Prasat Phanom Rung, Thailand (photo Andrea Acri)

Conference & Webinar

Nāgas and Territorial Deity Cosmologies in Monsoon Asia

Tantras, Mantras, and Worldly Rituals in Comparative Perspective

Harris Manchester College

The University of Oxford

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Telaga Batu inscription, Indonesia (photo Andrea Acri)

Territorial deities—intended as semi-human, superhuman, and nonhuman beings like *yakṣa*s, tree spirits, aquatic deities, serpentine beings, stones and features of the land, etc.—populated both elite (typically textual) and vernacular (often oral) religious and ritual traditions over much of Asia, and in particular the large belt of territory called 'Monsoon Asia', extending from the Himalayan arch through South Asia to Southeast and East Asia. These entities were—and, in many places, still are—perceived as the owners of the land. They were associated with fertility, water, rain, wealth, and kingship. Inhabiting complex and often hierarchical cosmologies, they were both beneficial and dangerous, and they presupposed shared ideas and practices around chthonic power, sacred space, supernatural efficacy, ancestry, and sovereignty. Integrated in the religious systems that we call Indic (like Śaivism, Buddhism, etc.), Sinitic (like Daoism or Confucianism), or simply 'animistic' or 'local', they formed part of an interconnected network of cosmological beliefs and worldly rituals set in a geographical theatre broadly dominated by monsoonal environments and often sharing climatic features, crops, fauna, agricultural practices and their calendrical events, etc.

Although Nāgas and their kin have received some academic scrutiny, there is a dearth of research on their manifestations in the scriptural traditions and ritual/mantric technologies of the Tantric movements that shaped the religious landscape of 'medieval' Asia (roughly between the 6th and 14th centuries CE). Further, more often than not, studies published since the second half of the 20th century have discussed localized instances of such beings and cults, for instance framing the former as 'Nāgas' in South and Southeast Asia and 'dragons' in East Asia, without attempting a comparative approach, or elaborating a methodological framework that could take into account an extended geography and diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Finally, from a historical point of view, the dominant paradigm has been that of 'appropriation' of these entities from pre-Indic cosmologies that were incorporated into their later institutionalized counterparts from the late second millennium BC, all the way to the Guptas and post-Gupta periods. However, this perspective has often failed to consider the similarity of these entities, cults, and practices across geographies and cultures, simply assuming that they were exported from India to the rest of Asia. This raises questions about their genealogy, i.e. whether they are the result of cultural diffusion, independent origins, or convergence, or even belong to a hypothetical 'cultic substratum'.

While remaining anchored in the philological investigation of textual material in various classical and modern languages (Sanskrit, South Asian vernaculars, Tibetan, Chinese, etc.), combined with insights from art history and ethnography, this conference seeks to revisit those wide-ranging problems. It will approach territorial deities and/as Nāgas in a comparative fashion as markers of a phenomenon that can be regarded as an integral feature of the Tantra-influenced cultures of Monsoon Asia, and which is intertwined in textual and non-textual traditions, as well as written and oral manifestations of mantras and supernatural efficacious practices ('magic', and management of such entities) by ritual specialists—whether exponents of Indic, Sinitic, or animistic religions. It also acknowledges the inseparable interconnectedness with and profound impacts that territorial deity cosmologies have had on Tantrism, both Śaiva and Buddhist. The environmental aspect of the phenomenon will receive particular attention. This forum will serve as a stepping stone towards the elaboration of a theoretical framework that can make sense of the phenomenon in all its diversity and multifariousness across a vast geographical area and over a timespan of at least 1,500 years.

Angkor Thiom, Cambodia (photo Andrea Acri)

