

REVIEWS

DIETER SCHLINGLOFF: *Die übermenschlichen Phänomene. Visuelle Meditation und Wundererscheinung in buddhistischer Literatur und Kunst. Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch.* Düsseldorf, EKÖ-Haus des japanischen Kultur, 2015 (Buddhismus-Studien 7/2015) XXII, 131 pp., 50 figures. ISBN 978-3-86205-340-7.

The book, consisting of a prologue and seven studies, centres around various supernatural phenomena in Buddhism. It is an enlarged summary of the author's previous research in this field. This highly puzzling topic has been tackled in a complex way as far as Professor Schlingloff has based his investigations on copious textual evidence and a rich collection of representations from Buddhist art.

In the prologue the author makes some genuine statements. Starting from the premise that certain people have the ability in a trance to see unrealistic forms he puts forward a thought-provoking reading of the New Testament accounts speaking of Jesus's transfiguration. In the descriptions of the three Gospels he discovers a common element: Peter and his two companions are covered by the shade of a cloud during the event. On the basis of the Old-Syrian translation of the Gospel according to Mark and a papyrus

of the Gospels according to Mark and Lucas he develops a point that Peter was a visionary and he was alone covered by the cloud.¹ The interpretation of the shining cloud (Matthew 17, 5) which in the Syrian translation casts a shadow over Peter alone as a sign of God's presence was familiar either to Peter or to any Jew of that time. It is important to note that Schlingloff makes this point on the ground of Nestle's 1948 edition of the New Testament, but these crucial references are missing from the *apparatus criticus* of subsequent editions the New Testament by Nestle and Aland.²

He makes a comparison between the Evangelical scene and the visions described in the *Buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch*³, a birch-bark manuscript from Central Asia. In the *Yogalehrbuch* there are visions which put the Buddhist

¹ See pp. XIV and XXI.

² I leave it to the respective Biblical scholars to take stand in this question.

³ *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch*, ed. und übers. von Dieter Schlingloff. Berlin, 1964 (Sanskrittexte aus dem Turfanfunden 7). Reprint together with the fragments which have been found since 1964, München, 2006 (Buddhismus Studien 5).

dogmas before the eyes of the meditating persons in a visual form. At the end of each practice the body of the meditating falls in a state of stiffness, a state known from hypnosis. This state of stiffness is connected with the appearance of clouds which the visionary can experience on his own body or on the forms that appear before his eyes. The body is covered by heaps of shining clouds (*Wolkenhaufen*, Sanskrit: *abhra-kūṭam*) or these bring him in the state of stiffness. Sometimes huts – described as brightly shining or crystal-clear – may evoke the same effect. These also wrap up or cover the forms or bring them in the state of stiffness. Both phenomena can pass into the other. Such a phenomenon can also be connected with an audition: the visionary hears the Buddha utter a verse, which expresses the quintessence of his teaching, then sees him and in the same way the vision becomes extinct. Although here the religious world is quite different from that of the Biblical transfiguration story, the phenomenon is the same: basic structures (*Grundstrukturen*) of the visionary experience are filled with life. This experience then will be theologically interpreted by the visionary or others after awakening from this state.⁴

It appears that a satisfactory translation of Sanskrit *abhrakūṭam* proves to be a vexed question. In a letter to me dated on 17 February 2016 the author corrects it for ‘Ränder der Wolken’ (the edges of the clouds). In a second letter dated from 18 July 2016 he writes that although the translation ‘Wolkenhaufen’ meets the approval of Professor Oskar von Hinüber⁵, he has still doubts. I think that Apte’s interpretation without reference to any place of occurrence in Sanskrit texts as ‘a peak of a (mountain-like) cloud also cannot fully be ruled out’.⁶

⁴ One has to keep in mind that the interpretation of such an experience by any mystic is hampered by its quality of ineffability. Schlingloff convinces us that this is not valid for Peter and the Evangelical account is not the work of later interpreters.

⁵ A personal communication by Professor Hinüber to Professor Schlingloff.

