

Editorial

Richard Gombrich

The most important recent development in Buddhist studies is a sad one. On 14 March Lance Cousins died in Oxford of a heart attack, his third, at the age of 72. We must derive some consolation from the fact that he was in excellent form in the weeks before his death, active as a teacher and scholar, and apparently enjoying life; moreover, he probably died with very little suffering.

This is not the place for a full obituary, but we must note the importance of his passing for Buddhist studies. Lance sometimes pointed out that he had a sort of dual Buddhist career. Nearly 50 years ago, when he moved to Manchester to take up his first academic post, he took the leading role in founding the Samatha Trust. He practised Buddhist meditation in both Thailand and Sri Lanka, and became a guide and inspiration to many of those around him – how many and how durably was demonstrated by the number who attended his funeral and the many tributes that then appeared on Facebook. He was explicit, however, in refusing to allow his religious experiences to influence his academic work, which he pursued without deviating from the canon of philological orthodoxy. The time and energy that he devoted to Buddhist practice, both his own and that of others, did however mean that he was slow to publish academic work, so that in worldly terms he had a less successful career than would otherwise have been the case. Only after he took early retirement from Manchester University and moved to Oxford, some ten years ago, did he publish more prolifically and enhance his scholarly reputation.

Those who knew him better, however, had long been aware that his knowledge of the Pali language and of Pali literature (as well as other Indian religious and philosophical traditions) was rivalled by few people anywhere in the world, and the age of e-mail made him the constant target of requests for help and advice – not least from me and my graduate students. His residence in Oxford was fortunate

for the University, in that he could take over the Pali teaching of undergraduates. As I write, it is not clear how he can be replaced in this role.

A list of Lance's publications, 24 papers and 14 book reviews, is on <https://oxford.academia.edu/LSCousins>; naturally it does not include the major article which appears in this volume.

Since the last volume of this Journal appeared, we have also lost Ian Harris, a co-founder and the present Chairman of the UK Association of Buddhist Studies. He died of cancer in December, aged 61. After contributing to other branches of Buddhist studies, in recent years he had learnt Khmer and become an authority on Khmer Buddhism as it seeks to recover from the depredations of Pol Pot. I hope to be proved wrong, but to me it looks as if the scholarly study of Theravada Buddhism world-wide is perilously close to extinction.

Early in my career, nearly 40 years ago, Margaret Cone and I published a book called *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara* with the aim of introducing the Western public to the *Vessantara Jātaka* and its place in Buddhist culture. While working in Sri Lanka I had found that it was the story most frequently depicted in mural paintings in Buddhist temples – more even than episodes from the Buddha's own life. The painters were not great artists, but their pictures were lively and usually brightly coloured. So I visited many village temples taking photos, and selected the best of them to illustrate Margaret's translation of the text. But when it came to publication we encountered a problem: to publish colour photographs was so expensive that the publishers (Oxford University Press) decreed that we could only have black and white plates. Luckily Sir Isaiah Berlin, who took a kindly interest in me, managed to persuade a benefactor to pay for a few colour plates.

As we all know, the cost of the technology of colour reproduction has dropped to almost nothing. When Cathy Cantwell offered us her article on a Tibetan ritual, it came with 120 fine colour photographs. For a descriptive piece like hers, words, however well chosen, require visual supplementation if the reader is to "get the picture". We decided to display the photos on the OCBS website with a link to her article. This time too, however, we had a snag, and again it was a matter of money: the OCBS is desperately poor and has only been able to afford a website which is too small to take so many colour photos. Luckily we have found another solution, and hope it is good enough to serve its purpose.

This gives me an occasion to remind readers that the OCBS, which has no regular source of income, is so poor that we are always teetering on the edge of

financial collapse. This journal, of which this is the 8th volume, is produced entirely by voluntary labour. We do not know how long this can last. If anyone reading this can make a donation, let them click on the OCBS web site and follow the simple instructions given there.