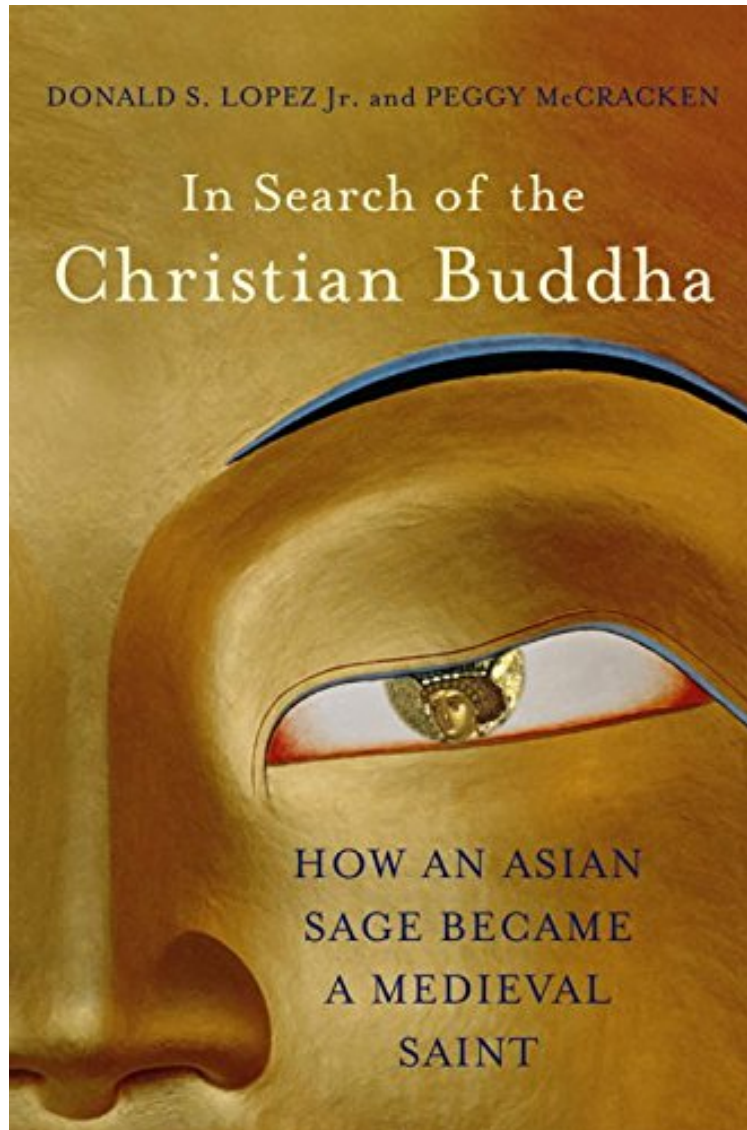


[Library ebook] In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint

In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint

Donald S. Lopez Jr., Peggy McCracken
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Donald S. Lopez Jr., Peggy McCracken : In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint:

1 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Architectoverbose, but informative7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. In-depth review: tangled transmissions, east to west and back againBy John L

