

# BUDDHISM ACROSS ASIA

Networks of Material,  
Intellectual and Cultural Exchange

VOLUME 1

*Edited by*

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SINGAPORE



MANOHAR

First published in Singapore in 2014 by  
ISEAS Publishing  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang  
Singapore 119614  
*E-mail:* [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)  
*Website:* <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>  
for distribution in all countries except South Asia

Co-published by Manohar Publishers & Distributors  
4753/23 Ansari Road, Daryaganj  
New Delhi 110 002  
India  
Manohar ISBN 978-93-5098-045-3  
for distribution in South Asia

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#### ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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Buddhism across Asia : networks of materials, intellectual and cultural exchange, volume 1 /  
edited by Tansen Sen.

Papers originally presented to a Conference on Buddhism Across Asia : Networks of  
Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange, organized by Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre  
at ISEAS and held in Singapore from 2 to 5 February 2009.

I. Buddhism—Asia—History—Congresses.

I. Sen, Tansen.

II. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre.

III. Conference on Buddhism Across Asia : Networks of Material, Intellectual and  
Cultural Exchange (2009 : Singapore)

BQ266 B922 2014

ISBN 978-981-4519-32-8 (soft cover)

ISBN 978-981-4519-33-5 (e-book, PDF)

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Cover illustration: C. 9th century terracotta votive tablet from Bodhgayā. © Trustees of  
the British Museum

Typeset by Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi 110 002

Printed in India by Salasar Imaging Systems, Delhi 110 035

*For*  
*John R. McRae*



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## Transmission of the Dharma and Reception of the Text: Oral and Aural Features in the Fifth Chapter of the *Book of Zambasta*

Giuliana Martini

### INTRODUCTION

This article examines the story of the Buddha's first return to his home city Kapilavastu after his awakening, as found in the fifth chapter of the Buddhist work known as the *Book of Zambasta*. This is possibly the oldest extant Buddhist text in Khotanese, an Eastern Middle Iranian language once spoken and written in Central Asia, in part of what is now the north-western Chinese region of Xinjiang.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose here is to investigate the fifth chapter in the context of the reception of the Mahāyāna in Khotan.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I explore how an appreciation of the mode of transmission of the text, through the analysis of its structure and contents and in comparison with a number of possible sources and parallels, can contribute to the reconstruction of the first documentable stages in the spread of the Buddhadharmā to Khotan.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter five is found as such in the only virtually complete manuscript of the *Book of Zambasta*, stemming from the eighth century.<sup>4</sup> It was not included in ms. T III S 16, the earliest witness of this work, datable on palaeographic grounds to the fifth/sixth centuries,<sup>5</sup> since the single surviving folio of this earliest witness, which contains stanzas belonging to chapter nine, enables us to calculate that the manuscript only contained part of the collection starting from chapter seven, that is, counting backwards, the first folio of the manuscript