

# The *Vessantara-Jātaka* and Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* Narrative

Anālayo

## Abstract

In this paper I study a tale whose probably best-known version is the *Vessantara-jātaka* preserved in Pāli. My exploration is informed by an interest in the genesis of the basic trope and its function as a *Vinaya* narrative.

I begin by summarizing a version of the tale found in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (1) and then turn to the topic of giving to brahmins (2) as well as to giving as one of the perfections (3). Next I take up aspects of the story from the viewpoint of normative Buddhist ethics (4) and from a historical-critical perspective (5), after which I explore its function as a *Vinaya* narrative (6).

## 1) The *Saṅghabhedavastu* Version

In keeping with a general tendency of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* to abound in stories, the *Saṅghabhedavastu* contains several tales that report past lives of Devadatta. These serve to provide a background to his activities at the Buddha's time. Besides attempts at assassinating the Buddha and creating a schism, according to this *Vinaya* he also killed an arhat nun.<sup>1</sup> From the viewpoint of Mūlasarvāstivāda

---

\* I am indebted to Naomi Appleton, *bhikkhunī* Dhammadinnā, Richard Gombrich, Jonathan Silk, and Fumi Yao for commenting on a draft version of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Gnoli 1978: 255,1 or Dutt 1984: 227,9, D 1 *nga* 286b6 or Q 1030 *ce* 264a1, and T 1450 at T XXIV 148a12.

*Vinaya* reciters,<sup>2</sup> he thus committed three of the five severe crimes which bring immediate retribution (*ānantarya*).<sup>3</sup> The *Saṅghabhedavastu* reports that, on being informed that Devadatta had beaten an arhat nun to death, the Buddha delivered a story of a former life of Devadatta as an animal in which he acted similarly. This tale serves to show that Devadatta had a deep-seated tendency towards performing wicked deeds from his past lives and also explains why a relative of the Buddha, who even goes forth as a monk, could still go so far as to perform such evils.

The same pattern of portraying Devadatta as an evil character throughout many of his former lives leads the *Saṅghabhedavastu* to present its version of the tale of the prince Viśvantara, a former life of the Buddha. At the conclusion of the tale, the Buddha informs the listening monks that a merciless brahmin, who had brazenly asked for the children of Viśvantara, was a former life of Devadatta. The main story proceeds as follows:

Brahmins from a rival country ask the prince for the royal elephant, and he gives it to them. For this action he is exiled from his country; his wife Mādrī and his two children follow him. On his way into exile, a brahmin asks for his chariot, and this too he gives away.

When the family has settled down in a hermitage and Mādrī is absent gathering fruit, a brahmin asks for the two children to become his servants; the prince gives them to him. Indra/Śakra transforms himself into a brahmin and asks the prince for his wife Mādrī; her too he gives away. Indra/Śakra discloses his identity and returns Mādrī, admonishing the prince not to give her away again. The brahmin in the meantime tries to sell the children at the market in town. They are ransomed by the king, who then recalls the prince and Mādrī from exile.

This sketch of the main elements in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* equally well summarizes a tale found in the eleventh-century *Kathāsaritsāgara* by the Śaivite Somadeva. The resemblance is so close that, even though the name of the prince differs (which it also does in various Buddhist tellings of the story),<sup>4</sup> the name of his faithful spouse Mādrī remains the same.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Devadatta's killing of a different nun is reported in EĀ 49.9 at T II 803c29, already noted by Mukherjee 1966: 125f.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of the five *ānantarya* cf., e.g. *Mahāvvyutpatti* 2323–2328 (§122), Sakaki 1916/1962: 172, and for a discussion Silk 2007.

<sup>4</sup> For a survey of different names of the prince in Buddhist sources cf. Lamotte 1949/1981: 713f note 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also the *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* 18.211, Śivadatta and Parab 1901: 616,21.

The *Kathāsaritsāgara* shows that the tale summarized above can function meaningfully outside a Buddhist context. It follows that the identifications of the prince with the Buddha and the brahmin with Devadatta, found in several Buddhist versions of the story,<sup>6</sup> are not indispensable elements in the narrative. By implication the same holds for the idea that the various gifts made to brahmins are part of the pre-awakening path of cultivation required for reaching Buddhahood. Although this is a prominent element in Buddhist tellings, so much so that in one *jātaka* extant in Chinese translation the prince even proclaims that he aspires to the path of the Mahāyāna,<sup>7</sup> in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* the prince just explains that his giving is motivated by his desire to give to brahmins.<sup>8</sup>

