NIRVANA AND OTHER BUDDHIST FELICITIES

Utopias of the Pali imaginaire

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This general introduction sets out a very broad framework, both historical and methodological, for the account of nirvana and other Buddhist felicities to be offered in the main part of the book. It raises a large number of heterogeneous, complex and difficult issues, making connections between my approach to them and those of other scholars. I hope that both what it says, and the point of saying it, will become clear during the course of the book. What I have to say falls into three parts:

(i) the first outlines a model for thinking about Theravāda Buddhism from the perspective of world history in general, and the history of civilizations in particular. It offers an analytical account of ideology and power in premodern agrarian states, and of the processes of culture-making in them which produced texts such as those of the Pali *imaginaire*.[1] What is said here about the discursive enunciation of order and the cultural logic of asceticism provides an essential part of both the conceptual and the sociological grounding for the Buddhist discourse of felicity, and for the particular role of nirvana within it.

(ii) The second part discusses the provenance of the ideas, images and stories dealt with in Chapters 1 through 7. It situates that imagined world in the real world of South and Southeast Asian history and historiography,[2] aiming to bring about a kind of double vision: one which will hold in view, throughout the book, both the inside and the outside of these texts at the same time.

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[1] The sense in which I use this term, henceforth as a non-italicized English word, is explained in section II.e.

[2] For the sake of brevity I refer hereafter to "Southern" Asia, which for my purposes refers to what is now the Indian subcontinent, the island of Sri Lanka, and the territory occupied by the nation-states of Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

(iii) The third part introduces the specific topics addressed and
      my approach to them. This approach argues against what is a
      very widely held consensus in the study of Buddhism, shared
      by historians and ethnographers alike, by decentering
      nirvana within what is usually called "Buddhist doctrine," and
      recentering it in the perception of "Buddhism in practice"
      (by one and the same argument); and thus aims to present a
      new perspective from which to understand Buddhism as a
      phenomenon of history and culture.

In this Introduction, I adopt the wide-angle view of the *longue
durée*, to locate the texts of the premodern Pali imaginaire in their
natural habitat – the premodern world – and the readers (and
writer) of this book in theirs – the modern world. In this way I hope
to suggest how both the book and its subject matter are located in
a common but mutually distanced historical space. One of the pur-
poses of the book is to provide historians and theorists of the
modern and (if such a thing exists) postmodern worlds with an
alternative vision of the cultural possibilities of premodernity. The
Pali imaginaire is only one part of Southern Asian Buddhism, and
a fortiori of Southern Asian civilization; but it is a specific imag-
ined world which, although produced in what I depict, ideal-
typically, as the universal conditions of pre-industrial, agrarian
society, has for modern scholarship the advantage of differing
markedly and profoundly, in certain crucial respects, from that
imagined in medieval European Christianity. (It would be wrong
to assume, however, that it differs in every possible respect.) The
apparently cosmopolitan conversation about modernity in con-
temporary scholarship is often, it seems to me, hampered by the
fact that many who take part in it – not only westerners – tend to
assume in practice that the societies from which the change to
modernity is to be plotted are culturally comprehensible in the
terms of medieval European Christianity. It is to Max Weber's very
great credit that as a sociologist and social historian of modern
Europe he set out to understand other premodernities in an
empirical-historical manner, even if the questions he took with
him, along with the state of scholarship available at that time, in
large measure determined what he could see there. It is striking –
and unfortunate – that many discussions in this genre still refer to
Weber not only for his own ideas, which remain important, but
also for the information he gives about Southern Asia and

Buddhism, which we now know to be very often either very mis-
leading or simply wrong.[3] I hope, *inter alia*, that this book will
provide the conversation about modernity with a more accurate
and usable example of what LaCapra (p. 42 below) calls the "pro-
cessing of primary material," from one tradition, in one part of the
globe. It is not, however, a book about premodernity which takes
Buddhism as an example; it is a book about Buddhism which finds
it necessary to think about the conditions of premodernity if it is
to arrive at the kind of understanding it seeks.

