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Kevin Trainor

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

Orientalisms

The reverence paid to the *dāgobas* arises from the supposition that they contain relics. The miracles performed by the “holy bones” of the Budhas and their disciples vie in the absurdity of their character with the legends of the [Christian] saints; and although the errors elaborated in the time of the later fathers, and during the middle ages, present many striking parallelisms to the practices of the Budhists, the resemblance is here the most perfect.

R. Spence Hardy (1850)¹

When I began working on the subject of the present volume more than ten years ago, the topic of Buddhist relic veneration had not received a great deal of attention from European and American scholars.² It is therefore probably not surprising that I trace the original inspiration for undertaking this study not to the literature of Buddhist studies, but to the work of an historian of late antique Mediterranean culture. It was a lecture by Peter Brown that I attended in the late 1970s, and later his published work on the Christian cult of relics, that first demonstrated to me the pivotal role that relics played in providing a material focus for the religious authority of the “special dead” in the Christian tradition.³ His work

¹ R. Spence Hardy, *Eastern Monachism: An Account of the Origin, Laws, Discipline, Sacred Writings, Mysterious Rites, and Present Circumstances of the Order of Mendicants Founded by Gōtama Buddha* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1850), 224.

² This was noted by Frank Reynolds in “From Philology to Anthropology: A Bibliographical Essay on Works Related to Early, Theravada and Sinhalese Buddhism,” in *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon*, ed. Bardwell Smith, AAR Studies in Religion, no. 3 (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 118, and by Gregory Schopen in his article “Burial ‘ad sanctos’ and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archeology of Religions,” *Religion* 17 (1987): 224, n. 77. John Strong, in his article “Relics” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:281, has also commented upon the surprising absence of comparative work on relic veneration.

³ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); “Relics and

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was important not only because of the rich historical data that it brought to light, but also because it highlighted the inadequacy of an interpretive framework structured too simply along the distinction between elite and popular forms of religion.

As the above quotation from Spence Hardy's *Eastern Monachism* suggests, a work that was one of the earliest extended studies of Buddhism to appear in a European language, the practice of relic veneration was not altogether absent from nineteenth-century European and American Buddhist scholarship. There is, moreover, a substantial literature on the archeology of the *stūpa*, the structure in which relics are enshrined. What has been largely absent is detailed study of the distinctive ritual behavior centered on the Buddha's corporeal remains and its significance for understanding the diverse cultural and historical forms of Buddhism.⁴ It is worthwhile at the outset to reflect on why this should be the case.

European and American Buddhist scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century has become increasingly self-reflective as scholars have sought to uncover the implicit assumptions and cultural practices that have shaped the general course of Buddhist scholarship. One aspect of this inquiry has led to an increased awareness of the extent to which the very notion of Buddhism is itself inseparable from a particular history of European scholarship. While scholars of religion may be particularly prone to the tendency to organize their field of study into discrete religions, each with its distinctive systems of belief and attendant ritual patterns, the assumption that there is a transcultural and transhistorical entity that corresponds to the term "Buddhism" has exerted a profound influence on scholarship from other academic disciplines as well.⁵ Increasingly, however, the field of Buddhist studies is being defined in terms of regional specializations that reflect the diversity of cultures and language communities

Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours," in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982).

⁴ An exception is Nancy Falk's unpublished 1972 doctoral dissertation from the University of Chicago: "The Study of Cult, with Special Reference to the Cult of the Buddha's Relics in Ancient South Asia." Falk's work provides a useful overview of the cult of relics from a history of religions perspective, and draws heavily upon French secondary literature, especially the work of Paul Mus. For a brief overview of her research, see her article "To Gaze on the Sacred Traces," *History of Religions* 16 (1976–1977): 281–293. In addition, there has been research on the cult of the sacred tooth relic (*daladā*), presently centered in Kandy, Sri Lanka. The sacred tooth relic is unusual because of its consistent association with Sinhala royal authority. See n. 74 below. See Chapter 2 for bibliographic references on the *stūpa*.

