

# Proposal for a double session panel

**Title:** Sources for the study of asceticism in Southeast Asia

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**Abstract:**

The proposed panel will discuss the topics of asceticism and eremitism in Southeast Asia over the *longue durée* from a transdisciplinary point of view. We understand Hindu and Buddhist asceticism to comprise both an ideological dimension (its doctrine, value systems) as well as embodied and materialized practices. However, relatively little attention has hitherto been paid to the production of material culture related to ascetic activity. Traces of eremitic occupation such as rock-cut architecture, monumental epigraphs, sculpture, ritual objects or manuscripts have typically been found at scattered locations and have not yet benefited from broader/regional surveys.

It appears worthwhile to re-assess the role that these sources play in defining the complex relationships of integration between ascetic circles and their wider social *milieux*. This panel invites contributions from scholars whose work touches on some of these overarching issues:

- **Locating eremitism.** Combined with topographical details and toponyms contained in textual sources, archaeology can reveal distinctive patterns of eremitic settlement, thus lending visibility to previously undetected forms of occupations. What types of environment did seem to attract the development of eremitic activity? How did forms of materiality shape hermits' interactions with and differentiation from their natural and social environment? What were their relationships with state and non-state space and institutions?
- **Eremitic plural identities.** Inscriptions tend to portray ascetics as multifaceted social figures, appearing in turn as donors, land- and slaveowners or even poets. Are these representations substantiated by archaeological finds? In how far can the normative image of the recluse be reconciled with material witnesses to socio-economic activities? How has the materiality of extant heritage shaped popular narratives and ongoing myth-making about religious masters through collective memories?
- **Southeast-Asian connections.** In view of the great diversity of sources available for the study of eremitism across Southeast Asia, can we identify elements of commonality to write a history of asceticism in Southeast Asia? Or should we highlight local idiosyncrasies, grounded in the absorption of autochthonous elements? Further, how have images of the ascetic been discussed and recast to the present day, through national histories down to a postcolonial and globalized context?

Contributions will include case-studies dealing both with continental and maritime Southeast Asia, including Cambodia and Indonesia. They argue for the need to confront textual sources

with material culture to achieve a more balanced reconstruction of ascetics as social figures. Discussions aim at developing a theoretical framework for a transregional study of Hindu and Buddhist asceticism, in the context of the European project DHARMA.