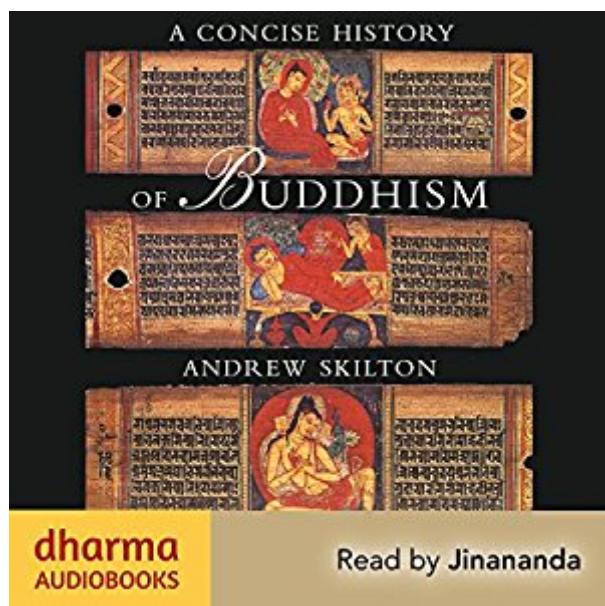


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A Concise History Of Buddhism: From 500 BCE-1900 CE



Synopsis

An ideal introduction to the history of Buddhism. Andrew Skilton - Senior Research Fellow in Buddhist Studies, Kings College, London - explains the development of the basic concepts of Buddhism and its spread across the continents during its 2,500 years of history. He begins with a close look at Buddhism in India, where it flourished until the 12th/13th century CE, charting the growth of different schools and practices. By the time it disappeared from its homeland midway through the millennium, it had become established in Central Asia and the Far East in a variety of forms. Skilton looks at Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Burma and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia and in countries where there are now only archeological remains, such as Iran. This is a fascinating and useful insight into the historical progress of one of the world's great religions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Although Buddhism has only recently begun to enter Western popular consciousness, its founder, Siddhartha Gautama, lived nearly five hundred years before Christ, and the religion has a rich and complex history in Asia spanning from that time up to the present. Like any religion that is living, yet ancient, Buddhism through the centuries has displayed certain continuities as well as what author Andrew Skilton calls a "bewildering diversity." On the highest level, Skilton's "A Concise History of Buddhism" divides this diversity into two parts: Buddhism within India and beyond it. The bulk of the main text is devoted to the first part, which makes some sense, as India was the birthplace of

Buddhism as well as the site of many of its later major developments. The first several chapters include an extremely brief sketch of Indian religion before the Buddha, then the story of the Buddha's life, and a description of some of his main teachings (such as the Four Noble Truths). The trouble with these early chapters is that they are not written in a manner that will be inviting to readers who have never studied Buddhism, yet they are likely to be too basic for intermediate students. Skilton clearly needs these chapters to establish the base on which the rest of Buddhist history will build, but he never fully integrates the bare-bones philosophical outline with what follows. The book gains strength as it begins to explore Buddhism after the Buddha. It surveys the development of the early sangha (Buddhist community) and discusses the increasingly vast array of sects, sub-sects, and schools of thought, as well as the major texts they prized. It continues through the emergence of the Mahayana schools, up to "the end of Buddhism in India" around the 13th century.

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