Friday 19 September

9.00-9.15	Welcome remarks
9.15-9.55	Andrea Acri (EPHE), Finnian Gerety (Oxford Univ.), Robert Mayer (Oxford Univ.)
	Keynote address
	Session I: Pre-Tantric Roots of Nāgas and Territorial Deities
9.55–10.35	Brian Black (Lancaster University)
	Beyond Good and Evil: Rethinking Nāgas in the Mahābhārata
10.35–10.55	**Coffee Break**
10.55–11.35	Sushma Jansari (British Museum) & Sureshkumar Muthukumaran (NUS) **[Online only]**
	Spirits of Earth and Water—Revisiting Nāgas and Yakṣas in the British Museum's Ancient India: Living Traditions Exhibition
11.35–12.15	Ronald Davidson (Fairfield University, Em.)
	Brothers and Sisters Revisited: Family Metaphors, Local Spirits and Tantric Practice
12.15–12.30	General discussion—Session I
12.30–14.00	**Lunch Break**
	Session II: Tibet and Central Asia
14:00–14:40	Robert Mayer (Oxford University) & Anna Sehnalova (Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong)
	Death, Treasures, yüllha*, and* yakṣas*: Territorial Deity Cosmologies of India and Tibet*
14:40–15:20	Alexander Zorin (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) **[Online only]**
	Nāgas in Tibetan texts from Khara-Khoto
15:20–15:40	**Coffee Break**
	Session III: Nepal and the Himalayas
15:40–16:20	Gudrun Bühnemann (University of Wisconsin-Madison) **[In-person only]**
	Śeṣanāga as Śākyamuni's Vehicle in Newar Buddhism
16:20–17:00	Gerrit Lange (University of Bochum)
	Āyā hai jogī banke luṭerā*? The Evocation of 'Tantric Knowledge' in the Worship of a Himalayan Nāginī—and in Classical Hindi Snake Films*
17.00–17.15	General discussion—Sessions II and III
17.15–17.30	Closing discussion

Angkor Thiom, Cambodia (photo Andrea Acri)

Saturday 20 September

Session IV: South Asia: Śaiva Texts and Rituals

9.00–9.40 Dominic Goodall (EFEO, Pondicherry)

Traces of Ophiolatry in the Literature of the Śaivasiddhānta

9.40–10.20 S.A.S. Sarma (EFEO, Pondicherry)

Nāga Rituals in Kerala: Gṛhyasūtra *Traditions, Tantric Practices, and Folk Performances*

10.20–10.35 **Coffee Break**

Session V: South Asia: Śākta Texts and Rituals

10.35–11.15 Sandra Sattler (University of Oxford)

Rising Snake Goddess: Manasā's Integration into Śākta-Purāṇic and Material Traditions

11.20–12.00 Olga Serbaeva (University of Zürich)

The Nāgas in the Jayadrathayāmala

12.00–12.15 General discussion—Sessions IV and V

12.15–13.45 **Lunch Break**

Session VI: South Asia: Tantric Buddhist Texts and Rituals

13:45–14:25 Aleksandra Wenta (University of Florence)

Between Wrath and Remedy: Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka Rituals Against Nāga Afflictions

14:25–15:05 Gergely Hidas (Dharma Gate Buddhist College, Budapest)

Is it Time to Prepare a Complete Edition of the Meghasūtra*?*

15:05–15:25 **Coffee Break**

Session VII: Southeast and East Asia

15:25–16:05 Saran Suebsantiwongse (Leiden University)

Sacred Serpents of the Mekong: Nāga Myths, Mantras, Symbolism and Cultural Identity in Thailand

16:05–16:45 Yasmin Koppen (University of Leipzig)

How to Tame Your Dragon: Discourse with Nāgas, Snakes, and Dragons in the Ritual Speech of China and Vietnam

16.45–17.00 General discussion—Sessions VI and VII

17.00–18.00 Closing roundtable (Andrea Acri, Kate Crosby, Finnian M. Gerety, Robert Mayer, Ulrike Roesler, Veronica Strang)

Prasat Phnom Rung, Thailand (photo Andrea Acri)

Abstracts

Brian Black | Lancaster University

Beyond Good and Evil: Rethinking Nāgas in the Mahābhārata

Nāgas in the *Mahābhārata* are often interpreted as representing evil or *adharma*. Danielle Feller has described Nāgas in the *Mahābhārata* as 'wicked' (2004: 175), who 'stand for … Evil, or the powers of *adharma*' (2004: 206); Christopher Framarin has described them as representing *adharma* (2013: 196); and Meena Arora Nayak has described them as agents 'pivotal to the concept of evil' (2018: 25). This paper will show that far from being equated with evil and *adharma*, Nāgas in the *Mahābhārata* are primarily depicted positively and sympathetically and are, in fact, exemplars of *dharma*. As I will suggest, one of the primary symbolic functions of Nāga characters is to invert dichotomies of good and evil to bring readers and listeners of the *Mahābhārata* to a higher understanding of dharma. I will further argue that the Nāga narratives of the frame stories are integral to setting up a counter perspective from which to view the *Mahābhārata* as a whole.

