

Literary Influences between Buddhism and Christianity

‘Buddhist Literature and World Literature’

(subject of discussion [pp. 402-423] in the)

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by

Maurice Winternitz

Translated from the original German by

Mrs. Ketkar and Miss H. Kohn

and revised by the Author

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Buddhist Literature and World Literature.

Just as Buddhism became one of the great religions of the world, a great part of Buddhist literature belongs to world literature. We have already seen, on various occasions, that Buddhist fables, anecdotes, fairy tales and legends not only migrated to the Far East with Buddhism, but also frequently have their parallels in European literatures, though it is not always certain that the Buddhist narratives migrated to Europe, for the reverse may sometimes have been the case.¹ We have also seen that the Buddha legend has some features in common with the legend of Christ,² and that certain speeches and parables in the Suttas of the Tipiṭaka and the Mahāyāna Sūtras are, more or less strikingly, reminiscent of passages in the Christian gospels.³

The question as to how far these points of agreement between Buddhist and Christian literature actually exist, and what significance is due to them, is sufficiently important to warrant our treating of them once more as a whole. Are they more or less accidental similarities, resemblances which may be explained by the fact that the respective legends, similes and utterances have arisen out of the same situations and religious moods, or is it a question of the actual dependence of the one literature upon the other? Were the Christian gospels influenced by the Buddhist sacred texts, which date from pre-Christian times? Or were later Buddhist texts, like the *Lalitavistara* and the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, influenced by the Christian gospels? These questions have repeatedly been the subject of research and have been answered in most varying ways.

¹ See above, pp. 61 note 2, 100 note 2, 121 f., 130 f., 132 note 2, 134 ff, 150 notes 2, 3, 4, 193 f., 214 f.

² See above pp. 97 notes 1 and 2, 232 note 1, 293 note 4.

³ See above, pp. 29 note 1, 74 note 1, 299 note 1.

Rudolf Seydel,¹ in particular, thought he could prove such numerous coincidences between the Buddha legend and the life of Jesus according to the gospels, that he framed the hypothesis that the Evangelists, besides using an “original text” of St. Matthew and an “original text” of St. Mark, had also made use of a poetical gospel, Christian though influenced by Buddhism, and had taken from this all those legends, parables and utterances which have parallels in the Buddhist texts. He considered this hypothesis to be necessary, because the points of agreement (in his opinion) do not appear singly but massed together, and actually form groups, indeed, a connected whole. A single stick, he says, can easily be broken, but it is more difficult to break a bundle, or indeed a bundle of bundles. This is well said! But if the stick is no stick, but only the phantom of a stick, then even a bundle, or a bundle of bundles of such “sticks” is of no use to us. In reality it is not difficult to show, and has repeatedly been shown, that the majority of the “parallels” indicated by Seydel will not bear closer examination.

The Dutch scholar *G.A. van den Bergh van Eysinga*² has approached the problem of the Indian influences on the Christian gospels far more cautiously than Seydel. He begins by eliminating everything which could easily be explained by the similarity of circumstances under which the texts originated, similarity of religious development, and finally on general human grounds. Nevertheless, even according to this scholar there still remain actual parallels which can only be explained as loans. He is, however, of the opinion that we are not justified in assuming that there

¹*Das Evangelium von Jesu in seinen Verhältnissen zu Buddha-Sage und Buddha-Lehre*, (Leipzig 1882); *Die Buddha-Legende und das Leben Jesu nach den Evangelien* (Leipzig 1884), 2nd edition with supplementary notes by von Martin Seydel (Weimar 1897).

²*Indische Einflüsse auf evangelische Erzählungen* (Göttingen 1904), 2nd ed. 1909. (I quote from this edition.)

was any dependence upon written texts, but by mere oral transmission at the time of the Roman Empire, Indian subjects, themes and ideas reached the West, and certain of these features were borrowed in the formation of the legends of the earliest Christianity. Of the 51 parallels which Seydel believed to have found, Bergh van Eysinga regards only nine as worthy of discussion, and only six as more or less important.

What Seydel undertook to produce with inadequate material, for Buddhist literature was but very incompletely known in his day, namely, a "Buddhist-Christian Gospel Concordance," was once again attempted later, on the basis of a far more accurate knowledge of the Pāli and Sanskrit texts, by the American scholar *Albert J. Edmunds*.¹ He expressly states that he is not out to prove the dependence of the Christian sacred scriptures upon the Buddhist texts, but only to compare the two religions, "as such a comparison will finally have the effect of making them respect each other." Nevertheless he inclines to the view that Christianity, as the more eclectic religion, borrowed from Buddhism, and that St. Luke, in particular, was acquainted with a Buddha-epic. On the other hand, it is precisely Edmunds' comprehensive collection of all the passages in both literatures which can possibly be dragged in, as it were, for comparison, which shows most clearly, firstly, that there is no instance in which a loan on the part of the four gospels must necessarily be assumed, secondly, that in most instances there is only a similarity of ideas, which does not presuppose a literary connection, and thirdly, that in the best cases, only a possibility of mutual influence can be admitted, and that this possibility amounts to probability only in

¹ *Buddhist and Christian Gospels: Now First Compared from the Originals* by A.J. *Edmunds*, edited by M. *Anesaki*, (4th Ed., Philadelphia 1908-9); A.J. *Edmunds*, *Buddhist Texts quoted as Scripture by the Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia-London 1911); and *Edmunds*, "Buddhist Loans to Christianity" in *The Monist* [Vol. 22, January 1912, pp. 129-138].

very few cases. Very frequently, indeed, Edmunds' comparison of the texts shows how very much greater the differences are than the points of contact.

We need only to read the texts, compared by Edmunds,¹ on the miraculous conception and birth of Christ and of Buddha, and the differences become obvious. It is true that there are miracles in both cases; but as the history of religion, mythology and folk-lore teach us, the birth of great men is attended by miracles everywhere. Greek mythology affords far closer parallels to the virgin birth than does the Buddhist legend.² As a matter of fact, Buddha is conceived and born of a married queen, and not of a virgin at all. Again, the texts about the temptation of Buddha by Māra and of Christ by Satan³ show more differences than points of agreement, and the temptation of Zoroaster by Ahriman proves that it cannot be a question of mere borrowing of texts, but at most a matter of connection in religious history, harking back to far earlier times. Likewise to the legend of the transfiguration of Jesus, as compared with the account in the Mahā-Pariṇibbāna-Sutta of the radiance of the Buddha's body, I can see only a striking parallel, of great interest from the point of view of the history of religion, but not a loan from Buddhist literature.⁴

¹ 1, 107 f., 167 ff.; St. Luke 1:35; *Majjhimanikāya* 35 and 128.

