

PREFACE

In Helena Blavatsky's lifetime (1831-1891) the perception of Buddhism in the West underwent monumental changes. Much information about Buddhism had reached Europe from the 16th century onward,¹ but Europe's first university chairs in Indology and Sinology were only established in 1815 in Paris, and in the following decades Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan studies began to take root in academia. Scientific journals such as the *Journal Asiatique* (founded in 1822) were instrumental in disseminating information about the Orient's largest religion and addressing basic questions. Was Buddhism fundamentally identical with Brahmanism, as Diderot, Herder and many others had thought? Was it the ancestor of Brahmanism or its reformist successor? Was it larger than Christianity and Islam? When and in what country was it born? Was its founder a historical person, some kind of god, an outgrowth of solar myth, or identical with Mercury and Wotan? Did Buddhism teach monotheism, mysticism, materialism, or nihilism?

In the 18th and the early 19th centuries such questions were hotly debated, as the first Western book about Buddhism of 1817 shows.² Even in the 1820s and 1830s, eminent scholars such as the world's first professor of geography Carl Ritter were still convinced that Shakyamuni Buddha was preceded by a far more ancient Buddha whose religion had spread very widely. Monuments such as Bamyán, Stonehenge, and Carnac were linked to this ancient religion whose traces were divined not only in monuments but also in many place names containing "Bud" or "Bod," for example "Bodensee" (Lake of Constance).³ In fact, Godfrey Higgins' two-volume *Anacalypsis* of 1836—a main source of Blavatsky's first major work *Isis Unveiled* (1877)—is a huge compendium of 18th- and early 19th-century speculation whose influence is still palpable in her article about "Lamas and Druses" (1881; Section 5 of the present book).

1 Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness. The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy*. Wil: UniversityMedia, 2012 / 2014.

2 Michel-Jean-François Ozeray and Urs App. *The First Western Book on Buddha and Buddhism*. Wil / Paris: UniversityMedia, 2017.

3 Carl Ritter, *Die Vorhalle europäischer Völkergeschichten vor Herodotus, um den Kaukasus und an den Gestaden des Pontus*. Berlin: Reimer, 1820.

To my knowledge, the first European to call himself “Buddhist” was the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer in the late 1850s. He possibly said this tongue-in-cheek; but in his works he *did* call Buddhism “the best of all possible religions” and encouraged its study by publishing a long list of recommended readings about it.⁴ One of his admirers and avid readers, the composer Richard Wagner, was so inspired by such praise that, in 1856, he conceived a Buddhist opera project called *Die Sieger* (The Victors) featuring Buddha and his favorite disciple Ananda.⁵ But possibly the first Westerners to formally convert to Buddhism were the co-founders of Theosophy, Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, who on May 19 of 1880 solemnly took *pansil* (*pañcasilā*; the five lay Buddhist precepts) at the Wijananda Monastery at Galle in Sri Lanka.

Why Blavatsky took this step, how her view of Buddhism evolved, and what role this religion played in her thought are subjects to be discussed in a separate book that will also analyse much additional source material from her book publications, additional articles, letters, and the so-called Mahatma Letters. The aim of the present volume, by contrast, is to reproduce Blavatsky’s major articles dealing with Buddhism along with some interviews and letters documenting her views between 1877 and 1889, her most productive years. Each section is introduced by remarks about sources, biographical context, and points of interest.

Blavatsky’s orthography, particularly that of Asian terms, is notoriously erratic; yet often it simply reproduces that of her sources with all the quirks of historical romanisations. Changing the spelling based on modern knowledge and conventions thus often hinders the identification of her sources, which is our second aim. Blavatsky has in the past been accused of rampant plagiarism.⁶ Far from such polemics, our aim here is simply to identify major sources of Blavatsky’s reception of Buddhism. Hers is not just a splendid case of 19th-century Western reception of Buddhism but—due to the unique wealth of available source material including countless dated letters—an exceptionally well documented one.

⁴ See Urs App, “Schopenhauer and China: A Sino-Platonic Love Affair.” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 200, (2010): 1–160.

⁵ This project was hatched at the same time as Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* and can be regarded as its Buddhist counterpart. See Urs App, *Richard Wagner and Buddhism*. Rorschach/Kyoto: UniversityMedia, 2011.

⁶ Most notably by William Emmette Coleman, for example in “The Sources of Madame Blavatsky’s Writings.” In Vsevolod Sergyevich Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895, pp. 353–366.