Gudrun Bühnemann | University of Wisconsin-Madison

Śeṣanāga as Śākyamuni's Vehicle in Newar Buddhism

In this paper, I will discuss a unique theme that emerged in Newar Buddhism, which depicts Śākyamuni Buddha travelling while standing on a serpent, typically identified as Śeṣanāga. This theme is known from descriptions in both Sanskrit and Newar texts and is frequently represented in art. It appears in at least two contexts:

1. The Buddha's return journey to Lumbinī, known as the *lumbinīyātrā*. When the Buddha revisits his birthplace, Lumbinī, he is honoured by Hindu gods who line up in a procession and perform services for him. The Buddha travels standing on Śeṣanāga.

2. Śākyamuni's journey to the Svayambhū Stūpa in the Kathmandu Valley. In a version of the mythological story, Śeṣanāga observes that all the monks in Śākyamuni's entourage are riding vehicles and offers his body as a vehicle (*vāhana*) for the Buddha so that he does not have to walk on foot.

While serpents play a significant role as protectors in Buddhist mythology, as evidenced by Nāga-enthroned Buddha images in Khmer art—often interpreted as representing the Nāga Mucalinda sheltering the Buddha in the weeks that followed his enlightenment—the motif of Śākyamuni using a Nāga king as a vehicle appears to be unique to Newar Buddhism. In this paper, I will examine this theme within the broader context of the Buddhist-Vaiṣṇava mythology in the Kathmandu Valley.

Ronald Davidson | Fairfield University (Em.)

Brothers and Sisters Revisited: Family Metaphors, Local Spirits and Tantric Practice

An emphasis on familial affinity is one of the hallmarks of Indian society, and religion is no exception, often employing familial metaphors or designations in labels or identifications of divinities or spirits. While the *fathers* (as the ancestors) and the *mothers* (as potentially destructive goddesses) have received some attention, in the history of tantrism the position of sisters (*bhaginī*) especially, but also their brothers, has intermittently been a point of discussion. In 1981 I drew attention to a statement in Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavarttikasvavṛtti* that mentioned in passing *ḍākinībhaginītantras*, which has been provided various interpretations since. However, I do not believe that all the evidence has been considered to date, so a fresh examination of the issue may be helpful. *Bhaginī,* was employed as a term of direct address to individuals and theological entities around the beginning of the common era. The term was applied quite early to localized figures, with a first-second century inscription to one *nāgī* in Bihār, a discussion about the river Gaṅgā in the fourth century, and as a group of *bhaginī* on the periphery of maṇḍalas from the fifth-sixth century forward, once accompanied by five brothers. More intriguing are the rituals, one of which coerces a *yakṣī* to be the sister in a magical rite associated with sexual conquest and satisfaction for the sorcerer. Other allusions to sisters of various numbers: three, four, six, seven or more are found as the ritual texts mature. Concomitantly, the sisters' brothers are provided names and identities that change quickly. The relative frequency of *bhaginī*s in ritual literature suggests that attempts to associate either *bhaginī* or their brothers exclusively with one tantric tradition do not attend to the manner in which lineages appropriate local divine figures and their cultic behaviours, called by Chattopadhyaya the 'brāhmanical mode of appropriation'. The net result is that *bhaginī* became for the authors of seventh and eighth century ritual texts a term surrounded with affective resonance of intimacy, sexual tension, spirit assistance and potential transgression.

Dominic Goodall | EFEO, Pondicherry

Traces of Ophiolatry in the Literature of the Śaivasiddhānta

Abstract TBA.

Gergely Hidas | Dharma Gate Buddhist College, Budapest

Is it Time to Prepare a Complete Edition of the Meghasūtra?

Perhaps the most widely known South Asian Buddhist source centred on Nāgas is the *Meghasūtra*. Curiously, its Sanskrit text is still unavailable in full length. Bendall 1880 leaves out several passages including the majority of the *dhāraṇī*s while Moriguchi 1980 covers less than the half of this scripture. The present paper surveys manuscript sources used so far and highlights further codices available to be included in a prospective critical edition.

Sushma Jansari & Sureshkumar Muthukumaran | British Museum & NUS

Spirits of Earth and Water—Revisiting Nāgas and Yakṣas in the British Museum's Ancient India: Living Traditions Exhibition

Nāgas and *yakṣa*s alongside their female counterparts are among the earliest deities of ancient India to be represented in the durable mediums of stone and fired clay. These deities fulfilled many different functions in society. They were tutelary deities of towns, villages, households, springs and wells, and they were worshipped as gods of childbirth, wealth and protection as well. The centrality of these nature spirits to peoples' everyday lives also meant that they were co-opted and incorporated into Jain, Buddhist and Hindu traditions, where they remain important to the present day. This talk traces the origin, persistence and evolution of Nāga and *yakṣa* traditions of worship through the lens of the ongoing exhibition 'Ancient India: Living Traditions' Exhibition at the British Museum.

