

Tantric Borderlands

*Survivals, Innovations,
(A)symmetries, &
Connections from the
Himalayas to the
Southern Seas*

Fri. 30 May 2025

Campus Condorcet

Bâtiment de Recherche Nord

Salle 6

Programme

09:30-09:40 Welcome and introduction

09:40-10:20 **Andrea Acri | EPHE/GREI**

*Archaic Elements in the Sanskrit–Old Javanese Śaiva
Tattva Literature from Java and Bali*

10:20–11:00 **Michael Slouber | Western Washington University**

New Findings on the Lord of Spirits, Khaḍgarāvaṇa

11:00–11:20 **Coffee Break**

11:20–12:00 **Louis Coppleson | Victoria & Albert Museum**

*Architectural Visualisation, Building Processes, and
Buddhism across Medieval Asia*

12:00–12:40 **Mathilde Mechling | EPHE/GREI**

*Innovation in Bronze: Cast Icons and Ritual Implements
in Mandala Practices from Java*

12:40–14:10 **Lunch break**

14:10–14:50 **Jeffrey Kotyk | Max Planck Institute, Berlin**

*Astral Icons in the Taizō Maṇḍala 胎藏曼荼羅 versus
Textual Descriptions*

14:50–15:30 **Aleksandra Wenta | University of Florence**

*Mapping the Transmission of the Raktayamāri Tradition
in Tibet*

15:30–15:50 **Coffee Break**

15:50–16:30 **Dorji Wangchuk | University of Hamburg**

*A Dot in the Line: Linking Rong-zom-pa with Tantric
Buddhism in Maritime Asia*

16:30–17:10 **John Newman | New College of Florida (online)**

*'Men from the Edge'—Reflections on Three Kālacakra
Masters: Piṇḍo of Java, Tsami Sangyé Drakpa of Minyak,
and Jé Lozang Drakpa of Tsongkha*

17:10–17:30 Final discussion

Funded by MANTRATANTRAM-ERC CoG 101124214 | contact: andrea.acri[at]ephe.psl.eu



Statuette from Sumatran Maṇḍala (Mathilde Mechling, Emma Stein, Eko Budiman, Ashur Mardiasoro)



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Abstracts

Andrea Acri | EPHE/GREI

Archaic Elements in the Sanskrit–Old Javanese Śaiva Tattva Literature from Java and Bali

My presentation posits that several texts in the corpus of Sanskrit–Old Javanese Śaiva scriptures referred to as Tattvas display archaic doctrinal features, reflecting a paradigm that may be detected in Śaiva Saiddhāntika texts in Sanskrit from the Indian Subcontinent doing back to the period before the dualist commentators and systematizer Sadyojyotis (ca. late 7th to early 8th century). Indeed, besides containing echoes of theologemes found in the works of the Br̥haspati (ca. mid- to late-7th century) as well as earlier Siddhāntatantras, they also feature analogies detected in non-dualist (or non-strictly-dualist) scriptures reflecting a pre-Śaṅkara and Maṇḍanamiśra philosophical stance. This fact is in harmony with the ideas expressed (mostly *en passant*) by previous scholars on the archaic character of Sanskrit–Old Javanese Śaiva texts on the one hand, and on the geographical peripheries of the Indic worlds as repositories of early materials that have not survived in the centre on the other.

Michael Slouber | Western Washington University

New Findings on the Lord of Spirits, Khaḍgarāvaṇa

Nearly twenty years ago, I began research on Khaḍgarāvaṇa, a Śaiva mantra-deity with special dominion over spirits. At that time, I edited only one chapter in the *Kriyākālagūṇottara*'s (KKGU) series on spirit possession, which is also the first in the three-part Khaḍgarāvaṇakalpa of the same text. The KKGU represents the most complete source on Khaḍgarāvaṇa, and likely the oldest source recovered too. I have now edited the rest of the KKGU's Bhūta Tantra material, and I will give a synopsis of what it can tell us about the origin and spread of Khaḍgarāvaṇa. We find reference to him in dozens of texts and several dozens of manuscripts from the far south of India to Nepal and in Old Javanese manuscripts. By the seventh century the Bhūta Tantras are referred to as a class of Śaiva Tantras, and we have a solid reference to a canonical Bhūta Tantra called Khaḍgarāvaṇa already in the ninth century. A Jaina text which might date to the 7th or 8th century uses Khaḍgarāvaṇa's mantras as well. Thus my talk will thus shed new light on a little known dimension of early Tantra.