Blavatsky's texts included in this volume can be chronologically arranged in seven categories:

I. SECTIONS 1-3 are newspaper articles by journalists who interviewed Blavatsky before the publication of *Isis Unveiled* in 1877 while she was still in New York. SECTION 4 reproduces a letter about Buddhism to her favorite aunt in Russia from December of 1877, two months after the appearance of *Isis Unveiled*.

II. SECTIONS 5-9 AND 11-13 consist of articles Blavatsky wrote for her journal *The Theosophist* between 1881 and 1883 while residing in India. They reflect her slowly growing acquaintance with scholarly work on Buddhism as well as an increasing interest in Tibet and in "Himalayan Brothers" representing an ancient esoteric doctrine. In this period she had access to much literature about Buddhism collected by Olcott for the redaction of his *Buddhist Catechism* (published on July 24, 1881)⁷ and increasingly also about Tibet. As our Table of Major Sources on Buddhism (pp. VIII-X) shows, from 1882 onward Blavatsky intensively used Emil Schlagintweit's *Buddhism in Tibet* (1863) and Heinrich August Jäschke's *Romanized Tibetan and English Dictionary* (1866).⁸ The many instances of their use both by Blavatsky and her "Mahatmas" are of profound relevance for a new appraisal of Blavatsky's (and her purported instructors') knowledge of Buddhism, Tibet, and the Tibetan language.

SECTIONS 10 and 14 were probably written in late 1882 and late 1883, but for some reason Blavatsky refrained not only from publishing them but apparently even from showing them to her associates. They document Blavatsky's attempt to smother lingering doubts about her own and the Mahatmas' view of Buddhism by way of missives from Tibet by supreme indigenous authorities. Blavatsky's quotations from texts of purported Tibetan origin are set throughout in italics in order to facilitate distinguishing them from her own commentary. Manuscripts of these two sections were found among other materials after Madame's death and published posthumously in 1894. Though the dates of redaction must remain conjectural, late 1882 and 1883 might not be far off the mark.⁹

⁷ Henry Steele Olcott, *A Buddhist Catechism, According to the Canon of the Southern Church* (Colombo: Theosophical Society, Buddhist Section, Pettah, 1881).

⁸ The latter has only recently been identified. See the next note.

⁹ For an analysis of these two articles and a discussion of their sources and authorship see Urs App, "Tibetan Theosophy: Helena Blavatsky's Tantric Connection." In *Sino-Tibetan Buddhism across the Ages*, ed. by Ester Bianchi and Weirong Shen. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021, pp. 141-69.

III. SECTIONS 15 AND 16, published between late 1883 and the fall of 1884, stem from a period when Blavatsky traveled to Europe and various problems required her intervention: 1. the Kiddle affair, triggered in September of 1883 and stretching into 1884, which led to the accusation that Mahatma Koot Hoomi had plagiarized a speech by a Mr. Kiddle and that, by implication, Blavatsky was the true author of the Mahatma letters; 2. the Coulomb affair, which came to a head in the fall of 1884 (while Madame was in Europe) with the publication of letters—purportedly from Blavatsky to her assistant Mrs. Coulomb—containing instructions for elaborate deception; 3. the onset of the inquiry of the Society of Psychical Research in Cambridge into Blavatsky’s “phenomena,” which was to peak in December 1885 with a devastating verdict; and 4. doubts sown by the likes of William Stainton Moses and Arthur Lillie about Blavatsky’s knowledge of Buddhism, her sojourn in Tibet, and the existence of her Mahatmas. Sections 15 and 16 were originally published in the spiritualist weekly *Light* as Blavatsky’s responses to the critiques of Moses and Lillie.

IV. SECTIONS 17-27 stem from Blavatsky’s final years in Europe after leaving India for good. She apparently intended to include this material in the text or as appendices of *The Secret Doctrine*; several of them are mentioned as Appendix titles in the “Würzburg” draft manuscript that she mailed in late 1886 to the Adyar headquarters. However, they were eventually excluded from the two-volume *Secret Doctrine* printed in 1888. After Madame’s death, the decision was made to publish them posthumously (1897) as a part of volume 3 of *The Secret Doctrine* entitled “The Mystery of Buddha” (vol. 3, Sections XLI-LI). These ten sections were probably written in 1886 or 1887; but it is possible and in some cases likely that Blavatsky and / or the editors added corrections and literary references at a later point.¹⁰

