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Buddhist Path, Buddhist Teachings is a collection of sixteen papers written in tribute to the late Lance Cousins, a leading scholar in the field of Buddhist Studies who passed away in March 2015. The book is a collection of articles first published in Buddhist Studies Review. The impact of Cousins’s work within the field is reflected in the wide range of topics addressed in this volume, which all focus on key themes in Cousins’s academic and personal interests. The collection is introduced with a Preface written by the editors Naomi Appleton and Peter Harvey and is followed by “Lance Cousins: An Obituary, Appreciation and Bibliography.” This chapter includes some background on Cousins’s life and career, including his election to the Council of the Pali Text Society, appointment as Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester, early retirement and move to Oxford, involvement in the founding of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, and his role as a meditation teacher. This chapter also includes personal anecdotes and messages of appreciation from scholars and colleagues from both academic circles and the world of meditation practice, highlighting just how many people have been impacted by the work and teaching of Lance Cousins.

The chapters from the fifteen contributors are divided into six main sections: “Meditation and the Buddhist Path,” “Comparative Mysticism,” “Interpreting Buddhist Teachings,” “Abhidhamma,” “Schools and Scriptures,” and “Literature.” While these chapters cover a range of sources, they all address topics that have remained fundamental to Buddhist Studies, such as the formation of early Buddhist schools, or key methodological and philological issues around the scholarly use of Pali texts. The section on “Meditation and the Buddhist Path” addresses a key focus in Cousins’s scholarship. Peter Harvey’s chapter on the four jhānas and their qualities draws on Cousins’s “Buddhist jhāna: its Nature and Attainment According to the Pali Sources”, published in 1973. Harvey investigates the nature of each jhāna as described in the Pali nikāyas and commentaries, noting that his analysis follows Cousins’s scholar/practitioner “dual tradition” approach. This refers to Cousins’s balance of scholarship and meditation practice, which he believed should inform each other but not inappropriately affect one another. With this in mind, Harvey draws on a combination of canonical and commentarial materials as well as accounts from practitioners to provide insights into the experience of existing in, and transcending, jhānic states. In Chapter 3, Bradley S. Clough responds to Cousin’s 1996 article “Scholars Monks and Meditator Monks

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Revisited” (Powers and Prebish 2009, 31–46) to reconsider the jhyāyin “meditator”/dhammayoga “scholar” monastic dichotomy in South Asian Buddhism. Cousins’s careful survey of the Pali commentaries provide a convincing argument that the formal division between village-dwelling monks being specialists in book learning and forest dwelling monks being specialists in insight meditation was not prevalent in South Asian Buddhism before the time of Buddhaghosa. Clough revisits the Mahācundasutta to both support and challenge some of Cousins’s analyses. In Chapter 4, Amaro Bhikkhu explores the positive and negative variations of goal-directed effort and contentment in the process of meditative practice from the perspective of a practitioner. Amaro Bhikkhu’s selection of translations and practical examples provide an account of meditation practice that is refreshing in its open exploration of the negative effects of misapplied goal-directedness and subsequent unsatisfying outcomes and how they might be addressed in order to make progress in one’s meditation practice.

The next section is entitled “Comparative Mysticism”, the topic of Cousins’s “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification: Interior Castle of St Theresa of Avila and the Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa” (1989). Elizabeth J. Harris presents a comparative exploration of the religious paths of the Carmelite friar John of the Cross and the Buddha. Harris explores similarities and differences between St John of the Cross’s spiritual commentaries and descriptions of the jhānas in sutta literature with specific reference to the jhāna and arūpa states. This is followed by Rupert Gethin’s chapter, which seeks to highlight parallels in Buddhist and Christian contemplative exercises. Gethin selects Buddhist accounts of meditation found in the Čula-suññatasutta and the Christian apophaticism presented in The Cloud of Unknowing, a fourteenth-century guide to contemplative prayer, to explore the phenomenology of meditation and contemplation. Gethin reframes how one might approach “religious” or “mystical” experience, suggesting that rather than dealing with unique problems of specific categories of experience, it might be more fruitful to consider such experiences more generally in terms of interiority. Gethin highlights that both traditions employ simplification and the emptying of the mind, and have emotionally transformative effects.

