



7th-8th October 2021
University of Lausanne
Amphipôle, Room 342

Regional Histories of South Asia in Light of Archaeological and Textual Sources

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Program

October 7, 2021, University of Lausanne, Room 342, Amphipôle	
9h00-9h45	Welcome and coffee
9h45-11h00	Welcome address Keynote Deborah Klimburg-Salter <i>Technique, Materials, and Methods: Recent Research on the Cultural History of the Shahi Kingdoms</i>
11h00-11h15	Coffee Break
11h15-13h15	Lucas den Boer <i>Mapping Early Medieval Scholarship in East India: Centres, People, Texts</i> Coline Lefrancq <i>The settlement Occupation and its Variations Through Time from 3rd c. to 12th c. in Ancient Bengal: Back to Archaeological Evidence into Historical Debates</i>
13h15-14h45	Lunch (Amphimax)
14h45-15h15	Michael Alram Presentation of <i>Das Antlitz des Fremden</i>
15h15-17h15	Shakirullah Khan <i>New Discoveries of Buddhist Heritage in the Tor Ghar District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan</i> Natasha Kimmet <i>Routes to Ambaran (Akhnur): Revisiting Clay-based Buddhist Sculptural Production from the Himalayan Foothills to the Kabul Valley during the Śāhi Kingdoms (c. 6th/7th-10th century)</i>
17h15-17h30	Coffee Break
17h30-18h30	Pia Brancaccio (online) <i>The Colossal Images at Bamiyan and Ancient Mining Technologies: a New Vantage Point Into the Regional History of the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan</i>

October 8, 2021, University of Lausanne, Room 342, Amphipôle

9h00-11h00	Minoru Inaba (online) <i>On the Temple of Sakāwand</i> Luca M. Olivieri (online) <i>The Śāhi Temples of Swat. Data from the Barikot Excavations 2018-2020</i>
11h00-11h15	Coffee Break
11h15-12h15	Ingo Strauch <i>Administrative Letters and Documents as Historical Sources</i>
12h15-13h30	Lunch (Amphimax)
13h30-15h30	Noémie Verdon <i>Regional Histories Across Central and South Asia</i> Annette Schmiedchen <i>East and West - The Regional Histories of Orissa and Gujarat in Comparison</i>
15h30-15h45	Coffee Break
15h45-16h45	Noémie Verdon : Intercultural exchanges and cultural changes project Florinda de Simini : Shivadharmā project Natasha Kimmet : Shahi project Discussion
19h00	Dinner

October 09, 2021, excursion, Lausanne and surroundings

10h00-12h00 - Guided tour in Lausanne

12h00 – 14h00 – Lunch

14h00 – 17h00 – Depending on the weather – Outside: Lavaux (visits of vineyard)
or Inside: Museum (Historical Museum of Lausanne)

Abstracts

Pia Brancaccio (online)

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The Colossal Images at Bamiyan and Ancient Mining Technologies: a New Vantage Point Into the Regional History of the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan.

Shifting away from traditional parameters of analysis applied to the history of the Bamiyan valley and the colossal images that once dominated the landscape, the paper aims at examining how engineering technologies developed in ancient mining may have become instrumental for the planning and execution of the monumental Buddhas. Drawing from archaeological evidence uncovered at the Buddhist complex of Mes Aynak in the Logar province of Afghanistan, the paper will also consider how Buddhist monastic institutions in ancient Afghanistan may have participated in the managing of human resources, technologies and water necessary for mining, thus offering an alternate viewpoint into the regional history of this part of South Asia.

