



Wandering Religious Poets & Religious Poetry of Wandering WORKSHOP, Friday May 5 2017

Wandering religious poets can be found in a variety of cultures, ancient and modern. In India, for example, the wandering poet-saint plays an important role in real life as well as in the *imaginaire*. The wandering ascetic and saint has been the subject of both veneration and fear in Indian culture for more than a thousand years. We also have much ancient poetry dealing with religious wandering, where the author is unknown; there are, for example, many verses celebrating the solitary wandering ascetic in the Buddhist Pali canon. While travel has been a dire necessity for some poets, the journey functions as a spiritual quest or a pilgrimage for others. The process of spiritual awakening can also be presented as a journey in itself. In Tibet the wandering poet is a popular figure, communicating his/her insight through songs of experience to all kinds of people. The songs and life story of the twelfth century *yogin* Milarepa, epitomize this ideal. So does the great seventeenth-century Zen Buddhist poet Matsuo Basho, who wrote *haikus* about places he visited on his journeys. In many oral cultures wandering poets function as custodians of traditional lore and myths. The ancient Greek myths about Orpheus, poet and founder of sacred rites, reflect the importance of wandering poets for the development of pan-Hellenic traditions, and the fact that some poets have themselves become the subjects of myths and cults.

Richard Hunter & Ian Rutherford has edited a collection of articles on *Wandering Poets in Ancient Greek Culture* (2009), but a cross-cultural study of religious *poeti vaganti* has not, to our knowledge, been undertaken before. Questions such as the following could be discussed addressed:

- What is the role of the poet (as saint, ascetic, ritual specialist, and/or client); how can poet and poetry be situated within client-patron-relationships, friendship networks and communities?
- How does he/she - as an outsider - relate to local communities and/or sacred geography (pilgrimage)?
- What are the spiritual/religious aims of these wanderings? How are spiritual experiences expressed in poetry?
- How is the wandering lifestyle reflected in the poetry and what is its religious message?
- How have wandering poets contributed to the formation of common religious traditions and textual corpora (canons)?

- How have the prerequisites for this type of wandering poet changed, depending on social and historical circumstances?

We hereby invite scholars in the study of religions to participate in a one-day workshop for a small group of participants and present papers on the wandering religious poets and poetry. The aim of the workshop is to highlight the religious poet for whom wandering is a part of his/her lifestyle, as well as the (authorless) religious poetry, which has wandering as its subject, in different societies and periods of time, from ancient to modern. Professor emeritus **Per Kværne**, expert on Tibetan Bön religion and author of *An Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs: A Study of the Caryagiti* (1977), among other works, will be speaking at the workshop. We plan to consider the contributions for publication in a peer-reviewed book.

If you wish to participate, please submit your abstract by March 1 2017, at the latest. Please include a short presentation of your academic background and affiliation. Submit queries and proposals to:

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Image: Footprints of the Buddha, Gandhara.

