Placing the Origins of the Buddha

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An Island, Its People, and an Orientalist Odyssey

By

Bhadrajee S. Hewage

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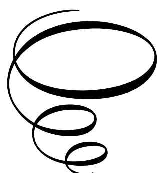

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minisun ona tharam loke harima karadare…eka demapiyan
yuvalaki atte api ovunta adareyi

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Oba samata bohoma stutiyi.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Thank you all so much.

INTRODUCTION

Seven years before his death in 1933, Anagarika Dharmapala reflected on his first visit to Bodh Gaya in 1891. Describing the utter neglect of the supposed site of the Buddha's Enlightenment to his followers, the Ceylonese Buddhist revivalist reminded them: "I made a vow surrendering my life in the hope of rescuing the sacred spot from the hands of the Saivite fakirs who had control of the place".[1] Four months after his fateful visit, Dharmapala established the Maha Bodhi Society "to rescue the holy Buddhist places and to revive Buddhism in India which for seven hundred years had forgotten its greatest teacher."[2] The Society's "principal object" being, according to Dharmapala, the recovery of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya from its Saivite custodians.[3] As he lamented in 1923, "[t]he Muhammadans visit Mecca; the Christians visit Jerusalem; the Hindus visit the various Shrines [in India] …but the Buddhists of Japan, Burma, Siam, Ceylon, China and Tibet have forgotten their Holyland."[4]

Retracing Tagore's voyages across the Indian Ocean to track the footprints of India's overseas history, Sugata Bose argues that pilgrimage as a religious duty can easily become transformed into a "broader intellectual

[1] Anagarika Dharmapala, "Buddhism in England", *The Maha-Bodhi* 34 (1926): 549. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, the Buddha refers to the "historical" Buddha or Gautama Buddha in this dissertation. When discussing the wider island polity and its inhabitants before 1972, I use the terms "Ceylon" and "Ceylonese" in place of "Sri Lanka" and "Sri Lankans".

[2] Anagarika Dharmapala, "Memories of an Interpreter of Buddhism to the Present-Day World", in *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed. Ananda Guruge (Colombo: The Government Press, 1965), 689. For an overview of Dharmapala's activities at Bodh Gaya, see "Anagarika Dharmapala at Bodh Gaya", chapter three in Alan Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949): Anagarika Dharmapala and the Mahabodhi Temple* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006).

[3] Anagarika Dharmapala and Jaipal Gir, *The Budh-Gaya Temple Case* (Calcutta: W Newman & Co, 1895), 7. For an overview of other Maha Bodhi Society activities in India following its founding, see Gitanjali Surendran, "'The Indian Discovery of Buddhism': Buddhist Revival in India, c.1890-1956" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013).

[4] Anagarika Dharmapala, "Rescue Buddhagaya", *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* 31 (1923): 7.

and cultural quest undertaken in its name".[5] Although, strictly speaking, Dharmapala's quest was more populist than intellectual and religious than cultural, the transformational aspect of his pilgrimage rather than its thematic overtones is of importance here. In fact, venturing to Bodh Gaya in 1891, Dharmapala arguably helped to singularly propel a process that turned a secular nineteenth-century intellectual and cultural quest to locate this Buddhist "Holyland" into a religious mission to encourage the veneration of its "forgotten" sacred sites.

How Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike *before* Dharmapala came to accept this Indian Buddhist Holy Land, however, deserves further analysis. Indeed, the role of colonial Ceylon and the Ceylonese specifically in what was a long nineteenth-century process of placing the Buddha in northern India is of interest herein. Dharmapala's arrival at Bodh Gaya coincided with and, indeed, grew out of a wider *fin-de-siècle* re-examination of deteriorating religious heritage across the Buddhist world. Dharmapala's own Ceylonese contemporaries regarded the nineteenth century as an *anduru yuga* or "dark age" where Ceylon's Sinhalese Buddhist population declined culturally and religiously.[6] The final British conquest of Burma in

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[5] Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 233.

[6] See [**Sinhalese**: "*Dharmapalatuma upan yugaya sanskrtika, arthika yana deyakarayenma simhalaya pirihi tibunu kalayak viya. Sinhala bhasava, sinhala sirit virit valin pirihunu me rata janaya agamika adahas valin da torava amutuma pahat svabhavayakaṭa veti siṭiyo ya…. Eda sinhalayan men peni sitiye samanya gambada janaya pamanaki. Nagara vasi usas gehenu – pirimi sema denekma ingrisi vesarudhava, sinhala bhasava caritra varitra hela dakimin nam gam pava venas kara gat namut, same pata venas kara genimata nohekiva soka vemin sitiyoya.*"] [**English**: "At the time of Dharmapala's birth, the Sinhalese were in decline in both cultural and economic terms. The [Sinhalese] people of this country, regardless of religious affiliation, had fallen into a strange low-caste status, and Sinhalese customs and the Sinhalese language were degraded…. At that time, only ordinary rural folk could be considered Sinhalese. All upper-class urban men and women changed their names and even condemned Sinhalese customs and the Sinhalese language [using] the English language [with only] their skin colour remaining unchanged."] Ganegama Saranankara, "Ma Asuru Kala Dharmapalathuma" [**Sinhalese**], *Budusarana*, 18 September 2009, for a typical description of the views of Dharmapala's later contemporaries on the state of Ceylonese Buddhism during the nineteenth century. Translation by author. All transliterations herein are conventional; I have, however, elected to avoid the use of diacritics except for transliterations from French. Whether nineteenth-century Ceylonese Buddhism was really in a state of decline is itself a matter of debate. For a rebuttal of decline discourses regarding this period, see Jonathan Spencer, "Tradition and Transformation: Recent Writing on the Anthropology of

1885 appeared to indicate to the Burmese that their Buddhist heritage was stagnating, with Buddhist elites in Cambodia also acknowledging during the 1890s that their Khmer culture was declining under French rule.[7] In Japan, too, the aftermath of the 1868 Meiji Restoration witnessed a wider realization among Buddhists that Japanese Buddhism remained tainted with the corruptions of the Tokugawa period and was in danger of becoming insignificant.[8]

Although ultimately falling onto deaf ears, Dharmapala's clamouring for Bodh Gaya during the 1890s also coincided with his emergence onto the Ceylonese Buddhist scene itself during the same period. With the gradual disestablishment of the Buddhist religion on the island polity accompanying the "secularizing displacements" which followed the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom to the British in 1815, a Buddhist re-awakening was in motion in which Dharmapala came to occupy a central position.[9] Accepting that he was treading on a Buddhist revivalist path already laid by the clerical polemicist Migettuwatte Gunananda and the Theosophist Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, Dharmapala added his own impetus to what was, in effect, a third period of Buddhist revivalism on the island.[10] Whereas Gunananda dealt primarily in polemics and Olcott concentrated his activities on legal reform and institutionalizing Ceylonese Buddhist revival, Dharmapala thus helped to internationalize what was then a primarily insular religious

Buddhism in Sri Lanka", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 21, 2 (1990): 129-30.

