

Naomi Appleton, Sara Shaw and Toshiya Unebe, *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha: An Illustrated Chanting Book from Eighteenth-Century Siam*, Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2013, xviii + 142 Pp. £ 35.00 / \$ 65.00. (Hardback)

The book by Naomi Appleton, Sarah Shaw, and Toshiya Unebe — three of the most distinguished scholars in Buddhist and Southeast Asian Studies — is about the venturesome and mysterious life of a Siamese manuscript, about its beauty and about its words. It allows us to follow the odyssey of this codex, from Siam to Galle, then to Kandy, on to Edinburgh, and finally to Oxford. It magnetises us with wondrous photos reproduced from the fragile leaves of the codex and allows us to admire its art and its aesthetic appeal. It teaches us ancient Buddhist texts and stories, which have been loved and recited for centuries by Buddhist monks and laypeople in Thailand and other Asian countries.

In all honesty, I immediately became aware of the impossibility of conveying here the aesthetical emotion that the book offers. In a short review without illustrations, I cannot even simulate the perfect harmony between images and text that the reader can admire in this volume. *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* is not only a descriptive book on a Siamese manuscript of the Eighteenth-century, but also a genuine homage to the culture, art, and the religious afflatus that created it. This work by Appleton, Shaw, and Unebe is undoubtedly one of the most important recent contributions to the study of Southeast Asian Buddhism and Thai narrative art.

The manuscript which represents the *raison d'être* of the entire volume is preserved in the prestigious Bodleian Library, Oxford (UK), catalogued as “Pali a. 27 (R)”. The data offered in the catalogue is as follows:

Folding ms.; 78 openings: paper, ill., 95 × 660 mm

Decoration: 40 miniatures, each c. 190 × 220 mm.

Layout: Written in 5 lines, per page (10 lines per opening), in one or two columns

Previous lives as Bodhisatta: 22 miniatures

Final life as Bodhisatta: 8 miniatures

Final life as Buddha: 10 miniatures

The design and the layout of the volume have been very carefully prepared by JCS Publishing Services. All the images of the manuscripts are reproduced in colour and their arrangement on the page is very elegant. Moreover the size and the quality of these pictures is excellent, and the captions are always easily relatable to the described image. The text, in Times New Roman (14pt), is clearly legible and the diacritics are perfect, even when the characters are in italics. However I did notice one awkward hyphen — certainly automatically inserted — at the end of line 17, page 4.

As Appleton notes in the Preface, this volume is the result of a collaboration — “a three-way collaboration” — among the three authors. Although the

authorship of the different sections of the volume is plainly noted, the research has obviously been the product of teamwork. This cooperation appears like a watermark throughout the entire volume. The chapters are joined by a very subtle bond, namely the common interest of the authors in that very beautiful manuscript preserved in the Bodleian Library.

In the pages *x-xi* there is a very interesting section with the forty images of the manuscript (inserted in twenty double folios) reproduced in miniature. Clear captions are at the bottom of each small image. The following pages (*xii-xiii*) contain a useful map of the manuscript prepared by Unebe. The authors of the volume refer to the manuscript by face, following a very philological system, and avoid using another equally possible method — conventionally followed by Bodleian Library — of numbering the pages consecutively from the first to the last. Also very useful are the Glossary and the Bibliography, at the end of the volume.

1. Introduction by Sarah Shaw

The essential introduction to the volume, offered by Shaw, synthesizes the fundamental arguments of the entire work.

The heightened sensitivity to beauty that is a distinctive characteristic of Thai culture, appears clearly proven by the quantity and the quality of magnificent religious artworks that we can admire in Thailand, not only in the murals of the temples but also in the most precious manuscripts. Among these artworks, probably the most commonly represented scenes are from the last ten Jātakas (in Thai *tosachat*, also known as *Mahānipāta*) the stories of the past lives of the Buddha. This is a collection of tales that is an almost uniquely Buddhist form of literature.

