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*Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India.* By Gregory Schopen. Studies in the Buddhist Traditions. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1997. ISBN 0-8248-1870-9. Pp. 298.

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Forming part of the University of Michigan's series in Studies in the Buddhist Traditions, this volume draws together in one useful collection twelve of Gregory Schopen's most influential and important articles. These selections provide a good overview of Schopen's work and, in particular, his method. In opposition to a predominantly textual approach used by the majority of Buddhist scholars, Schopen approaches Indian Buddhism through the lens of archaeological and epigraphical evidence. Pointing out this text-bias, its drawbacks, and the contrasting value of looking to "material" evidence is, in fact, the *Leitmotif* of the volume, and reflects a methodological shift that has taken place within the field of Buddhist studies in no small part because of the work of this scholar.

The twelve articles bring to light seldom-discussed facets of Buddhist monastic life in ancient India. In most of the articles, Schopen begins by highlighting what is almost always a textually-based view commonly held in the study of Indian Buddhism, and proceeds to bring that view into question by examining the relatively neglected evidence available in archaeological and epigraphical materials. What emerges is an understanding of ancient monasticism that differs quite substantially from views derived from scriptures. The material evidence indicates, for example, that ancient Buddhist monastics, including nuns, were owners of property and fully participated in and most probably initiated the cult of images and worship of *stūpas*, and played an important role in the disposition of the monastic dead. Donative inscriptions in particular reveal that the doctrine of the transference of merit and the importance of filial piety were a part of Buddhist practice from our earliest material records (viz., Bhārhuṭ, c. 200 BCE), and are neither a Mahāyāna development nor an example of the Sinicization of Buddhism (see especially chapters 2 and 3). This evidence brings into doubt some prevailing ideas found in Indian Buddhist studies, such as the division that is assumed to have existed between monastics and laypeople, the muted role of nuns in the community, and the so-called "two-tiered" model, which explains such developments as the appearance of the cult of relics in terms of capitulation by religious elites to the "vulgar" masses (chap. 9).

These findings illustrate Schopen's principal claim, which is that Buddhist scholars have created a distorted and in many cases false image of ancient Indian Buddhism because they have assumed that descriptions of doctrine presented in texts necessarily translated to descriptions of behaviour (65). He argues that since the textual sources scholars use are almost always scriptural, or "formal literary expressions of normative doctrine," these texts present ideals,

not history (3). As a result, the account of Indian Buddhism is largely based on “carefully contrived ideal paradigms,” instead of material that “records or reflects at least a part of what Buddhists...actually practiced and believed” (1). Whether or not one agrees with Schopen’s suggestion that the assumptions underlying this methodological bias are grounded in a Protestant view of religion (chap. 1), he is surely right to point out this bias and to call for recognition of the importance of material sources in studying the history of Buddhism.

One might be more hesitant, however, to adopt what appears to be his ideal vision for Buddhist and Religious Studies, which would see the text-bound *History of Religions* replaced by the “Archaeology of Religion” (114). This ideal discipline would use texts, but only those that influenced religious behaviour, and could be shown to be related to “what religious people of all segments of a given community actually did and how they lived” (114). Consequently, the *Archaeology of Religion* would primarily be concerned with religious architecture and constructions, inscriptions, and art historical remains. While I can readily join Schopen in hoping that such “on the ground” studies form an important part of Buddhist studies—and indeed I think we can say they already have—it seems strange to call for archaeological-based research to replace altogether or to dominate textually-based studies. If our studies have been skewed because archaeological evidence has become “the handmaiden of literary sources” (2), our perspective will be equally skewed if the roles are merely reversed. Furthermore, the assumption that material sources reflect “all segments of the Buddhist community” seems problematic. Can we really think that monastics and laypeople who were able to afford to donate property, caves, images, and other sorts of gifts represent all elements of the *sangha*? It seems highly doubtful that the full socio-economic spectrum of the Indian Buddhist community could be imprinted in the material sources cited by Schopen. It seems equally problematic to assume, as Schopen does repeatedly throughout the volume, that the epithets used to describe the donors, such as *dharmakathika*, “knower of the *Dhamma*,” or *trepiṭaka* “knower of the three *Piṭakas*” (e.g., 65) can be taken literally to indicate that the donors were monks of high status. Were these epithets carefully used titles or polite conventions? To assume that donative inscriptions necessarily reflect reality is questionable. Even platitudes can be carved in stone.

These criticisms notwithstanding, for the most part his scholarship is meticulous, his arguments compelling, and his work as enlightening as it is challenging. Schopen very skillfully weaves together methodological issues with the practice of Buddhist studies, thereby demonstrating theoretical sophistication without becoming overly theoretical. No doubt this volume will endure as a valuable contribution to our understanding of Indian Buddhist social history, as well as our understanding of how we do, and how we might best, approach the study of Indian Buddhism.