

Reviews

A Philological Approach to Buddhism: The Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai Lectures 1994,
K.R. Norman, 2nd edn (Lancaster: Pali Text Society, 2006), pp. xx+250, £23.
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Norman's *A Philological Approach to Buddhism* is a series of ten lectures given at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, each exemplifying how philology can be applied to extract details about and revise our understanding of aspects of early Buddhism. Although the studies in this collection look more textual than philological at first sight, Norman's point is that textualists lacking the ability to perform detailed philology, or ignorant of philological analyses relevant to their text, perpetuate or commit misunderstandings (pp. 14, 15, 19).

At the heart of each discussion is a detailed analysis of specific linguistic forms. Following the introductory lecture, Ch. II gives specific examples of how philology reveals the religious background in which Buddhism first arose, such as an early belief in a single afterlife rather than *saṃsāra* (p. 31). He demonstrates that, because of its equation with *paccato* 'as another', *anatta* must be understood as 'not-self', rather than as 'having no soul' or 'not soul' (pp. 33–6). Chapter III summarizes the features of Pali literature that hint at an early oral transmission, the mechanisms for which are different from those used in epic and Vedic orality yet still evade scholars. The features identified are repetitiveness, waxing numbers of syllables in lists of adjectives, the division of the corpus into sections transmitted by specialist reciters, and words indicating aural transmission. Chapter IV examines traces of eastern dialects in Pali. Chapter V analyses textual difficulties that may have arisen from the writing systems, such as Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī, used at points in the Gāndhārī and Pali traditions. Points relevant to the intriguing issue of whether writing allows for or stultifies heterogeneity are raised (pp. 120–21), with comments on writing's relevant status in Theravāda *vis-à-vis* Mahāyāna. Similar questions pertain to printing. For the status of writing and printing in later Theravāda, see now Daniel M. Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dhamma: Writing, Orality, and Textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) and Michael W. Charney, *Powerful Learning: Buddhist Literati and the Throne in Burma's Last Dynasty 1752–1885* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006). Chapter VI looks at Sanskritization in Pali. Chapter VII reviews Asoka's edicts (see below). Chapter VIII surveys evidence for the chronology of the emergence of the *tipiṭaka* as we know it. On the language of Andhaka texts (p. 203), see now Crosby 'Uddis and Ācikh: Buddhaghosa on the Inclusion of the *sikkhāpada* in the *pabbajjā* Liturgy According to the *Samantapāsādikā*', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (November 2000), 461–77, where I demonstrate that Pali was used by the Andhakas too in liturgical contexts. Chapter IX discusses the development of the Pali commentarial tradition, including an examination of how alternative readings and misunderstandings reveal geographical and chronological origins. Chapter X provides a summary of the preceding chapters (pp. 222–6). This chapter is the appropriate starting-point for any non-philologist reader. Norman then assesses the current state of

Pali publications, traces the history of the field, expresses his hopes and fears for future developments, and laments the demise of the diacritic.

The essays are technical although not entirely self-contained. Details of the philological developments adduced are pursued elsewhere in Norman's publications and the author on the whole stops short of extrapolating implications for or from the broader linguistic, socio-political or religious contexts. In reviewing the predominantly western features of Pali (Ch. IV), he does not relate this to a regional base for Theravāda. In examining Sanskritization, he does not discuss the broader context of social and political developments that may have encouraged it (Ch. VI). For a summary of the still unsatisfactory state of scholarly conjecture on the Buddhist 'turn to Sanskrit' see now, Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 56--9. Norman examines only Sanskrit forms that were easily transformed phonetically or scribally, such as *atraja* (for *ātmaja*, from *attaja*), to dismiss the notion of Pali being 'one of the oldest of the MIA dialects' (p. 96). To my mind, such forms as Vedic instrumentals in *ā* or absolutes in *tvāna*, are more compelling evidence of Pali's earliness and I would have been interested in his assessment of these features. In contrast, in the chapter on Asoka, Norman makes clear the wide discrepancies between accounts of Asoka's support of Buddhism found in Buddhist literature and statements found in Asoka's own edicts. These sources appear to converge substantively only regarding a split in the *Sarigha* during Asoka's reign. This chapter is an invaluable publication on Asoka and a useful complement to A. Basham's analysis of Asoka's political intentions, drawing on *arthaśāstra* ('Asoka and Buddhism: A Reexamination', *Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies* [1982], 131-43).

