



14th International Conference Cultures of Asia and Africa: Old Subjects, New Approaches?

November 17-18, 2025, University of Warsaw
Old Library Building, hall 308, Main Campus, Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Azra Abadžić Navaey, Ivan Andrijanić, University of Zagreb

*Between Sanskrit and Persian: The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* in Dārā Šukūh's *Sirr-i Akbar**

The *Sirr-i Akbar* ("The Great Secret") is a Persian rendering of fifty Upaniṣads, completed around 1657 under the patronage of the Mughal prince Dārā Šukūh, the eldest son of Šāh Jahān. This presentation focuses on the representation of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* within that collection. The structure of the Persian translation closely follows the arrangement of the original Sanskrit text, except for the omission of the final three *brāhmaṇas*. Particular attention will be given to the celebrated dialogue between Maitreyī and Yājñavalkya, which occurs twice in the Upaniṣad (BĀU 2.4 and 4.5). Moreover, as the Upaniṣad is preserved in two recensions—the Kāṇva and the Mādhyamīdina—there are in fact four distinct versions of this dialogue. In the Persian translation, however, the dialogue appears only once—at the point corresponding to BĀU 2.4—but incorporates elements from BĀU 4.5. This suggests that the Persian rendition is a compilation of both dialogues (BĀU 2.4 and 4.5), placed in the position of 2.4.

A close reading of the Persian version of the Maitreyī–Yājñavalkya dialogue reveals several deviations from the Sanskrit original, alongside the infusion of Sufi terminology and concepts. These deliberate adaptations of the Sanskrit source support the view that Dārā Šukūh was not merely a patron of the translation but an active participant in shaping the translation. As he himself states in the preface, he was assisted by two *saṃnyāsins* from Benares. Given the sophistication of the Sufi vocabulary employed, it is unlikely that such elements originated from the *saṃnyāsins*, pointing instead to Dārā's direct involvement.

Additionally, the treatment of Sanskrit words in the Persian translation displays features characteristic of the New Indo-Aryan pronunciation of Sanskrit forms. While the transcription of Old

Indian terms is constrained by the Persian script, the phonetic patterns suggest a Western New Indo-Aryan influence, likely shaped by oral explanations provided by Dārā's advisers.

Azra Abadžić Navaey holds a double major in Turkish Studies and French Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb (Croatia), where she also earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 2013. In 2018, she was appointed Assistant Professor in the Section of Turkish Studies at the same faculty. She teaches courses on Ottoman Literature, Modern and Contemporary Turkish Literature, and the Basics of Persian Language. Her research interests include Ottoman and modern Turkish culture and literature, Croatian-Turkish intercultural relations, Persian language and literature, Persian-Ottoman cultural exchange, Persianate societies, and imagology.

Ivan Andrijanić studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Zagreb, and Indology and Philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, where he is a Professor teaching Sanskrit grammar and South Asian history. His research focuses on Vedānta (especially Śaṅkara) and various aspects of Mahābhārata studies. He has worked on the relative chronology and authenticity of Śaṅkara's works; the reconstruction of Bhartṛprapañca's lost commentary on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad; the text-history of the Mahābhārata; and the history of Indo-European studies. He is the author of three Indological books and has published articles in Indological and linguistic scholarly journals.

Sumaiya Al-Wahaibi, University of Copenhagen

From Precarity to Power: Arab Asylum-Seeking Women's Storytelling as Feminist Resistance in Denmark

This paper explores how Arab asylum-seeking women in Denmark narrate their experiences of displacement, survival, and resistance through storytelling. Based on in-depth, phenomenologically informed interviews with first-generation Arab women who migrated to Denmark between the 1950s and 2010s, this study foregrounds women's voices as sites of feminist resistance and epistemic agency. Drawing on Butler's (2009) theory of precarity and critical feminist literature on migration (Borges, 2025; Al-Jarrah & Simonsen, 2023), the paper argues that women perform survival not only materially but discursively, reclaiming authorship of their narratives in the face of state-driven silencing, bureaucratic containment, and cultural othering. While existing research in Denmark often focuses on integration or policy design (Kohl, 2021; Liversage, 2025), this study highlights the narrative gaps around the asylum journey itself and the emotional labour it entails. Using narrative phenomenology as method, the research reveals how storytelling becomes a mode of embodied resistance, enabling women to challenge institutional representations of asylum seekers as passive, dependent, or voiceless. In doing so, this work contributes to the reimagining of both migration studies and feminist knowledge production, showing how lived experience, told, remembered, and reshaped, can confront structures of exclusion. This paper thus responds to the conference's call to rethink core concepts and methods in area studies, proposing that lived, narrated migration is both a methodological approach and a political act.

Sumaiya Al-Wahaibi is a Post-Doc Researcher on Gulf Feminisms at the University of Copenhagen. She previously worked with different UN agencies, such as UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNESCO HQ. With a strong background in international relations, Al-Wahaibi has extensive experience conducting research and overseeing multidisciplinary projects. She has also held academic positions, including a teaching assistant role at the University of Otago. Sumaiya holds a PhD in politics from the University of Otago, and her forthcoming scholarly publications focus on the Khaliji State-Society relations and gendered politics in the GCC.

Anita András, Uppsala University

Revisiting Karaim Derivational Morphology a Century after Zajączkowski (1932)

The study of Karaim word-formation began almost a century ago with Ananiasz Zajączkowski's (1932) pioneering work on West Karaim, one of the earliest systematic analyses of derivational morphology in a Turkic language. Since then, both Turkology and linguistic research practices have undergone profound developments, with advances in data accessibility, methodology, theory, and digital tools. However, research on Turkic word-formation has advanced only slowly. Despite a few notable exceptions, such as Erdal's (1991) study on Old Turkic and Károly's (2013) work on Yakut deverbal nominals, much of the literature continues to rely on earlier descriptions and isolated examples, often repeating previous observations without incorporating new data or analytical approaches. As a result, Turkic languages remain underrepresented in theoretically oriented studies of word-formation.

A major turning point in Karaim studies has been the recent (re)discovery and digitization of numerous Karaim Biblical manuscripts, followed by the creation of their digital text editions. Many of these sources, previously inaccessible or unknown, have been systematically incorporated into *A Database of Middle Turkic* (Uppsala University, <https://middleturkic.lingfil.uu.se>). This database provides an unprecedented corpus for comparative and historical linguistic research within the Karaim varieties and, once sufficiently developed, for broader comparison with other Middle Turkic sources.

The present study focuses primarily on this corpus aspect of the research, including the text editions, the structure and functions of the database, and the practical application of the corpus analysis software AntConc 4.1.4 (Anthony 2022). The broader project employs a data-driven approach to examine derivational patterns within the Karaim varieties, focusing on broader tendencies, semantic organization, and contextual patterns of derivation rather than listing individual suffixes with illustrative examples. The project represents a methodological renewal in Karaim word-formation research and aims to ensure reproducibility across other Turkic or typologically similar languages. The theoretical component, an up-to-date and cross-linguistically grounded functional-semantic analysis drawing on Bagasheva's (2017) article "*Comparative Semantic Concepts in Affixation*", will be presented at a later stage of the project.

Anita András is a doctoral student in Turkic languages at Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research focuses on Karaim word-formation, with particular attention to derivational morphology across the Karaim varieties.

Thupten Kunga Chashab, University of Warsaw

A Study on the Twelfth-Century Birchbark Tibetan Manuscript Kept at the Municipal Museum, Żory, Silesia

The birchbark Tibetan manuscript at the Municipal Museum of Żory contains forty-two leaves. The contents of the manuscript is the *Sdud pa* sutra, in Sanskrit, *Arya Prajnaparamita samcaya gatha*, and mantras of different deities, Amitawa and others. The sutra was brought to Poland by Roman Lutynski from one of these countries, India, Nepal, or today's Bangladesh, then Pakistan in the 1970s. As predicted, the result of the radiocarbon test (C14) confirmed the hypothesis that the manuscript was produced in the twelfth century. The manuscript is written in an archaic form of the Tibetan language. The manuscript must have been kept inside an early stupa or a statue as *gzungs* (dharani). The birchbark is used on rare occasions as writing material to honor the religious object itself.

Thupten Kunga Chashab obtained a higher studies degree in Tibetan literature and religion in 1993 from the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Dharamsala, India. Later, an M.A. degree in Tibetan studies from the University of Oslo in 2001, and a Ph.D and Habilitation degree from the University of Warsaw in 2003 and 2023, respectively. Currently, he holds an adjunct position and serves as a lecturer at the Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, University of Warsaw.

Nidhal Chemengui, Université de Tunis

The Arts and Culture between the Media and the State: The Case of Tunisia

In the aftermath of independence, arts and culture were considered a matter of state. We will begin by outlining the historical context of the instrumentalization of popular culture and popular arts, which were reflected in cultural policy documents that followed UNESCO's recommendations. In this context, the media, in the years immediately following independence, served the state by relaying and translating its directives in the effort to build the nation.

The argument of nation-building led to others such as "elevating public taste" and "educating the people." Within this policy framework, the state granted itself the authority to prohibit certain art forms in favor of others.

This policy marginalized popular arts such as *mezwed*, which were banned from the media for a long time. Meanwhile, certain other art forms were granted privileges such as the creation of schools, institutes, international exchange programs, dedicated funds, and professional cards — the latter also serving as a tool for the state to exercise hegemony and control over some artistic disciplines more than others.

Nidhal Chemengui is a cultural press officer for several public and private festivals. She is mainly responsible for national and international press relations for cultural events and projects. She is also the editor-in-chief of *No'o Cultures* magazine, a publication specializing in art criticism in Africa. She is a PhD candidate in sociology, and her research focuses primarily on cultural policies and the professionalization of art-related professions and ancillary cultural occupations in Tunisia.