V. SECTION 28 reproduces three excerpts from the “Würzburg” draft of *The Secret Doctrine* that was sent to the Society headquarters in Adyar in the fall of 1886. (A) Beginning of Blavatsky’s notice “To the Readers” at the beginning of the manuscript. (B) Introductory remarks on the text

10 For an overview of the genesis of *The Secret Doctrine* see Daniel H. Caldwell, “The Writing of the Secret Doctrine. A Chronology,” in David Reigle (ed.), *The Secret Doctrine Würzburg Manuscript. The 1885-1886 Version with the Stanzas of Dzyan and H. P. B.’s Accompanying Commentaries*. Cotopaxi, Colorado: Eastern School Press, 2014, pp. 261-349; and Caldwell’s “The Myth of the ‘Missing’ Third Volume of *The Secret Doctrine*” in the same volume (pp. 351-379).

of the Stanzas of the *Book of Dzyan*. (C) Blavatsky's notes 4 to 8 to the first Stanza. The Tables on pp. 301 and 302 pertain the vocabulary of the beginning of the first Stanza and its sources.

VI. SECTIONS 29-30 consist of two articles published in April and August of 1888, that is, just prior to the printing of the *magnum opus* of Blavatsky *The Secret Doctrine*.

VII. SECTION 31 reproduces the Preface and Fragment 2 ("The Two Paths") of Blavatsky's late work *The Voice of the Silence* (1889).

The spelling generally follows the earliest printed source, and for the reader's convenience I inserted page numbers of original publications and collections in angular brackets < >. For the used abbreviations see the List of Abbreviations on p. 358.

Footnotes that do not begin and end with a square bracket are by Blavatsky. Notes and comments by authors other than Blavatsky are set in square brackets [...] with identification of authorship. Mine are marked [UA]. In line with the stated aims of this book, I generally omitted comments about the accuracy of Blavatsky's statements and instead focused on the identification of her sources. In order to avoid even more numerous footnotes, cross-references to Blavatsky's other articles and books were also kept at a minimum.

The Bibliography (pp. 359-371) mainly lists works cited in the text and the footnotes and does not include secondary literature.

My heartfelt thanks go to my old friend Pat Lutkins who owns the Tibetan thangka used as background of the cover; to my son Alexander Huwyler for his expert graphic work; and to my spouse Eva Léandre who not only lovingly and enthusiastically accompanied the entire gestation of this book but also fructified and improved it through numerous comments, suggestions, and interesting discussions.

Paris, February 2023

Urs App

TABLE OF MAJOR SOURCES ON BUDDHISM

	Title	Date	Published & Identified	Undocumented
①	A Coming Buddhist Book	<u>U.S.A.</u> 01/1877	Jaccoliot	
②	A Lamasery in New York	03/1877	Max Müller, Yule, Coleman	
③	Catechizing a Buddhist	05/1877	Jaccoliot, Max Müller	
④	Letter to N. de Fadeyev	12/1877	Jaccoliot, Müller, Dunlap, Dubois, Alabaster	
⑤	Lamas and Druses	<u>India</u> 06/1881	Jäschke , Huc, Higgins, Kenealy, Vallancey, MacAuliffe	(from fall 1880: Teachings of the Mahatmas by letter)
⑥	Himal. Brothers	07/1881		
⑦	Seven-fold Principle in Man	01/1882	Schlagintweit, Beal, Markham , Jäschke, Monier-Williams	
⑧	Esoteric Axioms	01/1882	Jäschke, Schlagintweit, Beal, Markham	
⑨	Reincarnations in Tibet	03/1882	Jäschke, Schlagintweit, Beal, Markham, St. Hilaire	
⑩	Doctrines of the Holy "Lha"	late 1882?	Jäschke, Schlagintweit, Markham, Huc	• Letter from Tibet • <i>Book of Kbiu-ti</i>
⑪	Sacred Tree of Kum Bum	03/1883	Huc, Des Mousseaux	Senzar text on tree w/ Dharma & world history
⑫	Sakya Muni's Place in History	11/1883	Edkins, Turnour, Sinnett, Bigandet , Müller, Cunningham, Weber, Jäschke, Rhys-Davids	"Occult records," "Notes," "Scriptures," "Buddhist sacred annals"
⑬	St. James' Gazette & ESO BU	11/1883	Lillie , Sinnett, Rhys-Davids, Bigandet, Max Müller, Albrecht Weber, Childers, Olcott	
⑭	Tibetan Teachings	late 1883?	Lillie, Jäschke, Rhys-Davids, Schlagintweit, Markham, Huc, Beal, Rockhill	• Chohan's letter from Tibet with notes • <i>The Book of Law</i> • Thango-pa's notes
⑮	Lillie's Delusions	<u>Europe 1</u> 08/1884	Lillie, Schlagintweit	
⑯	Mr. Arthur Lillie	10/1884	Lillie	

