key revelations overleaf...*

## Key revelations in *Roots of Yoga*

- The development of posture practice, from extreme methods of mortification practised by ascetics, to body-cultivation techniques that foreshadow today's globalised postural yoga.
- A new understanding of the origins and development of hatha yoga, which lies behind many of today's popular yoga forms.
- *Roots of Yoga* contains many passages from the *Amrtasiddhi*, a text only available in manuscripts and the first to teach physical yoga practices systematically. Through analysis of a unique bilingual 12th-century Sanskrit/Tibetan manuscript, Mallinson and Singleton have identified the authors as tantric Buddhists.
- A hitherto unremarked esoteric breath practice in the *Atharva Veda*, one of Hinduism's most ancient texts.
- Several of the texts describe ancient traditions in which yoga is physically dangerous, even lethally so (pp.12-13).
- Criticisms of yoga from a broad range of traditions, including the Vedic mainstream.
- From the wicked Buddhist ascetic being thwarted in his attempt to use a cremation ground to gain the power of flight (p.383-4), to the tale of a Sufi master outdoing a yogi at levitation (p.388), chapter 10 covers the supernatural powers (*siddhis*) acquired through the practice of yoga, an important theme in pre-modern yoga texts but elided in modern practice. These include the powers of flight, omniscience and becoming infinitely light or heavy.

**James Mallinson** is Senior Lecturer in Sanskrit and Classical Indian Civilization at SOAS, University of London. He has edited and translated several texts on *hathayoga* from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries CE. He has also spent several years living with traditional Hindu ascetics and yogis in India and in 2013 he was honoured with the title of 'mahant' by the Ramanandi Sampradaya.

**Mark Singleton** is Senior Research Fellow in the department of Languages and Cultures of South Asia, SOAS, University of London. He was a consultant and catalogue author for the 2013 exhibition 'Yoga: The Art of Transformation' at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, and has served as co-chair of the Yoga in Theory and Practice Group at the American Academy of Religions. His previous publications include three edited volumes of yoga scholarship and the book *Yoga Body, the Origins of Modern Posture Practice*.



**'Momentous . . . we can expect original ideas and substantial insights'**

Georg Feuerstein, *Author of The Yoga Tradition*

**'With all the myth and misinformation in the Yogasphere this will be a much needed resource for yogis, practitioners, teachers and scholars'**

Ganga White, *Author of Yoga Beyond Belief*

**'Assembling in translation an unprecedented array of sources, many of which have been unknown or neglected, this anthology will be an indispensable companion for all interested in Yoga, both scholars and practitioners.'** Prof. Alexis G.J.S. Sanderson, Emeritus

fellow of All Souls and former Spalding Professor of Indian Religions, Oxford University