Pratapaditya Pal, ed., *Buddhist Art: Form and Meaning*. Mumbai, Marg Publications, 2007, 132 pp., Rps. 2,500 ($66). ISBN. 10: 81-85026-78-5

Most members of the Siam Society have come to know Marg Publications only recently, principally through the splendid collection of essays on Thai art now commonplace in libraries and bookshops in Bangkok (Robert L. Brown, ed., *Art from Thailand*, 1999). Begun by the late Mulk Raj Anand in Mumbai in 1946, Marg quickly rose as a leading voice in shaping the direction of Indian art history. The art of India remains the focus for Marg , but over the last decade or so the press has broadened its scope well outside the nation's borders. The long-time editorship of Dr Pratapaditya Pal , together with an outstanding design team in Mumbai, has assured the volumes a warm reception among academics, connoisseurs and collectors. This volume on Buddhist art was prompted by Pal's discovery of an unpublished essay by the great Indologist, the late Johanna Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, tucked away in the files of the Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, California, where Pal served for many years as curator of Asian art.

This volume casts a wide net over the entire Buddhist world, ranging from three essays devoted to the early Buddhist art of India to later wall painting traditions in Tibet. A number of the essays touch in one way or the other on issues relating to the art of Thailand, so this volume is of added interest to readers of this journal. Society members are also urged to consult another favorable review of *Buddhist Art: Form and Meaning,* by Peter Skilling (*Orientations*, vol. 38/8, 2007, 102–103).

The three opening essays explore issues in early Indian art. Gautam Vajracharya has tackled no less a problem than the identification of the Buddha's *ushnisha*, translated variously as topknot, turban or cranial protuberance. While Buddhist literature describes the Buddha as a simple tonsured monk, the Buddha is of course at the same time endowed with special physical markings, the well-known *lakshanas*, which include the *ushnisha*. The author concludes that the *ushnisha* represents a modified royal coiffeur, but this still does not completely explain the clear rise, or bump, in the rear part of the cranium, a hallmark of the Buddha. The author argues that the Buddha was also never represented with a completely shaven head (as a monk), because in early Buddhist literature the "sight of a shaven person is inauspicious", based partially on the "enduring theory that that hair is vegetation and symbolizes fertility" (pp .32–33). The association of fertility and the vegetal world (and do not forget sexuality) with Indian art has been a cliché since the study of Indian art began, and its cavalier application to anything to do with the sub-continent has often muddled our thinking, especially with respect to early Buddhist art. Nature indeed appears routinely as a significant backdrop in episodes of the Buddha's life, but its central purpose is

to demonstrate the miraculous rupture in nature's laws rather than to highlight fecundity and fertility. One example is the tree that Queen Maya holds when giving birth. The tree itself is not the focus but the fact that a branch deliberately and miraculously bent itself to reach her grasp at the moment Maya was to deliver, as the ancient texts inform us. The same notion is illustrated by the story of the twin trees of identical size that appear at the time of the Buddha's death. Another example describes how the Buddha caused a mango seed to grow instantly into a mighty tree, thereby impressing a king; such a miracle does not point to the fecundity of nature (or the sweetness of a mango) but to the Buddha's power. Such episodes number among hundreds, if not thousands, inside and outside canonical sources. It is therefore not nature per se that is elevated and venerated but rather that the empirical rules governing the universe are suspended in order to underscore the divine nature of the Buddha. Such intervention in the natural world extends even to the timing of earthquakes.

The symbolic role of hair is illustrated when the Buddha removed his splendid turban and severed his hair, signaling the break with his royal heritage. Buddhist monks, emulating the Buddha's tonsure, provided a stark contrast in ancient India to the Hindu ascetics with their disheveled locks. Indeed, the belittling of ascetics, their attire and deportment is a leitmotif in Buddhist literature, such as the Kashyapa brothers who are described as matted-hair ascetics (see the Pali *Nidankatha)*. The ascetic Sumedha who unfurled his long matted hair to Dipankara Buddha to bridge a muddy patch on the road is perhaps the most dramatic example of how early Buddhism highlighted the hairstyle of ascetics. The long, unkempt hair of ascetics was one of many contrasts with members of the *sangha*.

Van Lohuizen's essay explores two unusual iconographic features represented on a spectacular Kushan pillar from Mathura, now in the Norton Simon Museum, and how this iconography, by its rarity, bolsters the pillar's authenticity. One involves the monk Upavana who fans the Buddha at Kushinagara and the other, snakes, or *nagas*, entwined about a stupa drum, perhaps indicating the famous Ramagama stupa. Sonya Rhie Quintanilla focuses on the same pillar and convincingly demonstrates that it once belonged to a stupa found at Govindnagar, Mathura, and should date to the first century C.E. Her essay, which effortlessly moves between history, iconography and stylistic analysis, is a model.

Two of the essays focus on a snake-hooded stone Buddha in the Norton Simon Museum that has been attributed to northeastern Thailand and to the ninth century. The theme is the snake-king Muchalinda who winds his coils about the Buddha seven times in order to protect the Buddha from various inclemencies. Only rarely in Buddhist art is the Buddha's body shown wrapped within the coils, and Pal illustrates a rare example from Gandhara (another

example may be the nineteenth century bronze image at Wat Suthat, Bangkok). The Norton Simon example follows the norm, with the snake heads represented above the Buddha. This same example is unusual, however, since it is depicted with only three heads rather than seven which is customary in mainland South-east Asia (another example with three heads is among the eighteenth century painting at Dambulla, Sri Lanka, where, incidentally, the coils conceal the lower half of the Buddha's body). Pal provides a perceptive review of the vast number of snake-hooded Buddhas in order to place the Norton Simon work into context. Joyanto Sen's article treats the same Muchalinda stone sculpture but more from a stylistic angle.

Hiram Woodward reminds of us of the complex and fluid religious setting of the Khmer world. His starting point is an inscribed standing Avalokiteshvara in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, which is compared to other examples, notably a tenth century stele in the Bangkok Museum. These works are related to two *sutras*, the *Karandavyuha* and *Mahavairochana*.

The last three essays range over issues in Himalayan art. Steven Kossak looks at the depiction of jewelleries, both in stone and painted examples, to determine their use as chronological guideposts. He delineates four stages, beginning in the eleventh century. Erberto Lo Bue explores two phases of Ladakhi painting. The earliest is marked by Kashmiri influence, while the second, following the fouteenth century, shows a debt to Tibet, especially the Kagyu tradition in the sixteenth century. He has also identified the names of no less than six artists, based on painted inscriptions. The last essay is a personal reflection by Jaroslav Poncar, a photographer who has specialized on the Himalayas. He speaks of his experiences growing up in his native Czechoslovakia which contributed to his unique perspective from behind the camera. Panoramic views are his forte, a number of which appear here for the first time. He is at present a professor of physics in Cologne.

The superb layout of *Buddhist Art* encourages one to keep thumbing the pages to ever new delights. The scores of color and black-and-white photographs are crisp, with few exceptions. The rich deep red backgrounds in some of the *thankas* are even so luscious that the garlands of severed heads are scarcely noticed. There are approximately ten full-page color illustrations. One of the most dramatic is a wall painting from Miran, in the National Museum, Delhi, extending over two pages and boldly silhouetted against a stark white background. These nine essays provide an up-to-date look at many of the most provocative issues in the study of Buddhist art. The volume's wide scope offers a little of something for everyone.

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