⁵ For a sustained criticism of the categories "religion" and "religions," see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

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that have been significantly influenced by a religious movement that began more than two millennia ago in northern India. The reasons for this cultural specialization are complex, but surely the sheer proliferation of primary and secondary sources, combined with the increasingly common expectation that graduate training should include an extended period of study in the cultural setting most relevant to one's research, has imposed certain practical limitations on what scholars of Buddhism can claim to cover.

As scholarly attention has turned from the towering edifice of an abstract Buddhism to heterogeneous communities of Buddhist practice, so has it focused increasingly upon the contours of the distinctive academic milieu in which the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship on Buddhism was produced. Some recent work has focused upon the intellectual and social conditions that informed the research agenda of European and American scholars writing on Buddhism, and in particular, on the relationship between this scholarship and the legitimation and administration of European colonial empires.⁶

This increasing attention to the history of "western" Buddhist studies, a history that appears remarkably brief when compared, for example, with the centuries of scholarship centered on the Christian and Jewish traditions, has yielded a number of important insights. It is clear, to begin with, that the Euro-American study of Buddhism has been characterized until recent decades by a primary emphasis on interpreting and analyzing Buddhist texts. As J. W. de Jong has observed, the study of Buddhist texts was taken up initially because of its significance for the emerging discipline of philology, and philological concerns have continued to exercise a major influence on Buddhist studies.⁷ De Jong also points to the dominant influence

⁶ For a recent set of reflections on the links between orientalist scholarship on India and British colonialism, see *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). Connections between colonialism and orientalism in the study of Buddhism are explored in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Philip Almond's *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) is the first sustained analysis of nineteenth-century British representations of Buddhism. See also Jonathan Silk's review essay "The Victorian Creation of Buddhism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994): 171–196. On the relation between colonialism, Christian missionary activity, and the study of Sinhala Buddhism, see David Scott, *Formations of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁷ J. W. de Jong, "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America," *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 7 (1974): 49–82; 55–106; reprinted under the same title in book form (Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1976). De Jong has published an update covering the period 1973–1983 in *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 17 (1984): 79–107.

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of Hermann Oldenberg's work on the life and teaching of the Buddha, which attempted to create an historical portrait of the Buddha by distinguishing between earlier and later strata in the Pāli canon.⁸ This quest for origins, grounded on the assumption that the earliest was also the truest, dominated Buddhist studies in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁹

Oldenberg's work relied heavily upon the Pāli canon, based on his conviction that this literature provided the earliest and most historically reliable source for reconstructing primitive Buddhism. The validity of Oldenberg's analysis came increasingly under scrutiny as scholars concluded that the Pāli texts could not be dated as early as Oldenberg had believed and recognized that these texts represent the perspective of only one of the early Buddhist schools. There is increasing consensus among modern European and American scholars that the biographical traditions preserved in texts of the various Buddhist communities cannot provide much historically reliable information about the details of the Buddha's life.¹⁰ Modern scholarship has turned from the nineteenth-century quest for the historical Buddha and his original teaching to the task of outlining the evolution of the Buddha biography.¹¹

Despite this redefinition, however, some twentieth-century Buddhist scholarship continues to bear traces of the earlier rationalistic ethos exemplified by Oldenberg. Thus it is assumed that accounts of miraculous occurrences and passages depicting a devotional attitude toward the person of the Buddha, particularly when manifested in

⁸ Hermann Oldenberg, *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (Berlin: W. Hertz, 1881). This work has continued to be reprinted with revisions; the 13th ed. (Stuttgart: Cotta Verlag) was published in 1959. There is also an English translation of the first German edition under the title *Buddha: His Life, his Doctrine, his Order*, tr. William Hoey (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882). Oldenberg devotes only two paragraphs to the cult of relic veneration in a section on Buddhist monastic observances. He emphasizes a strict distinction between monastics and laity with respect to these rituals, concluding: "The Order of monks as such has nothing to do with this pompous show of veneration; the old rules of the Order have not a word to say about it" (Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, his Doctrine, his Order*, 377).

⁹ The implications of this quest for "original Buddhism" have been discussed by George Bond in his article "Theravada Buddhism and the Aims of Buddhist Studies," in *Studies in History of Buddhism*, ed. A. K. Narain (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corp., 1980), 43–65.

