

Oxford Workshop Brings International Scholars Together to Study Padmasambhava, Uddiyāna, and Tibet

Supported by WAKSAW, the two-day Oxford workshop united international scholars in history, archaeology, art, ritual, and Buddhist traditions

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 22, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The WAKSAW-Uddiyana Archaeological Alliance](#) provided financial support for the international workshop "Padmasambhava, Uddiyāna, and Tibet," held September 18–19, 2026, at Wolfson College, University of Oxford.

Convened by Cathy Cantwell, Robert Mayer, and Yunyao Zhai, the workshop brought together international scholars and invited contributors for two days of presentations and discussion. The program focused on Padmasambhava, one of the most influential and complex figures in Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the historical, religious, and cultural connections among Uddiyāna, Kashmir, Tibet, Swat, and the wider Himalayan region.

The gathering grew out of the ongoing Oxford-based online seminar series "Padmasambhava, Uddiyāna, and Tibet." The series studies Padmasambhava through interdisciplinary approaches to history, myth, religion, society, and ritual. All the seminar presentations are publicly available through Oxford University Podcasts (see links from <https://thsc.web.ox.ac.uk/padmasambhava-uddiyana-and-tibet-seminar-series>).

DIFFERENT SOURCES AND PERSPECTIVES

The workshop examined Padmasambhava and Uddiyāna from a wide range of perspectives, sources, and methods. Presentations addressed the historical and religious settings of Tibet, Swat, and Kashmir during the period associated with Padmasambhava, early textual and visual



From left: Yali Xuan, WAKSAW founder; Dr. Olga Serbaeva, Sanskrit and digital humanities scholar; Dr. Ulrike Roesler, Oxford professor of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies; and Zenab Adnan, Swat Valley heritage advocate.

representations, Tibetan biographical and ritual traditions, the place of Uṣṇīyāna in Buddhist and Śaiva-Śākta tantric literature, and the transmission of teachings and lineages across South Asia and the Himalayas.

Participants also considered historical and archaeological evidence from Swat, different understandings of sacred geography and tantric sites, and the continuing importance of Padmasambhava in Bhutanese and Himalayan religious life.

Academic presentations formed the core of the program. Extended general discussions allowed participants to compare textual interpretations with archaeological evidence and with perspectives from living religious traditions.

The concluding discussion brought textual and historical scholarship into conversation with archaeological research and perspectives from living Buddhist traditions. Contributions addressed archaeological work and heritage sites in Swat, as well as the continuing importance of Guru Rinpoche in Bhutanese monastic life.

Discussion focused on comparing different bodies of evidence, clarifying points of disagreement, and identifying questions for further research.

Despite Padmasambhava's unrivalled pre-eminence within Tibetan Buddhism, only two small academic conferences have previously been convened to discuss him (Shang Shung Institute, London, 2013; Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2018). The online seminar series with its associated in-person workshop meetings are intended to build on previous academic scholarship and to help foster an international community of scholars that can take Padmasambhava scholarship forward in a more systematic and sustained way.



A moment of warm and genuine applause, with thangkas of Padmasambhava in the background.



SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP AND LONG-TERM COLLABORATION

“WAKSAW’s role is to support scholar-led research, open discussion, and long-term collaboration,” said Yali Xuan, founder of WAKSAW. “We hope this workshop will further strengthen cooperation among scholars, institutions, and local communities.”

WAKSAW thanked Cathy Cantwell, Robert Mayer, Yunyao Zhai, Wolfson College, and all participating scholars and guests for making the workshop possible.

The organization welcomes proposals for future research, publications, workshops, and collaborative academic projects related to Padmasambhava, Uṣṣīyāna, Gandhara, Tibet, and Himalayan Buddhism.

WAKSAW has also begun early planning for a proposed international conference in Bhutan in 2029. Scholars and institutions are invited to submit ideas for conference themes, panels, publications, and research collaborations.

Proposals and inquiries may be sent to: info@waksaw.org with a copy to: waksaworg@gmail.com

ABOUT WAKSAW

WAKSAW-Uddiyana Archaeological Alliance is a New York-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization supporting the exploration, preservation, and interpretation of the Buddhist archaeological and cultural heritage of Asia, with a special focus on Gandhara and Uṣṣīyāna. WAKSAW supports scholar-led research and works to connect international scholarship with local knowledge, cultural institutions, and living traditions. It supports a small number of carefully selected projects and works with its partners over the long term.

For more information:

WAKSAW

<https://www.waksaw.org/>

Oxford “Padmasambhava, Uṣṣīyāna, and Tibet” Seminar Series

<https://thsc.web.ox.ac.uk/padmasambhava-uddiyana-and-tibet-seminar-series>

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