

OMnibus of MANTRAMS

A mobile-first, immersive digital archive of multimedia material on mantras in Global Southern Asia

The ERC-funded research project „MANTRAMS – Mantras in Religion, Media, and Society in Global Southern Asia“ is jointly hosted by the Universities of Tübingen, Vienna and Oxford (2024-2030) and aims at producing a global history and anthropology of mantras past and present, combining historical-philological methods, material culture studies and sonic ethnography with unprecedented interdisciplinary collaboration. Researchers and local collaborators collate, collect and produce large bodies of multimedia material in many languages and scripts, with a particular focus on highlighting vernacular religious practices of marginalized communities.

The OMnibus of MANTRAMS is the core digital research output, an online multimedia exhibition and archive of mantras, curated from the MANTRAMS data corpus, mapped and openly accessible. Navigating FAIR and CARE Principles of Indigenous Data Governance, local protocols of access and representation, EU Data Protection legislation as well as participatory processes of co-creating academic knowledge, we aim at establishing an immersive yet low-tech online-presence as a de-colonial collection practice to foster epistemic justice.



Devanagari Graffiti spelling Rām using Sindo (orange powder mixed with oil) on a wall located in Tulsi's temple dedicated to Rama and entourage in his house located in Tulsī Ghat. Field photography in Varanasi, India (2026) by Borayn Larios.



Shawl with red print of Jai Śrī Rām and Om sold in a bazaar stand. Field photography at Godowlia Bazaar, Varanasi, India (2026) by Borayn Larios.



Untitled [Rāmānandi] holyman practicing dhūni-tap, the penance, religious austerity - tapasya, yoga. Photographed in Allahabad, India (2019) by Prema S. Goel. Rāmānandi sadhu. Phalarī Jī Tyagi.



Recitation of the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kīrtānī during the peak monsoon season of Kaikkāṭam as part of a village sāṅgama group. Field photography in Ernakulam District, Kerala, India (2025) by Mukul Menon.



Devīa Nāg Dhumal crossing the river Beas, while departing from his mother's village Goshal. Field photography in Manali, Himachal Pradesh, India (2021) by Ishita Mahajan.

Collaboration and participatory design

- Required baseline: mobile-first design
- Fieldwork Call for **contributions** (material / data)
- Fieldwork Call for **collaborative design** (user-centric design, UI/UX, languages, affordances, look and feel)
- Fieldwork Call for **emic ethics and knowledge representation** (metadata, access and secrecy, modes of display)

Tools of immersion and intervention

- **Focus Modes** for visual material and synaesthetic *Listening Rooms* for audio material
- Highly simplified graphics templates with customizable combinations to curate moods
- Possibilities of **Hypermedia Representation** (Dicks et al. 2005): Interpretative Pages, Multimedia Essays
- Animations to retain tactility and movement
- **Development fully in-house** for maximum customization and control

Interpretative Pages



Mockup of a Multimedia Essay page for mobile viewports (2026) by Edda Schwarzkopf. Essay development by Kamika Pruthi, Piyush Kukrety and Borayn Larios.

Access and Secrecy

Secrecy is both analyzed and performed on the OMnibus. Secrecy around material from the MANTRAMS data corpus is relational and highly contextual. The analysis itself is understood as an emblematic performance of knowledge production (Lorea 2018).

The OMnibus of MANTRAMS employs visualization strategies and disclaimers to sensitize users to the nuances of access while being aware that any upload remains an open access publication. For material that cannot be made available with disclaimers, other modes of claiming space among accessible material are sought out: "The absence of a sign becomes itself a sign." (Riffard 1996, p. 67)

Access to this video recording is not possible.

This recording contains displays of possession. Permission for publication was denied by the deity.

You may access the audio recording only. Learn more about secrecy and access on the OMnibus here.

Bootstrap alerts used as micro-interventions to address secrecy and access. Screenshots from the OMnibus pilot in development (2026) by Edda Schwarzkopf.