These final ten Jātakas are depicted not only in the murals of the temples but also in the so-called *samut khoi*, “a class of paper book, often with concertina folds, usually made with white or off-white mulberry (*khoi*) paper” (p. 2). The white paper that forms the support of the *samut khois* is prepared with the bark of the mulberry tree (*Streblus asper*) mixed with a solution of lime and flour glue.

Shaw points out that the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha, when he was a Bodhisatta, including the first part of his last life as Siddhattha Gotama before his awakening, are included exclusively in the face A of the manuscript, while the face B shows only images of the Buddha, his career as teacher, and his final extinction (*parinibbāna*).

This clear division is not concerned with the written part of the manuscript, which has a totally autonomous life and does not recount the Jātakas represented in the miniatures. It is important to observe that the images of this manuscript are not considered just an embellishment or a decoration of the written text. They are, in essence, an artistic and visual representation of another text, which is not the actual text written in that manuscript but a different text well known to the audiences having been memorized by them as part of the oral literary tradition. So the images evoke texts by offering “visual and verbal cues” (p. 9). When this refined form of narrative appears so beautifully represented on the small pages of

a manuscript rather than on the large walls of a temple, it must have a high level of synthesis, as any chronological sequence cannot be represented in the limited space available in the codices.

2. *The past lives of the Buddha by Naomi Appleton*

In the second chapter Appleton offers a necessary explanation and a useful summary of the Jātakas that have been represented in the artworks contained in the manuscript “Pali a. 27 (R)”. Through this chapter we can really penetrate the stories described in the images.

She illustrates the Jātaka literature in the Pali tradition by explaining how the last ten birth stories gradually assumed greater importance and by discussing the significant role of the gods and goddesses in this narrative. Her masterful description of the ten Jātakas presents an accurate comparison between the stories, translated from the Pali texts, and their artistic representation not only in the manuscript “Pali a. 27 (R)” but also in the other four manuscripts held in the British Library. This method of comparison shows “how MS. Pali a. 27 (R) fits into a wider tradition of *jātaka* depiction” (p. 15) and enables the reader to understand the sophisticated art and literary tradition of the Buddhist narrative. The ten Jātakas are: *Temiya* (or *Mūgapakkha*), *Janaka*, *Suvannasāma*, *Nemi*, *Mahosadha*, *Bhūridatta*, *Candakumāra*, *Nārada*, *Vidhura*, and *Vessantara*. The only “non-classic” Jātaka (in other parts of the volume Shaw uses the term “para-canonical”) represented in the images of the Bodleian manuscript (folio A3, right and left) is the *Siricudāmaṇi-jātaka*. This Jātaka belongs to a group of stories that are not found in the *Jātaka-atthavaṇṇanā* (or *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā*) but have been originally conceived in Southeast Asia and collected under the title *Paññāsa Jātaka*. There are different recensions of these non-classic Jātakas and only the Burmese version has been edited in Latin characters and translated into English by Horner and Jain. A brief explanation of these important textual differences, at least in a footnote, would have been useful.

An accurate description of the *Vessantara-jātaka*, one of the most famous and venerated Jātakas, also known as *Mahājāti*, the Great birth, concludes the second chapter of the book. In some Pali and vernacular traditions the number of stanzas of this Jātaka is one thousand (in Thai *gāthā phan*), and these verses are recited in Southeast Asian countries with the support of manuscripts and cloth paintings (*pāṭa*), in very complex ceremonies (in Thai *thet mahachat*).

King Song Tham (r. 1610–1628), translated the *Vessantara-jātaka* into Thai, and this work, titled *Mahā Chāt Kham Luang*, is still considered one of the pearls of Thai literature. King Rāma IV even expressed in Latin the great importance of this Jātaka for Thai people: *Decem ultima in magna veneratione habentur. Ultima Vesandon dicitur Mahājāti, Magna Generatio*. “The last ten [lives] are held in high veneration. The last one, “Vesandon”, is called Mahājāti, the Great Generation” (Gerini, p. 20).

