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**Abstract** Philosophy has long become a key term in the study of Buddhism, defining the moral and rational essence of the Buddha's teaching, emblematic of its Indian origins. In this essay, I suggest that the relation of Buddhism and philosophy, which prior to the mid-nineteenth century was framed as the relation of the Religion of Fo to the cult of voidness, was reformulated in the self-styled language of science in the wake of the study of Buddhism from Sanskrit sources. Specifically, I suggest that the philosophical dimension of Eugène Burnouf's reading of the *Divyāvadāna* and his idea of "simple sūtra" played a crucial role in defining Buddhism as a philosophy for the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The idea of a "simple moral philosophy" emerged in Burnouf's particular reading of the story of the Buddha's last days in the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, as the play of magic and death unfolds in the theme of the master's denial of the will to live. Burnouf's philosophical reading rests on the purification, in the theme of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, of the foundations of magical power (*catvāra ṛddhipāda*) that articulate knowledge of this world and beyond in the Buddha's discourses. In the conclusion, I reformulate Burnouf's question about the Buddha's moral philosophy in his study of the simple sūtras vis-à-vis the historically self-conscious question about the Buddha's ability to defer death by magic that traces back to the early debate of Buddhist exegetical traditions.

**Keywords** Eugène Burnouf, simple sūtra, *catvāra ṛddhipāda*, *Divyāvadāna*, *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, Philosophy, History

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## Buddhism, Philosophy, History. On Eugène Burnouf's Simple Sūtras.

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The Indian mind was wanting in that simplicity, which can believe without knowing, as well as in that bold clearness, which seeks to know without believing, and therefore the Indian had to frame a doctrine, a religion and a philosophy combined, and therefore, perhaps, if it must be said, neither the one nor the other; Buddhism.

—Hermann Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order* (1881).<sup>1</sup>

When we think of Buddhism it is natural to think of philosophy. For the scholar of Asia and for the student of religion, philosophy has long become a key term in the study of Buddhism, defining the moral and rational essence of the Buddha's teaching, emblematic of its Indian origins. Yet, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, in a long history of writing about Asia, the question of whether Buddhism is a philosophy, a religion, both, or neither, was not an important question. Questions on the nature of Buddhist doctrine began to emerge in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the accounts of the religions of Asia by Christian missionaries, merchants, and voyagers. By the early nineteenth century, such questions, raised from the perspective of Christian theology, were thus familiar to European scholars at the institutional site of the production of knowledge about Asia—Oriental philology. Still, questions about Buddhist doctrine raised at this institutional site were often reformulations of earlier, theological concerns, in the name of a new, self-styled language of science. To understand Buddhism as a philosophy, we must understand how the attitude of Oriental philology changed toward the Buddha—his life and his doctrine—in writing the history of Buddhism in India. To do so, we must understand how the Buddha's doctrine came to be related with particular notions of history in the wake of the study of Buddhism from Sanskrit sources.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oldenberg (1882, p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> For a historical approach to Buddhism and philosophy, see the two volumes by App (2010), (2012); for the discourse of Buddhism and Science and the European encounter with the Buddha across the premodern and the modern age, see Lopez (2008), (2012), (2013), and (2016); see also Sharf (2015), who focuses in particular on the relation of Buddhism to Western phenomenology. For examples of contemporary trends in the study of Buddhism and philosophy, see the studies by Arnold (2005), Coseru (2012), Garfield (2015), Garfield et al. (2009), and Siderits et al. (2010). In taking a genealogical perspective, the present article does not engage directly a comparative approach. By revisiting the foundational texts and figures that contributed to shaping the relation of Buddhism and philosophy, the aim of the present study is not to define the nature of such a relation, rather to suggest that the relation of Buddhism and philosophy has been empowered by what it excludes: the "foundations of magical power" (S. *ṛddhipāda*), namely the roots of "superknowledge" (S. *abhijñā*), the technology of truth upon which knowledge is constituted in

Prior to Brian Houghton Hodgson's (1800-1894) discovery of the Sanskrit Collection of Nepal during the 1820s,<sup>3</sup> and the publication in 1844 of Eugène Burnouf's (1801-1852) *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*,<sup>4</sup> European theologians and philologists regarded Buddhism for the most part as a religion. The Buddha, portrayed as an idol, a false god whose origins were lost in the archive of the religious customs of India, had just recently become to Oriental philology the historical founder of a great Asian religion. In 1819, in a groundbreaking study entitled "Sur quelques épithètes descriptives de Bouddha, qui font voir que Bouddha n'appartenait pas à la race nègre" ("On Some Descriptive Epithets of Buddha, Showing that Buddha Did Not Belong to the Negro Race"), Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832) demonstrated beyond dispute that the Buddha was a historical human being. In refuting Sir William Jones's (1746-1794) famous theory of the African Buddha, according to which the pagan gods of the ancient Mediterranean were nothing but the idols adored in modern Asia worshipped under different names, Abel-Rémusat asserted that, because of his Indian birth, the Buddha was a historical figure whose descent was that of the European race.<sup>5</sup>

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Buddhist discourse. The relation of Buddhism and philosophy must implicate the question of the degree to which Buddhist forms of morality and rationality are separable from the doctrinal domains engendered by magical discourse as it unfolds in history. For an analysis of the idea that "Buddhism is a philosophy, not a religion," see also Bernard Faure's *Unmasking Buddhism*. Faure (2009, pp. 27-34) suggests that one solution to avoiding the problem of defining Buddhism as either a philosophy or a religion, the term "thought," as in the phrase "Buddhist thought," could be taken into consideration as an alternative. While the present study agrees with Faure (2009, p. 33), in that "by failing to question the privilege granted to a certain type of Western rationalist discourse, we risk contributing to a new and more subtle form of exclusion, again shifting the question to the West," it does not suggest, for lack of better terms, to substitute philosophy with other terms in relation to Buddhism. For, if alternative terms might provisionally seem more suitable to avoid the exclusion of magical discourse as the nonrational, for as long as the generative stages of the discourse of Buddhism and philosophy remain unknown, the risk of using alternative, seemingly neutral terms, might only result in further obscuring the history of the relation of Buddhism and philosophy—which not always abides to the rules of the East/West or rational/nonrational divide—along with the ethical and epistemological implications that this history bears on the study of Buddhism.

<sup>3</sup> On Hodgson, see Lopez (1995), (2004).

<sup>4</sup> On Eugène Burnouf, see Lopez (1995), (2008), (2010), (2013), (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Prior to the publication of Abel-Rémusat's study, other European writers had claimed that the Buddha was a human figure. Not only that, they also claimed that he was a philosopher. Still, the Buddha was a philosopher who taught a form of morality, and yet whose doctrine retained the errors of its origin in polytheism. See, for example, the 1817 brochure by the French scholar Michel-Jean-François Ozeray (1764-1859), entitled *Recherches sur Buddou ou Bouddhou*, where he writes: "Down from the altar where blindness and superstition had placed him, Buddhou is a distinguished philosopher, a sage born for the happiness of his kin and the good of humanity. A deified man, he is the foremost of the religious legislators of East Asia. His doctrine, despite the second level of error, while destroying coarse superstitions, still retains the vice of its origin: it is infected with polytheism. Concerning its morality, the author presents, but often exaggerates, to man his duties, seduced by the desire to make himself more appreciated." (1817, p. 111, my



By the 1820s, the human life of the Buddha, together with his Āryan descent, was thus established as a historical fact. Still, before a clear distinction was made between the study of Buddhism from original sources in Sanskrit and Pāli and secondary sources in Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian, Oriental philology regarded Buddhism as the “Religion of Fo,” an archaic name of the religion taking the Chinese name of the Buddha. To European scholars, as for Christian theologians, the Religion of Fo was a false religion, if compared with the monotheistic religions. Before it consistently portrayed Buddhism as philosophy, Oriental philology thus regarded Buddhism as an Indian form of Idolatry (otherwise referred to as Paganism, Heathenism, or Polytheism) that had taken root throughout the countries of Asia. But what was to be made of this form of Idolatry in terms of its metaphysical and moral systems? By the 1780s, as Sir William Jones speculated on the African origins of the idol Fo, Orientalists had come to the conclusion that his religion was the combination of a twofold doctrine. The Religion of Fo was endowed with a double core: an outer form of polytheistic worship, based on the cult of idols, and an inner metaphysical doctrine, grounded in a simple morality and centered on the cult of voidness or nothingness.

In an essay entitled “Recherches sur la religion de Fo, professée par le Bonzes Ho-chang de la Chine” (“Researches on the Religion of Fo, Professed by the Ho-shang Bonzes of China”), written in the 1780s but published only in 1825, the renowned Sinologist Michel-Ange-André Leroux Deshauterayes (1724-1795) offered a summary of several centuries of European debates on Buddhist doctrine.<sup>6</sup> “The Religion that we are about to describe,” he writes, “is original of the Indies; its author is *Boudh* or *Bouda* so well-known in China under the name *Fo*, and in Japan under that of *Chaka*.”<sup>7</sup> In describing the double nature of the Religion of Fo, Deshauterayes writes:

The missionaries say that this is a sect whose doctrine is twofold: the one, external, accepts the worship of idols, teaches the transmigration of souls, and prevents from eating that which has had life; the other, inner or secret, asserts nothing but voidness or nothingness, does not recognize penalties or rewards after death,

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translation). For Ozeray, see also Droit (2003, p. 40), and Faure (2009, p. 17). I would like to thank Hyoung Seok Ham for pointing to Ozeray as a representative of scholars who called the Buddha “a philosopher” prior to Burnouf (private communication, September 2016).

<sup>6</sup> See also App (2010b). The editorial project of publishing Deshauterayes’s manuscripts was undertaken by Abel-Rémusat in the decade that followed his appointment as the first chair of Chinese at the Collège de France in 1814. In a footnote to the essay on the Religion of Fo, Abel-Rémusat says that the majority of the works by Deshauterayes remained unpublished since the year of his death in 1795. Soon after Abel-Rémusat took his position, he found a large number of Deshauterayes’s manuscripts collected in the archives of the Bibliothèque du Roi (the present-day Bibliothèque Nationale) in Paris. Yet most of Deshauterayes’s essays were unfinished, or in a state that made it impossible to collect them for publication. See Deshauterayes (1825, p. 150n).

<sup>7</sup> See Deshauterayes (1825, pp. 150-1). My translation. On Deshauterayes, see App (2010), (2012).



meaning that nothing was ever real, asserts that everything is an illusion, and regards the transmigration of souls into the bodies of animals as a figurative passage of the soul into the brutal affections and inclinations of these very beasts; it is a doctrine that in this regard would be entirely moral, for its object is the victory of the soul over her dissolute affections, if only there could ever be a real morality where nothing exists that is real.<sup>8</sup>

In this précis, Deshauterayes condenses many of the central themes that characterized the European encounter with the Buddha. These are themes that through the nineteenth century challenged professional Orientalists such as Abel-Rémusat and Burnouf, and whose implications troubled philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900):<sup>9</sup> the pagan cult of idols and the transmigration of souls, the nihilistic view of voidness or nothingness, and the nature and value of morality in a world without a creator God. If truth about these themes developed through centuries of European translation and interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, it is hardly an accident that by the early 1880s, when the celebrated Indologist Hermann Oldenberg (1854-1920) published his *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order*, perhaps the most widely read book about Buddhism during the twentieth century, this truth resonated in his statement about the twofold nature of Buddhism as a “religion and a philosophy combined.” However, despite echoes of Deshauterayes’s seemingly archaic views in Oldenberg’s more familiar language, did the German Indologist portray an entirely different truth about Buddhist doctrine, or, for that matter, a merely altered version of the same truth, as the French Orientalist?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Deshauterayes (1825, pp. 152-3). My translation. For a detailed analysis of this passage, see the study on Arthur Schopenhauer’s “love affair” with China in App (2010b, pp. 20-29). App has shown the importance of Deshauterayes’s essay on the Religion of Fo in regard to Schopenhauer’s understanding of the Buddha’s “inner doctrine,” an idea whose philosophical reformulation was incorporated by the German philosopher into the second edition of *The World as Will and Representation*. Moreover, App (2010b, p. 22) identified the work entitled *Dazang yilan* (“The Buddhist Canon at a Glance”), compiled in 1157 by the Song-dynasty scholar Chen Shi, as the Chinese source for Deshauterayes’s “inner doctrine.”

<sup>9</sup> For Schopenhauer’s understanding of Buddhism see App (2010b), (2011), and Droit (2003); for Nietzsche and Buddhism see, for example, Mistry (1981), Elman (1983) and Panaïoti (2013), and in particular Droit (2003).

<sup>10</sup> The present essay suggests that the separation of Buddhism into a philosophy and a religion is not a novelty that begins with the breakthrough of the self-styled scientific study of Buddhism that begins in the 1820s. Rather, as App has suggested (2010a, pp. 189-190), the innovations of professional Orientalism were marked by a transformation of the European knowledge about Buddhism that is far from being a clear-cut break from the “missionary” past. The idea of a distinction between an inner and an outer doctrine of the Buddha’s teaching was widely popular in Europe since the sixteenth century, when, as App notes, the Jesuits engaged in dialogue about Buddhist doctrine with Zen monks in Japan. For this dialogue, see App (2007). One implication is not only the problem of how the same division into inner and outer doctrine was reconfigured and re-contextualized in the new language of science, but also the ways in which the division of

In his inquiry from Chinese sources, Deshauterayes engages the mode of the Christian theologian, subsuming Buddhist doctrine into an early modern program of truth by which early professional Orientalists sought to demonstrate the inferiority and worthlessness of its conceptions as a system of Paganism. In contrast, as a modern historian-philologist, Oldenberg's questions arose in the frame of the much newer program in the tradition of Oriental philology that traces to the work of Burnouf, the founder of the field of studies that during the nineteenth century was referred to as the "Science of Buddhism." By consulting sources in Sanskrit and in Pāli, the modern historian of Buddhism gained access, in his scientific imagination, to the reality of the setting of the Buddha's teaching in ancient India. And, as this reality unfolded before his eyes, the Orientalist could know and describe historical facts about the Buddha and the true nature, together with the Indian essence, of his doctrine. In the mind of the modern historian and critic of Buddhism, the question on the nature of Buddhist doctrine, whether a philosophy or a religion, was thus a question of belief – in Oldenberg's words, the faculty to "believe without knowing" – and its relation to knowledge – the faculty to "know without believing" –.