	Title	Date	Published & Identified	Undocumented
⑰	SD3, Doctrine of Avatāras	<i>Europe 2</i> 1886/87?	Eitel, Jäschke, Jacob, Schlagintweit, Kenealy, Sinnett, Müller	• Commentary on the <i>Book of Dzyan</i> • “Secret volumes”
⑱	SD3, 7 Principles	1886/87?	Schlagintweit	
⑲	SD3, Mystery of Buddha	1886/87?	Schlagintweit, Lillie, Bigandet, Dunlap	• Secret portions of <i>Kala chakra</i>
⑳	SD3, Reincarnations of Buddha	1886/87?	Jäschke, Schlagintweit	• “Commentaries” • “A secret volume”
㉑	SD3, Discourse of Buddha	1886/87?	Jäschke, Schlagintweit, Beal, Victor Cousin	• “Second book of Commentaries”
㉒	SD3, Nirvana–Moksha	1886/87?	Beal, Jäschke, Johnson, Olcott	• Text of Gautama’s secret teachings
㉓	SD3, Secret Books of “Lam-rim” and Dzyan	1886/87?	Markham, Beal	• <i>Book of Dzyan</i> • <i>Book of Lam-rim</i> • <i>Book of Secret Wisdom of the World</i>
㉔	SD3, Amita-Buddha, Kwan-shai-yin, & Kwan-yin	1886/87?	Beal, Schlagintweit, Edkins	• “Secret folios” on Gautama, Tsong khapa • <i>Mani Kambum</i>
㉕	SD3, Tsong-khapa.—Lohans in China	1886/87?	Edkins, Schlagintweit, Digha nikaya	• “Records” from a Gompa at Tashi hlumpo in Shigatse • “Secret commentaries” ab. Tsong khapa, <i>Mani kambum</i>
㉖	SD3, A few more Misconceptions Corrected	1886/87?	Schlagintweit, Jäschke, Eitel, Markham, Hardy, Jacob	• “Secret volumes” of Nagarjuna • <i>Dus-Kyi Khorlo</i> with commentaries
㉗	SD3, Doctrine of the Eye & Doctrine of the Heart	1886/87?	Edkins, Weber, Rhys-Davids, Markham, Müller, Alabaster, Schlagintweit	• Translation of a Chinese text written by a Tibetan, published at Tientai
㉘	Parts of Draft MS of <i>The Secret Doctrine</i>	fall 1886	Beal, Eitel, Edkins, Schlagintweit, Dowson, Auguste Barth	• “Secret part” of <i>Dan/Dhyan</i> • “Dsungarian <i>Mani Kumbum</i> ”
㉙	Christian Lectures on Buddhism	04/1888	Schlagintweit, Edkins, Monier Williams, Eitel, Bigandet, Hordern	
㉚	Theos. Society: Its Mission & Future	08/1888	Émile-Louis Burnouf, Edwin Arnold, Abel-Rémusat, Sinnett	
㉛	<i>Voice of Silence: The Two Paths</i>	1889	Edkins, Beal, Schlagintweit	<i>Book of Golden Precepts, Dzyan</i>

NOTES TO THE TABLE OF MAJOR SOURCES ON BUDDHISM

- This table lists only sources used in the sections included in this book. It does not document Blavatsky's vast reading on Buddhism. Sources in Blavatsky's other writings (letters, published books, etc.) do not form part of this survey.
- Mere mention of an author's name or of a book title is not sufficient for inclusion. To be listed in the "Published & Identified" column of this table, sources must have been quoted or their actual use otherwise documented.
- The first documented use of an author in our 31 sections is marked by bold type of the author's name. Authors such as Évariste-Régis Huc, Max Müller, T. W. Rhys-Davids, and Louis Jacolliot that Blavatsky was already familiar with during her New York period and whose early use is documented are not marked in bold.
- With regard to major printed Western sources on Buddhism, this table indicates initial use of:
 - Heinrich August Jäschke's *Romanized Tibetan and English Dictionary* by June of 1881 (see Section 5);
 - Emil Schlagintweit's *Buddhism in Tibet*, Samuel Beal's *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese*, and Clements R. Markham's *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet* by the end of 1881, while Blavatsky still lived in India (see Section 7);
 - Paul Ambroise Bigandet's *The Life or Legend of Gaudama, the Budha of the Burmese* by November of 1883 before her tour to France and England (see Section 12);
 - Joseph Edkins' *Chinese Buddhism* and Ernst Johann Eitel's *Hand-Book for the Student of Chinese Buddhism* during her final sojourn in Europe while she was writing sections that after her death were included by editors in volume 3 of *The Secret Doctrine*.
- The "Undocumented" column of the table is of particular interest since it shows Blavatsky's rapidly increasing references during her final years in Europe—while she was redacting *The Secret Doctrine*—to "secret" folios, commentaries, scriptures, letters, and notes she claimed to have obtained in or from Tibet.