² Cf. H. *Gunkel*, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen 1903), p. 65 ff.; *Garbe*, *Indien und das Christentum*, p. 31 f., *Günter*, *Buddha in der abendländischen legende?*, 194 ff.; *Haas*, *Buddha in der abendländischen legende?*, 17 ff.; W. *Printz* in *ZDMG* 78, 1925, 119 ff.

³ *Edmunds*, I, 196 ff.; also Pischel *Götz*, *Der Katholik*, 1912 (IV, 9), 485 ff.; *Beth*, *Theolog. Studien und Kritiken*, 1916, 202 ff.; *Carpenter*, *Buddhism and Christianity*, p. 180; and E. *Leumann*, *Buddha und Mahāvīra*, reprinted from *ZB* 1921, p. 60 ff. On the other hand, *Garbe*, *loc. cit.*, 50 ff., regards the points of agreement as so striking, that he deems it necessary to trace the Gospel narrative back to the Buddhist temptation stories, "for a devil in the flesh does not appear anywhere also in the Bible, but occurs constantly in the Buddhist Canon." Cf. J. *Charpentier* in *ZDMG* 69, 1915, 441 f.

⁴ *Edmunds*, II, 123 ff.; Mark IX, 2 ff.; Luke IX, 30 f.; *Rhys Davids*, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, p. 145; *Dufoit*, *Leben des Buddha*, p. 283 f. *Bergh van Eysinga*, p. 73, alludes to the transfiguration of Moses (Exodus XXXIV, 20 ff.).

In his comprehensive work¹ on Indian influences on Christianity and Christian influences on the Indian religions, Richard Garbe assumes a loan from Buddhist tradition on the part of Gospel narratives, in four cases only: the story of Simeon in the temple, the legend of the temptation, St. Peter walking on the sea, and the miracle of the loaves. With regard to the parallel to the "widow's mite," Garbe assumes that the Christian legend is the original one, and that it was taken over by the Buddhists.

It will never be possible to give a conclusive answer to these questions. Any decision in this matter is more or less subjective, for parallels are never equations. In each instance there are both resemblances and divergences. In the vast mass of literature which has accumulated on this problem and which is well-nigh overwhelming,² some scholars emphasize

¹ *Indien und das Christentum* (Tübingen 1914). In his earlier studies (*Deutsche Rundschau*, Vol. 144, 1910, 73 ff., Vol. 149, 1911, 122 ff., and *Contributions of Buddhism to Christianity* (Chicago 1911) **Garbe** had taken up a more sceptical attitude. Joh. B. **Aufhauser**, *Buddha und Jesus in ihren Paralleltexen* (Bonn 1936), has confronted the parallel texts, giving the Gospel legends in the Greek text and the Indian legends in German translations, for the cases treated by **Garbe**.

² Cf. Hans **Haas**, *Bibliographie zur Frage nach den Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum* (Veröffentlichungen des Forschungsinstitut f. Cf. Religionsgeschichte an der Universität Leipzig No. 6) and **Aufhauser**, *Buddha und Jesus*, Introduction. Besides **Seydel**, **Berg van Eysinga**, **Edmunds** and **Garbe**, other supporters of the theory of the dependence of the canonical Gospels upon the Buddhist texts or traditions, are H. **Kern** (*DLZ* 1832, col. 1276) and R.O. **Franke** (*DLZ* 1901, col. 2757 ff.), who have a prehistoric ("Aryan") connection in mind; also: O. **Pfleiderer**, *Die Entstehung des Christentums*, 2nd ed. (München 1907), p. 198 f., Ernst **Kuhn** in the Appendix to Bergh van Eysinga's work (p. 102 ff.) and R. **Pischel** (*DLZ* 1904, col. 2938 ff.) who confidently asserts: "The question as to whether Indian influences are at all to be found in the narrative literature of the Gospels can no longer be denied at the present day"; also K.E. **Neumann**, *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhas* (München 1911) III, 112, 256 note, 258 note, 250 note, 260 note, 231 note and elsewhere (cf. the criticism of Günter, *Buddha*, 259 ff.); K. **Seidenstücker** in his German translation of *Udāna* II, 8; VII, 9; VIII, 5; 9; 10 and introduction, p. xxii; in a few cases, also H. **Haas**, "Das Scherflein der Witwe" und seine Entsprechung in *Tripitaka*, Leipzig 1929 (Veröffentlichungen etc. No. 5) and *Buddha in der abendländischen legende?*, Leipzig 1923 (Veröffentlichungen etc. No. 9), A. **Weber** (*Griechen in Indien*, SBA 1890, p. 928 f.) and H. **Oldenberg** (Theolog. Litztg. 1905, col. 65 ff., *Aus dem alten Indien*, p. 47 f.) regard it as an open question.

above all, the divergences, whilst others lay stress upon the resemblances. The question of chronology, moreover, can rarely be decided in such a way as to exclude all doubt. All that can be said with certainty¹ is that, centuries before the birth of Christ, numerous trade connections and manifold intellectual relations were already in existence between India and the West, and that there is a possibility of Christianity's having been influenced by Buddhism. We also know that, from the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., representatives of various religions, Syrian Christians, Zoroastrians and Buddhists, met one another, especially in Eastern Turkestan. At this period it was just as much possible for Christian themes to find their way into Buddhist tales, as for Buddhist ideas to be incorporated in Christian