[7] Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 1; Anne Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 120.

[8] Robert H Scharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism", in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 109.

[9] For the implications of British colonial rule on Buddhism during the nineteenth century, see David Scott, "Religion in Colonial Civil Society: Buddhism and Modernity in 19th-Century Sri Lanka", *Cultural Dynamics* 8, 1 (1996): 7-23, esp. 21. For an overview of the British disestablishment of Buddhism on the island polity, see Tennakoon Vimalananda, *The State and Religion in Ceylon Since 1815* (Colombo: MD Gunasena and Company, 1970), 83-4; and Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 214.

[10] Anagarika Dharmapala, "Reminiscences of My Early Life", *The Maha-Bodhi* 41, 1-2 (1933): 156.

campaign.[11] Fighting for Bodh Gaya while working to revive the Buddhism of his own native land, he strove to awaken the Ceylonese to their "ancestral" Indian Buddhist heritage in a manner hitherto unseen during colonial times.

While Dharmapala could lament in 1923 that the Ceylonese remained ignorant of their Holy Land, the same critique can surely not be levelled at Sri Lankan Buddhists today. If anything, the island's Buddhists currently cannot seem to get enough of India's Buddhist heritage. Indeed, owing to unprecedented demand, Indian Railways announced the establishment of a new route in 2011 from Chennai to northern India to cater specifically for Sri Lankan pilgrims.[12] The following year, relics excavated at Kapilavastu left India for the first time and arrived in Colombo for a prolonged period of public display and veneration.[13] In 2018, the Indian government further permitted the exhibition of more Buddhist relics from the mainland on the island during *Vesak* celebrations as a gesture of the "spiritual bond" tying the shared Buddhist heritage of the two nations.[14]

Tim Winter describes as "heritage diplomacy" the ways in which heritage can function both *as* diplomacy and *in* diplomacy between nations, and the management of the Buddha's traces on the subcontinent fits quite neatly into Winter's concept.[15] Using Buddhism to counteract increased tensions with India regarding developmental policies, human rights issues, and security concerns, Sri Lanka certainly continues to gain as much capital as possible from its religious connections to its much larger neighbour. Nevertheless, putting the motives behind Sri Lanka's willingness to engage with India's Buddhist heritage to one side, Dharmapala would surely

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[11] For Gunananda's contribution to Ceylonese Buddhist revivalism, see "Buddhism Versus Christianity: Beginnings of Buddhist Protest", chapter six in Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900*. For an overview of Olcott's revivalist activities and how he understood them, see "The Sinhalese Buddhist Revival", chapter four in Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); and Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1935), 2: 166.

[12] RK Radhakrishnan, "Special train for Buddhist pilgrims coming soon", *The Hindu*, 20 March 2011.

[13] RK Radhakrishnan, "Kapilavastu relics to be displayed in Sri Lanka", *The Hindu*, 10 September 2011.

[14] Press Trust of India, "Buddha relics from India feature in Lanka's Vesak festival", *Business Standard*, 30 April 2018. Vesak is a Buddhist festival commemorating the birth, Enlightenment, and death of Gautama Buddha.

[15] Tim Winter, "Heritage Diplomacy", *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, 10 (2015): 1012.

welcome the popular engagement of Sri Lankan Buddhists today with the Holy Land he so revered during his lifetime.

Historiography

Modern quests like these in search of the historical Buddha are, however, not unique. Hans Penner argues that Buddhism, like any other religion, is a symbolic expression of "primal experiences" with inquiries into a religion's origins linked to a belief that religious practices remain inexplicable without first understanding the religion's origins.[16] For Penner, there is value enough in the various legends and deeds attributed to the figure we identify today as the Buddha. A historical Buddha is thus not necessary for the existence of a Buddhist religion from which we can derive meaning and merit. Provocatively claiming that we remain unable to prove that a historical Buddha existed using strictly *historical* criteria, he faults Buddhist Studies for its continued insistence of what he calls the "received tradition" that the Buddha, as a historical figure, ever actually existed.[17]

Wider scholarship, understandably, remains hesitant to take a position on the historical Buddha as firm as that of Penner. Buddhist Studies itself appears to have largely moved away from the quest to confirm the physical existence of the historical Buddha during the early twentieth century to focus on a variety of other issues concerning developments in Buddhist thought and practice. Nevertheless, Penner is not alone in the academy in questioning the basis for our understanding of the historical Buddha.

Though focused more on geographizing the Buddha than historizing him, Toni Huber insists "from the outset" that there was never anything like a "fixed and stable tradition" regarding the Indian geography we associate today with the Buddha's biography.[18] Referring to the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* from which we see the earliest encouragement to visit the four key sites associated with the Buddha's life, Huber emphasizes that the text itself does not explicitly identify any site by either name or geographical location.[19] Pointing to works such as the *Asokavadana* and the *Divyavadana*

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[16] Hans Penner, *Rediscovering the Buddha: Legends of the Buddha and Their Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.
[17] Ibid., 133-142.
[18] Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 16.
[19] Ibid., 19. These four sites being in traditional Buddhist literature: Lumbini, the place of the Buddha's mortal birth as Siddhartha Gautama; Uruvela, the site of his Enlightenment; Rajagaha, the locality where he first preached; and Kushinara, the location of his mortal death.

which describe an extended Buddhist pilgrimage network, he notes how we simply do not know whether these textual accounts reflect the realities of pilgrimage practices following the Buddha's passing.[20] Archaeological evidence of the Buddha's presence in northern India, as he cautions again, does not predate the third century BCE – several centuries later than when scholarship speculates he lived.[21] Nevertheless, as Huber himself acknowledges, we continue to assume without serious reservation that sites situated across the Middle Ganges are connected to the Buddha himself and form the centerpiece of a Buddhist Holy Land.

