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Department of South Asian,  
Tibetan and Buddhist Studies

# Mantras: Sound, Materiality and the Body



12–14 May 2022  
University  
of Vienna

## WORKSHOP CONVENORS

**Dr Borayin Larios**  
University of Vienna, Austria

**Prof Finnian Gerety**  
Brown University, USA

**Dr Carola E. Lorea**  
National University of Singapore

**Prof Gudrun Bühnemann**  
University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

**Mr Dominik A. Haas**  
University of Vienna, Austria

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workshop-mantras-2022](http://stb.univie.ac.at/news-events/workshop-mantras-2022)



**Workshop at the Department South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, Austria; co-organized by the Center for Contemporary South Asia, Brown University, USA; and the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore**

For the last three thousand years, mantras in Sanskrit and other Indic languages have profoundly influenced religions in South Asia and around the world. Mantras take many forms, materializing in the sound of the human voice, the silence of thought, the script of writing and diagrams, the space of shrines and temples. In spite of the ubiquity and relevance of mantras, academic scholarship on mantras has proceeded in fits and starts, impelled by research on specific texts, traditions, and contexts—but only rarely through the systematic investigation of mantra as a category in its own right. While some studies of mantra in terms of language, sound, and ritual have gained wide attention, the intersections of mantra and other important scholarly categories—the body, performance, media, materiality, religious authority and identity—are relatively unexplored.

“Mantras: Sound, Materiality, and the Body” is an international workshop convened at the Department South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Vienna and co-organized by the Center for Contemporary South Asia at Brown University and the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. This workshop aims to further the growth of mantra studies by bringing together scholars from various disciplines— religious studies, Asian studies, sound studies, anthropology, art history—around our shared interest in mantras. We will curate several days of conversation on mantras in all their multiformity, with a focus on sound, materiality, and the body.

What is a mantra, exactly? How does the philosophy of mantra relate to practice (and vice versa)? What role does embodiment play in mantra systems? How do mantras mediate between practitioners and their material or spiritual goals? How do mantras change when adapted to new technologies and media? How do mantras shape identities, communities, and traditions?

With the aim of grappling with these big questions (and more), we are calling for papers on mantras in premodern and contemporary contexts, in major Asian religions as well as global spiritualities, and addressing texts, practices, material culture, lived religion, and critical theory. Proposals may be works-in-progress, ideas for future research projects, summations of previous research, and theoretical or methodological interventions. We encourage contributions that span disciplines, consider mantras in vernacular languages and popular traditions, address neglected domains of inquiry, examine mantras using digital and audio-visual resources—and otherwise cultivate synergy between scholars working on mantra with different materials, approaches, and framings. This workshop will offer a forum for exploring future collaborations on mantras and the prospects for securing funding for a multi-year, international research project on mantras.

### ***Members of the Organizing Committee***

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**Ms Valerie Yeo** | valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg (Secretariat)  
*Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore*

## PROGRAM AT-A-GLANCE

DATE	TIME (Austria)	TIME (Singapore)	PANEL SESSION
12 May 2022 (Thu)	08:45 – 09:00		Arrival & Registration
	09:00 – 09:15		Welcome & Introductory Remarks
	09:15 – 10:30		Panel 1
	11:00 – 12:30		Panel 2
	14:00 – 15:30		Panel 3
	16:00 – 17:30		Panel 4 - Roundtable
13 May 2022 (Fri)	09:00 – 10:30		Panel 5
	11:00 – 12:30		Panel 6
	14:00 – 15:30	20:00 – 21:30	Panel 7 (Virtual)
	18:00 – 19:30		Workshop Dinner
14 May 2022 (Sat)	09:00 – 10:30	15:00 – 16:30	Panel 8 (Virtual)
	11:00 – 12:30	17:00 – 18:30	Panel 9 (Virtual)
	14:00 – 15:30	20:00 – 21:30	Panel 10 (Virtual)
	16:00 – 17:30	22:00 – 23:30	Panel 11 (Virtual)
	17:30 – 17:45	23:30 – 23:45	Concluding Remarks

## 12 MAY 2022 • THURSDAY

<b>08:45 – 09:00</b>	<b>ARRIVAL &amp; REGISTRATION</b>
<b>09:00 – 09:15</b>	<b>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS</b>
	<p><b>Borayin Larios</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i></p> <p><b>Finnian Gerety</b>   <i>Brown University, USA</i></p> <p><b>Carola E. Lorea</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i></p> <p><b>Gudrun Bühnemann</b>   <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA</i></p> <p><b>Dominik A. Haas</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i></p>
<b>09:15 – 10:30</b>	<b>PANEL 1</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<p><b>Gudrun Bühnemann</b>   <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA</i></p> <hr/> <p>Mantra Deities or Deified Mantras?  <b>Dominik A. Haas</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i></p> <hr/> <p>On the Application of Buddhist Apotropaic Mantras  <b>Kathrin Holz</b>   <i>Universität de Lausanne, Switzerland</i></p> <hr/> <p>Saying, Self, <i>Sampradāya</i>: The Introduction of Three New Mantras in the Swaminarayan Tradition  <b>Kush Depala</b>   <i>Heidelberg University, Germany</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b></p>
<b>10:30 – 11:00</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>PANEL 2</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<p><b>Borayin Larios</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i></p> <hr/> <p>Medication or Magic? Mantras in Early Ayurveda  <b>Vitus Angermeier</b>   <i>Universität Wien, Austria</i></p> <hr/> <p>The Alchemical Mantra  <b>Patricia Sauthoff</b>   <i>University of Alberta, Canada</i></p> <hr/> <p>Coming to Terms with Folk Mantras  <b>Joel Bordeaux</b>   <i>Leiden University, Netherlands</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b></p>
<b>12:30 – 14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>

<b>14:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>PANEL 3</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<p><b>Finnian Gerety</b>   <i>Brown University, USA</i></p> <hr/> <p>Nāth Mantras, Popular Religion and Print Culture</p> <p><b>Adrián Muñoz</b>   <i>El Colegio de México</i></p> <hr/> <p>Mantras in Middle Bengali Nātha Literature</p> <p><b>Lubomír Ondračka</b>   <i>Charles University, Prague</i></p> <hr/> <p>To Summon or to Surrender: A Development of Mantric Arts among Tamil Swamigals</p> <p><b>Keith Edward Cantú</b>   <i>Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b></p>
<b>15:30 – 16:00</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>16:00 – 17:30</b>	<b>PANEL 4   ROUNDTABLE - THE FUTURE OF MANTRA STUDIES</b>
	<p>In this roundtable discussion, we will brainstorm ideas for the future of Mantra Studies. Building on their own work, the conference organizers will begin by presenting some of their initial thoughts on how they envision the next steps on the road to new research pathways. They will then moderate an interactive online discussion with the participants to gather diverse perspectives on how mantra studies could benefit from interdisciplinary research that rethinks mantras through innovative theories, research methods, and new conceptual frameworks. In what ways will adopting interdisciplinary perspectives that combine Indology and Anthropology help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of mantras? What are the advantages of studying mantras from the perspective of Sound Studies and Media and Communication theories? What kinds of evidence and findings will emerge when we study mantras at the intersections of ethnography and Vedic studies? What will we learn about the transmission and dissemination of mantras and the communities that use them by looking at transnational religious networks and inter-Asian connections? How does our view of mantras change when we analyze them at the crossroads between visual arts and embodiment theories? With this roundtable we hope to address these and many more questions, and develop preliminary research agendas for advancing the social, cultural and historical understanding of mantras.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Roundtable discussion facilitators:</i></p> <p><b>Borayin Laríos</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i></p> <p><b>Finnian Gerety</b>   <i>Brown University, USA</i></p> <p><b>Carola E. Lorea</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i></p> <p><b>Gudrun Bühnemann</b>   <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA</i></p> <p><b>Dominik A. Haas</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b></p>
<b>17:30</b>	<b>END OF DAY 1</b>

## 13 MAY 2022 • FRIDAY

<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>PANEL 5</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Gudrun Bühnemann</b>   <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA</i>
	On the Curious Life of Sanskrit in Japan: The Case of a 17 <sup>th</sup> Century Japanese <i>Siddham</i> Manual
	<b>Georgi Krastev</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i>
	Power before Knowledge: Sonic Religious Exchange in Island Southeast Asia
	<b>Julia Byl</b>   <i>University of Alberta, Canada</i>
	Mantras in the Religious and Ritual Traditions of Java and Bali (with special attention to Mantras in the Sanskrit–Old Javanese Śaiva Text <i>Bhuvanakośa</i> )
	<b>Andrea Acri</b>   <i>École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), PSL University &amp; École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), France</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>10:30 – 11:00</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>PANEL 6</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Carola E. Lorea</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
	Inscribing Maṇi Mantras in Exile: Lived Spaces
	<b>Nike-Ann Schröder</b>   <i>Humboldt Universität Berlin, Germany</i>
	Living through Mantras: The Use of Mantras among Contemporary Hindu Ascetics
	<b>Daniela Bevilacqua</b>   <i>SOAS University of London, UK</i>
	Human Exceptionalism and the Sound of Awakening: Countercurrents in Buddhist Soteriology
	<b>Saskia Abrahms-Kavunen</b>   <i>University of Copenhagen, Denmark</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>12:30 – 14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>

