Editorial

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We begin this issue of Buddhist Studies Review, once more, with the acknowledgement of a sad loss. In his obituary documenting the life and achievements of David Seyfort Ruegg, who passed away in February 2021, Jan Westerhoff charts a life that touched many in our international community. Contained within Westerhoff’s reflections is a journey through Ruegg’s many outstanding contributions to our field, his legacy.

Ruegg, like so many modern scholars, focused his scholar pursuits on one specific region of the world, Tibet. The first article in this issue continues important work on another country that has a long and rich history of Buddhist practice, Thailand. Phibul Choompolpaisal and Andrew Skilton examine the Phitsanulok inscription. Continuing their interest in pre-reform Buddhist practices in Thailand, the authors offer an examination and assessment of this inscription and its importance in establishing certain practices in the history of Thai Buddhism. The inscription contains a version of the Dhammakāya text, and Choompolpaisal and Skilton provide an edition and translation that marries this with manuscript editions of Cœdès and Bizot. As the inspiration can be firmly dated to the sixteenth century, the authors conclude that it offers an “objective chronological horizon” that further demonstrates that these boran kammathan (“traditional meditation”) practices “can no longer be relegated by serious academic commentators to peripheral or incidental significance in the history of Theravāda.”

The second article also concerns issues of reform and revival. In this paper, Bhadrajee Hewage focuses on Ceylon. He argues that, in relation to Ceylonese Buddhist revivalism in the nineteenth century, it was Anagarika Dharmapala, rather than Migettuwatte Gunananda and Henry Steel Olcott, who was the driving force. After taking us on his own tour de force through the vicissitudes of the revival endeavours of the three men, Hewage concludes that “Gunananda gave impetus to a polemical campaign that Olcott helped to institutionalize through his support for educational reform and legal redress” whilst Anagarika Dharmapala “connected Ceylonese Buddhist revival to a wider vision of Sinhalese social reform and industrialization previously unseen on the island during the British colonial period.”
Staying with forms of Theravāda, or Theravāmaṇḍa, Buddhism, in the third article in this issue Eng Jin Ooi looks at the history of the Milinda-Nāgasena debate. Ooi argues that the debate has a richer and more intertwined history within Buddhist communities than extant texts lead us to believe. In a meticulous and thorough analysis of various versions of the text—focusing on Siamese recensions circulating from the seventeenth century—Ooi examines the sections of the text, the “questions,” in detail, providing useful tables that chart differences. Ooi’s contribution to our understanding of the Milinda-Nāgasena tradition, the texts, and its relevance in the history of Buddhism helps to round out previous assumptions, and also contributes to research on the nature of textual transmission.

The final article in this issue also deals with texts. Kam Wei Erich Tam examines the Pāli metre of the Theragāthā. Advancing study of Pāli metre, Tam focuses on the less-studied stylistic aspects of metre, namely opening, trimetre break, caesura and cadence. Focusing on four poems in the Dasanipāta of the Theragāthā, Tam seeks to demonstrate the interplay of rhythmic uniformity and how that impacts on the audience. He argues that rhythmic uniformity can work to demarcate and divide sections of the poems to enhance the audience’s ability to engage with both the poems and their narratives as well as, ultimately, the teachings of the Buddha enclosed within.