Here I would like to make two general remarks. First, it may be recalled that the shadow of the cloud (*abhra-cchāyā*) is a frequent symbol of transiency in classical Sanskrit literature;⁷ it is well known that transiency is one of the qualities of the mystical states.⁸ The connotation of a cloud with God’s mystical presence seems to be a general idea as it indicates among others the title of the 14th-century classics of Christian mysticism.⁹ Secondly, apart from the common motif of the cloud and that Peter and the Yoga practisers belong to people who have the ability in a trance to see unrealistic forms, their experiences are of different origin. Peter shares in a vision of God by grace of God similarly to Arjuna¹⁰ and the *yogī* ‘by the devotion to God/ feeling omnipresence of God’ (*īśvara-prañidhānāt*) in the *Yogasūtra* I, 23’.¹¹ What is common in these three is devotion. On the other hand the Buddha and his disciples make their progress excluding this factor.

In Chapter One Schlingloff propounds the riddle of the show of the celestial worlds in trance in the *Theravāda* context and the same with reference to the inscriptions of the king Aśoka. He is critically engaged with this phenomenon as it appears in the *Prātimokṣasūtra*. Here he arrives at some edifying conclusions: such a show had originally to do with trance experiences; these experiences do not necessarily lead to salvation.

⁶ Apte, V. S.: *The Practical Sanskrit–English Dictionary*. Vol. I. Ed. by Gode, P. K. and Karve, C. G. Poona, 1957, p. 198.

⁷ Cf. *Mahā-Subhāṣita-Saṃgraha*, Vol. II. Ed. by Sternbach, L. Hoshiarpur, 1976, Nos 2411–2415.

⁸ Cf. James, William: *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*. Ed. by Marty, M. E. Harmondsworth, 1985, p. 381.

⁹ *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Ed. by Hodgson, P. London, Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, 1958.

¹⁰ *Bhagavadgītā* Chapter XI.

¹¹ *Patanjali’s Yoga Sūtras* with the Commentary of Vyāsa and the Gloss of Vāchaspati Miśra. Ed. and trans. by Rāma Praśāda. New Delhi, 1982³, p. 40.

As to the meaning of the appearance of celestial forms and the statement that gods and men are mixing together in heaven in MRE I he offers an ingenious solution. He means that men can reach the world of gods only in trance. In order to stress his point he takes a wall-painting from Ajanta depicting the descending of *Brahmā* from heaven: men and gods can physically meet on earth. This argumentation is logical as it is, but I think that these phenomena need to be put in a broader perspective, i.e. Aśoka's religious policy is a rather complex issue. Olivelle means that Aśoka was not 'a religious (Buddhist) fanatic' and 'specifically Buddhist doctrines are promulgated' in his inscriptions and calls it as 'civil religion', where the place of 'God' is taken by 'Dharma'.¹² Romila Thapar opines that 'in the Aśokan cosmos the gods are rather shadowy figures with uncertain roles'.¹³ Strong thinks that in MRE I Aśoka does not aim at 'leading people to Nirvāṇa', but rather 'makes possible a cosmological vision of the whole'. As the Buddha, descending from Trayastriṃśa 'erases the distinctions between gods and humans and creates a double utopia of devas on earth and humans in heaven. Aśoka seems to proclaim the same double possibility of mixing in MRE I'.¹⁴

I can but subscribe to his arguments advanced in Chapter Two: symbols perfectly fulfilled the role of objects of meditation and the appearance of the Buddha portrait does not mean any breaking in tradition.

In Chapter Three the author aptly maintains the theory that the first trance experience gave the decisive impetus to the Bodhisattva to take the path of enlightenment. The underlying idea is here can be the same as in the case of Peter. This statement gains a strong reinforcement by the numerous illustrations of the scene: the car-

riage-drives, which had been regarded by many Buddha bibliographers as a key experience of the would-be Buddha, are not at all in the oldest period and they figure in the later periods only sparsely. Although, on the basis of the textual tradition, no one can say the last word about this crucial issue, it can be regarded as a strong alternative standpoint.

