

LANCE SELWYN COUSINS
1942–2015

Rupert Gethin

Lance Cousins died in Oxford following a heart attack in the early hours of Saturday, 14 March 2015, just a few weeks short of his seventy-third birthday. He is survived by his ex-wife and his two children, as well as a brother and sister.

Lance was born in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, on 7 April 1942, and after attending Letchworth Grammar School took up a place to read history at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1961. In 1963, after completing his Part I examinations in History, he changed to Oriental Studies, studying Sanskrit with Sir Harold Bailey and Middle Indian with K.R. Norman. On completion of his degree in 1965 he stayed on in Cambridge as a postgraduate student, working on an edition of the *ṭīkā* to the Saṃyutta-nikāya with a view to completing a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of K.R. Norman. His interest in the Pali *ṭīkā* literature subsequently led to Lance's first publication, "Dhammapāla and the *ṭīkā* literature",¹ a review article of Lily de Silva's edition of Dhammapāla's *ṭīkā* to the Dīgha-nikāya (3 volumes, Pali Text Society, 1970). This remains an important discussion of the issues surrounding the question of two Dhammapālas, one the author of *aṭṭhakathās*, the other of *ṭīkā*s. In 1970 Lance was elected to the Council of the Pali Text Society and continued to serve as a member of Council until the mid 1980s.

During his time in Cambridge Lance also became actively involved in the Cambridge University Buddhist Society (founded in 1955 and the second oldest Buddhist society in the UK). He began attending *samatha* meditation classes in London taught by Boonman Poonyathiro (1932–), who had been a Buddhist monk for fifteen years in Thailand and then

¹ *Religion*, 2 (1972), 159–65.

India. Subsequently Lance arranged for Boonman to teach classes in Cambridge. Lance's close involvement with this tradition of meditation was to continue for the rest of his life.

In 1970 he was appointed Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester in the same department that the founder of the Pali Text Society, T. W. Rhys Davids, had been appointed the first Professor of Comparative Religion in 1904. In Manchester Lance taught courses in Indian religions — Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism — and Indian languages — Pali and Sanskrit — but also a course in comparative mysticism, which took in Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity as well as the methodological issues raised by the study of religious experience cross-culturally. During the 1980s Lance published several influential articles: his 1981 article on the Paṭṭhāna carefully demonstrates how the Abhidhamma theory of the process of perception (*citta-vīthi*) set out in the *aṭṭhakathā* literature is already assumed in the canonical Paṭṭhāna;² his 1983 article on “Pali oral literature” with its suggestion that early Buddhist texts exhibit the marks of techniques of improvisation continues to challenge scholars to provide a convincing model of their oral composition.³ And in 1984 he published a masterly overview of Buddhism in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, edited by his colleague at Manchester, John Hinnells.⁴ His only publication to reflect directly his broader interest in mysticism is his 1989 article comparing aspects of St Teresa of Ávila's *The Interior Castle* and Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification*.⁵

² “The Paṭṭhāna and the Development of the Theravādin Abhidhamma”, *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, IX (1981), 22–46.

³ “Pāli Oral Literature”, in *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by P. Denwood and A. Piatigorsky (London: Curzon Press, 1983), pp. 1–11.

⁴ “Buddhism”, in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. by John R. Hinnells (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 278–343.

⁵ “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification: The Interior Castle of St. Teresa of Avila and the Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa”, in

In Manchester Lance continued to be active in Buddhist circles and was instrumental in founding the Manchester University Buddhist Society, and in 1973 became the founding chairman of the Samatha Trust, a charity established to foster the practice and teaching of the form of *samatha* meditation first taught in the UK by Boonman Poonyathiro. Lance served as chairman of the Trust until 1999 and remained a trustee until his death.