Dragomir Dimitrov, Philipps-Universität Marburg

On Some Early Devanagari Types and the New Incarnation of the Schlegel Font

The origin and development of the first Devanagari movable metal types in the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries is an object of study which has received considerable attention both in India and in the West. Despite the laudable efforts of earlier scholars, however, even nowadays interesting discoveries concerning the efforts of typefounders and typographers who aimed to make the print of books in Sanskrit possible in the early days of Indology can still be done. One of the most significant and remarkable achievements in Devanagari typography is undoubtedly the creation of a font which was designed in the early 1820s in Paris by the renowned German Indologist, literary historian and critic, translator, and poet August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845). Once the punches were cut by the French punchcutter Joseph Vibert and the necessary types were cast in Paris, Schlegel was able to proceed in Bonn with typesetting himself his edition of the Bhagavadgītā in 1823. Schlegel's «fonte divine», as he once called his «Indian types», received a warm reception from Sanskritists and quickly spread across Europe. During the rest of the nineteenth century many important Sanskrit editions were typeset with this font, until in the beginning of the twentieth century it gradually came out of use. Some one hundred years later, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the appreciation for the typographic qualities of the Schlegel font started growing again and digital replicas of it begun emerging. In this talk attention towards a new Unicode incarnation of this remarkable font will be drawn.

Dragomir Dimitrov teaches and researches at the Department of Indology and Tibetology, Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany). He is also an Honorary Adjunct Professor at the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University (India). He is interested in a wide range of fields such as Indian grammar, poetics, metrics, paleography, manuscriptology, Indo-Tibetan studies, Buddhist studies, Pali and Saindhavi literature, as well as modern Sanskrit.

Jevgenija Driuk, Vilnius University

*The Burden of Traditions and the Search for Individual Self in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian**

Even in the 21st century, South Korea remains deeply rooted in Confucian traditions that emphasize hierarchy, filial duty (*hyo*, 효), and the maintenance of social harmony. Hierarchical order and the logic of collective belonging continue to shape both language and interpersonal relationships. However, rapid social and cultural changes, mainly caused by globalization, are increasingly challenging this traditional framework, prompting a re-evaluation of the individual's place within the collective society.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the traditional hierarchical and collectivist model of relations in Korean society are being transformed toward a more individualistic perception of a person as an autonomous individual. The Vegetarian (채식주의자, 2007) by Noble Prize-winner Han Kang serves as a literary reflection of this cultural transition, illustrating the tension between inherited Confucian values such as obedience, hierarchy, and group harmony, and the growing assertion of personal autonomy.

At the center of the novel stands Yeong-hye, a seemingly ordinary woman whose decision to stop eating meat becomes a radical act of rebellion against the social and family order. Her refusal to comply with the established traditional norms challenges the Confucian ideal that a wife embodies

her husband's face and reputation. Through the prism of the family, which takes one of the central stage in Korean social structure, Han Kang depicts how deviation from collective expectations is perceived not as an individual choice but as a threat to social harmony itself. A cruel attempt by the father to force his daughter to eat meat symbolizes the confrontation between patriarchal power and individual will, revealing how hierarchy often prevails over empathy or personal freedom.

Yeong-hye's transformation does not raise solely feministic questions, but more existential. Her silence, physical alienation, and eventual psychological collapse express a deep aversion to the social demand for conform. Han Kang contrasts her obvious insanity with moral emptiness of those who uphold social conventions, implying that true insanity may lie in blind obedience rather than in defiance. The novel reveals the price of conformity and raises a fundamental question - can a society built on collective harmony give place to individuality?

The questions raised in the novel published in 2007 have so far been increasingly topical in modern-day Korea. For instance, the recently popularized neologism *self-hyodo* (셀프효도) reflects a shift toward more balanced family practices, where married couples take equal responsibility for their own parents rather than following the traditional expectation that a wife must prioritize her husband's family. Such examples illustrate that even within the realm of filial piety, one of the strongest Confucian virtues, Korean society seeks new forms of equality and self-determination.

Finally, through the Vegetarian Han Kang captures the profound transformation of Korean society, which is the transition from collective conformity toward personal authenticity. Han Kang's novel becomes not only a story of resistance but also a symbolic narrative of cultural evolution, illustrating a future in which harmony no longer requires the suppression of the self.

Jevgenija Driuk is a PhD student in Ethnology at Vilnius University, Lithuania. Her research sits at the intersection of ethnology, sociology and Korean studies, focusing on modern South Korean literature and the way it reflects transformations in Korean society. Her current project explores representations of the family and the individual in modern Korean literature. She also teaches Korean language and Korean culture at Vilnius University, and has worked as Korean-Lithuanian translator. Her broader interests include contemporary Korean society and culture, modern literature and its role as a mirror of social change, Korean language and intercultural communication.

Kirti Gahlawat, University of Warsaw

Western Bias in Spiritual Care Assessment. Evaluating Compatibility with Asian Non-Theist Religions

In today's pluralistic societies, spiritual care is increasingly recognized as essential for holistic wellbeing across diverse settings such as healthcare, education, and counselling. However, the frameworks guiding spiritual care often stem from specific religious traditions, which can limit their ability to support individuals from various spiritual and secular backgrounds. The present paper undertakes a critical analysis of the spiritual assessment models like HOPE, and highlights their pervasive Western orientations and failure in efficient coverage of the diversity in spiritual needs of religiosity and non-religiosity-based patient groups. By assessing these models' strengths and

identifying where they fall short, particularly in inclusivity and relevance, the paper aims to uncover possibilities for developing more flexible, adaptable models of spiritual care. The paper discusses non-theist Asian traditions such as Buddhism and Classical Yoga as relevant paradigm for modern, inclusive framework for spiritual care.

Kirti Gahlawat recently completed her MA in Religious Studies: Religions of Asia and Africa – Buddhism, Islam and Others (RAABI) at the University of Warsaw. Her master's thesis, "The Development of Modern Spiritual Care: Insights from Religious Studies," explores the adaptation of spiritual care frameworks for multicultural and interfaith contexts. Alongside her academic work, she is an accredited Yoga educator and instructor with multiple certifications and a Postgraduate Diploma in Yoga, bringing practical insights from Indian philosophical traditions into modern approaches to spirituality and well-being.

Marcin Grodzki, University of Warsaw

In the Quest of the Proto-Islamic Doctrine – can Abraham help us?

This paper is intended to examine to what extent the legacy of Abrahamism (as a hypothetical religious belief) might have influenced the embryo-form of the emerging Islamic religion in the 7th century CE. Out of a myriad of interweaving religious and philosophical currents of the Late Antique Middle East, it is not easy to track down and anticipate those that could have contributed in a way or another to the gradual emergence of the Arab state religion and then - in the longer perspective - to the evolution of full-fledged Islam. Futile would be the task to study the origins of Islam without delving into the broader historical and religious contexts of the pre-Islamic era, including the geopolitical and demographic situation, starting at least from the 5th / 6th century AD. Besides the important literary sources, the disciplines of archaeology, numismatics and epigraphy can also come to the rescue by delivering us important clues about *wie es eigentlich gewesen war*. Abrahamism is not a scholarly defined term today; it appears here and there in academic discourse, with a range of different meanings. However, looking from the perspective of the formation of the foundations of the Muslim religion, one could hypothetically postulate that this term, in its historical context, be understood as identical to primitive Judaism (Yahwism) or the proto-Mosaicism of the Hebrews. In this sense, Abrahamism would be a form of simple monotheism with elements of pagan cults, glorifying Abraham as the founder of the religion and a model for following. Such meanings can be sought in late-Antique Jewish and Christian sources.

Marcin Grodzki is a scholar of Arabic, Semitic and Islamic studies. His fields of academic interest include literary, linguistic and religious studies (Arabic language / Semitic languages, history of early Islam and pre-Islamic era, the Qur'an, religious minorities in the Middle East, contemporary Middle Eastern geopolitics). He is an author of scholarly publications in the above-mentioned fields.

Natalia Hapek, Płock Science Society

Circassians in Syria: Between War and the Unknown

This paper explores the situation of Syria's Circassian minority – a community whose history has been defined by forced displacement and the struggle for survival. Following the mass killings and

expulsions carried out by Tsarist Russia after the Caucasian War of 1864, around 80–90% of Circassians were driven from their North Caucasian homeland. Resettled by the Ottoman Empire in Syria from the 1860s onward, they established communities in the Golan Heights, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Before the civil war, their population was estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000.

The Syrian conflict profoundly affected this already vulnerable group. Seeking to remain neutral, most Circassians avoided siding with either government or opposition forces – a position that left them exposed to pressure from both sides. Some served in security structures, while others defected or joined rebel units. The war destroyed many Circassian villages, especially around rural Damascus and Quneitra, causing heavy losses and mass displacement. Many fled to Turkey, Jordan, Europe, or attempted repatriation to the North Caucasus.

After the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, Syrian Circassians experienced an unprecedented degree of cultural freedom. For the first time in over fifty years, they publicly commemorated the Circassian Day of Mourning on May 21, 2025, in Damascus's Umayyad Square – marking the 161st anniversary of their 1864 expulsion. The event symbolized both remembrance and a test of the new political order's openness.

Yet the community's future remains deeply uncertain. Circassians now face suspicions of collaboration with the former regime due to their historical presence in security institutions. Meanwhile, Israeli military operations in southern Syria have displaced residents of Circassian villages in the Golan Heights, such as Breqa and Bir Ajam. Once home to about 250 families, only around 60 elderly households remain.

This paper asks whether Syria's Circassians can preserve their distinct identity amid accusations of collaboration, limited repatriation opportunities, and ongoing emigration pressures. Drawing on historical patterns of displacement, wartime experiences, and the fluid political landscape of post-Assad Syria, it examines the survival strategies of a community once again caught between precarious hope and existential threat.

Natalia Hapek is an independent researcher affiliated with the Scientific Society of Płock (Towarzystwo Naukowe Płockie), currently conducting independent doctoral research in Public International Law. With over a decade of experience as a senior MENA analyst, her work focuses on ethnic minorities in the Middle East, armed conflict dynamics, political violence monitoring, and the history of the North Caucasus. She has conducted field research on the Circassian minority in Jordan, presented at over 35 international conferences and published on security developments, armed groups, and diaspora communities. She holds degrees in Arabic Studies and Law from the University of Warsaw and a postgraduate diploma in Contemporary Armed Conflicts.