<b>14:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>PANEL 7   VIRTUAL (20:00 – 21:30   Singapore)</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Gudrun Bühnemann</b>   <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA</i>
	Why is the Mahamantra called the Great (Maha) Mantra? A Theological Discussion Based on Radha Govinda Natha's Commentary on Caitanya-Caritamritam III.20.8 <b>Katrin Stamm</b>   <i>International Center, Europa-Universität Flensburg, Germany</i>
	The Padamālā Vidyā: Puranic Adaptations of a Tantric Mantra <b>Mery Ceconi</b>   <i>University of Leiden, The Netherlands</i>
	Practical Magic: Accessible Mantras and Hindi Handbooks, c.1870-1930 <b>Richard David Williams</b>   <i>SOAS University of London, UK</i>
	Decoding the Arrow Chart ( <i>nārācaprastāra</i> ): Mantra, Secrecy, and Writing in Early Tantric Śaivism <b>Shaman Hatley</b>   <i>University of Massachusetts, USA</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>15:30</b>	<b>END OF DAY 2</b>
<b>18:00 – 19:30</b>	<b>WORKSHOP DINNER</b>

## 14 MAY 2022 • SATURDAY

<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>PANEL 8   VIRTUAL (15:00 – 16:30   Singapore)</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Dominik A. Haas</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i>
	Meaningful Vedic Mantras and their Transformations <b>Jan E.M. Houben</b>   <i>Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sciences historiques et philologiques – Paris Sciences et Lettres, France</i>
	Mystical Mantras of Rāma: An Overview of Rāmarahasya Upaniṣad <b>Shilpa Sumant</b>   <i>Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, India</i> <b>Madhavi Godbole</b>   <i>Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, India</i>
	Growing of Sound in the Body: The Experiential Meaning of <i>Brahman</i> <b>Joanna Jurewicz</b>   <i>University of Warsaw, Poland</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>10:30 – 11:00</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>PANEL 9   VIRTUAL (17:00 – 18:30   Singapore)</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Borayin Larios</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i>
	With or Without Mantra: Mantra, Power and Sectarian Affiliations in Datta Sampradāya <b>Hemant P. Rajopadhye</b>   <i>University of Mumbai and Ahmedabad University, India</i>
	Usage of Mantras in the Malayalam Manuals on Domestic rituals ( <i>Gṛhya</i> ) or <i>Caṭaṅṅu</i> Manuals <b>S. A. S. Sarma</b>   <i>École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Pondicherry, India</i>
	Forms and Practices of the <i>Pañcāksara</i> in Purāṇic Literature <b>Christèle Barois</b>   <i>Institut d'études avancées de Nantes, France</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>12:30 – 14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>



<b>14:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>PANEL 10   VIRTUAL (20:00 – 21:30   Singapore)</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Carola E. Lorea</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
	Facebook in the Time of Covid-19: Virtual Mantras and the Affordances and Challenges of Commercial Social Media <b>Katherine Scahill</b>   <i>University of Pennsylvania, USA</i>
	SBNR Mantra Theologies: Vibrations and Universalism in the Case of Gāyatrī <b>Neil Dalal</b>   <i>University of Alberta, Canada</i>
	Living Mantra: Mantra, Deities and Visionary Experience Today <b>Mani Rao</b>   <i>Independent scholar, India</i>
	Transference and Modification of a Purificatory Ritual in the <i>Śrīśrīkālīpūjāpaddhati</i> <b>Liwen Liu</b>   <i>University of Toronto, Canada</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>15:30 – 16:00</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>16:00 – 17:30</b>	<b>PANEL 11   VIRTUAL (22:00 – 23:30   Singapore)</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>Finnian Gerety</b>   <i>Brown University, USA</i>
	Manifestation of a Mantra: ‘ <i>Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ</i> ’ and Ṣaḍākṣarī Avalokiteśvara in Buddhist Art <b>Vaishnavi Patil</b>   <i>Harvard University, USA</i>
	Sonic Agency in Newar Buddhist Doctrine and Ritual <b>Alexander James O’Neill</b>   <i>SOAS University of London, UK</i>
	The Density of Mantra: Navigating Text, Image, and Embodiment in the Dunhuang Library Cave <b>Rae Dachille</b>   <i>University of Arizona, USA</i>
	<b>DISCUSSANT COMMENTS</b>
	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>17:30 – 17:45</b>	<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS   VIRTUAL (23:30 – 23:45   Singapore)</b>
	<b>Borayin Larios</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i>
	<b>Finnian Gerety</b>   <i>Brown University, USA</i>
	<b>Carola E. Lorea</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
	<b>Gudrun Bühnemann</b>   <i>University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA</i>
	<b>Dominik A. Haas</b>   <i>University of Vienna, Austria</i>
<b>17:45</b>	<b>END OF DAY 3</b>

## PANEL 1

### Mantra Deities or Deified Mantras?

**Dominik A. Haas**

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In Tantric traditions, mantras are not only used to invoke deities, but are generally considered deities themselves. They are often visualized accompanying their recitation, usually in an anthropomorphic form. When and how did the notion that mantras are deities in their own right emerge? How do we explain the fact that mantras, i.e. essentially fixed sound sequences, were and are worshipped as deities in the religious systems of South Asia? To answer these questions, I propose an interdisciplinary approach that combines philological and historical analyses with perspectives and insights from religious studies. In my presentation, I first analyse what is probably the earliest historical case of a deified mantra: the mantra/goddess Sāvitrī. In the emergence of this mantra deity, identification of the mantra with a pre-existing deity seems to have played a major role. At the same time, when looking at the topic of deification from the perspective of religious studies, we observe that the ascription of divinity in many cases also entails the ascription of personhood and agency, i.e. personification. This could also affect the deification of mantras, which, in many ways, can be said to have “divine,” i.e. superhuman, powers. The question arises as to what the driving force behind the emergence of mantra deities in general was: the identification of mantras with deities or the personification of divine mantras?

**Dominik A. Haas** is an Indologist interested in the phenomenon of adaptive reuse of texts in South Asian religious literature. His research interests focus on the development of Vedic culture and religion, together with its reception and representation in later Hindu traditions. As a Sanskritist and Vedist, he applies philological and historical methods in his research on texts, whereby he relies heavily on the procedures and resources of the Digital Humanities.

PANEL 1

**On the Application of Buddhist Apotropaic Mantras**

**Kathrin Holz**

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Mantras function in early Buddhist apotropaic texts as a means of efficacy, and their recitation is supposed to provide protection, welfare, and other benefits. The important role protective scriptures always played in ritual practices cannot be underestimated. It is a special characteristic of these texts that they were not only preserved and transmitted but applied in ritual practices and ceremonies to bring about their apotropaic effects in everyday life on almost every occasion. While most of the apotropaic texts containing mantras survive in manuscript form from the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent, epigraphical and archaeological sources show that apotropaic mantras found widespread application in the entire Indian culture area and beyond. Isolated mantras, extracted from their source text, were found written on sheets of birch bark, paper or cloth or inscribed on ritual objects, so that they could easily be carried on by travelers and merchants. This paper examines the form and materiality of Buddhist apotropaic mantras, and the way practitioners applied these mantras. It also addresses the question of how these mantras become efficacious when carried on the body in a container or in a pocket.

**Kathrin Holz** studied Indology at the University of Würzburg, and, after an extended research stay in Kathmandu, received her PhD on the topic of Buddhist protective texts at the University of Lausanne in 2019. Her research focuses on Indian philology, epigraphy and manuscript studies as well as early Buddhist literatures and languages.

PANEL 1

**Saying, Self, *Sampradāya*:**  
**The Introduction of Three New Mantras in the Swaminarayan Tradition**

**Kush Depala**

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*Mantras* are usually given a divine provenance in purāṇa and vedic texts, thus placing their introduction chronologically can be a challenge. These mantras can grow into signifiers of their traditions (for example, ‘*Hare Kṛṣṇa*’ for ISKCON, or ‘*Svāminārāyaṇa*’ for the Swaminarayan sampradaya). Scholars can seldom examine how new mantras are formulated and initially passed onto communities in *bhakti sampradāyas*, as most mantras used by these communities were introduced long ago. Employing both a text-historical and ethnographic approach, this paper will examine the relationships between very recently introduced mantras, their surrounding literature, and the communities that use them. Specifically, I shall examine the *āśraya dīkṣā* and *sādhanā mantras*, which were introduced to the BAPS Swaminarayan community between 2017 and 2020, engaging with the mantras, and their surrounding texts. Based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in my ritual studies project, I shall observe how they were received by their community. I argue that within the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition, but perhaps in other traditions too, formulating a network of mantras specific to a tradition encourages a user to form a very particular ritual body that aligns itself with that tradition’s theological ‘ideal’, but moreover, it enables a tradition to differentiate itself from its surrounding traditions. In conclusion, by closely examining the new mantras and their reception, I hope to shed new light on the mechanisms behind writing mantras in bhakti traditions, as well as explore the ways in which new mantras are employed and older mantras are relegated.

**Kush Depala** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Cultural and Religious History of South Asia, at the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg University. He is working on the interrelationship between ritual texts, theology and the growth of *bhakti sampradāyas* in North India in the early modern and modern period (but recently his work has been getting more ethnographic and contemporary).