Yasmin Koppen | University of Leipzig

How to Tame Your Dragon: Discourse with Nāgas, Snakes, and Dragons in the Ritual Speech of China and Vietnam

This paper explores how serpentine beings—Nāgas, snakes, and dragons—became agents of ritual efficacy within the ritual speech traditions of China and Vietnam. Both cultures developed deeply hydrolatric worldviews, shaped by persistent environmental challenges: northern China faced recurring droughts and floods, while southern China and Vietnam contended with a dense and often unpredictable fluvial landscape. In these settings, the ability to summon or regulate rain through ritual was not only a spiritual concern but a critical tool of statecraft and moral performance. Ritual texts from China and Vietnam, penned by high-ranking officials or local specialists, demonstrate how water-controlling entities were approached with persuasive, bureaucratic, or even threatening rhetoric to compel compliance. This reflects a theory of performative speech efficacy deeply embedded in both Confucian and Daoist frameworks. Drawing on imperial edicts, stele inscriptions, liturgical records, Daoist and Buddhist ritual texts, this talk examines how Buddhist rhetoric and practice affected the interactions with dragons and dragon-shaped water deities. While originally drawn from Indian traditions of Nāga veneration, East Asian Buddhist traditions introduced mantras and *dhāraṇī* to local cosmologies in order to summon rain, control serpents, or heal disease (which were associated with poison). Vietnamese sources further reveal a blending of Buddhist, Daoist, and vernacular elements, including magical water rites, female-centred traditions and gender-diverse ritual specialists. Through comparison of orthodox and heterodox performative strategies, this talk argues that the perceived success or failure of these rituals affected not only the fate of local deities or the careers of the officials who performed them, but could also reshape cultic hierarchies. In sum, these beings were not passive symbols of nature but volatile forces whose taming demanded rhetorical precision and spiritual authority. Defining their identity, and the appropriate way to interact with them was one way to successfully compete for religious and worldly authority.

Gerrit Lange | University of Bochum

Āyā hai jogī banke luṭerā*? The Evocation of 'Tantric Knowledge' in the Worship of a Himalayan Nāginī—and in Classical Hindi Snake Films*

In the local religious tradition around the Naiṇī or Nāginī sisters, the nine serpent goddesses of Pindar valley in the Indian Himalaya, 'Tantric knowledge' (*tantrik vigyan*) is attributed both to Brahmin priests and to Dalit drummers. Respectively, they are the ones who know the right mantras and drum patterns to activate deities through rituals of awakening (*jāgna*) calling (*bulāna*) and inviting them, giving life to their material embodiments and charging the atmosphere with emotion (*bhāv*)—to the point of possession trance. 'Tantric', in this region, refers to secret knowledge of specific mantras, which could also mean to understand the snake language. During my fieldwork, the villagers of Rains often seemed to use this term to indicate that they could or would not tell me more details. The leading priest of the procession that I studied is referred to as a 'Tantrik' and as a 'snake charmer' with a fully positive connotation, quite different from the evil 'Tantrik snake charmers' known from Hindi films such as Nāginā or Tum Mere Ho. My contribution will explore the contrast between the positive local use of Tantrik and the negative stereotype transported in colloquial Hindi, which associates the Sanskrit term *tantra* not only with specific religious traditions, but also with folkloristic figures of black magicians (cf. Ramos 2020, Sax 2009, Iyer 2013). In Indian folktales and popular culture, tantra and mantra often have ambiguous or even outright negative connotations. Bhairo Nath, the antagonist of the *nāgin* in the influential 1986 movie Nāginā, is called an evil '*jogī*' and 'tantrik'. The figure of has since been re-staged time and again (cf. Sen 2017): a villain who, out of selfishness (*ahaṃkār*), tries to subdue and control a Nāginī. In a song accompanying a virtuous dance battle between the two of them, she calls him a yogi-turned-gangster (*jogī banke luṭerā*), a 'snake charmer' (*sarperā*) and mocks him that his yantras, his 'tantric' paraphernalia, and his mantras are only toys to her (*jantar-mantar, jādu-ṭoṇe—ye tu haiṃ mere khel-khilaune*).

