



Lives of Early Buddhist Nuns: Biographies as History

Alice Collett

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Based on new translations of Pali texts and rare sources, *Lives of Early Buddhist Nuns* analyzes the portrayal of women in the Pali canon and commentaries. Focusing on the differences between canonical and commentarial literature, the author goes beyond the practice of using the commentaries to merely enhance the understanding of the Pali canon; she emphasizes the differing social and historical milieus out of which these genres of literature were born. Assessing each genre on its own terms, the work demonstrates that the Pali canon, contrary to how it has been presented previously, is more favorable to women.

The first part of the volume contains biographies of the six best-known Buddhist nuns who were considered to have been direct disciples of the Buddha. These biographies throw light on gender relations as they evolved in the early centuries of Buddhism in India. The life stories also serve as the foundation for discussion of Buddhist women in the second part. From notions of beauty and adornment to family, class, and marriage, various themes in the biographies are explored in this work, and through this exploration the changing form of Buddhism in early India is captured.

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