Lucas den Boer

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Mapping Early Medieval Scholarship in East India: Centres, People, Texts

East India is well known for its monastic centres that flourished in the early medieval period. The Buddhist vihāras and mahāvihāras determined the cultural and physical landscape of this region, and their historical presence is still reflected in the contemporary name of the state Bihar. None of the early medieval monasteries has survived, but the scale of the archaeological sites, such as Nālandā and Antichak (Vikramaśīla), is still impressive. Given the large number and size of these monastic sites, it is remarkable that we know so little with certainty about the ideas and practices of the people who once inhabited these monasteries. The main reason for our limited historical understanding of monasticism in East India is the paucity of useful historical sources. The archaeological sites have often been hastily excavated, and, not infrequently,

the excavation reports are found to be limited or even non-existing. The most relevant sources that provide a description of the monasteries are the travel reports of the East Asian monks who visited India between the 4th and the 8th century CE. Additionally, there are several Tibetan accounts that were composed long after the demise of Buddhism in India. However, given the nature of these historical sources, we cannot accept their content at face value. Moreover, they focus on the Buddhist monasteries and practices and have almost nothing to say about non-Buddhist monasticism. This leads to a distorted historical understanding which does not match the epigraphical evidence of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava maṭhas in East India. The Chinese and Tibetan sources are also not helpful to understand the large number of Hindu images that have been found at monastic sites that are usually seen as exclusively Buddhist. In order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the monastic history of East India, I propose to combine different datasets, ranging from philosophical texts to inscriptions, images, and hagiographical accounts. Instead of looking for indisputable historical information, I suggest looking for patterns that can be seen in the different datasets that could provide us with important clues about monastic life in early medieval East India.

Minoru Inaba (online)

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On the Temple of Sakāwand

On the mountain of Sajāwand, in the Logar province between Kabul and Ghazni, is a ruin known as the temple of Sajawand or Takht-e Jamshīd. Sajawand was also known as Sakāwand in the premodern time. Muḥammad ‘Awfī, who composed the collection of the stories (*Jawāmi’ al-ḥikāyāt*) in the 13th century, records that a general of the Saffarids, whose name was Fardghān or Fard’ān, attacked and destroyed the temple of Sakāwand which is said to have attracted numerous pilgrims even from India, in the reign of ‘Amr b. al-Layth (879-901 r.). Aḥmad ‘Alī Kohzad, one of the most renowned scholars of Afghan history, has identified the mountain on which the temple was/is located with Mt. Chunahila. Chunahila is the name of the mountain, to which, according to Shoshin Kuwayama who examined the records of Xuanzang and the *Sui-shu*, the former deity of the Congling mountain in Kapiśi had to migrate as a result of the conflict

with another deity who had newly come to the Congling. The monk states that Chunahila mountain was located on the southern edge of Zabulistan. Kohzad considers the deity Chuna (= Shun in *Suishu*), which is identical with the god Žūn appears in other sources, was the Solar deity, and accordingly the temple of Sakāwand was for the sun god. Due to the paucity of the source materials on this spot, no further detailed study has been conducted on Sakāwand, so that we can find several websites which follow the hypothesis of Kohzad. In this paper, I will demonstrate a facet of religious landscape of east Afghanistan on the eve of the Islamic conquest, by reviewing what we have now on the site and the related religious landscape of eastern Afghanistan on the eve of the Islamic era.

Shakirullah Khan

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New Discoveries of Buddhist Heritage in the Tor Ghar District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

The Archaeological Investigations carried out by the Department of Archaeology Hazara University Mansehra in the Hazara Divisions since 2006 aims to establish a proper gazetteer of the Archaeological sites and monuments. The present work is a continuation of the same exploration extended time to time with the support of different agencies. The area under discussion has been explored recently in 2019-20 by the Department with the financial support of NRPU HEC funded project. The present discussion is confined to the District Torghar formerly known as Kala Dhaka administered under the PATA. The district is recently established being 6th District of Hazara Division of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The area bridges Udhyana and Gandhara the two famous schools of Buddhist art. Along with the other historical period sites and monuments, Buddhist remains at several parts of the District are in intact state. Some of the sites are located on a very strategic and scenic spots. Further excavation and research will yield a very important information, as the potential of the sites is showing that will add new chapter to the history of the area and both the above-mentioned schools. The present exploration will make a clear recommendation of the potential sites for further excavation and preservation for multi purposes.

