ONLINE LECTURE BY

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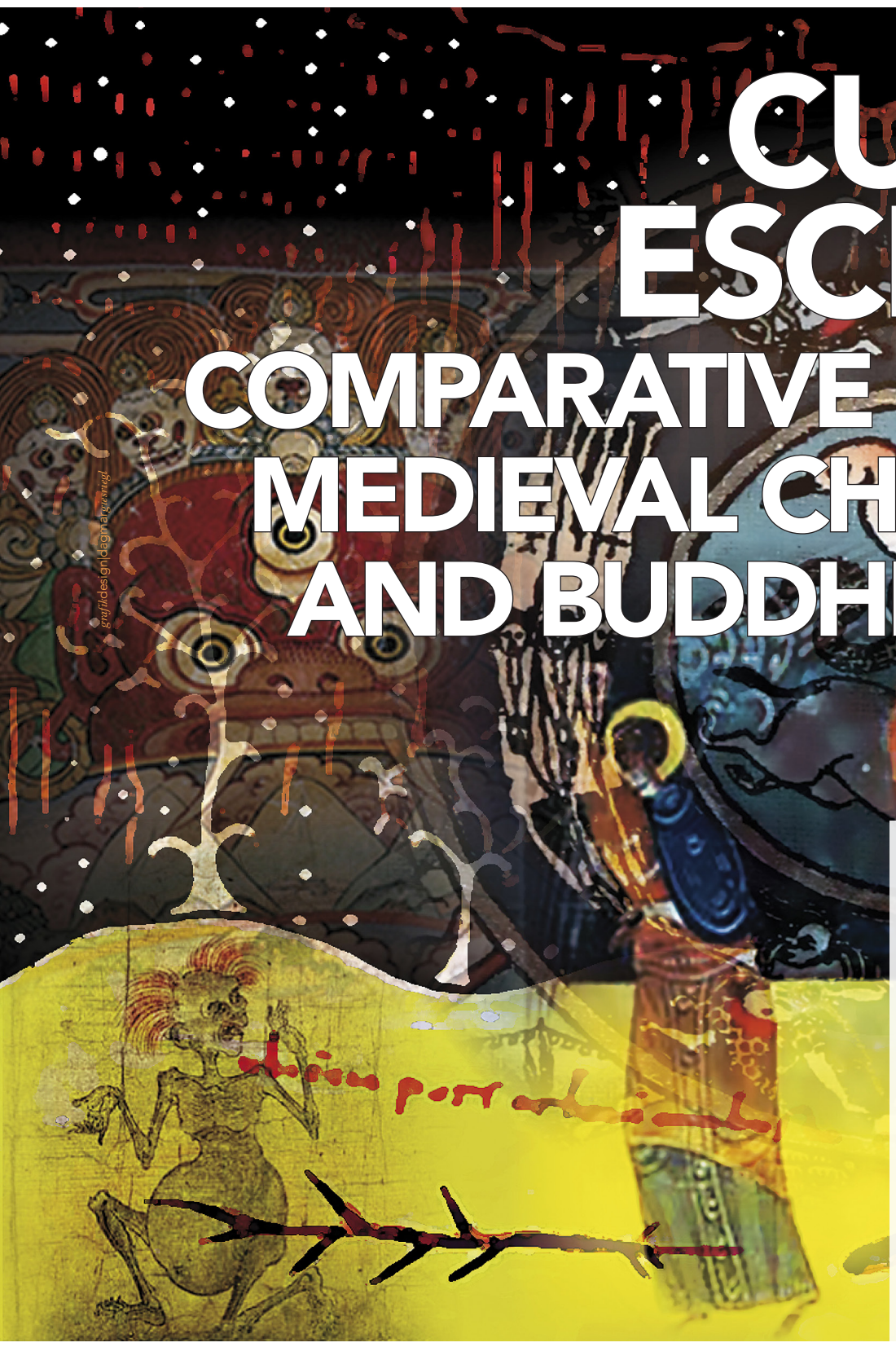
CULTURES OF ESCHATOLOGY

COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN, ISLAMIC AND BUDDHIST APOCALYPTIC THOUGHT



In all religions, in the medieval West as in the East, ideas about the past, the present and the future were shaped by expectations related to the End. Such beliefs in the Last Things, have been integral to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, especially in the pre-modern era, and range from the final battle between good and evil and the dawn of a new, divine order to death, divine judgment and eternal afterlife. Over the past forty years, especially from the beginning of the new millennium onwards, eschatology and apocalypticism constituted a dynamic field of research and have received much scholarly attention. However, many studies so far have focused primarily on Europe. In my paper, I will explore how cross-cultural comparison can be carried out on a larger Eurasian scale, drawing on the experiences gained in the publication project 'Cultures of Eschatology'. I will discuss our vantage points for comparison as well as opportunities and challenges, theoretical and terminological problems of comparative methodology. Actively engaging in cross-cultural comparison in medieval Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist communities provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the various ways in which divine presence was felt in the course of history and opened up new perspectives on specific literary, iconographic, intellectual and religious traditions.

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