Disillusioned with some of the changes affecting British academic institutions in the 1980s, Lance took early retirement in the early 1990s when he was only a little over fifty. In 2000 he moved from Manchester to Oxford where until his death he taught Pali and Middle Indian in the Faculty of Oriental Studies and Buddhism in the Faculty of Theology. While he did not hold a formal post he became an established member of the community in Buddhist and Indological studies in Oxford and a Supernumerary Fellow of Wolfson College. Throughout the 1990s Lance continued to publish significant articles focusing especially on the history of the early Indian Buddhist schools and Abhidhamma literature and thought. In 1996 Lance became the first president of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, serving in that role until 2000. In 2001 he delivered the ninth I. B. Horner Memorial Lecture (“Sanskrit, Pali and Theravāda Buddhism”) and again became a member of the Council of the Pali Text Society, subsequently serving as its president from 2002 to 2003. At this time Lance began working with Somdeva Vasudeva on photographs of a portion of the recently discovered manuscript of the *Dīrgha Āgama*; together they produced a preliminary transliteration of a number of its sūtras. In 2005 he was Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai Visiting Professor at SOAS, delivering a series of lectures some of which provided the basis for articles that have subsequently appeared in print or will shortly do so.

During the last twenty years of his life Lance worked especially on the early history of Indian Buddhist schools, publishing articles on the

The Yogi and the Mystic: Studies in Indian and Comparative Mysticism, ed. by Karel Werner (London: Curzon, 1989), pp. 103–20.

Pudgalavādins⁶ and various divisions of what he latterly preferred to call the Theriya school, including an important contribution on the Abhayagirivāsins.⁷ He also continued his investigations on the neglected field of the medieval Pali *ṭīkā* literature.⁸ Lance was also among the pioneers in applying the tools of computing to Pali texts, producing the first electronically generated index of a Pali text (the index volume to the Mahāniddeśa published by the PTS in 1995), and serving as international editorial coordinator for the Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project's digitized Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka.

Lance was a frequent visitor to Asia, especially Thailand and Sri Lanka where he twice spent several weeks at the Kalugala Aranya Senāsanaya in Kalutara District and more recently (2012) himself led a meditation retreat in Hantana near Kandy. In 2013 he was awarded an honorary doctorate in Buddhist Studies by the Mahamakut Buddhist University in Bangkok.

Lance formally supervised very few research students, yet his influence on Buddhist studies in the UK and internationally was considerable. Research students in Oxford attended his classes, both formal and informal, benefiting from long conversations with him. Others discussed drafts of articles and monographs with him. All benefited from his advice, suggestions and comments. Indeed, Lance's name appears in the acknowledgements of a remarkable number of monographs and articles concerned with Buddhist studies published in the UK throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Lance was also a frequent and thoughtful contributor to the various online lists concerned with

⁶ "Person and Self", in *Buddhism into the Year 2000: International Conference Proceedings* (Bangkok and Los Angeles: The Dhammakāya Foundation, 1994), pp. 15–31.

⁷ "The Teachings of the Abhayagiri School" in Peter Skilling, et al. (eds.), *How Theravāda Is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012), pp. 67–127.

⁸ "Abhidhamma Studies I: Jotipāla and the *Abhidhamma Anuṭṭikā*", *Thai International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 2 (2011), 1–36.

Indology and Buddhist studies which emerged in the 1990s. Those who had the opportunity to meet, study, or correspond with Lance found him always ready and willing to share his very considerable learning across broad areas of Indian history and thought, not to mention Jewish *kabbalah*, Christian mysticism, Gurdjieff, and alchemy. His death is a great loss to Buddhist and especially Pali scholarship. Several significant scholarly projects he was working on when he died were nearing completion. It is to be hoped that at least some of these may be published posthumously.

Committed to rigorous scholarship, Lance was nonetheless not bound by the conventions and fashions of academia in his quest for knowledge. Devoted to the practice of meditation, he never allowed this to cloud his scholarly judgement. Asked if he was a Buddhist, he would quip, “The Buddha was not a Buddhist, I try to follow his example.”