Natasha Kimmet

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Routes to Ambaran (Akhnur):

Revisiting Clay-based Buddhist Sculptural Production from the Himalayan Foothills to the Kabul Valley during the Śāhi Kingdoms (c. 6th/7th-10th century)

This paper sheds new light on the exceptional red clay sculptural production (attributable to the c. 6th/7th century) of the Buddhist site of Ambaran (Akhnur) at the eastern periphery of the Śāhi kingdoms in present-day Jammu, India. Situated along former major trade routes linking Jammu and Kashmir to Taxila and the Panjab, this religious foundation was once an important waypoint for pilgrims, merchants, goods, and ideas traversing the northwest of the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia.

Ambaran is known for its more than sixty expressive and elaborately-coiffured clay heads of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, princely figures, and lay devotees which are now dispersed in global museum and private collections. Regrettably, the entire corpus lacks secure archaeological context, and there are no firm references to the site in historical textual sources. Yet the site's structural remains offer the only archaeological evidence for a landscape that—according to the 6th-8th-century travel records of Buddhist monks—was once populated by large Buddhist establishments. The dearth of primary sources presents substantial challenges to the study of a local history and efforts to better understand Ambaran's political circumstances and questions of patronage. Ambaran's sculptural program was likely completed at the cusp of the Śāhi and Karkota dynasties, during a period when the Hephthalites still struggled against Kashmir for control of the Panjab and the history of the ancient kingdoms and hill states south of Kashmir—Rajapuri, Ṭakka (Ṭakkadeśa), Darvābhisāra—remains murky.

This study turns to the objects themselves as the point of departure. Through new documentation and examination of the materials and techniques of production of Ambaran's clay-based sculptures, the study confronts longstanding historiographical issues, like their frequent and imprecise material attribution as 'terracotta.' It broadens the geographical and historical scope and suggests that the objects attributed to Ambaran demonstrate stylistic, material,

and technical affinities with sculptural production across the northwest of the Indian subcontinent from the Himalayan foothills to the Kabul Valley during the c. 6th/7th-10th century. It asks if there was a late phase of clay-based Buddhist sculpture production linking Ambaran to Taxila and sites in eastern Afghanistan (e.g., Haḍḍa, Tapa Sardār, Mes Aynak).

Deborah Klimburg-Salter

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Technique, Materials, and Methods: Recent Research on the Cultural History of the Shahi Kingdoms

By way of introductory remarks to the conference, I have chosen to discuss the Shahi Kingdoms as an example of a regional focus in historical research. This case study allows us to explore methodological strategies for the analysis of the cultural history of this kingdom from the mid-7th to the early 11th century. This discussion is based on the results of the ongoing research of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) financed project “Cultural Formation and Transformation: Shahi Art and Architecture from Afghanistan to the West Tibetan Frontier at the Dawn of the Islamic Era” (P-31246)* The Shahi Kingdoms have never before been the subject of an interdisciplinary research project. Following a discussion of the methodological approaches used in this study, I will address two fundamental problems in the study of the cultural history of the Shahi Kingdoms: the definition of the geographic territory associated with the Shahi Kingdoms (often difficult to define in ancient societies); and the definition of the administrative structure.

The historical northwest of the subcontinent including Afghanistan has a rich and turbulent history stretching back over millennia. Archaeological evidence records a high degree of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity resulting in a layered cultural heritage. The geographic centers of power shifted in different historical phases. The long sequence of Shahi coins was issued by rulers whose main administrative seat was Kabul and later also Udabhāṇḍa (modern Hund). The political importance of the different ethnic groups also changed over time. The Shahi Kingdoms were characterized by economic affluence fueled by a fortuitous conjunction of phenomena—the most sizable mineral resources in

Inner and South Asia which were linked to the extensive system of exchange developed since the time of the early Kushan empire. There was significant mobility of people, commodities, and ideas throughout the period of the Shahi Kingdoms. Trans-national trade flourished and was secured by a coordinated military associated with the Shahi princes who ruled from local political and cultic centers. As we shall see, these factors decisively influenced the material culture of the kingdoms.

