



Buddha, Vol. 1: Kapilavastu

Osamu Tezuka

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Osamu Tezuka's vaunted storytelling genius, consummate skill at visual expression, and warm humanity blossom fully in his eight-volume epic of Siddhartha's life and times. Tezuka evidences his profound grasp of the subject by contextualizing the Buddha's ideas; the emphasis is on movement, action, emotion, and conflict as the prince Siddhartha runs away from home, travels across India, and questions Hindu practices such as ascetic self-mutilation and caste oppression. Rather than recommend resignation and impassivity, Tezuka's Buddha predicates enlightenment upon recognizing the interconnectedness of life, having compassion for the suffering, and ordering one's life sensibly. Philosophical segments are threaded into interpersonal situations with ground-breaking visual dynamism by an artist who makes sure never to lose his readers' attention.

Tezuka himself was a humanist rather than a Buddhist, and his magnum opus is not an attempt at propaganda. Hermann Hesse's novel or Bertolucci's film is comparable in this regard; in fact, Tezuka's approach is slightly irreverent in that it incorporates something that Western commentators often eschew, namely, humor.

Buddha, Vol. 1: Kapilavastu Details

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Author : Osamu Tezuka

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From Reader Review Buddha, Vol. 1: Kapilavastu for online ebook

Sam Quixote says

I admit I'm not the most enlightened (rim shot - thank you!) guy when it comes to Buddhism, or religion in general for that matter, in knowing its origins, tenets, and so on. But I do have a rudimentary understanding of Buddhism and the Buddha having read Hermann Hesse's "Siddhartha" a few years ago, and because of osmosis through pop culture. Buddhists believe all life is sacred, something about existence being suffering, and reincarnation, with the Buddha as an enlightened chap who figured out everything while sat under a special tree and now lives in space.

I thought reading a book, or the first volume anyway of a series, celebrating and informing readers of the life of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, would leave me somewhat more knowledgeable about the guy and the religion. It turns out that "Volume 1: Kapilavastu", has surprisingly very little to do with the Buddha, with a brief segment of its 400 pages dedicated to the Buddha's birth before turning focus back to the main story...

... which is about a young slave call Chapra who is determined to overcome the caste system into which he was born and become a nobleman. Accompanying Chapra is a kind of wild child called Tatta who doesn't wear clothes and has a weird superpower which enables him to transfer his consciousness into any animal he wishes. There's also a monk called Narradatta who is looking for the "Chosen One" and we see the tenets of Buddhism being formed by his master, the wise saint Asita.

The other big surprise in this book is how nutty the tone of the story is. I expected it to be somber and reverential but Osamu Tezuka isn't afraid to throw in slapstick humour or fantastical flights of fancy, or include action fight sequences. It's a very anachronistic take on this story with the characters all speaking in modern-day vernacular ("bro", "hey, ya" and "honey" all feature frequently) and possessed of 20th century sensibilities despite this story being set in c.560 BCE! Early on he even draws a packet of cigarettes and a pocket watch falling out of a monk's robes! But I like that Tezuka's playing fast and loose with the storytelling - he's not being disrespectful but giving this story his own spin on it.

Tezuka's drawing style also compliments his storytelling approach perfectly. The characters look very manga-esque with big eyes, hair - Chapra looks like a million manga leading guy characters while Tatta looks (deliberately?) like Tezuka's most famous creation, Astro Boy. Female readers might be put off by his portrayal of women in this book who all, strangely, look the same - a very idealised beauty with almost every woman going topless throughout. And despite being malnourished, etc. they all have large, perfectly round breasts! And then there are side-characters that look really cartoonish with exaggerated features like foreheads or mouths or eyes or body shapes that don't even try to resemble reality. He even draws himself into the comic, giving himself cameos at random points for no real reason other than he was bored! Awesome.

So for those readers put off of this book by thinking it would be a boring religious tract or straightforward biography, think again! This first volume at least is a rollicking adventure set in "ancient times" written and drawn by a master comics storyteller who's clearly having fun with the material and who knows when to scale back the ribaldry and bombast to emphasise important points about the story of the Buddha. It's a very fast paced, enjoyable and funny book with some excellent scenes, great characters, and a riveting story that'll keep you entertained from the first page to the last.