Still, in saying that the "Indian mind" had to formulate Buddhist doctrine, a philosophy and a religion combined, Oldenberg also concedes that such a doctrine is, "therefore, perhaps, if it must be said, neither the one nor the other." Indeed, in his play of negations, Oldenberg leaves something unsaid, as if a third term of comparison, one that is neither philosophy nor religion, prevents Buddhism from being defined as a philosophy, a religion, or both combined. To engage this question, we thus pause at the outset in a moment of self-reflection. By the very gesture through which he defines his object of study, the German scholar opens the meaning for this object as that which it both is and is not – philosophy and religion. This essay suggests that this third, unsaid and yet constitutive, term in the modern definition of Buddhism as philosophy is to be traced to the category of *ṛddhipāda*, that is, the magical foundation upon which knowledge of both this world and beyond is constituted in Buddhist discourse. To understand the relation of Buddhism to philosophy, we must then trace the relation of magic to history and legend in the work of the founder of the study of Buddhism, where this relation was formulated in the scientific language of Oriental philology as the removal of magic from the historical Buddha's moral and rational teaching. To be sure, Burnouf's scientific method rests on such a purification, in the theme of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, of the foundation of magical

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Buddhism as religion and philosophy owes part of its history to the Jesuits and their theological concerns, their Buddhist informants and their choices in relating Buddhist doctrine to the Jesuits, and the philologists who interpreted the encounter of the former two. The problem of the distinction of Buddhism into a philosophy and a religion must be traced within the global network of knowledge whose actors and their diverse motives travel in a world that in many ways transcends the monolithic West-East (or Europe-Orient) divide. For this line of reasoning, see Hallisey (1995, pp. 31-33).



powers that articulates knowledge in the world of Buddhist scriptures.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the idea of a “simple moral philosophy” emerged in Burnouf’s particular reading of the story of the Buddha’s last days, as the play of magic and death unfolds in the master’s denial of the will to live.

## I

In 1824, as Abel-Rémusat prepared Deshauterayes’s essays on the Religion of Fo for publication in Paris, Brian Houghton Hodgson began to collect Sanskrit manuscripts that would soon become renowned throughout Europe as the original scriptures of Buddhism. Indeed, cast away from the European academy, Hodgson knew that he enjoyed the unprecedented opportunity, unimaginable for British, French, and German Orientalists, to gain first-hand knowledge of Buddhism in the Newar community of Nepal. In learning that the scriptures of the Newars were written in the sacred language of India, he became aware of the importance of the task at hand. However, the basic training in Sanskrit Hodgson received in Calcutta was not sufficient to read or translate Buddhist books. The scriptures had to be sent to Europe, to be studied by the scientific methods of Oriental philology.

Between 1827 and 1845, Hodgson shipped from Nepal a total of 144 volumes containing 423 manuscripts of Sanskrit Buddhist works. Of these, 66 were originally given to the library of Fort William in Calcutta, and then moved to the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Furthermore 94 volumes, among which copies made for the occasion, were directly shipped to the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Between 1835 and 1836, 79 were sent to the Royal Asiatic Society of London, 30 to the library of London’s India Office, and 7 to Oxford’s Bodleian Library. Moreover, a first shipment of 24 volumes of original manuscripts in 1836, and a second shipment of 64 volumes of copies in 1837, were sent to the Société Asiatique. Finally, upon a private request by Burnouf, Hodgson sent 59 additional volumes to him personally the following year. The manuscripts deposited in Calcutta and in London were neglected by scholars for decades, while the first 88, and then the remaining 59 which reached Paris, met with a different destiny in Burnouf’s hands.<sup>12</sup>

In 1837, by the time Burnouf received the first case of the Sanskrit collection at the Société Asiatique in Paris,<sup>13</sup> two recent works had become particularly

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<sup>11</sup> On the idea of Buddhism as a “purified religion,” see Lopez (2012, pp. 1-20).

<sup>12</sup> For the complete list of the manuscripts collected by Hodgson, compiled by F. M. Müller, see “Appendix A” in Hunter (1896, p. 337).

<sup>13</sup> As Burnouf received the shipment that contained the first twenty-four volumes of Sanskrit manuscripts, the case contained seven of the nine scriptures of the *Navadharmā*, that is, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, the *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, and the *Tathāgataguhyaka*, otherwise known as *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, while it also contained other works such as the *Durgatipariśodhanī Tantra*, the *Sukhāvatiṣṭyūha Sūtra*, the *Mahākāla Tantra*, the *Gitapustaka Tantra*, the

renowned for their unprecedented detail in discussing Buddhist doctrine. The first, compiled in Asia, was Hodgson's 1828 "Sketch of Buddhism, derived from the Bauddha writings of Nepál."<sup>14</sup> The second, entitled *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* ("History of the Eastern Mongols"), was published in 1829 in Saint Petersburg by the Dutch-Moravian Mongolist Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1779-1847), later known for his translation of the *Vajracchedikā*, or *Diamond Sūtra* from Tibetan into German. From both works, Burnouf writes, it was possible to know in detail the "metaphysics of Buddhism." Yet, Burnouf finally engaged in a deeper way only with Hodgson's essays. For, unlike Schmidt, who had relied on Mongolian sources, Hodgson had described Buddhist doctrine by employing the same original Sanskrit works that the French scholar would now employ as sources to write the history of Buddhist philosophy in India.

As Burnouf writes in his July 5, 1837, letter to Hodgson, after the first twenty-four volumes were received in Paris, the Société Asiatique selected the first manuscripts to be examined by Burnouf and one of his students, the young Belgian scholar Eugène Jaquet (1811-1838). Burnouf was assigned four scriptures, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, or the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, and the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. Initially, he also examined the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, but finding its linguistic form difficult, he decided to postpone its reading and dedicate his first extensive study to the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>15</sup> Entranced by the parables and by the preaching of the Buddha to his disciples, Burnouf began his

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*Pratyāṅgirā Dhāraṇī*, the *Dhāraṇī Saṃgraha*, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, as well as the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* and the *Soayambhūpurāṇa*, that are central to the Buddhism of the Newar community. See Hunter (1896, p. 353).

<sup>14</sup> On Hodgson's works that Burnouf employed as his sources, see Hodgson (1828, 1829, 1971). The complete list of the 144 Sanskrit volumes had become available to the European public in 1828 in Hodgson's "Sketch of Buddhism, derived from the Bauddha writings of Nepál." Here, Hodgson's "List of Sanskrit Bauddha Works" presents a twofold division of Buddhist scriptures that echoes Deshauterayes's twofold division of Buddhist doctrine into an inner and an external form: "Purāṇas or Exoteric works" and "Tantras or Esoteric Works." His first list of 70 manuscripts, under the heading of "Purāṇas or Exoteric Works," includes several among the most influential scriptures of Buddhism throughout Asia: six versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*; the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, important for the Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines; the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, among the most popular of Buddhist scriptures; the *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, a biography of the Buddha; the *Divyāvadāna*, or legends from the former lives of the Buddha; the *Aśokāvadāna*, source of stories about King Aśoka, the "enlightened ruler" of Buddhism; the *Jātakamālā*, or stories from the previous lives of the Buddha; the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*, the foundational scripture of the Pure Land schools in East Asia; the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, among the most highly regarded tantras; and the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, one of the *Navadharmas*, the nine scriptures held in the highest regard by the Buddhists of Nepal. The second class of scriptures in Hodgson's list, identifying the "Tantras or Esoteric Works," included 74 volumes, among which the *Hevajra Tantra*, the *Samvara Tantra*, the *Vajrasattva Tantra*, the *Tārā Tantra*, the *Mahākāla Tantra*, and the *Kālacakra Tantra*.

<sup>15</sup> For Burnouf's reception of the *Lotus Sūtra*, see Lopez (2016).





translation, along with an additional project of publishing what at this early stage he called an “analysis or some observations on the *Saddharma pundarīka*.”<sup>16</sup>

By October 1837, 233 of the 248 folios of the scripture had been translated. In July 1839, once the translation was complete, Burnouf began to look after the aspects of printing. But the European public, he thought, was not yet prepared to appreciate such “little known and often also bizarre” work. Setting aside the index and the notes, this peculiar book needed an introductory essay. In the next three years, Burnouf would thus write his *Introduction*, which, in the meantime, he came to conceive of as only the first of a series of volumes on the history of Buddhism in India. To be sure, it is during these three years, from 1841 to 1844, that Burnouf developed his theory about the original teaching of the Buddha: the moral philosophy of the “simple sūtras.” For, Burnouf read the scriptures contained in Hodgson’s second and third dispatches of 1837 only as he prepared the translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, when he began the comparative work of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* with other scriptures of the collection. Once the *Introduction* was published, he sent a copy to Hodgson, who in 1844 had resigned from his position as British resident in Nepal and had briefly returned to England.

On February 16, 1852, in what is probably his last letter to Hodgson, Burnouf writes that the final revision of his French translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, based on a second manuscript, was about to be completed. As the notes and the appendices on the *Lotus Sūtra* grew in number, the volume’s length reached 808 pages, which would then be supplemented by extensive tables and indexes. The final, monumental edition of the text, of 897 pages, was edited and published the same year, four months after Burnouf’s untimely death, by his student Julius Von Mohl (1800-1876), with the title *Le Lotus de la bonne loi traduit du Sanscrit accompagné d’un commentaire et de vingt et un mémoires relatifs au Bouddhisme* (“The Lotus of the Good Law, translated from Sanskrit, accompanied by a Commentary and by Twenty-One Memoirs about Buddhism”).

Burnouf set the aim of the *Introduction* at the beginning of the book, divided into five “memorandums.” Here, after presenting the results of his preliminary observations, he states that the main objective of his study was to determine whether the works of the collection attributed to the Buddha had all been written in the same epoch. Thus in the “Second Memorandum,” that is the next section of the *Introduction*, he would shed light on the early period of Buddhism, “offering the most characteristic features of the picture of India’s social and religious state at the moment of the preaching of Śākyamuni Buddha.”<sup>17</sup> But this memorandum, the study of the Sanskrit collection of Nepal, would only be the first of a series. In another memorandum, to be published after the 1844 *Introduction*, Burnouf planned to conduct a similar study for the Pāli collection of Ceylon, in order to

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<sup>16</sup> See Feer (1889, p. 159). My translation. In his early correspondence with Hodgson, at least in Feer’s publication of his letters, Burnouf does not always employ Sanskrit diacritics. Compare with *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.

<sup>17</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 79).



assess the period of the Buddhist councils, when the doctrines preached by the Buddha were said to have reached the form in which they were later written.

Burnouf would then write a final memorandum to compare the results of the studies of both collections of Nepal and Ceylon. That is to say, it would be in this final comparison of the two collections of scriptures of Nepal and Ceylon, which Burnouf came to call of the North and of the South, that he would cast light on the epoch of the preaching of Śākyamuni. And by comparing different chronologies about the historical date of the Buddha's death found in the Tibetan and Pāli scriptures, he would make a final choice as to the most convincing date. The result of the comparison would thus show, Burnouf writes, that the "fundamental and truly antique elements of Buddhism must be sought in what the two Indian redactions of the religious books, that of the North, which uses Sanskrit, and that of the South, which uses Pāli, have kept in common."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, previous insight into the story of the Buddha's last days in the Pāli scriptures of Ceylon helped Burnouf identify similar themes in the Sanskrit collection of Nepal that he would conceive as the earliest historical kernel of the Buddha's doctrine.

## II

If Burnouf's image of the Buddha and of his teaching could be described in a few words, they could be illustrated by his following description of the sūtra class of scriptures: "Written generally in a form and a language that is quite simple, the sūtras retain the visible traces of their origin. They are dialogues related to morality and philosophy, in which Śākya fulfills the role of master."<sup>19</sup> As he introduces his readers to these dialogues related to morality and philosophy, in the first section of the Second Memorandum of the *Introduction* Burnouf offers a general description of the collection. Here he provides his own interpretation of the various categories contained in the collections of Tibetan and Nepalese scriptures already discussed in previous essays by Hodgson, but also by the Transylvanian scholar Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784-1842), in his summary of the Tibetan canon, published between 1836 and 1839 in the *Journal of the Asiatic Studies of Bengal*.<sup>20</sup>

Having found most convincing in Hodgson's and in Csoma's essays the division of the Buddhist teachings called *tripiṭaka*, or "three baskets" – that is, *sūtra*, or the discourses of the Buddha, *vinaya*, or discipline, and *abhidharma*, or, as he rendered the term, "metaphysics" – he organized his analysis of the Nepalese

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. (p. 86).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (p. 155).

<sup>20</sup> The first section of Csoma's work, the "Analysis of the Dulva, a Portion of the Tibetan Work entitled the *Kah-Gyur*," commented on the Buddhist scriptures on monastic discipline, the first division of the Tibetan canon; the second section, the "Analysis of the Sher-chin–P'hal-chen–Dkon-séks–Do-de–Nyáng-das–and Gyut; being the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> divisions of the Tibetan Work, entitled the *Kah-gyur*," examined the remaining six canonical divisions.

collection in the central section of the *Introduction* according to these three categories. He then placed his analysis of the books called tantras and of the commentaries after the three chapters forming the bulk of the volume. It is in the second section that deals with the sūtras that we see Burnouf painting his own image of Buddhism as a simple moral philosophy. In particular, Burnouf's idea of what must constitute the original, most antique, elements in the Buddha's teaching, takes shape in his analysis of the sūtra class of scriptures – more precisely, in the distinction he makes between those which he calls the “simple” and the “developed” sūtras. While Burnouf assesses the developed sūtras and the tantras in the later chapters of his work, it is the idea of what he calls a “simple sūtra” that shaped his interpretation of the other categories of the Sanskrit collection. Once identified, the content of a “simple sūtra” would help Burnouf distinguish the philosophical portions of Buddhist doctrine from the religious rituals and ceremonies, but it would also serve as the basis for his later evaluation of the tantras as the most idolatrous scriptures of the entire collection.<sup>21</sup>

In Burnouf's analysis, the sūtra category could be explained in relation to the titles of different scriptures found in the collection: (1) the sūtras, (2) the mahāyāna sūtras, or sūtras of the Great Vehicle, and (3) the mahāvaiṣṭya sūtras, or, as he called them, sūtras of “great development.” But, setting aside the translation of the *Diamond Sūtra* by Schmidt, no sample of these sūtras had been published in a European language. To make his point, Burnouf thus had to provide fragments of different types of sūtras in his own translation from Sanskrit. “I thus have chosen from the great Nepalese collection, known by the title *Divyāvadāna*,” he continues, “two fragments in which I have recognized all the characteristics of the real sūtras, focusing, in order to make this choice, on the subject itself rather than on the title these fragments bear in the aforementioned collection.”<sup>22</sup>

In his quest for scriptural fragments that portrayed the subject of the Buddha's “real sūtras,” that is, the discourses that Burnouf believed to have been truly spoken by the Buddha, the twenty-four scriptures he received in Hodgson's first shipment, including the *Lotus Sūtra*, did not meet his standard. For, despite his earlier choice of the *Lotus Sūtra*, abounding in moral tales but also exceeding in magical formulas, now his selection of scriptural fragments with the characteristics of the “real sūtras” had fallen on the *Divyāvadāna* (“Divine Legends”), a collection of thirty-eight narratives illustrating Buddhist virtues, the law of cause and effect, and aspects of cosmology. Each legend in the collection recounts the deeds of a different protagonist, at times the Buddha, at other times a disciple, in the present and in former lives. The Buddha illustrates the topic of the legend, such as the virtues of offering or almsgiving, through his recollection of the protagonist's

<sup>21</sup> For the way in which Burnouf related the simple sūtras with the other sūtra categories of scriptures in the Nepalese Collection, including the mahāyāna sūtras and the vaiṣṭya sūtras, see Dibeltulo (2015, pp. 111-14).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. (p. 117).

deeds in a remote past. By means of this recollection, the Buddha then connects the past deeds with the protagonist's present condition. Hence the Buddha exhorts his disciples to cultivate the moral virtue that is the main topic of the legend.