An entirely or almost entirely negative attitude is taken up by T.W. **Rhys Davids**, *SBE* XI, 165 f.; J. Estlin **Carpenter**, *The First Three Gospels: Their Origin and Relations*, 2nd ed. (London 1890), pp. 136 ff., 161 ff., 174 ff., 203 ff., 237 f.; "Buddhist and Christian Parallels" in *Studies in the History of Religions*, presented to Crawford Howell Toy, New York, 1912 (not accessible to me) and *Buddhism and Christianity* (London 1923), p. 179 f.; E. **Hardy**, *Der Buddhismus*, new ed. by Rich. Schmidt (Münster i. W. 1919), p. 175 ff.; E.W. **Hopkins**, *India Old and New* (New York and London 1902), p. 120 ff.; E. **Windisch**, *Māra und Buddha*, pp. 60 ff., 214 ff., 312, and *Buddha's Geburt*, p. 195 ff.; **La Vallée Poussin**, *Revue Biblique* 1906, p. 353 ff., *Bouddhisme*, p. 5 ff.; *L'histoire des religions de l'Inde et l'Apologétique*, London, 1912 (not accessible to me); S. **Lévi** in *Revue critique*, 1908, N.S. 65, p. 382; A.B. **Keith** in *JRAS* 1910, 213 f.; *History of Sanskrit Lit.*, 501 ff.; Edv. **Lehmann**, *Der Buddhismus als indische Sekte als Weltreligion* (Tübingen 1911), p. 78 ff.; A. **Götz** in *Der Katholik*, 1912 (IV, 9), 74 ff., 254 ff.; (IV, 10), 16 ff.; 1915, 363 ff.; Karl **Beth** in *DLZ*, 1915, 893 ff., 957 ff., and *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1916, 169 ff.; Carl **Clemen** in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wiss.*, 1916, 128 ff.; *DLZ* 1917, 668 ff.; *OZ* IX, 185 ff., and *RGG* I, 1882 ff.; Joh. B. **Aufhauser**, *Christentum und Buddhismus im Ringen um Fernasien* (Bonn and Leipzig 1922), p. 349 ff.; Edward J. **Thomas**, *The Life of Buddha*, 1927, p. 237 ff. J. **Kennedy** (*JRAS* 1917, 200 ff., 469 ff.) seeks the origin of all legends in the West. H. **Günter** (*Buddha in der abendl'nischen Legende?*, Leipzig 1922) is inclined to explain all the Buddhist-Christian parallels on the grounds of the "relationship of life," i.e. the similarity of religious moods and experiences in the two religions; H. **Fick** in *GGA* 1924, p. 172 ff. agrees with him, but is more in favour of a "non liquet" ["It is not clear"].

¹ Cf. **Bergh van Eysinga**, loc. cit., 88 ff.; **Edmunds**, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels*, I, pp. 111-164, and R. **Stübe** "Indien und der Westen," in M. Kern's *Das Licht des Ostens*, p. 242 ff.

legends. On the other hand, it is very improbable that Christian ideas penetrated to India as early as in the 1st century A.D. It is true that J. *Dahlmann*¹ was at pains to prove that there is an historical basis for the *Acts of St. Thomas*, that a Christian mission was at work in Northern India as early as the 1st century A.D., and that Mahāyāna Buddhism developed under Christian influence – but his arguments are by no means convincing. The mention of historical names, such as Gundaphorus and Gad only proves that the background of the legend is historical, but not that the nucleus of the legend itself is necessarily so. There is not the least proof of Christian missions in India in the 1st century, and it is highly improbable that Christianity influenced the origin of the Mahāyāna.² It is not likely that anything much about Christians was known in India prior to the 3rd century.³ It must be admitted, however, that the Buddhist texts can scarcely ever be dated with any degree of certainty. Moreover we have always to reckon with the possibility that a legend might have originated at an early period, even though it was not written down until later. We see, then, that these are very complex questions, and each case must be decided on its own merits. It is only such elaborate monographs as those of *Hans Haas*⁴ on the “widow’s mite” and *William Norman Brown*⁵ on the miracle of walking on the sea, which can pave the way for a tolerably satisfactory result.

¹ *Indische Fahrten* (Freiburg i. B. 1908), II, 100, 129 ff., 152 ff.; *Die Thomas-Legende*, (Freiburg i. B. 1912); cf. Alfons *Väth*, *Der hl. Thomas der Apostel Indiens* (Aachen 1925), and J. *Charpentier*, “The Apostle of India,” in *Kyrko-historisk Arsskrift*, 1927, 21 ff.

² Cf. *Winternitz* in *DLZ* 1913, 1750 ff., and *Garbe*, *Indien und das Christentum*, 128 ff., 159 ff.

³ Cf. A. *Harnack*, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th ed. (Leipzig 1924), p. 698.

⁴ Cf. “*Das Scherflein der Witwe*” (see above, p. 406, note 2).

⁵ *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water*, The Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago, London 1928.

The Buddhist parallel to the story of the “widow’s mite” is the legend of the poor girl who gives the monks the whole of her possessions, two copper coins which she has found in the dust-heap, and is praised for it by Buddha, her gift being valued as highly as that of the rich man who gives all his estates and treasures as alms. She does not go without a reward for her good deed, for soon afterwards she is discovered by a passing king, who immediately falls in love with her and makes her his queen. There is no doubt that the Buddhist narrative, in this form in which we know it from the Chinese translation of the *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā*,¹ is far inferior to the Gospel story, so beautiful in its simplicity, of the widow’s two mites. As the Buddhist tale is first attested by the Chinese translation of 402 A.D., and can scarcely be earlier than 200 A.D., it is not impossible that the Buddhists learned it from Christians, and made it end like a fairy tale. It is also possible, however, that an earlier and better form of the Buddhist legend has been lost. The agreement with regard to so small a detail as the “two mites” makes it highly probable, nevertheless, that the Buddhist and Christian stories did not originate independently of each other.

