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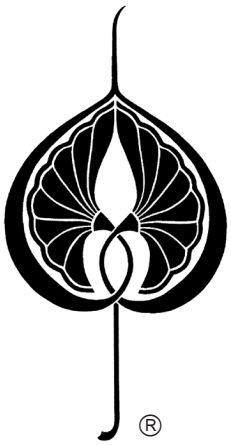

Selected Materials for the Study of the Life of Buddha Śākyamuni

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The first of the "three precious things" is the life of the Buddha. Its study will lead to insights into and understanding of the two other precious things, dharma (doctrine) and sangha (religious order).

I. INTRODUCTION

Name: Buddha Śākyamuni is the historical Buddha. Buddha means "awakened" (Skt. *budh°*, to awaken; Sanskrit is the Latin of Buddhism in general). He was born into the noble Gautama family of the Śākya clan of Kapilavastu in southern Nepal. That is why he is also known as "Śākya sage," Śākyamuni. He was given the name of Siddhārtha, "Goal Accomplished." Gautama Siddhārtha is Śākyamuni, the Buddha.

Place of birth: foot of the Himalayas, in Lumbinī (Rummindei), near Kapilavastu, now in Nepal. In the brahmanical society of Magadha, immediately to the south, he was said to be of the *kṣatriya* caste, just below brahmins. Rulers are linked with his caste.

Life and death: he died ca. 483 BCE, at the ripe age of approximately eighty years (see Narain 1994 in the bibliography, below). Traditional dates of his death, *(pari)nirvāṇa*, vary widely, from 2420 BCE to 290 BCE. The southern Theravāda tradition believes that the death of the Buddha occurred in 543 BCE. This chronology is said to be part of the long chronology. A short chronology, taking mainly northern Sanskrit-based information literally as to the time (about a hundred years) between the death and the reign of King Aśoka (ca. 264–227 BCE; see Narain 1994), places the death between 420 and 350 BCE, possibly shortly after 400 BCE, as in Bechert 2004. The Japanese scholar Ui Hakuju (宇井伯 壽) was the first to propose the short chronology in 1924–1930. He dates the death to 386 BCE.

The Buddha, called Bodhisattva before his enlightenment, knew worldly happiness in his palace in Kapilavastu, and he later practiced asceticism in Uruvilvā. These experiences led him to find a middle way leading to perfect rest, nirvana. Having realized the four noble truths—(1) suffering, *duḥkha;* (2) origination, *samudaya*; (3) extinction, *nirodha*; and (4) the path, *mārga*—and the twelve links of the chain of dependent origination in Bodh Gayā, presently in Bihar, he put an end to karma, intentional action, and to samsara, birth and death, two dogmas of Indian intellectual life at the time. He then went to the Mṛgadāva, Deer Park, in today's Sārnāth, near Vārāṇasī, Benares, to turn the wheel of the law, dharma, doctrine, i.e., to preach for the first time. Vārāṇasī (in today's Uttar Pradesh) has been a traditional center of cultural life since long before Rājagṛha (Rajgir in Bihar), Magadha's capital at the time of the Buddha. The young Śākyamuni, still in his thirties, went there to expound his new teaching, but he did (could?) not do that on the bank of the Ganges in Vārāṇasī itself. After that he spent about forty-five years as a wandering ascetic, making conversions. Many of his converts were brahmins, a fact which seems to have influenced the development of later schools, *nikāyas*, e.g., Vātsīputrīya Pudgalavādins or "Personalists." At the age of approximately eighty he passed away in Kuśinagara, in the land of the Mallas. He had accepted a meal of pork or of truffles (there is uncertainty about the meaning of the Indian term *sūkara-maddava*). It was presented to him by the metal-worker Cunda. The Buddha seems to have died of mesenteric infarction (Mettanando and von Hinüber 2000).

Only after he had arrived from Rājagṛha, Mahākāśyapa was able to set fire to the bier. After the cremation the bones (*śarīra*, relics) and the ashes were distributed.

The Buddha and his life's experiences are a practical example for our own behavior. The study of his life is of utmost importance.

Buddha is the first of the triple refuge. The second (dharma, doctrine) and the third (sangha, religious order, namely its rules, *vinaya*) refuges are expounded by the Buddha himself, but the first one shows us how to live a moral life, also as a layperson.