CHRONOLOGY OF PUBLICATIONS

Period & Place	Events / Publications
<u>U.S.A.</u> 1873/7– 1878/12	Blavatsky lives mainly in Philadelphia and New York 1877/1 ① Interview “A Coming Buddhist Book” 1877/3 ② Interview “A Lamasery in New York” 1877/5 ③ Interview “Catechising a Buddhist” 1877/9 Publication of <i>Isis Unveiled</i> in two volumes 1877/12 ④ Blavatsky’s letter to aunt N. de Fadeyev
<u>India 1</u> 1879/2 – 1884/2	1879/2 Blavatsky & Olcott arrive in Bombay, settle there 1879/10 Publication of the first number of <i>The Theosophist</i> 1880/9-10 First stay in Simla; phenomena; <i>first Mahatma letter</i> 1881/6 ⑤ Publication of “Lamas and Druses” 1881/7 ⑥ Publication of “The Himalayan Brothers” 1881/7 Publication of Olcott’s <i>Buddhist Catechism</i> 1881/7-10 Second stay in Simla; Cosmol. Notes, Chohan letter 1882/1 ⑦ Publication of “The Seven-fold Principle in Man” 1882/1 ⑧ Publication of “Esoteric Axioms” 1882/3 ⑨ Publication of “Reincarnations in Tibet” 1882/4 Hume publishes Hints on Esoteric Theosophy No. 1 1882 fall ⑩ Redaction of “Doctrines of the Holy Lha” (putative) 1883/1 Blavatsky settles in new headquarters at Adyar 1883/3 ⑪ Publication of “The Sacred Tree of Kum Bum” 1883/6 Sinnett’s <i>Esoteric Buddhism</i> is published in London 1883/11 ⑫ Publication of “Sakya Muni’s Place in History” 1883/11 ⑬ “St. James’ Gazette & Esoteric Buddhism” 1883/12 ⑭ Redaction of “Tibetan Teachings” (putative)
<u>Europe 1</u> 1884/2 – 1884/10	1884/2 Blavatsky leaves for Europe. Kiddle & Coulomb affairs 1884/8 ⑮ “Mr. A. Lillie’s Delusions” 1884/10 ⑯ “Mr. Arthur Lillie”
<u>India 2</u>	Blavatsky is back in India (1884/12 – 1885/3), then leaves for good
<u>Europe 2</u> 1885/4 – 1887/4 1887/4 – 1891/5	During stays in Italy (1885/4–7), Würzburg (1885/8-1886/5), Elberfeld (1886/5-7) and Ostende (1886/7-1887/5), Blavatsky redacts the “Mystery of Buddha” essays ⑰ ⑱ ⑲ ⑳ ㉑ ㉒ ㉓ ㉔ ㉕ ㉖ ㉗ that will be posthumously published in vol. 3 of <i>The Secret Doctrine</i> (1897). 1886/11 ⑳ Blavatsky sends draft of <i>The Secret Doctrine</i> to India 1888/4 ㉑ “Christian Lectures on Buddhism” 1888/8 ㉒ “The Theosophical Society: Its Mission & Future” 1888/11-12 Publication of <i>The Secret Doctrine</i> in two volumes 1889 ㉓ Blavatsky publishes <i>The Voice of the Silence</i> 1891/5 Blavatsky completes a Glossary of Eastern terms 1891/5/8 Blavatsky dies in London (1897/6 Volume 3 of <i>The Secret Doctrine</i> is published including ⑰ ⑱ ⑲ ⑳ ㉑ ㉒ ㉓ ㉔ ㉕ ㉖ ㉗.)