



International workshop • Journée d'étude internationale

VOTIVE STAMPED CLAY OBJECTS THROUGHOUT THE BUDDHIST WORLD MATERIALS, TEXTS AND RITUALS

LES OBJETS VOTIFS EN ARGILE ESTAMPÉE À TRAVERS LE MONDE BOUDDHIQUE MATÉRIAUX, TEXTES ET RITUELS



NOVEMBER 19, 2024 • 9:15 AM

GRAND SALON
MAISON DE L'ASIE
22 AVENUE DU PRÉSIDENT WILSON
PARIS 16^e

& ONLINE

Contact: www.seechac.org
contact@seechac.org



Photographs: Private Collections

International workshop organized by the SEECHAC, November 19, 2024

**Votive stamped clay objects throughout the Buddhist world:
materials, texts and rituals**

Since at least the Gupta period (3rd-6th century), impressions of Buddhist images have been made in clay, and often referred to as 'seals'. This stamping practice, which spread with Buddhism throughout Asia, remains an important part of the religious life of certain communities today. These objects, in the form of monuments in the round or historiated tablets, are commonly known as *tsha tsha* in Tibetan. They are produced as part of various rituals (obtaining karmic merit, funeral rites) and in varying quantities, from a single piece to hundreds of thousands.

This international study day will explore the material, textual and ritual dimensions of this ancient and protean Buddhist tradition.

Hybrid event.

The Zoom connection link will be available on request from contact@seechac.org.

Journée d'étude internationale organisée par la SEECHAC, le 19 novembre 2024

**Les objets votifs en argile estampée à travers le monde bouddhique :
matériaux, textes et rituels**

Depuis au moins l'époque Gupta (III^e-VI^e siècle), des impressions d'images bouddhiques sont réalisées en argile, et souvent désignées sous le terme de « sceaux ». Cette pratique d'estampage, qui s'est répandue avec le bouddhisme à travers toute l'Asie, reste aujourd'hui une composante importante de la vie religieuse de certaines communautés. Ces objets, sous forme de monuments en ronde-bosse ou de tablettes historiées, sont couramment appelés *tsha tsha* en tibétain. Ils sont produits dans le cadre de divers rituels (obtention de mérites karmiques, rites funéraires) et en quantités variables, allant d'une pièce unique à des centaines de milliers. Cette journée d'étude internationale explorera les dimensions matérielles, textuelles et rituelles de cette tradition bouddhique millénaire et protéiforme.

Évènement hybride.

Le lien de connexion Zoom sera disponible sur demande faite auprès de contact@seechac.org.

Programme

- 09:15-09:45 Arrival of participants - Coffee & tea
- 09:45-10:00 Welcoming remarks by Charles Ramble, President, SEECHAC
- 10:00-10:30 **Massimiliano A. Polichetti (Museo delle Civiltà, Rome)**
The Giuseppe Tucci tsha tsha collection kept at the Museum of Civilizations in Rome
(Zoom presentation)
- 10:30-11:00 **Valérie Zaleski (Musée Guimet, Paris)**
Votive tablets from China preserved in the Musée Guimet
- 11:00-11:30 **Liyang Kuo (EFEO, Paris)**
The making of Shanyeni 善業泥, “Clay of Good Karma” in Central Tang China and the ceremony of Yinsha fo 印沙佛, “Stamped Sand Buddha” in Dunhuang
- 11:30-12:00 **David C. Andolfatto (CRCAO, Paris)**
Of clay and bones. Archaeometric analyses of tsha tshas from the collections of the musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris.
- 12:00-14:00 Lunch break
- 14:00-14:30 **Erika Forte (Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University)**
Making sense of the sparse: What can we say about the production, circulation, and ritual use of clay votive plaques in the Tarim area?
- 14:30-15:00 **Anna Filigenzi (University of Naples “L’Orientale” / ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies)**
From models to models: Himalayan tsha tsha and their rhizomic connections with Uḍḍiyāna
- 15:00-15:30 **Christian Luczanits (SOAS, London)**
Painted Tsatsa in Painted Chörten
- 15:30-16:00 **Kunsang Namgyal Lama (INALCO, CESAH, Paris)**
Considerations on ancient depictions of stūpas on tsha tshas
- 16:00-16:30 Closing remarks by Anna Filigenzi, Vice-President, SEECHAC
- 16:30 Aperitif

David C. Andolfatto (CRCAO, Paris)

Of clay and bones. Archaeometric analyses of tsha tshas from the collections of the musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris.

