

11.30-12.00 **Susmita BASU MAJUMDAR** (Professor and Head, Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta)
“Revisiting the Vestiges of Buddhist Art in the Forest Corridor”



This paper aims to look at the vestiges of artistic specimens and traditions along with the epigraphic texts in the forest corridor of Chhattisgarh. This zone was the corridor that connected north and south India, being located in a strategic crossover it received influences and inspiration from both north and south which is noticeable not only in art but also on epigraphic and numismatic specimens. The site of Sirpur has yielded Buddhist structures, sculptures and textual materials which need a re-examination and re-evaluation. The meteoric rise of this site under the Panduvamsins and during their regime the art activities also reached a zenith and this city became a major production zone of bronze images. The present paper intends to explore Buddhist art from Sirpur and also from Malhar.

12.00-12.30 **Elora TRIBEDY** (Associate Professor, Nalanda University, Rajgir)

“In the Shadow of the Bodhisattva’s Compassion: Reexamining the ‘Local Genius’ of the Cult of Tara in Premodern Sri Lanka”

The iconographic examination of Tārā images reveals that beneath the layer of the text-oriented instructions and influences from Indian representations, an echoic resemblance of the well-known ‘princely’ and ‘yogic’ representations of Avalokiteśvara. The examination of primary and ritual contexts of the cult of Tārā, such as the Vijayarama complex, Anuradhapura, presents a thriving esoteric ritual environment of late Mahāyāna Buddhism. The present study also offers new insights into the spread of esoteric Buddhism in the Indian Ocean, highlighting the role of Srilanka in the circulation of Buddhist images and manuscripts, gleaned from this case study of Tārā.

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A study of the bodhisattva **Avalokiteśvara** as protector of seafarers:

Mahāyāna Buddhism
in Sri Lanka
in relation to maritime trade
in the Indian Ocean

Journée d'étude

13 juin 2024

Salle Fustel de Coulanges
Palais Universitaire — Strasbourg

A study of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as protector of seafarers:

09.00-09.10 **Guillaume DUCŒUR** (Université de Strasbourg)
Ouverture de la Journée d'étude

09.10-09.40 **Osmund BOPEARACHCHI** (Director of Research - emeritus CNRS-ENS, AIBL and Kalpa Asanga, Archaeological Research Officer, Department of Archaeology, Colombo,

“Avalokiteśvara Survey Project, Sri Lanka, 2015-2024: Introduction”

The aim of the Avalokiteśvara Survey Project launched in 2015 by the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS-ENS), Paris in collaboration with the University of Rajarata, Mihintale, and the Department of Archaeology, Colombo, Sri Lanka, and completed in February 2024, was to study the relationship between Buddhism and maritime trade in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean using Geographic Information System (GIS) to uncover spatial and temporal patterns. Beginning in the seventh century CE, Chinese, Arab, Persian, and South Indian merchants established trade networks with Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. With the sudden explosion of commercial activity between China and South Asia in the course of the seventh century, Sri Lanka in particular came to play a decisive role in maritime trade across the Indian Ocean. At the height of this mercantile movement in Asia, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and his consort Tara achieved significant popularity as protectors of ships and sailors.

09.40-10.10 **Nuwan ABHYAWARDANA** (Professor University of Rajarata, Sri Lanka)
“Methodology of the GIS Avalokiteśvara Survey Project”

Today, heritage studies are successfully using state-of-the-art digital application technology. Thanks to the flexibility and precision of this technology, digital applications have opened up new frontiers in heritage studies. A Geographic Information System (GIS) can be used as a tool to facilitate the recording and preservation of heritage sites by collecting and presenting site information in an integrated and meaningful way. The Avalokiteśvara study project aimed to develop a GIS-based information management system for the archaeological sites of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Sri Lanka. To map the cultural and environmental features of the region, various surveying methods, satellite methods and the Global Positioning System (GPS) were used. The basic data was collected on an island and regional scale, and the heritage information was collected for each Avalokiteśvara site. All coordinates are expressed in meters according to the new conformal coordinate system and are based on the transverse Mercator projection. The vertical datum is mean sea level as defined by the Survey Department of Sri Lanka. Topographic data of surface features were overlaid on satellite imagery for further interpretation of heritage values and identification of the extent of ancient Avalokiteśvara sites. All data collected was integrated into a geographic information system.

10.10-11.40 **Kellie POWELL** (PhD candidate, University of California, Berkeley)

“The Creation of Sacred Space: The Importance of Maṇḍalas, Images, and Ritual Texts in the Study of Sri Lankan Vajrayāna Buddhism”

While incontrovertible evidence exists for the widespread practice of both Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the field of Buddhist Studies continues to be dominated by the narrative that the Buddhism of Sri Lanka is, and always has been, strictly Theravadin. Even when the existence of non-orthodox Buddhism on the island is acknowledged, its significance is undermined—often described as a heretical or degenerate incursion from South India that had minor influence in the eighth and ninth centuries. In this presentation, I argue that not only was Vajrayāna Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka, but that it was the dominant tradition of the late Anurādhapura Period (i.e. the early eighth to early eleventh centuries). Utilizing textual, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence, I argue that a pivotal Vajrayāna text, the Sarvatathāgatataṭṭvasaṃgraha (STTS), and its Vajradhātu-maṇḍala were of central importance to the practice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Consecration rituals featuring the STTS's maṇḍalas were used to sacralize Buddhist monasteries and images, and Sri Lankan practitioners were known to be experts in the text—so much so that the famous eighth-century translator Amoghavajra traveled to Anurādhapura seeking out tantric teachers and manuscripts. When he returned to China, his translation work centered on the Sarvatathāgatataṭṭvasaṃgraha and related ritual manuals, making his Sri Lankan teachers important figures in the development and proliferation of Vajrayāna Buddhism in East Asia.

10.40-11.00 Pause

11.00-11.30 **Sven BRETFFELD** (Professor, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim)

“We'd Rather Starve to Death ... than to accept this Heresy: Mahāyāna and the Illusion of Orthodoxy in the Historical Literature of Sri Lanka”

The study of Buddhist diversity in Sri Lankan history has confronted historians with a rich, but utterly incomplete set of data. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence as well as the reputation Sri Lanka enjoyed within the ancient Buddhist world allow us some inferences about the composition of intra-religious plurality on the island. This evidence testifies to a highly variegated and fluid Buddhist landscape, to some extent mirroring the religious diversity on the Indian mainland. Alongside this positive evidence we have limited access to the meta-discourses in which contemporary and later Buddhist authors processed the historical experience of intra-religious plurality, transforming it into discourses of historiographical meaning-making. These discourses are perspective-dependent and therefore polyphonic by nature. Regretfully, historical contingency left us with only a single surviving voice from a discourse that must once have been a complex and manifold contest for interpretative authority. Modern scholarship has been highly dependent on this one remaining voice, since—in the absence of competing perspectives—it seems to recount the background story to the excavated artifacts.