

Transnational Asia

Speaker Series

The Demons of Kucha



Friday, September 18, 2020 @ 12 PM CDT

Online via Zoom (registration required)

Free and open to the public.

A quantitative analysis of the Buddhist paintings in Kucha on the Northern Silk Road (5th – 10th century) provides many surprises. Among the most important results is the high number of demons represented in the paintings. Almost every cave contains images of demons venerating the Buddha; their appearance and the weapons they carry vividly illustrate how dangerous they are. On the other hand, we also encounter deities of very similar appearance, who take on the role of protective deities. They are placed at the cave entrance or in the squinches of the dome – here they ward off attacks on the temple covering all directions. A number of elements in the appearance of the deities were taken from India; the *nāgas* display cobra hoods and Viṣṇu and Śiva are included among the demons. Other iconographic features – such as ears in the shape of pots – are not found in the Indian imagery, but are the literal visualization of an Indian expression (*kumbhakamā*). In most cases, however, the demons depicted do not follow any Indian prototypes. Unknown to India are elements such as the two long objects appearing on their heads – usually explained as feathers – and the frequently depicted calf warmers made from fur. There are many indications that the ancestor of these demons is the shepherd god Pan with his horns and goat legs.



PROF. MONIKA ZIN is the head of the research group “Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road” at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig, Germany. She studied Dramatics, Literature, Art History, and Indology in Krakow and Munich where she also taught Art of South and Central Asia for 25 years. Zin’s dissertation focussed on the Sanskrit dramas discovered in Trivandrum; for her second dissertation (Habilitation) she studied the paintings at Ajanta. Among her research contributions are monographs (*Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings 2: Devotional and Ornamental Paintings*, Wiesbaden 2003; *Compassion and Miracles. Difficult Conversions and their Iconography in Indian Buddhism*, Wiesbaden 2007; [with Dieter Schlingloff] *Śaṃsāracakra, The Wheel of Rebirth in the Indian Tradition*, Munich 2007; all written in German; English editions will be published in India) as well as numerous shorter studies on Buddhist narrative art ranging from Kucha in Central Asia to Borobudur on Java. One of her long-term research interests is the art of ancient Āndhradeśa; her book on the *stūpa* at Kanaganahalli (Karnataka) was published in Delhi in 2018. Her book *Representations of the Parinirvāṇa Story Cycle in Kucha*, the second volume of the Leipzig Kucha Studies, has just been released.

FACULTY HOST: ERIC HUNTINGTON



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