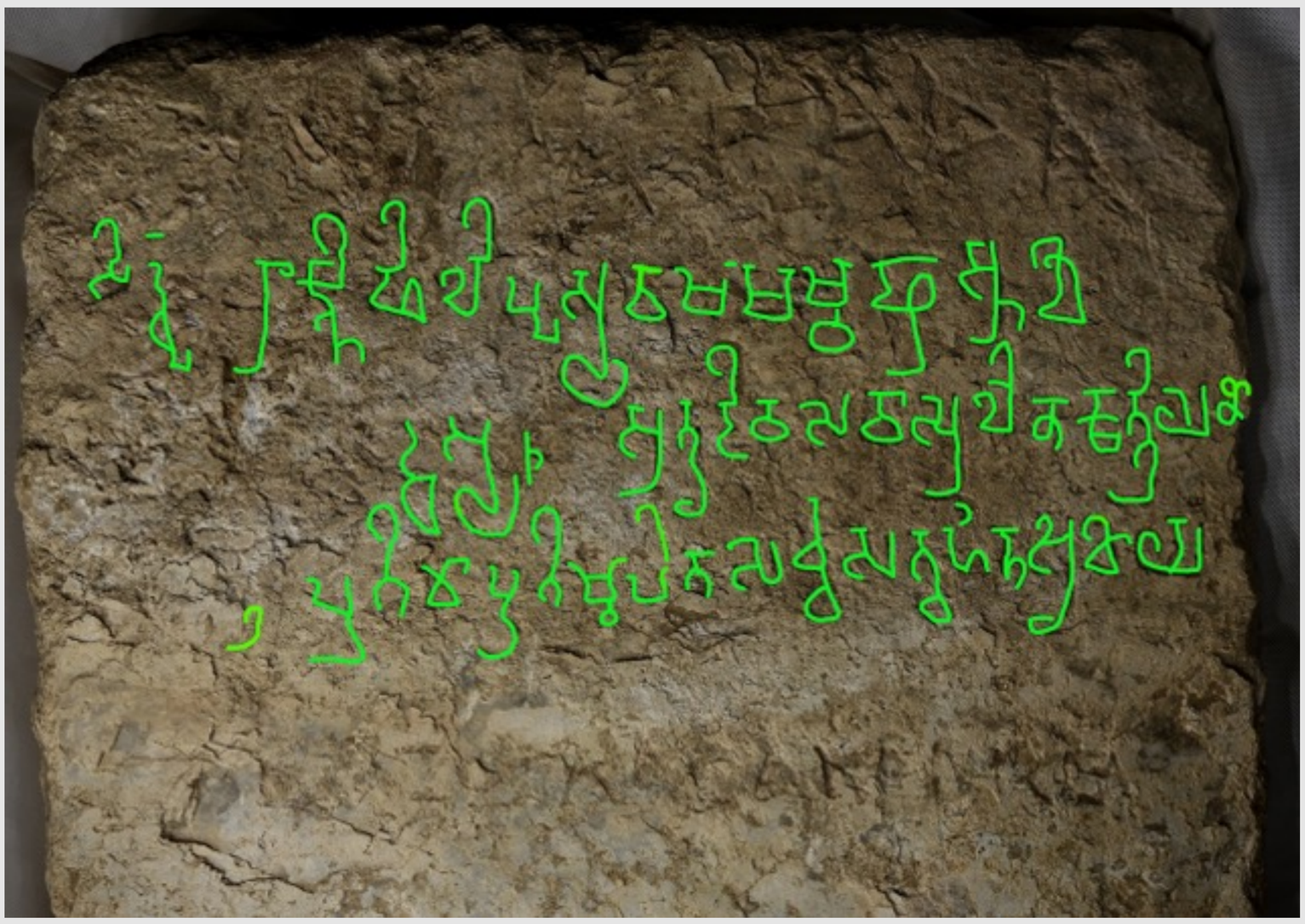
FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

The Gandhāra Corpora Project Lecture Series

THE GHENT CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES (GCBS) & GHENT CENTRE FOR SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES (GCSAS) PRESENTS:

A PUBLIC TALK BY PROF. INGO STRAUCH, UNIVERSITY OF LAUSANNE

BUDDHIST WORSHIP AND INDIAN TRADERS IN ROMAN EGYPT AND BEYOND



Stele with Brahmi-Sanskrit and Greek inscription from Isis temple courtyard.



~2nd century Buddha statue recovered from Berenike, Egypt.

The maritime trade routes connecting India with the Roman Empire during the first centuries CE facilitated not only the exchange of commodities but also the movement of people, religious practices, and written traditions across the Indian Ocean. Archaeological, epigraphic, and manuscript evidence from various sites along these maritime trade networks offers important insights into the activities and cultural identities of Indian travelers in this interconnected world.

This paper examines three groups of evidence. The Indian inscriptions and drawings from the cave of Hoq on Socotra document the presence of merchants and sailors from western India, some of whom expressed their Buddhist affiliations through inscriptions and religious imagery. At Berenike, the recent discovery of a Buddha statue and a bilingual Greek-Sanskrit dedicatory inscription dated to 248 CE provides remarkable evidence for Buddhist worship within the religious environment of a Roman trading port. Finally, the paper presents a hitherto unpublished palm-leaf letter from Myos Hormos, written in a Middle Indo-Aryan language and a Brāhmī script associated with the southeastern Deccan. Its contents offer a rare glimpse into the everyday concerns and written communication of Indians involved in overseas trade. Dating probably to the second or third century CE, it may represent the earliest surviving Indian letter.

Taken together, these discoveries reveal the diversity of Indian participation in transoceanic commerce and illustrate how commercial mobility facilitated the spread of religious traditions and writing practices beyond the Indian subcontinent, while also shedding light on the cultural identities of Indian travelers in the Roman world.

Thursday, Nov 19, 2026 @ 16.00

Location: Vergaderzaal 0.1 Simon Stevin, Plateau - Rozier, Campus Boekentoren9000 Gent

All are welcome. The Gandhāra Corpora Lecture Series is in-person and hybrid online. Please register for the series through this Google Form: https://forms.gle/TwffQCPuVipUpMvk6 (or through the QR code above).

Scan here to register to join online.

Contact Prof. Dr. Charles DiSimone

charles.disimone@ugent.be

Universiteit Gent

@ugent

Ghent University

GHENT UNIVERSITY

European Research Council
Established by the European Commission