I like this book. But then I feel that it was written specifically for me and the few score others who also, while lacking Norman's expertise, have sufficient familiarity with the technicalities of Sanskrit phonology and traditional grammar to follow Norman's arguments. In spite of claims that 'The lectures were intended for an audience which knew ... nothing about philology', 'The notes which I have added are intended for the general reader' (p. vii) and that the author has avoided 'using a plethora of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit words' (p. 222), the author has either an elevated or an unsympathetic notion of the general reader. The English structure is straightforward, but laden with phrases completely obscure to anyone without Indological training. To offer a taste of this low-level subterfuge: 'Whether the four *nimittas* were seen on the same day or not' is his elucidation of the types of debates that arose within the tradition (p. 59). Those without Sanskrit are expected to tut knowingly at 'an unbelievably slipshod *paramparā*' (p. 105). And what is the non-philologist to make of 'crasis vowels' (p. 129) or gain from the note 'Although *saññāvedayita* is usually translated as a *dvandva* compound, this is not necessarily correct. Grammatically, it could as well be taken as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, with the past participle *vedayita* being used as an action noun' (p. 41 n.1.). There is no glossary. I suspect the reader also needs a touch of classical training to appreciate Norman's comparison of himself with Socrates (pp. 2, 11), although for those whose Greek is rusty, he does at least explain *homoioleuton* (p. 107).

Norman's pride in the linguistic training of students of religion in Cambridge (p. 242) is poignant in the light of the recent crisis for Sanskrit at Cambridge (*The Times*, Monday, 19 February 2007, p. 21, with a new temporary appointment recently made). Yet teaching non-philological classes has more than economic advantages: the students train the lecturer to explain himself or herself in non-technical terms, and bring questions from the vantage point of other disciplines. For an accessible account of the role of philology and

the fragility of the text, I would recommend A. Skilton's 'The Letter of the Law and the Lore of Letters', *Contemporary Buddhism* 1 (2000), 1–26.

A second problem with this attempt to bridge the gap between philologist and Buddhologist and inspire the latter to foster the skills of the former (p. 242) is that Norman can be as glib about religion and history as he finds others glib about philology. The essays abound with literalism and second-guessing indicative of the limitations of a uni-dimensional approach: 'It is also very likely that the knowledge itself is efficacious, i.e. "I know that it is possible to be released and merely by knowing I am released"' (p. 42). The words *buddha* and *jina* 'were in common use prior to the origin of both religions ... The fact that Gotama was not the first *buddha* ... helps us to understand how both religions evolved a theory of previous Buddhas and Jinas' (p. 47.) Here no mention is made of *dharmic* truth as everlasting, cyclical time, the logic of a panhuman potential for perfection, or developments in the understanding of Buddhahood. If the linguistic presence of the words *buddha* and *jina* in pre- and early Buddhist times inspired those of a later period to conjecture a string of Buddhas and Jinas, why did every other religion, whose technical terms are also adapted from available language, not do likewise? Is the presence of a broader literature in Jain libraries a sign of better relations between monastics and laypeople in Jainism than in Buddhism as claimed (p. 145) or a reflection of the Jain understanding of omniscience? Does the picture change when we consider the paracanonical and vernacular writings of Buddhism? For an update on the statement that 'there is only one text devoted to the life of laymen' (p. 145) see my 'A Theravāda Code of Conduct for Good Buddhists: the *Upāsakamanussavinaya*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126(2) (2006), 171–88). For Buddhist versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (contra p. 145) see, for example, François Bizot, *Rāmakaṇṭha ou L'Amour Symbolique de Rām et Setā* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, 1989). A Buddhist version of the *Mahābhārata* is found in manuscripts from Sri Lanka. Yet Norman sees Buddhism's failure in this regard as the cause of its demise in India (p. 145).

The nature of the 'corrections' made in preparing this second edition is unclear. Strikingly, no mention is made of the huge impact of recent work on central Asian materials which supplants Norman's statements on Gāndhārī, beginning with Richard Salomon's, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra: The British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments* (London: British Library, 1999).

These shortcomings can be supplied by Buddhologists, while the strengths can perhaps be achieved only through such dedication to a single, in this case, philological approach. The book hints at Norman's enormous contribution as a philologist to our understanding of early Buddhist texts and epigraphy, a contribution more fully represented in the octad of his collected articles (1994–2007). It is fitting that this octavo is reprinted by the Pali Text Society, which now acts as a single repository of his writings, in honour of this awe-inspiring octogenarian. May his productivity long continue unabated.

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