II. GENERAL OVERVIEW

Literature about the life of the Buddha is quite vast and exists in many languages (Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian, etc.). Many Japanese scholars are very interested in the legend and in the

facts concerning the life of the Buddha (see Hirai 2002). One can follow developments in the yearly catalogue of Tokyo's Sankibō Busshorin (山喜房佛書林, http://www.bukkyosho.gr.jp/). For example, the general catalogue no. 25, pp. 22–25, of 2008 presents new books about the life of the Buddha.

While Chinese and other East Asians pay a great deal of attention to (religious) history, South Asians are more concerned with the Buddha's message, the teaching. That explains why Chinese texts are numerous today, even though they ultimately rely on Indian material.

Material in Indian languages exists in English translation.

The Pāli *Jātakanidāna* (*Nidānakathā*, Account of Events; fifth or sixth century) is translated in Jayawickrama (2002), but the material found in the Pāli canon as a whole is presented in Ñānamoli (1978). Many modern authors rely on these texts. Pāli material is certainly not older than Sanskrit material. The Sautrāntika Sarvāstivāda *Lalitavistara* (Graceful Description) is not a text by one author. It grew over time, and became quite influenced by so-called Mahāyāna ideas (e.g., *tathāgatagarbha*). Speaking in terms of *nikāyas* (schools, rather than vehicles, *yānas*), one can say that the Sarvāstivāda text adopted some Mahāsāṅghika elements, a phenomenon which is typical for Sautrāntikas, i.e., non-Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins. From the end of the seventh century these were known as Mūlasarvāstivādins, which helps explain why there is a Tibetan version. The text was already studied in 1902–1908 by Lefmann. The standard edition of the text is Vaidya (1958). The Mongolian version was studied by Poppe (1967). The Chinese versions *T*. 186 (*Puyao jing*, 普曜經, by Dharmarakṣa, 308 CE) and *T*. 187 (*Fangguang da zhuangyan jing*, 方廣大莊嚴經, by Divākara: arrived in Chang'an in 680 CE, d. 688 CE) do not exist in English translation.

Another old biography of the Buddha is found in the *Mahāvastu* (The Great Event), a Lokottaravāda Mahāsāṅghika text. It was translated by Jones in 1949 (see Jones 1949–1956). This text is part of *vinaya* literature.

The most famous biography of the Buddha is Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* (Acts of the Buddha). Aśvaghoṣa (ca. 100 CE) was a brahmin who converted to Sautrāntika Sarvāstivāda Buddhism but was influenced by (Bahuśrutīya?) Mahāsāṅghika ideas. The first fourteen chapters of the Sanskrit text, which belongs to world-class literature, are preserved in the original Sanskrit language. The remaining fourteen chapters exist in Chinese and Tibetan versions. Johnston

(1972; orig. pub. 1936) studied and translated the Sanskrit text, trying to reconstruct the last fourteen chapters. There are numerous reprints of his work. The Tibetan version was translated to German by Weller (1926–1928). The Chinese version, *T.* 192 (*Fo suoxing zan*, 佛所行讚), was translated by Willemen (2009). The Chinese text is the work of Baoyun (寶雲) in 421 CE in Jiankang (建康, Nanjing). Beal (1883) made a pioneering English rendering of the contents more than a century ago. Only the Chinese and the Tibetan texts have all twenty-eight chapters.

