

This very readable book is much more than a case study of a 'mad mullah' and a potentially wide readership will benefit from the author's insights.

Werner F. Menski

HEINZ BECHERT (Hrsg.), *The Dating of the Historical Buddha/Die Datierung des historischen Buddha*. Pt. 1. (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse, Folge 3, Nr. 189). (Symposien zur Buddhismusforschung, IV, 1). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1991. XV, 525 pages, DM 310.- (ISBN 3-525-82476-9).

Until quite recently, the dating of Siddhārtha Gautama, known as the Buddha, was considered as practically certain. His Nirvāṇa, believed to have taken place around 480 BC, was cited as one of the very few certain dates, indeed the earliest date, of ancient Indian history. Few scholars questioned the historicity of the traditional dates which appeared time and again in handbooks and encyclopaedias and served as the basis for all early Indian chronology.

Since the early 1980s H. Bechert has renewed discussion of the dating of the Buddha. In a booklet¹ published in 1986 he gave a summary of research, pointing out that none of the relevant sources can be relied upon as evidence for the exact dates of the Buddha. Since the dating of the Buddha is of considerable interest not only for students of Buddhism, a symposium on "The Date of the Historical Buddha and the Importance of its Determination for Historiography and World History" was held in Hedemünden near Göttingen on April 11-18, 1988 under the sponsorship of the Göttingen Akademie der Wissenschaften². Among the participants were indologists, historians and archeologists as well as specialists on Tibet, Central Asia and East Asia.

In order to render the standard of discussion as high as possible, a new procedure was followed that seems highly recommendable: all contributors had the opportunity to get acquainted with each other's views before the actual conference through the circulation of all papers re-

1 Die Lebenszeit des Buddha - das älteste feststehende Datum der indischen Geschichte? NAWG 1986, 127-184 (cf. review in Vol. 19 (1988), p. 99).

2 See *Internationales Asienforum*, 19, 1988, 391-403.

ceived prior to the opening of the conference; furthermore, all participants could revise their texts after the conference. The papers in the present volume can thus be considered to represent the views that their authors had arrived at after thoroughly weighting all arguments brought forward during the symposium. They have been arranged thematically under eight sections, covering all major aspects of the subject, namely I. History of Research, II. The Date of the Buddha in the Context of Indian Cultural History, III. The Indian Tradition Evaluated, IV. The Spread of the Theravāda Chronology and its Implication, V. Traditions of Late Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, VI. Central Asian Traditions, VII. East Asian Traditions, VIII. The Axial Age Theory.

H. Nakamura gives a survey of "Japanese Research on the Date of the Buddha". J.-U. Hartmann and G. Roth review relevant works from South Asia written in Western languages and in Hindi. One of the texts which is often quoted in these and other works as a primary source is the *Mālālaṅkāravatthu*. H. Braun's contribution "The Buddhist Era in the *Mālālaṅkāravatthu*" is thus especially welcome. He shows that any speculation based on dates quoted from this work is futile since no date at all is in fact given in the Burmese original but was supplied by the translator from another Burmese source. G. Roth makes an interesting attempt to date the Iranian prophet Zarathustra nearer to the Buddha, indeed as late as the 4th century BC, which will, however, probably be unacceptable to Iranian scholars on linguistic grounds. H. Härtel examines the archaeological evidence of the principal sites which the Buddha is said to have visited. Since the first settlement of some of them apparently did not take place before the 6th century BC, an earlier dating of the Buddha can be excluded. H. Kulke, examining reports of archaeological excavations and comparing them with evidence from literary sources, concludes that the process of urbanization in the Ganges valley of the late 6th century is not contemporary with but rather precedes the early state formation with which it has hitherto been linked. According to him, the emergence of strong regional kingdoms in Northern India reflected mainly in early Buddhist and Jaina literature, should be dated to the 5th or even early 4th centuries B.C. Urbanization is also the starting point of O. v. Simson's attempt to analyse the cultural background to the development of early Buddhism. Papers by A. Mette, K.R. Norman and P.H.L. Eggermont are devoted to evidence about the Jina as the Buddha's contemporary. R. Tsuchida examines the genealogy of the Buddha as derived from the various names used for him in Buddhist sources. W. Halbfass deals with "Early Indian References to

the Greeks and the First Western References to Buddhism". O. v. Hinüber contributes "Linguistic Considerations on the Date of the Buddha". S. Lienhard explains the ancient Buddhist anthologies *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* as instances of early classical poetry with a distinct Buddhist turn. G. Obeyesekere, drawing attention to a conspicuous predominance of the number 18, points out that in ancient accounts relevant for the dating of the Buddha, chronology in the modern sense could, as a perfectly acceptable stylistic convention, be substituted by numerology. Numerology, according to him, links the scholarly tradition of early chronology with folk traditions traceable up to the present day. Despite certain shortcomings (see Bechert, p. 338), his article will be a highlight of the book for readers interested in ethnology and oral history.