David Schaafsma says

So, you walk into a bookstore and you see shelf after shelf of manga, different categories, crazy volume after volume of individual titles and you go: nah, don't know where to start, too cartoony, don't get it, too much of an investment, what's the best way to go for an adult just wanting to sample some of the best stuff? That was me, 3-4 years ago, and since I was teaching a graphic novels class, I asked the young manga experts to suggest the best manga series they knew and so I read 1-2 of their suggestions: Ranma 1/2, Deathnote, Fruits Basket, Berserk, etc. which not surprisingly were YA-oriented titles, which was okay for me in the sense that I also teach YA classes... but still, pretty unsatisfying to me as an adult reader. I stumbled on a transition from the silly smash-em-up, cartoony goofiness of manga (which I really don't like) to more serious themes through Lone Wolf and Cub (which Road to Perdition owes a lot to...), which has gorgeous historical scenes and is not silly, and (especially) through Kawasaki's Barefoot Gen, which focuses on the author's personal (survivor, was there!) experience of Hiroshima and its aftermath... (silly, smash-em-up, goofiness AND total devastation!). The mix of goofy/cartoony (hey, manga for kids!) and serious subjects/scenes, exquisitely drawn, in contrast) in Barefoot Gen is at the heart of the nature of Tezuka's more serious work, and (the eight volume) Buddha is considered by most to be his masterwork, his magnum opus.

Tezuka, the grandfather of manga, is one place to start, and I have been making my way slowly, dabbling, through a lot of his work, but this is finally my first run at Buddha, which mixes fictional characters who are pariah, slave and brahmin with actual historical figures, places, and events, and religion/spirituality/mythology (as you prefer). The cartoony stuff I still don't like, though I suppose it makes the (potentially boring) epic tale a little lighter, less ponderous and serious... throws in a mix of irreverence with its reverence for Buddhism (Thanks, Seth Hahne, for that observation, too, and read HIS review and others for detailed actual awesome review accounts that tell you plot and character stuff in true review fashion.. this is just my typical ramble..), better for kid readers to whom maybe he intends introduce Buddhism... not sure. Gorgeous, detailed drawings of places and events contrast cartoony pissing pariah Tatta... we get to know main characters and like them and a couple of them die, so it feels not trivial... and what do I know about Budda and Buddhism so far? Not much, since the Buddha was just born.. we situate that huge spiritual event/person in the contrast of a real, very casted world where you get to care about the people and their travails first, which makes a lot of sense for how to situate Buddhism... The complexity of the artwork and its strategies and the storytelling are worthy of a Master of Manga... great work, from the seventies... and so I'll read on (and haven't with Black Jack and others from him, so that's a good sign, I guess).

Exploring Buddhism a little bit through a comic book, a lighter source than huge religious tomes, is part of the attraction to Tezuka's Buddha, not surprisingly, perhaps. I read Herman Hesse's Siddhartha (and other books from him and others then) when I was in high school during a period when many folks raised in Christianity found (like me, who became essentially agnostic, non-religious, though spiritual, trying to be ethical, etc) it too patriarchal and Western and authoritarian and were looking to the East for alternatives. I have friends who seem to be highly influenced by Buddhism, and some who became and still are actual Buddhists... so that is part of my interest, to know a bit more, I guess, as well as to get to know a Japanese master and his masterworks as I have gotten to know Yukio Mishima in fiction and Akira Kurosawa in film... icons of art. For other great manga, you can go to my pretty damned slight manga list and then other GR listopia lists, of course, but Seth Hahne has been (so far) my best source for great manga to read...

Svanhvít Björns says

This book marks the beginning of a story that will span all of Siddharta's life yet Siddharta plays little to no part in this book. Instead we have the story of Tatta and Chapra and the suffering of all living things.

Beginning off with a fable about the bear, fox, and the rabbit, we are off into a world of suffering where humans are given castes at their birth. The shudra, kshatriya, vaishyas, and the brahmin. No one is allowed to exceed their order and at the top the brahmin reside as the most noblest of all humans. One's only escape is a short life and the hope that one's life was good enough to warrant a higher caste in the next.

One of the main themes of the first book is to address the travesty that is the caste system and how futile it can be to fight against it. A shudra remains a shudra regardless of their skill or aspirations and the book hammers that point in the final pages giving rise to hatred towards the caste system and the injustice it begets. Yet we see valiant figures try their best and show through both courage and effort that they are no lesser than those who sit at the top. That all are equal in the order of life; that nature does not favour one or the other.

