



Fabulous Creatures and Auspicious Symbols

A Farewell Symposium in Honour of Ellen Raven

Date: Tuesday 24 May 2022

Location: Leiden University, LIPSIUS building, room 019

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Gods, humans and animals are not the only living creatures in Indian imagination. Various more-than-human creatures populate different levels of the cosmos, some demonic and dangerous (Rākṣasas, Piśācas, Vetālas), others more akin to fairies (Gandharvas, Apsarases, Vidyādharas). Many of these fabulous creatures belong to the common heritage of Indian cultures and they transcend religious boundaries. They can be found in the most ancient texts as well as in late mediaeval works. They also decorate the walls, pillars and images of Buddhist, Jain and Hindu sacred compounds, although there is much uncertainty about the exact identification of such creatures in art-historical literature and names given to them are not always consistent.

Ellen Raven's lifelong research and teaching at Leiden University commenced with one such creature, the fabulous Garuḍa, described by Jorge Luis Borges in his wonderful *Book of Imaginary Beings* as "half vulture and half man, with the wings, beak, and talons of the one and legs of the other." To celebrate Ellen Raven's achievements as a scholar and teacher this symposium aims to shed light on the multiple meanings, roles, and identities of such fabulous creatures and related auspicious symbols, whether they appear in a text, in stone, or in the sky.

Programme

Morning

- 9.30-10.00 Walk-in, coffee/tea
- 10.00-10.15 Opening, welcome, introduction
- 10.15-10.45 Peter Bisschop: Amṛta, Śrī and Talking Jewels: Churning Fabulous Products from the Milk Ocean
- 10.45-11.15 Anna Ślaczka: Depictions of Bhṛṅgin and Other Three-Legged Beings in Indian Art
- 11.15-11.45 Coffee/tea
- 11.45-12.15 William Southworth: The Evolution of the *Kala* or Monster-Head in Champa and Its Relations to China and Central Java
- 12.15-12.45 Elizabeth Cecil: Pot-Bellied and Pot-Born: Visualizing Brahmanical Auspiciousness through Temple Art

Afternoon

- 14.15-14.45 Sasha Lubotsky: The *āyudha-puruṣas* at the Viṣṇu temple in Deogarh
- 14.45-15.15 Fan Lin: Washing Elephant: An Invented Buddhist Tradition in Late Imperial China
- 15.15-15.45 Coffee/tea
- 15.45-16.15 Jonathan Silk: Disneyland Audio-Animatronics *avant la lettre*: Birds in Amitābha's Pure Land
- 16.15-16.45 Marijke Klokke: Kinnaras and Kalaviṅkas: Hybrid Human-Bird Creatures and Their Encounter on Borobudur
- 17.00-18.30 Reception (Vrieshof 3, basement)



Images: British Museum, 1940,0713,0.26