Tsha tshas are created during Buddhist rituals or observances primarily aimed at accumulating merit. They can also be made for funerary purposes, in which case materials such as crushed bone fragments, ashes from a pyre, or nails can be incorporated into the clay during preparation. Easily transportable because of their small size, *tsha tshas* are nomadic objects that can be found in the collections of many museums. However, the precise contexts of origin of these museum objects remain largely unknown. Furthermore, the notices of certain artefacts indicate that they are made of clay and powdered human bone. This information implies a funerary purpose and, consequently, specific contexts of deposit depending on the cultural setting. It is therefore relevant to question whether archaeometric analyses can be used to verify the presence of human remains in *tsha tshas* and if it can tell us more about the contexts of manufacture, deposit, and collection.

This presentation will share the results of non-invasive examinations made on *tsha tshas* from the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris. These analyses include radiology (tomodensitometry), 3D microscopy, scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and X-ray fluorescence.

Anna Filigenzi (University of Naples “L’Orientale” / ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies)

From models to models: Himalayan tsha tsha and their rhyzomic connections with Uḍḍiyāna

The connections between Uddiyana and Tibet (and, by extension, the neighbouring regions) have long remained confined to the non-place of mythicised stories of a purely literary nature, which still struggle to interweave on an equal footing with other source systems. In particular, there still seems to be little room for comparison with archaeological sources, admittedly for different reasons. Archaeology, understood as the acquisition of historical knowledge based on material signs of all kinds left on a given territory by human societies and their interactions with the environment, takes a long time. Not unlike textual sources, archaeological sources can be patchy and random, and the transformation of material data into historical information is a slow process that requires, as with written sources, qualitative and quantitative validations. However, as far as the Uḍḍiyāna is concerned, archaeological research today can provide elements for comparison and integration with written sources, provided that our use of both fields of investigation takes into account the fact that the margins of overlap are by their nature imprecise and that we refrain from epistemically assuming the primacy of text over object.

Although not unanimously accepted, the identification of the Uḍḍiyāna with Swat or with a wider area centred on Swat, finds firm archaeological confirmation. This allows us to consider the Buddhist art produced in Swat and neighbouring regions in the second half of the 1st millennium, and particularly between the 7th and 8th centuries, as the most direct bridge to the

beginnings and developments of Himalayan Buddhist art. Indeed, studies based on archaeological data have progressively shortened the distances between the two worlds, revealing common repertoires of visual forms. Within this framework, although traces of the existence of objects equivalent to what we know as tsha tsha are tenuous in Swat and its environs, more substantial are the traces of rhizomic processes of transmission, reception and transformation of patterns which also invest the tradition of small votive plaques.

Erika Forte (Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University)

Making sense of the sparse: What can we say about the production, circulation, and ritual use of clay votive plaques in the Tarim area?

Stamped votive clay objects, including miniature stūpas and plaques, became prominent in Mahāyāna Buddhist practices across Asia, first emerging in the Indian subcontinent around the 7th century CE. This tradition subsequently spread to Tibet, where clay image molding became essential to Buddhist rituals by the 10th and 11th centuries. While these objects were also found in Central Asia, evidence from this region remains limited. In the Buddhist sites of the Tarim region, documentation on the use of stamped clay votive objects is scarce and fragmented, indicating they may have played a marginal role there.

This perceived marginality is likely due to the limited attention these objects have received in academic studies, often viewed as minor compared to sculpture and painting. This paper reviews the available evidence from the Tarim Basin region, focusing on information derived from archaeological excavation reports. By examining this material, the paper aims to enhance understanding of the production, circulation, and use of stamped votive clay objects in the region.

Liying Kuo (EFEO, Paris)

The making of Shanyeni 善業泥, “Clay of Good Karma” in Central Tang China and the ceremony of Yinsha fo 印沙佛, “Stamped Sand Buddha” in Dunhuang

The making of molded *caityas* (small stūpas) and tablets of Buddhist images in clay by Indian monks in India is well described by the two Chinese pilgrim scholar monks, Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) and Yijing 義淨 (635-713). It is known that in central China, during the 7th - 9th centuries, Buddhist monks and laity literati persons also used to make the votive tablets to earn merit for their deceased masters and parents. Nevertheless, it was only from an unexpected discovery that the small tablets of Chinese molded clay images were named.