The charm of Tezuka is that he is excellent at making the history of Siddharta accessible to the reader. Injecting humour, both universal and referential, he never manages to make light of the suffering that seems to hold both Kapilavatsu and Kosala in its grips; the very suffering that will then become the main theme of Siddharta's road to enlightenment.

This volume is the groundwork for the tale that is Buddha. Each brick a carefully laid piece of a larger structure that emanates through time and space; linking us all to the nature of reality.

Seth T. says

At 3013 pages, Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha* was something of an investment in time. I received the last two hardcover volumes of the collection (vol. 7 and 8) for my birthday at the end of July and began reading from start to finish in mid-August. It's true that one could possibly read the entire collection - and a handsome collection it is - in a day (at perhaps two hours per volume), but I didn't feel compelled to rush things.

In *Buddha*, Tezuka presents a curious blend of themes and styles. This project, ten years in production (1974-1984), presents the life of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, from birth to death, capitalizing on famous episodes and creating fictional ones as well. Tezuka includes a robust cast of characters both fictional and historical that waxes and wanes over the near-century that the story narrates.

Not being a Buddhist, I have no idea how well Tezuka's tale reflects either the historical man or the religious conception of him (though genuine Buddhist's seem to like the book - and I don't know if Tezuka was Buddhist or not, though it seems likely or plausible). But one thing is for certain, I cannot see a similar book being crafted about the life of Christ and being well-received. And a similar version of the life of Mohammed would end in bombs, death threats, and ambassadors demanding apologies.

Because the thing is: Tezuka's tale is as irreverent as it is reverent.

He clearly thinks highly of Buddha and his teachings. And yet, the books is filled with jokes and antics and

all kinds of nuttiness. Pokes and jabs at Buddha himself are rare (though present), but there are a constant stream of silly asides, even in the midst of what would otherwise be a sober scene, fraught with drama. A horse will gallop in on a messenger to deliver dire news to the king. A character will be confronted by his haunted conscience, seeing a vision of Buddha speaking to him - only to have Buddha bite him on the face and we realize he's been talking to his horse. Characters from Tezuka's other works show up not infrequently and even Tezuka himself will appear in cameos, taking the place of a character for a single panel.

The story is also filled with anachronisms as well. Both visual and verbal. At one point, a poor peasant family wishes to send their son with Siddhartha as he follows the path of monkhood, claiming that their son should be able to become a monk "in this day when even actors can become president." There are further references to Paris and New York and Spielberg. And E.T. and Yoda even make appearances, and at one point a royal councilor asks if Buddha actually *is* E.T. (as Buddha has just healed someone with the touch of a finger).

It took me a while to get a handle on exactly how to approach the book. The fact of the sheer silliness of moments. The fact of the gorgeous and highly detailed landscapes intruded upon by Disney-esque cartoon characters. The fact of main characters who die 300 pages in to the 3000-page epic. The fact that every woman in the book is topless. The fact of mixing faith and fantasy so seamlessly in a book that I believe is trying to promote the teachings of Buddha. And the fact that Buddha isn't even born until the end of the first volume. It was a weird mix, but after not too long, I found myself quite at home with his unique style and let the story wash over me.

All in all, I found it both interesting and fun. And surprising. Characters you expect to be redeemed end tragically and characters you expect to turn their back on Buddha turn out to be some of his biggest boosters. Add to the religious story the sheer scope of the political story and you've got an action-packed tale of religious enlightenment.

I still couldn't really tell you what Buddhism's about though.

Jerry Jose says

Few months before, I read *Sidhartha* to know more about *Buddha* and eastern philosophy. That book gave me cancer. This is my first course towards recovery.

Manga felt a bit childish at first, on a wtf level, like *Dragonball* with a messiah complex. Even locusts from *Leviticus* made an appearance. Well, once I made peace with the weirdness and explicitness, this Eisner award winning comic soon became an adorable run.

This is a variegated and unique interpretation against the historical one we are familiar with, with completely fictional characters and accords, so far at least. Geography and cultural background is very similar to what I've been exposed to, and by the look of it, manga seems to be following the *Mahayana* tradition associating Siddhartha with divinity and halo. So far, Buddha has just made his appearance in the story, and I am reserving my opinions to further installments. Unlike the usual treatment of caste system with 'dharma', individualism and conceptual obligation towards 'moksha', this narrative gives it a morbid take of oppression and privileges. And the comic cleverly distracts readers off this morbidness and pain with lively drawings, lovable characters and occasional humour. It is stupidly funny at times, I spilled my coffee at a scene where a sixth century BC Doctor made his appearance with stethoscope and a lab coat.