Similarly, the parallel to St. Peter’s walking on the sea, is not found until the time of the later Buddhist literature: we have it in the *Jātaka* commentary. Just as in Matth. XIV, 28 ff., St. Peter walks on the sea, and begins to sink as soon as his faith wavers, similarly, in the “Story of the present” of *Jātaka* No. 190, a believing layman walks across the river as long as he thinks joyfully of Buddha, and begins to sink as soon as this joyful mindfulness of Buddha diminishes at the sight of the waves. In this instance the details coincide so strikingly, that it is highly improbable

¹ *Sūtrālamkāra*, translated by Huber, p. 119 ff.; Mark XII, 41 ff.; Luke XXI, 1 ff.; *Bergh van Eysinga*, p. 50 ff.; *Lehmann*, *loc. cit.*, p. 88 ff.; *Götz* in *Der Katholik* 1012 (IV; 10), 18 f.; *Clemen* in *OZ* IX, 186 f., 199 f.; *Garbe*, *Indien und das Christentum* 33 f.; *Haas*, *l.c.*

that the two legends originated independently of each other. As the Indian legend is not an isolated one, whilst as far as the New Testament is concerned, it occurs only in St. Matthew, it is very likely that the Christian legend was derived from an Indian source. We must assume, it is true, that the narrative which has come down to us in the Jātaka commentary, is based upon a much earlier tradition.¹

Again, the parallel to the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, does not occur earlier than in the Jātaka commentary. Just as Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes, the Buddhist narrative tells us that 500 monks were fed with a cake which increased of itself. There is, however, a considerable difference between the two. In the Gospel we have a miracle which Jesus performs in order to feed a multitude of poor people, and in which he raises his eyes to heaven, and blesses, whilst in the Jātaka commentary we have a comical, not to say silly, fairy-tale, in which the miracle is performed by a saint in order to convert a miser. Indeed, the miracle of Jesus has more in common with the miraculous feeding of the children of Israel with quails and manna (Exodus XVI, *cf.* Numbers XI, 31 f.) than with the Buddhist fairy tale.²

¹ Cf. W.N. **Brown**, *loc. cit.*; **Edmunds**, II, 257 f.; **Bergh van Eysinga**, p. 52 ff.; **Carpenter**, *First Three Gospels*, p. 203 ff.; *Buddhism and Christianity*, p. 180; **Garbe**, *Contributions*, p. 12 f.; *Indien und das Christentum*, 56 ff.; **Götz**, *l.c.*, 19 ff.; **Beth** in *DLZ* 1915, col. 1900; *Theolog. Studien* 1916, 214 ff.; **Clemen** in *Zeitschr. für die neutestamentliche Forschung*, 1916, 137; **Charpentier** in *ZDMG* 69, 441; **Günter**, *Buddha in der abendländischen Legende?*, 218 f.; **Haas**, *Buddha in der abendländ. Legende?*, 25 f.

² Matth., XIV, 16 ff.; XV, 32 ff.; Jātaka, No. 78. Cf. **Edmunds**, II, 253 ff.; **Garbe**, *Indien und das Christentum*, 59 f.; **Charpentier** in *ZDMG* 69, 441; **Carpenter**, *Buddhism and Christianity*, p. 180; **Clemen** in *OZ* IX, 185 f.; *Zeitschr. f. d. neutest. Wiss.*, 1916, 137 f.; **Beth** in *DLZ* 1915, 900 f.; *Theolog. Studien*, 1916, 219 ff.; **Günter**, *l.c.*, p. 214; **Haas**, “*Das Scherflein der Witwe*”, 37 f. The *Rasavāhinī*, in which similar legends occur (**Lehmann**, *l.c.*, p. 90 ff.) is quite a late work (see above, p. 224 f.). In his book, *Unter Brahmanen und Parias* (Leipzig 1923), p. 68 f., J.A. **Sauter** tells of a miracle of feeding which he says he witnessed himself, on the part of Devanand Svami, who fed and satisfied twenty guests with two handfuls of rice.

There is also an account of miracle of feeding in the Mahāyāna-Sūtra, *Vimala-Kīrti-Nirdeśa*.¹ Many Bodhisattvas have assembled for a pious conversation. It is time for the meal, and by his miraculous power, Vimalakīrti causes a being from the world of sweet perfumes to produce a tiny fragment of food, which satisfies the whole assembly, and yet does not grow smaller. This miraculous feeding differs as widely from that of the Jātaka as it does from that of the Gospel. Finally, if we remind ourselves of the fairy-tale motif of “Table, fill thyself!”, which has its counterpart even in the Mahābhārata² in the self-filling pot which was the gift of the sun-god, we shall come to the conclusion that all these miracles of feeding are but variations of a motif which could quite well crop up afresh as a new invention at different times and in different places.

There is a far more striking similarity between the legend of Asita and that of Simeon in St. Luke. In spite of some differences, which, here too, are undeniable, I regard it as fairly probable that the author of the Christian narrative was acquainted with the Buddhist legend.³ It is possible, too, that there is a connection between the legend of Buddha who, as a boy, goes apart from his companions, and after being missed by his family, is found absorbed in deep meditation, and the story of the twelve-year old Jesus, who instead of returning to Nazareth with his parents, remains behind in the temple in Jerusalem and converses with the teachers.² I also consider

¹ Communicated by **Haas**, “*Das Scherflein der Witwe*”, p. 89 ff.

² See above, Vol. I, p. 346 f.

³ See above, p. 96 f. Cf. **Bergh van Eysinga**, 28 ff.; **Edmunds**, I, 181 ff.; **Pischel** in *DLZ* 1904, 2938 ff.; **Garbe**, *l.c.*, 48 ff.; **Charpentier** in *ZDMG* 69, 441. The divergences between the two legends are emphasized by **Götz** in *Der Katholik*, 1912 (IV, 9), 429 ff.; **Beth** in *DLZ* 1915, 898 f.; *Theolog. Studien*, 1916, 192 ff.; **Clemen** in *Zeitschr. f. d. neutest. Wiss.*, 1916, 134 f.; **Carpenter**, *Buddhism and Christianity*, 179 f.; and by **Günter**, *l.c.*, p. 203 f. (on the other hand, cf. **Haas**, *Buddha in der abendländischen legende?*, 24).

⁴ St. Luke II, 41 ff.; *Lalita-Vistara* XI; *Nidāna-Kathā*, Jātaka Ed., p. 58; **Rhys Davids**, *Buddhist Birth Stories*, p. 75; **Kern**, *Der Buddhismus*, I, 39 f. Cf. **Bergh van Eysinga**, p. 83.

it within the realm of possibility that the beatification of the mother of the Lord by a woman in St. Luke XI, 27 f. is connected with that in the *Nidāna-Kathā*.¹

It is less probable that the parable of the “prodigal son” in the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* is connected with that in St. Luke. Even Seydel² says: “The parable of the ‘Lotus’ has in reality nothing in common with the Christian parable, except that a wandering son returns in poverty, and above all the tendency of the comparison is entirely different in the two parallels.” Also the similarity between the legend of Jesus and the woman of Samaria in the Gospel of St. John, and that of Ānanda and the pariah girl in the *Divyāvadāna* is none too great.³ Besides, in both cases they are Buddhist texts of post-Christian times.

