

The 17th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS)
Kathmandu, Nepal, August 23–29, 2026

CALL FOR PAPERS

Etched in Devotion: Dedicatory Texts and Religious Patronage in Tibet

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Dedicatory texts are written statements—often inscribed on or associated with religious objects such as monuments, statues, paintings, printed books or manuscripts—that formally record acts of religious donation. These texts typically identify the donors and other agents involved in the production, describe the nature of the offering, and articulate the intended spiritual and communal benefits, such as the accumulation of merit or the aspiration for awakening. Beyond their commemorative function, these texts operate within broader ritual and social frameworks, linking tangible artefacts to the communities that produced, sponsored, venerated, and used them.

This panel investigates the multifaceted roles of dedicatory texts in Tibetan and Himalayan religious cultures, with a focus on their significance for understanding both Buddhist and Bön traditions. In these contexts, sacred objects are not regarded merely as devotional artefacts or symbolic representations, but as *rten*; i.e., material supports that embody specific aspects of awakened presence. As such, they are understood to manifest divine power and serve as ritual focal points, eliciting acts of devotion, protection, and merit-making.



Dedicatory texts, often inscribed directly onto these objects, capture the intentions and identities of those involved in their creation, from lay donors to religious professionals. Whether composed in prose or verse, these texts range from devotional invocations to formal statements of donation, expressing the intentions of patrons, practitioners, and sometimes artisans alike.

Bringing together case studies from a range of media, such as engraved bronze statues, mural inscriptions, inscribed *thangka* paintings, manuscript prefaces, or book colophons, this panel examines the literary conventions and religious meanings of these texts, while also attending to the historical and social circumstances of their production. Through close textual analysis and contextual interpretation, this panel aims to illuminate the networks of sponsorship, ritual authority, and material production that shaped Tibetan Buddhist and Bön cultures. In doing so, the panel intends to demonstrate how dedicatory texts mediate between the physical presence of religious objects and the broader social and spiritual environments in which they were embedded.

Interested contributors are invited to submit a 200–300 word abstract to the panel organisers (markus.viehbeck@univie.ac.at & yannick.laurent@unibe.ch) no later than **August 15, 2025**. Following the review of submissions, further information will be shared with selected participants in early September.