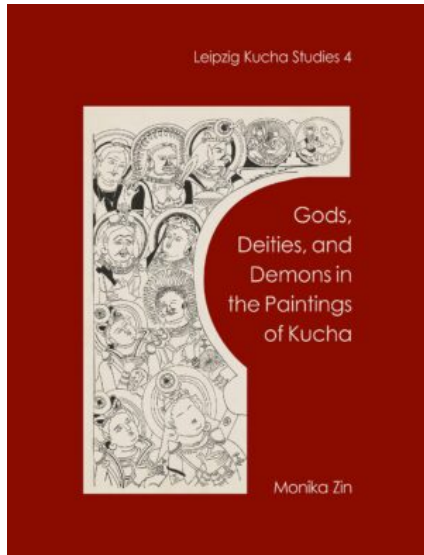


Gods, Deities, and Demons in the Paintings of Kucha (Leipzig Kucha Studies 4)



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About the Book

This book changes our perspective on the paintings in the Buddhist caves of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road (today's Xinjiang Province, an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China) by showing the important role spirit-deities – both benevolent and malevolent – and demonic iconography in general played in the pictorial programmes of the caves. The Kucha paintings show things that were never popular in South Asia: demons attacking the Buddha, but also worshipping him. The message is clear: they are all controlled by the Buddha. Whether these numerous renditions are merely generic apotropaic images, or rather a reaction to an actual threat by the Huns remains an open question.

The Kucha painters were familiar with the iconography of Viṣṇu and Śiva, although we do not know how they understood them: endowed with demonic attributes, the two Indian gods appear among the demons. Furthermore, in some cases, iconographical patterns such as nāgas shown anthropomorphically but with snakes behind the head were adopted from South Asia, while other iconographical models, such as the kumbhāśas, were thoroughly reinvented: thus, the kumbhāśas of Kucha are bald. This book deals with representations of deities and demons as decorative elements in the caves but also in the context of narrative illustration. It is indeed surprising how many of such narratives were depicted in Kucha. Obviously, knowledge of Sanskrit can be detected as Sanskrit names were sometimes taken literally and rendered figuratively. For example, there is not just one Kumbhakarṣa but a whole class of demons shown with pots instead of ears, and the gandharva Pañcāśikha is always presented with five tops on his head.

The book contains 161 colour figures and 441 drawings in the text (most of them by the author), which make the often poorly preserved paintings accessible even to the untrained reader.

About the Author

Prof. Monika Zin is the head of the research group “Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road” at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig. She studied literature, art history and Indology in Krakow and Munich, where she taught the art of South and Central Asia for 25 years. She is the author of books on Ajanta (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, Delhi: Munshiram, 2003) and Kanaganahalli (Delhi: Aryan, 2018). In 2022, she published *Saṃsāracakra, The Wheel of Rebirths in the Indian Tradition* (Delhi: Dev), which she co-authored with Dieter Schlingloff. Zin has contributed to numerous studies on Buddhist narrative art, ranging from Kucha in Central Asia to Borobudur on Java. For the series “Leipzig Kucha Studies”, which she co-edits with Eli Franco, she has hitherto authored a study on the representations of the First Council in Kucha paintings (LKS 1) and the monograph *Representations of the Parinirvāṇa Story Cycle in Kucha* (LKS 2).

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