## PANEL 2

### **Medication or Magic? Mantras in Early Ayurveda**

**Vitus Angermeier**

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The seminal 1989 study “Mantra in Ayurveda” by Kenneth G. Zysk describes four areas in which mantras were used in early Ayurveda: the treatment of wounds and swellings/tumours, of poisoning, of mental disorders, and the collection and preparation of certain medicines. Although this article is a highly important contribution to the study of the significance of Vedic concepts in Ayurvedic medicine, it leaves much room for further investigation into the role of mantras in early South Asian medical history. Mantras appear in many more contexts than those mentioned by Zysk.

Vedic and post-Vedic mantras are also mentioned in prescriptions on general preventive measures, preparation of food, intake of medicines, after-care of surgical procedures, pregnancy, childbirth and childcare, initiation of medical students, and other topics. Apart from their mere appearance, their medical use raises several more concrete questions such as: Who is in charge of pronouncing the mantras? Are they taken from the Vedic corpus or other sources, and are there original “Ayurvedic” mantras? To what extent and in what way are the prescribed mantras connected to the medical circumstances?

In this talk, I would like to update and complement Zysk’s list, give an overview of the importance and prevalence of mantras in the various Ayurvedic schools and disciplines, and provide a perspective on what still needs to be done to thoroughly understand the role of mantras in Ayurveda.

**Vitus Angermeier** (University of Vienna), engages with textual sources from Ayurveda, the Indian epics, and the Arthaśāstra, focusing on topics such as the reception of nature, notions of geography and space, ethical concepts, and social, cultural, and scientific developments. Beginning in March 2022, he will be conducting a project examining "Epidemics and Crisis Management in Pre-modern South Asia."

## PANEL 2

### The Alchemical Mantra

**Patricia Sauthoff**

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The South Asian alchemical tradition of *rasaśāstra* presents itself as a largely indigenous tradition, with almost no references to non-Sanskrit or even non-alchemical Sanskrit works. However, in its use of mantra, *rasaśāstra* can clearly be tied to tantric traditions. While we know little about the home or domestic life of the alchemist, we do know that the processes of alchemy are time consuming. Ingredients must be churned, cooked, or in other ways actively manipulated, sometimes for days on end. In addition to teaching recipes for various ailments, *rasaśāstra* texts present *japa* with various tantric mantras. In this workshop, I would like to examine some of the mantras found in works such as the 11th c *Bhūtiprakaraṇa*, 12th-13th c *Ānandakanda*, 17<sup>th</sup> c *Āyurvedaparakāśa*, unknown date Kākacaṇḍīśvarakalpatantra, and 20thc *Rasa Jala Nidhi* in order to examine the role of alchemist as initiated holy-man pharmacist. Some of the familiar mantras include the aghora, kāmika, visvarūpā vidyā, and trailokyaḍā mantras. My work with the mantric materials from these wide-ranging works is in its infancy and the *Mantras: Sound, Materiality, and the Body* workshop would be a wonderful place to compare and contrast the use of these mantras in *rasaśāstra* and the wider Sanskrit literary context.

**Patricia Sauthoff** holds a PhD from SOAS in South Asian Languages and Cultures. She is currently an assistant lecturer at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. She is the author of *Illness and Immortality: mantra, maṇḍala, and meditation in the Netra Tantra*, which examines healing rites in medieval Śaiva tantra. She was formerly a postdoctoral fellow with the AyurYog project focused on Sanskrit alchemical traditions.

## PANEL 2

### Coming to Terms with Folk Mantras

**Joel Bordeaux**

International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands

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Down-market magical Bengali booklets with titles like *Fulfilling the Heart's Desires Through Mantra* are, in many senses, the modern descendants of famous tantric digests like the *Mantra-mahodadhi* and *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra* yet “are rarely examined by scholars.” They typically feature unsourced Bengali and Hindi charms for quotidian ends, and present these ‘mantras’ alongside their Sanskrit counterparts with minimal ritual instructions. These vernacular mantras especially appear to be tailored more for use by ojhās (village healers/cunning men) and women in the domestic sphere than for elite tantric virtuosi. Drawing on discussions of so-called śābara mantras in premodern Sanskrit sources, my presentation surveys possible emic rationales for the ritual efficacy of vernacular mantras before turning to formal and rhetorical analysis from etic perspectives. Alongside groundwork by Slouber, Yelle, etc., related scholarship on verbal charms from Folklore Studies offers an expanded repertoire of relevant tropes and types for understanding such utterances, raising the question of what is distinctively ‘mantric’ about them.

**Joel Bordeaux** is a Research Fellow at the International Association for Asian Studies in Leiden. He is a specialist in East Indian Shakta traditions with interests in kingship and court culture; tantra; Bengali literature; and the relationships between Hinduism, Buddhism, and Victorian-Era Occultism.

### PANEL 3

## Nāth Mantras, Popular Religion and Print Culture

**Adrián Muñoz**

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The religious order of the Nāth Sampradāy has interesting features of its own. It has been associated with the practice of hathayoga; it has a lively, rich source of folk stories about yogis and kings; and it is also linked to a wide textual corpus that, unlike most other religious groups in South Asia, has been composed and transmitted in both the Sanskrit language and the vernaculars. The number of popular publications related to the Nāth Yogis is overwhelming and multifaceted. This project seeks to examine Nāth-related booklets available in fairs, stands, and other popular locations as well as the content of them in terms of mantra formulation and practice, while also addressing issues of access and utilization of said mantras. I seek to classify most of the available Nāth mantras according to function, goal and execution. For example: identifying what deities are usually summoned or revered can be useful in tracing denominational identities among Nāth Yogis. It will be important to ask if the mantras are expected to be chanted in unison with other ritual practices, such as yantra-mediated visualization. Thus, special attention will be allotted to finding out which are the most recurrent motifs —both lexically and symbolically— in these mantras. This begs for probing into the inner and outer dimensions of intertextuality: Do Nāth mantras claim to be directly extracted from older scriptural sources, or are they unique developments? And if so, does their grammatical structure follow closely traditional mantras, or rather merge Sanskrit grammar with vernacular ones?

**Adrián Muñoz** is a Historian of religions and staff member at the Center for Asian and African Studies, El Colegio de México. He is interested in interdisciplinary work, with special emphasis on South Asian religious movements and yogic traditions and hagiography. He has authored and edited dozens of academic articles and monographs in both Spanish and English, including *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Nathas* (2011) and *Historia mínima del yoga* (2019). He is currently heading an ambitious project on the history and reception of yoga in Latin America.



## PANEL 3

### Mantras in Middle Bengali Nātha Literature

**Lubomír Ondračka**

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Middle Bengali Nātha literature consists of a number of texts of different genres: large narrative poems, yogic songs, technical treatises on tantric yoga etc. The most prominent works are two narrative cycles, adapted by various authors. The first one (*Gorakhabijaya*) recounts Gorakhnāth's rescue of his teacher, Mīnanāth, from the kingdom of women; the second (*Gupicandrer sannyās*) describes the adventures of Gopīcandra, a son of the queen and great yoginī Maṅgāmatī. In all these texts different mantras are used on different occasions. In my talk, I will present a thorough analysis of the use of mantras in Middle Bengali Nātha works, particularly in the two narrative poems. First, I will show what mantras are found in these texts (a preliminary search suggests that the most frequent mantra is *humkāra*). Next, I will ask for what purpose each mantra is used, i.e. what is its function. Finally, I will try to answer the question of whether the fact that the Middle Bengali texts of some other religious traditions do share (e.g. Muslim yogis) or do not share (e.g., Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyas) the same mantras with the Nātha tradition may say something about their historical connections.

**Lubomír Ondračka** is an independent researcher, publisher and part-time lecturer at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Charles University, Prague, and at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Pardubice. His research is focused on the history of yoga, death and dying in India, and on religions and culture of Bengal.

PANEL 3

**To Summon or to Surrender:  
A Development of Mantric Arts among Tamil Swamigals**

**Keith Edward Cantú**

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This paper will examine the artistic development of mantra in the works of Sri Sabhapati Swami and to some extent his guru Chidambara Periya Swamigal, both of whom were part of an important networks of early modern “Swamigals,” Tamil Vīraśaiva-leaning yogic meditators and ritual specialists. After examining the ways in which mantra plays a central role in these figures’ teachings as well as those of this wider network, the discussion will center on how one of Sabhapati’s illustrated works, entitled a “scripture of instructions on meditation with compiled Vedic mantras” (Tamil Maṇḍiravālam: *Mantira caṅkiraha vēta tiyāṅōpatēca smiruti*, < Skt. *Mantra saṅgraha veda dhyānopadeśa smṛti*), used the medium of visual art to communicate a cosmological system that included mantras for a wide array of deities as mapped onto the human body. At least one pertinent issue this discussion will raise is how the authority of the Vedas is claimed according to popular Hindu Vedāntic tradition, yet the mantras in texts like Sabhapati’s at least equally derived from Tantric ritual practices and the artistic traditions of the Siddhars, semi-legendary figures who are renowned across Tamil Nadu as alchemists, singers of spiritual poetry, and oral repositories of lore. The paper will close with an example from the author’s ethnographic research that shows how mantras in some still-extant ritual contexts associated with Sabhapati Swami are accompanied by Tamil poetic compositions set to music, a blend that harmonizes mantric invocations with a kind of absorptions in a deity (or deities) more often associated with *bhakti*.