You are given permission to access this recording under the following conditions, as instructed by Khyepa Baba, Carola Lorea's teacher of Tantric knowledge and techniques, during her research in Kalimpong (India) in August 2025:

TK Secret / Sacred

If one tries to practice the advanced or accomplishing stages of mantra with only primary preparation, there is the risk of disastrous effects, including brain damage, cerebral attacks, mental breakdown, hysteria, etc. Mantras are to be taken seriously along the codes of practice. They are to be learned specifically under a proper mantra-specialist Guru.

The CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (adapted to MANTRAMS)

Collective Benefit. The MANTRAMS data corpus can be accessed from FDAT and, in a curated and easy-to-use fashion, via the OMnibus by local practitioners for future reuse and distribution. By adding sonic and visual data not just from hegemonic temple communities but from vernacular use as well, MANTRAMS is designed to strive towards inclusive representation. Through extended fieldwork and building reciprocal relationships of trust, the curation of the data corpus will improve citizen engagement and visibility.

Authority to Control. We will implement policies that ensure that indigenous and otherwise marginalized research participants can exercise as much control over their data as possible. They will be able to access the Data Hub, should they choose to do so, and the Digital Humanities and Data Management Officer (DHDMO) and the Data Protection Officer (DPO) will be responsible to edit and delete any data upon low-threshold requests via Email or WhatsApp to compensate for the possibility of lacking resources to access the Data Hub.

Responsibility. Each researcher will be responsible for conducting herself in a beneficial manner with a positive impact on the research participants. The DHDMO, the MANTRAMS PIs and all involved researchers will strive towards capacity building and training workshops for any interested indigenous or otherwise marginalized parties. Special care will be put into developing the OMnibus in a way that is accessible to local communities, users and contributors alike.

Ethics. As per the research design, representing mantras in a transnational manner across religious and linguistic boundaries and particularly recognizing vernacular contributions to the development and spreading of mantras strives to contrast harmful normative politics and maximize benefit for all involved parties. Representing emic ethics protocols in our data management and dissemination is a core task of the Digital Humanities components of MANTRAMS.

Note on the term "Indigenous" in Asian contexts.

Most populations have very long, entangled histories of migration, conquest, caste formation, assimilation, and state incorporation over millennia. There is no simple binary between "native" and "settler" for the subcontinent as a whole.

In Southern Asia, "indigenous" generally refers to communities who identify themselves, or are identified by others, as historically rooted in particular lands and ecologies, socially and politically distinct from dominant populations, and disproportionately affected by dispossession, marginalization, and struggles over land, autonomy, culture, and recognition (e.g., Adivasi communities). Because states across the region define and govern such communities differently, indigeneity in Southern Asia is best understood as a historically and politically situated category rather than a uniform legal status.

At MANTRAMS, we are prepared to apply the concepts and the standards of CARE for Indigenous Data Governance to all research data co-produced with communities of practitioners from South and Southeast Asia, regardless of their administrative categorization.

Technical Details

omnibus.mantrams.eu

Official Launch Date:
20 May 2026

following a
Minimal Computing Approach
(see Risam/Gill, 2022)

to create a static website without dependencies. Native HTML and CSS, JavaScript only where necessary.

built with
CollectionBuilder CSV

using the Static Site Generator Jekyll,
Bootstrap for responsive layouts
and Liquid data flow mechanisms



longevity through
low-maintenance tech stack

MANTRAMS data archived in FDAT, OMnibus presentation layer archived in PHAIDRA, Open Source code publication on GitHub.

Layered sustainability strategy: web hosting, domain responsibility, isolated web content

References: Dicks, Bella, Amanda Coffey, and Bruce Mason. *Qualitative Research and Hypermedia. Ethnography for the Digital Age*. SAGE, 2005. Lorea, Carola Erika. "I Am Afraid of Telling You This, Lest You'd Be Scared Shitless": The Myth of Secrecy and the Study of the Esoteric Traditions of Bengal." *Religions* 9, no. 6 (2018): 172. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9060172>. Riffard, Pierre A. L'esotericisme. *Cos'è l'esotericismo?* Milano: BUR, 1996. Risam, Roopika, and Alex Gil. "Introduction: The Questions of Minimal Computing." *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 16 (2022).

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Edda Sofie Schwarzkopf · Carola Lorea

data@mantrams.eu · www.mantrams.eu · github.com/mantrams-erc · mailing list: groups.google.com/g/friends_of_mantrams