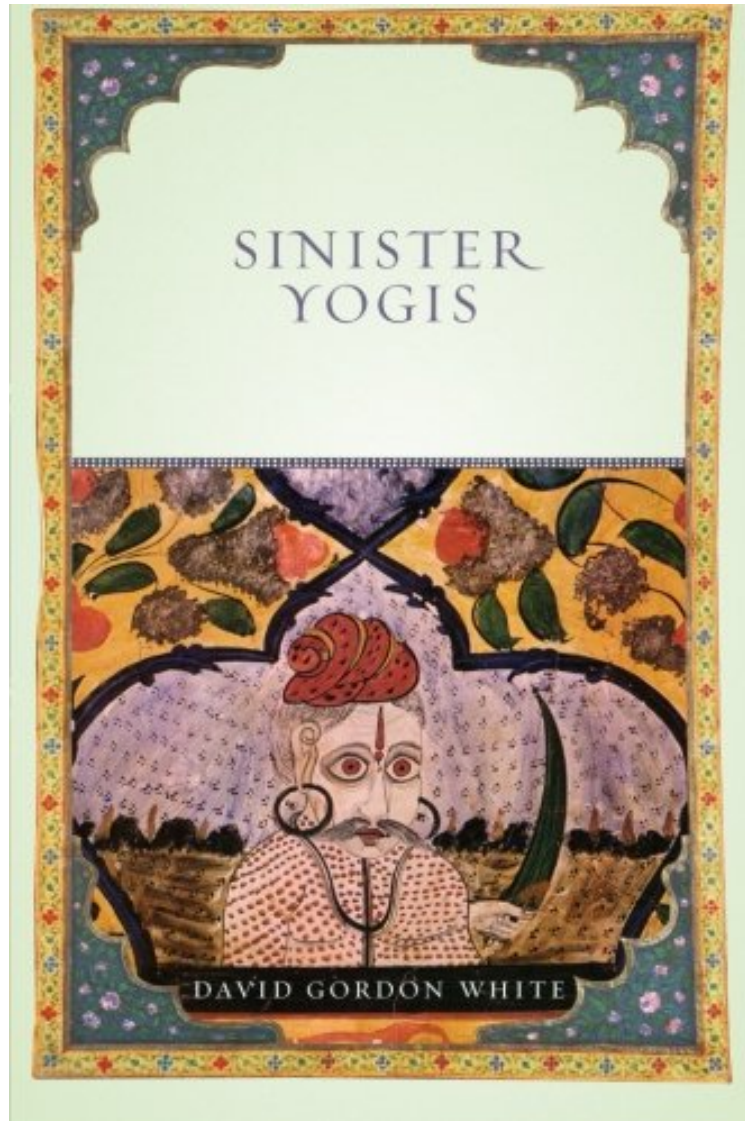


Sinister Yogis

David Gordon White

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David Gordon White : Sinister Yogis before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sinister Yogis:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Thought provoking examination of how yoga was really practiced By Shannon This book examines how yoga has been practiced historically, in contrast to how yoga is described in the official literature. It is well written and as compelling to read as a fantastic novel, yet provides a deeply insightful approach to the historical record. The book ranges from the oldest visual and textual references to yoga to the development of modern postural practice. Be prepared to have your opinions about yoga challenged in an entertaining

and thought-provoking manner. 15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. dense but informative
By sykch
This is definitely not for the casual reader...it's dense with hypothesis, examples, citations, quotes, lists...almost written like a thesis, and geared for the academic reader. Editorially, it is not organized for the average Jane/Joe...you will get lost in the density of the supporting examples...it is not an easy read, but it is nevertheless informative. For example, the word yogi, according to the author, denoted a cannibalistic Bacchus-like character, and/or a shape(human)-shifter. Only much later did "yogi" take on more a positive, spiritual context. At the same time, "yogi" could also denote a charlatan, a side-show (man could hold his breath for one hour, etc), and even a grifter. There is even some interesting information on the Naths and their political power. Yogi/yogini did not always mean a person who does stretching poses to get ready for meditation, nor did it denote a spiritual leader. The author contends that it was only in recent history that asanas (positions) were established, and that more positive associations were linked to yogis. And it will surprise you to know of the actual origin and context of asana. This latter information is not terribly new (see Paul Brunyon and NE Sjoman), and is only briefly discussed in this book. I do agree with others reviewers in that the shamanistic aspect of the yogi is not as emphasized as much as the sinister aspect, but this may have been addressed in previous writings. Also, the author is probably trying to draw readers to yoga history by giving the topic a little more controversy. If you want a fast, easy, history of yoga, I would read the preface to "Yoga" by Linda Sparrowe, but if you already have a few yoga history books on the shelf, this would be a good addition to your learning.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By Izi
Fascinating subject matter, rarely touched by our white-washed Yogi-Guru-Tantra-Bhagshwami-whatever-xenophobic new fad culture

Since the 1960s, yoga has become a billion-dollar industry in the West, attracting housewives and hipsters, New Agers and the old-aged. But our modern conception of yoga derives much from nineteenth-century European spirituality, and the true story of yogas origins in South Asia is far richer, stranger, and more entertaining than most of us realize. To uncover this history, David Gordon White focuses on yogas practitioners. Combing through millennia of South Asias vast and diverse literature, he discovers that yogis are usually portrayed as wonder-workers or sorcerers who use their dangerous supernatural abilities which can include raising the dead, possession, and levitation to acquire power, wealth, and sexual gratification. As White shows, even those yogis who arent downright villainous bear little resemblance to Western assumptions about them. At turns rollicking and sophisticated, Sinister Yogis tears down the image of yogis as detached, contemplative teachers, finally placing them in their proper context.

This is a riveting account of the early history of yoga and yogis in India that weighs the perspectives of both the yogis and the public culture of yoga. The history of yoga practice, and of yogis, is finally receiving the critical attention from scholars that will alter the views made popular by modern yoga teachers who believe their doctrines of mental and physical culture constitutes classical yoga. David Whites entertaining and intelligent account of yogis drawn largely from Hindi and Sanskrit sources will contribute enormously to this corrective project. White has a real gift for making difficult, opaque material comprehensible, and he does so in writing that is bright and lucid.