The very term "Holy Land" as used in the English language derives semantically from the Latin *terra sancta* referring, in its traditional sense, to an area in what is now Israel and Palestine. The expression, nevertheless, extends in modern scholarship to refer also to Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh areas of spiritual significance across the world.[22] Using the expression in uppercase, I use the term merely as a convenient signifier to describe the region containing the *most* important Buddhist geography and sacred network of sites associated with the Buddha's own life. Of course, Buddhists continue to use linguistic terms such as *puṇyabhumi* in Sanskrit and in other vernacular Indic languages and *phagyul* in Tibetan to convey a similar meaning. Yet I employ Holy Land as a serviceable translation to convey how colonial Buddhist subjects themselves such as Dharmapala lauded northern India within a wider public sphere.[23] A public sphere – we

[20] Ibid., 21-22.
[21] Ibid., 19. Nevertheless, a team of archaeologists led by Robin Coningham argued in 2013 that they discovered a Buddhist shrine at Lumbini dating from the timeframe in which we believe the historical Buddha existed. See RAE Coningham, KP Acharya, KM Strickland, CE Davis, MJ Manuel, IA Simpson, K Gilliland, J Tremblay, TC Kinnaird, and DCW Sanderson, "The earliest Buddhist shrine: excavating the birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini (Nepal)", *Antiquity* 87, 338 (2013): 1104-23. The significance of Coningham's discovery itself remains disputed. For a critique of what exactly Coningham's discoveries demonstrate, see Richard Gombrich, "Recent discovery of 'earliest Buddhist shrine' a sham?" *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 12 December 2013.
[22] For uses of the term in a Hindu context, see Geoffrey Waring Maw, Gilliam M Connacher, and Marjorie Sykes, *Pilgrims in Hindu Holy Land: Sacred Shrines of the Himalayas* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1997). Similarly, for uses of the phrase in a Sikh context see Gurharpal Singh, "The control of sacred spaces: Sikh shrines in Pakistan from the partition to the Kartarpur corridor", *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 16, 3 (2020): 209-26.
[23] While the geography of this Buddhist Holy Land today includes parts of the Nepalese Terai in addition to northern India, the inclusion of Nepal within this wider geography did not gain widespread acceptance until the early twentieth century.

must not forget – where Christian missionary influence permeated Asian discourses on supreme sacred geographies and their origins.[24]

Nancy Falk describes the allure of this Middle Gangetic region for Buddhists as a "cult of the traces" whereby Buddhists evoke a continuing presence of the historical Buddha by bridging the presence of ruins from his own lifetime with the physical absence of the Buddha himself from their current lives.[25] Aware of the irony of the Buddha's final act being the permanent removal of his "lived" self from the worldly domain, Étienne Lamotte argues that Buddhists derive merit not from the act of following "the traces" in itself but from the positive intentions and motives engendered within.[26] Describing further the phenomenon of pilgrimage and how traces are always associated with specific spaces, Victor Turner argues that "[t]he point of it all is to get out, go forth, to a far holy place *approved by all*".[27]

Although I am not concerned with the phenomenon of Buddhist pilgrimage itself herein, Buddhist understandings of places, spaces, topographies, and landscapes – as previously noted – never formed anything like a fixed and stable tradition of a sacred Buddhist geography fixed around northern India. How Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike therefore came to singularly accept the Middle Gangetic region as an area worthy of supreme

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Equating northern India with the Buddhist Holy Land for sake of generality, I intend no disrespect to the people of Nepal.

[24] For an overview of Christian influences on wider Asian Buddhist discourses, see "The Spectrum of Tradition and Modernism", chapter two in David McMahon, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[25] Nancy Falk, "To Gaze on the Sacred Traces", *History of Religions* 16, 4 (1977): 281.

[26] [**French**: "*…les reliques symbolisent le Buddha, parce que celui-ci a déclaré qu'il n'y a aucune différence entre les reliques et lui-même et parce qu'au moment du Nirvana, il a accepté à l'avance tous les dons….reliquaire et sanctuaire étant des choses sans vie, ne peuvent sentir le bénéfice du don qui leur est fait. Dans ces conditions, la seule valeur du don aux reliques provient des dispositions intérieures du donneur.*"] [**English**: "…relics symbolize the Buddha because he asserted that there is no difference between himself and his traces and because at the moment of his Enlightenment, he accepted all offerings in advance….[yet] reliquaries and holy places being lifeless things cannot experience the benefit of the offering that is made to them. Under these circumstances, the only value of the offering to the traces comes from [the value of the Buddha's traces in] the donor's own mentality."] Translation by author. See Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien: Des origines à l'ère Śaka* [**French**] (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1958), 702-3.

[27] See "Pilgrimage as a Liminoid Phenomenon", introduction to Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). Emphasis added.

veneration and preservation surely warrants further analysis. This analysis, I believe, requires a re-examination of our understandings of the origin of the Buddhist religion itself.

In his landmark study on the "discovery" of Buddhism, Philp Almond discusses how Europeans gradually connected various Asian customs, practices, and rites during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to uncover a distinct Buddhist faith based on a reputedly historical Buddha figure.[28] Yet what Buddhists *themselves* thought of their religion's origins during this process of European discovery does not come to the fore in Almond's otherwise comprehensive analysis.[29] Recent scholarship, however, helps to shed light on the contemporaneous quests of Asian Buddhists to discover the roots of the Buddhist religion and to connect their various homelands to a primeval Holy Land.

Gene Smith first argued in 2001 that Tibetans "rediscovered" India during the eighteenth century and connected its northern portions to their Buddhist heritage roughly half a century before the first Britons in South Asia began looking for the Buddha's origins.[30] Exploring Japanese quests to "seek" the historical Buddha, Richard Jaffe further highlights how Japanese Buddhists started thinking of their links to India during the 1700s, though an intimate connection with the subcontinent was not achieved until at least the 1880s.[31] Turning to South Asia itself, however, scholarship on Buddhist connections to the Holy Land remains fixated on the period that followed Dharmapala's arrival at Bodh Gaya in 1891.

Indeed, aside from examinations of Indian archaeological developments, explorations of Indian Buddhism during the colonial period remain focused on the "rebirth" of Buddhist India within a Protestant missionary milieu through revival moments and movements traced back to the Maha Bodhi Society.[32] This is despite, as Giuseppe Tucci arguably first

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[28] See "The discovery of Buddhism", chapter one in Philip Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[29] Janice Leoshko also makes this criticism of Almond's investigation. See *Sacred Traces: British Explorations of Buddhism in South Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 61.