Although Chapter Four is called 'The state of levitation', it gives ample room to other supernatural phenomena such as the Buddha's emanating fire and water and producing various wonders in order to demonstrate his superiority over heretical teachers. Levitating and flying is first confined to the fourth stage of trance, however, it takes a physical shape already in the canonical scripts. Curiously, the improper use of the faculty of flying by a certain monk is condemned by the Buddha, but it is not regarded as the fourth of the highest sins. A salient feature of this chapter is the prompt analysis of carefully selected illustrations of the respective phenomena both from the aniconic and iconic periods of Buddhist art.

In Chapter Five Schlingloff happily resorts to illustrations to represent a special form of supernatural phenomena, the multiplication of form produced by monks and the duplication of form made by the Buddha. He justly points out the historical roots of such illustrations in Gandhara and their transfer to Central Asia.

In Chapter Six he deals with the Buddha's supernatural capacity to produce a great number of Buddha forms which is visible in illustrations as the accumulation of Buddhas (*Buddha-Häufungen*). This chapter also excels with minute observations and very instructive explanations. The accurate German rendering of the relevant passage of the Divyāvadāna about the miracle at Śrāvastī considerably helps us to understand the contents of the wide range of representations reproduced in the text.

In Chapter Seven the author turns to a special category of supernatural phenomena which he calls 'the emanation of forms'. As the *Yoga-lehrbuch* puts it: 'Then from all the pores of the skin [emanating] Buddhas, Pratyekabuddhas and Buddhist disciples seated on lotus flowers dif-

¹² Olivelle, P. (2012): Aśoka's Inscriptions as Text and Ideology. In: Olivelle, P. – Leoshko, J. – Ray, H. P. (eds): *Reimagining Aśoka. Memory and History*. New Delhi, pp. 173–174.

¹³ Thapar, Romila (2012): Aśoka. A Retrospective. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Strong, S. J. (2012): The Commingling of Gods and Humans. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

fuse widely all directions below and above'.¹⁵ The choice of examples of reliefs and wall-paintings this scene from Gandhara, Kizil and Sorcuq representing this scene and their elucidation is impressive. Schlingloff succeeded in offering a highly plausible explanation for the presence of the inch broad hole on the head of a series of Buddha and *bodhisattva* statues. He convincingly rejects its identification with *brahmarandhra*¹⁶ and its connection with ascetic practices or stopping of breath, but at the same time he admits that the idea which seeks here for an aspect of light or fire symbolism worth developing. Nevertheless, the *Yogalehrbuch* gives a better solution. The text calls it *mūrdhacchidra* 'a hole on the head' (*Kopf-Öffnung*) and this is the starting point of emanations.

As a whole this book is a highly valuable contribution to *Theravāda* studies and the history of Buddhist art and symbols. I am sure that it will certainly stimulate a great interest and at the same time debate among scholars.

Professor Schlingloff is a context sensitive scholar. His great scholarly merits are all at present here: seminal ideas, deep understanding of the subject, great subtlety of interpretation and meticulous execution of the whole work.

The volume is neatly printed, the number of misprints is at minimum. Special thanks are due to Professor Monika Zin for copying reliefs, sculptures and paintings from Central Asia as well as to Matthias Helmdach for copying the Ajanta paintings.

Finally, I want to thank the EKÖ-Haus der Japanischen Kultur for accepting the publication of this highly important and richly illustrated volume.

Gyula Wojtilla

¹⁵ *Tataḥ sarva-srotobhyaḥ buddha-pratyekabuddha-śrāvakāḥ padmādhirudhā...sarvadiḡvidiśaḥ urdhvam adhaś ca spharitvā tiṣṭhamti.*

¹⁶ It is 'a suture or aperture in the crown of the head (through which the soul is said to escape on death)'. Cf. Monier-Williams, M.: *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford, 1960, p. 739.

HAGGAI MAZUZ: *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina*. Brill, 2014. xvi, 132 pp. ISBN13: 9789004250628; E-ISBN: 9789004266094.