Robert Mayer & Anna Sehnalova | University of Oxford & City University of Hong Kong

Death, Treasures, yüllha*, and* yakṣas*: Territorial Deity Cosmologies of India and Tibet*

This paper looks at a Tibetan funerary ritual as used for clan chieftains in Golok in East Tibet, where the clan chiefs are understood as descendants of the local apical mountain deity. Hence the ritual is deeply embedded in the ancestral territorial deity cosmology, and the chieftain's post-crematory remains are envisaged as an offering of treasure (*ter*) to the mountain deity and his court. Yet at the same time, this ritual employs the language and mantras of Indic *yakṣa* traditions to associate the treasure-owning mountain deity (*terdak*) with the Indian category of treasure-owning *yakṣa*. We see the same pattern repeated in many other rituals, for example where local *lu* are ritually envisaged as Indian Nāgas. While territorial deities are understood in local Tibetan terms and characteristics at a vernacular level, these very same deities, and the cosmology they inhabit, can be envisaged in Indic terms at a liturgical or learned level. We suggest that there was an underlying similarity of entities, cults, and practices across India and Tibet, allowing Tibetans to use Indian territorial deity ritual categories as a prestigious language in which to approach their own local deities, which could otherwise remain little changed in many respects.

S.A.S. Sarma | EFEO, Pondicherry

Nāga Rituals in Kerala: Gṛhyasūtra *Traditions, Tantric Practices, and Folk Performances*

The worship of Nāgas has a long antiquity, as attested in the *Gṛhyasūtra*s, where rituals such as the Sarpabali are described (e.g., *Baudhāyana Gṛhyasūtra* 3.10.1–8). Kerala, known for its enduring traditions of Nāga worship, preserves this legacy in the form of Sarpakāvus (serpent-groves) and temples dedicated to Nāgas, where the rituals follow the Tantric traditions, especially as performed by the Nambuthiri Brahmin community. These include the Noorum Pālum (offering of milk mixed with rice powder) and Sarpabali, which are regularly performed in major Nāga temples such as the Pāmbinmelkkāṭṭu temple in Thrissur district, as well as the elaborate ritual of Nāgabali, conducted on special occasions. Rituals pertaining to the Nāgas in the *Gṛhyasūtra*s and the *pratiṣṭhā* (consecration) manuals connected with the installation of Nāgas attributed to various Āgama scriptures will be briefly discussed as part of the introduction. The presentation will then focus on the manuals on Nāga worship known in Kerala and the present-day rituals performed in major Nāga temples, including the offerings made there—especially those intended to provide a remedy for infertility. The discussion will also extend to folk rituals associated with Nāga worship, such as Sarpamtuḷḷal and Puḷḷuvanpāṭṭu.

Sandra Sattler | University of Oxford

Rising Snake Goddess: Manasā's Integration into Śākta-Purāṇic and Material Traditions

While the serpent goddess Manasā has been studied more extensively in the context of Bengali *Maṅgalkāvya*s and folk traditions, comparatively little attention has been paid to her appearance in Purāṇic literature, where she is integrated into a Śākta framework through narrative and hybrid ritual, drawing on Tantric, Vedic, and Purāṇic modes of worship. This paper examines how the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* constructs her identity, and, in parallel, considers her visual trajectories in Indian art. Although female serpent figures are attested from as early as the 1st century BCE, Manasā's emergence as a distinct goddess of yogic and mantric power appears to crystallise in the medieval period, as textual and material traditions coalesce around a dominant snake-hooded female form, notably in the art of Pāla-period India. By situating Manasā at the intersection of local Nāga cults, Purāṇic textuality, and Śākta iconography, this paper contributes to wider discussions of serpent deities in South Asia. In particular, it foregrounds *mantra* and *mūrti* as key media in the process of goddess-making.

Olga Serbaeva (University of Zürich)

The Nāgas in the Jayadrathayāmala

This presentation explores the relationship between the *sādhaka* and the *nāgas*, supernatural serpents believed to inhabit their own realm of the underworld, known as Nāgaloka. We will first examine instances of poison magic—remnants of the Bhūta- and Gāruḍa-tantras preserved in the *Jayadrathayāmala*—in which the *sādhaka* is capable of healing even those 'bitten to death'. Subsequently, viewing the encounter with the Nāgas as part of the middle phase of the *sādhana*, we will accompany the *sādhaka* on a journey into the serpents' underworld. There, we will explore its secret locks, encoded linguistic expressions, and consider what the *sādhaka* seeks to gain from this descent. Finally, we will investigate which forms and *vidyā*s of the goddess Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī possess the power to open the gates to Pātāla and to control the Nāgas.