Akira Ide, University of Warsaw

Current Research on Dark Tourism: A Comparative Perspective of Japan and Europe

Research on “dark tourism” --travel to sites associated with tragedy, such as war, disaster, or terrorist attacks --currently thriving. This fairly new concept originated in the UK in the 1990s and quickly attracted many researchers, establishing itself as an important area within tourism studies.

In contrast, dark tourism faces strong resistance in Japan and has not yet become a prominent field of research. This report first explains how the concept of dark tourism was developed in Europe, then discusses its spread in Japan. In this context, the report argues that the challenge in accepting dark tourism in Japan arises from deep-rooted differences in views on life and death, especially when compared to Europe's Christian cultural background.

Poland, with sites like Auschwitz, is seen as a hub for dark tourism research. I am currently in the University of Warsaw researching dark tourism and will elaborate on why this location was chosen. If time permits, I will also introduce the fundamentally different perspectives on World War II in Europe and the Pacific War in Japan and explain why these differences make dark tourism less likely to gain acceptance in Japan from the standpoint of war memory.

Furthermore, even within Asia, it is crucial to note that dark tourism has evolved quite differently in countries such as China and South Korea. While dark tourism remains unpopular in Japan, South Korea is recognised as a pioneer of dark tourism in Asia, and I will explore the reasons behind this. In China, history related to disaster recovery and war has been used as propaganda to promote the Chinese Communist Party's greatness, which notably diverges from the original idea of dark tourism. Additionally, I would like to briefly touch upon the current state of dark tourism in Islamic countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, if time allows.

Akira Ide works at Kanazawa University and his specialty is tourism. Especially, he led the research of dark tourism in Japan. Now he is researching dark tourism at the University of Warsaw as a visiting professor from this October.

Atsumi Ide, Nagoya University

Correspondence Education for Aspiring Manga Artists and Illustrators: A Case Study of Kodansha Famous Schools

Manga culture is deeply rooted in Japanese society. According to the “36th Annual Survey of Children’s Dream Jobs” conducted by Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company (3,000 respondents), 7.4% of elementary school girls, 9.4% of junior high school girls and 4.8% of high school girls aspire to become “illustrators or manga artists,” consistently ranking among the top career choices. As Akihiko Ieshima (2007) points out, Japanese people are exposed to manga from an early age, and manga can significantly influence self-formation beyond mere entertainment.

Despite the cultural importance of manga, little attention has been given to the role of major publishers in offering art correspondence education. One notable example is Kodansha Famous Schools, established in 1967 as a correspondence institution for art and illustration aimed at adults and young learners aspiring to become illustrators, manga artists and picture book creators. In April 2007, the school had 14,100 students enrolled. Over nearly half a century, it trained a large number of creators; however, since the suspension of new student admissions in 2014, its history has gradually faded from public memory. As of 2025, aging of related personnel has made interviews increasingly

difficult, and because course materials were directly mailed to individual learners, few official records remain even in the National Diet Library.

Drawing on collected materials and interviews, this presentation examines the educational practices of Kodansha Famous Schools from three perspectives: (1) the characteristics of its learners, (2) its distinctive teaching methods, and (3) its support for professional debut through publisher networks. Furthermore, by referring to Miyako Okada's (2013) discussion of "the system for discovering and fostering manga artists," this study situates the institution within the broader history of manga and illustration education in Japan. Through this analysis, it seeks to clarify how the publishing industry has contributed to the cultivation of cultural creators through the medium of correspondence education.

Atsumi Ide is a doctoral student at Nagoya University, specializing in art management and distance learning. Her research focuses on art correspondence education in Japan. She has examined the historical transformation of lifelong learners and the practices of art correspondence education during the Second World War. In particular, she explores the roles of amateur learners and the cultural creativity that emerges from their participation.

Pramod Jaiswal, Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement, Kathmandu

The Rise of Gen Z and the Reshaping of Nepal's Political Landscape

Nepal's political trajectory has been marked by continuous transformation—from a monarchy to a republic, from revolution to reform, and from ideological struggle to democratic experimentation. Within this evolving democratic framework, a new force has begun to redefine the nation's political discourse: Generation Z. Born into a post-conflict, post-monarchical era, Nepal's Gen Z has come of age in a time of political instability, economic uncertainty, and growing disillusionment with traditional leadership. This paper examines the emergence of this generation as a significant sociopolitical actor, analyzing how their frustrations, aspirations, and digital engagement are reshaping Nepal's political landscape.

The study begins by tracing the evolution of Nepal's democracy, situating Gen Z's activism within the broader historical continuum of political change. It explores the legacy of the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006), a movement that sought to overthrow entrenched hierarchies and deliver social justice but ultimately became absorbed into the mainstream political establishment. The rise and fall of the Maoists—once symbols of radical transformation but now perceived as part of the corrupt political elite—has left a generational imprint of disappointment. As Nepal transitioned to a federal democratic republic in 2008, hopes for inclusion and transparency faded amid persistent governance failures, party fragmentation, and patronage politics. These developments have deepened the generational divide, fueling Gen Z's skepticism toward conventional politics.

Against this backdrop, the paper investigates how Nepal's Gen Z—armed with digital literacy, global awareness, and a strong sense of justice—has begun to redefine political participation. This generation is not bound by the ideological legacies of their predecessors but is instead mobilized by issues of accountability, meritocracy, and social equity. Through social media platforms such as

TikTok, X, and Instagram, they have created new spaces of dissent, bypassing traditional gatekeepers and challenging political inertia. Movements for environmental justice, education reform, and anti-corruption have found new momentum among the youth, signaling a shift from street protests to digital activism. The paper highlights how these online networks have not only amplified political consciousness but also fostered a culture of transparency and civic engagement unprecedented in Nepal's modern history.

The discussion further explores the role of international actors in shaping Nepal's political dynamics. Situated between India and China—two major powers with competing strategic interests—Nepal occupies a delicate geopolitical position. External influences from regional and global powers, such as the US, which was the second country that Nepal established diplomatic ties after the Great Britain and have deeper ties, as well as international development partners such as Europe and Japan, have had both stabilizing and disruptive effects on Nepal's democratic processes. The paper argues that Gen Z's awareness of these dynamics contributes to a more nuanced political discourse, one that critiques both domestic corruption and foreign interference while calling for greater sovereignty and accountability in policy-making.

Ultimately, this paper contends that Nepal's Gen Z represents not merely a demographic cohort but a transformative political force. Their rise reflects a growing demand for integrity, innovation, and inclusivity in governance. By reshaping how politics is practiced and perceived, this generation holds the potential to revitalize Nepal's fragile democracy and steer it toward a more transparent, participatory, and future-oriented path.

Pramod Jaiswal is the Research Director at NIICE. He has been a regular and visiting faculty at different universities of Nepal, Bangladesh, China and Thailand. He is Visiting Fellow at Sandia National Laboratories, Cooperative Monitoring Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico, US; Senior Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi; Non-Resident Fellow at India Studies Center, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand and Senior Research Fellow at Institute for National and International Security, Belgrade. He is also an alumnus of the Near East South Asia Center, National Defence University, Washington DC. Previously, he was Researcher at South Asian Studies, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok and Manohar Parikkar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. He has worked as Correspondent and Strategic Affairs Editor with different reputed media outlets of Nepal. He is the Member of the Editorial Board, Journal of International Affairs, Kathmandu; Member of the Academic Committee at the Pangoal Institution, Beijing; Member of International Advisory Committee, Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Macedonia; and member of Subject Committee of International Relations and Diplomacy, Tribhuvan University. He holds Masters, M. Phil and PhD from School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the recipient of Silver Jubilee Scholarship and SAARC Doctoral Fellowship from Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Government of India. He has authored, edited and co-edited around two dozen books on China and South Asia affairs.

Stanisław Jan Kania, University of Warsaw

'Some Wise People'—meaning us. On the *Tattva-saṅgraha* and the *Mādhyamikas*

Śāntarakṣita (ca. 725–788), one of the most eminent Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist scholar-monks, authored i.a. 'The Ornament of the Middle Way' (*Madhyamakālaṅkāra*), in which he offered a quasi-synthesis of the idealist Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda (regarded by him as provisionally tenable conventional truth) and the antirealist Madhyamaka (considered by him to represent the ultimate truth). This

unique philosophical enterprise was later labelled by Tibetan doxographers as *Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka. In his encyclopaedic work titled 'The Compendium of Principles' (*Tattva-saṅgraha*), however, Śāntarakṣita appears to operate solely on the plane of Yogācārin-Vijñānavādin analysis, not once pointing to the Mādhyamika ultimate truth. It is Śāntarakṣita's disciple and commentator, Kamalaśīla (ca. 740-795), who appears to suggest that the root text is nonetheless marked by an endorsement of the Madhyamaka, when he glosses 'some wise people' with 'Mādhyamikas'. This paper attempts to shed some light on this peculiar passage.

Stanisław Jan Kania is an Adjunct at the Research Centre of Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw. His main research areas include Indian Buddhist philosophy, in particular Madhyamaka school of Mahāyāna philosophy, and Cārvāka/Lokāyata studies.

Krešimir Krnic, University of Zagreb

Beyond Aesthetics: Can Rāma be Wrong? A Re-evaluation of Ethical Role Modeling in the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa

The paper is fundamentally motivated by the question: Why do modern readers engage with Sanskrit epics? Do we seek aesthetic value, philological challenges, historical data, worldly wisdom, spiritual guidance, or merely a pastime? Ultimately, the paper asks: Do these texts, particularly the *Rāmāyaṇa*, pass the test of time and remain meaningful to us today, regardless of our initial expectations?

While we often celebrate the Sanskrit epics as great works of literature and art, appreciating their inherent artistic value requires us to adjust our *horizon of expectation* by understanding the poetic conventions of their age. Similarly, comprehending the ethically challenging content demands familiarity with, and some measure of acceptance for, the belief systems and cultural context from which they emerged.