[30] EG Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 175.

[31] See "Locating Tenjiku", introduction to Richard Jaffe, *Seeking Sakyamuni: South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[32] For further material on the dominance of revival narratives in studies of Indian Buddhism, see Douglas Ober, "'Like Embers Hidden in Ashes, or Jewels Encrusted In Stone': Rahul Sanktyayan, Dharmanand Kosambi And Buddhist Activity In Colonial India", *Contemporary Buddhism*, 14:1 (2013): 134. For examinations of

proposed during the 1930s, the travelogue and epigraphical evidence for the existence of Buddhism in India well into the present period.[33] Others such as Benoy Ray and Nagendra Vasu also suggest that Buddhism continued to survive in eastern India until its revival either through Buddhist reform movements or transformation into neo-Indian religious groupings.[34] The continued existence of Tabo and other Tibetan monasteries since the tenth century in the Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh, further serve as a living reminder that Buddhism never physically disappeared from India at any stage following its introduction.[35]

Alan Trevithick further speculates that there remains a Dumontian understanding of Hindu "encompassment" to explain the lack of an indigenous Indian focus on the Buddha during the colonial period. For Trevithick, Buddhism's differences with Vedic orthodoxy possibly became the very principle through which Buddhism became integrated into the wider Hindu fold. [36] In other words, Buddhism, understood by Hindus as a form of Vedicism, was never really established in India in the first place. It cannot, therefore, have ever really disappeared. Nevertheless, contemporary scholarly understandings of modern Buddhist developments within India continue to be tracked back to Dharmapala and his campaigns to revive and to rescue the country's seemingly forgotten and neglected Buddhist heritage.[37]

Moving from India to Ceylon, there remains a marked absence of scholarly material exploring either Ceylonese imaginings of or connectivity with the Middle Gangetic region during the colonial period before Dharmapala. This anomaly contrasts with what Thomas Tweed calls Buddhism's "translocative history" given Ceylon's Buddhist connectivity with southern Asia across temporal and spatial boundaries both before and

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the archaeological history of Indian Buddhism, see Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), and *Archaeology as History in Early South Asia*, eds. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Carla M Sinopoli (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research and Aryan Books International, 2004).

[33] See Giuseppe Tucci, "The Sea and Land Travels of a Buddhist Sadhu in the Sixteenth Century", *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 7, 4 (1931): 683-702.

[34] See Benoy Gopal Ray, *Religious Movements in Modern Bengal* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1965); and Nagendra Nath Vasu, *The Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa* (Calcutta: UN Bhattacharya Hare Press, 1911).

[35] Ray, *The Return of the Buddha*, 157, n. 80.

[36] Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya*, 5-6.

[37] For more on this argument, see Ober, "Like Embers Hidden in Ashes, or Jewels Encrusted In Stone", 134; and Douglas Ober, "Translating the Buddha: Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia and Its Indian Publics", *Humanities* 10, 3 (2021): 2.

during European colonization.[38] Stanley Tambiah also describes the "galactic" nature of Theravada networks where Buddhist centres and peripheries continually redefine relations, and Anne Blackburn highlights how Ceylon's contact with other Theravada polities enabled the mutual creation and restoration of Buddhist institutions.[39] As an authoritative centre of Buddhist learning due to its rich Pali literary heritage, Blackburn again argues that Ceylon became the preeminent nucleus of mobile Buddhist networks in southern Asia due to its textual traditions before the arrival of European colonization.[40] Indeed, despite Ceylon's status as the most ostensibly Buddhist location within South Asia itself during the colonial period, a paucity of literature exists exploring how the islanders viewed the Middle Ganges before Dharmapala.

Analyses of Ceylonese Buddhism itself during the nineteenth century remain focused on Gananath Obeyesekere's concept of "Protestant Buddhism" to describe how Buddhists both protested against proselytism and looked to Protestant Christianity in advancing their religion.[41] Indeed, for the past five decades, scholarship on Ceylonese Buddhism remains focused on critiquing this concept by providing alternative explanations of the relationship between Buddhism and "modernity" in colonial Ceylon.[42]

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[38] See Thomas Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 270.

[39] SJ Tambiah, *World Conqueror, World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 70; Anne Blackburn, "Buddhist Connections in the Indian Ocean: Changes in Monastic Mobility 1000-1500", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58 (2015): 237-66.

[40] Anne Blackburn, "Buddhist Networks across the Indian Ocean: Trans-Regional Strategies and Affiliations", in *Belonging across the Bay of Bengal*, ed. Michael Laffan (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 15-34.

[41] See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon", *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1 (1970): 43-63 and Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 7.

[42] Prominent rebuttals of the notion of Protestant Buddhism can be found in: John Holt, "Protestant Buddhism?" *Religious Studies Review* 17, 4 (1991): 307-12; Charles Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism", in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31-62; Irving C Johnson, "The Buddha and the Puritan: Weberian Reflections on 'Protestant Buddhism'", *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* 27, 1-2 (2004): 61-105; Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steel Olcott and 'Protestant Buddhism'", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, 2 (1995): 281-302; and "Dharmapala as Theosophist",

Despite the dominance of these "decline-and-revival" and "degeneration-and-reform" narratives in the historicization of Ceylonese Buddhist society, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that the island's Theravada Buddhism did experience a series of changes as result of the colonial encounter.[43] As Charles Hallisey reminds us, a colonized Buddhist "East" did not just differentiate itself from a colonizing Christian "West" but also firmly connected itself to it.[44]

Turning to colonialism itself, however, knowledge and situational awareness were just as important as administrative, economic, and military prowess in the British conquest of the subcontinent.[45] Of course, the valuation of knowledge, both secular and otherwise, in South Asia did not begin with the arrival of the Europeans. CA Bayly underlines how pre-colonial Indian states possessed detailed archives with long institutional memories and how Mughal kingship was itself an office directed towards the knowledge of both worldly and spiritual affairs.[46] Sujit Sivasundaram shows how in Ceylon, too, historical, religious, and topographical knowledge permeated Sinhalese polities long before the arrival of the British.[47] Describing Britain's "islanding" of Ceylon whereby the island became unified as a single polity set apart from the mainland, he further demonstrates how the British "recycled" existing insular innovations and

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chapter one in Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). Ananda Abeysekara has recently criticized these critiques themselves and several others of a similar nature for inscribing an *a priori* ontology which serves to separate the past from the present in rebuttals of Protestant Buddhism given the excessive preoccupation of these critiques with the question of influence. See "Protestant Buddhism and 'Influence': The Temporality of a Concept", *Qui Parle* 28, 1 (2019): 1-75.