Louis Coppleson | Victoria & Albert Museum

Architectural Visualisation, Building Processes, and Buddhism across Medieval Asia

Architectural historians have conventionally established proof of historical relationships between buildings by identifying shared formal features—particularly through comparisons of ground plans and ornamentation. While this approach is valuable, it does not account for the possibility that architectural ideas and practices might travel independently of the masons and artists who realise a building. And unlike the study of sculpture and painting, where iconographic comparisons across styles serve as useful indicators of the long-distance transmission of religious ideas, buildings are less explicitly representational and cannot typically be compared in terms of 'attributes'. In this presentation, I examine architectural connections at a less material level. I explore the practice of visualising construction sites and building processes in Tantric terms—conceiving of the site as a mandala and the mason's tools as ritual implements—and ask whether the ritualisation and visualization of construction constituted a distinct ritual repertoire among Buddhist communities across medieval Asia.

Mathilde Mechling | EPHE/GREI

Innovation in Bronze: Cast Icons and Ritual Implements in Mandala Practices from Java

Throughout the Buddhist world, mandala depictions take on many forms. They are often sculpted in stone and wood, printed on clay, painted on silk and as murals, drawn in ink on paper—but few of them are cast in bronze. This presentation will focus on the only extant examples in tenth-century Buddhist visual culture of large ensembles of small, individual bronze sculptures forming three-dimensional portable assemblies of mandala deities. These were all found in Java, Indonesia, buried at three locations—in Nganjuk (1913) and Kunti (1992), both in East Java, as well as in Surocolo (1976), in the Special Region of Yogyakarta in Central Java. In addition to these cast icons, Java also preserves innovative forms of bronze ritual implements, particularly handbells with vajra handles, four faces, and cosmic symbols (double vajra, jewel, lotus and vajra) linked to three-dimensional representations of mandala concepts. In an attempt to situate this tradition within the broader context of Tantric Buddhist visual and ritual practices, we will see that traces of similar bronze objects in other regions are rare, perhaps because they were not preserved or did not exist in this form. A few potential earlier and later examples from India, Japan, China and the Himalayas reveal conceptual differences, which will lead us to ponder the questions of innovations, interconnections, and survivals in this practice.



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Astral Icons in the Taizō Maṇḍala 胎藏曼荼羅 versus Textual Descriptions

The **Garbhakośa-maṇḍala* is associated with the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi* (大日經). The painted form was preserved in Japan, primarily as the *Genzu mandara* 現圖曼荼羅 (the standard form of the *Taizō mandara* 胎藏曼荼羅). Examining the positioning of the planets and other stellar deities, we find that they differ not only from the explanation in the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi*, but also from descriptions given in Tibetan. Moreover, the extant documentation from Tibet shows that only a limited number of astral deities are to be depicted, but in East Asian sources we find a wide array illustrated, such as the planets and zodiac signs. This presentation will show these differences, offering a tentative explanation for how and why the astral figures evolved in the way they did as the *maṇḍala* was transmitted from India to China to Japan.