The focus of this paper will be precisely on these ethical challenges. Starting with well-known controversial topics—such as the banishment of Sītā, the killing of Vālin, and the killing of Śambūka—the analysis will also extend to the episodes for which Rāma is routinely praised (e.g., obedience to parents, brotherly love, and siding with the downtrodden). All of these actions will be submitted to the test of applicability, meaningfulness, and possible downsides in modern societies.

Commentators frequently scrutinize or defend the so-called "controversial" episodes based on personal, religious, or philosophical inclinations. However, those traits of Rāma's character regularly emphasized as the touchstone of ethical behavior and humanity are often accepted without critical inquiry.

In alignment with the conference's theme, "Old Subjects, New Approaches," this paper offers a critical, contemporary re-evaluation of Rāma's qualities, fundamentally questioning his validity as an ethical role model in the present time. The analysis will focus primarily on Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, with possible contextual excursions into the *Mahābhārata*.

Krešimir Krnic is a long-standing faculty member in the Department of Asian Studies, specializing in Indology. Having completed studies in Indology and Philosophy (1989) and an M.A. on the Indian epics (*Rāmāyaṇa*) (1994), he has since taught widely, covering Sanskrit and Hindi grammar and literature. His main interests lie in Sanskrit epic literature, Hindi language and literature, and Indian culture and society. He has held visiting research positions at the Oriental Research Institute in Mysore (1992) and UC Berkeley (2006).

Darui Long, University of the West, Los Angeles

The Chinese Buddhist Literature in Jagiellonian University Library

Arranged by Professor Jakub Zamorski, I spent more than 40 days at the University of Jagiellonian Library, examining its collection of Chinese Buddhist canon. This paper aims to illustrate the characteristics of Chinese Buddhist literature kept in Jagiellonian Library.

1. Independently Printed Buddhist Scriptures.

Independently published Buddhist scriptures are more valuable for a number of reasons. First, they were sponsored by local people who wished to make merits by sponsoring the carving, printing and distributing the Buddhist scriptures. Their names and even commentaries were recorded. In many cases, these names are not recorded in the Buddhist canons.

Second, the editors of these scriptures were free to add phonological and semantic explanations to the Buddhist scriptures. Although such information could be found in formal printing of the Buddhist canons, the editors might add more entries of the words that ordinary readers who need such explanations.

Third, woodcut illustrations of frontispieces demonstrated the fine arts of time and locality which were not collected in other editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon, especially the court editions. Authentic Buddhist woodblock illustration from the Ming Dynasty are now quite rare, and the sheer number of such prints held by the library is even more uncommon.

2. Blood-written *Saddharmapuṇḍarika Sūtra*

Volumes 1,3 and 4 of *Saddharmapuṇḍarika Sūtra* written with blood were found. What is more is that volume 4 is intact. The other two volumes are fragmentary.

The Yungchuan Temple in Gushan, Fuzhou 福州鼓山涌泉寺, has a collection of blood scriptures. Due to the hot and humid climate in Fujian, the condition of the scriptures is not optimistic. Xiyuan Temple in Suzhou has a few blood-written Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist monks reluctant to show them either privately or publicly.

3. The Covers of Silk and Brocade

The *Yongle Northern Canon*, printed with funds donated by Lady Hao, who was a concubine of Emperor Wanli (r.1573-1620), features exquisite binding and decoration. Its opulence rivals that of the *Yongle*

Northern Canon housed in the East Asian Library at Princeton University and the *Yongle Northern Canon* in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, both of which boast silk covers. The beautiful fresh colors remind us of the silk made five hundred years ago.

4. The values of the *Yongle Northern Canon*

This set of Buddhist canon, totaling about 5000 volumes, is a rare edition of Buddhist canon. Colophons indicated that they were printed in six different reign periods. The highest-quality edition printed in 1592 was funded by Lady Hao, the consort of Emperor Wanli (r.1573-1620) in the Ming Dynasty. The next best is the edition printed in the fourth (1576), sixth (1577) and seven year of the Wanli era (1578). A portion of volumes printed in 1598 show signs of fading or blurring. There are quite a number of volumes of *Qianlong Canon*. Apparently, the German collector purchased these Buddhist scriptures from different temples and book sellers in Beijing in 1920s. There are numerous duplicate copies.

Darui Long is a Professor at the University of the West, Los Angeles, and the Editor-in-Chief of *Chinese Buddhist Canon Research Newsletter*, Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Arizona.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw

Some Observations on the Narrative Stories in the *Mahāvastu*

The *Mahāvastu* – a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text belonging to the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins – contains a rich collection of narrative stories, mostly belonging to the *jātaka* genre. In many cases they form a peculiar pattern in which a story is first told in a prose *parikalpa*, and then the same, or similar content is given again by means of a versified *jātaka* (or the other way round). The relationship between the two components is not entirely clear – sometimes the *parikalpa* seems to be merely a prose elaboration of the content of the *jātaka*, in other cases, however, there are major differences between the two, i.e., either of them may contain elements absent in the other one. It would seem that in most cases the verses were composed first, while the prose part, whose language is easier and more comprehensible to the reader, is an elaboration of the verses. However, there seem to be some exceptions to this rule. This pattern, i.e., the two redactions of the same story, in prose and in verses, occurs in the *Mahāvastu* several times.

In my presentation I would like to show on selected examples the peculiarities of the above-mentioned pattern in terms of its content, structure, and the language therein attested.

Katarzyna Marciniak is the head of the Research Centre of Buddhist Studies at the Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, Warsaw University. Main fields of research: Buddhist narrative literature, *Mahāvastu*, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, manuscriptology.

Marek Mejer, University of Warsaw

‘The Method of Reading Texts’: a Vajrayāna Buddhist Meditation Ritual

The Method of Reading Texts (Sanskrit: *Pustaka-pāṭhopāya*, Tibetan: *Glegs bam bklag pa'i thabs*) is a very short text that has only survived in Tibetan translation in the Tanjur. It is peculiar that this text is placed in a section containing works on logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa, tshad ma*), even though it concerns Vajrayāna Buddhist ritual. The author and translator was Dānaśīla, who was probably active in the later phase of the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. The text describes a specific practice of visualising the Buddha Vairocana. Numerous goddesses emerge from the syllable *bhrūṃ*. Having received empowerment, the adept can proceed to recite the main text.

Marek Mejer is Prof. em. at the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Asian and African Cultures; Professor & head of the Research Centre for Buddhist Studies at the Faculty of Oriental Studies (Faculty of Asian and African Cultures), University of Warsaw, 2008-2019; Professor & head of the Department of South Asia at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań (1999-2014); President of the Polish Oriental Society, 2003-2012; Chairman of the Committee of Oriental Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2007-2019; Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences (from 1 Jan 2020).

Marcin Michalski, Filip A. Jakubowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

*Kitāb, sharī'a and Other Translation Pitfalls. Translating *The Meadows of Gold* by al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) into Polish*

The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems (*Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*) constitutes a milestone in medieval Arabic literature. This geographical and historical work by al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) offers an account of both pre-Islamic and Islamic history up to the third decade of the tenth century, drawing upon written sources, eyewitness accounts and the author's own observations.

This paper presents the results of research and the translation of the first 69 chapters constituting nearly a half of the work. One of the key aspects examined is the vocabulary employed by the author to describe pre-Islamic cultures and religions. Al-Mas'ūdī's use of Islamic terminology raises questions not only concerning the translation of *The Meadows* but also the interpretation of the worldview he conveys to the reader.

Filip A. Jakubowski Ph.D. (2015), historian and Arabist at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, an assistant professor and head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the same University. His dissertation was devoted to everyday life in Córdoba in the tenth-eleventh centuries according to Maliki fatwas. He is a member of the Polish Oriental Society and the Polish Historical Society. His scholarly interests include Arabic historiography, the history of Islamic law, al-Andalus, and the history of Oriental Studies in Europe. Together with Marcin Michalski, he is currently working on a Polish translation of al-Mas'ūdī's *The Meadows of Gold*.

Marcin A. Michalski is an associate professor at the Faculty of Modern Languages at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. His academic interests include translation to and from Arabic, the descriptive grammar of Classical and Modern Standard Arabic, and the development of writing systems for Arabic dialects, with a particular focus on Moroccan. Together with Michael Abdallah, he co-authored a concise Polish–Arabic and Arabic–Polish dictionary. He also translates both fiction and non-fiction into Polish, primarily from Arabic and English. Together with Filip A. Jakubowski, he is currently working on a Polish translation of al-Mas'ūdī's *The Meadows of Gold*.

Michał Milówka, University of Warsaw

Language Policies of Mongolia in Relation to the Native Language of the Kazakh Ethnic Minority in the Period from 1992 to 2025

This paper aims to highlight the language situation of the Kazakh ethnic minority residing in the country of Mongolia, as well as to describe the position of the state towards it, as shown through its policies. It focuses on Kazakh as a living language of an officially recognised ethnic minority, which is in active use day-to-day, mainly in the provinces of Bayan-Ölgii and Khovd in the West of the country as well as in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. It is to describe and compare the official as well as the de facto status of the Kazakh language within Mongolia, its rights as described within the legislation and the Constitution as well as the extent of personal and official usage within the country's institutions such as in education. The Kazakh minority constitutes the second largest ethnic group within Mongolia and as such the relation between the state and the Kazakh community is of major importance. The paper also incorporates some of the findings discovered during author's personal expedition conducted in both provinces in the summer of 2025 with the aim to research the topic more deeply on-site. Unfortunately, this subject is not widely researched and as of now there are few scientific publications about it. The aim of this paper is to help promote further research as well as facilitate and highlight its importance within Mongolia, the region of Central Asia as well as globally.

Michał Milówka is a master's student at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Warsaw. He is currently writing his master's thesis on the topic of the Kazakh minority within Mongolia, which is also to include personal research conducted this year in the provinces of Bayan-Ölgii and Khovd in Western Mongolia.