The next theme explored is “Interpreting Buddhist Teachings.” In the first chapter in this section, Richard Gombrich examines Buddhist attitudes towards departed relatives. Gombrich draws on examples from early Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism to explore ambiguity in Buddhist treatments of the dead, focusing specifically on two theories about the fate of the dead: the first being that the dead require regular attention from the direct descendants through ancestor worship, and the second being the theory of karma. Gombrich considers how traditional Brahminical concepts have influenced such traditions. For example, in the Aṅguttaranikāya when the Buddha is asked if gifts given to the officiating Brahmins are enjoyed by the dead, the Buddha replies that such offerings are ineffective if a relative is reborn in hell, as an animal, human or god and it is only preta or hungry ghosts who enjoy such offerings. Here, the Buddha does not interfere with ingrained local customs and his reply reflects Brahmin orthodoxy.
Next, P.D. Premasiri uses the Alagaddūpamasutta to explore the Buddha’s role as one of the earliest thinkers in the history of philosophy. He highlights that the Buddha, as remembered in Pali literature, valued worldviews on the grounds of the transformative effect they have on an individual rather than the logical skill with which they are constructed. This is followed by Anālayo’s analysis and translation of a discourse in the Ekottarikāgama, preserved in Chinese and of which no parallel in any other language is known. Central to this discourse is the perception of impermanence in the path to liberating insight. Anālayo explores how the results of such practice relate to notions of rebirth in the Pure Abodes (suddhāvāsa), and how this discourse in the Ekottarikāgama could be the starting point for the aspiration of rebirth in the Pure Lands in later Buddhist traditions.

Abhidhamma is the focus of the following section. Cousins was described as the leading authority on Abhidhamma in the West and published extensively on Abhidhamma throughout his career, viewing it as an exploration of subtle relationships and an aid to practice. Tse-Fu Kuan’s chapter is an exploration of the attainment of arahantship at the time of death with a particular focus on accounts of the suicide of three bhikkhus in sutta literature. Kuan contrasts the Pali commentary with (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda sutras to explore different attitudes towards suicide and the attainment of arahantship among different schools of Buddhism. Next, Peter Skilling presents five intriguing fifteenth to sixteenth century Pali Abhidhamma inscriptions from Sukhodaya, Thailand, along with photographs and transliterations of the inscriptions. Skilling uses these as examples to explore how the epigraphic tradition in Buddhist communities has influenced customs, such as abbreviation and condensation in contemporary Thai liturgical and manuscript practices. Skilling explains that the slab inscriptions link Sukhodaya to the broad stream of Siddham alphabetic. Siddham is a network of educational and didactic practices that harness the visual power of letters and the power of sound, highlighting the sacred power of written and recited Buddhist teachings. In the following chapter, Petra Kieffer-Pülz provides a compelling argument for attributing the authorship of the twelfth/thirteenth century Pali commentaries—the Vinayavinicchayaṭīkā, the Uttaravinicchayaṭīkā, and the Saccasaṅkhepaṭīkā—to the Sinhala monk, Thera Vācissara. Kieffer-Pülz explains the process of ascribing works to specific authors through cross-referencing and checking for consistency of style. This includes looking out for broad structural accord or more specific similarities in the use of vocabulary and idioms, as well as reoccurring peculiarities. Ascribing texts to authors is important, Kieffer-Pülz argues, because it situates the text within the context of a specific time and location.

Contributions from Mark Allon and Alexander Wynne begin the section on “Schools and Scriptures.” Allon’s chapter uses early Gāndhāri manuscripts—found in Afghanistan and Pakistan from the first century BCE to the third or fourth century CE—to explore canon-formation. These manuscripts are the earliest witnesses to the Indian Buddhist nikāyas and preserve texts found in various Tripiṭakas. Wynne’s chapter supports a series of articles written by Cousins from 2001, 2012 and 2013 which use canonical material to argue that the Pali canon, reportedly committed
to writing in the first century BCE in Sri Lanka, was based on a Theriya manuscript tradition from South India. Cousins argued that the process of canon formation took place within a Vibhajjavādin framework that dates back to the third century.

The final part of the book explores Buddhist literature. In this section, Sarah Shaw discusses the role of the Buddha’s wife, Yasodharā/ Rāhulamātā in the Pali jātakas. Despite appearing thirty-three times in these sources, in a range of human and non-human forms, Yasodharā is often defined by her relationships with others rather than as a complex individual who is a wife, mother and spiritual practitioner. This survey is supported by a helpful table detailing each jātaka story in which Yasodharā features and the form of her rebirth. Shaw also draws on representations of Yasodhārā as a female heroine in modern Thai depictions of the Vessantara jātaka to highlight the enduring appeal of a character that has been consigned as peripheral in Pali literature and has historically been overlooked in scholarly discussion. Shaw seeks to investigate what role Yasodharā plays in the larger Pali Buddhist story and encourages further research in areas such as local contexts, narratives, vernacular traditions and drama to provide more context and a richer understanding of figures such as Yasodharā. In the book’s final chapter, Naomi Appleton explores the liminality of paccekabuddhas as they are portrayed in Pali and Sanskrit jātaka literature. Appleton notes that paccekabuddhas occupy a space somewhere between a buddha and an arahant, and unpacks the hierarchy between paccekabuddha, bodhisatta and buddha, as well as how the limitations of the jātaka genre effect the depiction of paccekabuddhas.

The contributions in this book are diverse, which reflects Lance Cousins’s holistic approach to Buddhist studies scholarship. It is both a wonderful contribution to the study of Buddhism and also a touching tribute to a distinguished scholar whose work has left a lasting impression. There is no doubt that the work of Lance Cousins will continue to influence the field of Buddhist Studies and this volume is of great benefit to subsequent generations of scholars.