

Gregory SCHOPEN, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997. 298 pp. ISBN 08248-1870-9.

GREGORY SCHOPEN HAS written a number of articles that have challenged some of the most basic assumptions of the field of Buddhist Studies, and this book is a collection of the most influential of his works. Several are rightly regarded as classic studies in the field, and all should be required reading for anyone with more than a passing interest in Buddhist Studies. A central theme running through the articles in this volume, all of which have previously appeared in academic journals, is Schopen's contention that much of the received knowledge in Buddhist Studies derives from textual sources composed by small and unrepresentative groups of scholar-monks, whose works may have had little or no impact on early Buddhist communities. Schopen comes to this conclusion through a primary reliance on archaeological and epigraphic materials that, he believes, present a more accurate picture of the practices of Indian Buddhist communities than what is given in the canonical literature on which most of Buddhist Studies is based.

In the opening article, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," Schopen demonstrates how many scholars in the field consider archaeology and epigraphical evidence to be less important than the evidence contained in canonical texts. In responding to this view, Schopen argues that archaeological remains and inscriptions provide much clearer evidence of the sort of practices in which early Buddhist communities actually engaged, and he shows how these sources often directly contravene

many of the core assumptions that scholars of Buddhism have derived from texts. But Schopen's conclusion is even stronger than this; he argues that "there appears to be...no actual evidence that the textual ideal was ever fully or even partially implemented in actual practice," and so attempts to discern the actual practices of early Indian Buddhist communities that rely exclusively on textual sources are fundamentally flawed. We learn from inscriptions at early Buddhist sites from all over India, for example, that monks often owned considerable amounts of property, had money at their disposal, and were involved in the development of the cult of relics and the building and worship of stupas, and that mortuary practices appear to have been an important concern of many early monastic communities. In addition, Schopen cites evidence from a number of sites indicating that many of the donations of monks and laypeople were intended to provide merit for others. The fact that these themes are well-attested in surviving inscriptions is contrasted with several statements by textually-based scholars who assume that the paradigms outlined in canonical texts accurately represent actual practice. Schopen then speculates on the basis of the widespread valorization of the text and concludes that it appears to stem from the cultural backgrounds of the Western scholars who espouse it, and to what he terms their "Protestant presuppositions." Schopen contends that the devaluation of archaeology and epigraphical evidence, coupled with the assumption that the study of the essence of a religion should properly be concerned with texts, is a continuation of Reformation theological values that have been largely unconsciously adopted by scholars of Buddhism. This bias has blinded them to the value of other types of evidence.

In the second article, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism," Schopen challenges the widely-held notion that agreements between different textual traditions indicate that a text, passage, or doctrine represents an early stage of development. By comparing several Vinaya texts, Schopen argues that in fact the opposite appears to be the case in the materials he examines. Agreements between different schools were at least sometimes the result of centuries of debate and mutual borrowing, which resulted in consensus on a number of points.

Schopen argues in "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism" that, contrary to the assertions of a number of scholars, Indian monks demonstrated a concern with filial piety from a very early date, as attested by a number of published inscriptions. While it is often assumed that practices designed to transfer merit to one's parents and a strong emphasis on filial piety are innovations of Chinese Buddhism, Schopen demonstrates that these were already pervasive motifs in the earliest Indian sources. A related concern is found in the next article, in which Schopen argues that although contemporary buddhologists commonly assume that Indian Buddhist monks were mainly ascetics who cut all ties to family and society, there is a great deal of evidence that in fact they were involved in a wide range of domestic and life-cycle rituals, and that they also often maintained strong ties to their families and communities.

The next two articles examine textual evidence of monastic involvement in

the cult of stupas and the relic cult. Schopen cites convincing evidence that not only were Indian monks involved in such practices, but they may have taken a leading role in promoting and developing these innovations. Moreover, he argues that the failure of buddhologists to recognize these facts—well-attested in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*—is due to an over-reliance on the Pāli *Vinaya* that, Schopen argues, is regarded as the standard source on Indian monastic rules by most Western scholars, although there is no evidence that it was actually used by any early Indian Buddhist communities. By contrast, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* was widely used, and so Schopen argues that it is a more reliable guide to the actual religious practices of Indian monks.

The next several articles are concerned with burial practices and with the treatment of relics in early Indian Buddhism. Drawing parallels from archaeological studies of mortuary practices in Christian communities, Schopen states that in Indian Buddhist sites that have been excavated the most common pattern is a large central stupa erected on a site believed to have been in physical contact with the Buddha and housing one of his relics, with smaller stupas clustered around it, mostly containing mortuary remains of the local monastic dead. He also argues that all available evidence indicates that these remains were believed to actually be the Buddha or the deceased monk, and that the structures that housed them were regarded as persons for legal purposes, and that they owned property. Moreover, the Buddha was thought to be actually resident in the monasteries where his remains were housed, or in which a special residence chamber had been constructed for him, although he had been dead for centuries.

There is a wealth of information in these articles, each of which challenges some aspect of accepted wisdom in the field of Buddhist Studies. Together they provide an outline of Schopen's idea of what an "archaeology of religions" would look like. He contrasts this with the dominant academic tradition in Buddhist Studies, commonly referred to as "history of religions," which is primarily based on texts and which derives its evidence from canonical sources, rather than from archaeology and epigraphical evidence. Schopen has often been criticized for devaluing textual study as relatively unimportant for buddhology, but these articles indicate that he has a thorough familiarity with Buddhist textual traditions and uses them expertly in conjunction with other kinds of evidence to challenge widely-accepted theories and to propose new models for understanding the actual practices of early Buddhist communities.

Schopen also provides a wealth of corroborating material in his copious notes. These articles are all meticulously researched, carefully argued, and expertly constructed. Schopen begins by presenting a problem, and then leading his readers through the relevant evidence, often pausing along the way to summarize what has been established. Schopen's work is a pleasure to read, and its importance is attested to by the number of articles that have been written in response to his conclusions (many of these responses are parenthetically cited at the end of several articles) and the number of panels that have been devoted to discussion of his work at major academic conferences. Many of these works break new ground in Buddhist Studies, and the publisher

does a great service to the field by bringing them all together in one volume, which allows the reader to discern trajectories and recurrent themes in Schopen's work.

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