

European Association for Asian Art and Archaeology

Online Panel no. 3

**Borrowing, Appropriation and Displacement:
Studies in Iconography**

(Tuesday, 19 October 2021; 13:00)

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Date: Tuesday, 19 October 2021

Time: 13:00 - 16:15 (CEST time, UTC+2)

Chair: Julia A. B. Hegewald

13:00 - 13:15 **Saran SUEBSANTIWONGSE:** Cakrasaṃvara or Trailokyavijaya?: Ascertaining the Identity of a Tantric Deity at Phimai through Sanskrit Manuscripts

13:15 - 13:30 **Anil Kumar SARKAR:** The Mech Tribe in Sub-Himalayan North Bengal: Study of the Traditional Folk, Goddesses and Changes

13:30 - 13:45 **Pappu Kumar NAIK:** Appropriation and Resistance through Visual Culture in Western Odisha

13:45 – 14:00 **M. K. EDWARDS LEESE:** On the Provenance of a Buddhist Tara-devi supported by the Maitraka king Dharasena IV

14:00 - 14:30 *DISCUSSION*

14:30 - 14:45 ***BREAK***

14:45 – 15:00 **Gerald KOZICZ:** The Geometric Formula behind a Tibeto-Buddhist Pantheon

15:00 - 15:15 **Heinrich POELL:** The Buddha Life cycle in the Khawaling stupa in Nyoma, Upper Ladakh

15:15 - 15:30 **Ajanta DAS:** Vasundharā: Earth and its Personification in Buddhist Visual Imagery of Indian Subcontinent

15:30 - 15:45 **Laxshmi Rose GREAVES:** The Rāmāyaṇa Imagined on the 9th Century Kāmākṣamma Temple at Dharmapurī, Tamil Nadu

15:45 - 16:15 *DISCUSSION*

ABSTRACTS

(in alphabetical order)

VASUNDHARĀ: EARTH AND ITS PERSONIFICATION IN BUDDHIST VISUAL IMAGERY OF INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Ajanta DAS

School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

The earth is significant in Buddhism as it was the witness of Buddha in defeating Māra to reach enlightenment. Although the most traditional Buddhist texts the Pāli Cannon doesn't mention earth as a deity, the earth is personified as the Vasundharā in the Buddhist believe of South and SouthEast Asia. In the Buddhist schools of Indian sub-continent Vasundharā is regarded as a female deity. However, the concept of an earth deity is old in the area and doesn't confine to Buddhism only. Goddess Vasundharā appears in some Sanskrit and/or Tantric Buddhist texts. But her descriptions vary in these texts. Images of Vasundharā are seen in the Indian Buddhist sites like Sanchi, Ajanta and Ellora. She is also found in Nepalese miniatures. Further, amongst the Theravada Buddhists of North-Eastern India she is in worship as a cult deity. While she appears in the Māra-Vijay episode with Buddha in Sanchi and Ajanta, in the other places she is a standalone deity. These ambivalent descriptions and representations of Vasundharā offer us an interesting case study of a Goddess cult. The proposed paper intends to analyze these iconographies of Vasundharā from the Indian sub-continent to understand the dynamics of personification of the earth in Buddhism and its further development as a Goddess in different Buddhist pantheons. By performing a comparative stylistic analysis of the images in relation to textual sources and local cults the study will explore amalgamation of mainstream and marginal traits in the making of Vasundharā.

Ajanta Das is a PhD candidate at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her doctoral research is studying the surviving and evolving art and architecture of the living Buddhist monasteries of Northeast India as visual evidences of Buddhism continuing in the region from the late medieval period. Further, her analysis of these monastic arts is trying to read the aspects of Buddhist political connotations, heritage protection and museumization. She wrote her MPhil "Tai Buddhist Visual Culture in Assam: Religion, Connection, Politics (A Study of Local and Transnational)" from the same institution, from where she also completed her post-graduation. In the year 2019 she was awarded the Sahapedia-UNESCO fellowship for the project "Theravada Buddhist Monasteries of Arunachal Pradesh".

ON THE PROVENANCE OF A BUDDHIST TARADEVI SUPPORTED BY THE MAITRAKA KING DHARASENA IV

M. K. EDWARDS LEESE

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

This paper addresses two mid-seventh century dedicatory grants made to a Buddhist establishment at Valabhi, Gujarat. Each record refers to the worship of the female bodhisattva, Taradevi. One of the grants places Taradevi at “Kanhasihanaka.”

This paper investigates whether the icon’s provenance could be Kanheri (“Kanhasila” according to early inscriptions). A large Buddhist cave monastery situated on Salsette Island (still a popular destination for Gujarati pilgrimage), Kanheri’s excavated halls bear numerous sculpted Buddhist images, including female figures of ca. 500 CE. Of special relevance regarding Taradevi is the author’s discovery in the site’s forested environs of a free-standing stone slab depicting a ca. sixth century female image. Asking if this image could be the Taradevi of Maitraka fame, the paper focuses on style and iconography, as well as early political, economic, religious and travel connections between Valabhi and Kanheri.