## 2) Giving to Brahmins

The important role of brahmins as recipients of gifts emerges not only from the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, but can also be seen in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* version. Here the brahmin, on being congratulated by others on the wealth he has acquired by selling the children of the prince, affirms that this is his due, since being from the highest caste he is worthy of offerings.<sup>9</sup> This places the dramatic story of the gift of the children within the framework of the role of brahmins in ancient Indian society as worthy recipients of gifts, whose requests have to be met in order to avoid causing any offense. The need to avoid offending brahmins also finds explicit mention in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* version, where, in the episode that involves giving away the chariot, the prince tells his wife that one should never disparage a brahmin.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The identification of the two is reported in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 133,27, D 1 *nga* 200b5 or Q 1030 *ce* 189a2, and T 1450 at T XXIV 184b21, as well as in Jā 547 at Jā VI 593,25, the *Avadānakalpalatā* 23.53, Chandra Das and Vidyabhushaṇa 1888: 658,16 (Tibetan) and 659,15 (Sanskrit), the Gilgit manuscript *Viśvantarāvadāna*, Das Gupta 1978: 63,9 or Matsumura 1980: 158,2, T 152 at T III 11a18, and T 171 at T III 424a13.

<sup>7</sup> T 171 at T III 421b3: 欲求摩訶衍道; already noted by Durt 2000: 151.

<sup>8</sup> Durgāprasād and Parab 1930: 536,39 (§77): *na me sādhyam kim apy asti vācchā tve tāvatī mama, prāṇān api sadā dadyām brāhmaṇebhya iti dvija*.

<sup>9</sup> Gnoli 1978: 133,25: *uttamavarṇaprasūto 'ham, dakṣiṇīyo lokasya*, D 1 *nga* 200b4 or Q 1030 *ce* 189a1: *rigs mchog gi nang du skyes pas kho bo 'jig rten gyi yon gnas su gyur te* (Q: *to*), and T 1450 at T XXIV 184b18: 云我是最上, 是人之福田, 合得受供養 (translated in Durt 1999: 176).

<sup>10</sup> Gnoli 1978: 123,23: *na khalu bhavatyā brāhmaṇaḥ paribhāṣaṇīyaḥ*, D 1 *nga* 195a5 or Q 1030 *ce* 183b6: *khyod kyis bram ze ma spyo shig*, and T 1450 at T XXIV 182a26: 汝於婆羅門勿出惡言.

Jamison (1996: 164) reports that “the figure of the Exploited Host, who patiently and unquestioningly accedes to increasingly onerous and often humiliating demands, is almost a stock character in the Mahābhārata”, “there are several similar stories in the Mahābhārata about ... imperious and capricious visiting Brahmans who take over their host’s households and even their lives.”

According to Jamison (1996: 168f), “the host’s duty of unflinching generosity to a visitor is not limited to the usual food and other accoutrements, but extends to the ceding of control over the persons of the hosting family.” Such stories demonstrate “the value attached to yielding without complaint to any demand ... no matter how bizarre or painful”, providing “an incentive to practice unquestioning hospitality ... as no doubt the Visiting Brahman lobby was well aware.”

The notion that the requests of begging brahmins have to be met at all costs comes up also in the prologue to the *Pārāyana-vagga*. Having just completed a great sacrifice, Bāvāri is unable to give to a visiting brahmin the sum of money the latter requests. The visiting brahmin threatens that after seven days Bāvāri’s head will split into seven pieces for having failed to satisfy his request.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Pārāyana-vagga* the claim by the begging brahmin is dismissed as deluded, exemplifying the early Buddhist attitude to the trope of the supposed duties of a host towards a visiting brahmin’s unreasonable requests and the alleged dangers incurred by upsetting a brahmin.

The commentary to the *Pārāyana-vagga* reports that the begging brahmin had been sent on his mission by his young wife, who wanted him to get money from Bāvāri and then buy a household servant who would relieve her of the housework.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in the *Vessantara-jātaka* the brahmin who begs the children has been sent by his young wife, who wants to have the children as household servants to relieve her of the housework, in particular of having to fetch water.<sup>13</sup> This similarity in the narrative background of these two instances reflects the same basic tendency to ironical exaggeration by depicting a brahmin whose unreasonable demands are motivated by the wish to please his young wife. The portrayal of this brahmin in the *Vessantara-jātaka* in fact brims with a tendency to caricature.

---

<sup>11</sup> Sn 983 and T 202 at T IV 432c22; on the trope of splitting the head cf., e.g., Hopkins 1932: 316, Insler 1989/1990, Witzel 1987, Black 2007: 80–88 and 2011: 154–158.

<sup>12</sup> Pj II 582,2.

<sup>13</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 523,23.

In contrast to this basic similarity in narrative mode and detail, the prologue to the *Pārāyana-vagga* and the *Vessantara-jātaka* exhibit a substantially different attitude towards the trope of having to oblige the demands of a begging brahmin. Here outright dismissal in the *Pārāyana-vagga* stands out against wholehearted compliance in the *Vessantara-jātaka*. This conveys the impression that the basic trope in the *Vessantara-jātaka* is perhaps more at home in the *Mahābhārata* than in Buddhist discourse.