As for the manuscript of the *Divyāvadāna*, it was part of the Nepalese collection of Sanskrit books that Hodgson shipped to Paris. In his early essays, Hodgson listed *avadāna*, along with *sūtra*, as one of the classes of the twelvefold division of scripture adopted in Nepal. Yet, the *Divyāvadāna* was never translated into Tibetan or Chinese as a collection bearing this title. The majority of the stories appear in the monastic codes preserved in the Tibetan and Chinese scriptural collections. Indeed, these stories resemble the stories told in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, the largest extant monastic code compiled in Sanskrit in the early centuries of the common era. But the extant Sanskrit manuscript of the *Divyāvadāna*, upon which Burnouf based his analysis, traces back to the seventeenth century, to the work of a Nepalese compiler. Even though the legends contained in the *Divyāvadāna* date to the early centuries of the common era, the collection itself may be a late and local compilation in Nepal.<sup>23</sup> Burnouf however assumed the legends of the *Divyāvadāna* to have been compiled in the extant form by the immediate disciples of the Buddha. Furthermore, his undertaking was complicated, but also enabled, by the fact that, among the thirty-eight texts of the collection, thirty-six were styled as *avadānas*, and only two as *sūtras*: the *Prātihārya Sūtra* and the *Dānādhikaraṇamahāyāna Sūtra*.<sup>24</sup> In Burnouf's opinion, the subject of the former clearly did not reflect its title, while the latter, styled as a *mahāyāna sūtra*, could be regarded neither as a *sūtra* nor as an *avadāna*, for it only consisted of a concise

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<sup>23</sup> For a history of the Nepalese manuscripts of the *Divyāvadāna*, see Hiraoka (1998) and Rotman (2008). For further research on the manuscript editions of the *Divyāvadāna*, see Cowell and Neil (1886) and Silk (2008a), (2008b).

<sup>24</sup> The *Prātihārya Sūtra*, renowned for the Buddha's miracle at the city of Śrāvastī, told of Śākyamuni's display of magical powers before a large public assembly. Challenged by six heretics, the Buddha accepted king Prasenajit of Kośala's invitation to perform a miracle beyond ordinary human comprehension. Before a large gathering, the Buddha became absorbed in meditation. Having disappeared from his seat, he then rose in the sky, making four replicas of his body. Each replica then emanated lights of different colors. Taking turns, each buddha then set the lower body ablaze and rained showers of fresh water from the upper body. Having withdrawn this miracle, the Buddha then crossed his legs and sat on a magically created lotus throne. Finally, to make his powers visible to the entire world, the Buddha emanated an array of magically created replicas, filling the skies of buddha images up to the Akaniṣṭha heaven. It was only then that the Buddha set forth his discourse, causing thousands of beings to take refuge, while establishing thousands of others in various stages of attainment of the truths of his teaching. In Burnouf's opinion, the subject of the *Prātihārya Sūtra* clearly did not reflect its title. Hence the scripture was neither what he termed a "real *sūtra*," nor was it, to judge from its subject, an *avadāna*. Unlike the other *avadānas*, where the Buddha narrated the deeds of a protagonist in a remote past, the *Prātihārya Sūtra* reported the miracle at Śrāvastī entirely in the present tense. Likewise, although the *Dānādhikaraṇamahāyāna Sūtra* was the only text in the collection styled as a *mahāyāna sūtra*, Burnouf did not regard this scripture as a *sūtra*, nor as an *avadāna*. Unlike the *Prātihārya Sūtra*, this scripture did not unfold in narrative form. See Rotman (2008).



enumeration of the thirty-seven ways to practice the virtue of almsgiving.<sup>25</sup> The original teaching of the Buddha, the simple moral philosophy shielded from mythical, legendary, and supernatural elements, thus lay not, in Burnouf's scientific imagination, in the only two scriptures of the collection that the Nepalese compilers had styled as sūtras, but elsewhere.

### III

Burnouf's study of what he called the "simple sūtras" began from his comparison of two different fragments from the *Divyāvadāna*. The two fragments were what he presented as the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ" and the "Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa." The legend of Māndhātṛ began with the Buddha's dialogue with Ānanda, his beloved first cousin and attendant, and with the god Māra, a key figure of the Buddhist pantheon that Burnouf described as the "demon of love, of sin, and of death; ... the tempter and enemy of the Buddha."<sup>26</sup> The preamble of the scripture, set in the city of Vaiśālī toward the end of the Buddha's life, opened with the Buddha's decision to enter *parinirvāna*. Having completed the round of alms in the morning, the Buddha and Ānanda arranged their bowls and robes and set out from the city. The sage and his cousin thus walked to the Cāpāla *caitya*, a shrine in whose vicinity they sought shelter for the afternoon rest. After sitting under the trunk of a tree, the Buddha addressed Ānanda, expressing how beautiful, he thought, were the *caityas* of Vaiśālī, including that of Cāpāla, of Saptāmraka, of Bahupattraka, of Gautamanyagrodha, of Dhurānikṣepana, and of Makuṭabandhana, as well as the forest of śāla trees, and, indeed, Jambudvīpa in its entirety. The Buddha then explained to Ānanda that by means of his magical powers he, the *tathāgata*, could have removed the causes of a short life. The *tathāgata*, if requested to do so, could use magic to defer death.

These magical powers derived from the Buddha's meditative absorption on the *catvāra ṛddhipāda*, in Sanskrit the "four foundations of magical power." The *ṛddhipādas* are the four qualities that, if cultivated with diligence, endow a *tathāgata* not only with the mastery of magical powers—so that he possesses the ability to perform a vast range of miraculous feats—, but also with the final success of awakening—the power to extinguish the *āsravas*, in English the contaminants, or the mental afflictions, at the root of *saṃsāra*. The cultivation of the *ṛddhipādas* corresponds to the Buddha's meditative absorption on the four mental qualities of aspiration (S. *chanda*), thought (S. *citta*), effort (S. *vīrya*), and analysis (S. *mīmāṃsā*), in association with the mental factors that lead to the abandonment of the contaminants.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For the Japanese translation of the collection see Hiraoka (2007). For an analysis of the corpus of the *Divyāvadāna* and a partial English translation of the tales see Rotman (2008).

<sup>26</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 120n).

<sup>27</sup> In the traditional presentation of the qualities of a buddha's mind, the four *ṛddhipādas* are regarded as one of seven groups of factors collectively known as the *bodhipākṣikadharmā*, or "wings



In Sanskrit literature, reference to the four *ṛddhipādas* is made in the *Arthaviniścaya Sūtra*, where the Buddha explains the main formulas of Buddhist doctrine in twenty-six chapters. The formula concerning the *ṛddhipādas*, where the Buddha teaches the way to cultivate the four qualities of aspiration, thought, effort, and analysis, occurs in the sixteenth chapter, entitled “*Catvāra ṛddhipādāḥ*.”<sup>28</sup> However, it is in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (“Connected Discourses”), the third of the five collections of the Pāli *Suttapitaka* of Sri Lanka, that the *ṛddhipādas* (P. *iddhipāda*) are covered in greater detail. The Buddha’s statements concerning the *iddhipādas* are collected in the seventh chapter of the *Mahāvagga*, the fifth book of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, entitled *Iddhipādasamyutta* (“Connected Discourses on the Foundations of Magical Powers”).<sup>29</sup> A Pāli version of the sixteenth chapter of the *Arthaviniścaya Sūtra* appears, despite minor differences, in the seventh chapter of the *Mahāvagga*, the fifth book of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, entitled *Iddhipādasamyutta* (“Connected Discourses on the Foundations of Magical Powers”). Here, in the first subsection of the “*Cāpāla*” *vagga*, entitled “*Aparā*” (From the Near Shore), the Buddha says:

Monks, these four foundations of magical power, if developed and cultivated, lead to going from the near shore to the far shore. What are the four? Here, monks, a monk develops the foundation of magical power that is endowed with the meditation on aspiration, together with the forces of abandonment. He develops the

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of awakening.” This is a list of thirty-seven factors pertaining to a buddha’s awakened mind—a list which includes the four foundations of mindfulness (S. *smṛtyupasthāna*), the four right abandonments (S. *samyakprahāna*), the four bases of magical powers, the five faculties (S. *indriya*), the five powers (S. *bala*), the seven factors of awakening (S. *bodhyaṅga*), and the eightfold path of the nobles (S. *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*), regarded as Śākyamuni’s earliest teaching. For a detailed presentation of the *bodhipāksikadharmā* in Sanskrit and Pāli sources, and specifically of the four *ṛddhipāda*, see in particular Gethin (2001, pp. 81-103).

<sup>28</sup> For the Sanskrit version of the *Arthaviniścaya*, see the studies by Alfonsa Ferrari (1944) and by N. H. Samtani (2005), and the translation from Sanskrit into English by Samtani (2002). The sixteenth chapter of the *Arthaviniścaya* reads as follows: “(16) *catvāra ṛddhipādāḥ. tatra bhikṣavaḥ katame catvāra ṛddhipādāḥ. (1) idha bhikṣavo bhikṣuś chanda-samādhi-prahāṇa-saṃskāra-samanvāgatam-ṛddhipādāṃ bhāvayati viveka niśritaṃ virāganiśritaṃ nirodhaniśritaṃ vyavasarga pariṇatam; ātmachandho nātilīno bhāviṣyati nātipragrhitāḥ. (2) vīrya-samādhi-prahāṇa-saṃskāra-samanvāgatam-ṛddhipādāṃ bhāvayati viveka niśritaṃ virāganiśritaṃ nirodhaniśritaṃ vyavasarga pariṇatam; ātmachandho nātilīno bhāviṣyati nātipragrhitāḥ. (3) citta-samādhi-prahāṇa-saṃskāra-samanvāgatam-ṛddhipādāṃ bhāvayati viveka niśritaṃ virāganiśritaṃ nirodhaniśritaṃ vyavasarga pariṇatam; ātmachandho nātilīno bhāviṣyati nātipragrhitāḥ. (4) mimāṃsā-samādhi-prahāṇa-saṃskāra-samanvāgatam-ṛddhipādāṃ bhāvayati viveka niśritaṃ virāganiśritaṃ nirodhaniśritaṃ vyavasarga pariṇatam; ātmachandho nātilīno bhāviṣyati nātipragrhitāḥ. Ime bhikṣavaś catvāra ṛddhipādāḥ” (in Samtani, 2005, pp. 30-1). On the Pāli version of this passage see note XX, and Feer (1960, 254). For an analysis of the “*viveka niśritaṃ virāganiśritaṃ nirodhaniśritaṃ vyavasarga pariṇatam; ātmachandho nātilīno bhāviṣyati nātipragrhitāḥ*” formula in the Sanskrit version, whose presence is the major difference with the Pāli rendering of the four *iddhipāda*, see Gethin (2001, pp. 92-94).*

<sup>29</sup> For an English translation of the *Iddhipādasamyutta*, see Bodhi (2000, pp. 1717-1749) and Woodward (1965, pp. 225-260). For the Pāli text see Feer (1960, pp. 254-293).



foundation of magical power that is endowed with the meditation on thought, together with the forces of abandonment. He develops the foundation of magical power that is endowed with the meditation on effort, together with the forces of abandonment. He develops the foundation of magical power that is endowed with the meditation on analysis, together with the forces of abandonment. These four foundations of magical power, monks, if developed and cultivated, lead to going from the near shore to the far shore.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear, from the *Iddhipādasamyutta*, that the Buddha regarded the cultivation of the *iddhipādas* as the cornerstone to the complete abandonment of the contaminants, in Pāli *āsava*, resulting in the *arhat*'s attainment of the final goal of *nirvāṇa* and in liberation from *saṃsāra*. Success in the development of the four *iddhipādas* resulted in the eightfold *iddhi* (P. *iddhi*) or magical powers. In Pāli literature, the Buddha teaches the eightfold *iddhi* as the first item in a list of six *abhiññās* (Pāli *abhiññās*), in English "direct knowledges" or "superknowledges." For instance, in the *Majjhima Nikāya* ("Middle Length Discourses"), the second collection of the *Suttapitaka*, the Buddha teaches the six *abhiññās* in the sixth sutta entitled *Ākankheyya Sutta*.<sup>31</sup> A more elaborate list however appears in the section entitled "Pubbe, Hetu" ("Formerly, Conditions") of the "Pāsādakampana" division of the *Iddhipādasamyutta*.<sup>32</sup> Here, the Buddha, in his recollection of the causes and conditions by means of which he developed the four *iddhipādas* during his former career as a bodhisattva, teaches the six *abhiññās* as the fruit of the foundations of magical power.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Bodhi (2000, p. 1718) and Woodward (1965, pp. 225-226), modified. For the Pāli, see Feer (1960, p. 254).