The paper also considers the locale of the discovered image. Found near the beginning of a series of broad steps leading up a hillside, the image may have marked the start of a movement ritual-procession route. Regarding the possibility of a procession, the paper turns to another female image, seemingly also of Taradevi, which was found earlier at Kanheri by M.G. Dikshit. Depicted as seated, it dates to the ca. eighth-ninth century period. Sculpted from wood, it was sufficiently portable as to be carried to the top of the hill for worship there.

In summary, given that female images were important in Kanheri’s Buddhist life, the paper allows for the possibility that Taradevi’s worship at Kanheri received shared support from the Buddhists of Valabhi.

M. K. Edwards Leese, Ph.D. (University of Michigan), is a former research associate at University of California, Berkeley, and Faculty at Institute of Buddhist Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley.

THE RĀMĀYAṆA IMAGINED ON THE 9TH CENTURY KĀMĀKṢAMMA TEMPLE AT DHARMAPURĪ, TAMIL NADU

Laxshmi Rose GREAVES

Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

Around the base of the Kāmākṣamma Temple in Dharmapurī, Tamil Nadu, is a 48-metre-long frieze depicting the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* carved in *mezzo rilievo*. This fascinating frieze belongs to the Nolamba period and constitutes one of the most significant of the early visual *Rāmāyaṇas* being the lengthiest and most complete of the corpus. This study provides a detailed reading of the imagery and concludes that the telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the frieze is presented in the form of a play with the setting being the court at Ayodhyā. To support the identification of the images, the paper draws upon several literary and visual tellings of the epic. Additionally, the narrative structure of the frieze, its formal qualities, the multiple modes of communication utilised, and the architectural and historic contexts are explored. Certain scenes depicted on this frieze represent the sole surviving versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* stories and thus constitute a highly important record of tales – even if only in pictorial form – that would otherwise be lost to us.

Laxshmi Greaves, PhD, is a Leverhulme Fellow in the School of History, Archaeology and Religious Studies at Cardiff University. Her current research project focuses on the origins, development, and spread of visual narratives from the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* depicted on temples situated across the Indian subcontinent (5th-10th centuries CE).

THE GEOMETRIC FORMULA BEHIND A TIBETO-BUDDHIST PANTHEON

Gerald KOZICZ

University of Technology Graz, Graz, Austria

Art historians working on Buddhist Monuments normally apply a three-fold approach for the study of a piece of art: motif, style and iconography. Although iconometry is inseparable from iconography, iconometric manuals themselves have hardly been applied as tools to analyse paintings (thangkas or mural). Likewise, iconometric patterns of existing paintings have not been made subject of a proper, comparative study yet.

The papers aim is to carry out such an investigation using a complete „mandala“-space as a case study: The chamber of the Khawaling Stupa of Nyoma in Upper Ladakh. This monument represents the classical passageway stupa with the actual stupa built on a broad cube. The iconographic programme centers on the five-fold order of the Five Tathagatta. The mandala of Akshobya claims the central position of the ceiling, while the four walls are dedicated to the remaining four directional Buddhas. While the ceiling mandala is embedded in a double band of Tibetan letters which read the dharani of Akshobya, the four directional Buddhas are surrounded in a precisely organized system of adjoining deities. The order is based on rank and function of the respective deities.

The presentations aims at linking the iconometric patterns of the single deities with the overall paradigms of geometry-based design in a two-step procedure: In a first step, the iconometric grids of single deities and their panels will be reconstructed. In a second step, the geometric order of the assembly, the positions of the panels within the three-dimensional order and their proportional canon will be reconstructed. The paper will thereby explore the potential of iconometric principles and spatial analysis as categories for art historical dating.

Gerald Kozicz, PhD, is an architectural researcher currently based at the Institute for Architecture and Media at TU Graz. Since 2005 he has directed five successive projects funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF focusing on Himalayan and Indo-Tibetan architecture and its related religious art. His research centers on the architecture in the Western Himalaya region. It includes both Hindu and Buddhist religious architecture.

APPROPRIATION AND RESISTANCE THROUGH VISUAL CULTURE IN WESTERN ODISHA

Pappu Kumar NAIK

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

This paper specifically discusses the dynamics of cultural resistance in the village of Ichhapaur. The village is placed in the Kalahandi district in Western Odisha. The main focus of this paper is based on the politics of appropriation of the indigenous female folk-deity 'Dokri Budhī' into the Brahmanical pantheon. The religious appropriation has triggered resistance to keep the indigenous culture alive, later it turned into a movement to claim justice against long-lived exploitation in the form of land grab, educational deprivation, labour exploitation etc. There are various socio-political reasons for Sanskritization of the folk and tribal culture, evident in Hinduism to gain economic and political benefits. One of them, the local deity 'Dokri Budhī' worshipped by the *Dalit-Bahujans* who are from the 'lower' strata of the society, this deity is now assimilated in the Brahmanical pantheon. This assimilation did not stop here but they have changed her 'aniconic' form in 'iconic' form by the given name 'Kanak Durga', which will be examined through the study of visual culture. Slowly, the impact of this religious conversion of the deity can be observed in the society by finding the imposition of Brahmanical norms and conditions to worship her which also creates the hierarchy within the society. The disassociation of the lower caste people started by the upper caste especially Brahmins by imposing hegemonic rules and regulations. As the state, ruling power and media is having control under the particular section of the society (upper caste), so there is very less chance to reveal the discrimination against the powerless.