¹⁰ This is the position taken by Etienne Lamotte in his frequently cited article "La Légende du Bouddha," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 133 (1947–1948): 37–71. Lamotte identifies a five-stage evolution in the biographical tradition.

¹¹ Frank Reynolds provides an overview of recent research on the Buddha biography in his article "The Many Lives of Buddha: A Study of Sacred Biography and Theravāda Tradition," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 37–61.

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cultic forms of worship, represent later strata in the developing Buddha legend.¹² Given the pronounced tendency on the part of many Euro-American scholars to regard signs of ritualized devotion toward the person of the Buddha as evidence of the degeneration of the tradition,¹³ it is understandable that the subject of relic veneration has not been at the forefront of research into the Buddhist tradition.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY REPRESENTATIONS OF SRI LANKAN
BUDDHISM

When we look specifically at nineteenth-century British scholarship on Sri Lankan Buddhism, we can discern an important shift in the way that Buddhism was constructed as an object of study. Buddhism in Sri Lanka presented the British colonial administrators and Christian missionaries who encountered it with interpretive difficulties. What was to be made of a religious tradition that rejected belief in a supreme creator of the universe and was therefore classified as “atheistic,” and that at the same time included ritualized devotion to the Buddha? In fact, attention to the ritual behavior of Buddhists in Ceylon was fairly prominent in the earliest English accounts which appeared around the turn of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Perhaps because these early orientalist approached Buddhism with some knowledge of Hindu religious practices, they tended to highlight its

¹² This assumption is evident in the work of André Bareau, who has produced a lengthy and detailed analysis of the biographical tradition based on a careful comparison of the extant textual accounts. See, for example, his *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dans les Sūtrapitāka et les Vinayapitāka anciens* (2 vols., Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1963–1971), 1: 384–385; 395ff. Note, however, Bareau's acknowledgment of the tentative nature of his research on p. 395. I examine his position in greater detail in the next chapter.

¹³ Jonathan Z. Smith, pointing to a general lack of sympathy and understanding for ritual among the influential eighteenth-century theorists of religion, has characterized the modern Euro-American tradition of religious studies as a “Protestant exercise,” and noted that this legacy “continues to haunt theorists of religion even to the present day.” See his *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 98. Gregory Schopen makes an analogous argument about Euro-American scholarship on ancient Indian Buddhism; see “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 31 (1991): 1–23.

¹⁴ Four accounts appeared in the highly influential *Asiatick Researches* of the Bengal Asiatic Society, founded by William Jones in 1784: Mr. Joinville, “On the Religion and Manners of the People of Ceylon,” *Asiatick Researches* 7 (1803): 397–444; Captain Mahony, “On Singhala, or Ceylon and the Doctrines of Bhooddha; from the Books of the Singhalais,” *Asiatick Researches* 7 (1803): 32–56; and Colin McKenzie, “Remarks on Some Antiquities on the West and South Coasts of Ceylon,” *Asiatick Researches* 6 (1801): 425–454. McKenzie's article was written in 1796, and has appended to it a series of observations on two Buddhist temples in Ceylon written in 1797 by a Mr. Harington, presumably J. H. Harington.

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cultic dimension. For example, Harington's 1797 description of two Sri Lankan Buddhist temples includes a fairly detailed account of the devotional objects and ritualized offerings that he observed, and he relates that the monks at one of the temples were kind enough to perform a "poojah" to the Buddha when he asked about their daily worship, even though it was not the proper time of day for the ceremony.¹⁵ It was only when a substantial body of Buddhist texts began to be collected and analyzed by European and American scholars, first in manuscript form and then as printed editions, that Sri Lankan Buddhism as an object of scholarly inquiry became less a matter of what contemporary Buddhists did and more a matter of what the Buddha taught.

In 1855 the first complete text from the Theravāda canon appeared in Europe – Fausböll's edition of the *Dhammapada*, with a Latin translation and excerpts from the Pāli commentary.¹⁶ Even before Fausböll's edition and translation of the *Dhammapada* appeared, however, a Wesleyan missionary named Daniel Gogerly developed proficiency in Pāli (Rhys Davids later described him as "the greatest Pāli scholar of his age"¹⁷) and began to publish English translations of Pāli canonical texts in a Sri Lankan missionary publication called *The Friend*. His translation of the first half of the *Dhammapada* (verses 1–255) appeared in 1840,¹⁸ and he continued to publish translations of Pāli canonical texts both in *The Friend* and in the *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. These translations appear not to have been widely accessible in Europe and America, however, and his work was not collected and published in Europe until 1908.