I. SOME CONCEPTS AND MODES OF ANALYSIS

I.a. Ideology and power in agrarian/tributary states

Historians seeking to delineate stages of world history have often
done so from the teleological viewpoint of European triumphal-
ism, or at least from a presupposition that "the rise of the West" is
the principal world-historical *explanandum*. It may seem to some
readers that the ideal-typical, generalizing kind of historiography
to be found in this and the following sections necessarily does the
same thing. I think, naturally, that this is not the case, and I try to
describe exactly what are the historiographical intentions of this
book in section II.e below: but for the moment the risk of being
misunderstood as proposing ahistorical, structural-functionalist
social matrices is one that has to be run. Later in the book I have
much to say about two kinds of thought, which I call systematic and
narrative. The distinction is applicable here: in systematic histori-
ography of the sort I will be presently engaged in, one is looking
to isolate in ideal-typical form deliberately simple categories of
analysis, not to provide precise descriptive tools for a narrative his-
toriography of specific times and places. If one confuses the two
then the goal of elegant simplicity in an analytical model,
intended to apply to a wide range of differing actual cases, will
result in a woefully simplistic, even absurd failure to write
chronologically and geographically detailed history. In discussing
the concept of modernity in Buddhist Southern Asia in section II.c
below, I have recourse to a particular, because to me particularly

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[3] This book owes much to Weber; but it tries to make some radical revisions to a Weberian
approach. A balanced assessment of Weber on South Asia can be found in D. Gellner
(1982).

telling narrative history of late-eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Thailand, which illustrates clearly that one can indeed talk of the arrival of modernity at that time and place. The analytical scheme introduced in these first sections cannot, in itself, capture the specificities of such localized *histoire événementielle* . But both forms of thought and writing can be genuine and informative modes of historiography.

Any form of historical periodization, clearly, is contestable, and better seen as a tool of analysis which can be more or less useful, than as a descriptive matrix which might be more or less true. The most pervasive contemporary western form – ancient, medieval, and modern – is an invention of the seventeenth century, deriving from earlier Italian humanists (Green 1992, 1995). In world history what Gellner calls trinitarianism (1988: 16–29) is particularly common, and perhaps such tripartite divisions are plausible in part because they reproduce the narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end. Nonetheless, the model adopted here, in common with many others, posits three stages, whose distinguishing criterion is the mode of acquisition and/or production of food and resources; from this one can trace differences in the corresponding forms of social organization, and the conditions for the production of culture. Further subdivisions and transitional stages may of course be necessary for certain purposes. My purpose here is to bring out some features of the second, agrarian stage, which has characterized most human societies throughout most of human history, and in which what we call "civilization" emerged. This is the stage in which the Pali imaginaire was created and transmitted as a plausible whole. The three stages are:

(i) The *pre-agricultural:* usually referred to as that of hunter-gatherers, but also called communal (Amin 1980), family- or kin-ordered (Wolf 1982: 73ff.; Stavrianos 1992; Johnson and Earle 1987). At this stage food is for the most part gathered by women, supplemented by some hunting, which is done mostly by men. (Thus one might follow Mann 1986 in referring rather to "gatherer-hunters.") There may also be, to a greater or lesser extent (on which see below) some horticulture. Society consists only in small-scale families; disputes within and between such kin-groups occur, naturally, but anything serious enough to warrant,

at a later stage, physical conflict and/or long-term submission of one group to the other is solved by the whole or part of a group simply moving to another area where they can gather and hunt untroubled.[4]

(ii) The *agrarian*: although the transition to settled agricultural life must have been gradual, and there is no agreed narrative of it, most theorists concur on the main features of this stage.[5] Food, obviously, now requires co-ordinated and co-operative agriculture; people living in settled abodes require new forms of conflict resolution. (The picture is complicated, but for my purposes not fundamentally changed, by the presence, in different times and places and to a greater or lesser degree, of nomadic pastoralism and/or merchant commercialism.) Society is organized in increasingly large-scale groupings, passing through family societies, local groups with or without leaders termed Big Men, chiefdoms, to agrarian states as regional and trans-regional polities, kingdoms and empires. In Southern Asia, as elsewhere, sociopolitical formations oscillated back and forth over this continuum (it being an "evolutionary" sequence only in ideal-typical terms[6]). At the largest end of the spectrum are found rulers called in Pali "Wheel-turning Kings," or "Emperors"[7] (*cakkavatti*-s). The political form of agrarian states is constituted by some mixture of routinized and bureaucratized military and/or political power. Defining features of the state include: a monopoly over the means of violence in a given area, taxation, the right, or at least the capacity to draft corvée labor and an army, the enforcement of some form of articulated law, and perhaps – although this is debatable – some ideology

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[4] The features of this stage are arrived at by means of archaeological reconstruction of the past and extrapolation from contemporary peoples, obviously a procedure not without problems, as everyone working in the area realizes. But there is no alternative, apart from an all-purpose, self-defeating skepticism.

