

Dominic Goodall and Andrew Wareham, Gifts of Power

“The comparison of the meanings of gift-giving in Buddhism and Christianity is to be valued as an important contribution to the historical debate on gift-exchange, which, as has been said before, when it explicitly makes use of anthropological models of gift exchange, only refers to studies of gift-exchange in ‘primitive’, illiterate societies and seems erroneously unaware of the ongoing research on religious gift-giving in large-scale, literate traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.”

Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld (2001), ‘The medieval gifts as a agent of social bonding and political power: a comparative approach’, p. 143

These papers will take up the challenge posed by Bijsterveld through parallel readings of charters and inscriptions from the Hwiccan and Khmer kingdoms in the early middle ages. We propose to show that royal gifts to monastic foundations in western England and Cambodia not only enhanced the spiritual power of rulers and social cohesion of regional communities, but also assisted state rulership with longer-run consequences for the formation of the state. The first paper will use anthropology and the second philology, with a view to situating our conclusions within Lieberman’s model of ‘a unified and interactive Eurasian zone, in which exceptionalism (such as the ‘strong Anglo-Saxon state’) is no more than ‘idiosyncratic representations of an increasingly coherent ecumene’, rather than evidence for ‘a model of East-West incomparability’, *Strange parallels II: mainland mirrors*, p. 908.