The author of this short monograph (102 pages plus appendices, indices and bibliography) has undertaken the difficult task of delineating the religion of the Jews who lived in Medina at the dawn of Islam. This endeavour is all the more venturesome since the historical sources related to the issue are scarce: there are absolutely no contemporary, what is more, not even roughly contemporary Jewish sources about the Jews of Medina. The three references cited in the monograph date from the 10th and the 12th centuries, and relate to the Jews of Wādī al-Qurā, Teima and Khaybar. Islamic sources, on the other hand, do deal with Jews who lived in Medina at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, but their historical value can be questioned for several reasons. First of all, they are tendentious and do not aim to portray Jews as they actually were, but to create a kind of counterexample to Muslims. Secondly, most of the sources date long after the events they treat, and it is possible that the Muslim authors, who were familiar with the Jews of the lands conquered by Muslims, projected their image of the Jewish communities to 7th-century Arabia. Mazuz made ample use of Arabic sources; he has consulted some fifty works, mainly commentaries of the Qur'ān, collections of *ḥadīth*, historical and theological works, biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad, etc. The great variety of sources studied is impressive and evidences very serious efforts in collecting the relevant material.

Mazuz is well aware of the methodological problems just mentioned, and he frankly points out the doubtful elements of his argumentation throughout the work. His scrupulousness in this respect is one of the major virtues of the book. Further merits of the work must be mentioned here: the author's train of thought is clear-cut; his discussion of the problems is to the point; references to primary sources and secondary literature are abundant and detailed. Mazuz outlines the history of previous research conducted on

the topic – quite a short history indeed, since hardly a dozen of scholars dealt with the Jews of Medina in any greater length. The chief novelty of Mazuz's contribution is his methodology based on the principle of inductive reconstruction of the Jews' religious life supposing that Muḥammad deliberately wished to distance Islam from Judaism by enacting laws and introducing customs that contradicted Jewish practices. Therefore, if a Muslim precept clearly counters a Jewish one (known from the Talmud, for example, but never mentioned in connection with Medinan Jews, not even by Muslim authors), then it follows that the opposite of the Muslim law was practised by Medinan Jews. One example might illustrate this method of reasoning: according to a *ḥadīth* (al-Qurṭubī: *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 3:90) a woman who wants to perform ritual purification after menstruation does not need to untie her braids when pouring water over herself. Since Jewish law (Talmud Bavli, Bava Qama 82a–b) prescribes the opposite, that is, untying and combing the hair before the ritual bath, Mazuz concludes that Medinan Jewish women obviously untied their braids.

Mazuz applies a somewhat similar technique of argumentation when operating with the supposition that Islam aims to be a “middle nation” (p. 26) (*umma wasaṭ*, Qur'ān 2:143) between Jews and Christians, being the Jews who follow the stringent path while Christians follow the more lenient path. Therefore, when a Muslim source explains the origin of a certain practice by indicating its contrast to both Judaism and Christianity, the veracity of the practice attributed to Medinan Jews must be accepted even if no Jewish community is known to have ever performed the acts attributed to them. For example, a *ḥadīth* explaining the origin of the Muezzin relates that Muḥammad chose the call to prayer by human voice because Christians used to strike metal boards and Jews were blowing a ram's horn. Mazuz admits that no other source testifies that Jews wherever would call to prayer like that, and the practice mentioned in the *ḥadīth* is totally unknown in Jewish religion. He, however, accepts the information provided by the *ḥadīth* as trustworthy, and remarks that “appar-

ently this was a unique local custom among the Medinan Jews” (p. 37). Given the fact that Muḥammad's comments on Jewish religion are frequently erroneous (for example, that Jews fast on *yaum 'āshūrā'* in order to commemorate an event of the Exodus, namely that God drowned the army of the Pharaoh in the sea, see p. 28), it might be suggested that the *ḥadīth* merely confounds the practice of blowing the ram's horn on the feasts of Rosh ha-Shana and Yom Kippur with everyday call to prayer.