**Keith Cantú** is an Assistant Professor (PostDoc / Research Associate) at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. His forthcoming book *Like a Tree Universally Spread: Sri Sabhapati Swami and Śivarājayoga* examines Sanskrit and Tamil yoga, pan-Indian networks of Hindu admirers, visual arts and music, and esotericism in South Asia.

## PANEL 4 - ROUNDTABLE

### The Future of Mantra Studies

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**Dominik A. Haas**

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In this roundtable discussion, we will brainstorm ideas for the future of Mantra Studies. Building on their own work, the conference organizers will begin by presenting some of their initial thoughts on how they envision the next steps on the road to new research pathways. They will then moderate an interactive online discussion with the participants to gather diverse perspectives on how mantra studies could benefit from interdisciplinary research that rethinks mantras through innovative theories, research methods, and new conceptual frameworks. In what ways will adopting interdisciplinary perspectives that combine Indology and Anthropology help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of mantras? What are the advantages of studying mantras from the perspective of Sound Studies and Media and Communication theories? What kinds of evidence and findings will emerge when we study mantras at the intersections of ethnography and Vedic studies? What will we learn about the transmission and dissemination of mantras and the communities that use them by looking at transnational religious networks and inter-Asian connections? How does our view of mantras change when we analyze them at the crossroads between visual arts and embodiment theories? With this roundtable we hope to address these and many more questions, and develop preliminary research agendas for advancing the social, cultural and historical understanding of mantras.

**Borayin Larios** teaches at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies of the University of Vienna and is assistant to the Chair of South Asian Studies. He holds an MA in Religious Studies from the Universities of Fribourg and Lausanne, Switzerland and a PhD in classical Indology from Heidelberg University in Germany. He authored 'Embodying the Vedas: Traditional Vedic Schools of Contemporary Maharashtra' published by DeGruyter Open Access in 2017. Dr Larios uses an interdisciplinary methodological approach, combining cultural anthropology, religious studies, and historical philology to understand the contemporary religious traditions of India. His main regional focus is in Maharashtra. He has also been a practitioner of yoga and meditation since he was a child.

**Finnian Gerety** works on texts, rituals, and the senses in South Asian religions, with a focus on Hindu traditions of India. He is especially interested in Sanskrit *mantras*: how they are performed, textualized, and passed on; how they are embodied and sensed; how they are reflected upon and interpreted; how they are transformed in the digital age; and how they influence identity, community, and heritage within religious traditions.

**Carola E. Lorea** is Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster of the Asia Research Institute in National University of Singapore. She is interested in sound, Tantra, oral traditions and popular religious movements in South Asia, particularly eastern India, Bangladesh and the Andaman Islands. Her monograph *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman* (Brill, 2016) is the result of a four-year travel along ethnography with Baul practitioners. She was a research fellow at IAS (Leiden), Gonda Foundation and the South Asia Institute at University of Heidelberg. She is the founding editor of the research blog *CoronAsur: Religion & Covid-19*. Her current book project on soundscapes of religion and displacement is focused on the Matua community and its flows of preachers, performers, religious items and ideas across the Bay of Bengal.

**Gudrun Bühnemann** is a Professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After receiving her PhD in Buddhist Studies and Indology from the University of Vienna, Austria. She spent extended periods of time as a post-doctoral researcher at Pune University in India and at Nagoya University and Kyoto University in Japan. Her research has been supported by fellowships from the *National Endowment for the Humanities*, the *American Council of Learned Societies*, the *American Academy of Religion*, the *Japan Society for the Promotion of Science* and the *German Research Council*, among other organizations. She has published extensively on South Asian iconography and ritual. Her recent books include *The Life of the Buddha: Buddhist and Śaiva Iconography and Visual Narratives in Artists' Sketchbooks from Nepal* (Lumbini International Research Institute, 2012), *Śākyamuni's Return Journey to Lumbinī (lumbinīyātrā): A Study of a Popular Theme in Newar Buddhist Art and Literature* (Lumbini International Research Institute, 2015) and *The Iconography of Hindu Tantric Deities* (First Indian edition, revised, as a single volume, Aditya Prakashan, 2016).

**Dominik A. Haas** is an Indologist interested in the phenomenon of adaptive reuse of texts in South Asian religious literature. His research interests focus on the development of Vedic culture and religion, together with its reception and representation in later Hindu traditions. As a Sanskritist and Vedist, he applies philological and historical methods in his research on texts, whereby he relies heavily on the procedures and resources of the Digital Humanities.

PANEL 5

**On the Curious Life of Sanskrit in Japan:  
The Case of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese *Siddham* Manual**

**Georgi Krastev**

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As Buddhism travelled to the East, so did its languages. Sanskrit, and even some texts in Prakrits like Gāndhārī gradually found their way into China. But these sacred texts did not contain mere narratives—they also had *mantras*—potent formulae with soteriological, ritualistic and even magical significance. There was a problem, however. The argument for the necessity of a mantra’s exactitude had been inherited from the ritual environment of South Asia where Buddhism had grown up. But how to render the sacred sounds of *mantras* into Chinese? When, a few centuries later, it was brought to Japan, the same problem arose, but this time with Chinese as an intermediary, creating a perfect storm of systems nested within other systems—phonetic, semantic and scriptural. By a roll of the phonetic dice, Japanese is acoustically much better suited to the rendition of Sanskrit than its mainland counterparts. However, this did not prevent Japanese Buddhist schools from developing their own ideas about *mantras* and their usage, mixing and matching phrases, pronunciations and meanings as they went along. In this talk I will attempt to lay out the fascinating problematics of this dynamic using the example of a Japanese Siddham manual from the year 1695. I will explore the interplay of historic pronunciations and their written renditions and look at examples of how Japanese Buddhist traditions took *mantras* and over the centuries made them their own. This process is still ongoing, as *mantras* continue to be made, live and evolve even in present-day Japan.

**Georgi Krastev** is an MA student in Tibetan and Buddhist studies at the University of Vienna. He has a background in English linguistics and specialises in tantric Buddhism in South and East Asia, with a particular interest in the history of the spread of Buddhism, tantric ritual and yoga.

PANEL 5

**Power before Knowledge:  
Sonic Religious Exchange in Island Southeast Asia**

**Julia Byl**

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In the old theories of "Greater India," Sumatra was a crucial node. The links between Srivijaya and Nalanda burnished elite transmissions, while descriptions of "Indian" *marga* (clan names) amongst interior trading families invoked relations with Tamil merchants. In recent decades, cultural histories of Southeast Asia revel in religious difference and local autonomy: the Javanese clowns are more popular than the princes of the Ramayana, and the changes wrought by Islam, colonial powers, and the nation-state are as important as Sanskrit inscriptions. Yet even in a place like the Batak interior of North Sumatra, home to Indonesia's largest Protestant church, Indic traditions are still put into play. They are there when a drum-chime ensemble invokes aspects of Shiva in ritual, and when the lines and loops of the *bindu matogu* yantra are carved into a new house. This paper considers the Southeast Asian traditions of the *bindu matogu*, of the Islamic invocation "*bismillah*" written in a Pallava-derived script on amulets, and of the "Seal of Solomon," a diagram which inscribes Indic and Islamic power into manuscripts. I explore how these devices allowed new religions to be integrated into local knowledge systems, powerful not in spite of but *because of* the lack of lexical or doctrinal context. And as these traditions are often understood as sonic--regularly woven into recitation, music, and ritual--such exploration allows us to understand mantra as a novel notation of performance history.

**Julia Byl** is Assistant Professor in ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta, and the president of the Canadian Society of Traditional Music. Her recent book, *Antiphonal Histories: Resonant Pasts in the Toba Batak Musical Present*, is about the expressive culture of the Toba Batak people North Sumatra. With Jim Sykes, she is preparing a new volume, *Sounding the Indian Ocean: Musical Circulations in the Afro-Asiatic Seascape*. Julia's newest project, "Civic Modulations," is based in Dili, East Timor, and explores public music, the individual, and the transnational institution in one of the world's newest nation states.

PANEL 5

**Mantras in the Religious and Ritual Traditions of Java and Bali  
(with special attention to Mantras in the Sanskrit–Old Javanese Śaiva Text  
*Bhuvanakośa*)**

**Andrea Acri**

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Mantras are an important aspect of the Śaiva and Buddhist traditions that took hold in Java and Bali from the 7th century CE. Indeed, much of the living ritual practice as well as the psycho-physical and bodily techniques of self-cultivation, visualization, and asceticism found in Java and Bali, in both Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic contexts, revolve around mantras. Instances of mantra-use are the emplacement of mantras in bodily limbs, their mental repetition and visualization through the body to bring about yogic death or longevity, or their chanting during Balinese daily rituals, death ceremonies, and temple performances. Significant local instantiations of Indic mantras include the 'ten syllables' *sañ bañ tañ aṅ in na maḥ śi vā ya*, the Nāvātman and Mṛtyuñjaya mantras, or the Trailokyavijaya-related Tantric Buddhist mantras engraved on Central Java epigraphic documents, or again the hybridization of Śaiva mantras and Islamic prayers found in Modern Javanese mystical texts. My presentation will survey and discuss these various usages of mantras, and especially focus on mantras in the unpublished Sanskrit-Old Javanese text *Bhuvanakośa*, whose mantric system revolves around the Śaiva *pañcabrahmamantras*. The aim of my presentation is not only bring to the attention of scholars of South Asia this neglected vernacular material from Southeast Asia, but also to engage with wider dynamics of transcultural transfer and transformation of Indic ideas and practices, and to highlight the processual continuities involving mantras in the Javanese and Balinese socio-religious contexts.