3. *The final life of the Buddha by Toshiya Unebe*

The third chapter of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* is focused on the last life

of the Buddha. One of the most significant qualities of this chapter is the refined balance between texts and images. It clearly proves that the author has absorbed the real spirit of the original manuscript.

Unebe has not only based his research on the images of manuscript “Pali a. 27 (R)”, but he also offers a comparative analysis of the probably coeval temple murals in four Wats located in Thonburi, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. These are Wat Ratchasitharam, Wat Thong Thammachat, Wat Dusidaram and Wat Suwannaram. The scenes of the final life of the Buddha illustrated in the manuscript are compared to the same events in the temple murals and go from the birth of the Bodhisatta (A 18 left) to the division of the relics (B35 right).

To this already interesting examination of the images of the manuscript, Unebe adds a crucial and philologically accurate study of the *Paṭhamasambodhi*. This is an extra-canonical biography of the Buddha that was widespread in all Southeast Asian countries in ten different recensions written in different languages and various vernaculars. The original text was probably written in Sukhothai during the fourteenth century but the composition of additional sections and revisions continued till the eighteenth century. In Thailand the most commonly used version is the twenty-nine chapter edition, the *Paṭhamasambodhi-kathā*, based on a Pali version made in 1845 by the Prince Patriarch Paramānujit Jinorasa and commissioned by King Rāma III (r. 1824–1851) himself. The Pali text in fourteen chapters was published by George Coedès in 2003.

Unebe notices that the miniatures in the Bodleian manuscript have several affinities with the description of the events we find in the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, especially in the section dealing with the “Return to Kapilavatthu” which is beautifully represented in B09 (p. 80). When the images of the manuscript do not correspond to the description offered in the fourteen chapter *Paṭhamasambodhi* — as with the “Lesson of the Three Strings” — the correlation can be found with the twenty-nine chapter edition. This has to be interpreted not “as a discrepancy, but rather as evidence that there was interaction between the textual narrative and the visual narrative” (pp. 58–59).

The tight connection between visual art — understood as a sort of non-verbal summary of the previous lives of the Bodhisatta and the events of the Buddha’s life — and text appears clear here. The borderline between “image” and “word” seems to become weaker and almost dissolves. The two realms give the impression of overlapping each other, though they still remain formally separate. The correlation between image and text appears also in other important parts of Buddhist literature. I find it appropriate to quote, here, a passage from the *Saṅghabhedavastu* (ed. Gnoli 65–66; cf. *Rudrāyaṇāvadāna*, *Dīvyāvadāna* 37), in which a portrait of the Buddha was depicted on a cloth together with a few important quotations from Buddhist texts. This was eventually offered to Princess Muktikā, in Sri Lanka (incidentally this was also the destination of the manuscript “Pali a. 27 (R)”). The visual and verbal means of communication are undoubtedly related, and they are able to produce a clear and serene sensitivity of mind (*pasāda*) in the Sinhalese princess Muktikā.

The Blessed One said: “Bring here a precious and beautiful cloth and call also painters”. They brought the cloth and called the artists, and the Blessed One said: “Now paint the image of the Tathāgata on the cloth”. The painters started to draw [66] the image of the Buddha but they were not able to reproduce a reflected image of the Tathāgata as it was originated from the innumerable spiritual merits of the Blessed One. Thus the Blessed One said: “Hand over the cloth: I will radiate an aura”. They handed over the cloth and the Blessed One emanated an aura: [it formed a shape on the cloth that] was completed by the artists using various colours. Then, below the image of the Blessed one, they wrote the (a) Three refuges, the (b) Five precepts, the (c) Twelve causes of the dependent origination, in regular and reverse order, and the (d) Noble eightfold path. Above the image they wrote these two stanzas:

*Arise, go forth, exert yourself in the Buddha’s Teaching, destroy the army of Death as an elephant does a hut made of reeds.
One who dwells diligently in this Dhamma and Discipline, having abandoned the cycle of birth, will reach the end of suffering. (Cf. Saṃyuttanikāya I, 157)*

A letter to the king of Siṃhala (Sri Lanka) was written, and in this missive the Buddha said: “I send this gift painted on the cloth to Muktikā. You should magnificently honour it, exposing it in a vast open space where the people living in the island of Siṃhala (Sri Lanka) can convene”.