Aleksandra Wenta | University of Florence

Mapping the Transmission of the Raktayamāri Tradition in Tibet

The spread of the Raktayamāri tantric cycle in Tibet is linked to the translation activities of the five bilingual lo tsā ba of the *phyi dar* period, namely, Dpyal lo tsā ba, Chag lo tsā ba, G.yag sde lo tsā ba, Glo bo lo tsā ba, and Shong lo tsā ba Blo gros brtan pa. The analysis of masters in the line of succession can be seen as a dynamic process of transmission practice and, therefore, an articulation of mobility that does not flow unimpeded but is channeled through the cracks of specific encounters. This model of analysis places the category of 'encounter' at the center of investigation, and implies that religious practice is transmitted through the circulation of audiences. The transmission practice is also in various degrees dependent upon the centers that often, due to their strategic geographical location, enable circulatory traffic movement. The emphasis on the aspect of mobility situates transmission as a form of social practice that simultaneously reveals an emergent process of site making. In this case, the transmission practice that could involve both formal tantric initiation and the translation of a Tantra is linked to certain geographical places that played a pivotal role in the dissemination of tantric teachings. This presentation will take a closer look at some among the locations that appear to have assumed a wider significance in the circulatory tantric network, and that provided a regular opportunity for the exchange of ideas and spread of Raktayamāri teachings through Tibet.

Dorji Wangchuk | University of Hamburg

A Dot in the Line: Linking Rong-zom-pa with Tantric Buddhism in Maritime Asia

The eleventh-century Tibetan scholar and translator Rong-zom Chos-kyi-bzang-po was deeply rooted in his ancestral rNying-ma ("Ancient") school and propounded the doctrine of the Great Perfection. Though active in the intellectual milieu of the gSar-ma ("New") schools that were at that time in the course of their formation, his writings reveal that the Kālacakra teachings—which first appeared in India during the early decades of the eleventh century and which are said to have been introduced to Tibet in 1027 by Gyi-jo Zla-ba'i-'od-zer—did not form a part of his intellectual edifice. We do, however, find some traces of Rong-zom-pa's knowledge of the Kālacakra tradition. He, for example, mentions a certain Slob-dpon Nas-gling-pa (*Yāvadvipaka), who is probably to be identified with the Javanese Piṇḍo (tenth–eleventh century), one of the key figures who disguised their identities with mythic pseudonyms and were responsible for the creation of the Kālacakra system. In this paper, I will examine Rong-zom-pa's link with some works, persons, and doctrines associated with the Kālacakra system, especially with the Javanese Piṇḍo also known as the Senior *Kālacakrapāda (Dus-zhabs-che-ba).

John Newman | New College of Florida (online)

'Men from the Edge'—Reflections on Three Kālacakra Masters: Piṇḍo of Java, Tsami Sangyé Drakpa of Minyak, and Jé Lozang Drakpa of Tsongkha

This talk will discuss the first of three Vajrayāna Buddhist masters who were born in 'peripheral' regions, travelled considerable distances to 'central' regions, and appear in the historical record due to their accomplishments as scholars, adepts, and teachers. In addition to sharing 'remote' birthplaces, all three of these men were involved in the transmission of the Kālacakra *tantra*. The three masters are: 1) Piṇḍo of Java (*bSod snyoms pa Ya ba dwi pa*) [fl. 10th–11th cent.]; 2) Tsami Sangyé Drakpa of Minyak (*Mi nyag Tsa mi Sangs rgyas grags pa*) [fl. 11th–12th cent.]; 3) Jé Lozang Drakpa of Tsongkha (*rJe Tsong kha pa bLo bzang grags pa*) [1357–1419]. Tsongkhapa has long been famous as the founder of the Gandenpa (later, "Gelukpa") Dharma tradition (*chos lugs*) of Tibet. Piṇḍo and Tsami Sangyé Drakpa have not been studied to nearly the same extent. In this presentation I will cover a bit about the life and works of Piṇḍo of Java. Prior to the presentation a draft version of the paper this talk will summarize will be posted on my academia.edu page: <https://ncf.academia.edu/JohnNewman>. In this workshop, I will present a mere overview of aspects of the first part of a projected three-part study examining 'the Kālacakra connection' between three figures who played significant roles in the development and transmission of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism.

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