It is important to note that Gogerly's scholarly exertions were not motivated by a sympathetic attitude toward Buddhist teachings; rather, he undertook these translations in order to equip himself and

¹⁵ J. H. Harington, "Brief Notes (1797)," *Asiatick Researches* 6 (1801): 453.

¹⁶ Turnour's translation of the first thirty-eight chapters of the great Buddhist chronicle the *Mahāvamsa* had appeared in 1837, but it provided only indirect access to Buddhist teachings.

¹⁷ Daniel John Gogerly, *Ceylon Buddhism: Being the Collected Writings of Daniel John Gogerly*, ed. Arthur Stanley Bishop (2 vols., London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1908), 2: vii. One hopes that Rhys Davids meant the greatest European Pāli scholar. Gogerly arrived in Sri Lanka in 1818 and began systematic study of Pāli in Mātara, where he was in charge of the Wesleyan mission station; there he came to know some of the leading Buddhist monks of the area and benefited from both their knowledge and their libraries; K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 216.

¹⁸ It would appear that Fausböll was unaware of Gogerly's work; in any case, he does not cite him in his *Dhammapada* edition and translation, though he does refer to Spence Hardy's *Eastern Monachism*.

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his fellow missionaries with additional evidence for demonstrating the superiority of Christian teaching. As K. Malalgoda observes, it was Gogerly's 1849 publication, *Kristiyāni Prajñāpti*, "The Evidences and Doctrines of the Christian Religion," that, through its detailed assault on Buddhist teachings replete with numerous quotations from Pāli canonical texts, succeeded in galvanizing a direct Buddhist response both in print and in public debate.¹⁹

Gogerly was aided in this evangelistic endeavor by R. Spence Hardy, another Wesleyan missionary who eventually succeeded Gogerly as General Superintendent of the Wesleyan mission in Sri Lanka. Hardy, who drew upon Buddhist texts in Sinhala, published studies of Sri Lankan Buddhism that were widely read within the English-speaking community on the island and that were highly influential in Europe and America as well.²⁰

While earlier missionary propaganda tended to focus on Buddhist practice and decried its "idolatrous" character, the work of Gogerly and Hardy shifted the grounds of the debate to doctrine, a shift that depended upon a detailed knowledge of Buddhist texts. Gogerly's and Hardy's work can thus be seen as marking a transitional period in the representation of Sri Lankan Buddhism. As Christian missionaries, both were much concerned with the practice of Buddhism, including relic and image veneration, activities which they condemned as idolatrous, and we thus find Hardy making the comparison between Buddhist and Roman Catholic relic veneration quoted at the beginning of this chapter. At the same time, both were concerned to refute the broader doctrinal positions of the Buddhist tradition as found in scriptural sources. Given the primacy accorded the Bible in Protestant Christian practice, it is not surprising that Gogerly and Hardy, having begun to gain access to the voluminous body of Buddhist texts in Sinhala and Pāli, were instrumental in reconstituting Sri Lankan Buddhism as an object to be known primarily through the study and exegesis of texts.

In this respect Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka occupied a position fundamentally analogous to that of the members of the Buddhist saṅgha, whose high social status owed much to their activity

¹⁹ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 217. Between 1849 and 1861, a total of more than 1,500,000 tracts and pamphlets was published in Sri Lanka under Christian missionary auspices, and this more aggressive and informed critique began to elicit a public response on the part of the Buddhist monastic community; *ibid.*, 205.

²⁰ Hardy's *Eastern Monachism* (1850) and *Manual of Buddhism in its Modern Development* (1853) were particularly influential.

