



Asien-Orient-Institut | Abteilung für Indologie

Claire Maes, University of Tübingen

The Emaciated Body: Contested Ideologies of Asceticism in Early India

Monday, November 10, 2025 | 6:00-7:30pm CET

This talk examines the emaciated ascetic body as a site of ideological contestation between Buddhists and Jains in ancient India. Through a critical comparison of early Buddhist and Jain portrayals of the emaciated ascetic body, it sheds new light on inter- and intra-religious debates about extreme asceticism, and the role of the body in attaining enlightenment. While both traditions provide vivid descriptions of severe emaciation, sometimes using similar metaphors, they often diverge sharply in their evaluations.



Claire Maes is Assistant Professor of Indology at the University of Tübingen. She earned her Ph.D. from Ghent University and held a Postdoctoral Fellowship from The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on Indian Buddhism and Jainism, and she is currently writing a monograph on the Jain practice of fasting to death (*sallekhanā*). Her recent publications include “Gossip and Rumour in the Pali Canon” (2025), “Anger and Defamation in the Theravāda Vinaya” (2024), and “*Sallekhanā* and the End-of-Life Option of Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking” (2023), recipient of the Bhagwan Kunthunath Award for the best research paper in Jainism in 2025.

*This talk is part of the lecture series **Embodiments of Truths: The Body and Ascetic Practices in Ancient Indian Traditions**, jointly conducted by the Department of Indology at the University of Tübingen, the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires, and the Centro de Estudios de Asia y África at El Colegio de México*

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