Riddhi Nirkhe, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

A Crosslinguistic Study of Modal Expressions in Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, and Tamil

This research focuses on the patterns found in the verbal and grammatical expressions of selected modalities in Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, and Tamil. The objective of this paper is to contribute to the semantic and morphological understanding of these modal expressions in the selected South Asian languages and provide a base for further research. The analysis covers a total of 9 modalities including imperative, hortative, optative, obligative, ability, permissive, conditional, and prospective. Additionally, the research also discusses the polysemy patterns of modality found across these languages.

Marathi and Kannada were selected as the primary focus of this study because of their long history of linguistic contact (Southworth, 1974; 2005). The study aims to explore potential connections between the two languages in their use of modal expressions. In addition, Hindi and Tamil were included as comparative languages, since they are spoken in regions geographically close to Marathi and Kannada, respectively. This comparison helps determine whether Marathi aligns more closely with other Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages and Kannada with Dravidian languages, or whether their modal systems show cross-family influence due to contact.

Linguistic expression of modality varies across different languages. The methods used to express modal categories are diverse and depend on the linguistic features of each language. Narrog (2016, 90-97) describes these expressions as explicit (overt) and implicit (covert). Languages that have lexical and grammatical means to express them are said to have explicit methods while languages that do not, are said to have implicit methods. Verbs/verbal auxiliaries, affixes, nouns, adverbs, and particles come under explicit expressions, and mood, voice, possession, aspect, etc. for modality are the implicit ways to express. As mentioned by Bhat (1999), the language will have well-defined paradigms for the prominent category while mood/modality will be expressed through loosely grammaticalized forms or through a combination of tense and aspect or tense and mood.

The analysis is done with the help of descriptive grammars of all four languages; Kachru (2006) for Hindi, Dhongde and Wali (2009) and Pandharipande (1999) for Marathi, Sridhar (1990) for Kannada, and Asher (1985) and Lehman (1989) for Tamil as well as the language family descriptions by Masica (1991) for Indo-Aryan and Krishnamurti (2003) for Dravidian. In addition to this, native speakers' judgments were also taken to cross-check the data and description.

Riddhi Nirkhe is a doctoral student at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. Her research interest lies in language typology and currently she is studying the languages of western India from historical-typological point of view.

Łukasz Piątak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

The Medicinal Bowl. Item of Practical Magic from the Perspective of Iconography, Philology and Islamic Studies

The aim of the paper is to present a group of late medieval Islamicate magic bowls stemming from most probably from North Syria or Mesopotamia/South Anatolia, based on the example of MfIK, Berlin 1992.7. The item is full of diverse inscriptions and figurative depictions of various kinds: Qur'anic quotations, description of application, disjointed letters, magical squares, phrases penned in secret scripts, graphic symbols and animal depictions. I would like to present each element individually, as well as attempt to reconstruct the context in which these objects were created and actually used. What beliefs and convictions accompanied them? Can the messages visible on the bowls be related to specific mystical, philosophical, or scientific ideas of the time? Or do they remain confined to folk rituals?

Łukasz Piątak is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. He received his PhD from the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw in 2019. His research focuses on intersections of Islamic philosophy, mysticism and the occult. His critical edition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī's (1156-1191), *al-Wāridāt wa'l-taqdīsāt* with English translation and commentary is now pending for publication (2026). He is a member of Islamic Occult Studies on the Rise international academic working group as well as European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism. He pursues also the side projects devoted to Judeo-Arabic philosophical writings of Judah Halevi and Solomon ibn Gabirol.

Magdalena Pinker, University of Warsaw

Transcultural Trajectories and Artistic Resistance: Inji Efflatoun's Painting and Its Unexpected Warsaw Connections

Although modern Arab painting is rarely found in Polish art collections, a few examples are housed in the National Museum in Warsaw. This paper focuses on what is likely the most significant of these works – an oil-on-canvas painting by Inji Efflatoun (1924–1989). Acquired in 1970, the painting and its provenance serve as a starting point for a broader reflection on the life and artistic legacy of one of the most remarkable Egyptian artists of the twentieth century, as well as on the mechanisms that enabled Arab art to enter Polish museum collections.

From an early age Inji Efflatoun combined artistic practice with deep social commitment. Her feminist, anti-colonial, and leftist beliefs were expressed not only in her paintings but also in her literary work. Her artistic activity consistently mirrored her political and social convictions, ultimately leading to one of the most transformative events in her life – imprisonment. Efflatoun became one of the first Egyptian women to be incarcerated by Gamal Abdel Nasser for political reasons. After her release in 1963, she devoted herself almost exclusively to painting. The piece currently held in the National Museum in Warsaw originates from this period, marked by a renewed search for expressive forms.

The analysis of this artwork is grounded in an interdisciplinary methodology encompassing several research approaches. Formal and stylistic analysis allows for the examination of composition, colour palette, iconography, and symbolism. Provenance research, based on museum archives, acquisition records, and correspondence, makes it possible to reconstruct the painting's journey from Egypt to Poland. Historical contextualisation situates Efflatoun's work within the socio-political environment of mid-20th-century Egypt, particularly feminist movements, anti-colonial struggles, and post-revolutionary cultural policies following 1952. This multi-layered methodology not only provides insight into Efflatoun's artistic development after her imprisonment but also illuminates the broader phenomenon of cultural transfer that enabled Arab art to reach Poland during the communist era.

Magdalena Pinker is an assistant professor in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, University of Warsaw; Chief Curator of the Department of Oriental Art at the National Museum in Warsaw. Her research focuses primarily on Islamic art and on tracing the provenance of Asian and North African artworks in Polish museum collections.

Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł, University of Warsaw

Postcolonial Reaction Reflected through the Costumes of African Leaders

The paper explores sartorial expression as a political language of decolonization and identity reclamation. Through examples from historical and contemporary leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Mobutu Sese Seko, Haile Sillase, Muammar Gaddafi as well as Abiy Ahmed and Ibrahim Traore it analyzes how dress functioned as a visual assertion of sovereignty, authenticity, and ideological stance against Western dominance. Costumes, ranging from indigenous attire to hybrid national

styles, become powerful signifiers of postcolonial resistance and cultural self-definition. The paper further extends this discussion to contemporary reactions to neo-colonialism, examining how current African leaders and activists reinterpret sartorial symbols in the struggle against economic dependency, Western (but also internal) cultural dominance.

Drawing on visual culture studies, postcolonial theory, and semiotic analysis, the study investigates how African leaders also mobilized attire to convey distinct visions of nationhood, modernity and resistance. Using iconographic and discourse analysis of archival photographs, newsreels, and political speeches with contextual readings of documents of different kind it is possible to offer a layered interpretation of costume not only as material culture but also as a communicative act situated within power relations, performative leadership, and the politics of representation.

Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł is an Africanist historian and professor at the Department of African Languages and Cultures of the Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, University of Warsaw. Her scholarly interests focus on the history of modern Ethiopia, particularly Ethiopian political culture. She explores the symbolism and legitimisation of power from the late 19th century to the present day. Her research includes studies on iconographic representations of authority, the spatial dimensions of power, and the concept of power in space from a *longue durée* perspective. These themes are explored in depth in her monograph *Ethiopia Between Tradition and Modernity: The Symbolism of the Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I* (Elipsa, 2016), which analyzes the 1930 coronation as a carefully staged ritual of imperial legitimacy. In addition, she has co-edited several volumes that expand on the intersections between art, orality, and cultural expression in Africa. Notably, *The Art, the Oral and the Written Intertwined in African Cultures* (Tako, 2020), part of the series *The Artistic Traditions of Non-European Cultures*, which investigates the layered nature of African communication systems through material, spoken, and textual forms. She served for many years as chairperson and currently acts as deputy chairperson of the Polish African Society. She is also a member of the board of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies.

Zofia Sawicka, University of Rzeszów

Culture in the Service of Building a New Nation – The Case of Saudi Arabia

Contemporary Saudi Arabia is undergoing a profound social, economic, and cultural transformation, the ultimate goal of which—according to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman—is the creation of a modern, open, and sustainable society. Culture plays a pivotal role in this process, serving both as a tool of modernization and as a means of preserving national identity, because the Saudi ruler seeks to minimize the traditional dominance of Islam in the public sphere, as well as its political and social influence.

The reforms introduced under the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative, launched by Mohammed bin Salman, position the cultural sector as one of the key pillars of the new economy. Investments in art, cinema, music, theatre, and national heritage are intended not only to create new jobs and attract tourism, but also to foster a sense of community and national pride.

Opening up to the world through culture—by organizing international festivals, supporting artists, and establishing museums and cultural institutions—is, according to the authorities, meant to enable Saudis to rediscover their own history, reinterpret tradition, and shape a modern national identity. Culture thus becomes a space of dialogue between past and future, religion and modernity, the local

and the global. It represents a form of social engineering, aimed at moving away from the long-standing tradition of the “throne and altar” alliance and building national loyalty on the basis of attachment to the ruling dynasty.

In this way, culture in Saudi Arabia—according to Mohammed bin Salman's vision—is designed to serve as a strategic instrument in the construction of a new society: one that is proud of its heritage, yet modern, creative, and open to dialogue with the world. This society is expected to be prepared to fulfil the geopolitical ambitions set forth by Crown Prince. Time will tell whether society will accept these changes.

Zofia Sawicka is a graduate of the Jagiellonian University with a degree in Oriental Philology, specializing in Arabic Studies, as well as Political Science with a specialization in Journalism. She was a Polish government scholarship recipient in Syria (Damascus) and an intern at the Polish Embassy in Damascus. She holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences, specializing in Media Studies. From 2009 to 2020, she was employed at the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, initially as an assistant and later as an assistant professor, as well as a researcher at the Institute for Civilizational Studies. There, she focused on analyzing macro- and micro-level phenomena in the Middle East, monitoring areas of risk, identifying potential conflicts in the region. Since 2021, she has held the position of assistant professor at the Institute of Political Science and Security Studies at the University of Rzeszów. Her academic interests center around the broad issues of Arab countries, particularly with an emphasis on the political transformation of these nations following the Arab Spring, security in the region, and issues related to Islam.