<sup>31</sup> For the *Ākankheyya Sutta*, see Bodhi (1995, pp. 115-117).

<sup>32</sup> See Bodhi (2000, pp. 1726-1728), (Woodward 1965, pp. 235-238). For the Pāli, see Feer (1960, pp. 263-266).

<sup>33</sup> The first superknowledge of unrestrained bodily action has eight aspects: (1) the ability to make replicas of one's body, (2) the ability to appear and vanish at will, (3) the ability to pass unhindered through solid objects, (4) the ability to sink into the ground, (5) the ability to walk on water, (6) the ability to sit cross-legged and fly through the air like a bird, (7) the ability to touch the sun and moon with one's hand, and (8) the ability to ascend to the world of Brahmā. For the first *abhiññā* as the Buddha preaches it in the *Ākankheyya Sutta*, see Bodhi (1995, p. 116); for the version of the first *abhiññā* in the *Iddhipādasamyutta*, see Bodhi (2000, p. 1727), Woodward (1965, p. 236), and Feer (1960, pp. 264-265). In turn, the remaining five superknowledges are: (2) knowledge of the divine ear, (3) knowledge of others' thoughts, (4) knowledge of past lives, (5) knowledge of the divine eye, and (6) knowledge of the destruction of contaminants. For the remaining five *abhiññās* in the *Ākankheyya Sutta*, see Bodhi (1995, pp. 116-17); for the longer version of the remaining five *abhiññā* in the *Iddhipādasamyutta*, see Bodhi (2000, pp. 1727-1728), Woodward (1965, pp. 237-238), and Feer (1960, pp. 265-266). The *abhiññās* are described in detail in the twelfth and thirteenth chapter of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, entitled respectively "Iddhividha Niddesa" and "Abhiññā-niddesa." See Ñyānamoli (1964, pp. 409-478).



The first five superknowledges are said to belong to the world (*S. laukika*): humans and gods, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, can obtain them by means of the proper meditative absorptions. Only the sixth superknowledge grants a power whose domain reaches beyond the world (*S. lokottara*). Through the cultivation of the eightfold path, an *arhat* thus permanently extinguishes the contaminants, thereby attaining *nirvāṇa*. The Buddha could then be said to inhabit the world as a human being, yet also to have reached beyond it, for he had permanently destroyed the causes of rebirth in the world by the sixth superknowledge. The Buddha's cultivation of the four foundations of magical powers and of the eightfold path thus accomplished the goal of the awakened in this world and beyond it. The cultivation of the former contributed to the achievement of the latter. Yet the eightfold path leading to the extinction of the contaminants was achieved simultaneously by means of the four foundations of magical power.<sup>34</sup>

The four *ṛddhipādas* therefore not only resulted in the attainment of the first superknowledge, that is, the fivefold *ṛddhi* of unrestrained bodily action, but were also said to confer upon the Buddha the power to extinguish the causes of a short lifespan. "So he can live," the Buddha told Ānanda, as Burnouf continued in his rendering of the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ," "if so requested, either for a full kalpa, or until the end of the kalpa."<sup>35</sup> After the Buddha spoke thus, however, Ānanda remained silent. The Buddha repeated the same formula for a second time, and a third. And still, Ānanda did not take the Buddha's hint. The hindrance in Ānanda's understanding, the Buddha thought, must have been the demonic work of Māra. So while Ānanda sought refuge under the trunk of another tree, Māra approached the Buddha, addressing him as the *sugata*, in English "well gone." The time for the *sugata* to enter *parinirvāṇa*, said the god, had come. Māra thus recalled how in the past, right after the Buddha had attained awakening under the bodhi tree, he had already approached the Buddha, asking him to depart from the world.

At that time, Māra continued, the Buddha replied that he would not have done so until the ordained and lay disciples of both sexes had purified their views, had been well instructed in his teaching, and until they had propagated it among humans and gods. Now that time, said Māra, had come. The Buddha could not disagree, so he kept his promise. Three months would suffice, the Buddha told the god, to bring his endeavor to fruit. The Buddha thus entered meditative absorption, concentrating on his life forces, and renounced the thought of using his magical powers to defer death. Pleased by the Buddha's resolution, Māra vanished with no trace. A series of omens then occurred, including a great trembling of the earth. Ānanda, startled by the quake, ran to the Buddha, to ask him about its cause. The Buddha explained the eight causes of earthquakes, the eighth being a *tathāgata's*

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<sup>34</sup> The Buddha makes the point of how a monk who cultivates the *ṛddhipādas* tends to *nirvāṇa* in various passages throughout the *Iddhipādasamyutta*. See for example the fourth section of the *Iddhipādasamyutta* entitled "Gaṅgāpeyyāli" in Feer (1960, pp. 290-291).

<sup>35</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 119).





imminent entrance into final *nirvāṇa*. Ānanda thus recalled the Buddha's discussion on the *tathāgata*'s ability to defer death. And so he asked the Buddha to use his magical powers. But it was too late. It had been Ānanda's fault, the Buddha told his cousin, his mind hindered by Māra, not to have requested the *tathāgata* to remain in the world on the proper occasion.

So the Buddha gathered the monastic community at the Cāpāla *caitya* to deliver what would be his last teaching in the city of Vaiśālī. "All compounds, O monks, are perishable;" Burnouf translated, "they do not endure; one cannot rely on them with confidence; their condition is change; so that it is not fitting to conceive anything about what is compounded nor is it fitting to take pleasure in it."<sup>36</sup> Even the Buddha, the holiest of beings, having relinquished his magical powers to prolong his life, was subjected to the compound nature of things. He was therefore subjected to change, impermanence, and death. Thus the time had come when he would leave the world. The Buddha instructed his disciples to collect and understand his teachings, to preserve, accept, and disseminate them through the world of humans and gods. These teachings consisted in the practices of the *bodhipāṅśikadharmā*, that is, the thirty-seven wings of awakening that feature the four *ṛddhipādas*.

The Buddha thus walked with Ānanda towards a grove near Vaiśālī, to announce his decision: three months later he would enter into *parinirvāṇa*. As he said so, the divine inhabitants of the grove shed tears, producing an abundant rain. Having heard of the Buddha's decision, several hundred thousand beings gathered in his presence. The mere hearing of his words caused these beings to reach various levels in the truths of his teaching. It was extraordinary, the Buddha proclaimed before the assembly, that he had thus fulfilled his role of teacher, he who in former times had been "spiteful, passionate, given to error, in no way free, slave to the conditions of birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, pain, distress, disquiet, misfortune."<sup>37</sup> It had been at the moment of death, in his former life as the king named Māndhātṛ, that he had made a prayer to accomplish the present result. "May several thousand creatures, after having abandoned the condition of householders, and embraced the religious life under the direction of the *ṛṣis*, after having meditated on the four fortunate abodes of the Brahmās, and renounced the passion that draws men to pleasure, may, I say, these thousands of creatures be reborn in the participation of the world of Brahmā and become its numerous inhabitants!"<sup>38</sup>

Thus, for Burnouf, did the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ" end. Yet the Buddha's discourse only seemed to have ended where the legend had begun. Burnouf rendered into French only the preamble of the *avadāna*. He left the main portion of the text, and the conclusion, untranslated. Notably, he presented this fragment

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. (p. 126).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. (p. 119).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. (p. 129).

to the learned European public as the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ,” and not as the “Avadāna of Māndhātṛ.” Even though it may appear that he changed the title of the latter into the former, in fact he did not do so. In order to say that there was a “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ,” Burnouf had to make a distinction. The subject of the avadāna could thus be said to consist of two parts: the Buddha’s discourse in the preamble, that is, the simple moral story of the Buddha’s decision to enter final *nirvāṇa*—narrated in the present tense, at the time and in the setting of Śākyamuni’s teaching—, and the Buddha’s legendary recollection—narrated in the past tense, at the time of the Buddha’s former life as king Māndhātṛ. It was thus the preamble, and not the central text of the avadāna, that Burnouf called “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ.” It was a sūtra, then, or some element traceable to what Burnouf regarded as a sūtra, that he saw in the preamble, despite the fact that the scripture bore the title of avadāna. Hence the sūtra that Burnouf termed simple was this “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ.” It was a historical fragment of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ. The remaining, untranslated part, Burnouf clarified, was in many respects similar to the *Saddharmaṣuṇḍarīka Sūtra*. Like the *Lotus Sūtra*, the central narrative of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ abounded in legendary and superhuman elements. Still, in his selection of the textual fragment that served as the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ,” Burnouf did not seem to consider the *ṛddhipādas*, Māra, or the deferment of death as superhuman elements.

Burnouf explained the relation between the text and its title in a simple way. The Buddhist compilers of the *Divyāvadāna*, who, he thought, were the early disciples of the Buddha, must have attached more importance to the legend of Māndhātṛ than to the Buddha’s decision to enter final *nirvāṇa*. These early compilers, therefore, must have entitled the legend after the king’s name, and not after the events of the Buddha’s last days. They must have styled the narrative as an avadāna because of its legendary content, and not based on what Burnouf recognized as its authentic, historical content. “Perhaps also the preference that they accorded here to legend over history,” he observed, “comes from the fact that the last years of the life of the Buddha are recounted in detail in other books.”<sup>39</sup> After all, the Buddhist compilers of the *Divyāvadāna* may have thought of it as a necessity to entitle the text after the story of the Buddha’s resolution to leave the world. Indeed, as it will become clear below, Burnouf formed his idea of the historical events of the Buddha’s last days from his knowledge of one of these “other books.”

In sum, in Burnouf’s opinion, only the preamble of the legend of Māndhātṛ presented authentic content—historical elements traceable to the epoch of Śākyamuni’s simple moral teaching. Burnouf admitted that the Buddha’s dialogue with Ānanda and Māra was indeed marked by the Buddha’s reference to his superhuman powers. Still, it was possible to perceive in the preamble a series of historical facts tracing to Śākyamuni’s human life. Indeed, it was the Buddha’s

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. (p. 130).



simple discourse on the truth of impermanence at the moment he announced his own death—“All compounds, O monks, are perishable”—that made him, in Burnouf’s eyes, the respected human teacher of a simple moral philosophy: the philosopher of the simple sūtras.

The issue of the simple sūtras, then, concerned the definition of Śākyamuni’s human life. This definition issued from what Burnouf doubted and from what he believed. For the first time in the study of Buddhism, Burnouf analyzed the Buddha’s mind to imagine this mind as the mind of a historical human being. Burnouf described the Buddha’s mind as the mind of a respected, historical human teacher, depriving him of the qualities of a *mahāpuruṣa*, the superman of Buddhist scriptures. Put another way, Burnouf removed the Buddha’s divine elements, that is, the powers regarded as the fruition of the six superknowledges, from the historical setting of the preaching, which he described based on the scriptural fragments he analyzed.

With the Nepalese collection of Sanskrit books at hand, Burnouf could now access the deeper aspects and the earliest accounts of the Buddha’s mental powers. Notably, it was in the legend of Māndhātṛ, that is, in what Burnouf believed to be the earliest core of Buddhist scriptures, that the Buddha himself declared to possess the four *ṛddhipādas*. It was by means of the four foundations of magical power that the Buddha here claimed to be able to remove, if requested, the causes of a short life. Still, Burnouf doubted that these magical powers belonged to Śākyamuni, the human being, a revered historical teacher. For Burnouf, magical powers were qualities that, indeed, an ordinary human being simply could not possess. In Burnouf’s terms, then, even as he presented for the first time to the European public the Buddha’s claim to possess these faculties, the Buddha’s humanity was marked by the absence of magical powers and superhuman elements.

In a note on his French rendering of the four *ṛddhipādas* in the preamble of the legend of Māndhātṛ, Burnouf admitted his inability to understand, and to correctly translate the term. “I cannot,” he observed, “in the absence of a commentary, flatter myself to have rendered these formulae well, which are summaries of notions I have not seen elsewhere.”<sup>40</sup> In an appendix at the end of the volume, Burnouf resorted to the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte*, the famous eighteenth-century dictionary in five languages (Chinese, Mongolian, Manchu, Tibetan, and Sanskrit) commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799), to compare the Sanskrit and Tibetan definitions of the term. “The fundamental term,” he noted, “is *ṛddhipāda*, which the Tibetans represent by *rdzu ‘phrul gyi rkang pa*, ‘the foundation of miraculous transformations.’”<sup>41</sup> The Tibetan definition of the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte* thus aided Burnouf in the comprehension of the term in the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. (p. 119n).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. (p. 580).



Sanskrit manuscript of the *Divyāvadāna*. At the conclusion of his philological excursus, Burnouf writes:

It results from all this that the Buddhists attribute supernatural faculties to one who has succeeded in imagining that he has renounced all ideas of desire, thought, effort, investigation, or meditation, that is to say, one who, somehow, has detached himself from all interior operation. Since that is hardly possible in the ordinary state of humanity, one understands that those who one believed capable of this prodigious detachment could have been taken, by people who believed in the possibility of such a power, to be endowed with the power superior to that of a man.<sup>42</sup>

In Burnouf's reading, Buddhist compilers believed that Śākyamuni was a person who had effectively imagined to have abandoned the four qualities of aspiration, thought, effort, and analysis—Burnouf translated the four qualities from Sanskrit into French as “*désir*” (desire), “*pensée*” (thought), “*effort*” (effort), and “*recherche*” (investigation) or “*méditation*” (meditation).<sup>43</sup> If the Buddha had renounced all mental activity, the Buddha's disciples would thus say that he had separated himself from “all interior operation.” The Buddha's magical powers thus seemed to Burnouf to derive from this renunciation, or from his detachment.

Yet Buddhists, in the French scholar's view, must have only imagined that the Buddha possessed such a renunciation. For, in the “ordinary state of humanity,” the achievement of such a renunciation, and the superhuman powers it would grant, was highly improbable. Simply put, the Buddha could not be endowed with such magical powers. Buddhists, Burnouf believed, must have only believed that their teacher had been capable of this fabulous abandonment of all mental activity. Therefore, he assumed, the Buddha had been “endowed with the power superior to that of a man” by his disciples. Buddhists were thus the “people who believed in the possibility of such a power.” And this power, Burnouf believed, was the Buddha's power of “prodigious detachment.” It was therefore Burnouf's doubt in what Buddhists believed, that is, his doubt in their account of the Buddha's qualities of mind, that defined what he called an “ordinary state of humanity.” This is the humanity Burnouf ascribed to Śākyamuni—a human teacher who could hardly have possessed, in the domain of the French scholar's scientific imagination, this degree of detachment and, in his view, the magical powers it yielded.

