



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

INSTITUTE OF
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Colloquium Series of the Institute of Anthropology

Public Online Lectures



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Masters of the Underground: Termite Mound Veneration in Thailand's Lower Northeast

Termite mounds are frequently mentioned in anthropological discussions of territorial cults in the region Paul Mus called monsoon Asia. While Mus concentrated on stones and their veneration to identify a shared ritual language of chthonic cults that enabled him to formulate this alternative regionalisation, he did not address termite mounds and their worship explicitly. This original omission may be the reason why termite mounds, although frequently mentioned by anthropologists working in the region, are largely neglected as study objects *sui generis*. Most anthropologists tend to follow Mus and focus on stones, which makes them miss the essential fact that many stone-like artefacts worshipped in territorial cults throughout Southeast Asia bear intimate linkages to termite mounds.

In this talk, I will follow Mus and use aspects of Ditte König's study of termite mounds to look at ancient India from the East to better understand everyday ritual practices in contemporary Thailand. I am, however, not suggesting that we find the origin or true meaning of these local practices in the Indian subcontinent, Sanskrit texts or Hindu mythology. I am rather emphasising Mus' central point that the meaningfulness of termite mound veneration rests on a shared language game of chthonic cults in which the worshipped 'stones' are not 'the "seat" of the god, but the god himself, consubstantially. Not the stone of the genie, but the stone-genie'. I am drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a rural sub-district (*tambon*) of Thailand's Buriram Province in which termite mounds and their stone-like remnants are objects of worship in localised territorial cults to answer why these earthly structures and their stone-like remnants have such a great spiritual significance in the region.

All are cordially invited!

Tuesday, May 11

17:00 ct. (CET) – 19:00 ct. (CET)

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