

GÉRARD FUSSMAN:

Choix d'articles. Réunis par Denis Matringe, Éric Ollivier et Isabelle Szlagowski.
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The thirteen contributions reprinted in this carefully edited and well-presented volume cover the broad spectrum of Gérard Fussman's (hereafter: GF) core expertise in the political and religious history of pre-Gupta India. This selection, prepared by GF at the request of three close collaborators, and edited by them, contains eleven articles, one necrology, and one summary of the lectures and seminars delivered by GF at the Collège de France in 1988–89. Ten of these contributions are in French, the remaining three being in English. To fully represent the scholarly genres to which this prolific scholar contributed, the inclusion in the collection of a book review or review article—following, for instance, the model of the selected papers of another eminent contributor of erudite and uncompromising reviews, J.W. de Jong—would have been a valuable addition, worth representing his critical engagement with a wide range of studies: indeed, reviews amount to a third—81 out of 267—of the publications by GF recorded in the bibliography concluding the book (pp. 551–74).

GF's foreword (pp. 13–27) to this collection, modestly labelled “quelques explications,” revisits his academic and intellectual trajectories, disclosing his affinities and enmities, praising his teachers and disparaging his enemies as “caimans” or “mandarins.” GF also expresses his strong ideas about *Festschriften* and bibliography, and reveals the difficulties individuals holding unconventional academic or political ideas have encountered in their ascent through Parisian academic spheres—a topic that Georges Dumézil's necrology (pp. 223–27) also touches upon. This very personal academic self-portrait thereby complements the institutional biography appended to the book (pp. 541–47), while also providing the reader with precious information about the contexts of redaction of some of the most important contributions of GF to our knowledge of ancient India. A list of Errata and supplements (pp. 575–83) provides a short follow up on each article, mentioning what GF considers to be “the most recent important contribution on the subject discussed:” in reality, more than one publication is often listed, while for one article (no. 5) curiously none is provided. While the introduction to this section states that “the compilation of the index led to the spotting and indication of a few typos,” many of the typos have in fact been left unnoticed. They are overall rare, and it is not the place to list them here, but the fact that Lañkā is consistently misspelt Lañka in article no. 5 could have easily been spotted (pp. 191–92), had this toponym been included in the Index (pp. 587–95), or a more thorough proof-reading of the reprinted articles had been carried out.

To turn to the contributions themselves, they reflect very well the style, methods, and academic qualities of this scholar, in particular his sound scepticism, keen historical reasoning, and impressive ability to scrutinize the wide variety of sources relevant to an argument. The research articles republished here will contribute to GF's lasting legacy in especially two fields, namely the political history of ancient South Asia—articles no. 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12—in particular the north-western part of the subcontinent, from the Mauryas till the Kuṣānas, and that of Buddhist Studies—

articles no. 2-3, 5-6, 9-10 and 12—even if the scholar does not consider himself as an “institutionally recognised Buddhologist” (p. 26). As a sample, I shall comment here briefly on three articles in French that illustrate GF’s original contribution to the latter field. Article no. 9, published in 1993, is an outstanding clarification of what is known of the Indo-Greek king Menander, being also conceived as an homage to the masterful and too often neglected book-length study on the Chinese versions of the *Milindapañha* by Demiéville, who was GF’s own teacher’s teacher. GF’s scepticism is an effective remedy against the fascination exerted by the elusive figure of Menander, even if, at places, the details of his argument may not be entirely convincing, e.g. when dwelling on the impossibility for Pāli *dīpa* (Skt. *dvīpa*) to mean anything else than “island” or “continent” (pp. 273–76). In the article no. 12 (pp. 453–516), published in 1999, GF re-read with his sharp, rationalist eyes the *Sukhāvāṭṭyūhas*. The part of the article scrutinising the epigraphic and art-historical evidence of Amitābha’s cult is remarkable (pp. 470–82), and many of his interpretations, although challenged in the past (e.g. by Salomon and Schopen), have been confirmed by more recent scholarship. The attempt at tracing stages in the formation of the *Sukhāvāṭṭyūha* corpus with a minimal engagement with the Japanese scholarship on this text, and little access to early Chinese translations, is much less compelling, and so is GF’s interpretation of several points of doctrine. The recent article by Harrison and Luczanits, listed by GF in the Supplements (p. 582) in relation to the Mohammed Nari stela, contains among other things a clarification of the dates of the various Chinese versions of the Larger *Sukhāvāṭṭyūha*, and constitutes an eloquent illustration of the relevance of such sources to shed light on Indian matters. Finally, article no. 10, published in 1994, presents an admirable synthesis of the spread of Buddhism in Gandhāra. Addressing the theme of a volume on “Buddhism and local cultures,” GF argues against the temptation to see in Gandhāran Buddhism the product of massive influences from non-Indian cultures (be they Hellenistic or Iranian). In doing so, GF goes as far as suggesting that the evidence known to us does not allow to think that Gandhāran Buddhism had a marked regional specificity (e.g., p. 339f.). Such a statement now deserves to be nuanced. For instance, Antonello Palumbo has convincingly argued (*An early Chinese Commentary on the Ekottarika-Āgama: The Fenbie gongde lun 分別功德論 and the History of the Translation of the Zengyi ahan jing 增一阿含經*, Taipei, 2013, pp. 283–95) that the trope associating the generation of *brāhmapuṇya* with the establishment of relics in places where no relics or *stūpa* has been previously established, occurring in the Indravarman inscription discussed by GF, primarily stems from north-western canonical transmissions. Similarly, the work of Stefan Baums and Colette Cox on the impressive corpus of scholastic texts preserved in *kharoṣṭhī* manuscripts has shown how specific hermeneutical devices developed within this literature. The blooming field of Gandhāran studies owes much to the erudition and critical acumen of GF, evidenced also in article no. 6, which is a milestone in the chronology of the regional art.

The publication of this volume of studies by GF, carefully selected and contextualised by the author himself, will encourage scholars and students alike to encounter and revisit this scholar’s important work and challenging ideas, and it is therefore a most welcome event.

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