The spotlight on having to oblige begging brahmins is a general feature of the tale in various other versions, where those who ask the prince for his possessions and family members are invariably actual brahmins (or Śakra disguised as a brahmin). Brahmins are even explicitly mentioned in rather brief references to the story. This holds for a *pūrvayoga* extant in a Gāndhārī fragment, which notes that the gift of the elephant was made to a brahmin.<sup>14</sup> Similarly brief references in the *Jātakastava* and the \**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* report that the prince gave his children to a brahmin.<sup>15</sup> That the elephant and the children were given away to brahmins also finds explicit expression in the description by the pilgrim Xuánzàng (玄奘) of his visit to the location where these events were believed to have taken place.<sup>16</sup>

The same can also be seen from a representation of the gift of the elephant from Goli in Andhra Pradesh (see next page image 1), which shows the prince ceremoniously pouring out water when giving the elephant to brahmins, recognizable as such by the pots they carry (the two behind the one who receives the elephant on their behalf also carry sticks, another signifier of brahmin identity in pictorial representation).<sup>17</sup>

In a *jātaka* collection extant in Chinese translation the children tell their father that, in spite of their youth, they have already heard that according to the Dharma of brahmins one should protect one's wife and children in order to be reborn in the Brahmā world.<sup>18</sup> This implies that for the prince to give away his children (and later his wife) to a brahmin is not in keeping with the very Dharma of brahmins. In fact the children qualify the one to whom they are being given as an “evil brahmin”.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Lenz 2003: 144 (§24): *hastinago bramanasa dite*.

<sup>15</sup> Dresden 1955: 444 (§161). T 1509 at T XXV 146b5: 以其二子布施婆羅門。In a footnote to his translation of this passage, Lamotte 1949/1981: 713f offers a detailed survey of various versions and representations of the tale; for another detailed survey cf. Schlingloff 2000: 198–201.

<sup>16</sup> T 2087 at T LI 881b9 and 881b19.

<sup>17</sup> Chennai Government Museum; courtesy of Monika Zin.

<sup>18</sup> T 153 at T III 60a13: 我雖幼稚亦曾聞說婆羅門法, 若有擁護妻子, 因緣得生梵天 (translated in Durt 1999: 160f).

<sup>19</sup> T 153 at T III 60a5: 此惡婆羅門。In the Gilgit manuscript *Viśvantarāvadāna*, Das Gupta 1978: 56,20 or Matsumura 1980: 149,15, the mother refers to him as a cruel brahmin.



*Image 1: The Gift of the Elephant*



The *Vessantara-jātaka*, Āryasūra's *Jātakamālā*, and *jātaka* collections extant in Chinese translation go a step further. They report that one of the children tried to prevent their being given away by telling their father that the one who has asked for them is not a real brahmin, but an evil spirit.<sup>20</sup> Clearly the motif of having to give to begging brahmins whatever they demand is a central aspect of the various tellings of the story and explains the denouement of the main plot.<sup>21</sup>

Needless to say, brahmins are of course a recurrent feature in the wider *jātaka* and *apadāna* genre, so that their occurrence as such in the present tale is not in itself surprising. What is unusual, however, is the type of gifts they request and receive in the *Vessantara-jātaka*.

### 3) The Perfection of Giving

Whereas from the viewpoint of the need to fulfil one's obligation towards begging brahmins the basic story is well in line with other such tales in the *Mahābhārata*, as a *jātaka* the same narrative is extraordinary. As Shaw (2015: 513) points out, "in no other *jātaka* does the Bodhisatta make such gifts, encourage others to do so, or speak to his children in this way." Here it needs to be kept in mind that the trope of giving away part of one's body or the whole body differs, since making such offerings only requires directly inflicting harm on oneself, not on others. The challenge to understand and appreciate the gifts made by the bodhisattva in the *Vessantara-jātaka* is in fact a continuous theme in the Buddhist traditions, which can best be explored by taking up the Pāli version and its reception.