[43] For another overview of the effect of these narratives on Ceylonese Buddhist scholarship, see Anne Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 8.

[44] Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism", 33.

[45] This reality forms the backbone of works such as CA Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas B Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Philip B Wagoner, "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, 4 (2003): 783-814.

[46] Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 21, 178.

[47] Sujit Sivasundaram, "Tales of the Land: British Geography and Kandyan Resistance in Sri Lanka c.1803-1850", *Modern Asian Studies* 41, 5 (2007): 925-39.

intelligence. A recycling, Sivasundaram argues, which involved a renegotiation of the traditional monarchic cosmopolitan awareness of the bounds of the island polity with indigenous understandings of the island space.[48]

In this wider "mess of encounters", to use Peter van der Veer's expression, indigenous subjects themselves were of utmost importance for the colonial power as the vast reaches of the subcontinent became gradually absorbed into an ever-expanding British domain.[49] Indigenous knowledge-bearers served to shape colonial intellectual discourses while also accommodating the European encounter within their own pre-existing scholarly networks and traditions. Indeed, as Sivasundaram argues of Ceylonese Buddhists and John Cort of Indian Jains, both colonizer and colonized operated in a shared epistemic field. This "multiplicity of knowledges" further ensured that both communities were able to both contest European knowledge while also building on it in a manner that was not simply derivative.[50]

These forms of imperial knowledge of subcontinental polities – and the indigenous reactions thus engendered – today feature in critical engagements with the term "orientalism", and likewise – in part – does this work as a historical analysis of Ceylon's understanding of Dharmapala's Holy Land. Using "orientalism" as opposed to "Orientalism" herein, I seek not to critique the various nuances of Saidian thought or its influence on our understanding of South Asia. I do not doubt that Buddhist Studies can serve to both complement and complicate Saidian Orientalist narratives, but such an endeavour falls outside the remit of the task at hand here.[51] Furthermore, I do not concern myself herein with relating the study of subcontinental

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[48] Sujit Sivasundaram, "Cosmopolitanism and Indigeneity in Four Violent Years: The Fall of the Kingdom of Kandy and the Great Rebellion Revisited", in *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History*, eds. Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (London: UCL Press, 2017), 194-215; "Paths through Mountains and Seas", introduction to Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[49] Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 160.

[50] Sivasundaram, "Tales of the Land", 927, 965; John Cort, "History and Indology as Authoritative Knowledge: Debates about Jain Icons in Colonial India", in *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*, eds. Brian Hatcher and Michael Dodson (London: Routledge, 2012), 137-61.

[51] For a wider discussion on the possibilities and potential of relating Buddhist Studies to Saidian Orientalism, see Donald S Lopez, introduction to *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10-13.

Buddhism to wider genealogical trends within the European academy during the nineteenth century.[52]

Michael Dodson reminds us of the importance of considering the wider contexts of *imperial* scholarship itself and the range of purposes so served, and I employ orientalism herein to refer to such scholarship within a colonized subcontinent.[53] Like Dodson, I merely rely on the term to denote a variety of European-dominated colonial efforts – scholastic and otherwise – to understand the subcontinent using textual and material analyses and through associations with indigenous informants and their own knowledge systems.[54] Of course, this subcontinental orientalism itself also involved distinct phases in which intellectual, socioeconomic, and political concerns battled for primacy whilst orientalist activities themselves differed in emphasis and scale across the region.[55]

Employing the "orientalist" signifier, I refer primarily herein to the Europeans throughout the subcontinent engaged in the gathering and processing of Indic knowledge rather than to their Asian subjects who served as mavens on their respective cultures. This is not to deny that these subjects could not be orientalists themselves and many certainly contributed greatly to both the gathering and processing of the knowledge which Europeans, and arguably Asians themselves, needed to place the Buddha in the Middle Ganges. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, the Indian geography in which we place the Buddha today would remain undistinguished if it were not for autochthonous Asian authorities. I use, therefore, the signifier herein to describe the efforts of those Europeans determined to place the Buddha

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[52] For a general overview of the developments within the European academy involving encounters with non-Christian religions and Buddhism especially, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and JJ Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[53] Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4.

[54] Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture*, 4-5.

[55] For further material on the different phases of British subcontinental orientalism, see George D Bearce, *British Attitudes toward India, 1784–1858* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), and David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). For a brief overview of the differing orientalist activities across the subcontinent itself, see Cort, "History and Indology as Authoritative Knowledge", 137-61, n. 34, and David Scott, "Colonialism and Demonism: Colonial Christian Discourse and Religion in Sri Lanka", *Contemporary Studies in Society and History* 34, 2 (1992): 337-48.

rather than to categorize a fixed grouping to which only Europeans themselves belonged.

It is worth remembering also that these orientalists, for the most part, began their careers as administrators or military officials within the British colonial regime in all its iterations in both Ceylon and India. For these men, questions about Buddhism and its origins served mainly as exegetical problems bearing upon their understanding of how Indic histories connected chronologically to narratives familiar from European antiquity. That the emergence of Christian missionaries in the region helped to move these discourses on Buddhism beyond intellectual circles and into the practical repercussions of European involvement with Indic religion is evident.[56] What is less clear, however, is the political significance of this orientalist fascination with Buddhism for the colonial relationship between Asian Buddhists and their European rulers. Of negligible consequence to the colonizer-colonized dynamic during the initial phases of placing the Buddha, the politicization of this process nonetheless emerged from its rapid popularization during its final stage as I will highlight herein.

Outline

Working thus, in effect, to interrogate orientalism, I focus this work on one specific development within a shared epistemic field of knowledge-gathering and processing. How did colonial Ceylon contribute to understandings of the Middle Ganges as the region from which the Buddha emerged before the arrival of Dharmapala at Bodh Gaya in 1891? Furthermore, how important were the Ceylonese themselves to this wider process? What was, in effect, one of the most notable achievements of British rule in the subcontinent, the process of placing the Buddha in the Middle Ganges was, in many ways, analogous to solving a jigsaw puzzle. Yet this was a puzzle of sorts where the image on the jigsaw box itself was initially unknown – to Europeans and, evidently, to Buddhists themselves – and only began fully forming as more and more pieces were found and tools discovered to put them in place.