Pappu Kumar Naik is a PhD candidate under the supervision of Prof. Y. S. Alone at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

THE BUDDHA LIFE CYCLE IN THE KHAWALING STUPA IN NYOMA, UPPER LADAKH

Heinrich POELL

Independent researcher, Graz, Austria

The Khawaling stupa (Tib. chorten) is a gateway chorten, located below the monastery and former fortifications of Nyoma, ca. 150 km upstream from Leh. The chorten was already mentioned by the Moravian missionary August H. Francke in 1914; its archaeology and architectural features were discussed more recently by Quentin Devers.

The Khawaling chorten is unusual for the extensive (and well-preserved) paintings on its four interior side walls and the ceiling, which can be dated to the late 13th or early 14th century CE. The walls show the four Tathagata flanked by secondary bodhisattvas and surrounded by minor deities. Below these large panels, a frieze along all four walls depicts the Buddha Life in 35 scenes, from the sojourn in the Tushita heaven prior to Birth to the Parinirvana, with a total length of 8.5 m. So far, the Khawaling stupa is the only surviving stupa monument in Ladakh where this specific topic of Buddhist art has been documented. Otherwise, paintings of the life of the Buddha are only found inside temples.

The paper will present this visual narrative in detail, identifying the scenes, analysing their iconography and the overall structure of the life story, and tracing its relationship to other (earlier and contemporaneous) life cycles in Ladakh.

Heinrich Poell, Dr.-Ing., is an Austrian national and was educated as an engineer. He works for international development organisations, has lived in India and Bangladesh, and has published research papers on Eastern Indian art and on the wood art of Ladakh.

THE MECH TRIBE IN SUB-HIMALAYAN NORTH BENGAL: STUDY OF THE TRADITIONAL FOLK, GODDESSES AND CHANGES

Anil Kumar SARKAR

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Sub-Himalayan North Bengal as well as North East India may be called the museum of races and tribes. No other part of India saw such a conglomeration of races and tribes. Most of the scholars agreed that the Meches belong to the mongoloid groups, which constitutes the third largest group of racial element in India. The Indian literature and the Epics have described Meches as the Danavas, Asuras, the kiratas and Mlechhas.

According to R.H. Codrington, the Meches believe in animism. Mech, their social customs and beliefs as a whole, touch upon their beliefs with regard to the creation of the world and various items of tribal folk-lore. They worshiped natural forces. Rites consist of sacrifice of animals and birds. Prayers consist of invocation for protection for the people, the crop, and the domestic animals and from all other misfortunes. Sacrifice is generally of hogs, goats, fowes, ducks and pigeons.

The Meches have an innumerable host of gods and goddesses whom they worship. Many of the Mech deities have been borrowed from the Hindus or vice-versa. A. Campbell thinks that the religions of the Meches are the Shivite form of Hinduism. The popular Mech deities are –Noni Modai (House hold gods), Doini Modai (River gods) and Gamini Modai (Village gods) etc. Recently, there are so many changes in their traditional folk and worship of Goddesses.

Anil Kumar Sarkar is a Professor Department of History at University of Kalyani, Nadia, India.

CAKRASAMVARA OR TRAILOKYAVIJAYA?: ASCERTAINING THE IDENTITY OF A TANTRIC DEITY AT PHIMAI THROUGH SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPTS

Saran SUEBSANTIWONGSE

King's College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK

The lintel situated above the eastern portal of the *garbhagr̥ha* at Phimai depicts a threeheaded deity with eight arms while dancing on an elephant head. Owing to the fact that Phimai is confirmed to be a temple for esoteric Buddhist practices according to the inscriptions attributed to various kings of the Khmer Empire, the deity in question is, therefore, unquestionably belong in the pantheon of Tantric Buddhist deities. While most agree that the deity is tantric, some scholars in the past, nevertheless, have mixed opinions in pinpointing the identity of the deity, which has been thought of as either Cakrasamvara or Trailokyavijaya.

Hence the primary objective of this paper is to verify the identity of this deity through the studies of Sanskrit manuscripts, particularly the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, *Sādhanamālā* and *Sarvavajrodaya*, which are some of the most authoritative texts on esoteric Buddhist deities of the Mahāyāna tradition. The results demonstrate that tantric Buddhism had once flourished in Thailand, but which had subsequently been taken over by the Theravada Buddhism, and that Sanskrit texts on tantric iconography may have been used in the creation of tantric iconographies at Phimai as well as in other esoteric Buddhist temples in the Khmer Empire.

Saran Suebsantiwongse is a PhD candidate in Sanskrit at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge University. Saran Suebsantiwongse works on the *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*, a hybrid manual on kingship and tantric practices, which he proposes to be from Vijayanagara. Saran is also interested in art history and apart from the PhD course at Cambridge, he concurrently pursues a Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art History at SOAS.