[5] Sanderson (1995: 34–51) gives an overview of the hypotheses so far suggested for the transition; and on pp. 94–133 surveys the characteristics of agrarian states once established.

[6] These ideal-typical categories are useful for an analysis which focuses on the question of overall historical development. Historians and anthropologists looking for accurate descriptive terms for spatio-temporally located circumstances may well find such a categorial sequence inadequate (see Bentley 1986: 297–8).

[7] Translators and historians often refer to Buddhist rulers as "emperors," although with important exceptions such as Aśoka in the third century BC, few governed territory as large as those normally called "empires." I use the word "king." In modern times the concept of kingship or emperorship has been scaled down to apply to rulers, monarchical and other, of ethnically plural nation-states.

which "justifies" or "legitimizes" the social status quo.[8] The agrar-
ian stage, and the societies and states within it, are sometimes
called "tributary." The term was first used of a world-historical stage
by Samir Amin, to describe a mode of production in the Marxist
sense (1976: 13ff.; cp. Wolf 1982: 73–100); but he and others
have since generalized it, to depict "Formations" (Amin 1980),
"Ideology," "Culture" (Amin 1989) and "Societies" (Stavrianos
1992). "Tribute" here refers to food, goods, services and eventually
cash extracted by a ruling elite[9] from peasant-cultivators and herds-
men, directly by military or political means, and indirectly (but on
this see below) by means of ideologies which normalize and so
justify the extraction process. Society, hitherto egalitarian, is split
into two main groups, the tribute-givers and the tribute-takers, and
so Giddens (e.g. 1981, 1987) speaks of societies under these condi-
tions as "class-divided."[10]

(iii) The *modern*: this is characterized by capitalism and industrial-
ization, although there is dispute as to whether both are necessary,
and if not, which is the more important. For those who emphasize
changes in the mode of production it is the capitalist stage; that is,
the stage at which the ruling elite not only extracts tribute from
primary producers but also controls their access to the means of
production, leaving them only the power to sell their labor. For
others, such as Gellner (1988), this stage is better described as that
of industrial society, where the production of food becomes the
occupation of a minority, and most people manipulate the enor-
mously increased capacity to produce wealth enabled by science
and technology. And of course it is only now that one can speak of
the beginnings of nations and the nation-state system, developing

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[8] The narrative of this process is, of course, widely debated and contested, as are the
criteria for what constitutes a "state." Overviews are given by Johnson and Earle (1987)
and Sanderson (1995: 53–94). Claessen and Skalník (1978) is a standard collection
of articles; cp. also Carneiro (1988), replying to the critics of his influential (1970)
article.

[9] The word "elite," unless otherwise specified, refers in this book only to a class defined
socioeconomically. The word can be used differently, of course, as when it refers to those
who are more sophisticated in terms of literacy and education. To conflate these two
meanings, for example, would make it a priori impossible for anyone to be both rich and
stupid – which would be an unfortunate restriction on one's historical vision.

[10] It is sometimes said that one should speak of "peasants" only where there is such sub-
jection to a tribute-extracting class, for example by Wolf (1966); cp. Redfield (1989[56]:
19–20), agreeing with an earlier article by Wolf, on peasants as the "rural dimension of
old civilizations."

in conjunction with the world-system colonialism of modern Europe (to use the terminology of Wallerstein, e.g. 1974). Previous "world systems" existed, in the sense of extensive trading networks;[11] South India, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia were at the confluence of Roman, (later) Arab trading routes from the West, and Chinese from the East, from at least the beginning of the first millennium AD. Exactly when and how one can place the concept of modernity in Southern Asia is a complex question, addressed in the note in section II.c below.