The papers evaluating the Indian tradition are at the same time those that propose a dating of the Buddha's death, ranging from 486 B.C. (Yamazaki) to 261 B.C. (Eggermont). A. Bareau, the author of the famous survey "La date du Nirvāṇa"³, and A. Hirakawa attempt to analyze a certain stage in the development of Buddhism to be used as indirect evidence for the dates of the Buddha. G. Yamazaki investigates "The Lists of the Patriarchs in the Northern and Southern Legends". P.H.L. Eggermont presents the rather surprising hypothesis that king Aśoka (3rd cent. B.C.) is identical with the Buddha's contemporary Ajātaśatru. The editor H. Bechert, as in his earlier publication (footnote 1), expresses the view that many arguments point to a date for the Buddha's death later than that of the corrected long chronology (ca. 480 BC), but that no evidence is available to allow an exact dating.

Papers by H. Bechert, C. Mallebrein and Mahes Raj Pant, and (with emphasis on its implications in contemporary history) by P. Kieffer-Pülz and M. Sarkisyanz, are devoted to the influential Theravāda chronology. As for the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, C. Vogel gives an annotated translation of the chapter of Bu-ston's History dealing with the date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa. H. Durt reports on traditions in Korea and Japan, and Bhikkhu Pāsādika on traditions in Vietnam.

"The Date of the Buddha according to Tantric Texts" is the title of G. Grönbold's paper. Since the historicity of the Buddha is of minor importance for tantric Buddhism, it is quite remarkable that a whole chapter of the tantric text *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* deals with Indian history, even though it does not provide any new or original evidence. From the *Kāla-*

3 Journal Asiatique, 241, 1953, 27-62.

cakrantra on the other hand, a date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa can be evaluated from the dates of kings figuring in the specific mythology of this text.

In Tocharian and Uigur Buddhist literature, dealt with by K. Röhrborn, there is no information about the year of the Buddha's birth though the exact date and even time of his birth is given. In Tibetan Bonpo, East Asian and non-Buddhist Central Asian traditions, it can generally be said that the various theories about the Buddha's dates are often a matter of secondary concern and reflect the doctrines important for their respective authors rather than a genuine interest in correct chronology. P. Kvaerne shows how the dates of birth and death of the Buddha figure in texts of the Bonpo religion, W. Sundermann deals with Manichaean traditions. In Central Asia, there is no evidence about the Buddha's dates before the Mongol period where they appear in connection with the biography of Tchingis Khan. According to K. Röhrborn, the chronological speculations reflected in the history of the Muslim writer Rasīd al-Dīn (14th cent.) are due to the Mongol rulers' attempt at legitimization. The papers by H. Franke and L. Lancaster show that chronological theories current in China served to prove the relative age and superiority of Buddhism against other religions, as well as to establish for the believers the state of the Dharma in their own times.

Finally, after a concise survey by S.N. Eisenstadt of the Axial Age theory as applied to the dispute about the dates of the Buddha, the book closes with Reinhard Wenskus' article about the cultural changes in "Central and Northern Europe at the Time of the Buddha". Pointing out remarkable parallels in the development in Western Europe and North Eastern Iran, he suggests that peripheral cultures may have had an important role in the diffusion of cultural achievements.

The main object of the symposium could not be to find a definitive consensus, but rather to critically review the earlier theories as well as to present and discuss new evaluations of all the available evidence. One result is that there is no absolute certainty about the dating of the Buddha. "The earliest historical date of Indian history" will no longer be the date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa, but, quoting H. Kulke (p. 107), "the conquest of Gandhara and the Indus valley by Darius around 520 B.C."

The present volume, though a complete unit in itself, is only the first of three parts. It includes a preface and an introductory essay by the editor H. Bechert to whom one must be grateful for this major contribution to Buddhist and Indological studies.

Almuth Degener