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as preservers and interpreters of an authoritative textual tradition. That this analogy in status was recognized to some extent by members of the Buddhist saṅgha is suggested by the fact that Christian missionaries in the first half of the nineteenth century were commonly offered food and lodging in Buddhist monasteries as they traveled throughout the countryside on their preaching tours, and Buddhist monks willingly provided access to their preaching halls and even assisted Christian missionaries in the translation of the Bible into Sinhala.²¹ It is also clear that this attitude of sympathetic identification was not reciprocated. When a group of Buddhist monks requested access to a Christian school for the reading of *baṇa* (whether for the purpose of preaching or for the chanting of protective *pirit* texts is not clear), they had trouble understanding why their request was rebuffed.²²

In general, Christian missionaries seem to have interpreted the sympathetic attitude of Buddhist monks toward Christian missions in the early decades of the nineteenth century as evidence of a racial predisposition toward apathy and indifference, an interpretation that served, as well, to explain the general failure of Christian missions to win many zealous converts.²³ That this generally irenic attitude on the part of Buddhist monks was transformed into anti-Christian feeling after 1860 owed much to Hardy's and Gogerly's aggressive

²¹ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 211.

²² Hardy, *Eastern Monachism*, 313.

²³ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 212. Scott argues that nineteenth-century Christian missionary discourses about Sinhala religion were shaped by the need to account for the failure of Christian missions to win large numbers of converts. This failure was explained through a bifurcation of Sinhala religion in which the true religion of the people was represented as "demonism," while Buddhism, seen primarily as an elite ethical system, was depicted as a surface veneer to which the people had but a customary attachment; Scott, *Formations*, 137–169. Hardy, for example, in describing the devotional practices of the Sinhalese, notes that, "It is to be supposed that an atheistical system will pay little regard to acts of worship." He then goes on to give a fairly detailed account of their devotional practices, but then concludes: "the worshipper goes through the process with feelings kindred to those with which he would irrigate his field, or cast his seed-corn into the ground, knowing that in due time, as a natural consequence, he will reap the reward of his toil"; Hardy, *Eastern Monachism*, 209. Implicit, of course, in this representation was a notion of what constituted "true religion," an ideal that in evangelical Protestant circles presumed a strong affective relationship with Jesus. It would be revealing to compare the representations of Sinhala religiosity formed by Catholic and Protestant missionaries, a comparison that has not to my knowledge been pursued in any detail. There is always a danger of constructing a monolithic "Christian" missionary perspective when in fact the various Christian missionary presences in Sri Lanka were grounded in distinctive historical and cultural milieux. For a study of contemporary Sri Lankan Catholicism, see R. L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

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attacks on Buddhism, now defined increasingly as a body of doctrines derived from a reading of Buddhist texts. In this discursive shift, one can perhaps see the first stages of the “textual reification” that Almond, following Edward Said’s broad critique of orientalism, highlights in his analysis of Victorian representations of Buddhism.²⁴ And preeminent among the orientalists responsible for the textualization of Theravāda Buddhism was T. W. Rhys Davids, founder of the Pali Text Society.

Rhys Davids’ representations of Buddhism shared many of the rationalistic presuppositions of Oldenberg’s work that I noted above. His scholarship, like that of other contemporary British writers on Buddhism, reveals a distinct distaste for the devotional and cultic aspects of the Buddhist tradition, which he regarded as examples of the degeneration of the Buddha’s original teaching.²⁵ A striking example of this basic orientation can be found in a general overview of Buddhism which he published in the *North American Review* in 1900. In this survey, Rhys Davids identified the era of Aśokan patronage as the major turning point in the decline of authentic Buddhist