Murphy Canonized unwittingly as St. Josaphat, a corruption of "bodhisattva," the Buddha, condemned as an idol worshipped by his duped followers, had his story transmitted after long centuries within the hagiography translated to convert the Japanese in the 1600s. So runs one of many twists in the tale translated by Peggy McCracken and introduced by Donald S. Lopez in a companion to this book, as a Penguin Classic. Gui de Cambrai (around 1220-25) adapted the story into French verse; McCracken renders it efficiently into modern English. Gui takes the core elements of the Buddha legend. 1) The prediction that the prince will be a saint or a king. 2) The ensuing protection by his father the king to keep him from the sights of the world. This ruse fails, as a series of chariot rides reveal mortality, sickness, age, and death to the coddled lad. 3.) Then, seductive women seek to dissuade the prince from his destiny and enlightenment as he vows to depart the palace for a life of asceticism. But first, to fulfill his duty, he fathered an heir, as a prince who is expected to carry on the royal family line. The tale of Barlaam and Josaphat (see my July 2014 review) was one of many which told the Buddha's story with nobody suspecting this until the 1600s. A 1446 editor of Marco Polo's journey caught on to a resemblance. Then scholars in the 19th century, investigating the sources for the misunderstood origins of Shakyamuni, or Prince Siddhartha, finally figured out the elaborate and entangled transmission gone haywire. Lopez, as a noted scholar of Buddhist reception in the West (see *Prisoners of Shangri-La on Tibet* and *The Scientific Buddha* for attempts to reconcile the historical Buddha with post-Darwinian science; both reviewed by me), is well-suited to convey these crossed messages. Joined by medievalist Peggy McCracken, the two seek *In Search of the Christian Buddha* to explain the origins of the tales told throughout the Middle Ages. The Buddha's story was embedded into narratives and biographies which asserted often the superiority of non-Buddhist ideas. Here's the basics of the book. In Persia in the 8th c. a Muslim writer compiled Bilawhar and Budasaf. Armies of Islam had begun entering northwestern India, the first home of Buddhism. They spread the stories westward. Arabic preserved some of the core tale's triple elements mentioned above. A century later, the Muslims conquered the Christian kingdom in what is today Georgia. Refugee monks fled to Jerusalem and turned the Muslim story into a Christian one, the Balavariani. A Jewish translator four centuries on took the story from Arabic and sent it west again, via Muslims, into Moorish Spain, where it would turn *The Prince and the Hermit* via Hebrew and much later, rendered into both German and Yiddish. Greek and Latin stories, once attributed to John of Damascus in their beginnings, kept the idea that the prince learned about God from a hermit, Barlaam. This turned into stories as told in lives of saints, such as the very popular Latin *Golden Legend* or *Legenda Aurea*, by Jacobus de Voragine. The authors err repeatedly on p. 139. While Franciscans are mendicants, they are not monks. Benedictines are not mendicants but they are monks. Additionally, the hagiographer of *Ss. Barlaam and Josaphat* and many others, Jacobus de Voragine (Jacobus de Varazze), was not a "monk belonging to the Benedictine preaching order" but a Dominican mendicant friar of the Order of Preachers. Another aside: the book relies on paraphrases of the main texts and one loses some idea of their various styles, lengths, and flavor. Textual excerpts might have helped key in readers as to their strengths or weaknesses, cited more directly. Primarily summarized, the source texts discussed float past rather than sink in. Back to the authors' main narrative, part of the spark of this tale comes when the stories of saints get sent to Japan by those seeking to win them away from Buddha to Christ. The irony is dealt with lightly by Lopez and McCracken, but it cannot be denied. Condemning idolators, the story of Josaphat is used against those supposedly worshiping false gods such as Xaca, the name garbled from Shakayamuni. Subsequent thinkers, clued in bit by bit to such garblings, sought to deploy them differently. For some in the early 19th century, the discovery of the historical roots of Buddhism in India led them to propagate a bold claim. Buddhism and Christianity were purer as world religions open to all. Judaism and Hinduism were grounded in tribal identities, and not open to adoption by other peoples. Furthermore, the "Aryan" roots of Jesus who studied in the East were purported. Buddhism could be seen here as an attempt to detach Christian origins from Hebrew tribalism. Others enticed by folklore found appeal in those three core stories repeated. They also liked the tale of three caskets in it, used by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*. Finally, another tale of women named as "geese" to a curious boy seeing women for the first time (cited in Boccaccio's *Decameron*) reveal intriguing tidbits, as elements of folk narrative dispersed across time and space into tales. Still others saw in Buddhism a palliative to other faith. In it nestled human striving, and purer motives rather than superstitious, quasi-Catholic accretions. Some sympathetic to Protestant reform or humanist progress sympathized therefore with attenuated evidence of the antiquity and durability of the Buddha's presence over so many different times and places. On the other hand, those who liked to sneer at the Church found plenty of ammunition in the ironic canonization of St. Josaphat by Buddhist persecutors. Lopez and McCracken aver some of this guilt underlies the fascination recent scholars have had in the eager reception of this tale's provenance and message. Even if the trace elements of the Buddha's coming of age story are faint by the time they are detected by recent critics, the telling manner in which critical reception "seems to dissolve in the presence of the Buddha," a theme Lopez often analyzes, may account for--if not excuse--the appeal of a sage without priests, ritual, or dogma. As Lopez repeats a phrase from his "scientific Buddha" book in 2013: "The goal of the Buddhist path is not creation but extinction." (37) The authors here conclude that the aim of Buddhism is not perpetuation of narrative or allurements of story, but a rejection of the pleasures of palace and princes. Separation from the enticements of this world is necessary. As the editors insist, for Buddhism, "The goal is to finally stop dying." (222) Flawed by change and doom, this world is not transcended as in Christian or Muslim terms for future reward but

by renunciation of family, goods and attachment to all that would impede separation from its glittering delights. The Christian story of Barlaam and Josaphat sought to lure listeners away from the secular to the spiritual realm of the Church, and to ensure princes listening took care of pious hermits. But as Lopez and McCracken hint, these durable tales also sought to keep alive the very system that Buddhism seeks to put to an end.³ of 4 people found the following review helpful. what would his teachings have been like? And so the long-running series was born.