Any analytical system can be further complicated. How horticulture fits into the transition from the hunter-gatherer to agrarian stages, for example, remains contested. Woodburn (1980, 1982) makes a helpful distinction between immediate-return and delayed-return hunter-gatherers (cf. Testart 82 on "non-storing" and "storing" kinds). The former acquire, with relative ease, only enough food and other requirements for a few days, avoiding long-term commitments in the production and storing of food, and in other forms of labor; the latter are part of a larger category of "delayed-return systems," which includes both hunter-gatherers of various kinds[12] and farmers. Only the former can be sharply contrasted with tribute-paying "peasants" cultivating food and/or rearing domestic or herd animals; and only they might have constituted the pre-agrarian, egalitarian, "original affluent society" made popular by Sahlins (1972; cp. Bird-David 1992). In the transition from agrarian to modern stages (which has occurred, where and when it has, in different places at different times and at different speeds), one can ask: did the modern begin with fifteen- to sixteenth-century merchant capitalism, whose historical course coincided – not coincidentally – with that of European colonialism, but which predated industrial society? If scientific technology and industrial production are the crucial factors, do we date modernity from the seventeenth century, when modern science as a system of thought, a form of knowledge, began, or should we follow Jacques LeGoff in arguing for what he calls "an extended

[11] See, inter alia, Abu-Lughod (1989), Amin (1991), Frank and Gills (1993), Chase-Dunn and Hall (1994a and b), Chase-Dunn and Grimes (1995), Peregrine and Feinman (1996).
[12] Examples given by Woodburn (1980: 98–9) are: part-time hunters; sedentary or semi-sedentary hunters and gatherers; fishermen who invest; trappers who invest.

Middle Ages," lasting until the nineteenth century, since it was
only then that "modernity was fully embraced," in the sense that
the conditions of industrial society, along with the mass education
it requires, were not until then fully instantiated throughout
society, at least in Europe (1988: 18–23; and cp. Gellner 1983)?
And in this case are the still non-industrialized parts of the world
"non-modern"? Important though these issues are, for my pur-
poses they do not need to be addressed, although it is certainly
crucial to recognize that the conditions of modernity – notably the
political form seemingly required by the industrial or capitalist
stage, the nation-state, and the facts of European colonialism –
have affected both Buddhist ideology and western knowledge of it.
It was under these conditions in the nineteenth century. that
western knowledge of Buddhism arose, and from these conditions
now that both western scholars and modern Buddhists look back
at the premodern world and write their histories.[13] But my
concern in this book is with the nature of society, the state and the
production of culture in the agrarian stage, as an – ideal-typical,
systematic – historical context for exploring the imaginaire of Pali
texts.

   The idea of delayed-return, storing hunter-gatherer systems
undoubtedly helps clarify the possible nature of the transition
from pre-agricultural to agrarian stages; but this development
cannot – if we are concerned with the emergence of tributary
systems in the full sense – be regarded as a natural, inevitable
occurrence in the "evolution'[14] of human societies. The transition
was, rather, an intensification of delayed-return cultivation pro-
pelled – perhaps inaugurated – by the incipient tribute-taking
class, an intensification which could both rise and fall in any
given place at different times. The process is often called the
extraction of a surplus, but one might well recall here what John
Berger says about the phenomenology of peasants: that for them
the meeting of "enforced social obligations" – taxation and the
like – is more likely to present itself as a preliminary obstacle,

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[13] On Buddhist modernism, see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988); on western knowl-
   edge of Buddhism see de Jong (1987), Almond (1988), Carter (1993: 9–35), Scott
   (1994), Lopez (1995a).
[14] On the use of this contentious term in this regard see Johnson and Earle (1987),
   Sanderson (1995), and for a dissenting view Layton et al. (1991), who regard hunting-
   gathering and cultivation as alternative strategies which respond to climatic and other
   changes.

after which they can begin to work for the needs of their own families (1992[1979]: xiii). That is, the surplus needs to be produced first. Such "surplus" extraction was no doubt pursued by the tribute-takers for their own ends; but it also had benefits for the tribute-givers (as the takers were prone to point out), notably in the provision of what Peter Brown (1995: 53), speaking of the Roman Empire, nicely calls the "'gentle violence' of a stable social order." This is a theme explored in considerable detail later in this Introduction and in Chapters 6 and 7; but it is an ambivalent and very difficult issue relevant to the book as a whole, which is worth introducing here briefly.

Violence and other forms of coercion, both internal and external, would seem to be universal, indeed necessary preconditions for the hierarchical human societies which produced premodern civilization. When population density is sufficiently large (which can be brought about by coercion, as it was repeatedly by kings in mainland Southeast Asia) and the economic arrangements of agrarian society are sufficiently complex, the provision of internal dispute resolution, social order and eventually the administration of an impersonally conceived justice by greater degrees of centralized control produce the fact, or at least the rhetoric, of peace and prosperity which enables the production of an extractable surplus. Eckhardt (1995: 92; cf. 1992) summarizes his and others' quantitative research in premodern history by saying that "at both the global and regional levels, civilizations, empires and wars were significantly related to one another, tending to rise and fall together." Violence, exploitation and inequality entered into the very constitution of the agrarian states in which Buddhist felicities were produced as objects of human aspiration, including the utopian discourse that wished such things away. This affects both how one interprets these felicities taken singly (especially what Chapter 6 calls the "Perfect Moral Commonwealth"), and one's grasp of what I call in section III of this Introduction and *passim* the Buddhist discourse of felicity as a whole. That is to say, this is a theme of importance for understanding not only some particular products of the work of Buddhist culture, but also the conditions under which the work of Buddhist culture could take place at all.

