



We are pleased to announce the next Friends of the Kern Institute lecture:

Sacred Serpents of the Mekong: Nāga Myths and Magic in Contemporary Thailand
by dr. Saran Suebsantiwongse

Date : Wednesday, October 15, 2025

Time : 16.00h

Venue : Leiden University, **Herta Mohr Building, room 1.78**. The lecture will be followed by **drinks** in the LIAS common room of the same Herta Mohr Building (first floor).

Abstract

Nāgas occupy a central place in Thailand's mythology, religion, and art. Originating in Indian Buddhist and Hindu traditions, they have been reshaped through local animist beliefs and Theravāda Buddhist practice. In Thai contexts, Nāgas serve as guardians of sacred spaces, symbols of fertility, and powerful beings who can grant blessings or inflict harm. Pāli and Thai literature classify them into four families, each with distinct powers and domains. Their presence remains strong in temple architecture, royal ceremonies, protective chants, yantras and sacred tattoos, where they are believed to embody transformative and protective power.

This lecture will explore the widespread presence of Nāgas within the spiritual, cultural, and artistic life of contemporary Thailand, with a special focus on the Mekong region. Moving between mythology, ritual practice and material culture, it examines how these sacred beings continue to shape landscapes, identities, and beliefs, highlighting the resilience of Nāga traditions in both religious contexts and everyday life.

Saran Suebsantiwongse holds a PhD in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Cambridge and a Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art from SOAS. His research focuses on the material culture of South and Southeast Asia in relation to Sanskrit texts and epigraphy. He is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Material and Visual Culture of Southeast Asia under the ERC's PURANA Project at Leiden University.