4. *The life story of a manuscript, by Sarah Shaw*

The concluding chapter of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* by Shaw deals more exclusively with the manuscript “Pali a. 27 (R)”, and offers to the reader a very accurate description of the codex and also a very interesting account of its life story.

Thai tradition produced the first illustrated manuscripts probably in the thirteenth century, and the oldest illustrated codex we have dates from 1504. The *samut khoi* structure of “Pali a. 27 (R)” mentioned in the Introduction is based on the palm-leaf manuscripts. But, since the *samut khois* offer a larger space and a better support for the artists who can finally paint images on paper, the enormous expressive capacities of this new type of codices radically changed the idea of transmission of literature. The peculiarities of this manuscript are various. The images that appear in the Bodleian manuscript are peculiar and not found in other *samut khois*. They represent events of the Bodhisatta life as Siddhattha Gotama and moments of his life as the Buddha himself. This style was normal in the temple murals or even in Burmese manuscripts, but not in Thai illustrated codices.

“Pali a. 27 (R)” was probably part of the material sent from Siam to Kandy, together with many other ordination texts (*kammavācā*), brought by a delegation of monks specifically requested by the king of the city. This mission, inserted in the lively exchange of culture among all the Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia, was probably aimed at revitalizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The Pali texts written in the Bodleian manuscript are epitomes or extracts from the three canonical baskets (*piṭaka*). The first text is the *Suttavibhāṅga*, from the Vinaya-piṭaka, followed by the *Brahmajālasutta*, first discourse of the Suttapiṭaka, and then selections from the seven parts of the Abhidhammapiṭaka. The following four texts are extremely important in Thai Buddhist tradition and

they are the *Sahassanaya*, the *Mahābuddhagūṇa*, the *Mahābuddhagūṇavaṇṇanā*, and finally the *Uṇhissavijaya*.

Shaw gives a very accurate historical and artistic description of the style of the miniatures intelligible to readers who are not expert in art. For example, she explains how the fold of the pages of the manuscript, which is a technical and unavoidable feature of the *samut khoi*, far from being considered a disturbing element, has been often used as an actual component of the image to horizontally separate two different sections of the scene and became a significant medium of the narrative structure.

The conclusion of the fourth chapter is devoted to the story of this manuscript, perfectly supported by original documents. Among them we find a beautiful letter written in 1819 by the Methodist missionary Reverend Benjamin Clough, in response to a query by Gibson about a manuscript, which is most probably our Bodleian codex, “Pali a. 27 (R)”. The words used by Reverend Benjamin Clough are very accurate and full of enthusiastic admiration for the codex itself but also for the culture that created that artistic and religious object. “Pali a. 27 (R)” was written and sent to Sri Lanka with the precise goal of revitalizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka, but it was also able to touch the heart of people like Reverend Benjamin Clough who belonged to a different culture and religion. This demonstrates that “teaching” is, after all, a wonder, a prodigy, and a real miracle (*anusāsanīpāṭi-hāriya*).

Conclusion

The three authors of *Illuminating the Life of the Buddha* show, with philological precision, aesthetic sensitivity, and indispensable enthusiasm, the importance of the Siamese manuscript “Pali a. 27 (R)”. It is not just a religious object, an artistic expression, a linguistic document, or even a political instrument. With its beautiful images and powerful texts it is above all a sort of “living teaching” able to propagate and promulgate the doctrines taught by the Buddha.