Cognizant of the dangers of a set teleology in determining Ceylon's role in placing the Buddha in northern India, I divide my examination into three general phases with thematic overlap throughout each stage.[57] The first

[56] For an overview of the practical implications associated with the orientalist fascination with subcontinental Buddhism, see Scott, "Colonialism and Demonism", 348.

[57] Sivasundaram argues that given the ongoing renegotiation of continuity and modernity in Ceylon during the nineteenth century, strict periodization in the

phase involved orientalists finding the different jigsaw pieces of the Buddhist sacred geography puzzle as Europeans first encountered Buddhism across Asia. Locating different Buddhist holy lands, orientalists relied on indigenous explanations of geo-cosmologies and Buddhist traces to learn more about the possible geographic origins of the Buddha. With both Ceylon and the region around Gaya in northern India emerging as possible contenders for the Holy Land into the 1830s, orientalist scholarship nonetheless remained undecided as to where the Buddha's true origins lay.

Coupling textual analyses with archaeological inquiry, the second phase in this process of placing the Buddha involved orientalists refiguring the Buddha's origins within a singular area focused on India's Middle Gangetic region by the 1870s. In a period marked by a wider belief that texts held the key to definitively placing the Buddha's biography, a hierarchy of texts appeared to evolve from which our current geographic understanding of the Buddha's life emerges. With orientalist scholarship continuing to rely on indigenous authorities, this phase also witnessed the rise of a new kind of Ceylonese scholarship whereby islanders began to think again about their own heritage by using orientalist activities on the mainland as a reference and guide.

With the Ceylonese themselves coming to acknowledge the significance of the Middle Ganges during this second period, the final phase of placing the Buddha in northern India involved Ceylonese Buddhists working, in effect, to make what was supposedly a Holy Land "holy" again during the 1880s. Connecting the Middle Gangetic region to Ceylon's ongoing Buddhist revival and reminding orientalists themselves of the spiritual value of their intellectual endeavours, this final period also played witness to a popular Ceylonese Buddhist reckoning with northern India a decade before Dharmapala's emergence.

Whereas Ceylonese Buddhists, like other Asian Buddhists, did not initially appear aware of – or even of much help in locating – the Buddha's origins, the islanders were crucial in helping Europeans conceive how Buddhists understood the ancient geography associated with the founder of their faith. Refiguring the Buddha across the Middle Ganges during the second half of the nineteenth century, orientalists continued to value Ceylonese texts long beyond the traditional time-period in which contemporary scholarship believes they were of greatest use. Indeed, with the Buddha definitively placed in northern India, the Ceylonese monkhood itself first urged sympathetic orientalists to compel Britain to restore

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historization of the island polity needs to be avoided during the period. See "Buddhist Kingship, British Archaeology, and Historical Narratives in Sri Lanka, c.1750-1850", *Past & Present* 197, 1 (2007): 141.

Buddhist ownership of ancient Indian sites before Dharmapala's own interventions.

Yet, in emphasizing the role of the island and its inhabitants in placing the Buddha in northern India, I also highlight herein the many flaws and inconsistencies associated with this wider orientalist process. As I illustrate throughout, the very basis for our current identification of the Buddha and the key sites associated with his life with the Middle Ganges relies more on speculation and projection than on undisputed evidence and fact. By illuminating the presence of sources from across Sri Lanka pointing to a more intimate connection between the Buddha and the wider island polity than currently presumed, I further demonstrate the need for Buddhist Studies to critically re-analyze how we know what we know about the Buddha. This is because in examinations of our current understanding of the geographical locations associated with the Buddha and his emergence, we find more questions than answers.

LOCATING BUDDHISM'S ORIGINS

Before orientalists could geographically locate the Buddha, Buddhist lands themselves needed to be discovered and understood. This chapter explores how both Ceylon and the region around Gaya, in what is Bihar today, became key locations for attributing the Buddha's origins as Europe expanded its influence in southern Asia from the seventeenth century onwards. Europeans did not initially come to the subcontinent to look for the Buddha. Yet encountering Buddhist practices, geographies, and traces of the Buddha himself, orientalists picked up pieces of what would become a wider puzzle to locate the places associated with the Buddha's biography. Indeed, before the first detailed translations of Buddhist texts became available to Europeans during a period of intense engagement with Buddhist works from the late 1820s, these pieces remained the only clues available to orientalists in the quest to place the Buddha.

Orientalism, as an activity of understanding within a wider imperial framework, depended on cartographic and topographical awareness in a most basic manner. Indeed, only once the subcontinent was demarcated and geographically defined could the process begin of exploring what exactly lay within.[1] Just as understandings of the various regions that did and did not become associated with the idea of a geographically coherent "India" evolved until the late seventeenth century, in Ceylon, too, we see a similar development in discussions of what exactly "Ceylon" constituted.[2] For Ceylon, this progression can be tracked back to the very first European accounts of the island polity.

Early European Scholarship and Ceylon

Establishing a difference between *Brachmanas* and *Garmanas* in India using the now lost account of Megasthenes, Strabo used the accounts of

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[1] I draw here on the work of Matthew Edney and Sumathi Ramaswamy. See *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1; and *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 289.

[2] See "Yearning for form", chapter one in Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*, 289; and Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, 1-5.