One minor issue with this issue though, the characters kinda look like *Astroboy*.

Sanjay Gautam says

After a long time I've found a book that has hooked me from the start.
It also raises many philosophical questions on life.

Riku Sayuj says

Anime Buddha with no expressions spared... what next?

Tyler Hill says

I originally collected and read this series as it's hardcover volumes were released in the United States, a half dozen years ago. But, having recently watched PBS's documentary about the life of Buddha, and having read several other books by Tezuka since then, I figured it was time to revisit the series.

In all honesty, while the series is essentially about the life of Buddha, it's a very hard series to encapsulate. To start, it's worth pointing out that Buddha isn't even born until about 2/3rds the way into this first volume. And that the majority of the book, instead, focuses on the adventures of the slave Chapra and the pariah Tatta who possess the ability to, er, possess animals. Their stories, and the stories of the other characters in this book, play out as a series of allegories emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life, how violence begets more violence and the roll of self-sacrifice. While these stories feel true to teachings of Buddha, it's my understanding that most of them are not historical Buddhist stories, but instead are the inventions of Tezuka creatively and effectively intertwined with the tale of Buddha's life.

It's also worth pointing out that, despite the subject matter, this is not a self-serious book by any regards. It's often irreverent and -like many manga comics- the characters switch from realistic to abstract on a near panel to panel basis. Also there are moments of meta-humor when characters will interact with the panel they are standing in (or more often, bouncing off of) or where characters make references to modern day cities or ideas. It's to Tezuka's credit that he's able to balance those moments with heady philosophical subject matter and allegories so deftly.

I'm glad I revisited volume 1, and look forward to diving into the next volume.

Annie says

I read this book several years ago, I confess, not a whit out if any interest in Manga. I'd read a scant few "manga" at the time & was thinking: why do all these books seem suspiciously similar to each other down to how the characters were drawn, their roles and (most) surprising, even most of the plot lines! However, my first foray into the Manga of Tezuka was I can only compare to being introduced to some of the animated films of Miyazaki or even some of the works of the great Japanese film director Akita

Kurosawa. The work of these 3 men was somehow, more often than not, able to transcend the limits of the medium itself surpassing form to take on a life of their own. Something which only happens when true art is created.

My true purpose for coming to the work of Tezuka had been to learn much more about the life of the Buddha. Through 11 beautifully illustrated, and lovingly written volumes, I was able to explore the wonder that was the life the Buddha chose to live. A simple life, yet in retrospect, so full of feeling, meaning and inspiration.

Each Volume took about 2+ hours to read. It is worth a mention that Vols 9 & 10 have been OOP for some time and can command quite a high price used.! Longer to reflect on bigger issues or record a quote now & then. For myself, I spread the series over among a years' time.

If only I could i would run clean the slate, and start right back at the 1st volume once again!

Jokoloyo says

I tried but I couldn't like this manga. The storytelling feels flat for me. There are some recurring (POV? fictional?) characters in this manga, but I don't feel they give additional value for the story, and some of their plots are inconclusive.

Phrodrick says

There are a lot of reasons why Osamu Tezuka's Buddha: Volume I Kapilavastu is wrong. This is a version of the story of the Buddha that includes humor, nudity, great violence, meat eating, and anachronisms and not very much Buddha. For all its faults I am taken in. I want to know more about such of these characters who survive the volume and how the story will bring us back to the foundation of Buddhism. The nudity is not for erotic purposes and make a claim for historic accuracy. The violence is by definition cartoonish but if you are into the story it is no less shocking for the black and white artwork. Parents may want to think before placing these books into the hands of younger readers but the intent is sufficiently serious that context should count. Much in Buddha Vol. 1 can offend a lot of readers. If you can open yourself to a non-western, but still familiar world view this is a good graphic novel.

I had only slight contact with the work of Osamu Tezuka. The artwork is familiar to anyone who has seen for example Astro Boy. Astro Boy and the character Tatta are almost the same drawing. Buddha is much grittier and realistic and very adult in its sensibilities. I find the art work slightly uneven, but there are conventions in magna, many invented by Tezuka that I find jarring. The use of near photo realism and more minimal drawing styles in the same frame can be distracting. I am also not used to characters who are nude because clothes are not possible either due to poverty, age or social status. Which if any of these are the reason for almost all of the pariah class children being naked we are never told. They just are.