Hence Burnouf was right about one thing. Lacking commentary, one could not claim to have rendered the short Sanskrit definitions of the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte* in a satisfactory manner. Burnouf's understanding of the Buddha's “prodigious detachment” derived from the Sanskrit term *prahāṇa*. His

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. (p. 580).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. (p. 580). See also Burnouf's French original, in Burnouf (1876, pp. 625-26).

understanding, however, also derived from the grammatical value he assigned to the term in the definition of *rddhipāda* from the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte*. Here, the term *prahāṇa* appeared in the four Sanskrit formulas that were quoted from such scriptural sources as the *Arthaviniścaya Sūtra* and the *Samyutta Nikāya*. These formulas, each containing five words, defined the *rddhipādas* in relation to the four qualities of aspiration, thought, effort, and analysis the Buddha chose as the dominant object in the development of meditative absorption. This was a deep state of concentration that was also endowed with the “forces of abandonment,” namely mental factors leading to the suppression, or abandonment, of the contaminants. “The first of these foundations is, for the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte*, as for our text,” Burnouf observed in his grammatical analysis, “*chanda samādhi prahāṇa saṃskāra samanvāgata*, a compound the examination of the Tibetan version of which allows me to place all terms in the following relation: ‘endowed with the conception of renunciation of the meditation of desire.’”<sup>44</sup>

Thus Burnouf translated *prahāṇa* in French as “renoncement” (renunciation), “abandon” (abandonment), or “détachement” (detachment). Furthermore, he rendered the term *saṃskāra* as “conception,” though the term can also be rendered in English as “factor,” “formation,” or “force.” Yet, he provided a particular reading of the grammatical relationships in the compound *chanda-samādhi-prahāṇa-saṃskāra-samanvāgata* that differed entirely from the way of reading the formula according to commentary. He placed the two *tatpuruṣa* compounds *chanda-samādhi* (meditation on desire) and *prahāṇa-saṃskāra* (forces of abandonment), in turn, in a *tatpuruṣa* relationship, with *prahāṇa-saṃskāra* in a genitive relationship with *chanda-samādhi*, rather than in apposition with it. Hence, Burnouf did not take both compounds as objects of *samanvāgata* (endowed with) but only the *prahāṇa-saṃskāra* compound, whose object, in turn, became *chanda-samādhi*.

Lacking commentary, Burnouf was thus led to interpret the four qualities as objects of both the Buddha’s meditative absorption and of his forces of abandonment. But in fact the four should have been taken only as objects of the Buddha’s meditative absorption, and not of Burnouf’s “conception of renunciation.” In contrast, the objects of the forces of abandonment were said to be the contaminants, whose abandonment was granted by the achievement of the sixth superknowledge, the knowledge of the elimination of the *āsravas*. Burnouf thus contextualized the qualities of aspiration, thought, effort and analysis in the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte*’s definition of *rddhipāda* as qualities of mind the Buddha had completely renounced in his meditative absorption. He did not consider the alternative reading of the four as objects upon which the Buddha claimed to have relied in the development of such an absorption.

It was the Buddha as portrayed by the French scholar, then, not the Buddha of the Buddhists, who was endowed with the conception of renunciation of the

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<sup>44</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 580).



meditation of aspiration, thought, effort, and analysis. In contrast, the Buddha as portrayed by the compilers of the *Divyāvadāna*, in terms similar to Burnouf's own definition, would be endowed with the forces of abandonment *and* with the meditation on the four qualities of aspiration, thought, effort, and analysis. Thus, as he envisioned the mental qualities of the Buddha, Burnouf concluded that no one in the "ordinary state of humanity" could have been capable of such a prodigious abandonment.

The consequence was that the Buddha may have not developed his mind to such a prodigious extent. In Burnouf's opinion, Buddhists believed the Buddha had been capable of detaching himself from all "interior operation." Therefore, they endowed him with this power only in their imagination. In so far as he was a human being, the Buddha could hardly have succeeded in the renunciation of all objects of knowledge. Yet the Buddha of the Buddhists, the yogin who had mastered magic and vanquished death, was anything but purely human. It was no coincidence that one of the epithets of the Buddha is *devātideva*, the god beyond the gods, for, to his disciples, he was endowed with power and knowledge beyond those of humans and gods.

Burnouf's understanding of the Buddha's magical powers thus derived from his particular interpretation and grammatical analysis of the *Vocabulaire Pentaglotte's* definition of *ṛddhipāda*. Yet the sense of the French scholar's disbelief could also be traced to the passage of the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ" where he sought this definition in the first place. It was in his commentary on the Buddha's dialogue with Ānanda, their discussion about the *tathāgata's* ability to defer death, that Burnouf contested his magical powers. It thus seemed that no ordinary human being could defer death, "if so requested, either for a full kalpa, or until the end of the kalpa,"<sup>45</sup> as the scripture claimed. For it was true, the scripture taught that the Buddha had indeed renounced something in order to enter *parivāṇa*. Yet this something the Buddha renounced was not what Burnouf regarded as the Buddha's detachment of all mental operations. And so the Buddha's decision did not originate in his meditation on the four *ṛddhipādas*, or in the abandonment explained in their definition. Indeed, as he proclaimed after his dialogue with Māra, the Buddha did abandon one thought. It was the very thought of resorting to magic to defer death. It is to a different form of abandonment, then, to which we now turn in the *avadāna* of Māndhātṛ to frame Burnouf's contention about the Buddha's magical powers.

#### IV

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. (p. 119).



Burnouf's investigation of the Buddha's psychic powers had one major consequence to his idea of the original content of the Buddha's simple philosophy. Indeed, as the Buddhist compilers of the *Divyāvadāna* reported in the preamble of the legend of Māndhātṛ, though the Buddha claimed to be able to defer death for a cosmic age, or for the remainder of a cosmic age, he had not done so. Similarly, the Buddha's teaching, at the time he announced the *parinirvāṇa* to the monastic assembly, did not center on the denial of death or on its deferral by means of magical powers. On the contrary, the Buddha's teaching on impermanence – "All compounds, O monks, are perishable" – centered on the inevitability of death. It centered on the simple acceptance of this truth. The Buddha's claim to see Māra's hidden, yet inevitable, workings in the world, was thus the power of one who had triumphed over the demon of death. It was the power of one who not only possessed the first five superknowledges, but who had also attained the knowledge of the elimination of the contaminants, that is, the sixth superknowledge.

The Buddha could thus be in this world, where he preached to various kinds of audiences. And this world was also the domain of those who possessed the magical powers of the first five superknowledges. Yet the Buddha could be at once beyond the world. This beyond was the domain exclusive to the Buddha and to the *arhat*, who, having attained the sixth superknowledge of the extinction of the contaminants, dwelled in *nirvāṇa*. In this world, where, even the unawakened who inhabited the superhuman domain could, along with the Buddha and the *arhat*, develop magical powers, magic itself could be undone by the work of death. For, when the Buddha asked him three times, Ānanda missed his suggestion. Hence, the Buddha had passed beyond death. Yet because of the workings of Māra in this world, the Buddha's magical powers were still of no avail. For, despite his power to defer death, the Buddha, as the scripture recounts, would prolong his life force only if asked by others.

The story of the Buddha's decision to enter *parinirvāṇa* thus revealed the creative interpretation its compilers had made of the historical events of their teacher's death. They did so as the historical event of the Buddha's last days fashioned their world – a world of humans who articulated the vision of a domain of superknowledges. Despite Burnouf's contestation, the content of the Buddha's teaching on impermanence and death – the Buddha's simple philosophy – were thus intimately related to the articulation of the vision of a world whose superhuman domain shaped the narration of the historical event of Śākyamuni's death. By his alternative reading of the term *prahāṇa*, Burnouf thus extended his argument only so far as to assume that the Buddha's renunciation of the four qualities, and the superhuman powers they yielded, had been merely imagined by his direct disciples.

It is the reality of death, as opposed to the Buddha's magical powers, that sheds light on the proclamation of the imminent *parinirvāṇa* as a historically self-conscious account of the Buddha's last days. The Buddha's declaration to be able

to defer death by magic inscribes itself in a discourse articulated by the vision of superknowledges, whose historicity abided by the rules of both the humans who possessed the first five – the certainty of death – and of the Buddha, who attained the sixth – the power to defer death –. It was the power of this vision that shaped the narration of the Buddha’s announcement of his own death. The doctrinal view of impermanence – “All compounds, O monks, are perishable” –, being the simple philosophy that Burnouf portrayed as the original core of the Buddha’s teaching, is thus historically situated in the human, and in the Buddha’s domain of superknowledges, as both are interwoven in the history of the events at the Cāpāla *caitya*.

In a parallel sense, in the *Divyāvadāna* the Buddha’s renunciation to use magic to defer death can also be traced to the portion of the legend of Māndhātṛ that Burnouf had left untranslated. Here, the Buddha’s decision to enter *parinirvāṇa* related not only to his dialogue with Ānanda and Māra at the Cāpāla *caitya*, as the story appears in the Pāli Nikāyas, but also to another story about magic and death, which better fits with the legends of the *Divyāvadāna*. It was the lesson that Śākyamuni, in his former life as king Māndhātṛ, had once learned about the misuse of magical powers. The lesson was about the mistaken use the bodhisattva, in his past life as a world conqueror, had already made of magic – a mistake whose consequence was death. According to the story, Māndhātṛ was miraculously born as a *suvarṇacakravartin*, the first type of wheel-turning sovereign, a powerful king who is said to be able to occupy and conquer the four island continents of the world by the sheer power of his charisma. Māndhātṛ had then become renowned for his majestic fall from the summit of Mount Sumeru. It was on his deathbed that he, the sovereign of the four continents, had renounced all desire for the world and its things, expressing a wish to establish all beings in the religious life.

Māndhātṛ’s final wish was the prayer that Burnouf provided at the conclusion of the preamble of his simple sūtra, before he intentionally interrupted the translation of the avadāna. Indeed, the Buddha’s aspiration was what related Śākyamuni’s decision to enter *parinirvāṇa*, narrated in the historical setting of ancient India, with Māndhātṛ’s teaching prior to his death, tracing to the mythical beginning of our cosmic age. But the same aspiration was also what related Māndhātṛ’s legendary present as a wheel-turning sovereign with his future life as the bodhisattva in his very last lifetime: Śākyamuni, the historical Buddha. In this legend of the *Divyāvadāna*, the theme of magic and death, unfolding in the present tense, thus related the Buddha’s decision to enter *parinirvāṇa* with the future of Māndhātṛ’s untimely end, which took on meaning as a series of events past.

I will provide here the salient points of the remaining part of the legend, intentionally left untranslated by Burnouf.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For a full English translation of the avadāna see Rotman (2008). See also Schiefner (2007[=1887]) for a German translation from Tibetan, and Rouse (1895) for an English translation from Pāli.





As soon as the Buddha recited his prayer, he began to recollect his former life. It was a time, at the beginning of the present world age, when human beings enjoyed a very long lifespan. The continent of Jambudvīpa, the Buddha told Ānanda, was ruled by a king named Upoṣadha, who had a son named Māndhātṛ, endowed with the seven precious things and with the *catvāra rddhipādas*, the four foundations of magical powers. Māndhātṛ was powerful and charismatic, and his skills in the arts of government caused Jambudvīpa to flourish and prosper until, one day, he showed signs of discontent. He began to cherish the desire to control the entire world, including the three remaining continents of Videha in the east, Godānīya in the west, and Uttarakuru in the north.

Once Māndhātṛ became the sovereign of the world's four island continents, he then asked the yakṣa Divaukasa, a demon who served as his attendant, whether there was still a place in the world that was not under his dominion. There was one more place, Divaukasa told the king, that he did not control. It was Sudarśana, the magnificent city of the gods of the Trāyastriṃśa, atop Mount Sumeru. Thus Māndhātṛ, leading his sons, his army and retinue, rose in the skies, and reached the summit of Mount Sumeru. Right before the Trāyastriṃśa, he met the four great kings of the four directions Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Virūḍhaka, Virūpākṣa and Vaiśravaṇa. Entranced by Māndhātṛ's charisma, the gods did not even attempt to stop him, but instead joined his retinue, became his attendants, and marched ahead of him.

When Māndhātṛ met the four great kings, they were aware of his power. In awe, they informed the gods of the Trāyastriṃśa of his coming. Aware of his power, the thirty-three gods welcomed him to the divine city of Sudarśana. Then Śakra, the king of the gods, went to greet Māndhātṛ, offering him half of his seat. Māndhātṛ thus ruled with the gods for a very long time. Until, one day, the demigods attacked the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. Thanks to his powers, Māndhātṛ helped the gods win the war, becoming the most powerful being in the world. At this point, a thought arose in the mind of Māndhātṛ. To sanction his dominion over all humans and gods, he could have dethroned Śakra, to become the only king of the Trāyastriṃśa, of Sumeru, and of the four continents.

In that very moment, however, Māndhātṛ's magical powers vanished entirely, for he could not kill Śakra. And, because a human could not die in heaven, he fell to Jambudvīpa. In a condition of extreme pain, Māndhātṛ knew he would soon die. He thus gathered his ministers to express his last wish. Anyone who asked what Māndhātṛ said at the time of death was to be told the following: Endowed with the seven precious things and with the four foundations of magical powers, the king had established dominion over the entire world, including the four continents and the heavenly abodes. Yet the king approached death unsatisfied with the objects of the senses. Satisfaction, Māndhātṛ continued, was not to be found even among the divine enjoyments of the gods. All pleasure would only lead to suffering. For, at the time of death, they would be of no avail. Therefore, how could one who understood the pleasures of the senses as suffering ever enjoy even the smallest pleasure of the senses, not to mention the pleasures



of the gods? Desire, unquenchable for the senses, was the true root of suffering in the world.

A Buddha's disciple, Māndhātṛ continued, should have taken pleasure in the extinction of desire. Having learned of the imminent death of the king, hundreds of thousands of beings gathered in his presence, to hear his discourses on the perils of the pleasures of the senses. And so hundreds of thousands of beings developed such a disgust for the pleasures of the senses that they abandoned the condition of householder. Hence they set out to the forest to seek guidance under the *ṛṣis*. Having become *ṛṣis* themselves, they cultivated the four meditative absorptions corresponding to the four levels of the form realm. These beings thus completely destroyed desire for the object of the senses, relinquishing the causes of rebirth in the desire realm. As a result of their meditation, inspired by Māndhātṛ's last teaching, hundreds of thousands of beings were thus reborn as gods of the form realm, becoming inhabitants of the heavens of the world of Brahmā.

