universität wien
Institut für Südasien-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde

EurAsia
EURASIAN TRANSFORMATIONS

Public Lecture

SAM VAN SCHAIK

Endangered Archives Programme,
British Library

PADMASAMBHAVA: MYSTIC AND SORCERER

A LOOK AT THE MAGICAL SPELLS ASSOCIATED WITH PADMASAMBHAVA IN BARI LOTSAWA'S GRIMOIRE

Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, is revered in Tibet as the second Buddha, and credited with firmly establishing Buddhism in the region. His legendary life story tells of his teaching the highest tantric meditation practices and the immediate approach of the Great Perfection (dzogchen), as well as his travels across Tibet concealing hidden treasures (terma) for future generations. This talk explores a different side of Padmasambhava, as a sorcerer and teacher of magical spells. These spells are found in one of the earliest books of spells, or grimoires, which is credited to the translator Bari Lotsawa (1040-1113), who in later life was the head of the Sakya school. They include rituals for curing illness, countering poison, destroying enemies, and even a recipe for a weapon to paralyze the threatening migo, a wild man or yeti. These spells complement the picture we have of Padmsambhava from the hagiographies and terma texts, and can perhaps help us understand how he came to pervade so thoroughly the cultures and practices of Tibet.

Sam van Schaik is Head of the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) at the British Library, where he oversees the work of EAP in funding projects to digitize and preserve archives and manuscripts at risk across the world. Before 2019 he was the Research Project Manager for the International Dunhuang Programme (IDP), an international digital cooperation focused on Silk Road collections across the world. Here he led several major research projects including the ERC Synergy project Beyond Boundaries: Region, Religion, Language and the State. His books include Tibet: A History (2011), Tibetan Zen (2015), The Spirit of Tibetan Buddhism (2016) and Buddhist Magic (2020).

Thursday,
26 Nov 2026, 17:30

Seminar room 1,
Dept. of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies,
University Campus,
Spitalgasse 2, Entrance 2.7
1090 Vienna

Scan &
Save the Date

Scan &
Stay Updated



Image: Padmasambhava, "Looks Like Me" statue, no longer extant (photographer unknown, colourised image of the original black and white photograph)