Two further aspects of the agrarian state may be mentioned at this point. First, tributary relations vary along what Wolf calls "a

continuum of power distributions." "It is possible to envisage two
polar situations: one in which power is concentrated strongly in
the hands of a ruling elite standing at the apex of the power
system; and another in which power is held largely by local over-
lords and rule at the apex is fragile and weak" (1982: 80). These
two situations correspond to what have been called – very impre-
cisely, to be sure, in the Southern Asian case – the Asiatic and
Feudal modes of production respectively. Oscillation between
strong/centralized and weak/diffused power – but with a long-
term linear trend toward centralization – was characteristic of the
sociopolitical circumstances of Theravāda Buddhist ideology
throughout its premodern history. Second, the word "agrarian"
does not exclude cities – on the contrary they were central, in
more ways than one and increasingly so, in the agrarian stage, and
are implied in the very idea of civilization. Marshall Hodgson's ter-
minology is useful if rather ungainly: he saw civilization as a
product of "agrarianate citied society" or "citied agrarianate com-
munities" (1974: 107; 1989: 46). Cities were vital to the produc-
tion of culture, as to economic, military and political power. In
some places (as in insular Southeast Asia) they could develop into
city-states based primarily on trade, but the fundamental organiza-
tion of premodern civilization, and the framework of plausibility
for Buddhist ideology, was that of agrarian social order.[15] In a valu-
able discussion of "The Politics of Aristocratic Empires," Kautsky
(1982: 23) in my view unnecessarily restricts himself by defining
"a pure traditional aristocratic empire as a political entity that con-
tains an aristocracy and is unaffected by commercialization." He
then has to exclude from his purview the classical Greek and
Roman Empires, for example, since they were highly commercial-
ized. It seems better, at least from the point of view adopted here,
to say that premodern agrarian states, and certainly the political
formations in which the traditional Pali imaginaire was of cultural
significance, were predominantly agrarian in their demographic
constitution, but contained, to varying degrees in varying times
and places, urban *milieux*, which were important economically, cul-
turally and otherwise. (To jump forward briefly: this perspective

[15] This is clear, for example, from the writings of Aung Thwin (1979, 1980) and Lieberman
(1980, 1987, 1991) on premodern Burma, despite their disagreements about the impor-
tance of trade through coastal outlets, and other economic processes. (See further
section II.e.)

will be useful in Chapter 2, when interpreting the textual trope of "the city of nirvana.")

The preceding is a preliminary sketch of agrarian states in world history. To begin to think, again ideal-typically, about the distribution of ideology and power in such societies, I want to start from models proposed by Gellner (1988) and Mann (1986). To start with Gellner: he accepts the three stages of world history outlined above, and considers not only the different means (or their absence) of producing, accumulating and storing food and resources, but also the forms of coercion and legitimation which accompany them (as well as, in the second and third stages, the social distribution and varieties of cognition they encourage[16]). "Agricultural society is defined by the systematic production and storage of food, and in a lesser measure of other goods. The existence of a stored surplus inevitably commits the society to some enforcement of the division of that surplus, and to its external defense. Hence violence, merely contingent amongst hunters, becomes mandatory amongst agriculturalists".[17] The surplus of agrarian societies is small, when compared to that of industrial society, but compared to that of hunter-gatherers it is sufficiently large and stable that such societies "tend to develop complex social differentiation, an elaborate division of labor. Two specialisms in particular become of paramount importance: the emergence of a specialized ruling class, and of a specialized clerisy (specialists in cognition, legitimation, salvation, ritual)" (1988: 17). (As mentioned earlier, the ruling class may in fact have emerged before or during the transition, encouraging if not initiating it.) These two groups he calls kings and clerisy, warriors and priests, or most simply thugs and legitimators.

