

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)  
announces a Lecture  
by

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## **Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa (India): An Exercise in Digital Contextual Epigraphy**

Compared to other cultures of the written word, India arrives on the scene rather late, when in the 3rd century bce emperor Aśoka creates out of nothing an epigraphical tradition, ordering his edicts to be engraved on monumental stone pillars and on rocks that occupy dominant positions in the landscape, both in the valley of the Ganges and at the extremities of the Indian subcontinent. To do so, he first had to create his own writing system: Brāhmī. Over the following centuries, this Indian epigraphic tradition and the Brāhmī writing system spread all over South Asia. They reached Central Asian and Southeast Asia in the early centuries ce.

In my lecture, I will focus on one of the successors to the Aśokan epigraphic tradition, that of ancient Āndhradeśa, corresponding to the present Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, a territory dominated by large rivers draining into the Bay of Bengal. It is on the banks of these rivers that is born in about the first century bce a rich culture of monumental religious architectures, of sculpture, of coinage and of engraving texts on stone. These cultural practices were nourished to a certain degree by contacts, particularly intensive in the early centuries of our era, with the Mediterranean world, but even more so by Buddhism. It was also from the deltas of these same rivers that Buddhism and the epigraphic habit associated with it were disseminated a few centuries later to Burma, in a movement that accompanies the disappearance of Buddhism from this part of India, and announces profound changes in local epigraphic practices.

Since 2015, I have been leading a team of scholars working on the 'Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa', aiming to document the complete epigraphic corpus from the beginning till about 600 ce, through extensive surveys in the field and in museums, and to publish this epigraphic material online, giving more attention than was possible in the past to the material aspects of the inscription-bearing objects. I will present the present state of our online epigraphic corpus, sketch some of the problems we are facing, and the road ahead.

**Thursday, 16 November 2017 at 6 pm**  
**Room 0001, CSMC**