**Andrea Acri** is Assistant Professor in Tantric Studies at the Religious Studies Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE, PSL University, Paris). His main research and teaching interests include the history and circulation of Śaiva and Buddhist tantric traditions in South and Southeast Asia; Yoga Studies; Indian Philosophy; the religious history of Java and Bali from the pre-modern to the modern period in the light of textual sources; and wider cultural and historical dynamics of intra-Asian maritime connectivity.

PANEL 6

**Inscribing Maṇi Mantras in Exile:  
Lived Spaces**

**Nike-Ann Schröder**

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My presentation is concerned with the practice of inscribing mantras in rocks and stones against the background of the biography of a person who makes such inscriptions, a Tibetan yogi living in a Tibetan Refugee Settlement in Ladakh. I will look at the lived spaces of the religious practice of inscribing maṇi mantras by applying the methodological approach and working hypothesis that such lived spaces arise from an interplay of a triad of factors involved: first, traditions of religious practices and performances; secondly, Tibetan-Buddhist and related frameworks as laid out in philosophy; and thirdly, what the practitioner brings in: former individual and collective experience, skills, life settings and important former and current life events. This approach shall suggest a new perspective, and it shall serve to decolonize the overall view on Tibetan Buddhist practice by adding ethnographical data and practitioners' voices to the discussion of textual sources. I will draw on ethnographic film material from our movie project which tells the Tibetan yogi's life story and his way of negotiating his past experiences as a member of the armed resistance. I will show film sequences which highlight different aspects of inscribing the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion into stones and rocks in the Indian exile – and I will demonstrate in which way this practice has contributed to regain agency after political turmoil in Tibet had led to traumatic experiences and a complete loss of agency. I will furthermore show in which ways the yogin draws on inscribing mantras into rocks and stones to reach out to his relatives who died through violence and starvation decades ago, and to Tibetans who lost their lives through self-immolation in more recent times. To relate back to a more general discussion on mantras and religious practices involving mantras, I suggest discussing the approach of 'lived spaces' of religious practice by relating textual studies with both, ethnographical and biographical research. In this way we can look at the complexity of lived experiences of practitioners enacting various techniques which can serve to implement mantras, evoke them to life and induce effects in religious, individual, social, and possibly further dimensions. I pose the question to the audience: can we – within the theoretical and situational frameworks of the practices of invoking and/or inscribing - conceptualize mantras as acting entities in their own rights?

**Nike-Ann Schröder** obtained Magister Degrees in Tibetology (HU Berlin) and Social Education Sciences (TU Berlin), and a PhD in Cultural Anthropology (SAI Heidelberg, 2018), researching ritual god healing in Ladakh. 2018-2021 she held a Postdoc position as a lecturer and assistant to Prof. Huber in Tibetology at the Humboldt University Berlin.



PANEL 6

**Living through Mantras:  
The Use of Mantras among Contemporary Hindu Ascetics**

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Mantras are fundamental in the life of Hindu ascetics since they mark the time of their daily activities, concern several aspects of their spiritual routine and of their interaction with lay people. Using an ethnographic perspective and taking into consideration different settings, this paper is going to investigate mantras as living and lived formulas able to transform and empower those ascetics who own them. It will look at the rituality of the use of mantras as part of *sādhus'* daily routine to sanctify and purify their body and actions, as well as at the use of mantras as part of *sādhus'* personal *sādhana* (spiritual discipline), which involves both the *dīkṣā* mantra (the mantra received during the initiation that will always accompany the life of an ascetic) and those mantras used in specific time according to specific spiritual practice. This will lead to deal with the topic of 'access to mantras', i.e. the transmission of mantras that, in ascetic communities, occurs among suitable people. Eventually, it will look at the practice of mantras to engage with third party, which means mantras used as source of exchange with the lay society and as powerful tool through which *sādhus'* role in society is justified and reiterated. Thanks to these different contexts in which *sādhus* employ mantras, the paper will investigate how mantras shape ascetic identities and authority in contemporary India.

**Daniela Bevilacqua** is a South-Asianist specialized in Hindu asceticism, investigated through an ethnographic and historical perspective. She received her PhD in Civilizations of Africa and Asia from Sapienza University of Rome and in Anthropology from the University of Paris Nanterre. Her PhD research was published by Routledge under the title *Modern Hindu Traditionalism in Contemporary India*. She worked as a post-doc research fellow at SOAS, for the ERC- funded Haṭha Yoga Project (2015–2020). She has published several articles and book chapters on topics related to Hindu religious traditions, gender and embodied practices. She is currently a Research Fellow at SOAS.

PANEL 6

**Human Exceptionalism and the Sound of Awakening:  
Countercurrents in Buddhist Soteriology**

**Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenکو**  
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Speaking of his time in long retreat, a visiting Australian monk explained to the full and lively shrine room of Shredrup Ling Buddhist Center in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital city, that the sound of him reciting 'om mani padme hum' may well have been enough to secure a 'precious human rebirth' for a passing kangaroo. Just as prayer flags are believed to spread blessings with the wind to human and non-human beings in Mongolia, the sound of mantras or even the wind passing through the papers upon which unknown mantras are written, are believed to have great power amongst my interlocutors in Mongolia. Does the human capacity to make 'sacred sounds' and to communicate through written language categorically distance us from the animal kingdom? Or do they allow for subtle forms of interaction and influence? What do these capacities say to how Buddhists perceive the human and animal realms and, more broadly, the ecological systems in which we see ourselves as being a part of or apart from? By looking at the reading of mantra among Mongolian and Australian Buddhists this talk will explore how the power of sacred speech through mantra relates to human exceptionalism within Buddhist soteriology.

**Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenکو** is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow within the Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen. She is an anthropologist and the author of *Enlightenment and the Gasping City*. She has published on the topics of Buddhism, shamanism, postsocialism, economic anthropology, global warming and pollution, plastics, and materiality in Mongolia and India.

PANEL 7

**Why is the Mahamantra called the Great (maha) Mantra?  
A Theological Discussion based on Radha Govinda Natha's Commentary on  
Caitanya-Caritamritam III.20.8**

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The following paper deals with the question why the Mahāmantra, also known as the Hare-Kṛṣṇa mantra, is called the Great (mahā) Mantra. I argue that its greatness consists of its *multifunctionality* on the one hand and its *uniqueness* on the other.

Starting with a short history of the Mahāmantra, the first focus lies on answering the question why the Mahāmantra is called a mantra if it only consists of Names: Hari/Harā (both Hare in the vocative case), Kṛṣṇa and Rāma.

After having traced the history of the Mahāmantra and having classified its nature, a thorough analysis of its unique features follows. The analysis is based on Rādhā-Govinda Nāṭh's commentary on one crucial verse of the Caitanya-Caritāmṛta (a biography of the prominent Vaiṣṇava personality, Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya (1486–1533)). In this verse, nāma-saṁkīrtana or the glorification of God's Names is declared the best religious means for the present age. Nāṭh claims, based on various authoritative religious texts, that whereas all other paths profit from including God's Names into their disciplines, the Divine Name itself as word-form of the Personal Absolute, remains transcendent, independent and self-sufficient. Moreover, it yields an exclusive fruit (prema) no other discipline can.

Next, the method and progressive effects of nāma-saṁkīrtana as part of the discipline of bhakti-yoga, leading to its exceptional result (prema), will be explained, before concluding the paper with an overview of how different groups nowadays use this mantra for their respective religious and non-religious purposes, demonstrating its multipurpose nature.

As the Mahāmantra only contains Divine Names, it makes sense that serving the Mahāmantra is a suitable spiritual practice for *everyone* in this age, irrespective of motive, time and circumstances. In addition to bestowing prema, this multifunctionality contributes significantly to its greatness.

**Katrin Stamm** is archival manager of the private Sadananda-Archive in Flensburg and research associate at the Europa-Universität Flensburg, Germany. Her MA and BA theses were written in the field of Philosophy of Language. She also studied Indology under Prof. Dr. Albrecht Wezler (Sanskrit) and Prof. Dr. Monika Boehm-Tettelbach (bhakti theology), with a special focus on Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

PANEL 7

**The Padamālā Vidyā:  
Puranic Adaptations of a Tantric Mantra**

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Tantric mantras can be constituted of powerful but semantically meaningless sounds and syllables. However, this presentation analyses a tantric mantra that is quite the opposite, consisting not only of words and epithets extolling the deity's power, but also full iconographic descriptions, which imply a complex narrative structure. This is the so-called *padamālā vidyā*, the "Garland of Mantra Words Vidyā" or "Word-Garland Spell" presented in chapter 9 of the circa ninth century *Devī Purāṇa*, a religious text for non-initiates. Here we find portrayed the terrifying goddess Cāmuṇḍā in her highest manifestation, as an independent deity. Embodying a comparatively old and detailed iconographic depiction, the *padamālā vidyā* recalls Cāmuṇḍā's independent images in early medieval Odisha. This paper investigates the probable Tantric source of the "Word-Garland Spell" and analyses its implications for Cāmuṇḍā's cult and iconography. Moreover, this study examines the mantra's development across three different texts, spanning more than three centuries, showing how the *padamālā vidyā* informs the ritual and political landscape over the time. A trend towards martial application of the *vidyā* is evident, as is its growing association with the goddess Durgā. Following the *vidyā* over time, we see that it mirrors broader trends in the development of Śāktism in the early-medieval period.