The journey of this manuscript, after a comfortable rest in the Bodleian Library, has started again with more vigour and dynamism. Its intellectual, artistic, and spiritual message can now move forward and proceed towards other regions of the world, thanks to the precious and admirable work of Appleton, Shaw, and Unebe.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cicuzza, Claudio and Peter Skilling, “The Number of Stanzas in the Vessantara-jātaka: Preliminary Observations”, in Giacomella Orofino and Silvio Vito (eds.), *Buddist Asia 2, Papers from the Second Conference of Buddhist Studies Held in Naples in June 2004*, Kyoto 2010, pp. 35–45.
- van Dyke, Yana, “Sacred Leaves: the Conservation and Exhibition of Early Buddhist Manuscripts on Palm Leaves”, in *The Book and Paper Group Annual* 28 (2009): 83–97.
- Gerini, Gerolamo E., *A Retrospective View and Account of the Origin of the Thet Mahā Ch’at ceremony (Mahā Jaāti Desanaā) or Exposition of the Tale of the Great Birth as Performed in Siam*, Bangkok: Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1976.
- Gnoli, Raniero (ed.), *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaranavastu*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO), 1978.
- Rotman, Andy, *Thus Have I Seen, Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Skilling, Peter, “‘Arise, go forth, devote yourselves...’: A verse summary of the teaching of the Buddhas”, in *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium: Essays in honor of the Ven. Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto) on his 60th Birthday Anniversary*, Bangkok: Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1999, pp. 440–444.
- Skilling, Peter, “Redaction, Recitation, and Writing: Transmission of the Buddha’s Teachings in India in the Early Period”, Chap. 4., in Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown (eds.), *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 53–75.
- Veidlinger, Daniel M., *Spreading the Dhamma. Writing, Orality, and Textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006.

Webster University
Hua Hin, Thailand

Claudio CICUZZA

ShashiPrabha Kumar, *Classical Vaiśeṣika in Indian Philosophy: On Knowing and What Is to Be Known*, London / New York: Routledge, 2013, xiv + 160 Pp, £ 80.00 / \$ 135.00. (Hardback)

A great volume is added to the Routledge Hindu Studies Series. The book, *Classical Vaiśeṣika in Indian Philosophy: On knowing and what is to be known*, by Prof. ShashiPrabha Kumar presents the theories of Vaiśeṣika in an epistemological format, focusing on the principles of knowable objects (*jñeya*) and the processes of knowing (*jñāna*) as propounded by the Vaiśeṣika school. As the author confesses in the Acknowledgement, the title of the book is influenced by *On Being and What There Is* by Wilhelm Halbfass. Ontology and epistemology constitute the twin pillars of the Vaiśeṣika. Therefore, the publication of her book on knowing means that researchers now have not only a remarkable study on being but on knowing as well in Vaiśeṣika philosophy, and adds even greater depth to Vaiśeṣika studies.

The book contains ten chapters. After a Preface, Acknowledgement, and Abbreviation, chapter 1 (pp. 1-7), entitled “Introduction,” explains basic conceptions of Vaiśeṣika, including nomenclature and sources of Vaiśeṣika, and so on. In chapter 2 (pp. 8-13), “Theme of knowing in Vaiśeṣika: *dharma*,” the notion of *dharma*, which is the means to worldly progress (*abhyudaya*) and ultimate goal (*niḥśreyasa*), and therefore is regarded as the main content of knowing in Vaiśeṣika, is explained in various aspects. In chapter 3 (pp. 14-37), “Objects of knowing (*pādarthas*),” seven categories — which are substance, attribute, activity, universal, particularity, inherence, and negation — are explained in detail. The author further discusses how the ultimate goal is attained via the essential of knowledge of these categories. In chapter 4 (pp. 38-57), “Methods of knowing (*sādharmya* and *vaidharmya*),” the categories are explained through the twin methods of similarity and dissimilarity, which are suggested by the school founder Kaṇāda and have been accepted by Vaiśeṣika philosophers after him. In chapter 5 (pp. 58-72), “Modes and means of knowing (*jñāna-prakāra* and *pramāṇas*),” two types of knowing, as non-veridical (*avidyā*) and