Ultimately I agree with almost every objection make by other reviewers. Yet for me, the book comes together. I am aware I am in a society and culture remote but not that different from any I have known. Tezuka has succeeded in making me care about characters, to feel the loss if any are killed and to wonder at

how the story can go forward. A writer/artist who can make you care, feel and wonder is one worth reading.

Morgan says

Possibly the best of Tezuka's many many many works. Oddly enough I learned a ton about Buddha and Buddhism via this manga. The first volume is the slowest if you ask me because it's the only one where the title character isn't the main character until the end. This volume is important though because it about the caste system. The rest of the series only gets better. With that aside, the art in this and all Tezuka's works is breathtaking. I should note that Tezuka is mostly known for Astro Boy, but this isn't kid friendly. This book was during his dark years for a reason. Plus there is a ton of nudity in this, no sex. Overall I HIGHLY recommend this series (all 8 volumes). It's a great into to Buddhism and history.

Matthew says

Lots of fun. This is perhaps a good introduction both to buddhist ideas as well as manga for those who aren't quite prepared to read from the right to the left. Also, you will find yourself wanting to read quickly, as it is manga. You may not want to look for historical accuracy in this, but Buddhism has a lot of background texts and myth (itself an incredible understatement), and this may stoke the curious budding Buddhist to explore further.

You will find yourself wanting to finish the series, even after the first book, if only for the fact that Tezuka masterfully paces the book around a number of subplots and the Buddha himself only just enters the story as a (much portended) birth in this volume. You'll look forward to diving into the rest.

Dioni (Bookie Mee) says

First published at: <http://www.meexia.com/bookie/2016/05/...>

Buddha is an 8-volume manga by Osamu Tezuka. Tezuka is best known as the creator of Astro Boy, which I never watched or read, but I knew Tezuka has also produced some more grownup manga, like *Buddha*. This is my first time reading his work, as I noticed the big volumes readily available at the Westminster libraries.

As titled, *Buddha* tells the story of Siddharta Gautama, on whose teaching Buddhism was founded. I have only a rough idea of Siddharta: how he was a prince born in India, and in opposition to the caste system he renounced his identity and went on a journey until he attained enlightenment and became Buddha.

Knowing that, I expected volume one of *Buddha* to jump straight to his birth and early childhood, however it is not the case. In volume one: *Kapilavastu* Tezuka takes his time to introduce the other characters (some invented, some possibly historical), but most of all, the caste and society system of the time. The birth of Siddharta practically just appeared in the last few pages of the 256-page manga.

Though that surprised me a little, it makes sense. Siddharta is born a prince as the highest caste (Brahmin). There needs to be a balance, other characters that are born as the lowest caste (slave and pariah) who will show the flaws and cruelties of the caste system.

Kapilavastu is the place where Siddharta was born - in Nepal, just close to the border with India. There's a map at the beginning of the book, showing places that we visit in that volume and future ones. So I wasn't quite right about Siddharta being born in India, but very close.

Animals have quite an important role here. One of the teaching of Buddhism is that animals are just as important as humans (hence the preference not to eat animals), and according to the story I was told as a child, upon Buddha's death 12 types of animals come to give him respect, and those become the symbols of Chinese zodiac as we know it until today. Animals seem important in the story of the Buddha and I like how this is used by Tezuka early on in his retelling. (Disclaimer: I'm not a Buddhist so my knowledge is pretty limited, mainly gained from some older family and even so the beliefs and teaching have been very watered down I assume.)

Some qualms: some attempts to modernize are downright silly (e.g. comparing a big city in Nepal at the period with New York or Paris. WHAT. I'm really curious whether this is just the translation problem.), some attempts to be funny are not funny (e.g. jokes at serious times seem misplaced), and the nudity seems unnecessary (I wonder whether women being bare-chested is the norm for its time and place?)

Negative point notwithstanding, I enjoyed the compelling story, and I love to learn more about the making of the Buddha, and Tezuka's take on it. Hubby who is not a big reader is devouring volume after volume of this series, faster than me! I'll definitely be reading more and gradually finishing the series.

Andrew says

Not a historically accurate or religiously orthodox retelling of the life and times of the Buddha. Rather, this is Osamu Tezuka throwing every idea in his gigantic brain onto the page. There's epic fantasy, philosophical musings, slapstick comedy, weird meta jokes, political commentary, action, and romance. Definitely not for everyone, but I loved it.
