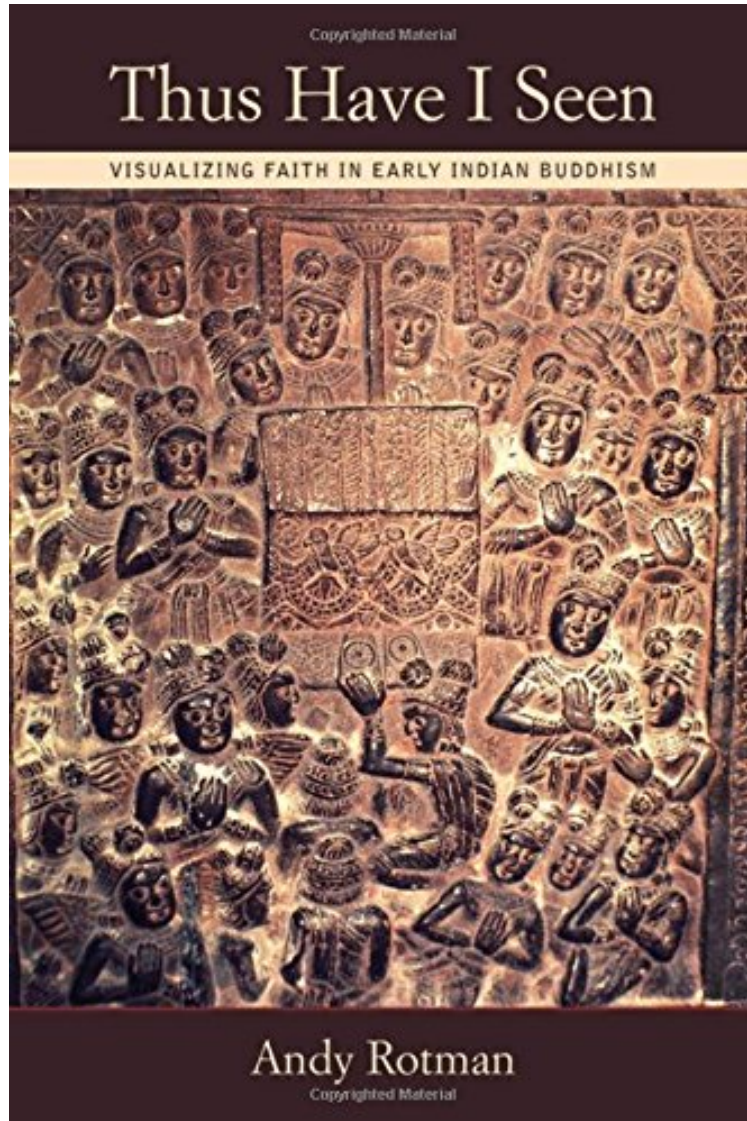


(Library ebook) Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism

Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism

Andy Rotman

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Andy Rotman : Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism:

Although Buddhism is often depicted as a religion of meditators and philosophers, some of the earliest writings extant in India offer a very different portrait of the Buddhist practitioner. In Indian Buddhist narratives from the early centuries of the Common Era, most lay religious practice consists not of reading, praying, or meditating, but of visually engaging with certain kinds of objects. These visual practices, moreover, are represented as the primary means of cultivating faith, a necessary precondition for proceeding along the Buddhist spiritual path. In *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*, Andy Rotman examines these visual practices and how they function as a kind of skeleton key for opening up Buddhist conceptualizations about the world and the ways it should be navigated. Rotman's analysis is based primarily on stories from the *Divyavadana* (Divine Stories), one of the most important collections of ancient Buddhist narratives from India. Though discourses of the Buddha are well known for their opening words, "thus have I heard" - for Buddhist teachings were first preserved and transmitted orally - the *Divyavadana* presents a very different model for disseminating the Buddhist dharma. Devotees are enjoined to look, not just hear, and visual legacies and lineages are shown to trump their oral counterparts. As Rotman makes clear, this configuration of the visual fundamentally transforms the world of the Buddhist practitioner, changing what one sees, what one believes, and what one does.

"This book is a significant contribution to the field of Buddhist Studies on at least three counts: it explores the neglected literary genre of Sanskrit legends (the *avadanas*, in particular the collection known as the *Divyavadana*); in so doing, it emphasizes the importance of the visual dimensions of the experience of the Buddha, in contradistinction to the aural ("Thus Have I Seen" instead of "Thus Have I Heard"); and it unpacks various typologies of Buddhist faith and devotion, paying attention to their experiential but also their sociological contexts. I highly recommend this work to anyone interested in the religious dimensions of Indian Buddhism." --John Strong, Bates College

"This is an excellent and important book that explores some of the central Indian Buddhist narratives-an often ignored aspect of the tradition. Rotman's most important contribution, however, is his ability to connect the analysis of this important material with relevant theoretical concerns such as the role of devotion in Buddhism, the role of visual culture therein and the place of gift exchange in this tradition. In short, a must read for all those interested in these important issues and in Indian Buddhism and its narratives." --Georges B. Dreyfus, Professor of Religion, Williams College

"This brilliantly original and accessible work restores the visual dimension to the erotic mercantilism of early Buddhism. Rotman's illuminating reading of the *Divyavadana* reveals the power of images and the manner in which an authoritative seeing generated faith in early Buddhism's embodied mechanics of efficacy. This remarkable study of the archaeology of looking deserves the attention of all those working on visuality and the 'sacred gaze'". --Christopher Pinney, author of *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*

About the Author
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