**Mery Cecconi** graduated at the Oriental University of Naples, Italy in 1998, and has attended an Advanced Master Programme at the University of Leiden in 2000. She is currently a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, working on the project entitled: *Art-historical, Religious and Political Dimensions of Cāmuṇḍā's cult in Odisha from the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries*.

PANEL 7

**Practical Magic:  
Accessible Mantras and Hindi Handbooks, c.1870-1930**

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In the mid-1870s, Panah Ali published his handbook on divination and magic, *Indrajāl*. This convenient guide provided its readers with accessible and practical information on different esoteric practices, including notes on astrology and the zodiac, recipes for charms, mantras, and yantra diagrams. This handbook located non-sectarian mantras within a larger framework of useful, quotidian magical practices. The spell book can be read against a longer history of manuscripts on *Indrajāl*, and we can consider how printed media curated, revitalized, or redirected older practices of inscribing potent sound. At the same time, Panah Ali can be seen against an innovative generation of editors and book entrepreneurs who were finding ways to make mantra accessible to their customers and readers in Hindi. This included medical mantras (as in the *Amṛtsāgar*, c.1800 but widely published mid-century) through to explanations of the affective power of sound in household encyclopedias (as in the *Sacitra Viśvakalā*, 1932). Taken together, these different genres indicate how mantra was discussed and practiced from a range of vantage points, including domestic magic, healing, colonial-era science, and treatments of the arts. Alongside these generalist handbooks, more specialist authors collected mantras dedicated to specific deities or sectarian communities, wrote commentaries on their effects, and prepared guidelines for their use. This paper will consider how mantra was mediated by the colonial Hindi book industry and explore what these books can tell us about the social life of mantra and the range of sonic ontologies active at the turn of the twentieth century.

**Richard David Williams** is Senior Lecturer in Music and South Asian Studies at SOAS University of London. His research examines how music and sound are explored in literature, and how colonialism reoriented early modern musical ideas and practices.

PANEL 7

**Decoding the Arrow Chart (*nārācaprastāra*):  
Mantra, Secrecy, and Writing in Early Tantric Śaivism**

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True to its reputation for obscurity, the *Brahmayāmala* utilizes a method of encoding mantras in its middle stratum (chapters 51–86) meagerly attested elsewhere and difficult to reconstruct. This presentation shares the results of my effort to decode the “Arrow Chart” (*nārācaprastāra*) on the basis of evidence internal to the text, marginalia in the old manuscript, and chapter 2 of the *\*Brahmayāmalasāra*. The Arrow Chart is essentially a re-ordering of the alphabet in a grid using code-words for each letter. No single basis underlies the code choices: some have semantic connections, some are based on cosmological homologies, while others are based on the “eight forms” (*aṣṭamūrti*) of Śiva. As I will argue, several appear instead to be based on the visual written forms of letters, possibly Brāhmī characters of the fifth to sixth centuries. Intriguingly, the Arrow Chart presents a sharp contrast to the first (and arguably older) half of the *Brahmayāmala*, where mantras are transmitted without the use of secret codes. What prompted the shift from matter-of-fact transmission of powerful, secret mantras to the use of obscure codes? This presentation seeks to unpack the Arrow Chart as a code-system as well as an historical development within early tantric Śaiva traditions.

**Shaman Hatley** is an associate professor of Asian Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, specializing in the history of yoga, early Tantric Śaivism, and Indian goddess cults. He studied Indology and Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania under the direction of Prof. Dr. Harunaga Isaacson (doctorate 2007).

## PANEL 8

### Meaningful Vedic Mantras and their Transformations

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In the transmission over several millennia of Vedic mantras and of the specific ritual contexts in which they are employed, it has been a topic of discussion since very ancient times whether or not Vedic mantras have any linguistic meaning, or whether that meaning is of any value in the performance of Vedic ritual. Both in ancient times and in modern times we encounter voices which advocate the employment of Vedic mantras as a mere utterance of syllables, *akṣaroccāraṇāmātram*. In his theory of basically meaningless ritual and basically meaningless mantras, Frits Staal (1979, 1989, 2008) gave examples of definitely meaningful mantras, the *praiṣas*, and of, in his view, entirely meaningless ritual utterances, the *stobhas* in the Veda of chant, the Sāmaveda. Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that, even if we accept the apparent meaninglessness of Vedic ritual and mantras as a startingpoint, a minimal meaningfulness of Vedic ritual episodes and the mantras employed in these is to be accepted (Houben 2010, 2016).

Whereas the position of the meaninglessness of Vedic mantras was apparently already formulated in some detail in ancient times by authors such as Kautsa, referred to in the Nirukta, we also find detailed accounts of the basic meaningfulness of mantras. To what extent do Vedic mantras, and especially Vedic mantras of the oldest and also ritually foundational Veda, the Ṛgveda, have linguistic meaning, which alone would make an enterprise such as the translation of Vedic hymns a useful one? Is there any way to prove or disprove that Ṛgvedic mantras had, at least at the time of their composition and early transmission, linguistic meaning? In order to explore this question, we will not only make use of the statements in rare, and so far rarely studied, Vedic commentaries, but also of a linguistic analysis of the Vedic mantras in the context of various ancient *dialects* of Indo-Iranian.

**Jan E.M. Houben** is Professor and Director of Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, at Sorbonne University, Paris Sciences and Letters, for the study direction “Sources and History of the Sanskrit Tradition,” and co-director of the research project “The augmented *Inde Classique ...*” (Laboratory of Excellence Hastec): [www.classicalindia.info](http://www.classicalindia.info).

PANEL 8

**Mystical Mantras of Rāma:  
An Overview of Rāmarahasya Upaniṣad**

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Rāmarahasya Upaniṣad (RāmRaU) is a Vaiṣṇavaupaniṣad supposedly composed in the medieval centuries of the common era, consisting of five chapters containing the preaching by Hanumat to different sages such as Sanaka, etc. Hanumat preaches several mantras of the deity Rāma beginning from a monosyllabic mantra up to the mantra having forty seven syllables. The information of *ṛṣī*, *devatā*, *chandas*, and *viniyoga* of the mantras is furnished in the verses of the *upaniṣad*. They also explain the *nyāsas* of the mantra before the recitation practice. The RāmRaU explicitly mentions the *dhyāna* verses to be recited for meditating on the deity before the repetitive recitation of every mantra. The fruits obtained from the recitation for the prescribed number of repetitions are also mentioned for each mantra. The third chapter of the RāmRaU elaborately explains how to draw the *yantras* for these mantras. Subsequently the fourth chapter describes the worship on these *yantras* and *puraścaraṇa* (recitation practice) of the mantras.

The present paper will bring to light the textual information of so far unknown mantras and *yantras* associated with the deity Rāma as seen from the RāmRaU. Undoubtedly, many of these mantras are not in vogue. The paper will try to discuss the reasons of disappearance of the mystical practice of Rāmamantras. We will also try to trace the present status of the cults associated with Rāma and the mystical practices of mantras and *yantras* if any.

**Shilpa Sumant** has participated in 44 national and international conferences and symposia and has published 3 edited books and 54 research papers. She has received the Gonda Advance Study Grant from the Royal Netherlands Academy in 2008 and 2015. She is one of the editors of ABORI.

**Madhavi Godbole** has participated in 17 national and international conferences and workshops and has published 1 edited book and 14 research papers. She worked as research head for Srivedant Foundation, Kenya, to develop the content for the website.



PANEL 8

**Growing of Sound in the Body:  
The Experiential Meaning of *Brahman***

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In the paper I will discuss the semantic changes of the concept of *brahman*, beginning with the *R̥gveda* (the power of the holy word and the holy word itself) and ending with the early Upaniṣads (the absolute). On the basis of the analysis of selected fragments of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.1.1.8), *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (2.1.4), *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.2) and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.25), I will show that the experience related to the long-term recitation of texts, necessary to remember and transmit them, had an impact on the formation of the final abstract meaning of *brahman*. I will also discuss the metaphor of a growing living being (*R̥gveda* 10.189, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.2) to support my main thesis that the literal meaning of *brahman*, ‘growth’, ‘expansion, evolution, development, swelling’ (coming from the root *bṛh-* ‘to be thick, grow great or strong, increase’) is based on the physical experience during deep breathing which accompanies recitation.