Biographical material in the Chinese language was noticed early on by Samuel Beal in the second half of the nineteenth century, but outside of Japan it has been given scant attention. Zürcher (1978) offered a Dutch translation of *T.* 184 (*Xiuxing benqi jing,* Former Events about His Practice, 修行本起經) and *T.* 196 (*Zhong benqi jing,* Middle [Length] Scripture about Former Events, 中本起經). He considers both Chinese texts to be the work of Kang Mengxiang (康孟詳). Nattier (2008) considers only *T.* 196 as Kang Mengxiang's work, carried out between 190 and 220 CE, the final years of the Han (漢). Based on Kawano's (河野) work Nattier mentions that *T.* 184 may be a revised and expanded version of an old, lost *Xiao (Short) benqi jing* (小本起經), perhaps established during the Eastern Jin (東晉, 317-420 CE). Then there is Zhi Qian's (支謙, d. ca. 252 CE, during the Wu 吳 dynasty in South China) *T.* 185 (*Taizi ruiying benqi jing*, Auspicious Former Events of the Crown Prince, 太子瑞應本起經, of 223–228 CE). Hirakawa (1993) says that this text possibly is of Mahīśāsaka affiliation. In that case the text may have reached China via the maritime route, ultimately coming from East India. *T.* 196, 184, and 185 seem to have been widely used at the time, and they have been reworked more than once. The anonymous *T.* 188 (*Yichu pusa benqi jing,* 異出菩薩本起經, Former Events of the Bodhisattva, different ed.) wrongly attributed to Nie Daozhen (聶道真) has no relation with *T.* 185. *T.* 190 (*Fo benxing ji jing,* 佛本行集經, Collection of Former Acts of the Buddha*, Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra?)* of the Gandharan Jñānagupta (523–600 CE) is said by Hirakawa (1993) to be clearly of Dharmaguptaka affiliation. The text is a collection from existing literature, and borrows, e.g., from the *Buddhacarita.* The text transcends sectarian lines. At the very end (*T.* 190, 932a17–21), it is mentioned that the Buddha's biography is known by different names, but that it is essentially the same text. Mahāsāṅghikas have a *Dashi* (大事, *Mahāvastu*), Sarvāstivādins have a *Da zhuangyan* (大莊嚴, *Lalitavistara*), Kāśyapīyas have a *Fo sheng yinyuan (*佛生因緣, Causality of Buddha's

Life), Dharmaguptakas have a *Shijiamouni Fo benxing* (釋迦牟尼佛本行, Former Acts of Buddha Śākyamuni), and Mahīśāsakas have a *Pinizang genben* (毗尼藏根本, Basis of the Vinayapiṭaka).

A text which has quite some influence in Japan is *T*. 189 (*Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing,* 過去現在因果經, Cause and Effect of Past and Present) by Guṇabhadra (394–468 CE), completed between 444 and 453 CE. Guṇabhadra came from South India via the maritime route, and he was nicknamed "Mahāyāna."

All these texts show that in China, both North and South, before the Tang (唐, 618–907 CE) there was a keen interest in the life of the Buddha.

Lamotte (1988) distinguishes five more or less successive stages in texts about the legendary life of Śākyamuni. (1) Biographical fragments incorporated in the sutras. He refers to the *Majjhimanikāya* and to Saṅghadeva's Chinese *Madhyamāgama T*. 26, and *Ekottarikāgama T*. 125. He also mentions the Sanskrit *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*, as studied by Waldschmidt (1952–1962). This text has its correspondent part in the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya.* He also mentions the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* in different recensions (Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese). (2) Biographical fragments incorporated into the *vinayas*, esp. in the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*. Buddha biographies may indeed have developed from the *vinaya,* or perhaps vice versa. About Frauwallner's (1956) theory about the relation between Buddha's biography and the *Vinaya* (old *Skandhaka*), Lamotte (1988) does not fully agree. (3) Autonomous but incomplete works in the "Lives" genre. These developed from ca. 100 CE. He mentions *Lalitavistara, Mahāvastu*, and many Chinese texts (*T*. 184, 185, 186, 189, 190, 191). (4) Complete "Lives" of the Buddha. These also developed from ca. 100 CE. Examples include *T*. 194 (*Sengqie Luocha suoji jing,* 僧伽羅刹所集經, Scriptural Text Compiled by Saṅgharakṣa, translated into Chinese by Sengqie Bacheng, 僧伽跋澄, Saṅghabhadra). Another text is the *Buddhacarita* (*T*. 192), translated by Baoyun. In the *Saṅghabhedavastu* and the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya* the life of the Buddha is narrated. (5) Sinhalese compilations.

In our time the life of the Buddha has been used in popular literature. Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* of 1922 (Berlin: S. Fischer) was translated from German in 1951 by Hilda Rosner (New York: New Directions) and in 2007 by Rika Lesser (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics). The book was very influential in the sixties, and it was often reprinted. There is the popular Deepak Chopra's *Buddha: A Story of Enlightenment*

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