The method of reconstructing the Medinan Jews' religious life by hypothetical reasoning can be misleading to a certain point, since it attributes the Medinan Jews customs that are not positively attested with regard to them, and even practices that are completely unknown in Judaism in general. Therefore, in my view, information gained by this method must be received with some reservations. It has to be admitted, however, that given the very limited extent of undoubtedly reliable data regarding Medinan Jews, the new inductive method followed by Mazuz has reasonable grounds and clear justification.

Thus, the picture that emerges from the sources is far from being complete, but offers a glimpse of the (supposed) laws and customs of Medinan Jews: they observed the Shabbat, fasted from one sunset to the next (not entirely clear, when exactly, but probably on Yom Kippur), they prayed three times a day facing either Jerusalem or toward the West, called to these prayers by blowing a ram's horn, kneeled and prostrated themselves during prayers. They failed to observe some Biblical precept concerning marital laws: marriage between a priest and a divorced woman was deemed as acceptable by them (although it is prohibited by Torah law). They also intermarried with Arabs, notably from the Quraysh (such mixed marriages are again explicitly prohibited by Torah law). On the other hand, they followed some Rabbinical statutes regarding divorce, adultery and menstruation.

This leads us to one of the main questions discussed by Mazuz: what kind of Judaism was observed by the Jews of Medina? Were they closer to the Sadducee or the Pharisee sect?

Mazuz concludes that with respect to Jewish law, they were apparently in line with Rabbinic Judaism, observing Talmudic law, which means that they accepted Pharisee views. But can this affinity be detected in their religious beliefs as well? The title of the book *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina* is misleading to a certain extent, since it promises to present their religious beliefs along with their religious practice. Apparently, however, Muslim sources do not disclose much information about the Jews' religious convictions. These issues are discussed by the author to a very limited extent: only some ten pages are dedicated to the actual "spiritual life" of the Jews. It is established that they believed in afterlife (like the Pharisees, as opposed to the Sadducees), in divine reward and punishment (like the Pharisees), in the existence of angels (again like the Pharisees). They were familiar with some *midrashic* (homiletic) traditions similar to those appearing in the Talmud (for example, that the people of Paradise will be fed with the flesh of the whale and the ox that God created in the six days of Creation, p. 75). They refused to accept Muḥammad as a prophet because they believed that prophets must be of Jewish origin; moreover, they held that no prophet was sent after Moses. Interestingly enough, Mazuz infers from this last statement without further discussion that "they accepted the traditional Talmudic perception, which states that the prophetic era ended after the destruction of the First Temple". In my opinion, this is an example of Mazuz reading into the sources his knowledge of mainstream Judaism. If he was

accepting the *ḥadīth* as trustworthy regarding the Jews' belief he should have said that they denied prophethood to all those who are commonly called as the prophets of Israel (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.), since all of them lived after Moses. Or else he could question the reliability of the *ḥadīth*, and suggest that it merely attributes to the Jews a belief similar to the "*khatm al-anbiyā*" the seal of the prophets, that is Muḥammad, by stating that God "did not send any messenger [...] after him [after Moses]" (see the discussion on p. 77).

The most interesting proposal of Mazuz is expounded in Appendix No. 1. He argues that the Dead Sea Scrolls and Apocryphal Literature was not unknown to Muslim authors, on the contrary, these writings made a marked influence on them. Several arguments brought by Muslim authors against Medinan Jews resemble those exposed in certain Dead Sea Scrolls against the Pharisees: "A study of the *pesharīm* demonstrates that their arguments against the Pharisees are very reminiscent of the arguments against the Jews of Medina that appear in Islamic tradition. Here are several points in which there is a similarity between what is written in the *pesharīm* and in the Islamic texts that discuss Jewish-Muslim relations in Muḥammad's lifetime." Mazuz does not raise the question that if Muslim authors indeed took their descriptions of Medinan Jews from passages referring to the Pharisees of the Dead Sea Scrolls, then how historically reliable the Muslim sources are regarding Medinan Jews?

Dóra Zsom