

Birds and Deer in Tibet and the Himalayas: from ancient Tibetan rituals and archaeology to sustainable development

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Vortrag im Rahmen des Forschungskolloquiums

2. Dezember 2022, 14.15 - 15.45 Uhr

Institut für Religionswissenschaft, Lerchenweg 36, Raum S 113



The research project "Birds and Deer in Tibet" (2023-2024) explores from an art-historical and historical perspective how people on the Tibetan plateau dealt with wildlife. Already during the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th century), rock carvings document hunting practices. Archaeological artefacts in silver, gold, wood and textiles represent birds and deer among funerary offerings. Tibetan manuscripts



from Dunhuang document deer and birds as vehicles and/or guides for the dead. Birds and deer are thus considered to be auspicious creatures, capable of bringing good fortune to the beholder of the animal /bird when represented on a vessel or if a fabric, to the wearer of a garment. The attitudes towards birds and deer documented in this early period of Tibetan history subsequently led, through the influence of the Bon religion and Buddhism, to a consistent, sustainable approach to the treatment of wildlife, which continues to influence animal welfare movements in Tibet and the Himalayas today. This project thus contributes to the University of Bern's priority theme of "Sustainability". The project is supported by funds from the "David Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski" Fund of the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Tring (UK), generously made available to the Institute of Religious Studies.