I will demonstrate that the material culture patronized by the ruling elite is marked by specific cultural characteristics. The management and distribution of the mineral resources are important for coin production as well as the production of high-quality portable metal images. Important evidence is provided by the monetary system used throughout the Shahi Kingdoms. The Shahi Kingdoms Database, one of the core research outputs, allows us to define and comparatively study different typological groups of material artifacts. Their geographic location demarcates the territorial extent of the kingdoms. At the same time, a more varied material culture with a broader patronage base can be identified at the local level. The study of more modest materials and techniques such as clay-based Buddhist sculptures demonstrates local stylistic and technical differences according to the place and time of manufacture. Thus, the study of the material artifacts associated with both elite and local patronage will allow us to understand the layered nature of the cultural heritage, as well as provide a more precise understanding of the territorial parameters of the Shahi Kingdoms.

*I acknowledge here with thanks the generous support of the FWF (Austrian Science Fund), and I am indebted to my colleagues for the inspiration their research has provided for my own studies, including the present paper. <https://shahimaterialculture.univie.ac.at/>

Coline Lefrancq

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The Settlement Occupation and its Variations Through Time from 3rd c. to 12th c. in Ancient Bengal: Back to Archaeological Evidence into Historical Debates

During this presentation, I will come back on two archaeological major issues dealing with the settlement occupation in ancient Bengal, i.e., the Gupta period (written mentions of Gupta presence *versus* little archaeological evidence) and the so-called Early Medieval period (urban decline *versus* urban expansion). We will confront historical views based on the interpretation of texts and inscriptions with the archaeological evidence (survey and excavations especially in the region of Mahasthangarh in Bangladesh) trying to explain the discrepancies observed between the two kinds of historical sources and what makes the specific features of ancient Bengal.

Luca M. Olivieri (online)

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The Śāhi Temples of Swat. Data from the Barikot Excavations 2018-2020

Between 700 and 1000 CE Barikot became a major Śāhi centre with palatial and cultic structures. At that time the site, known in earlier Greek and Latin sources as Bazira/Beira, is mentioned as Vajirasthāna in a Brahmi-Śāradā inscription, now in the Lahore Museum, dated to the reign of Jayapāladeva (964-1002 CE). Amongst the material remains is a large Hindu temple, constructed on a monumental terrace previously built for a Buddhist sacred area. According to archaeological evidence, the temple was built during the Turki-Śāhi phase (c. 700 CE), and further added on to under the later dynasty of the Hindu-Śāhi (c.850-1000). It was demolished after a Ghaznavid military settlement was established at the site. The archaeological evidence hints at a complex religious stratigraphy where Hindu elements overlap the Buddhist ones, but both survive to the later Islamic phase.

Annette Schmiedchen

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East and West - The Regional Histories of Orissa and Gujarat in Comparison

Orissa and Gujarat are “only” neighbouring regions of what has been defined by the organisers as the focus areas for this workshop or, in other words, as the peripheral zones in the north-eastern and northwestern parts of South Asia. With regions like Bengal, however, Orissa as well as Gujarat do not only share their position on the periphery of the Subcontinent, but also their localisation in proximity to coastlines and harbours. Unlike Bengal and Bihar, the regions of Orissa and Gujarat have in common that their early medieval history was largely dominated by polities with a regional focus rather than supra-regional or even ‘imperial’ ambitions.

In terms of the benefits and limitations of interdisciplinary approaches, namely the use of different sources for the reconstruction of regional histories, the situation is quite similar in Orissa and Gujarat: it is often very difficult, sometimes even impossible, to harmonise the archaeological data with the testimony of inscriptions and non-epigraphic textual material and vice versa. In many cases, we simply have to accept that our sources only provide glimpses of the “entire” picture, or merely pieces of a large puzzle, which will most probably remain incomplete. Therefore, it is essential to assess the limits and potentials of our historical sources before addressing specific historic questions.