Eratosthenes and Onesicritius to recall a "Taprobana" several days sailing south of India and 8,000 stadia in direction from Ethiopia during the first century BCE.[3] From Pliny, we learn how this Taprobana was supposedly divided by a river, possessed a huge interior lake containing several different islands, and was inhabited by an ancient *Palaeogoni* race who sent embassies to Rome.[4] Ptolemy provided us with the first map of this Taprobana, curiously including within it a river "Ganges" flowing eastward into the "Mare Indicum".[5]

The Sri Lanka that we know today was thus evidently well-known to the ancients, even if the exact topographical nature of the island appeared to confound them. The earliest accounts to appear from the start of period of European colonization lasting four centuries give us a further glimpse as to how the island's demographical and geographical profile continued to

[3] [**Ancient Greek**: "*Ten de Taprobanen pelagian einai phasi neson apekhousan ton notiotaton tes Indikes ton kata tous Koniakous pros mesembrian hemeron hepta ploun, mekos men hos pentakiskhilion stadion epi ten Aithiopian…. allen de diairesin poieitai peri ton philosophon, duo gene phaskon, hon tous men Brakhmanas kalei tous de Garmanas*."] [**English**: "As for Taprobana, it is said to be an island lying out in the high sea, seven days' sail towards the south from the most southerly parts of India, the land of the *Coniaci*; its length is about 8,000 *stadia* in the direction of Ethiopia…. [Megasthenes] makes another division of the philosophers into two kinds: one called *Brachmanas* and another called *Garmanas*."] Translation by author. See Strabo, *Geographica* [**Ancient Greek**], 15.1.14, 59. *Brachmanas* here likely refers to those adherents of the Brahmanical system whereas *Garmanas* likely describes the groups of wandering ascetics – of which early Buddhists were a part – who chose to live outside the wider Brahmanical fold. Although doubts later existed among Europeans as to whether this Taprobana referred to Sumatra instead of Ceylon, the Portuguese evidently came to accept the identification of the island with the entity by the close of the sixteenth century. See João de Barros, Diogo do Couto and Donald Ferguson, "The History of Ceylon, From the Earliest Times to 1600 A.D.", *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 20, 60 (1908): 81-7. For an example of an eighteenth-century account linking Sumatra to *Taprobana*, see Eusebius Renaudot, *Ancient Accounts of India and China by Two Mohammedan Travellers* (London: Bible and Anchor, 1733), 9.

[4] [**Latin**: "*…flumine dividi, incolasque Palaeogonos appellari…. Claudi principatu contigit legatis etiam ex ea insula advectis…*"] [**English**: "… [Taprobane being] divided by a river, and its inhabitants named the *Palaeogoni*…. during the reign of Claudius an embassy was even dispatched [to Rome] from this island…"] Translation by author. See Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* [**Latin**], 6.24.22.

[5] See Claudius Ptolemy and Bernardo Silvani, *Duodecima Asiae Tabula* [**Latin**], 1511, map print, 33 x 30 cm, G1005. P7 1511, Norman B Levanthal Map & Education Center Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston.

intrigue Europeans. Before the dominance of the Aryan origin theory for South Asians during the second half of the nineteenth century, contemporary scholarship shows us that an African origin theory gained currency among orientalists based both in Europe and in the subcontinent itself.[6] However, as accounts from Ceylon's early colonial period demonstrate, direct descent from East or Central Asian racial stock dominated discourses on the origins of the island's inhabitants.

Indeed, Portuguese accounts from the early sixteenth century argued that the Chinese Emperor peopled the island with his own countryfolk, with this same narrative also finding its way into Dutch descriptions of Ceylon during the seventeenth century.[7] However, London merchant Ralph Fitch, quite possibly the first recorded Englishman to visit Ceylon, described in 1589 how its inhabitants were not Chinese descendants but rather "Malabars" of "the best kind".[8] A French description of Ceylon in 1719 further speculated that the islanders were in fact a mixed stock descended from contact between Malabari exiles and Chinese traders, while a later report instead suggested Tatarstan as an origin for the islanders.[9]

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[6] Shruti Kapila, "Race Matters: Orientalism and Religion, India and beyond c. 1770-1880", *Modern Asian Studies* 41, 3 (2007): 512.

[7] Philip Baldaeus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, As also of the Isle of Ceylon* (London: Black Swan, 1703), 667; Philalethes, *The History of Ceylon, from the Earliest Period to the Year MDCCCXV* (London: JF Dove, 1817), 16. The identity of this "Philalethes" remains unknown, see Elizabeth J Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary, and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2006), 14, n. 15.

[8] Ralph Fitch, "Journey to India over-land, by Ralph Fitch, Merchant of London, and others, in 1583", in *General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels, Arranged in Systematic Order*, ed. Robert Kerr (London: W Blackwood and T Cadell, 1824) 7: 501.

[9] [**French**: "*Ces Peuples sont originaires des Chinois, qui autrefois avoient tout le commerce d'Orient en leur disposition. Quelques-uns de leurs Vaisseaux échouérent sur des Basses près d'un lieu qu'on a depuis appelé Chilao. Les Equipages qui se sauverent à terre, trouverent le Païs si excellent qu'ils s'y établirent, & s'allierent avec les Malabares, qui ont donné le nom de Malabar à cette partie de la Presqu'Ile au deçà du Gange, laquelle s'étend le long de la Côte Occidentale depuis le Cap Comorin jusques à la Riviére de Cangerecora. Ces Malabarois envoïoient à Chilao leurs éxilez qu'ils appelloient Galas, & des deux noms que portoient ces deux sortes de Peuples, il en est sorti un troisiéme, savoir Chingalas, & ensuite Chingulais*."] [**English**: "These people [the Ceylonese] are originally from the Chinese who previously had all the Orient's trade under their control. Some of their ships ran aground on shoals near a place since called Chilao [Chilaw]. The crews who escaped to land found the country so excellent that they settled there and allied themselves

What is also clear from these early narratives is a desire for Europeans to connect the immediate realities which they found in Ceylon to that which must have come before. From these accounts of Ceylon's early colonial period, a need to link the wider island with polities further afield is quite evident. Yet apparent divisions found within the island remind us that Ceylon was itself an umbrella of sorts under which various polities were both seen and imagined to exist therein.

For instance, while Milton described in 1671 an "utmost *Indian* isle *Taprobane*", a Dutch description noted instead the *islands* of Ceylon when narrating the kingdoms and provinces which comprised *India* the following year.[10] Another account listed Ceylon or *Sarandib* as "the Chief" of all the islands known as *Dobijat*, and a later list of voyages compiled from collections at Oxford in 1766 also described visits to the "islands of Ceylon".[11] Robert Knox, as an English captive of the island's Kandyan Kingdom during the mid-seventeenth century, curiously recalled not just cities, counties, and provinces on the island, but also insular "*countreys*" between which trade, warfare, and labour exchanges occurred.[12] He further listed the protection afforded to Kandyans who "go abroad into the countries about the King's business" despite these embassies travelling to areas *within* the island supposedly under Kandyan control.[13]

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with the Malabars who gave the name of Malabar to this part of the peninsula below the Ganges, which extends along the western coast from Cape Comorin to the Cangerecora river. These Malabars send their exiles called the *Galas* to Chilao and from the two names that these two kinds of peoples bore, a third emerged known as the *Chingalas* and then the *Chingulais*."] Translation by author. See Nicolas Gueudeville, *Atlas Historique ou Nouvelle Introduction à l'Histoire, à la Chronologie et à la Géographie Ancienne & Moderne* [**French**] (Amsterdam: L'Honore & Châtelain, 1719) 6: 159. For the origin theory from Tatarstan, see Peter Elmsly and David Bremner, "Asiatick Researches; or Transactions of the Society, Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia. Vol. II. III. IV, 410", *The Critical Review; Or, Annals of Literature* 24 (1798): 274.