²⁴ Almond, *British Discovery*, 13, 25. Almond stresses the importance of Burnouf’s *Introduction à l’histoire du bouddhisme indien* in this increasing identification of Buddhism with Buddhist texts, claiming that the “textual reification of Buddhism reaches its highest exemplification in 1844 in Burnouf’s *Introduction*” (25). Burnouf’s views on Buddhist rituals of veneration are suggested by his assertion that it is evident *a priori* that the cult must be a matter of little importance to the Buddha; E. Burnouf, *Introduction à l’histoire du bouddhisme indien* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844), 338. He regarded the development of a regular cult of veneration as a later degeneration of the tradition. Maintaining that the Buddha lived, taught, and died a philosopher, he observes that his humanity was so well known even to the authors of legends about him that they never considered transforming him into a god after his death (*ibid.*). While Burnouf devotes significant attention to the veneration of the Buddha as he is represented by images and relics, he nevertheless repeatedly stresses the primacy of Buddhist moral teaching and the simplicity of Buddhist ritual in contrast to the highly elaborated sacrificial rituals of the Vedic tradition. His discussion of Buddhist cultic practices follows a narrative of historical decline which culminates in what he describes as the disgusting superstitions of Tibetan Buddhism (see 357). Yet despite the shortcomings of this approach for a detailed analysis of Buddhist ritual, Burnouf managed to assemble and persuasively interpret an enormous wealth of philological, archeological, and historical material at a time when there were still virtually no published Buddhist canonical texts available to European and American scholars. While the first volume of the *Introduction* was based primarily upon Sanskrit manuscripts collected by Hodgson in Nepal, Burnouf quoted from Pāli manuscripts in his published work as early as 1827, and he continued to read canonical and post-canonical Pāli texts until his death in 1852 with the aim of publishing a second volume of his *Introduction* based on Pāli materials.

²⁵ This may have been influenced, in part, by anti-Catholic currents in the Victorian period. See Almond, *British Discovery*, 123–126. Ananda Wickremeratne has also noted the influence of Rhys Davids’ nonconformist religious upbringing on his scholarship. See his *The Genesis of an Orientalist: Thomas William Rhys Davids and Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Columbia, MS: South Asia Books, 1985), 181f.

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teaching, and compared this period to the age of Constantine in the Christian tradition. The ultimate outcome of this process of corruption, he suggests, can be seen in the Hindu Jagannātha festival at Pūrī in which massive carriages bearing images of the deities are pulled through the streets of the city. Having first asserted that the origins of the Hindu Jagannātha cult can be traced back to early Buddhism,²⁶ he paints a vivid picture of what happens when an elite tradition of moral restraint becomes transmuted into popular religion:

When we call to mind how the frenzied multitudes, drunk with the luscious poison of delusions, from which the reformation they had rejected [i.e., Buddhism] might have saved them, dragged on that sacred car, heavy and hideous with carvings of obscenity and cruelty – dragged it on in the very name of Jagan-natha, the forgotten teacher of self-control, of enlightenment and of universal love, while it creaked and crushed over the bodies of miserable suicides, the victims of once exploded superstitions – it will help us to realize how heavy is the hand of the immeasurable past; how much more powerful than the voice of the prophets is the influence of congenial fancies, and of inherited beliefs.²⁷

This critique of ritual as somehow fundamentally at odds with the essential teachings of the Buddha came to exert a powerful influence on the views that many Sri Lankan Buddhists held of their own

²⁶ This theory was probably first suggested in 1841 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* and it has continued to find its proponents up to the present. O. M. Starza provides a comprehensive analysis of the art, iconography, and cult of the Jagannātha temple, including a conclusive refutation of the theory that it originated in Buddhism. See his *The Jagannatha Temple at Puri: Its Architecture, Art and Cult*, Studies in South Asian Culture, vol. 15 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993). European accounts of the Jagannātha temple and its attendant rituals extend back to the fourteenth century, and the alleged horrors connected with it, including accounts of ritualized suicide, became a common trope in orientalist depictions of India (see *ibid.*, 17; 53–54). The English word “juggernaut” is an anglicization of Jagannātha.

²⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids, “Buddhism,” *North American Review* 171 (1900): 522. This theme of corruption and decline is perhaps even more pronounced in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on Buddhism in the 1878 edition. Also clearly in evidence is the connection between this interpretation and Rhys Davids’ own anti-Catholic sentiments. See, for example, the conclusion of the article in which he explicitly compares Tibetan Buddhism with “Romanism”: “Lāmaism, with its shaven priests, its bells and rosaries, its images and holy water, its popes and bishops, its abbots and monks of many grades, its processions and feast-days, its confessional and purgatory, and its worship of the double Virgin, so strongly resembles Romanism, that the first Catholic missionaries thought it must be an imitation by the devil of the religion of Christ; and that the resemblance is not in externals only is shown by the present state of Tibet – the oppression of all thought, the idleness and corruption of the monks, the despotism of the Government, and the poverty and beggary of the people”; T. W. Rhys Davids, “Buddhism,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 4:438.