For both regions, Orissa as well as Gujarat, large epigraphic corpora are available for the medieval period, the large bulk of them being Sanskrit inscriptions engraved on copper plates, mainly recording royal endowments for religious beneficiaries. The largest groups of recipients of such grants in both regions were individual Vedic Brahmins without any obvious connection to temples or other institutions. Hence, we cannot expect archaeology to provide supporting evidence to reconstruct the different phases of Brahmanical migration and settlement. The situation is often not much better for the study of regional Buddhist monasteries or ‘Hindu’ temples in Orissa and Gujarat. The existence of such religious institutions is attested in the early medieval epigraphic corpora from these regions; and there is archaeological evidence as well – in Orissa more than in Gujarat. However, it is very rare that the data from one kind of material actually corroborate the information derived from another genre of sources: be it due to the want of identification of buildings mentioned

in inscriptions, be it due to the lack of excavations at relevant places, be it due to the problem of dating structural remains excavated. Besides, there are groups like the Jainas, who refer to their regional presence in medieval Kathiawar in their own religious texts, whereas this claim is not corroborated by epigraphy.

However, there are a number of topics for which the available sources from Orissa and Gujarat provide crucial data, particularly for a comparative approach. One of these is the role of women in early medieval regional history – as donors and founders, as rulers, as religious persons. This and other themes will be addressed in the presentation.

Ingo Strauch

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Administrative letters and documents as historical sources

In the last years, a considerable number of birch-bark documents inscribed in Proto-Śāradā or early Śāradā script were reported from private collections in Pakistan and Europe. Most of them are of uncertain provenance, but seem to originate from sites in Western Punjab. Equally uncertain are their dates, although palaeography and contents are in favour of a dating into the 8th to 9th c. CE. As far as we are able to judge at this early stage of their exploration, these documents are part of one (or several) archive(s) that comprised tax documents and account books composed in Sanskrit.

Sources of this type are extremely rare in premodern South Asia, but can be related to literary genres such as the so-called “letter writers” of medieval India or even Dharmaśāstra texts on documents.

My presentation will shortly introduce this new material and its formal features and discuss its potential for further study.

Noémie Verdon

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Regional Histories Across Central and South Asia


This paper examines several historical and archaeological sites of the borderland between Central and South Asia, and especially Zābulistān, Kābulistān and Gandhāra. On a large scale, it aims at specifying the evolution, role and influence of the kingdoms of the Kābul Šāhs and the Hindu Šāhis in this region. The political situation before the advent of the Kābul Šāhs was particularly fragmented and different rulers, Kidarites, Alkhans, Nezaks, etc. succeeded each other or shared the governorship of the whole region. To some extent, the Kābul Šāhs (7th-9th c. CE) appear to have unified the region under their kingdom. At its heights, it extended from Kābul to Lahore, and from the foothills of Himalayan mountains to the upper Sind. The kingdom of the Hindu Šāhis inherited from this territory.

Further, the Kābul Šāhs have been considered for a long time as Buddhists by some modern scholars. This interpretation is now challenged by recent archaeological research. Material belonging to both religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, indeed, has been found on sites located in the territory of their kingdom.

Therefore, I broach the material studied in this research by hypothesizing regional differences in terms of religion and by considering the possibility of religious multiplicity in the whole region, despite being ruled over by one royal dynasty.

The situation may have changed with the advent of the Hindu Šāhis in the mid-ninth century CE and most probably Hinduism became largely predominant then. Thus, this paper is an attempt to understand how the culture and religion evolved during this period in this border area between Central and South Asia.

Focusing on local diversity constitutes a new methodological approach of studying this region, this paper aims at highlighting the diversity by addressing the questions of the religious and political situations in Zābulistān, Kabūlistān and Gandhāra during the process of Islamic settlement in the region. In addition, it broaches the question of how religions may have co-existed in this region, as well as that of the availabilities of primary sources for studying the history of this borderland between Central and South Asia.



This international workshop brings together scholars who research early and medieval South Asian history through archaeological and textual sources. The focus will be on two broad geographical areas: the north-western regions of the Sucontinent and the north-east of the Gangetic Plain.

Two theoretical points will be highlighted: the relevance of a regional focus in historical research, and the problems that arise when trying to harmonize the archaeological data with the testimony of inscriptions and textual sources.