**Joanna Jurewicz** is a professor at the Chair of South Asia (Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw) and a research fellow at the University of South Africa (UNISA, Pretoria). In her research, she uses the interdisciplinary methodology of philology and cognitive linguistics to analyse ancient Indian texts (Vedic texts and philosophical parts of the *Mahābhārata*, especially the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Mokshadharmaparvan*) and religious and cultural aspects of Hindu tradition. She is the author of four monographs (in English: *Fire and Cognition in the R̥gveda*, 2010, *Fire, Death and Philosophy. A History of Ancient Indian Thinking*, 2016, 2018, *Invisible Fire. Memory, Tradition and the Self in Early Hindu Philosophy* 2021) and of many articles. A member of the Academia Europaea.

PANEL 9

**With or Without Mantra:  
Mantra, Power and Sectarian Affiliations in Datta Sampradāya**

**Hemant P. Rajopadhye**

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Mantra initiation or Mantra dīkṣa is regarded as one of the most authentic ways to get initiated in a sampradāya. Since the last 3-4 decades, the worship of Datta or Dattatreya, a tutelary deity to various sects in the Marathi-speaking milieu is being institutionalized in western India. Datta, his modern avatāras, and avatāras of those avatāras have played a vital role in building the networks of Datta worshipping groups to subscribe to a modern monolithic identity of what is vaguely imagined as Datta sampradāya. Recent trends in the sectarian patterns manifested by several multifaceted Datta worshipping groups show us the thriving charisma and importance of the Mantra dīkṣā and Śaktipāta. It is, however, evident that the majority of the Datta worshipping sects and groups, affiliated with various modern Datta avatars, do not subscribe to the formal institutionalized Sanskrit Mantra practice. In such groups, the informal chants and newly coined Japa-mantras are attributed to the deity or the respective avatāras (and avatāras of those avatāras), composed in the local languages, i.e. Marathi and Gujarati, play a vital role in formalizing the respective sectarian practices.

My paper engages critically with the history and relevance of the role of Mantra and Mantra dīkṣā in the history of various Datta worshipping groups and aims at intertwining it with the evolutionary patterns that tend to sanskritize and sanitize the Datta worship across the Marathi speaking sphere in Maharashtra and the broader Marathi diasporas in the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. I also aspire to discuss the role of the 'mantracized' hymns and chants in sanskritizing and institutionalizing the Datta worshipping groups in the said public spheres. By bringing in the discussion about the new chants and 'mantracized' hymns in the local languages, I also intend to bring to the fore various factors instigating the Sanskritization of Marathi religiosity by throwing light on the processes of constant renegotiations and reconfigurations of the sectarian identities, myths and the narratives of the 'experiences' related to the formal mantra practices and the recitations of the 'mantracized' vernacular hymns and chants.

**Hemant Rajopadhye** is an adjunct faculty of Sanskrit at the University of Ahmedabad and Flame University, Pune. He completed his M.A. (Gold medal), M.Phil. in Sanskrit from the Pune University. He worked for his PhD on 'Rekindling the Sacred: History of Dattatraya Sampradaya and Religious Activism in modern Marathi speaking spheres', at the University of Goettingen, Germany.

PANEL 9

**Usage of Mantras in the Malayalam Manuals  
on Domestic rituals (*Gṛhya*) or *Caṭaṅṅu* Manuals**

**S. A. S. Sarma**

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*Caṭaṅṅu*'s are the ritual manuals written in Malayalam, a vernacular language of Kerala, that give detailed instructions for the performance of the *gṛhya* and *śrauta* rituals. These *caṭaṅṅu* manuals share a common vocabulary and use several of the same phrases too. These manuals help us not only to know how the ancient rules given in Sanskrit manuals have been transformed into Malayalam but also to understand how these rituals are performed today in Kerala. Often these manuals leave out rules and alternatives given in the original text that may not be required for performing the rituals.

More fully than the original *gṛhyasūtra* texts, these manuals tend to provide the mantras that are used in the rituals as well as detailed instructions for performing the rituals, acting as a commentary to those rituals. These manuals, while giving the mantras, often also provide the *saṃhitā-pāṭha* as well as the *padapāṭha* (ex. *Vādhulakacaṭaṅṅu*) of the mantras to enable the priest who acts as the *ācārya* (teacher) of the ritual to recite the mantras in the form of *padapāṭha*, that the performer of ritual could repeat after listening to *ācārya*. In some cases, we also find that some of the mantras that are given in these manuals have a variant form than their original texts (ex. Pakalīyam *caṭaṅṅu* of *Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra*).

This paper will discuss the application and usage of Vedic mantras in the *caṭaṅṅu* manuals in detail and will also compare the usage of Vedic mantras with its original texts (*gṛhyasūtras*). The usage of mantras that are described in the *śrauta* manuals written in Malayalam also will be discussed in brief. The tantric ritual manuals of Kerala also give importance to mantras and this also will be taken-up for discussion.

**S.A.S. Sarma** is a researcher at the Pondicherry Centre of the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). He is presently engaged in various projects at the EFEO, some of which concentrate on the edition of śaiva texts. S. A. S. Sarma also assisted Prof. K. V. Sarma in his several research works and for the project 'Science Texts in Sanskrit in the manuscript repositories of Kerala and Tamil Nadu', S. A. S. Sarma along with KV Sarma visited several public and private manuscript libraries in South India.

## PANEL 9

### Forms and Practices of the *Pañcākṣara* in Purāṇic Literature

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The *Vāyavīyasamhitā* is an extensive Śaiva text (about 4300 *ślokas*) which was composed in South India before the 11th century, and transmitted to us as a *saṃhitā* of the *Śivapurāṇa*. Its Uttarabhāga, in fact a comprehensive Śaivāgama, contains a chapter entirely dedicated to the *pañcākṣara*, entitled *pañcākṣaramantratattvanirūpaṇam*, “Description of the true nature of the five-syllable mantra” (Calcutta edition of the *Śivapurāṇa*, 1890).

This chapter describes the Vedic origin of the *ṣaḍakṣara* (*Oṃ namaḥ śivāya*), the “mythical” context of its revelation by Śiva to Brahmā and his mind-born sons, the practice of its enunciation or repetition (*japa*) within the framework of the preliminary rites of mastering it (*mantrasādhana* or *puraścaraṇa*), as well as the unconditional efficiency of the *pañcākṣara* (*Namaḥ śivāya*) for all, regardless of birth or conduct. It details the knowledge related to the five-syllable mantra and the mental visualization of its (anthropomorphic!) form (notably the female anthropomorphic visualization of it when used for the worship of the Goddess) in the context of its transmission to a *sādhaka*.

This chapter borrows many verses from the *Śivadharmottara*, and finds substantial parallel passages in the *Līṅgapurāna*. Some verses are quoted in the *Kriyāsāra* of Nīlakaṇṭha, for whom the *Vāyavīyasamhitā* is an important textual source, as well as in the *Śivārcanācandrikā* of Appaya Dikṣita.

This makes the *Vāyavīyasamhitā* a key-text for studying the forms and practices of the *pañcākṣara* in Purāṇic literature, including from a historical perspective.

**Christèle Barois** is currently resident researcher at IAS-Nantes. From 2003 to 2007, she was a research associate in the Indology Department of the French Institute of Pondicherry. Her thesis is devoted to the *Vāyavīyasamhitā*, an early medieval Śaiva text. In 2015, she joined the ERC AyurYog project: “Medicine, Immortality, Moksha” at the University of Vienna. Her current research focuses on ancient *yoga* and on narratives of embryogenesis in Sanskrit literature.

PANEL 10

**Facebook in the Time of Covid-19:  
Virtual Mantras and the Affordances and Challenges of Commercial Social Media**

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This paper examines how a mantric practice centered on the figure of the Medicine Buddha was translated into an online setting to promote healing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing upon recent work in mantra studies (Gerety 2021, forthcoming) and virtual ethnography I have conducted as part of my dissertation research, I discuss how female monastics (*bhikkhuni*) at the Theravada Buddhist temple, Wat Songdhammakalyani in central Thailand created a virtual version of the Medicine Buddha mantra for their Facebook followers. At the height of Thailand's lockdowns and Covid surge in July 2021, the Temple began issuing a weekly post including a photograph of the Medicine Buddha statue from their shrine hall, the text of the Sanskrit mantra in Thai script, and instructions to recite the mantra to overcome illness. These posts, as well as the range of Avatar, emoji, and written responses, highlight the multimodality of mantras and thus the importance of attending to the synesthetic relationship between sound, text, image, and bodily comportment. Because live and virtual mantric practices link image, sound, and gesture, I argue that online adaptations, such as those created by Wat Songdhammakalyani, are not so different from 'traditional' protective rituals in Theravada Buddhism. In addition to noting the continuities and affordances of digital media, I suggest that it is worth considering the challenges that commercial social media platforms pose to communication during a time of social distancing. Simply put, are mantras still efficacious when embedded within sites that are deliberately engineered to be addictive and distracting?

**Katherine Scahill** is a PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation research on voice and spiritual authority in the Thai *bhikkhuni* movement is funded through The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies administered by the American Council of Learned Societies, the Society for Ethnomusicology's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fellowship, and through a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship.