By Catherine Readers of Christian-New Age Quarterly will recall my review of Dr. Robert M. Price's *Biblical Buddhism: Tales and Sermons of Saint Iodasaph* in the Summer 2012 issue. His eBook is a compilation of his *Tales of Saint Iodasaph* series that ran intermittently from *Christian-New Age Quarterly's* January-March 1991 through Winter 2009 issues with a ten-year hiatus in between. (Visit christiannewage.com/StIodasaph.html for a list of the titles that constitute C*NAQ's *Tales of Saint Iodasaph* series.) The *Tales* sprang from a curious historical happenstance: the traditional calendar of Christian saints includes a Saint Josaphat or Iodasaph. The Saint was reputed to be the son of a fourth-century king of India who converted to Christianity, abdicating his royal standing to embrace a life of ascetic piety. By the nineteenth century, scholars recognized that the details of the life and legend of Saint Iodasaph were remarkably similar to those of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha!

Price's *Tales* played off an intriguing conceit: had there actually been a Christian saint with Buddhist leanings, what would his teachings have been like? And so the long-running series was born. Reading the *Tales* was a fun spiritual diversion, yet from time to time I wondered how it came to be that the story of Siddhartha morphed into the history of a Christian saint. Perhaps others did as well. Thankfully, we now have the answer, and we can thank an erupting volcano. Authors Lopez and McCracken, both of the University of Michigan, found themselves delayed at the end of a conference in Vienna in 2010 due to a volcanic eruption in Iceland that closed Europe's airports. During their layover, Lopez, a professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, and McCracken, a professor of French, Women's Studies, and Comparative Literature who had translated *Gui de Cambrais BARLAAM AND JOSAPHAT* (aka Iodasaph), decided to write *IN SEARCH OF THE CHRISTIAN BUDDHA* together. Thankfully, too, the two academics have composed this book in non-academic language. Everyday English is a boon, especially because of the painstaking detail the authors employed in tracing the changes of the narrative as it traveled the centuries through Muslim, then Christian iterations. That same attention to detail, however, marks this as a scholarly text. As I read, I felt grateful I did not have to take a final exam on this book. One could fill a notebook with the various versions, their respective names and places, narrative particulars and plot twists. Like much academic writing, the thorough outlay of facts the what and how invites us to read between the lines and offer our own interpretations of why certain elements are highlighted, others left out, and still others added. Why did the story of Siddhartha Gautama's evolution into Buddhahood catch on? The most obvious explanation is that it is a compelling, perhaps even archetypal, chronicle about coming of age, conflict and resolution. Here is the basic Buddha legend: Siddhartha was born to Suddhodana, a king, and Queen Maya, who died shortly after his birth. When Siddhartha was but a few days old, a holy man prophesied that the boy would become either a great military conqueror or a great spiritual teacher. King Suddhodana prepared his son for the first outcome, sheltering Siddhartha in grandeur and privilege, and shielding him from knowledge of human suffering. The young prince reached the age of 29 without having ventured into the world beyond the walls of the royal palace. Curiosity eventually overcame the prince and he persuaded a charioteer to take him outside the walls. On these rides he encountered an aged man, then a sick man, then a corpse. The blunt realities of old age, disease and death shocked the prince. Finally, he saw a wandering ascetic. The charioteer explained that an ascetic is one who had renounced the world in order to find release from the fear of death and suffering. That was enough for Siddhartha. He renounced his lavish lifestyle and set off to find such an awakening for himself, leaving behind his wife and infant son. While he sought the advice of many teachers, he found no resolution. Eventually he, along with five other seekers, set off to discover the answers for themselves by practicing extreme self-mortification. Nearly dead but no closer to the truth, Siddhartha realized that asceticism was the other side of the coin, so to speak, of opulence. He therefore embraced a Middle Way between these two counterparts. The way of liberation, he began to understand, is through the mind, and the mind needs nourishment. Rejected by his five companions, who thought he had abandoned the path, Siddhartha sat beneath the Bodhi Tree, tempted through the night by the demon Mara, who tried to lure him away from his quest by means of many temptations. In the morning, having prevailed, Siddhartha became the fully enlightened Buddha. He devoted the rest of his life some forty years to teaching the way of liberation. Three fundamental changes occurred to the storyline as Siddhartha transmuted into Saint Iodasaph: The conflict between the followers of the true religion and idolaters, in other words, everyone else, became central. The father developed a greater role in the narrative, degenerating into a monstrous despot who persecutes the believers. In the various strains of the story, he usually repents and becomes, toward the end of his life, a devotee of the faith. Iodasaph converts to Christianity but, because of his father's persecution, is never far from the politics of the day. When his father repents and becomes an ascetic, Iodasaph inherits the throne and everyone rejoices. Ultimately, however, he renounces it to resume his asceticism after appointing a fit successor. A mentor, the hermit Saint Barlaam, became a key character. He converts Iodasaph to the true faith. Iodasaph returns to him after the rift with his father resolves. Three doctrinal shifts grew from the narrative shifts: The Middle Way disappeared in favor of extreme asceticism. Especially sexuality was degraded. Women, the source of (straight mens) sexual desire, became