[10] John Milton, *Paradise Regain'd, A Poem in IV Books To which is added Samson Agonistes* (London: RE, [1671] 1678), 4: 49; Baldaeus, *A True and Exact* Description, 565. Emphasis in original.

[11] Renaudot, *Ancient Accounts*, 2; "Collection of Voyages from the Oxford Library, Volume III", *The Modern Part of an Universal History, from the Earliest Account of Time* 10 (1759): 13.

[12] Robert Knox, *A Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon, in the East Indies* (London: Rose & Crown, 1681), 2, 112.

[13] Ibid., 53.

In addition to demonstrating the varied imaginings of the island polity and its relationship to the mainland, these reports serve further to problematize the prevalence of singular all-island narratives before Britain began establishing its presence on the island.[14] As Knox himself emphasized, the islanders themselves possessed a rich understanding of Ceylon's internal divisions and its inner-geographical workings. In Ceylon, we therefore see the reverse of what happened in other polities across southern Asia where India, Indonesia, Thailand, and others inherited "colonial imaginings" of organized geographical entities which supposedly predated the colonial era itself.[15] Consolidating their grip on the island, the British instead inherited indigenous imaginings of an ordered all-island polity which predated the divided island which Britain "reunited" falling the fall of Kandy in 1815.[16]

Indeed, the *Sri Lamkadvipaye Kadaim*, a fourteenth-century text on Ceylonese boundaries, appeared to demarcate this *Lamkadvipa* or "island of Lanka" into 114 *ratas* or "countries" with a whole host of natural and physical features marking out boundaries between internal polities.[17] With several similar boundary texts appearing between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, these Ceylonese works functioned as a non-elite genre of literary application without parallel in the mainland.[18] Moreover, *lekam-mitti* or "registry rolls" further accompanied these boundary texts in providing extensive lists of property ownership and structures of land tenure. In using these rolls primarily for administrative and taxation purposes, the British thus followed the Dutch and Portuguese before them.[19]

Detailed geographical knowledge was thus clearly interwoven into the fabric of Ceylonese society before the arrival of European colonization in

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[14] For further analyses of this problematization, see Sivasundaram, "Cosmopolitanism and indigeneity in four violent years", esp. 213.

[15] Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, 16.

[16] However, see KM de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (London: C Hurst, 1981), 13-16; and HAP Abeyawardana, *Boundary Divisions of Mediaeval Sri Lanka (Based on a Study of Boundary Books)* (Colombo: Academy of Sri Lankan Culture, 1999), 68-9 for an overview of the debate concerning whether any insular king controlled the entire island before the arrival of the European powers.

[17] See introduction and "The Boundary Symbols", chapter seven in Abeyawardana, *Boundary Divisions of Mediaeval Sri Lanka*.

[18] Ibid., 10. For instance, Bayly argues that Indian land survey culture was of little use to British administrators and served merely to demarcate internal boundaries according to the "types and conditions" of men therein. See *Empire and Information*, 304-7.

[19] Abeyawardana, *Boundary Divisions of Mediaeval Sri Lanka*., 22-4; Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (London: Hurst, 2006), 21-2.

the sixteenth century. Yet before examining the significance of this indigenous knowledge in the search for the Buddha, we must first understand how Ceylon became separated from the mainland during the colonial period. 1802, when Company rule gave way to direct Crown rule, serves as a useful reference point for the political "partitioning" of the island from India whereby Ceylon became a "laboratory" of sorts for various forms of state-making not possible in Company realms.[20] However, early "physical" separation discourses remain important in understanding how Ceylon was initially seen as a stand-alone holy land with no meaningful religious connection to its larger neighbour.

One theory hinted at a "general deluge" which severed the "great island of Ceylone" from the Maldives and India's southern extremities, while another placed the blame on a "violent concussion of nature" stemming from inclement volcanic activity.[21] One account further relayed to European readers an "Indian" tale alleging the role of the wind in hurling Ceylon from the cosmological Mount Meru into the eastern seas as an island of paradise.[22] These early "geomythology" narratives regarding Ceylon's physical existence surely remain noteworthy today given the scientific recognition of the island over the past decade as a geological marvel of sorts.[23] Although a complete explanation for this anomaly continues to elude geologists, the earth's most pronounced geoid low is, remarkably, centred around the island itself.[24]

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[20] This is, of course, Sivasundaram's argument. See "Paths through Mountains and Seas", introduction to *Islanded*.

[21] Thomas Maurice, *The History of Hindostan* (London: W Bulmer & Co, 1795), 1: 509; "An Account of the Island of Ceylon, in the East Indies, and of the Town and Harbour of Trincomale", *Walker's Hibernian Magazine: Or Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge*, January 1796.

[22] Fra Paolino da San Bartolomeo, *A Voyage to the East Indies* (London: J Davis, 1800), 427-8.

[23] "Geomythology" as the geological application of euhemerism was first coined by Dorothy Vitaliano in 1967. See "Geomythology: The Impact of Geologic Events on History and Legend with Special
Reference to Atlantis", *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 5,1 (1968): 5-30, esp. 5. For geomythologists' renewed global focus in recent years in converting mythology back into history by uncovering the real geological event underlying a myth or legend to which it has given rise, see Timothy Burberry, *Geomythology: How Common Stories Reflect Earth Events* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

[24] For possible hypotheses, see Sonja Spasojevic, Michael Gurnis, and Rupert Sutherland, "Mantle upwellings above slab graveyards linked to global geoid lows", *Nature Geoscience* 3 (2010): 435-8; and Attreyee Ghosh, G Thyagarajulu, and Bernhard Steinberger, "The Importance of Upper Mantle Heterogeneity in Generating