

## Review

*Many Buddhas, One Buddha: A Study and Translation of Avadānaśataka 1–40*, by Naomi Appleton. Sheffield: Equinox, 2020. x + 245 pp., £75 (hb), £26.95 (pb or ebook). ISBN 9781781798966 (hb), 9781781798973 (pb), 9781781798980 (ebook).

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This is the first of what hopefully will be a series of translations from the *Avadānaśataka*, which was embarked upon by Naomi Appleton together with Karen Muldoon-Hules, Justin Fifield, David Fiordalis, and Andy Rotman after the 2014 International Association of Buddhist Studies Congress in Vienna. The *Avadānaśataka* is a collection of one hundred stories written in Sanskrit sometime in the fourth or fifth century CE, with revisions made up to the seventh century. Its authors were most likely of the Sarvāstivāda and/or Mūlasarvāstivāda schools. The text is divided into ten decades of ten stories each, with each decade bearing a particular theme. Appleton divides these decades into three broad sections: decades one through four deal with *buddhas* and *pratyekabuddhas*; decades five and six deal with bad (*pretas*) and good (*devas*) forms of rebirth; and decades seven through ten deal with *arhats* and the emperor Aśoka. (The *Aśokāvadāna* is found in the last decade.) The present volume contains Appleton's translation of the first of these sections—that is, the first four decades that concern *buddhas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to her felicitous translation of the first four decades of the *Avadānaśataka*, which will facilitate its accessibility to future generations of students and scholars, Appleton also provides a useful introduction to the text as a whole and to her section of the translation. She draws attention to the literary structure of the text, which is highly developed. The first decade of the text consists of stories in which a disciple encounters Śākyamuni and makes a vow to become a *buddha* in future. Stories in the second decade are similar but instead involve Śākyamuni in a past life encountering a previous

1. Earlier versions of Appleton's translations of the second and fourth decades were published in the online journal *Asian Literature and Translation* (vol. 1 no. 7, 2013; vol. 2 no. 5, 2014).

*buddha*. Most of the stories in the third decade involve Śākyamuni encountering a person and predicting that they will become a *pratyekabuddha* in a future life. And the stories of the fourth decade are much like classic Jātaka tales, in which Śākyamuni recounts an edifying tale from one of his past lives. Overall, Appleton traces a thematic unity within this set of four decades, centring on the magnificence of Śākyamuni Buddha, which is reflected in his relationships with other *buddhas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.

One of the most notable aspects of Appleton's translation and commentary is her attention to and appreciation of the formulaic aspects of the text. Indeed, with the exception of one very long formula involving the Buddha's smile, she makes a point of repeating every formula in her translation every time it occurs, rather than relying on ellipses. She convincingly argues that these repetitions are an integral part of the aesthetic of the text and that the stories cannot be fully appreciated as they were intended unless one attends to the repetitions. I would add that these formulas are particularly significant because they are not necessary for any practical reason. They mimic the formulas of earlier Buddhist literature (as represented by its most complete version, the Pali Canon), but given that the *Avadānaśataka* comes from a period when writing was prevalent, they do not serve the purpose of oral transmission that the formulas of the earlier literature did. This should serve as a notice to all scholars of Indian Buddhist literature that formulas clearly played a role in the tradition beyond a narrowly technical one.

Overall, Naomi Appleton should be commended for her translation, which will prove to be a useful contribution to scholarship of Indian Buddhism for generations to come.