PANEL 10

**SBNR Mantra Theologies:  
Vibrations and Universalism in the Case of Gāyatrī**

**Neil Dalal**

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Spiritual but not religious communities chant, consume, and propagate Sanskrit *mantras* in radically new ways within modern yoga and *kīrtan*. The paper analyzes SBNR *mantra* theology through a case study of the Gāyatrī *mantra*. I explain how and why SBNR doctrines reframe the Gāyatrī *mantra* as primordial transcendent wisdom, which is unowned by any culture or religious tradition. This reframing is premised on an ontology that reduces *mantras* to vibrations or frequencies. Viewing *mantras* in this way concludes in a type of universalism that ties into SBNR theologies of intuition and the law of attraction. This view also constitutes a foundational premise that provides SBNRs with authorial freedom to extract *mantras* from South Asian cultural contexts without attending to their ritual prescriptions and prohibitions; to assimilate *mantras* to SBNR goals; and to commodify them for profit.

**Neil Dalal** is Associate Professor of South Asian Philosophy and Religious Thought at the University of Alberta. He holds a joint appointment in the Philosophy Department and the Religious Studies Program, and is the Director of Religious Studies.

PANEL 10

**Living Mantra: Mantra, Deities and Visionary Experience Today**

**Mani Rao**

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This conference paper is a summary of my fieldwork between 2012-14 in Andhra-Telangana that aimed to document and attempt to understand mantra-experience; it was the basis of my PhD dissertation as well as a monograph— *Living Mantra: Mantra, Deity and Visionary Experience Today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

The primary sites were three Hindu-tantric communities. Phenomena and experience were a vital part of mantra-practice. Practitioners described (what I labeled as) seen and heard mantras, hidden mantras, lost mantras, dormant mantras, mantras given silently, mantras done unconsciously, and even “no”-mantra. They cared to discriminate between imagination and occurrence, but considered imagination crucial to the generation of results. Gurus were at the heart of mantra dissemination and practice. Like rishis of early Indian lore, these gurus spoke of receiving mantras and communicating with deities; some disseminated new mantras. Many practitioners saw themselves as practical researchers. Practice, experimentation and experience result in the rise of authoritative seers/gurus, new practices and traditions. Practitioners did not differentiate conceptually between revelations of vedic and tantric mantras. There is copious information in circulation on mantra-sadhana in Indian languages other than English, and practices are typically passed on “*guru-mukhatah*” (from the mouth of a guru).

**Mani Rao** (b.1965, India) did her PhD in Religious Studies from Duke University (2016). She is the author of ten poetry books, and has translated Bhagavad Gita, Kalidasa, and Saundarya Lahari (Harper Collins, forthcoming). *Living Mantra: Mantra, Deity and Visionary Experience Today* (Cham Springer, 2019) is based on her fieldwork at tantric communities in Andhra-Telangana.

PANEL 10

**Transference and Modification of a Purificatory Ritual in the *Śrīśrīkālīpūjāpaddhati***

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Mantras as an indispensable unit in the Hindu rituals endow a ritual with efficacy and authority. Though many textual studies have been conducted on mantras, most of them concentrate on prestigious Sanskrit scriptures which are doctrine-oriented and considered higher in the hierarchy of texts, and not enough attention has been paid to mantras in vernacular ritual texts which are practice-oriented and relatively less prestigious. To fill in the gap, this paper examines mantras in a contemporary ritual manual widely circulated in the Bengal area.

Composed in vernacular language Bengali, the *Śrīśrīkālīpūjāpaddhati* prescribes ritual worship of goddess Kālī which incorporates Sanskrit mantras drawn from Vedic, Purāṇic, and Tantric scriptures. Through an analysis of the animal sacrifice (*balidāna vidhi*) section of this manual, this paper examines two inter-related issues: 1) the way in which mantras from various traditions are systematized into an integral entity devoid of doctrinal conflicts; 2) the ritual efficacy and authority achieved through such a complex of mantras. These two inquiries are grounded on the reflection of the vernacular ritual manual as a genre of “text in practice” as well as “text for practice”. Therefore, this study also analyzes what happens to mantras when they are transferred from Sanskrit scriptures to the vernacular ritual manuals, and how they fit in the vernacular injunctions. Overall, this paper contributes to our understanding of the adaption of mantras across genres, languages, ritual contexts and sectarian traditions.

**Liwen Liu** is a PhD candidate of the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. Being trained as an Indologist, her areas of interest include Hindu rituals, Tantric Studies, and Sanskrit intellectual history. Her dissertation will investigate ritual killings and intellectual discussion on violence in Hinduism.



PANEL 11

**Manifestation of a Mantra:  
'Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ' and Ṣaḍākṣarī Avalokiteśvara in Buddhist Art**

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A form of Avalokiteśvara, known as the Ṣaḍākṣarī (or the six-syllable) Avalokiteśvara (or Lokeśvara), is identified as a deity seated in a padmāsana on a lotus, wearing a high crown and with four arms. The two hands are clasped in front of his chest in anjali mudrā, and the second pair of arms carries a lotus and a rosary in each of the hands. The deity is often flanked by two attendant deities, Maṇidhara and Ṣaḍākṣarī Mahavidya, holding the same attributes and seated on a lotus. This form of Avalokiteśvara is said to manifest the most potent mantra in Buddhism, the mantra of “Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ,” which first appears in the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra. This paper considers the visual representation of the Ṣaḍākṣarī Avalokiteśvara found in Eastern India dating from the period between the tenth to the twelfth centuries CE and situates the sculptural depiction of Ṣaḍākṣarī Avalokiteśvara in the larger context of Avalokiteśvara imagery. It demonstrates that these images can be approached through the concept of “meta-practical object,” an object which provides an opportunity for the veneration of the deity and the mantra simultaneously. Lastly, it argues that this diverse form of Avalokiteśvara, which developed during the Pala period, realized the esoteric Buddhist tendency of visual efficiency.

**Vaishnavi Patil** is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University working on South and Southeast Asian art. Her dissertation, titled "Tracing the Divine Mother: Representations of the Mother Goddess in South Asia," focuses on the development of the Mother Goddess in the first millennium. She is also interested in the text-to-image relationships in South Asian art, particularly the literal and the symbolic in the illustration of a text.

PANEL 11

**Sonic Agency in Newar Buddhist Doctrine and Ritual**

**Alexander James O'Neill**

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This paper explores how we can conceptualise different sonic ritual media employed in the Newar Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley (mantras, dhāraṇīs, vidyās, and sūtras), both doctrinally and ritually. Doctrinally, considering sūtra and tantra material and their paratexts such as ritual manuals and physical media, this paper will explore textual injunctions and prescriptions for ritual recitation and how redactors of those texts understand these practices as exerting agency. On the side of ritual practice, this paper will consider the contemporary practices of ritual recitation in the Newar Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley, including how Newar ritual specialists (vajrācāryas) conceive of sūtra pāṭha (pāḥ thyākegu) in contrast and comparison to mantra, dhāraṇī, and vidyā recitation. It will consider the matter of the agency of sonic media and manuscripts from the perspective of consecration, where Newar ritual specialists install manuscripts with life (jīva), considered necessary for worship. This paper will also ask to what extent Newar Buddhists see both consecrated and non-consecrated manuscripts as having life in the same way as other ritual formulae such as vidyās. Theoretically, this paper will suggest that Newar Buddhist conceptions of materiality and agency employ a flat ontology, wherein texts and ritual specialists speak of objects (including sonic materiality and manuscripts) as having an agency like humans. It will also suggest a broader conceptualisation of paratexts and consider to what extent we can see ritual framing as performative paratextuality.

**Alexander James O'Neill** is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He studied for his PhD at the University of Toronto. His work focuses on the Newar religions of the Kathmandu Valley, with a focus on manuscript worship and Mahāyāna literature.

PANEL 11

**The Density of Mantra:  
Navigating Text, Image, and Embodiment in the Dunhuang Library Cave**

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Building upon my 2020 article in *Numen*, entitled “Inscribing the Corpus: Scribal and Ritual Practice in the Material Culture of Dunhuang,” I consider how mantra informs our understanding of the intersections of text, image, and body. Scribal anomalies in transcribing the seed syllable *om* found within a tenth-eleventh-century Tibetan manuscript [IOL Tib J 576] recovered from the Dunhuang “library cave” function as the focal point for this exploration. I closely examine one text from this manuscript describing a tantric Buddhist ritual in which a practitioner uses seed syllables to map deities onto the body. The five variations on *om* encountered in this text suggest ways of parsing the visual field of the manuscript in a manner analogous to parsing the body through such corporeally-centered rituals. The parsing of the text operates in tension with its density, a quality that presents obstacles to the scribe and practitioner alike. Mantras and seed syllables transliterated from Sanskrit to Tibetan include a surplus of vowels, superscripts, and subscripts. Inspired by Nelson Goodman’s observations on “notational systems,” I show how differentiating between instances of *om* in this text suggests strategies for navigating and orienting within the visual field. *Om* also indicates a vital shift in modes of reading, from ordinary speech to mantra and from semantic to performative value. *Om* therefore triggers recitation, memory, and imagination as well as a transition between linguistic systems. Finally, in comparing the manuscript with esoteric drawings from the cave, density emerges as a ritual strategy for achieving apotropaic goals.

**Rae Erin Dacheille** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Arizona. Her research focuses upon representations of the body in art, ritual, philosophy, and medicine in Tibetan and Sanskrit sources. Dr Dacheille’s book project, entitled *Searching for the Body: Translating Buddhism in the Postmodern Age*, explores the variety of attitudes toward the body reflected in a heated scholastic exchange between two prominent Tibetan monks.