Maria Skryśkiewicz, University of Warsaw

Palestinian Houses ‘Unhomed’. Searching for Common Ground between Home Studies, Settler Colonialism and Thirdspace

In this paper I am going to outline what I propose to be methodological framework of my doctoral project, *The Thirdspace in a Settler-Colonial Context: Life and Elimination of the Palestinian Family Home in the West Bank*. The research is an attempt to bridge three conceptual domains—settler colonial studies, home studies, and Edward Soja's theory of Thirdspace—to explore the Palestinian home as a hybrid site of oppression, resistance, and endurance under the settler-colonial logic of elimination and domicile.

During the presentation I hope to introduce my attempts to enter the Thirdspace via eliminated Palestinian homes. To do that, I combine fieldwork, spatial theory and literary analysis in order to include different dimensions of home: material, imagined, and experienced.

To understand the process of domicile fully, my project proposes to examine three intertwined spheres: (anti-)home in refugee camps, practices of inhabiting and surviving under occupation outside the camps, and literary representations and distortions of the idea of home. Through this triangulated methodology, Palestinian homes – whether demolished, lived, remembered or dreamed of – emerge as one Thirdspace: a contested arena where resistance, oppression and other experiences coexist. This approach seeks to extend spatial theory by exploring meanings and scales of home which is a target of settler-colonial elimination.

Maria Skryśkiewicz is an Arabist and a second-year PhD student at the University of Warsaw. Her doctoral research examines the notion of the Palestinian home, with a focus on its spatial, cultural, and political articulations within the broader context of Palestinian society. Prior to her PhD studies, she conducted field research in the West Bank, investigating everyday life and practices of dwelling under conditions of occupation. Her academic interests include spatial turn, history and culture of Palestine, settler-colonial studies, and the anthropology of home.

Małgorzata Sobczyk, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

The Historical and Literary Image of the Ban on Women's Entry to Mount Shosha

Mount Shosha (Hyōgo Prefecture, Himeji), home to the Engyō-ji temple of the Tendai school, has long been an important pilgrimage site as one of the 33 temples on the Kannon pilgrimage route in western Japan. Founded in 966 by the monk Shōkū, the temple is closely associated with teachings concerning the salvation of women (*nyonin ōjō* 女人往生), a theme that will be central to this presentation.

This paper examines literary sources *engi* 縁起 (origin stories) and *setsuwa* 説話 (anecdotal stories) genres to show how the issue of women's salvation was set in the literary context in relation to the *Lotus Sutra*. It also explores the historical background of the official ban on women entering Mount Shosha, issued in 1398 by an imperial rescript. The event is documented and appraised in the monk Chinzō's chronicles (*Chinzō watashi kikigaki* 鎮増私聞書). In later years, in response to the ban, a special hall (*nyonindō* 女人堂) for women was established to cater to the needs of female pilgrims. The legend of its foundation, recorded in the *Saigoku junrei uta yōge* 西国巡礼歌要解 (1755), reflects the role of sacred mountains as places of retreat and spiritual discipline for monks.

In search of new perspectives on the prohibition of women's entry into sacred spaces, this presentation will highlight the voices of those directly affected – namely, female pilgrims – through the analysis of travel diaries. It will provide an insight into how the ban shaped their religious experiences.

This presentation aims to examine some aspects of women's salvation in the Tendai tradition through a case study of Mount Shosha, combining literary analysis, historical documentation, and the religious experiences of female pilgrims.

Małgorzata Sobczyk is an assistant professor at Nicolaus Copernicus University; PhD in Japanese studies acquired at Osaka University. Her research interests include Christianity in Japan, women in Japanese Buddhism, female pilgrimages.

Krzysztof Stroński, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Atypical Compound Verbs in IA – Diachronic and Typological Insights

The present study focuses on the 'atypical' compound verb (CV) construction ('V1+V2'), where the V2 element is an intransitive light verb with a detransitivizing force (1).

1) Punjabi (own and Bhatia 1993: 252)

- a. *billī* *ne* *dud* *piyā*
 cat.F ERG milk.NOM.M.SG drink.PAST.M.SG
 ‘A cat drank milk.’
- b. *billī* *sarā* *dud* *pī* *gaī*
 cat.F all.NOM.N.SG milk.NOM.M.SG drink go.PAST.F.SG
 ‘The cat drank up all the milk.’

Given the fact that constructions of this type have a very low frequency, it is not surprising that they have not received much attention in the linguistic literature until recently. Drocco and Tivari (2020) is the first attempt to analyze ‘atypical’ compound verbs in Hindi from a typologically oriented perspective.

The aim of the present paper is, therefore, to demonstrate that:

- a) there is notable variation in the syntactic behaviour of atypical CVs, which chiefly depends on the transitivity status of either V1 (2), V2 (3), or both (4);
- b) atypical CVs can be traced back to early New Indo-Aryan (NIA) (5).

Moreover, atypical CVs can be analyzed as non-prototypical or antipassive lookalikes. The antipassive-like voice is marked analytically, which is a rare phenomenon (Zuñiga and Kittilä 2019: 104, 113). However, the flagging alternation observed in (1a) and (1b), as well as the loss of indexation, can only be attested in those Indo-Aryan (IA) languages that show a split ergative pattern. We suggest that the assumed antipassive-like status of the construction requires further verification based on a larger sample of modern New Indo-Aryan languages.

2) Nepali (Kantipur Daily 12/03/2017 accessed on 02.01.2024)

varṣauṁ-samma *du:kha gar-ī* *chorā-harū* *hurkā-ě*,
 year-till sorrow do-CVB boys-PL raise.up-1SG.PAST
budhesakāl-mā *euṭā-le* *chāḍ-i-gay-o*
 old age-LOC one-ERG leave-CVB-go.PAST
 ‘I raised my sons with sorrow for years, one left (me) in old age.’

3) Marathi

tyā-ne *dzhop-ūn* *ghet-l-e*
 he-ERG sleep-CVB take-PAST-3SG.N
 ‘He slept.’

4) Hindi

dhobī *vahā se* *cal* *diyā*
 washerman.NOM.M.SG there from go give.PAST.M.SG
 ‘A washerman has gone from there.’

5) Old Rajasthani, A.D. 1450 (Smith 1976: 11, 62)

<i>rōva-t-ī</i>	<i>melh-i</i>	<i>g-aũ</i>	<i>dhaṇa</i>	<i>kau</i>	<i>[re]</i>
cry-IPVF-F.SG	leave-CVB	go-PST.M.SG	lady.F.SG	GEN.M.SG	[oh]
<i>nāha-∅</i>					
husband-M.SG.NOM					

‘[Oh] the lady’s husband left the weeping one (=‘left (her) weeping’).’

Our preliminary analysis shows that a set of motion verbs, attested from the early periods of NIA, contributed to the emergence of atypical compounds. This process, however, has not yet been fully realized in several IA languages, such as Marathi or Kumaoni.

The research is based on corpora of early NIA varieties—such as Braj, Dakkhini, Awadhi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Kumaoni, and Nepali—as well as modern NIA corpora, such as the Nepali National Corpus and Hindi Web 2012 (HindiWaC v. 4).

Krzysztof Stroński, Riddhi Nirkhe, and Husendra Sethiya

Krzysztof Stroński is an associate professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies AMU. His main areas of research interest are: historical and typological linguistics with a focus on historical syntax of Indo-Aryan languages. He has carried out field work in Northern India in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and in Uttar Pradesh.

Anna Sulimowicz-Keruth, University of Warsaw

A Karaim Translation of Shlomo ibn Gabirol’s Poem *Shokhnei batei ḥomer*

The recently discovered Karaim translation of a poem by the eleventh-century Jewish poet from al-Andalus, Shlomo ibn Gabirol, reveals cultural contacts between the Polish-Lithuanian Karaite (Karaim) community and the rabbinic Jewish milieu. The poem *Shokhnei batei ḥomer* (“O dwellers in houses of clay”), reflecting on the vanity of earthly life, can be found in the tradition of Eastern Jewry primarily as a lament recited on the Ninth of Av, as well as a component of funeral ceremonies. Its translation into Karaim Turkic, beginning with the words *Adam bilip ki topraqsan*, is found in two manuscript prayer books. One of these probably dates from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was produced in the territory of Lithuania; the other was written by the well-known copyist and translator Joshua Joseph Mordkowicz of Halicz (1802-1884).

In the first manuscript, the authorship of the poem is erroneously credited to another rabbinic poet, Shlomo ben Mazal Tov, who lived in the sixteenth century, and it is stated that the translation into Polish was done by Zerah ben Natan of Troki (1578–1657/8). The second manuscript does not name the translator, however, it correctly identifies the author of the Hebrew original as Shlomo ibn Gabirol. In both manuscripts, the poem is placed in a section containing elegiac or mourning compositions, suggesting it served a similar role in ritual practice as among Eastern Jews.

The presentation will address the question of the translation's authorship, its linguistic and stylistic features, and the possible circumstances under which this poem might have found its way into prayer books of Polish-Lithuanian Karaites.

Anna Sulimowicz-Keruth, ThD, Assistant Professor at the Department of Turkology and Peoples of Inner Asia of the Faculty of Asian and African Studies, University of Warsaw. Her research focuses on the history, language and culture of Eastern European Karaites. From 2019 to 2024, she was a member of the research team of the project "KaraimBIBLE. A new approach to unedited Biblical manuscripts as sources for the early history of the Karaim language" funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and conducted at the Language Documentation Center of the Faculty of Philology at the Jagiellonian University. As Vice-Chairwoman of the Association of Polish Karaites and member of the Board of the Karaim Heritage Foundation, she engages in socio-cultural activities in support of the Karaite minority in Poland.

