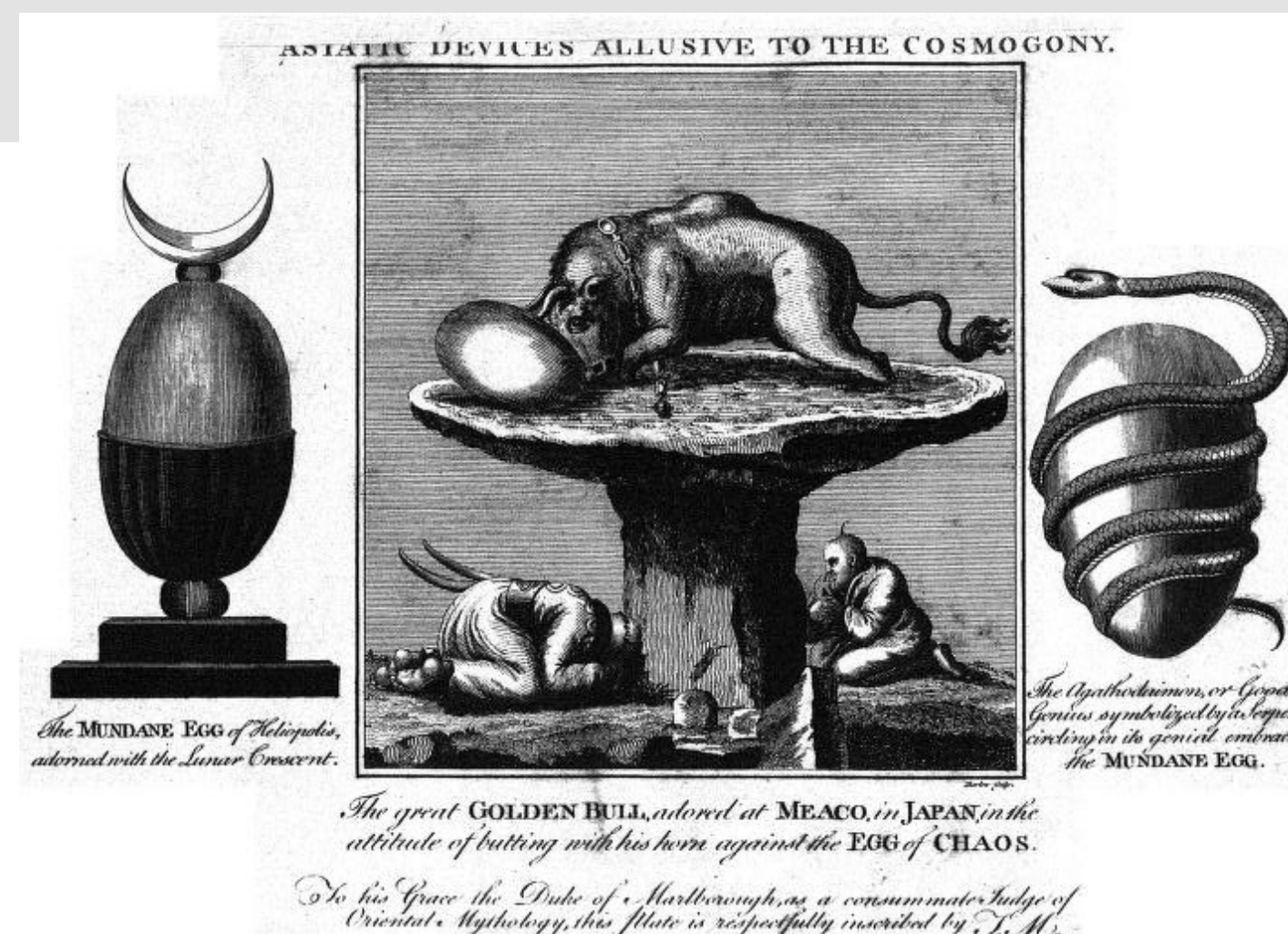




This image is the frontispiece to the Thomas Maurice's *The History of Hindostan: Its Arts and Its Sciences*. First published in 1795, the version of the book housed in Roderic Bowen Library & Archive is a second edition, released 1820.

Maurice wrote about India because he was intrigued by apparent affinities between Eastern and Western belief systems. He investigated similar theories about the origins of the universe ('cosmogonies') found in ancient civilisations of Asia, Europe and North Africa. In particular, Maurice explored different cultures' stories about the 'mundane egg' out of which the universe is said to have hatched (pictured below).

The frontispiece embodies Maurice's notions about harmony between different cultures. The book explains that the female figure is 'Isis Omnia or universal nature personified,' and that she amalgamates Egyptian, Grecian and Hindu deities. At the same time, the image contains subtle hints towards the global exploration and imperialism that were characteristic of Maurice's own era. Visible beside Isis's right foot is a sailing ship, perhaps alluding to Georgian Britain's maritime pre-eminence. Exaggerating this link to empire, Maurice dedicated the engraving to George Spencer, a 'patron of Eastern Science,' Second Earl of Spencer (1758–1834) – a public figure after whom the British East India Company named its ship the *Earl Spencer*. Maurice also thanked the Directors of the East India Company for funding his research, adding that his project would 'necessarily ... sink' without their support.



Thomas Maurice (1754–1824)

Thomas Maurice was one of the leading orientalist scholars of the Georgian period. The son of a wealthy West Indies merchant, he developed a passion for Classics and Ancient History while studying at the University of Oxford. Fascinated by Britain's colonial presence in South Asia Maurice began work on his multivolume *History of Hindostan* in 1783. This was the first of a number of books on Indian religion and material culture, including *The Modern History of Hindostan* (1802–10), *Indian Antiquities* (1793–1800) and *A Dissertation on the Oriental Trinities* (1800). In 1799, Maurice was appointed assistant keeper of manuscripts at the British Museum, a post he held until his death. Maurice was widely read in the 19th century, with several of his books included in the library collection donated to St David's College, Lampeter by Thomas Phillips. Modern scholars, however, are more dismissive of Maurice's interpretations, particularly because not conversant in the languages of the Indian subcontinent.

Thomas Phillips (1760–1851)

Thomas Phillips was a key benefactor of St David's College, Lampeter. Between 1834 and 1851, Phillips donated more than 22,500 volumes to the university library, forming a key component of its founders' collections. Phillips's donations included medieval manuscripts, incunabula and early books, as well as items with more autobiographical significance. A seasoned overseas traveller, Phillips owned a slave plantation in St Vincent and spent parts of his life living in India and Australia, working as a surgeon for the Royal Navy, East India Company and the Bengal medical board. Reflecting this, the Phillips collection features more than a hundred books with some connection to South Asia, including several by Thomas Maurice.



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