In 1839, a scholar and antiques enthusiast, named Liu Yanting 劉燕庭 unexpectedly discovered many of these Buddhist tablets in Xi'an, at the famous Cien 慈恩寺 monastery where Xuanzang undertook his great translation of the Buddhist Canonical scriptures. Liu's collection was published in 1877. Inscriptions on some of these tablets provide valuable information. Thus, we discover that Datang Shanyeni 大唐善業泥, “Clay [to receive] good karma of the Great Tang” was the name given to some votive tablets. This is the first time in Chinese history that these votive objects made of stamped clay have been found to be referred to as Shanyeni, or ‘Clay of good karma’. The name Shanyeni was not known in Chinese literature before 1877.

Twenty Dunhuang manuscripts provided another insight into the production of clay *stūpas* and tablets that depict the Buddha's image in moulded clay. These are the prayers composed during the celebration of the ceremony named Yinshafo 印沙佛 "Buddha of Stamped Sand". The dates of these texts vary from the 9th to the 10th century, in the Tibetan period and that of the Cao family 曹. The celebration takes place, notably on the supposed date of the birth of the Buddha (the 8th day of the 2nd month), on the new year's day and the changing date of the season. It consists of releasing the *stūpa* (*tuota* 脱塔) and the effigy of Buddha (*tuofu* 脱佛) from the matrix, and stamping the mould on the sand at the banks of the Dang 宕河 river near the site of Mogao grottoes. Despite the years, some of these moulded clay *stūpas* and Buddha image tablets are still found deposited or decorating the walls of the Dunhuang caves.

Christian Luczanits (SOAS, London)

Painted Tsatsa in Painted Chörten

Following the tracks of Giuseppe Tucci in my early research in the 1990ies, *chörten* and *tsha tsha* have been one of my research interests from the outset. In Ladakh, I spent considerable time trying to document early *chörten* and their content, in particular between Nyarma and Tikse as well as Stok. In the end, I decided not to publish anything about this research, as I did not want to encourage further disturbance to these sites.

Now with some of those sites published by others, I will use this conference to review the research done and that time under the perspective of providing a context for the documented *tsha tsha* and their usage. Of special interest are a few painted *tsha tsha* and their usage within painted *chörten*.

Kunsang Namgyal Lama (INALCO, CESAH, Paris)

Considerations on ancient depictions of stūpas on tsha tshas

The *stūpa* forms depicted on ancient *tsha tshas* from the western margins of the Tibetan plateau show a diverse range of architectural features. Some of these closely resemble models related to the eight types of *stūpas* associated with major events in the Buddha's life.

This paper explores to what extent some of these architectural forms serve as relevant sources for understanding the emergence and development of the eight *stūpa* types.

Massimiliano A. Polichetti (Museo delle Civiltà, Rome) - Online presentation

The Giuseppe Tucci tsha tsha collection kept at the Museum of Civilizations in Rome

The international scientific community widely recognises the historical role played by the former Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci' (from 2016 part of the Museum of Civilizations in Rome) in the protection, study and conservation of works of Asian and particularly of Himalayan art.

The Himalayan collections of the Museum mainly consist of paintings on cloth (*thang ka*), statues in metallic alloys, clay votive offerings (*sa tsha tsha*), wall paintings, furnishings and

ritual objects, in addition to jewellery, architectural wooden elements and parts of furniture. The *sa tsha tsha* collection kept at the Museum of Civilizations in Rome were collected by Giuseppe Tucci during his numerous field expeditions; in my opinion, this collection constitutes one of the most important in the world for this type of artefact, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

During the ppt presentation, a few dozen of these *cretulae* will be shown to at least give an idea of their beauty and importance.

Valérie Zaleski (Musée Guimet, Paris)

Votive tablets from China preserved in the Musée Guimet

The votive tablets from China held by the Musée Guimet came to the museum mainly through donations and following the Pelliot mission. Despite their limited number and the random nature of their presence in the museum's collections, they reflect certain aspects of the history and practices of Buddhism in China and its journey. Through the few examples available, this contribution will attempt to outline some of these peculiarities, which are much better known through the great statuary or paintings than through these small ex-votos.

contact@seechac.org