Even the death of Christ has been compared with Buddha’s entrance into Nirvāṇa. Seydel has pointed out that both events are accompanied by an earthquake, while Edmunds goes so far as to emphasize the fact that Jesus and Buddha both die in the open-air!⁴ And yet the differences between the two religious texts is nowhere shown so clearly as here. What a vast

¹ Jātaka I, p. 60; *Rhys Davids*, *Buddhist Birth Stories*, p. 79 f.; *Seydel*, *Die Buddha-Legende*, p. 26 f.; *Bergh van Eysinga*, p. 48 ff. It is true enough that such beatitudes also occur elsewhere in poetry (*Neumann*, *Lieder der Mönche und Nonnen*, p. 309 note; *Lehmann*, *Der Buddhismus*, p. 85); nevertheless, it is a remarkable coincidence that both Buddha and Jesus append to the benedictions a remark concerning that whereof true blessedness consists. The connection is denied by *Götz* in *Der Katholik* 1912 (IV, 10), 16 f., and doubted by *Garbe*, *l.c.*, p. 32 f.

² *Das Evangelium von Jesu*, p. 230; cf. above, p. 296 f.; J.M. *Carter*, *JRAS* 1893, p. 393 f.; *Bergh van Eysinga*, p. 67 ff.; *Edmunds*, II, 260 f. *Seydel*, *l.c.*, p. 232 f., has, however, compared the allegory of the man who was born blind (John IX) with *Saddharma-P.* V. (see above, p. 287), though the Indian parable has nothing in common with the Christian legend, except that a man who was blind occurs in both.

³ See above, p. 275 f.; *Bergh van Eysinga*, p. 57 ff.

⁴ *Seydel*, *l.c.*, p. 280 ff.; *Edmunds*, II, 169 f.; cf. *Windisch*, *Māra und Buddha*, p. 60 ff.

difference between the *Mahā-Parinibbāna-Sutta* and the 27th chapter of St. Matthew! Here the heart-rending tragedy of a martyr and a victim of fanaticism, there the calm passing of a sage – a glorious Euthanasia. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, the earth opens and quakes, and the graves yawn in horror at the crime which was being committed; in the *Mahā-Parinibbāna-Sutta* the earth quakes in token of her jubilation that the complete Nirvāṇa of the Lord, a beautiful event, has taken place.

When we come to the single utterances and parables of Jesus and Buddha, it is still more difficult to prove a probable connection than it is in the instance of the legends. It is mostly only a question of resemblances,¹ or of such general ideas that they could easily occur and actually do occur, in the sacred books of all religions; when, for instance, *Majjhima-nikāya* 110, where there is talk of the sowing and reaping of good works, is compared with the parable of the sower (St. Matth. XIII, 18 ff.), or when, in the Sutta of the “real treasure,”² a similar idea is expressed as in Matth. VI, 19 f.: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt,” etc.

When we sum up all that has been brought to light by the comparison of the four gospels with the Buddhist texts, it is seen that the differences greatly outweigh the points of agreement. There is a great difference to be seen in the whole character of even those legends which bear comparison. Whilst in Buddhism all the miracles are explained by the Karman, the act

¹For instance, above, pp. 29 note 1, 72 note 1, 109 note 2, cf. *Neumann, Lieder der Mönche und Nonnen*, p. 359 note. There is greater similarity between St. Matth. XVII, 19, where there is talk of removing the mountain by faith, and *Āṅguttaranikāya* VI, 24, where it is said that the monk could cleave the Himalaya by meditation (*Edmunds*, II, 40). Nevertheless, even this agreement is most probably only an accidental one. Cf. also *Garbe, Indien und das Christentum*, p. 39 ff.

²*Khuddakapāṭha* VIII, translated by *Winternitz, Der Ältere Buddhismus* (Religionsgesch. Lesebuch, 2nd ed.), 1929, p. 105 f. Cf. *Edmunds*, I, 222.

working through the rebirths, the Christian miracles are only the outcome of God's mercy and omnipotence. Edv. Lehmann¹ says very aptly: "For the taste of Indians the events in the Christian narratives will always seem to be insufficiently justified by reason and for us Christians the Indian narratives, even from the purely aesthetic point of view, will appear to have an almost unbearably efficient sequence of cause and effect."

Whilst we have thus seen that doubts as to an historical connection on the strength of any of the parallels cited from the canonical gospels are more than justifiable, and whilst we can at the very most speak of the possibility of such a connection we find in the apocryphal gospels which originated in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., a whole series of legends, the loan of which from Buddhist literature may be asserted with as great a degree of probability as is at all possible in questions of this kind. The tales of the Bodhisattva, who is taken to the temple in his boyhood, and before whom the statues of the god arise, so as to fall down at his feet, and that of the Bodhisattva's first day at school, coincide so exactly with the stories of the childhood of Jesus as related in the pseudo-St. Matthew's gospel, Chapter XXIII and in St. Thomas's gospel, Chapt. I-VIII and XIV, that the dependence of the Christian legend upon the Buddhist one, could only be doubted by persons who refute any such dependence on principle. Or take such legends as the following: in pseudo-Matth., Chapt. XIII, it is said of the child Jesus that, while still in his mother's womb, a light shone forth from him, so that the dark cavern into which Mary entered, was illuminated and became bright as day, and that the Saviour's mother was in no wise stained with blood through the birth of the child, and felt no pain: in the proto-gospel of St. James, Chapt. VI, it is told of the six-months old Mary, that she walked towards her mother with seven steps; in the same gospel, Chapt. XVIII, it is related that the forces of nature and the

¹*Der Buddhismus*, p. 92.

