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Einladung zum Vortrag

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In and Around the Cosmopolis

Poetic Excavations of Tenth-
Century Kannauj through
the Works of Rājaśekhara

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Many Sanskrit poets lived in premodern Indian cities, but the conventionalized nature of *kāvya* means that their writings seldom reveal much about their local urban circumstances. This “placelessness” was an important feature of Sanskrit literary culture, providing poets and their patrons lasting power and prestige across a vast cultural and political landscape that some have called the “Sanskrit Cosmopolis.” Still, all poets lived in specific times and places, and wrote to impress specific courtly audiences. A close, geographically-sensitive reading of their works therefore has much to reveal about the historical contingencies of this Cosmopolis.

As part of a larger project on poets associated with the city of Kannauj, this presentation turns to one noted poet and critic, Rājaśekhara Yāyāvāriya, who was writing there in the early tenth century. How, I ask, was Rājaśekhara’s geographical vision dependent on the cultural diversity of this city’s inhabitants? And what, in turn, does this tell us about Kannauj as a metropolitan center in early medieval India?