particularly demonic. As these doctrinal emphases continued to creep into me yes, creep is the apt verb it became clear that the Christianity of Saint Iodasaph is more the Christianity of THE BURNING TIMES or MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL than any other in my experience. The shadow of medieval Christianity is long, bloody and dark. One lesson of IN SEARCH OF THE CHRISTIAN BUDDHA, for me, is that our stories reflect our shadows. The thing about shadows the Jungian ones anyway is that we normally don't perceive our own. This book left me wondering. How much of the Christian story, to this day, is shadow material? And what are those shadows doing to us? One other lesson is that we are storytellers who infuse memory and reality with our preferred narratives. How much of Siddhartha's life, as we hear it, actually happened? The same could be asked about Abraham, Moses, Jesus or Mohammed. On these perplexing implications I sit, like a Buddha: mute, awaiting an answer. Or not. The Reverend Daniel B. Hahn is an Evangelical Lutheran Church of America minister, now retired. He has also served as Christian-New Age Quarterly's Christian Focus Book Reviewer for over 25 years.

The fascinating account of how the story of the Buddha was transformed into the legend of a Christian saint. The story of Saint Josaphat, a prince who gave up his wealth and kingdom to follow Jesus, was one of the most popular Christian tales of the Middle Ages, translated into a dozen languages, and cited by Shakespeare in The Merchant of Venice. Yet Josaphat is only remembered today because of the similarities of his life to that of the Buddha. In Search of the Christian Buddha is set against the backdrop of the trade along the Silk Road, the Christian settlement of Palestine, the spread of Islam, and the Crusades. It traces the path of the Buddha's tale from India and shows how it evolved, adopting details from each culture during its sojourn. These early instances of globalization allowed not only goods but also knowledge to flow between different cultures and around much of the world. Eminent scholars Donald S. Lopez Jr. and Peggy McCracken reveal how religions born thousands of miles apart shared ideas throughout the centuries. They uncover surprising convergences and divergences between these faiths on subjects including the meaning of death, the problem of desire, and their view of women. Demonstrating the incredible power of this tale, they ask not how stories circulate among religions but how religions circulate among stories.

From Booklist While at a conference in Vienna, University of Michigan professors Lopez and McCracken were forced to lengthen their stay due to a volcanic eruption in Iceland that closed airports all over Europe. The circumstance set the stage for Lopez, an expert in Buddhist and Tibetan studies, and McCracken, a translator of Gui de Cambrais Barlaam and Josaphat, to forge the idea for this book. Exploring countless iterations of the tales of Buddha and of St. Josaphat a prince who shed his wealth and gave up his kingdom to follow Jesus this examines the interface of Christianity and Buddhism in numerous cultures and over several centuries. At times, the abundance of references to theological, historical, and cultural writings, as well as numerous scholarly examinations, causes this work to resemble a bibliography with historical markers and occasional backstories, but more curious readers and scholars can delight in further investigating. A scholarly and compelling examination of how Buddha's story morphed into the tale of a Christian saint. --Susan DeGrane A rich exploration. "A wealth of valuable information. --Leo Lefebure" The noble prince who would be a sage or a saint. The fierce king who opposes him. The wise teacher who counsels him. The deceitful temptress who entices him. The trials he must endure. The prize he will win. A story with all these archetypal elements might well travel the world, and the story of Prince Siddhartha Gautama leaving home to seek enlightenment as the Buddha did indeed travel the world, changing its doctrinal clothing as it crossed religious borders along the path from India to Europe, where it became the pious Christian tale of Barlaam and Josaphat. How it made that journey is a tale of multiple cultural and linguistic translations. How, in the nineteenth century, scholars retraced its steps is an even more fascinating tale of multiple decipherments. A literary detective story of the first order, in which Donald S. Lopez Jr. and Peggy McCracken recapture the color and excitement of every breakthrough along the way. --Jack Miles, author of God: A Biography" About the Author Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Ph.D. University of Virginia) is the Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan. His works include Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sutra, Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism, Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West, The Story of Buddhism, The Madman's Middle Way, The Scientific Buddha, From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha, The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism (with Robert Buswell), and In Search of the Christian Buddha (with Peggy McCracken, published by Norton). He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Getty Research Institute. In 2000 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Peggy McCracken, the translator of Gui de Cambrais Barlaam and Josaphat, is a professor of French at the University of Michigan.