activities of mankind came to a sudden standstill at the birth of Jesus; in pseudo-Matth., Chapt. XX, a palm-tree inclines its branches down to the ground at the command of the infant Jesus, in order to offer its fruits to Mary, who is thirsty and exhausted. It is so very obvious to anyone acquainted with the legend of Buddha, that these wonder-tales must be assumed to be of Indian origin, that even among Christian theologians, there are only few who doubt an historical connection.¹

It has also been attempted to trace some of the mediæval legends of the Christian saints back to Indian sources. Māra appears in the form of Buddha in two different Buddhist legends, on one occasion it is in order to seduce a pious man, in which he does not succeed; and the other time, Upagupta causes Māra, whom he has converted, to appear in the form of Buddha.² Christian legends tell of several monks to whom the devil appeared in the guise of the Saviour. The Christian legend of the presumptuous monk

¹ See above, p. 251; *Bergh van Eysinga*, p. 75 ff.; *Garbe*, *Contributions*, p. 19 ff.; *Indien und das Christentum*, p. 70 ff.; *Charpentier* in *ZDMG* 69, 442; E. *Hennecke*, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen 1924), p. 95 f. Even *Götz*, in *Der Katholik*, 1912 (IV, 9), 271, says: "An influence on the part of Indian and presumably also Buddhist traditions on the apocryphal writings of semi-Christian elements of the West is, then, an historical fact." J. *Kennedy*, in *JRAS* 1917, 508 ff., explains the undeniable resemblances between the apocryphal stories of the childhood of Jesus and the Buddhist legends, by the hypothesis of Christian-Gnostic influences on Buddhism. Among those who make it their principle to deny any connection whatsoever, even in this case, we may mention *Clemen* in *Zeitschr. für die neutestament. Wiss.* 1916, 131 ff. and *Günter*, *l.c.*, 74 ff., 78 f., 91 f.; see, however, *Haas*, *Buddha* etc. pp. 12 f., 22 f. As early as in 1762 the Augustine hermit Georgins pointed out that a similar story to that told of the five-year old Jesus and Zakchaïos, in the Gospel of St. Thomas, was told in Tibet about Buddha, see L. *Conrady*, "Das Thomasevangelium", in *Theolog. Studien und Kritiken* (Gotha 1903), p. 403 ff.

² See above, pp. 201 and 288.

Valens, to whom the devil appeared in the shape of Christ, whereupon the monk worshipped the devil and related that Christ had appeared to him, is traced by Garbe¹ to the Buddhist narratives, especially as “the monstrous idea of the apparition of the devil in the shape of the Saviour is not to be found anywhere in Christian literature except in this one isolated instance.” Günter² has shown, however, that “the monstrous idea” occurs frequently enough in Christian legendary literature. For this reason it is just as much possible for the legends to have originated independently of each other in Christianity and in Buddhism, as for the theme to have migrated to the West from India, where a legend of this nature was translated in Chinese as early as in the year 401 A.D.³

Garbe and others before him have also traced the legends of St. Eustace and St. Christopher back to Buddhist Jātakas. Nevertheless, in spite of Garbe’s arguments, I cannot bring myself to believe that this is a case of an actual connection.⁴

On the other hand, it is a fully established fact that one of the favourite books of the whole of Christendom in the Middle Ages, the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, was composed by a devout Christian on the basis of the Buddha legend, with which he might have become acquainted from the *Lalita-Vistara*.⁵ This story, which is otherwise entirely imbued with the spirit of Christianity, has a Buddhist setting: the main features of the Buddha

¹ *Indien und das Christentum*, p. 111 ff.

² *Loc. cit.*, p. 234 ff.; cf. **Haas**, *Buddha in der abendländischen Legende?*, p. 32.

³ **Chavannes**, *Cinq cents contes et apologues*, vol. II, p. 86 (N. 206).

⁴ Cf. above, pp. 132 note 2, 150 note 2, and **Garbe**, *Indien und das Christentum*, p. 86 ff.; 101 ff.; **Haas**, *l.c.*, p. 9.; **Günter**, *l.c.*, p. 7 ff.; **Charpentier** in *ZDMG* 89, 442 f.; **Beth**, *Theolog. Studien*, 1916, 197 f.

⁵ Max **Müller**, *Essays* III, p. 538 f. (cf. **Foucaux**, trans., *Lalita-Vistara*, II, 43 ff.), quotes a few passages from which it seems evident that the author “heard the story not only, as he says, from the lips of people who had brought it to him from India, but that he even had the text of the *Lalita-Vistara* before him.”

legend, the three excursions, at which the Bodhisattva becomes acquainted with age, disease and death, recur in it, a few of the interpolated parables (e.g. that of the “man in the well”) are familiar from Indian literature, and references to India occur in the story itself.¹ In Eastern Iran or in Central Asia, where, as we know through the finds of Sir Aurel Stein, Grünwedel and v. Le Coq in Khotan and Turfan, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Christians and Manicheans lived together in closest proximity, a Christian monk¹ could easily become acquainted with the Buddha legend, and be stimulated by it to compose a work which was to impart Christian doctrines. This work was presumably written in the 6th or 7th century, first in the Pahlavi language and afterwards translated into Arabic and Syriac. The Georgian and Greek translation might be traced back to the Syriac text. The Greek text gave rise to Arabian, Hebrew, Aethiopian, Armenian, Ecclesiastical-Russian and Rumanian versions, which came into being in later times.

¹ As early as in the year 1612 the Portuguese Diogodo *Conto* compared the Barlaam-Josaphat legend with that of Buddha (*Ind. Ant.* XII, p. 288 f.). It was, however, Laboulaye who first asserted the Buddhist origin of the legend, in *Journal des Débats*, of the 26th July 1859. The proof was then furnished by Felix Liebrecht (in *Jahrbuch für romanische und englische Literatur*, II, 1860, p. 314 ff., and in his book, *Zur Völkskunde*, Heilbronn 1879, p. 441 ff.). The whole history of the story has been traced throughout world literature, by E. Kuhn (Barlaam und Joasaph: Eine bibliographisch-literargeschichtliche Studie, A BayA XX, München 1897). *Kuhn* (p. 39) believes, however, that the author “made very free use of the entire Buddhist tradition, and not of one particular text like the *Lalita Vistara*.” Cf. also the literature cited in V. *Chauvin*, *Bibliographie des ouvrages Arabes*, III, 1893, p. 83 ff., and H.G. *Rawlinson* in *JBRAS* 24, 1915, p. 96 ff. Even *Günter*, *l.c.*, p. 92 ff., cannot but admit that Josaphat is the Bodhisattva, though he is very anxious to minimize the influence of the Buddhist legend over the Christian one, and prefers to assume nothing more than a “distant indirect influence” (p. 41).

