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*Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene, Visuelle Meditation und Wundererscheinung in buddhistischer Literatur und Kunst: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch.* Buddhismus-Studien / Buddhist Studies 7, by Dieter Schlingloff. Eine Vereingloff Stud des EKO-Hauses der Japanischen Kultur e. V., Düsseldorf, 2015. XXII + 131pp. EUR 28. ISBN-13: 9783862053407.

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Dieter Schlingloff's *Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene* gathers a number of earlier (German) essays by the same author (Schlingloff 1985, 1987/1, 1987/2, 1991, 1999, and 2003), now however in revised and extended form, and combined in one, handy volume. The actual chapters amount to 68 succinct pages. They are enriched and framed by an eight-page prologue, copious annotations and footnotes (six for the prologue, and 43 for the actual chapters based on earlier contributions), and 19 pages of bibliography. It is obvious that they reflect a lifetime's worth of committed Indological research, studying the interplay between Buddhist textual corpora and their visual, artistic counterparts and expressions, by a scholar well-known for, amongst others, his Ajanta studies. As the title indicates, the collection at hand focuses on the representation of religious visions, and the demonstration of supernatural, miraculous feats (Buddhist Sanskrit *uttarimanuṣyadharma-*, Pāli *uttarimanussadhamma-*). The literature and works of art under discussion are of Indian/South Asian or — if rooted in Indian sources — Central Asian provenance.

All essays deserve careful consideration and contain highly original interpretations and suggestions. Chapter seven, for instance, on emanations, offers a convincing explanation for the aperture at the crown of the head of many Gandhāra-style statues — dismissing earlier *cakra*-based or 'Tantric' solutions — namely the aforementioned emanations of beings in the context of visualized inner experiences, based on Sarvāstivāda texts (pp. 67–68). In a surprising move, Schlingloff's prologue examines the Christian motif of Jesus' transfiguration, in tandem with a detailed analysis of its Greek versions and variants. Juxtaposing this with descriptions from the Turfan Yoga Treatise (Schlingloff 1964), he introduces his overarching thesis: First we have a trans-culturally common process of 1) psychological processes and visions, followed by 2) their subsequent (re-)interpretation, culturally and theologically dependent and informed by corresponding sets of expectations, and ultimately often resulting in 3) a 'real' narrative that — intentionally or unintentionally — conceals its visionary origins (ix, xv). The remaining chapters treat specific types or aspects of Buddhist visions: celestial palaces and deities (chapter one); symbols for the Buddha and crucial stages of his path and teaching, along with general objects for meditation (chapter two); the details and circumstances of the Buddha's early biography (chapter three); levitation (chapter four); multiplication of bodies (chapter five); and production of beings and forms (chapter six).

The terminology encountered in the essays is, on occasion, slightly outdated (e.g. Hīnayāna on ix or p. 64). (Proto-)Theravāda or Śrāvakayāna are two possibly not perfect, but certainly preferable alternatives that come to mind. One rather eccentric choice however concerns the consistent translation of (Buddhist) Sanskrit *dhyāna* and Pāli *jhāna* as 'trance' (e.g. pp. 4, 31, 34). While it is not clear to me at this point whether said usage derives from a) perusing Childer's *Dictionary of the Pāli Language* (1875) or a short remark in the PTS *Pāli-English Dictionary* (1921–25), b) an understandable attempt to bring out the visionary character of religious experience in this context, and therefore to translate 'trance', or c) for additional or other reasons unknown to me, this decision is somewhat unfortunate, and may prove misleading for non-specialist readers. 'Trance', I will assume here, for most readers evokes associations with half-conscious, hypnotic states, fantasizing, and occult seances — or continuous electronic dance music. In the Buddhist context on the other hand, this term refers to the cultivation of calm/tranquility (Pāli *samatha*, Sanskrit *śamatha*, Tibetan *zhi gnas*). The meditator utilises the calming, stabilising, and purifying effects of this approach to then cultivate insight (Pāli *vipassanā*, Sanskrit *vipaśyanā*, Tibetan *lhag mtong*). In other words, concentration (Pāli and Sanskrit *samādhi*, Tibetan *ting nge 'dzin*) prepares for, or at least goes hand in hand with, wisdom (Pāli *paññā*, Sanskrit *prajñā*, Tibetan *shes rab*). The visions and powers covered by Schlingloff's articles fall more or less into the sphere of the former, that is to say, cultivating *samādhi* whilst moving towards and into the domain of the *jhāna*s. As for the possibility and scope of using 'trance' in contemporary translations of *dhyāna/jhāna*, I quote the lucid conclusion in Cousins 1973:

> To sum up, *jhāna* practice involves the systematic induction of a very specific type of 'trance' state under controlled conditions which necessarily require a previous clarity of consciousness and a well-balanced, happy frame of mind. It is clear that the use of the term 'trance' in this context is only satisfactory if it is understood in a strictly medical sense as referring to specific physiological phenomena. *Jhāna* is certainly not trance in the sense of a dull stupor nor does it involve catalepsy in the sense of 'suspension of consciousness'. Even a lucid trance, if it was accompanied by the five hindrances, would be considered quite distinct from *jhāna* as an aspect of Buddhist practice. (L. S. Cousins, 'Buddhist *Jhāna*: Its nature and attainment according to the Pāli sources', *Religion* 3(2), 1973, p. 127)

Given the apparent lack of medical expertise both on the reviewer's and the author's side, and beyond that, the problematic nature of diagnosing ancient meditators with medical symptoms, I recommend we abstain from using the confusing term 'trance'. This is not to deny the importance of visions in said context. With the terminology employed, the potential for misunderstanding is however too high.

On the other hand, the majority of Schlingloff's remarks, for instance his reflections on the transition and development from aniconic representations of the Buddha to later humanoid depictions on reliefs and paintings, are persuasive and lucid, both for specialists and also for a more general readership. His suggested approach, connecting the art-historical observations with the meaning of religious symbolism and actual contemplative practice with its — true to the title of the volume — visionary experiences, is more convincing than, for exam-

ple, solutions based on a supposed divide between abstract forms for 'religious professionals' and 'easier' humanoid forms for the laity and the conversion of non-Buddhists (pp. 11–22).

This volume — in a *Kleine Schriften* type of format — is a welcome addition to the scholarly literature on Indian Buddhist art and its interpretation in the light of relevant corresponding textual accounts. Indologists and Buddhologists will naturally find it stimulating and enriching. Students and scholars in Religious Studies, Theology, or similar disciplines will appreciate the remarks on visionary religious experiences and cross-cultural observations thereon.