

DEPARTMENT FÜR ASIENSTUDIEN
INSTITUT FÜR INDOLOGIE UND TIBETOLOGIE

Wir laden ein

zu einem Vortrag von

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Harvard University

über

Letters and Literization

Montag, 01.07.2019

18 Uhr c.t.

Ludwigstr. 31, 4. Stock, Raum 427

The story of traditional learning being “committed to writing” in South Asia, as it is usually told, focuses on events rather than processes, and depicts the transition as merely technological, rather than indexing a major shift in values. But communities adopted the technology of writing in distinct ways, reflecting different configurations of preexisting attitudes and different appreciations of the possibilities that writing might open up. The spread of manuscript literacy was a highly differentiated, and often highly contested, process, which gave a very specific form to both individual traditions of learning and South Asian manuscript culture as a whole. This presentation will focus on one aspect of this process: the **letter** (**lēkhaḥ** or **lēhō**, lit. “writing”) as a vector of manuscript literacy. I will discuss briefly (pun intended) the Buddhist genre of the “epistle,” but I will focus on relatively underappreciated Jain sources, namely, the origin story of the **Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgamah** (**Tradition in Six Pieces**), and the prominent role of letters in Pālitta’s verse romance, **Taraṅgavaī**. The story of the **Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgamah** shows letter-writing to be a forerunner of the literization of traditional learning, and in **Taraṅgavaī**, letter-writing reflects a particular form of textuality — literate, expressive, and disembodied — which characterizes the romance itself, in contrast to the oral, dogmatic, and embodied form associated with traditional learning.