² It has been supposed by A. v. *Le Coq* (*SBA* 1909, p. 1205) that the Buddha legend was first brought to Europe, not by Christians, but by Manicheans. The actual author of the story, however, can only have been a Christian, as the doctrines contained in the book are specially Christian. It was just as possible for Christians to become acquainted with the subject as it was for Manicheans.

The numerous European translations and recensions (Lope de Vega has even dramatized the story) can be traced back to the Latin text translated from the Greek. German recensions have been in existence since 1220 A.D. In course of centuries the characters in this work had grown so familiar to the Christian peoples, that they were regarded as pious Christian men who had really lived and taught, so that the Catholic Church finally made the two heroes of the story, Barlaam and Josaphat, into saints. Josaphat, however, is none other than the Bodhisattva.¹

It is not only pious narratives such as that of Kisā-Gotamī² which wandered from India to the West, but also many secular fables, and narrative motifs as are to be found in the Jātaka, the Dhammapada commentary and Buddhaghosa's commentaries.³ Even down to our own day, the Indian legend of Buddha has so well preserved its ever youthful freshness and vitality, that again and again it has inspired poets, including Western poets, to compose epic and dramatic renderings of this immortal theme.⁴ Thus Edwin Arnold's epic, *The Light of Asia*, was in the 19th century, still capable of inspiring such enthusiasm that it saw over sixty editions in England and over a hundred in America, and really laid the foundation for this poet's

¹ In Greek the prince is called Jōasaph, the Arabic Jūdāsaf, which is derived from Būdāsaf, *i.e.*, Bodhisattva. In Arabic, Syriac and Pahlavi, "f" and "b" are easily confused in the script. The sage Barlaam is called Balauhar in Arabic, which might be derived from Bhagavān. (Kuhn, *loc. cit.*, pp. 17, 19, 34 f.) Barlaam and Josaphat already appear as saints in the *Catalogus Sanctorum* of Petrus de Natalibus, who died in about 1370. Even in more recent times, the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat has been made the subject of a romance for children and also of a drama in Germany; s. *Slepcevic, Buddhismus in der deutschen Litteratur*, p. 33 ff.

² See above, p. 58 f.

³ See above, p. 200 f.; also *Günter, l.c.*, 107 ff., admits that a steady stream of Indian motifs, including such as we find in the Jātaka-Book, poured into the European Literatures from the 12th century onwards.

⁴ On the influence of Buddhism on German literature, see Pero *Slepcevic, Buddhismus in der deutschen Litteratur* (Diss. der Universität Freiburg in der Schweiz), Wien 1920.

fame.¹ Whilst Edwin Arnold kept closely to the Indian legend, the German poet *Joseph Viktor Widmann*, in his *Buddha*,² has left little of the ancient legend. On the other hand, much of the spirit and mentality of Buddhism is embodied in the beautiful epic poem “The Saint and the animals” by the same poet. The Buddha legend was made the theme of a drama in Germany by Ferdinand Hornstein, whose “Buddha”³ was produced at the Hoftheater in Munich in 1900.

Under the influence of the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Richard Wagner felt strongly attracted towards the Buddhist doctrine of salvation and morality of pity. “You know that I have become a Buddhist in spite of myself,” he wrote to Mathilde Wesendonk on the 22nd February, 1859; and on the 9th July of the same year he wrote to the same friend, full of enthusiasm about Buddhism: “Yes, child, this is a philosophy compared with which all other dogmas must appear petty, narrow and inadequate!”⁴ Three years prior to that, he had already sketched out a Buddhist musical drama “The Victors,” in which he intended to dramatize the legend of Ānanda and the Chanḍāla girl Prakṛiti. A year later he embodied the ideas of this sketch, which was never completed, in “Parsifal.” Not only here, but in others of Wagner’s works, too, we have sufficiently frequent instances of a perfectly clear expression of the Buddhist view of life.

¹ Cf. E.F. *Oaten*, *Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (London 1908), p. 84 ff.; Leon *Kellner*, *Die englische Literatur im Zeitalter der Königin Viktoria* (Leipzig 1909), p. 404 ff, and *Beil Allg. Zeitung* 1889, Nos. 30 ff.; Artur *Pfungst* translated *The Light of Asia* into German (Leipzig 1887).

²*Buddha: Epische Dichtung in 20 Gesängen* (Bern 1869). As the poet himself wrote to me (in a letter of the 27th August 1905), this poem of Buddha was “really only modern free-thinking views disguised in that Oriental garb.” Cf. also *Slepcevic*, *l.c.*, p. 55 ff.

³*Buddha: Legende in 3 Akten*, Musik von Robert v. Hornstein, München 1899. See *Slepcevic*, *l.c.*, p. 69 ff. Angelo de *Gabernatis* and A. *Obolonsky* have also dramatized the life of Buddha: “Le Prince Siddhartha – drama en 5 actes et 22 tableaux” (Tours 1899).

⁴ See *Richard Wagner und Mathilde Wesendonck*, 21st ed., Berlin 1904, p. 59 f., 77 f., 105, 161 f.

In the "Götterdämmerung" ("The Twilight of the Gods"), Brunhilde says:

"Wisst ihr, wohin ich fahre?
Aus Wunschheim zieh'ich fort,
Wahnheim flieh'ich auf immer;
Des ew'gn Werdens offne Thore
Schliess' ich hinter mir zu. . .
Von Wiedergeburt erlöst,
Zieht nun die Wissende hin."¹

These thoughts are Buddhist through and through.