Having completed the recollection of his former life, the Buddha again addressed Ānanda. He thus began to identify the beings in the legend with the beings in his presence at Vaiśāli. At that time, the Buddha revealed to Ānanda, he himself was none other than Māndhātṛ. The Buddha was none other than the king who, in Burnouf's words, had been "spiteful, passionate, given to error, in no way free, slave to the conditions of birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, pain, distress, disquiet, misfortune."<sup>47</sup>

In his former life as Māndhātṛ, however, at the moment death, the Buddha had been able to inspire hundreds of thousands of beings and established them in the heavens of the world of Brahmā. And now three months before his last death in *saṃsāra*, through his last teaching in the city of Vaiśāli prior to *parinirvāṇa* – "All compounds, O monks, are perishable" –, the Buddha had also established hundreds of thousands of beings in the religious life, from their admission into the religious order and the taking of precepts, to their attainment of the various levels of the disciples and the final fruit of *nirvāṇa*. When the Buddha completed his discourse, the assembly greatly rejoiced, accepting his words.

## V

The unabridged Sanskrit text of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ remained untranslated for the rest of the nineteenth and the entire twentieth century. In 1877, four decades after the Nepalese collection of Sanskrit books reached Burnouf's office in Paris, the Tibetan version of the legend of Rgyal po Nga las nu was translated into German by the Estonian Orientalist Franz Anton Schiefner (1817-1879), a folklorist and scholar of Tibetan and Mongolian who taught Classics at Saint Petersburg. Schiefner's "Der König Māndhātṛ" ("The King Māndhātṛ")

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<sup>47</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 119).

appeared as part of *Indische Erzählungen* (“Indian Tales”), a collection of forty-seven avadānas that was published in several installments on *Mélange Asiatiques*, the Orientalist journal of the Imperial Academy of Sciences of Saint Petersburg. The text of the legend was extracted from the ‘*Dul ba*, or *Vinaya*, section of the edition of the Tibetan canon that Vasily Pavlovich Vasil’ev (1818-1900), at Burnouf’s time the foremost Russian scholar of Buddhism, acquired in Beijing during his sojourn in the Russian Orthodox Mission over the 1840s, and which he brought back to Saint Petersburg in 1850.

In his translation from the Tibetan, Schiefner disclosed that Burnouf had translated the legend from the Nepalese manuscript of the *Divyāvadāna*. But in his brief introductory note, the Estonian Orientalist did not reveal to his readers the main striking difference between the Sanskrit and the Tibetan text. If Burnouf’s translation from Sanskrit only included the preamble of the legend, in Schiefner’s translation from Tibetan the preamble was absent. In other words, the only complete translation of the avadāna that had been made in a European language during the nineteenth century did not include the preamble, where the Buddha discussed the four foundations of magical power, taught the doctrine of impermanence – “All compounds, O monks, are perishable” –, and announced his own death. In the Tibetan version, the story began with Māndhātṛ’s miraculous birth from his father’s head.

Hence, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the European public never read about the Buddha’s death from the perspective of the legend of Māndhātṛ. The sense of the Buddha’s acceptance of death, followed by his teaching on impermanence, and the sense of his prayer in relation to Māndhātṛ’s abandonment of the pleasures of the senses, had been impossible to reproduce as Burnouf read it in his analysis of the Nepalese Collection from 1841 to 1844. What Burnouf popularized as a simple sūtra, in fact, was not the avadāna of Māndhātṛ, but the scriptural fragment he himself styled as the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ” – a fragment that did not exist by this title in any Buddhist canonical collection, even less in Hodgson’s Sanskrit Collection of Nepal.

After Burnouf’s assessment of the legend, together with his decision to leave it untranslated, his unfinished analysis of the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ” therefore provided later scholarship with the core idea of the simple sūtras. In Burnouf’s analysis of the simple sūtras, the idea of a simple moral philosophy he formulated about them thus became the kernel of Śākyamuni’s historical life and death. On the other hand, the untranslated avadāna remained the fabulous account of Śākyamuni’s former lives and deaths, whose history remained impossible to retrieve.

In 1886, the Sanskrit text of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ appeared in a volume edited by the British Orientalist Edward Byles Cowell (1826-1903), the first chair of Sanskrit in Cambridge, and by his pupil, the Classical scholar Robert Alexander Neil (1852-1901). The volume was entitled: *The Divyāvadāna: a collection of early Buddhist legends now first edited from the Nepalese Sanskrit MSS in Cambridge and Paris*.



In 1895, the Pāli version of the legend of Mandhātu was translated in the volume entitled *Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, by William Henry Denham Rouse (1863-1950), a Pāli and Sanskrit student of Cowell and professor of Classics in Cambridge. Like its Tibetan counterpart, the Pāli text of the legend of Māndhātṛ included the story of the Buddha's former birth, but lacked the preamble of the Sanskrit text from the Nepalese collection.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike the Sanskrit, Tibetan and Pāli versions, the Chinese legend of Dingshengwang, or "Crown-born King," was never translated into a European language. Yet in Chinese, too, the avadāna of Māndhātṛ contained the story of the Cakravartin but excluded the preamble.<sup>49</sup>

Because of Burnouf's untimely death, the question of the simple sūtras and their relation to the avadāna class of scriptures thus remained suspended. Burnouf did not live to complete his original project. But if he had lived, we might imagine that he would have carried on his *Introduction*, completing the remaining memorandums. Perhaps Burnouf's comparison of the Sanskrit collection of Nepal and of the Pāli collection of Sri Lanka would have begun, once again, from the the legend of Māndhātṛ, in search of the sense of the Sanskrit term sūtra. Again, the results of his comparison might have shown that the preamble only existed in the Sanskrit text that Hodgson dispatched from Nepal, and not in the Pāli text of the avadāna, nor in the Tibetan and Chinese versions of the legend. In the absence of the author of the *Introduction*, however, all that scholars of Buddhism were left with is the question of his original idea of "simple sūtra." So again, to understand how Burnouf imagined the teaching of the historical Buddha as a simple moral philosophy, we begin from his understanding of the term sūtra.

## VI

In Burnouf's study of the simple sūtras, the second fragment he selected from the *Divyāvadāna* was what he called the "Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa." Here the Buddha illustrates the fruition of almsgiving by recounting the acts of his former life as the king named Kanakavarṇa. As noted above, in the Sanskrit collection of Nepal, both legends of Māndhātṛ and Kanakavarṇa were entitled avadāna. Like the fragment of the former, which he renamed "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ," Burnouf intentionally changed the title of the avadāna of Kanakavarṇa to "Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa." The reasonings behind the changes, however, were different for each fragment. Indeed, for Burnouf the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ" could be styled as a sūtra because it seemed to contain historical elements traceable to the historical epoch of Śākyamuni's human life. "Despite the place that the belief in the

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<sup>48</sup> See Rouse (1895, pp. 216-218).

<sup>49</sup> See the *Foshuo dingshengwang yinyuan jing* in Takakusu and Watanabe (1923-24, vol. 3, no. 0165).



supernatural power of the Master occupies,” he clarified, “several circumstances of his human life can still be perceived in it.”<sup>50</sup>

Although the Buddha was said in the preamble to possess magical powers, a kernel of history could still be perceived by the scholar in the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ.” Thus, because history could be perceived in this fragment, Burnouf surmised that, despite the compilers’ belief in the miraculous, magic and legend could be said to be absent from the Buddha’s setting. On the other hand, because no historical details could be retrieved from the “Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa,” Burnouf regarded this text as entirely fabulous. Unlike the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ,” no historical elements on the Buddha’s human life, or the circumstances of his death, could be gleaned from the legend of king Kanakavarṇa. Hence, Burnouf changed the title of this avadāna to “Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa” for a different reason than the former. “It is worth remarking that this latter piece, which is a real sūtra as far as the form is concerned,” he observed, “bears, according to the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation, the title avadāna, or legend.”<sup>51</sup> The question of the authentic historical core of a scripture therefore concerned the relation between the scripture’s form and its content.

The reason behind Burnouf’s renaming was the fact that the legend, despite being only a legend, began with the Sanskrit formula *evaṃ mayā śrutam*, in English “Thus have I heard” (literally, “Thus it was heard by me”). This is the phrase that, placed at the beginning of a Buddhist scripture, certified that the compiler of such scripture had heard a discourse directly from the Buddha, or from a Buddha’s close disciple. The formula served to verify that a given discourse was *buddhavacana*, the “word of the Buddha.” The subject “I” thus commonly referred to Ānanda, but in mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and in the tantras, when the claim was made that a teaching had been preached by the Buddha but had not been heard by Ānanda, the teaching could be said to have been reported by another figure, such as the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. “A sūtra always begins with this formula,” explains Burnouf, “while this formula is lacking in all the avadānas I know.”<sup>52</sup> Burnouf’s choice of fragments from the *Divyāvadāna*—fragments that could serve as examples of simple sūtras—thus fell on two of a handful of avadānas in the collection that simply opened with this formula.

Burnouf therefore presented the two fragments to the European public as the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ” and the “Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa” because they introduced the setting of the Buddha’s discourse with the formula “Thus have I heard.” Still, although the two avadānas opened with the formula, according to Burnouf only the former could be said to be a “real sūtra” in both form and content. The latter could be regarded as a “real sūtra” only in terms of stylistic form. Unlike the former, the latter was said to have been heard by a human disciple of the Buddha,

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<sup>50</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 130).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. (p. 130).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. (p. 137).

yet no historical elements could be perceived in its content. Hence the legend of Kanakavarṇa could be said to contain only fabulous, and not historical, elements about Śākyamuni's life, elements that could serve as the foundation of the Buddha's simple moral philosophy. "One must then say that the legend," observed Burnouf, "forms the content and material proper of the avadāna, while it is nothing more than an accessory of the sūtra, and that it figures there only to confirm, by the authority of the example, the teaching of the Buddha, a teaching that is itself independent of the account given to support it."<sup>53</sup> For the French scholar, then, the content of the legend had been added to the historical core of teaching only to support the Buddha's simple philosophy concerning impermanence and death.

Lacking in all other avadānas, a preamble such as that of the legend of Māndhātṛ seemed to prove that the miraculous accounts of the former lives of the Buddha served only to reinforce the significance of the original teaching—"All compounds, O monks, are perishable"—that Śākyamuni dispensed in the historical setting of the *parinirvāṇa*. Hence Burnouf's comparison of the two avadānas proved the following: the content of the preamble—the simple sūtra—was independent from that of the legend—the avadāna proper—. The relation between the two scriptural categories of sūtra and avadāna thus concerned the relation between history and legend as Burnouf understood these terms. Put another way, the relation between sūtra and avadāna served to mark the rational and moral essence of what the scholar regarded as the Buddha's simple teaching.

The simple sūtra, imagined to contain Śākyamuni's original and independent teaching, could thus be said to make sense without the avadāna. The avadāna's legendary additions, in turn, added emphasis but were not essential to the meaning of Śākyamuni's simple philosophy. For Burnouf, then, Śākyamuni's teaching on impermanence and death as told in the simple sūtras would make sense in the Buddhist world of ancient India as it did in the scientific world of Oriental philology in modern Europe. In the former, however, Śākyamuni's human, historical life, and his divine, legendary lives across the realms of humans and non-humans, seemed inextricable. In the latter, the Buddha had lived a different life as the idol Fo until two decades earlier. Now, Śākyamuni inhabited the world of humans, a world tailored around the Buddha's human body, the body of a philosopher of European descent.

Burnouf's belief in the absence of magical powers in the setting of the Buddha's preaching articulated his scientific imagination of Śākyamuni's humanity in a setting conceived through this absence. Thus, as Burnouf displaced the magical foundation that is inherent to Buddhist scriptures, despite the miraculous elements that marked them, the sūtras could be said to convey historical details of the human world as imagined by the science of philology, whereas the avadānas could be said to contain entirely fabulous narrations where

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. (p. 137).



this world was ungraspable – the stories concerning the former and future lives of the Buddha, and of his disciples, throughout the three realms of *saṃsāra*. The Buddha’s life and death as a human being could thus take a different sense in each of these two worlds.

In Burnouf’s mind, it was thus the separation between the teaching of the sūtras – imagined as discourses unfolding in history – and of the avadānas – regarded as supporting accounts reflecting magical and legendary elements – that amounted to the separation of these two worlds. To Burnouf, a sūtra was a discourse of the Buddha that conveyed Śākyamuni’s simple and authentic teaching that been taught in the historical setting of an ancient Indian city. His removal of the magical content of Buddhist discourse is thus to be regarded as the dominant element in the formation of Burnouf’s idea of simple sūtra. His idea of the Buddha’s authentic teaching thus originated from his comparison of the Sanskrit manuscripts of the avadānas of Māndhātṛ and Kanakavarṇa, two of a handful stories of the collection marked with the *evaṃ mayā śrutam* opening formula.

## VII

Once again, to identify the “I” who heard the Buddha’s discourses in the opening formula, Burnouf dwelled on a scripture that conveyed the solemn moment of the Buddha’s death. This time, however, the scripture Burnouf analyzed was not an avadāna, but a mahāyāna sūtra. “If we are to believe the tradition preserved in a passage of the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, a book translated into Tibetan,” observes Burnouf, “it is Śākyamuni himself who determined the form of the sūtras, when he recommended to his disciples that they respond to the religious who come to question them.”<sup>54</sup> In his reading of a passage from the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, then, Burnouf explains how he came to believe that Śākyamuni himself had suggested to his disciples, the evening of his entry into *parinirvāṇa*, the stylistic form in which his discourses had to be preserved and transmitted. Thus for the French scholar the source of the formal style of the sūtras traced back to none other than Śākyamuni. “I have no doubt,” he explained, certain of his knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, “about the authenticity of this passage, which we will find in almost the same form in the Pāli books.”<sup>55</sup> Yet Burnouf did not read the passage in question in a Pāli scripture; nor did he read this passage in the Sanskrit manuscript of the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*. For, not only was this mahāyāna sūtra missing from Hodgson’s collection of Sanskrit books, but there was another fact that Burnouf, at the time, ignored. The *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra* was extant in Tibetan and Chinese translation, but not in Sanskrit. His knowledge of English would suffice.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. (p. 116).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. (p. 116).