Kasparas Svitojus, Vilnius University

Ainu Representation in Japanese Cinematography

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the identity of the Ainu is depicted and represented in Japanese cinematography and how their autochthony is conveyed, how these representations have developed in response to changing societal attitudes and the political context, whether these images are authentic, respectful and help to understand Ainu heritage and culture better. Tasks - review the historical situation of the Ainu in Japan; describe the historical development of the Ainu Representation in Japanese cinematography, paying attention to trends and changes and the interaction with the social change of the situation of the Ainu; analyse how and which narratives are used related to Ainu and Ainu culture in Japanese cinematography; to explore how narratives in Japanese cinema shape the image of Ainu identity and Ainu culture. Using structural narrative and visual analyses of the films and anime *The Dagger of Kamui* (1985), *Unforgiven* (2013), *Golden Kamuy* (2018 – present) and *Ainu Mosir* (2020), it is concluded that Ainu representation in Japanese cinema has varied with changing social and political context. In earlier films such as *The Dagger of Kamui* and *Unforgiven*, the Ainu are presented as "other", often exoticized and portrayed in simplistic stereotypes. In these films, one can see a shift from rejecting hybrid identities and promoting the idea of assimilation, to highlighting and embracing hybrid identities. The analysis also showed that while the Ainu are already recognised as autochthonous in Japan, recent works such as *Golden Kamuy* and *Ainu Mosir* are moving towards a more accurate and comprehensive depiction of the Ainu culture. New representations help to normalize the presence of the Ainu in the Japanese narrative. Today's Ainu problems are brought to the fore, and cultural resistance to the dominant culture can be seen. This paper can be useful for scholars who plan to analyze how marginalized communities are represented in cinematography, how representations evolve in response to changing societal attitudes, and how they convey communities' indigeneity.

Kasparas Svitojus is a PhD student in Ethnology at the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies, Vilnius University. He completed his master's degree in Modern Asian Studies at Vilnius University. His research focuses on Ainu studies and the representation of indigenous peoples in cinematography.

Raffaele Torella, Sapienza University of Rome

Of the Beginnings, the Ends, the Intermediate Spaces

Why should the incompleteness of something, in this case of an emotion, elicit a stronger aesthetic reaction than its completeness? Or, to put it in more general terms, why is the moment in which something is being born or near to extinction felt as more vivid or powerful than the stage of its full existence? Since, at least to my knowledge, we cannot find an answer in the *Alaṃkāra* texts of pre-modern India, we should look for one in the philosophical-religious texts, especially those belonging to nondual Śaivism of Kashmir, where a particularly keen attention is paid to subtle nuances of human emotions as well as to their spiritual significance.

Raffaele Torella is Emeritus Professor of Sanskrit at Sapienza University of Rome, where he has also taught for years “Indian Religions and Philosophies” and “Indology”. From 2010 to 2020 Director of *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*. From 2015 to date President of the Italian Association for Sanskrit Studies.

Main publications:

- Three treatises by Vāmanadatta: *Samvitprakāśa*, *Ātmasaptati*, *Vikalpavipplava*. Critical edition and annotated translation, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Wien (forthcoming)
- (with G. Boccali, M. Sacha) *Eros, passioni, emozioni nella civiltà dell'India*, Carocci Ed.: Rome 2023
- (ed.) *Italian Scholars on India. Vol. I. Classical Indology*, MLBD: Delhi 2021.
- *The Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikā of Utpaladeva with the Author's Vṛtti*, MLBD: Delhi repr. 2021
- *Il pensiero dell'India: un'introduzione*, Roma repr. 2020 (Engl. Tr. *The Philosophical Traditions of India: an Appraisal*, Indica Books: Varanasi 2011).
- (with B. Bäumer), *Utpaladeva, Philosopher of Recognition*, DK: Delhi 2016.
- *Gli Aforismi di Śiva con il commento di Kṣemarāja*, Adelphi: Milano 2013.

Selected articles can be downloaded from <https://www.uniroma1.academia.edu/raffaeletorella>

Joanna Tuczyńska, University of Warsaw

Tagore's Bengali Transcreation of the *R̥gveda* 7.89.2-4: *Rasa-Dhvani* in a Cognitive Framework

The paper cognitively analyzes Tagore's transcreation of the *R̥gveda* 7.89.2-4 into the Bengali *kīrtana* (devotional song): *Yadi jharer megher mato* (If like a storm cloud). The research reconstructs the transcreation framework based on Abhinavagupta's *Rasa-Dhvani* theory (flavour suggestion), drawn from Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Science of Drama) and Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* (Light of Suggestion). The research goal is to prove that the intertextual mythic context of the *R̥gvedic* Hymns was synthesized in the transcreation medium of metaphorical concepts, building a frame-constructed target text. The Conceptual Blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) was employed to reconstruct the transcreation process.

The *dhvani* context in the Sanskrit source text is very complex and multilayered in its structure, however, the most significant is the key concept constituting the metaphorical context that triggers *dhvani* layers in the transcreation process. Tagore recognizes this potential in the multilayered context of *ḍṛti* (leather container), which metaphorically evokes a cloud and intertextually refers to a honey bag. (RV 5.83.7; RV 4.45.3; cf. Bhattacharya 2008, 317) He deconstructs its original *dhvani* context and reconstructs it through an analogical suggestion rooted in the Bengali *Vaiṣṇava* tradition. He transforms the *ḍṛti* from the source text into a frame constructed image of a cloud placed in the metaphorical context of *cañcal-antar* (restless heart) and a honey container, metaphorically

evoked by *sudhāy hrday* (heart (filled) with nectar). The *dhvani* context is developed within a transformational metaphorical context that evolved from cloud-heart into nectar-heart, from restlessness into bliss, from alienation in *viraha* (separation) to union through *bhakti* (devotion). Tagore transforms rain into nectar across the time-space of ancient India and his contemporary Bengal, through Sanskrit mantras and Bengali *kirtanas*, adapting the source text to the target audience and bridging the Ṛgvedic and *Vaiṣṇava* traditions through *bhakti-rasa*. The flavour of devotion is recreated through the multilayered structure of the *dhvani* context, where the metaphorical image of the heart to be filled with nectar implies awaited communion with the divine.

The analysis of Tagore's transcreation of the Ṛgvedic Hymns 7.89.2-4 reconstructs the cognitive framework of the *dhvani* context that shapes the conceptual structure of the target text. Tagore follows the Sanskrit tradition, which aimed to appeal to the audience through *rasa* in the process of creation, recreation and transcreation. Hence, the poet, through the key concept of the source text serving as the transcreation medium, synthesizes the original conceptual network and conveys the original *rasa* through a *dhvani* context adapted to the audience of his times. The analysis proves that even intracultural translation between closely related languages is a dynamic process in the context of the time gap. The research also highlights the correspondence between the *Rasa-Dhvani* theory and the cognitive theory of Conceptual Blending in the transcreation process.

Joanna Tuczyńska is a scholar of Indian culture, with a particular focus on Bengali literature and language. Her research focuses on Rabindranath Tagore and the influence of the Ṛgveda, the Upaniṣads and Buddhism on his work. She is the author of many articles in the field of Bengali literature, cognitive linguistics and translation studies. She is currently pursuing a PhD in linguistics, cognitively examining the self-transcreation of Tagore's Bengali poetry.

Lidia Tuwalska-Napiórkowska, University of Warsaw

Bridging the Gap between 'Old Grammar' and 'New Language' through Linguistics: The Case of Teaching the Shwa in Modern Hebrew

The shift in focus of modern language instruction from traditional grammar to communication- and usage-oriented methods is undoubtedly the most desirable direction in language teaching. However, this approach has led to a significant reduction in historical and grammatical content, measured against effectiveness in communication or the quality of students' writing. This is reflected in teaching materials which often fail to provide accessible grammatical explanations. A case in point is the diacritic mark called *shwa* in Hebrew, which is introduced at the very beginning of language courses, but without providing sufficient grammatical and historical context (e.g., in the most widely used textbooks *Hebrew from Scratch* and *Barosz U-wa-riszona*). Here, the *shwa* sign is presented as having two mutually exclusive values, i.e. it either stands for the full vowel /e/, or it is silent and represents no vowel. Consequently, beginner students of Modern Hebrew may experience confusion and a lack of linguistic confidence, which could negatively impact their learning process. The problem of *shwa* is, of course, extensively discussed in Hebrew grammar books. However, the lack of linguistic and grammatical context in the curriculum leaves such material incomprehensible to students. I would argue that simple transferring traditional grammatical theory does not remedy the situation, and that it is modern linguistics that should create the link between theory and modern language instruction.

Modern scholarly consensus holds that the *shwa* indicates an absence of phonological vowel and an optional epenthetic, depending on the sonority of the consonants (Khan 2013, Coffin and Bolozky 2005:22). Although this concept may be challenging for beginner Modern Hebrew students, I will demonstrate how relying on language economy and naturalness in speech production can bridge the gap between traditional grammar and language use. Drawing on Raub's approach of "idea > name > definition" (Dean 2022), I first illustrate the process of vowel reduction by referring to familiar examples from English, e.g.: cannot > can't, could not > couldn't. Next, I relate this process to the development of Hebrew, and ask the students to deduce the rule governing the nature of *shwa* by pronouncing different Hebrew words. Finally, we define *shwa* as a sign marking a former vowel that has been reduced and compare it to the English apostrophe. We determine its status in the morphophonological system. This demonstration provides the students with a concise, hands-on explanation of this complex grammatical phenomenon, supported by familiar and easy-to-remember examples. By including comparative studies and the laws of speech naturalness, I argue that Modern Hebrew can be studied and taught like other modern natural languages, rather than an exotic variety full of inexplicable residue from the past. Combining theory and linguistics with a focus on communication skills enables students to progress more efficiently in the initial stages of language learning. I am convinced similar challenges in teaching materials can be identified that in many rarer and less extensively studied languages of Asia and Africa. Thus, I contend that linguistics is a useful tool in a modern language instructor's kit.