During the last years of his life, Wagner's mind was occupied with the personality of the Buddha, though there is no sufficient evidence to justify the rumour, spread abroad after his death, that he had worked at a musical drama "Buddha."²

Like Richard Wagner, the Danish poet Karl Gjellerup found Buddha by way of the philosophy of Schopenhauer. He drew upon K.E. Neumann's translations, but also made himself acquainted with Buddhism through his own independent study. Though his beautiful prose poem "The Pilgrim Kamanita"³ is entirely an invention of the poet's own, the figure of Buddha himself has been sketched lovingly according to the sources, and, what is

¹ "Do you know whither I go?
I bid farewell to the land of desires.
I flee for ever from the land of illusions;
I close behind me the open portals
Of never-ending existence. . .
Released from re-birth,
She who has gained knowledge now departs."

² See above, p. 287, note 1; H. **Lichtenberger**, *Richard Wagner* (Dresden and Leipzig 1899), pp. 357 f., 499 f.; Max **Koch** in *Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* 3, 1903, 412 ff.; **Slepcevic**, *l.c.*, p. 40 ff.

³ "Pilgrimen Kamanita," Kopenhagen 1906; *Der Pilger Kamanita: ein Legenden-roman*, 7-10, Tausend, Frankfurt a. M. 1917. Also trans. into English.

more important, the whole poem is instinct with the true spirit of Buddhism. The delicate poetical description of the Buddhist paradise Sukhāvatī is full of charm and there is no harm in the poet's having woven this picture, which is a part of the Mahāyāna, into his poem, which is mainly based upon the Pāli sources. In the drama "The Wife of the Perfect One,"¹ Gjellerup has endowed Buddha, who first appears in the play as Prince Siddhārtha, but later on as the Enlightened One, with more worldly traits, and above all, more attachment to his family, than the Buddha of the legend really possessed. It would scarcely be possible to find in Buddhist texts a counterpart to the scene in which Buddha yields the sovereignty to his half-brother Nanda. The Buddha of the texts never troubled about such matters. Neither could we find in any Buddhist text such words as Buddha is made to speak, in the last scene in the drama, when he hands his weapons to Nanda, and passes him the sword, with the words:

"Draw it in a just cause only! But then

Wield it well, and win, so that wrong may not triumph!"

The true Buddha had no dealings with the sword. For him there is no "just cause," for the sake of which we are justified in doing violence, for he knew, what we have learned but yesterday, that the "just cause" is always merely another name for our own cause, however unjust that cause may be.

Fritz Mauthner, too, in his prose work "The Last Death of Gautama Buddha,"² has made Buddha utter many a very un-Buddhist speech.

Among the works which serve Buddhist propaganda, "The Gospel of Buddha" by *Paul Carus* may be mentioned. In this work, edifying passages

¹ "Den fuldendtes Husfru," Kopenhagen 1907; "Das Weib des Vollendeten, ein Legendendrama, Quelle & Meyer, Leipzig. This drama was also staged in Germany.

² "Der letzte Tod des Gautama Buddha," München and Leipzig 1918. The poem is based upon the Mahā-Parinibbāna-Sutta in K.E. *Neumann's* translation.

from the most varied sources, from earlier and later Pāli texts, from the various biographies of Buddha and European works on Buddhism have been combined to form a mosaic which, from a scholarly point of view, is not always faultless, but is eminently suited to affect people's minds in the religious sense. Since its publication in the English language in America in 1894, this work has seen numerous editions, and it has been translated into many languages. In Ceylon and Japan the work is read in Buddhist schools and temples for purposes of edification.¹

Whilst Paul Carus lays no claim to erudition, the Italian Indologist *Luigi Sualì* has recently (1924) retold the Buddha legend in beautiful, poetical language, in his book *Il Illuminato*,² on the basis of an accurate knowledge of the original sources. Without the slightest thought of propaganda, he has allowed himself to become absorbed in the very spirit of the legend, and with a loving hand, has portrayed the Buddha with all his human, super-human and super-divine qualities, such as he has lived for over two thousand years, and still lives to-day, in the faith of devout Buddhists.

We may also mention *Lafcadio Hearn*,³ who has brought us into closer contact with Japanese Buddhism, in many of his sketches and tales. Free from any propagandist intentions, he has with love and sympathy, and with consummate art, given us an insight into Buddhist thought and sentiment as they still exist, even to-day, in the hearts of the devout Buddhists of Japan.

¹ See *Das Evangelium des Buddha nach alten Quellen erzählt* von Paul *Carus*, illustrated by O. *Kopetsky*, 2nd German edition by Karl *Seideastücker* (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1919). The translation was made according to the 13th English edition. Paul Carus died on 2nd Febr. 1919.

² I only know the German translation: *Der Erleuchtete, das Leben des Buddha* (translated from the Italian by Dora *Mitsky*), Frankfurt a. M. 1928.

³ *Gleanings in Buddha Fields, Out of the East*, and others, which are well known in German translations also.

There is not much of importance to be found in the propaganda literature which serves the Neo-Buddhist movement. Translations of Pāli texts are the best thing which we owe to it. *Paul Dahlke's* Buddhist Stories¹ may be mentioned, and also the lyric poems of *Hans Much*.² But though the latter are Buddhist in sentiment, this European monastic poetry is very feeble when compared to the Thera-Gāthās and Therī-Gāthās, the songs of the ancient Buddhist monks and nuns.

Nevertheless, whatever our views of the new Buddhist movement may be, we cannot but admire the vitality of Buddhism and of the works of Buddhist literature, which have ever and again inspired the minds of thinkers and poets of all nations, and still continue to do so. I hope, too, that I have succeeded in showing in the above chapters, that there is still much in Buddhist literature which well merits being introduced into European literatures and made the common property of world literature.

¹ *Buddhistische Erzählungen*, Dresden 1904.

² *Ich nahm meine Zuflucht . . . Flugsamen aus einem abendlichen Buddhagarten* (Leipzig 1920); "An Buddhas Hand: Lieder der Erweckung im Felde," 1917, in *Buddhistische Weisheit* by Georg *Grimm* and Hans *Much*, 1920.

Abbreviations

DLZ = *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*.

GGA = *Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen*.

JBRAS = *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

JRAS = *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*.

OZ = *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*.

RGG = *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Tübingen).

SBA = *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin*.

ZB = *Zeitschrift für Buddhismus* (München).

ZDMG = *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*