This analysis is relevant to two classic themes in South Asian history. First, given that the two specialisms are only possible because of agriculture and the surplus it produces, a tripartite structure of workers, warriors and priests (he depicts the three

[16] Gellner's account of cognition and society in the agrarian stage (1988: 70–112 and *passim*) is extremely useful, but for my purposes he places too much reliance on literacy, the role of which in Southern Asia remains to be clarified, but was certainly less decisive than in Europe. He also concentrates too much on other things specific to the European past, notably the idea of a jealous God and Protestantism.

[17] (1988: 275; cp. also 1995: 34–5, 160–72); cf. R. Collins (1990: 125–31 and 1992) on "agrarian-coercive societies."

elements as production, coercion and cognition) is not so much a
special feature of Indo-European society and culture, as Dumézil
and his followers claim, but a structural feature of any agrarian
economy producing a small but reliable surplus, as Gellner is
aware (1988: 86). Second, "thugs and legitimators," where they
are different, must, since they exercise related forms of coercion,
come to some sort of mutual *modus vivendi*: thus the complex and
multivalent relations between kings and priests, kṣatriya-warriors
and Brahmins – which Dumont (1980, et freq.) saw in terms of a
difference between power and status, a view which has occasioned
much discussion – are again not specific traits of Indian society
and culture but general features of the agrarian order.

For his purposes – which include as a central concern the search
for possible explanations for the rise of industrial society in
Europe, an issue which does not concern me here[18] – Gellner's
dichotomy is adequate, but if one wants to accommodate more
social and historical specificity more complex models are neces-
sary. To acknowledge trade, as a source both of material wealth and
of the prestige deriving from luxury goods brought from afar (and
from association with the foreign and distant *per se*: Schneider
1977; Helms 1988), one may make economic power a separate
category. Amin (1989: 1–2) is perhaps right in saying that before
the modern era the realities of commerce were clear to everyone,
whereas capitalism has mystified economic relationships, so that
they now require a science of economics to be understood. But
even if the facts were clear the capacity to influence trade was not
direct. Kings could and did extort taxes and protection money
from traders by direct coercion; but long-term royal income from
mercantile wealth obviously could not be either generated or
secured that way: it required indirect manipulation or persuasion.
In a similar way, if one wants to differentiate the kind of power
exercised by state bureaucratic and judicial apparatuses from the
merely physical capacity to threaten and coerce, one can separate
political power as an autonomous category, albeit that a standing
army is probably also a necessary condition of statehood. To
acknowledge these factors the fourfold model of Mann (1986) –
whose general applicability as an analytical device can be separ-
ated from the tone of European triumphalism which pervades his

[18] For a valuable historical critique of Gellner (1988), see McNeill (1990).

work as a whole – is useful: power takes Ideological, Economic, Military and Political forms (his "IEMP model"). This model may be usefully set alongside Giddens' almost identical division of four "types of institution" (1981: 46–7): symbolic orders/modes of discourse, political institutions, economic institutions, and law/modes of sanction, each of which has a particular relation to the forces of signification, domination and legitimation. Greater attention to social and historical differentiation would require more complex models again.

In historical reality, of course, all four of Mann's forms of power combine and overlap with each other, and none more easily than the ideological. The main part of this book is concerned with texts produced by the Buddhist clerisy, whose most significant other is the king, and so the main focus, especially in Part 2, is on the relations between ideological and military-political power. But it is well known that trade was a very important feature of the early Buddhist social world, and of support for Buddhism, so the interaction between ideological and economic power was also important. For much of this General Introduction, and of the book as a whole, Gellner's simpler dichotomy between kings and clerisy is adequate, although complications are introduced by the existence of what he calls "rival elements within the wider clerisy" (1988: 156), and their varying relationships with the political and military power of kings and the ruling class.

Note: on the concept of ideology in the premodern world

It may be helpful to take a moment here to focus directly on the difficult issue of how, if at all, the concept of ideology may be used in premodernity. Who believed what? What does the term mean? It is certainly used, speaking generally, in a bewilderingly large number of senses.[19] There is, first, what Geuss (1981: 5) calls the "broad and rather unspecific" descriptive sense: this, he says, typically includes "such things as the beliefs the members of the group hold, the concepts they use, the attitudes and psychological dispositions they exhibit, their motives, desires, values, predilections, works of art, religious rituals, gestures, etc." Applied to the Pali texts which are my concern, this sense of the word does little

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[19] As shown by Eagleton (1991), amongst many others.