Lidia Tuwalska-Napiórkowska holds a position at the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, where she combines teaching Modern Hebrew with her research interests in phonology, language contact and comparative Semitic studies. She also engages in fieldwork and documentation of the endangered varieties of Neo-Aramaic.

Magdalena Urbańska, University of Warsaw

Kanji Recognition in Stylised Graphies: Graphemic Competence of Japanese University Students as Illustrated by Yamanote Line Eki Sutanpu Case Study

This paper focuses on *kanji*, an inherent part of the Japanese writing system, and the level of their recognition in stylised graphies, which in this case are publicly available train station stamps from Yamanote Line in Tokyo, Japan. Although the line consists of 30 stations, and every single one has two or more kanji characters in its name, just one character from each name is transformed into a stamp graphy. 30 stamps can be divided into 9 morphological categories, depending on the level of interference into the character and its surroundings. 42 native Japanese university students aged 18-24 from Saitama Prefecture were selected as participants in the study. Every person was shown 30 station stamp graphies on a computer screen, and was asked to say which kanji character they see. The time limit for each graphy was 5 seconds. The study not only undermines the educational thought prevalent in the Japanese educational system, but also provides surprising insight into kanji recognition and asks where to draw a line between illustration and language.

Magdalena Urbańska, MA student from the Faculty of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw. Last academic year (2024/2025), she had the pleasure of being a recipient of JASSO scholarship and studying at Jōsai University in Japan. During the stay, she has conducted research for her MA thesis among Japanese university

students, and broadened her academic interests, which include Japanese writing system, graphemics, and graphic communication.

Marta Widy-Behiesse, University of Warsaw

Challenging the Harem Paradigm: Counter-visibility and the Reclaiming of Arab Women's Narrative Agency

The institution of the harem, its imagery, and the social roles ascribed to it in the West have, for centuries, shaped European perceptions of the construct known as the 'Orient' – a term that is broad and complex, yet primarily functions as a point of reference for the Occident. Representations of the harem have contributed to the construction of the Other – both Muslim women and men – depicting them through tropes of savagery, licentiousness, and excessive sensuality, in stark contrast to the Western ideals of rationalism and restraint.

This presentation critically examines how Western depictions of the harem have often been reductive and misleading. It further explores how contemporary artists from within Islamic civilization are reimagining representations of women, femininity, and the harem. By doing so, they challenge long-standing Orientalist narratives and reclaim agency in a discourse historically dominated by Western perspectives, as critiqued by Edward Said. The works of Lalla Essaydi, among others, as well as those of a younger generation – including Rania Matar and Fatima Mazmouz – will be analyzed. These artists engage with postcolonial and feminist discourse, employing artistic media such as photography, installation, and calligraphy as tools of resistance.

Through spatial composition, self-representation, and the integration of traditional and contemporary elements, these artists participate in a process of decolonization, subverting imposed visual paradigms and redefining the portrayal of Muslim women. The article argues that subversive photography serves as a form of counter-visibility, offering alternative images that challenge dominant power structures and reshape understandings of gender, identity, and cultural heritage within postcolonial discourse.

Marta Widy-Behiesse is Arabist and Islamologist, an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, University of Warsaw. She specializes in Arab-Muslims culture in Western Europe and the Maghreb, popular culture, and equality issues. A dedicated science popularizer, she has authored numerous academic articles and recently published the book *Muslim Feminists in the West*. She is affiliated with the Department of European Islam and the newly established Research Centre for the Culture and Art of Asia and Africa at the University of Warsaw. Additionally, she is a member of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies and Postcolonial Studies Association.

Jacek Woźniak, University of Warsaw

Nammālvār as the Recipient of Viṣṇu's Grace according to the *Ācāryahirutayam* by Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷapperumāḷ Nāyaṇār

Teṅkalai, or the Southern School of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindu tradition, recognized not only the Vedic sources in Sanskrit as authoritative but also the works of Tamil poets from the Bhakti period (ca. 6th-9th centuries). The acceptance of texts composed in a language other than Sanskrit, which was traditionally regarded as “the language of the gods,” was highly innovative in early medieval South India and held significant soteriological importance. It was accepted that the path to salvation can lead not only through the Vedic tradition expressed in Sanskrit but also through the hymns of Tamil poets, which can effectively help devotees achieve liberation and reach Viṣṇu.

Medieval theologians of the Teṅkalai school faced the challenging task of proving that Tamil poems had equal or even greater salvific value than the hymns of Vedic seers. They responded by producing numerous authentic theological treatises and commentaries on various religious works, in which they outlined their arguments and emphasized the importance of Tamil texts and the superiority of their authors over the Vedic seers. One of the most frequently referenced Tamil works was Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi*, known as the Tamil Veda.

This paper examines how Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷapperumāl Nāyaṇār (13th century), a renowned teacher of the Teṅkalai school, emphasizes the soteriological importance of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* by highlighting the concept of grace (*aruḷ*) that Nammālvār received from Viṣṇu, which made him superior to the Vedic sages.

In sūtras 58 and 94–98 of his treatise titled the *Ācāryahirutayam*, he describes grace as an act of divine gaze (*kaṭākṣam*), spontaneous and aimless, resulting from God's independent will (*svēccai*). Viṣṇu's choice of Nammālvār—tormented by the cycle of rebirths—reveals His compassion (*kāruṇiyam*) and concern for the world's welfare (*jakathitārttamāka*). Grace manifests as divine knowledge (*ñāṇam*), free from cognitive errors, leading to the highest form of devotion (*paramabhakti*). Thus Nammālvār becomes a model for others and a conduit of divine wisdom through his hymns of the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, which in Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition are considered equal to or even surpassing the Vedas. And one of the reasons for this, as Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷapperumāl Nāyaṇār argued, was the grace of Viṣṇu that was bestowed upon Nammālvār.

Jacek Woźniak's main research interests are in early medieval Vaiṣṇava literature in Tamil. He has written several articles on Tirumaṅkaiyālvār's poetry and a monograph on the theological importance of his hymns. He also studies modern Tamil literature and has published books on the works of Jayakanthan and Subramania Bharati.

Zafer Ayyaz, The Institute of Science and Wisdom, Frankfurt

The Institute of Science and Wisdom and International Qur'anic Exegesis Studies

This study presents the establishment, structure, and objectives of the Institute of Science and Wisdom, founded to coordinate an international project on the scientific exegesis of the Qur'an. Initiated in 2020 with the participation of scholars from five continents, the project brings together theologians and experts from natural, social, and human sciences to interpret the Qur'an through a multidisciplinary lens. Drawing upon classical and contemporary exegetical approaches, the paper explores how Qur'anic verses reflect scientific truths, particularly regarding environmental

phenomena such as pollution and ecological imbalance. The paper further delineates the institutional structure, methodological framework, and scholarly output of the institute, underscoring its distinctive contribution as a collective *tafsir* enterprise that seeks to bridge the realms of revelation and scientific inquiry.

Zafer Ayvaz received his B.Sc., M.Sc., and Ph.D. degrees from Ege University in İzmir, Turkey, where he also served as a Lecturer and Professor from 1972 to 2016. Throughout his career, Dr. Ayvaz has held esteemed academic positions internationally, including serving as the Founding Rector of Qafqaz University in Azerbaijan and as Co-Founder of the Institute of Science and Wisdom in Germany. He has also been a Researcher at Karlsruhe University in Germany, the Spokesman for the Foundation of Environmental Protection and Research in Turkey, and the Editor of *Ekoloji Environmental Magazine*. His academic interests include chemical engineering, environmental studies, migration, and Quranic studies. He has been residing in Poland since 2016.

Monika Zin, Leipzig University

A New Perspective on Tocharian Culture of Kucha

The long-term project ‘Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road’ at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, launched nine years ago, has not only stimulated research into Kucha, but has also led to some rather unanticipated results, which became apparent only through systematic examination of the finds and comparative analysis of different aspects of the culture. Amongst others, it has become apparent that the Sanskrit manuscripts found in the monasteries should not be offhandedly taken as the basis for the wall paintings. Local traditions transmitted in the native language or preserved in the reports of Chinese pilgrims played a prominent role, as did popular beliefs and protective magic. However, the role of prototypes from South Asia should not be underestimated. Several factors indicate that the local elites deliberately oriented their policies towards India, presumably in order to establish the kingdom’s independence among other peoples in the area and in the face of Chinese military power. The alignment with Indian prototypes led to the emergence of independent forms of expression such as the development of an unique visual language for conveying narrative content that goes way beyond the complexity of the Indian prototypes.

Monika Zin studied Art History, Indology and Dramatics at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (Poland) and the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich (Germany), where she finished her dissertation on the Plays from Trivandrum in 1991 and her habilitation on Ajanta paintings in 2000. Between 1994 and 2016 she taught Indian art history at the Institute for Indology in Munich, the Institute for Art History at Free University Berlin and the Institute for Indology and Central Asian Studies in Leipzig. Her research includes the monographs on Indian art: *Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings*. *Devotional and Ornamental Paintings* (2003), *Compassion and Miracles. Difficult conversions and their iconography in Indian Buddhism* (2006), both written in German (the English edition of the *Ajanta Handbook* is currently under preparation at the IGNCA), *The Kanaganahalli Stūpa* (2018) and *Samsāracakra. The Wheel of Rebirth in the Indian Tradition* (2022, together with Dieter Schlingloff). Since 2016 Prof. Zin leads the team of the Research Centre “Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road” at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig (Germany) and is co-editor of the *Leipzig Kucha Studies*. In this series appeared her *Representations of the Parinirvāṇa Story Cycle in Kucha* (2020), *Gods, Deities and Demons in the Paintings of Kucha* (2023) and *Essays and Studies in the Art of Kucha* (2020, together with Ines Konczak-Nagel). Monika Zin also published more than 100 articles on the identification of narrative art, dealing with Buddhist Art from South, Central, and Southeast Asia.

<https://www.saw-leipzig.de/de/mitarbeiter/zinm>

<https://uni-leipzig1.academia.edu/MonikaZin>