Weber, Claudia: *Die Lichtmetaphorik im frühen Mahāyāna-Buddhismus.* [Beiträge zur Indologie 37.]

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Claudia Weber’s study on “Light Metaphors in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism” deals with an important element in Buddhist literature: the imagery of light, darkness and fire with all their meanings and implications. In the Nikāyas, light and fire seem to be the most frequent *upamānas* next to water and animal metaphors,¹ and one may intuitively assume that light imagery gets even more prominent in Mahāyāna literature. Therefore a study of this topic is highly welcome.

The book presents the results of a DFG research project carried out at the University of Bonn. It is addressed to a broad readership, including scholars of Indian Studies and Religious Studies.² The study is based on sources ranging from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* as the earliest work to the *Lankāvatārasūtra* (5th century?). They comprise eight of the Sūtras known as the “nine dharmas” in the Nepalese tradition (excluding the *Guhyasamājāsūtra*) and the *Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra*. The light metaphors in these Mahāyāna Sūtras are selectively compared with the canonical literature of non-Mahāyāna schools, with Buddhist works like the *avadāna* collections, the *Abhidharmakośa* and the “Yoga Manual” (“Yogalehrbuch”) from

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¹On the frequency of water, fire and animal metaphors in the Pāli canon see C.A.F. Rhys Davids: Similes in the Nikāyas. A classified index. JPTS 1906-07, p. 54 and Buddhist Parables and Similes. The Open Court XII, 1910, pp. 528 and 532.

²Numerous notes even on basic topics (cf., e.g., the explanation of “Bodhisattva” on p. 20, the list of the sections of the Pāli canon on p. 29, the summary of Madhyamaka and Çittamātra on pp. 45f. and the trivial remark that *ava* means “downwards, away” on p. 186, note 20) and a glossary of Sanskrit words and technical terms makes the book accessible to an audience who does not read Sanskrit. If the book is indeed addressed to a non-specialist readership it would sometimes be desirable to find more bibliographical references concerning relevant issues of Buddhist Studies like, e.g, the dating of the Buddha (e.g. on pp. 29 and 31 we read “Buddhas Lebenszeit (4. Jh. v.Chr. (?))” without any further comment).

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Central Asia (ed. by D. Schlingloff in 1964), and with passages from earlier non-Buddhist literature. Weber does not consider other genres of Buddhist Sanskrit literature of the same period, like poetry, didactic stanzas, or philosophical literature, even though these would have also yielded a considerable amount of material.

The book begins with a brief discussion of light as “metaphor” as opposed to “symbol”. Weber prefers to speak of metaphors although she states that this distinction is not really relevant for her study (“Letztlich ist diese Entscheidung auch unerheblich . . .”, p. 5). In fact the reader will notice that the examples given cover similes (upama), illustrations (drṣṭānta) and metaphors (ṛūpaka) as well as totally non-metaphorical occurrences of light, like the light of Amitābha’s Buddha field Sukhāvatī or the fire and water that the Buddha miraculously emits from his body—elements that are certainly not intended to be taken as mere metaphors. Chapter 1 closes with some rudimentary hermeneutical considerations and a short description of how the material was collected and analysed. Chapter 2 introduces the sources used in the book.

The main part of the book begins with chapter 3, a study of “light and abstract concepts”. It discusses light metaphors for knowledge and cognition, virtues, excellence and fame. Moreover it addresses ideas that are not to be taken as metaphors at all: meditation methods employing light (light kasiṇa), light that is visualised in meditation (in the “Yogalehrbuch”), the ṛddhi of emitting fire and water (yamaka-pratīḥārya), cosmological and soteriological concepts (like the light of Sukhāvatī), and astrological ideas (the irregular behaviour of the celestial bodies indicates misfortune).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to “shining phenomena” apart from the natural lights: the radiating appearance of Buddha Śākyamuni, Buddha Amitābha, Bodhisattvas, the light of heaven, the Buddha fields, and the luminous nature of mind. The chapter includes a discussion of the hypothesis of Iranian influences on the figures of Amitābha and Maitreya and concludes that there is no necessity to assume such an influence.

Chapter 5 examines the celestial bodies and natural lights and discusses some of the standard similes of Buddhism like the reflection of the moon in the water, lighting or a lamp as similes for the momentariness of phenomena, and more elaborate allegories like the story of the burning house from the Saddharmapiṇḍarīkaśūtra. Chapter 6 deals with notions of seeing and blindness, and chapter 7 treats darkness as a metaphor for ignorance and sin and quotes a lengthy passage from the Gāndavyūha dealing with the dangers of the night.

Chapter 8, “Wortuntersuchungen”, presents the roots bhā, bhās, tap, ḍīp and jval and some of their simple nominal derivations. Brief phrases containing these verbs are quoted in German translation and the main agent nouns are listed. Unfortunately the analysis does not consider the morphology of the respective verbs. Moreover, Weber does not attempt to translate the verbs consistently. In addition, the relationship

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To give just one example, jval usually refers to fire and is translated with “to burn, to blaze” (“brennen, flammen, lodern”). Nevertheless in some cases it is rendered with “to shine”, as on p. 200: “(two princes) emit streams of water from the lower part of their body, from the upper part they let a mass of fire shine forth” (“aus dem oberen lassen sie eine Feuermasse (agni-skandha) leuchten”). Since the passage explicitly speaks about fire, I see no reason why jval should not be rendered as “to blaze, to flame forth”. A note on such varying translations would have helped to clarify the reasons for the respective choice.