Nāgārāja stone from Sri Lanka, Victoria and Albert Museum, WikiMedia Commons

Saran Suebsantiwongse | Leiden University

Sacred Serpents of the Mekong: Nāga Myths, Mantras, Symbolism and Cultural Identity in Thailand

The Nāgas occupy a prominent place in Thailand's mythological, religious, and artistic traditions. Rooted in Indian Buddhist and Hindu narratives and reinterpreted through local animist beliefs and Theravāda Buddhist frameworks, the Thai Nāgas function simultaneously as guardians, fertility symbols and powerful deities in their own right, capable of cursing or granting boons. In Thai belief, Nāgas are traditionally divided into four families, each with distinct attributes and spheres of influence. Appearing in temple architecture, ritual practices, and oral traditions, Nāgas are often associated with the Mekong River in Northeastern Thailand (Isān), protective thresholds and the underworld realms. Mythic narratives, such as those linking the Nāga to the Buddha's enlightenment or the founding of key cities, reveal a synthesis of Indic and indigenous elements that reinforce royal legitimacy, sacred geography and agricultural cycles. Magical practices associated with Nāgas often incorporate mantras derived from Pāli sources, such as the *Nāga-sutta* and the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, alongside localised protective chants preserved in *khatha* (Thai mantras) in Thai, Lao, Khmer or hybrid forms mixing languages, recited by monks and ritual specialists. Furthermore, Nāgas are among the most popular celestial beings depicted in *sak yant* (sacred tattoos), which must be ritually consecrated and invoked with specific mantras. In contemporary Thailand, Nāga imagery continues to inform popular culture, tourism and regional identity, particularly in the Isān, where the annual *Bang Fai Phaya Nak* ('Nāga fireballs') festival blends myth with communal celebration. This study examines the Nāga as a dynamic spiritual and cultural symbol, tracing its transformation from ancient Indic serpent-deities into a distinctly Thai celestial guardian of land, water and spiritual order—one that is deeply integrated into the Buddhist worldview. It also investigates the corpus of Nāga-related mantras and tattoos used in a variety of magical rituals, analysing their connections to original Pāli and Sanskrit sources and situating them within broader Indic cosmological frameworks, including those articulated in the Purāṇas.

Aleksandra Wenta | University of Florence

Between Wrath and Remedy: Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka Rituals Against Nāga Afflictions

While Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cults are conventionally characterized by their deployment of fierce and aggressive ritual magic, their involvement in protective and curative practices—especially those addressing snakebite—is comparatively understudied. This paper aims to illuminate this neglected dimension through a twofold analysis. The first section examines magical recipes for resurrecting individuals fatally afflicted by snake venom, as preserved within a yoga tantra exegetical commentary of the *Vajrabhairavatantra*. Of particular interest is the ritual incorporation of the Mahāsāgara *mudrā* within the Vajrabhairava framework, which suggests a noteworthy ritual syncretism and adaptation. The second section investigates two Nāgarakṣa *sādhana*s invoking the Yamāntaka form, both of which contain detailed ritual protocols aimed at counteracting diseases attributed to Nāgas. By tracing these ritual strategies, this presentation offers new insight into the apotropaic technologies, intertextual fluidity, and ritual semiotics within the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka tradition.

Alexander Zorin | Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Nāgas in Tibetan Texts from Khara-Khoto

This paper presents an overview of Tibetan texts from Khara-Khoto (mostly dated to the 12th–13th centuries) that contain specific references to Nāgas. Two items, XT-74 and XT-194 (formerly Dh. Tib. 178, before 2018), preserve the most important material on this topic. XT-74 opens with a ritual involving the creation of a figurine of the Nāga King Vasuki and his consort for "generating the pleasures of an estate and a royal palace". Subsequent fragments also refer to Nāgas as objects of worship. XT-194, a large scroll unfolded vertically, concludes with a lengthy versified text on Vajrapāṇi and the Eight Nāga Kings, during which another Nāga deity, named Sngags kyi bdag po, is invited to perform protective actions. These texts show that rituals involving Nāgas were transmitted into Tangut Buddhism by Tibetan masters, and may have been intended to provide specific benefits for the rulers of the land.