The passage to which Burnouf referred had appeared in 1836, as Burnouf began to translate the *Lotus Sūtra*, in *Asiatic Researches*. It was part of the summary of the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra* that Csoma provided in his 1836 “Analysis of the Sher-chin – P’hal-chen – Dkon-séks – Do-de – Nyáng-das – and Gyut; being the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> divisions of the Tibetan Work, entitled the Kah-gyur.” Here, set in a grove of śāla trees near the city of Kuśa, or Kuśinagarī, on the evening of the Buddha’s passing into final *nirvāṇa*, the sūtra opens with Śākyamuni’s teaching to Ānanda. As he lies on his deathbed between two śāla trees, a series of miracles occurs. The Buddha then welcomes Brahmā, who has descended from his heavenly abodes in the formless realm to pay him homage, and with whom the Buddha discusses the subject of the creation of the world. Śākyamuni, then, before instructing his direct disciples on how to collect his teaching, receives the god Indra and the four great kings.<sup>56</sup> Thus the Bhagavat, having entrusted the world where “all is illusion” to Brahmā’s care, addressed his foremost disciples Ānanda and Kāśyapa, instructing them about the future. The Buddha thus told his

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<sup>56</sup> I provide here the Transylvanian scholar’s abridged description of the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā*, as Burnouf read it, from the sixth division of his discussion of the mdo, or sūtra, division of the Tibetan canon. Csoma writes: “The second treatise (from *leaves* 76 to 187) is entitled in Sanscrit, *A’rya māha karuṇā puṇḍarikā nāma mahā yāna sūtra*. In Tibetan, *Hp’hags-pa-snying-rjé-ch-hén-po-pad-ma-dkar-po-zhés-bya-va-t’hég-pa-ch’èn-pohi-mdo*. Eng. A venerable *sūtra* of high principles, called “*Puṇḍarikā*, the great merciful one.” This was delivered by SHA’KYA in a grove of *Sāl* trees near the town of *Ku’sha* (*Kāma-rūpa*, in Assan) on the evening he was about to die. Addressing KUN-DGAH-VO (Sans. *A’nanda*) he orders him to prepare him his dying bed. He tells him his performances, and the substance of his doctrine. His discourse with A’NANDA. The miracles that happened when he lay down (between a pair of *Sāl* trees) on his right side, like a lion – all trees, shrubs, and grasses bow themselves towards that side; all rivers or streams stand still; all beasts and birds sit still and move not for food; all lucid or shining bodies are affuscated; all sufferers in hell are assuaged; all those in misery are relieved; all the gods feel some displeasure with their own residence. TS’HA’NGS-PA (Sans. *Brahmā*), together with his train, pays his respect to BCHOM-LDAN-HDAS. From *leaves* 80 to 90, there is a description of their conversation on the subject of creation – by whom the world was made. SHA’KYA asks several questions to BRAHMA’ – whether was it he who made or produced such and such things, and endowed or blessed them with such and such virtues or properties – whether it was he who caused the several revolutions in the destruction and regeneration of the world. He denies that he had ever done any thing to that effect. At last he himself asks SHA’KYA how the world was made – by whom? Here are attributed all changes in the world to the moral works of the animal beings, and it is stated that the world all is illusion; there is no reality in the things; all is empty. BRAHMA’ being instructed in his doctrine, becomes his follower. SHA’KYA vindicating the universe for himself, commits it to the care of BRAHMA’, and directs him what to do for promoting virtue and happiness in the world, *leaf* 90. His (SHA’KYA’S) conversation with DED-DPON, the son of KA’MA-DE’VA – his instructions to him. His conference with INDRA, (Tib. *Brgya-byin*) and with the four great kings of the giants (Tibetan *Lhamayin*). He gives several lessons to these four kings, and advises them to live contented, and not to make war against INDRA. They promise that they will obey his commands. *Leaf* 100, the lamentation of INDRA on the approaching death of SHA’KYA.” See Csoma de Kőrös (1836, pp. 433-4).



disciples what to do with what would remain of him after death: his *vacana*—his words—, and his *śarīra*—his body—. <sup>57</sup>

Hence, in Csoma's presentation of the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, Śākyamuni himself was said to have instructed Ānanda on the twelvefold division of scripture, the same division Hodgson reported in his essays according to the Buddhists of Nepal. This mahāyāna sūtra thus ascribed the classification of Śākyamuni's doctrine in twelve divisions, including the (1) sūtra, (2) geya, (3) vyākaraṇa, (4) gāthā, (5) udāna, (6) nidāna, (7) ityukta, (8) jātaḥ, (9), vaipulya, (10) adbhuta dharma, (11) avadāna, and (12) upadeśa divisions, to the Buddha himself. Therefore, as Csoma had reported according to the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, and as Burnouf came to believe after reading it, Śākyamuni would have personally requested Ānanda to report his doctrine to the assembly of *dge slong* (Tibetan for *bhikṣu*, or monks) with the opening formula '*di skad bdag gis thos pa dus gcig na*—in Sanskrit, *evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye*, "Thus did I hear at one time." Ānanda was then the rapporteur, the "I," the human disciple who heard the transmission of the Buddha's teaching, at a certain time of the Buddha's career, and in a certain setting. <sup>58</sup>

The *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, reported by its compilers to have been taught in the city of Kuśinagara, then lists the places where Ānanda heard the Buddha's teaching, including the cities of Gayā, where Śākyamuni was said to

<sup>57</sup> The passage that marked Burnouf's understanding of the term sūtra as a philosophical discourse unfolding in history appeared on "leaf 181" of the Tibetan scripture. Csoma continues: "Leaf 109. KUN-DGAH-VO is comforted by SHA'KYA, and directed what to do after his death (*leaves* 110-112). HOD-SRUNG (Sans. *Kāshyapa*) the immediate successor of SHA'KYA. His qualities. SHA'KYA tells to A'NANDA the increase of the believers in his doctrine, and the great veneration that will be shewn to the places of his relics. Leaf 124, the great qualifications of KUN-DGAH-VO, or A'NANDA. SHA'KYA's instructions to him. Leaf 181. On the request of KUN-DGAH-VO, SHA'KYA directs him what to do with respect to the compilation of his doctrine. Here are enumerated the twelve different kinds of the *Buddhistic* writings. He is directed to answer to the priests or *Gelongs*, when they shall ask where it was delivered,—"*Hdi-skad-bdag-gis-t'hos-pa-dus-gchig-na*"—I myself heard this at a certain time, when BCHOM-LDAN-HDAS was at such and such places, and the hearers were these and these; and that when he had finished his lecture, all those that were present rejoiced much, and approved his doctrine. The principal places where SHA'KYA had delivered the *sūtras* of his doctrine, are here enumerated. They are the *Byang-ch'ub-snying-po*, (Sans. *Bodhimañ'da*, or *Gayā* in *Magadha*) under a *Nyagrodha* tree. *Vāranāsi*, in the grove called *Drang-srong lhung-va-ri-dags-kyi-nags*. *Rājagriha*, and hear to it the *Bya-rgod-p'hung-pohi-ri*, and the *Hod-mahi-ts'hal*. *Mnyan-yod* (S. *Shrāvasti*). *Yangs-pa-chen* (Sans. *Vaishali* or *Priyāga*, *Allahabad*) *Champa* (on the bank of a tank dug by GARGA). *Kaushambi*, *Sakétana*, (Tib. *Gnas-bchas*,) *Pataliputra*, or *Patna*. (Tib. *Skya-nar-gyi-bu*.) *Mathura*, (Tib. *Bchom-rlag*.) *Kámarupa*, &c. He is directed farther to make introduction to them, to explain the subject with an amplification of the causes and effects, in good sense and proper terms of words, and to arrange the whole in such and such a manner. There are in this *sūtra* six *bam-pos* and thirteen chapters. This was translated by the Indian Pandits JINA-MITRA and SURENDRA-BODHI, and the Tibetan Lotsava BANDE' YE'SHE'S-SDE'." Ibid. (pp. 435-6).

<sup>58</sup> See the study by Lopez (1996, pp. 19-46). For the standards of scriptural authority in the Buddhism of India, see Davidson (1990).



have attained awakening, Sarnath, near Vārāṇasī, where he delivered his first sermon, Rājagṛha, the royal capital of the Buddha's patron King Bimbisāra, and Vaiśālī, where he taught the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ." After the enunciation of the setting, the Buddha would have finally instructed Ānanda on the formal style of the sūtra. Therefore when reporting a Buddha's discourse, Ānanda had to use specifically sets phrases and give the entire scripture a specific formal presentation. The formal presentation of the teaching, certifying that it had been spoken by the Buddha, would have then been translated from Sanskrit into the other Buddhist languages, such as in the case of the late eight to early ninth century Tibetan translator Ye shes sde, aided in the translation by the Indian scholars Jinamitra and Śilendrabodhi.

The *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra* thus recounted, from the perspective of a mahāyāna sūtra, the mode through which a teaching could be certified as *buddhavacana*—the word of the Buddha. The lesson Burnouf learned from the above passage in Csoma's summary was clear. The stylistic form of a scripture, that is, whether a scripture had an opening formula, whether it had been heard by a human disciple of the Buddha, and whether it was set in an Indian city, should have reflected its original, historical content. The passage from the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra* demonstrated two main points to Burnouf. First, he came to the conclusion that the formal style of the sūtras traced directly to the Buddha's word. Second, he came to believe that the opening formula "Thus did I hear at one time" had originated from the Buddha's necessity to make a distinction between the teachings he had truly spoken from those which, after his death, may have been claimed as his authentic teaching. In other words, the opening formula, in Burnouf's perspective, was the stylistic device that Śākyamuni would have consigned to his disciples at the moment of death as a seal of the historical authenticity of his teaching.

Yet, as it appears in the *Divyāvadāna*, the preamble of the legend of Māndhātṛ, telling of the events of the Buddha's last days, is absent from the Pāli, Tibetan and Chinese renderings of the same legend. It should also be noted, however, that a version of the same preamble appears in another scripture, in fact, the most renowned scripture on the events of the Buddha's last days. The story of the Buddha's dialogue with Ānanda and with Māra in fact appears in the third section of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, or "Great Discourse on the Final Nirvāṇa," known to have existed in Sanskrit, and extant in Pāli as the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*.

As Burnouf notes, the Sanskrit text of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* had not been dispatched by Hodgson with the Nepalese Collection. But, as he read the *Divyāvadāna*, it occurred to Burnouf that the story as told in the fragment of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* was the same as the one told in the preamble of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ. "Later, I will compare the present sūtra," Burnouf wrote, referencing his simple sūtra, "with the *Parinibbāṇa Sutta* of the Sinhalese, of which Mr. Turnour has already given some fragments of the highest interest and translated with a rare



exactitude.”<sup>59</sup> Burnouf had in fact learned in some detail the account of the Buddha’s death soon after he received Hodgson’s manuscripts in 1837.

## VIII

A partial translation of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* had been rendered from Pāli into English by George Turnour (1799-1843), a British civil servant who resided in Ceylon, and had been published in 1838 on the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Yet this discovery did not seem to play a major role in Burnouf’s formulation of the idea of simple sūtra. In effect, having deferred the comparison between the Sanskrit and the Pāli versions of the story to a later time, Burnouf dwelled on the Sanskrit source, on its own terms, of the story of the Buddha’s decision to enter *parinirvāṇa*, so that he could ascertain its place within the *Divyāvadāna* and the Sanskrit Collection. But as the comparison was suspended by Burnouf’s untimely death, the relation between history and legend as told in Burnouf’s reading of the *Divyāvadāna* would affect future comparisons of the sūtras, as he defined the term, with other classes of Buddhist scriptures, and, in particular, with the tantra class of scriptures.

And so, the twofold content of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ, namely, what Burnouf regarded as its historical and as its legendary content, could be related in more than one sense. In Burnouf’s comparison of the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ” and the “Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa,” he discussed his idea of the relation between history and legend in Buddhist scriptures by taking the story of the preamble (1) as an integral part of the legend of Māndhātṛ, but also, at the same time, (2) as a scriptural fragment that was independent from the avadāna. In other words, although he knew that the story of the preamble had been told separately in different contexts, for it also appeared in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, Burnouf chose to discuss its sense as a historical teaching of the Buddha as it appeared in the Sanskrit text of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ. Burnouf’s analysis of the twofold content of the avadāna thus centered on the mode through which the preamble related to the entire avadāna in terms of difference between history and legend. The legendary content, as Burnouf put it, therefore simply served to support the sense of the teaching of the Buddha that unfolded in the historical circumstances of his human life in ancient India.

Perhaps, in his future comparison, Burnouf would have also discussed the story of the Buddha’s decision to enter *parinirvāṇa* in relation to the different sections of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*. He would have thus compared the position of the “Thus have I heard” formula in the Pāli sutta, that is, whether the formula

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<sup>59</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 118n).

actually opened the story in the Pāli text of the story as it did in the Sanskrit text of the *Divyāvadāna*. In fact, the compilers of the *Divyāvadāna* had affixed the formula to the incipit of the avadāna of Māndhātṛ, whereas the compilers of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*—and this was clear to Burnouf from Turnour’s translation—had not done so, for the story appeared in the third section of the Pāli scripture.

Perhaps, in Burnouf’s analysis, the story of the Buddha’s dialogue with Ānanda about the *ṛddhipādas*, and with Māra concerning his entry into *parinirvāṇa*, could thus be regarded as independent in another sense. For, the French savant would have observed that the story may have been not only independent from the title of sūtra—for it appeared in both a Sanskrit avadāna and in a Pāli sutta—, but also from the opening formula—for it was the first section of a Sanskrit avadāna, yet only the third in a Pāli sutta.

The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* is the sixteenth and longest scripture of the *Dīghanikāya*, the “Collection of Long Discourses” forming the *Suttapiṭaka*. “It consists of six Bhānawārá,” wrote Turnour in 1838, commenting on the scripture’s structure and number of sections (P. *bhāṇavāra*), “and commences with the words ‘the following was heard by myself,’ being the introductory expression used by A’NANDO.”<sup>60</sup> It was clear from Turnour’s translation, then, that the opening formula had been affixed to the first section of the sutta, which tells of the Buddha’s journey in fourteen stations, from the city of Rājagṛha, towards the place of his death, the city of Kuśinagarī. En route, ever accompanied by Ānanda, the Buddha dispenses a variety of teachings to different audiences. And the Buddha’s teaching on impermanence and death, pronounced shortly after his announcement of the imminent *parinirvāṇa*, appears in the third section of the sutta, during his station in Vaiśālī.

