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AS MANY PEBBLES, SO MANY SHIVAS

Encounters and Reflections at Lakhamandal

This talk postulates that Lakhamandal village is a crucial site for understanding how artisanal intelligence, material agency, ritual technology, and transregional connections contributed to the emergence of the Himalayas as a sacred landscape. Located near an intersection of the Uttarapatha route and the Yamuna River in the Himalayas, Lakhamandal attracted individuals from diverse lands as early as the second century CE. Some brought lingas with them. Eventually, the village drew sculptors equally interested in how objects were made and what they meant. Encouraged by ritual specialists and supported by sovereigns, they shaped scores of lingas and edifices. Alongside they explored properties of rocks, studied effects of water on various surfaces, gauged potentials of chiseling and construction techniques, played with notions of finish and created engaging, even transformative experiences. In their zealous melding of materials and messages, these sculptors extended and deepened the efforts of agents who were active elsewhere and were trying to institutionalize Shivaism. These agents were probing relationships between the physical forms of signs and ideas expressed in them, classifying lingas, listing their locations, weaving myths into lucid narratives, and amalgamating doctrines. Cumulatively, these groups carved out a landscape where there were as many Shivas as pebbles («jitne kankar utne shankar«).

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INSTITUT FÜR SÜDASIEN-, TIBET- UND BUDDHISMUSKUNDE // Seminarraum 1

AAKH, Hof 2.7 // Spitalgasse 2–4 // WIEN 1090