As told in the previous section of the sutta, that is, in the second section, before they walk to the Cāpāla *caitya*, the Buddha and Ānanda visit the mango grove of Āmrapālī, a local courtesan who just met the Buddha in the nearby city of Kotigāma. Entranced by the Buddha’s teaching on the four noble truths (S. *catvāry āryasatyāni*), Āmrapālī hosts the Buddha to a meal and donates her mango grove to the monastic community. It is after his meal with Āmrapālī that the Buddha, now eighty years old, manifests the first symptoms of the severe illness that would lead to his death. The symptoms of the Buddha’s disease would then be described in the fourth section, after his departure from Vaiśālī. Here, stationed at the city of Pāvā, the Buddha consumes his last meal, prepared with “tender boar” (S. *sūkaramārdava*) by the blacksmith named Cunda, resulting in the fatal dysentery from which Śākyamuni suffers until the evening of his *parinirvāṇa* in Kuśinagarī.

The third section of the sutta, placed between the stories of the Buddha’s last meals with Āmrapālī and with Cunda, tells of the same events of Burnouf’s

<sup>60</sup> See Turnour (1838, p. 991).

“Sūtra of Māndhātṛ.”<sup>61</sup> Despite its absence in Turnour’s “Third Bhānawáro,” Burnouf was bound by the spell of the “Thus have I heard” formula opening Buddhist scriptures. Described in detail in the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarikā Sūtra*, the opening formula is a literary device that marks all scriptures, in particular the mahāyāna sūtras and the tantras, claiming to be the word of the Buddha. In such manner, adhering to the logic of this literary device, Burnouf came to believe that if the opening formula was present, the content of a scripture must have revealed historical details of Śākyamuni’s human life. Historical details aside, if the scripture also encompassed legendary content, such addition meant that legend had been added to historical account as a support of the Buddha’s simple, moral teaching. But if the formula was present and yet the scholar could not perceive any seemingly historical content in the scripture, the consequence would be the following: Buddhist compilers must have (1) styled the scripture as a sūtra, or (2) added the opening formula, only in an attempt to promote legend as history – namely, to elevate a teaching that Śākyamuni had not spoken to the rank of *buddhavacana*.

As shown in the *Prātihārya Sūtra*, the famous “Discourse on the Miracle,” the compilers of Buddhist scriptures could add the term sūtra to the title of a scripture that not only lacked the “Thus have I heard” formula, but that reported, entirely in the present tense and in the setting of the Indian city of Śrāvastī, the fabulous account of the Buddha’s display of magical powers. Burnouf’s choice of terms in what he called the simple sūtras – the “Sūtra of Māndhātṛ” and the “Sūtra of Kanakavarṇa” – enacted a similar thought. Like Buddhist compilers, the founder of the European study of Buddhism availed himself of the Buddhist device through which, by adding the term sūtra to the title of a scriptural fragment

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<sup>61</sup> I report hereafter the first three paragraphs in Turnour’s translation of the “Third Bhānawáro,” as read by Burnouf: “Subsequently, on a certain morning, BHAGAWÁ makes a pilgrimage in search of alms through *Wésáli*, and after his morning repast attended by A’NANDO, repairs for his noon-day rest to the *Chepúlá chétiyo*. BUDDHO there expatiates on the perfections of that *chétiyo*, as well as the *Wésáli*, the *Udéní*, the *Gótamá*, the *Sattambako*, the *Bahupatto* and the *Sárandado chétiyáni*; and explains that it is in the power of any BUDDHO, by his four (*idhi*) miraculous attributes, to prolong his existence even for a *kappó*, if, while sojourning at any of these places he is duly entreated thereto. MÁRO (*Death*) imperceptibly exerts his influence, and prevents A’NANDO from comprehending this exposition made by the BHAGAWÁ, thought repeated twice. A’NANDO then retires at the foot of a tree, disconcerted, and seats himself there. Before A’NANDO had proceeded to any great distance, the impious MÁRO approaches the BHAGAVA’, and having approached him and stationed himself on one side of him, thus addressed him: Lord BHAGAVA’, vouchsafe to realize thy *Parinibbánán* now. SUGATO, this is the appointed time for thy *Parinibbánán*. It had been declared so by thee, Lord BHAGAVA’, on a former occasion, &c. BHAGAVA’ replies that his death is at hand; and that his *Parinibbánán* will take place in three months. He then announces his resignation of all connection with this transitory state of existence, to prepare for his death, by chanting this hymn. “Having voluntarily overcome his desire for this life, the Muni has vouchsafed to relinquish all that is transitory, connected either with his human or divine essence, casting his existence from him, like unto a victorious combatant who divests himself of his armor.” See Turnour (1838, pp. 1000-1).

of his personal choice, he could seal a text, and promote it, among the European public, as a discourse of the Buddha that unfolded in history. In so doing, the moral philosophy of the simple sūtra, as Burnouf popularized it, removed the Buddha and his doctrine from the historically self-conscious world, articulated by the vision of the superknowledges, where the compilers of the events leading to the *parinirvāṇa* recounted their master's loss.

To end, let us dwell on a term that Turnour left untranslated in his version of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*: “kappó,” that is, *kappa* in Pāli, often rendered into English as “aeon,” or “cosmic age.” This is a term whose Sanskrit equivalent *kalpa*, like Turnour, Burnouf also decided to leave untranslated in his simple sūtra, for he had previously done so in the French rendering of the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>62</sup> In reading Turnour's translation, Burnouf was certainly unaware of the fact that Buddhist commentators had engaged in a dispute concerning the Buddha's statement, at the Cāpāla *caitya*, of being able to defer death, after the division into the proponents of the Sthāvirānikāya and the Mahāsāṃghika during the second council at Vaiśālī, about a century after the Buddha's death. Indeed, the dispute not only centered on the question of whether the Buddha *could* defer death, but also on the question of *how*, and *how long*, he could do so. Indeed, despite the Buddha's claim to possess the ability to generate new life force (S. *āyuh saṃskāra*), early Buddhist commentators did not agree on the manner in which he could do so by mastery of *rddhi*. If, taking the teaching of *karma* into account, any life force was determined at the moment of birth by the power of former deeds (S. *karma-vipāka*), it was not clear how new life force could be generated by magical powers deriving from meditative absorption, when the limit of life force deriving from former deeds was reached.<sup>63</sup>

Hence, in the passage of the Buddha's dialogue with Ānanda, where he declares that one who has mastered the four *rddhipādas* can extend one's life for “either for a full kalpa, or until the end of the kalpa,”<sup>64</sup> the contention dwelled on the Sthāvirānikāya interpretation of *kalpa* as “lifespan” (S. *āyuh kalpa*), which amounts to about one hundred years, and the Mahāsāṃghika reading of *kalpa* as “great aeon” (S. *mahākalpa*), which is more than a trillion years. Hence, when confronted with the Buddha's claim to be able to perform the miracle of eternal life, many early exegetes could not accept it on the basis of the explanation of the ability to generate new life force by magical powers. In disbelief, despite the difficulty of reconciling the Buddha's miraculous powers with *karma*, they still granted the Buddha these powers, but interpreted the term *kalpa* to mean “lifespan.” In contrast, it was not difficult to interpret the term *kalpa* as “great aeon”

<sup>62</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 126). Burnouf writes a long note about the term *kalpa* in his translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but he does not make a distinction concerning different uses of the term in the *Dīvyāvadāna*, in the *Lotus Sūtra* and in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*. See Burnouf (1852, pp. 324-329).

<sup>63</sup> On the issue concerning the Buddha's prolongation of life, see the studies by Jaini (1958) and Gethin (2001, pp. 94-97).

<sup>64</sup> See Burnouf (2010, p. 119).

for Buddhist exegetes who not only granted the Buddha the ability to prolong life, but who also sustained the Buddha's claim to be able to live for a great cosmic age."<sup>65</sup> Regardless, all accorded to the Buddha the mastery of *rddhi* and the power to control his life forces to some extent, whether to prolong his lifespan to reach the age limit for a human being, or to reach the end of the present great aeon, that is, the end of the world.<sup>66</sup>

"*Could* the Buddha defer death?" Thus, can Burnouf's quest be formulated after his reading of the "Sūtra of Māndhātṛ"? Clearly, like many scholars of Buddhism after him, his answer would be, "No." But no doubt, Burnouf's question is already implied in the history of the early commentarial traditions. For, if the dispute on the nature of the Buddha's decision to relinquish life was not always expressed in terms of the question, "*Could* the Buddha defer death?" it was in terms of the question, "*How, and how long, could the Buddha defer death?*" The doubt that the Buddha was unable to prolong his lifespan by magic is inherent to the historical consciousness of the early commentarial traditions. Regardless of whether the Buddha could extend his life force for an *āyuh kalpa* or a *mahākalpa*, all commentarial traditions accorded him to some degree the power to do so. For, the mastery of *rddhi* was in every case regarded in the Buddhism of India as a product of *samādhi*. Hence, the Buddhists's question of *how, and how long, the Buddha could defer death, become a single question with Burnouf's question, regarding whether the Buddha could defer death at all. On the twofold horizon of this single question,*

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<sup>65</sup> In the chapter on "Indriyas" of his *Abidharmakośabhāṣya*, Vasubandhu presents the various views on the prolongation and the shortening of lifespan according to the *abhidharma* traditions. In the final section of his excursus, he writes: "Why does the Blessed One cast off [death] and extend [life]? With the aim of showing that he possesses mastery over death, he casts off death; with the aim of showing that he possesses mastery over life, he extends it. He extends it for a period of three months, no more, no less; after three months, there is nothing more to do for his followers, after his task is well achieved, for, short of three months, he would leave his task unachieved. Or rather, with the aim of realizing this vow: 'Any Bhikṣu who has well cultivated the four supernormal powers (*rddhipāda*, vi.69b), can live, if he so desires, a *kalpa* or more.' The Vaibhāṣikas say: 'With the aim of showing that he triumphs over the Mara who is the *skandhas*, and over the Mara who is death. In the first watch of the night, under the Bodhi Tree, he has already triumphed over the Mara who is a demon, and, in the third watch, over the Mara who is the defilements (*Ekottarika*, TD 2, p. 760b17 and following).'" See de la Vallée Poussin (1990, Vol. 1, pp. 165-68).

<sup>66</sup> Gethin (2001, p. 97) concludes his study with the following statement: "What does all this signify for the understanding of the *iddhi-pādas*? Ignoring the question of *āyu-kappa* and *mahā-kappa*, the answer is, I think, quite straightforward. One who develops fully the *iddhi-pādas* is clearly understood to have at least some power to extend his life; he has at least some control over the particular factors that determine the time of death. This, in fact, accords quite well with the treatment of the *iddhi-pādas* elsewhere in the texts. As I have tried to illustrate, the *iddhi-pādas* are primarily concerned with the development of skill and facility in *samādhi* or types of meditative attainment, and they are frequently explicitly associated with various meditative powers that are linked to the development of *jhāna*. That an aspect or by-product of this kind of mastery of the forces of the mind is seen as an ability to have some measure of control over the factors that determine the moment of death, is not a notion peculiar to the Nikāyas, but entirely consistent with the wider Indian yogic tradition."



the Buddha's decision to enter *parinirvāṇa* retains the historicity, the humanity, and the truth of his teaching on impermanence—"All compounds, O monks, are perishable"—and on the inevitability of death. It does so as the reaction to the master's loss unfolds in the history of a world articulated by the vision of superknowledges, a world where the *tathāgata*, the god beyond the gods, is always full master of death and its demons.

Still, such demons—the human *māras*—of grief and nostalgia, inscribed themselves as the denial of the master's death into the history of the tradition, for thus says the Buddha,

"I proclaim monks, sons of good lineage, that I will enter into final *nirvāṇa*, although I refrain from doing so. Why? In this manner I lead all beings to maturity. If I remain too long in the world, those beings who have not acquired roots of virtue, who are impure, who are miserable, who are driven by their blind desires, and surrounded by nets of false doctrines, they, in seeing the *tathāgata* unceasingly, would say: 'The *tathāgata* remains in the world;' and they would imagine that there is nothing as easy to meet; they would not conceive the thought that there is anything difficult to obtain. If they said: 'We are close to the *tathāgata*,' they would not employ their energy to escape the gathering of the three worlds, and they would not conceive the thought that the *tathāgata* is difficult to meet,"<sup>67</sup>

as Burnouf translates the fifteenth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, entitled "La durée de la vie du tathāgata" ("The Lifespan of the Tathāgata"), in whose compelling parables, during the late 1830s, his quest for the Buddha's simple moral philosophy began. There is then an irony in this quest, opening the relation of Buddhism and philosophy to another sense, as the beliefs and knowledge of the historian-philologist are found to be constitutive of such a relation. For, unlike the doctrine of the mortal Buddha of the *Divyāvadāna*, who triumphs over Māra not in the denial but in the embrace of death, the moral message of the *Lotus Sūtra* is the doctrine of the deathless Buddha, who never truly passes into *parinirvāṇa*. It is the doctrine of the Buddha who, by secret and transcendent powers, puts on display the spectacle of death only as a means to free all beings from the three realms of *samsāra*. It is clear by now where a philosophical reading of Buddhism, whose major nineteenth-century proponents were Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, intersects with the steps that the Buddha has taken across Europe after the Age of Enlightenment, from Deshautes de La Rivière's idol Fo to Oldenberg's Buddha, from the Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra* to the Buddha of the *Divyāvadāna*, from the cult of voidness to Buddhist philosophy. How the philosophical dimension of Burnouf's

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<sup>67</sup> See Burnouf (1852, p. 194). My translation from Burnouf's French. See also See Kubo and Yuyama (2007, p. 225).





reading contributed to fashioning philosophy as such during the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century – to begin with Schopenhauer’s idea of the “denial of the will-to-live” in *The World as Will and Representation* – is a question that awaits further consideration.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> By the third edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, published in 1859, as he brings Buddhism into a dialogue with his own system of moral philosophy, Schopenhauer cites the work of Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat and Eugène Burnouf, respectively the 1836 *Foë Kouë Ki, ou Relation des royaumes bouddhiques* and the 1844 *Introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien*, among his main authorities on Buddhist moral philosophy. See Schopenhauer (1969, I, pp. 378-398; and 1969, II, pp. 603-633).



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