Already the *Vessantara-jātaka* itself voices criticism of the prince's generosity. After the gift of the elephant, the citizens point out that it would

---

<sup>20</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 554,14: *na cāyaṃ brāhmaṇo tāta, dhammikā honti brāhmaṇā, yakkho brāhmaṇavaṇṇena*, Kern 1891: 62,25 (9.65f): *na cāyaṃ brāhmaṇo ... yakṣo 'yaṃ brāhmaṇacchannā*, T 152 at T III 9c12: 彼是鬼也, 非梵志矣, T 171 at T III 422a19: 此非婆羅門, 為是鬼耳 (translated in Chavannes 1911: 382); cf. also T 2121 at T LIII 165c21: 此是鬼耳, 非梵志也. Although the corresponding part has not been preserved in the Sogdian version, the ensuing passages refer to the one to whom the prince had given his children as a brahmin who resembles a *yakṣa* or a brahmin *yakṣa*; cf. Benveniste 1946: 64 (§1044) and 66 (§1091). For a comparative study of the offering of the children and of Mādri, with particular attention given to sources extant in Chinese, cf. Durt 1999 and 2000.

<sup>21</sup> The significance of the depiction of brahmins in the *Vessantara-jātaka* has already been noted by Gombrich 1985: 436 and the pervasiveness of this motif in the various versions by Durt 2000: 137.

have been proper for Vessantara to give food, drink, clothes and dwelling places to brahmins,<sup>22</sup> but not the royal elephant. When giving away his children, the son asks his father if his heart is made of stone.<sup>23</sup> When hearing of the gift of the children, the courtiers express their criticism (*garaha*), in that it is wrong for Vessantara to act like this; he can give away slaves, animals, or a chariot, but not his own children.<sup>24</sup>

A critical attitude finds expression again in the *Milindapañha*. Putting the dilemma in succinct terms, the question is: “if one gives a gift that inflicts suffering on others, does that gift result in happiness and lead to heaven?”<sup>25</sup> The allusion to rebirth in heaven reflects the position taken in the Pāli tradition that Vessantara was reborn in the Tusita realm, from where he then took birth as Gotama and became a Buddha.

The dilemma spotted by Milinda concerns basic ethical norms of early Buddhist thought. The point he makes is that, granted that Vessantara wishes to gain merit, he could have given himself as a gift, instead of inflicting harm on others by giving them away.<sup>26</sup> The problem is that, whereas Vessantara has the right to do with his own body whatever he wishes, the authority he has as a father over his children and as a husband over his wife comes together with the responsibility to take care of them.<sup>27</sup> At least from the viewpoint of early Buddhist ethics, he is not free to give them away in a manner that clearly involves harming them.

Given this conflict with basic ethical principles, it is no surprise that misgivings continue to be voiced by modern-day Theravādins.<sup>28</sup> Gombrich (1971/2008: 312) comments on Vessantara’s giving away of his wife and children that this not only “strikes us as excessive. It strikes the Sinhalese

<sup>22</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 490,24: *annapānañ ca yo dajjā, vatthasenāsanāni ca ... etaṃ kho brāhmaṇārahaṃ*; for a discussion of the placing of this criticism cf. Alsdorf 1957: 25f.

<sup>23</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 549,4: *asmā nūna te hadayaṃ āyasaṃ dalḥabandhanaṃ?*

<sup>24</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 575,14: *dukkāṭaṃ vata bho raññā ... kathan nu puttake dajjā? ... dāsaṃ dāsīñ ca so dajjā, assaṇ c’ assatarī rathaṃ, hatthiñ ca kuñjaraṃ dajjā, kathaṃ so dajjā dārake ti?*

<sup>25</sup> Mil 276,14: *paraṃ dukkhāpetvā dānaṃ deti, api nu taṃ dānaṃ sukhavipākaṃ hoti sagga-saṃvattanikaṃ ti?*

<sup>26</sup> Mil 275,27: *puññakāmena manujena kiṃ paradukkhāpanena, nanu nāma sakadānaṃ dātappaṃ hoti ti?*

<sup>27</sup> The responsibility of a husband to ensure the wellbeing of his wife is reflected in DN 31 at DN III 190,4 and its parallels DĀ 16 at T I 71c26, T 16 at T I 251b18, T 17 at T I 254a25, and MĀ 135 at T I 641a22; cf. also SHT IV 412.27 R4–6, Sander and Waldschmidt 1980: 58.

<sup>28</sup> On my reasons for having no qualms in employing the term Theravāda cf. Anālayo 2013.



in the same way. The two monks with whom I brought up the subject both said that Vessantara was *wrong*.”<sup>29</sup>

Gabaude (2016: 38) notes that “the story has confused and disoriented the East ... in Thailand, it has generated hot debates among elite as well as common voices.” One critique mentioned in Gabaude (2016: 40) turns in particular on Vessantara’s failure to fulfil his moral duties, in that he is “‘a king who fails to keep the morality of kings’; in other words, he fails to obey the national interest” by giving away the royal elephant. “Vessantara is ‘a husband who fails to keep the morality of husbands’: far from protecting his wife ... he lets her slip into poverty and even gives her away to another man ‘as if she were not a human being’. Vessantara is a ‘father who fails to keep the morality of fathers’: he does not protect his children ... he accepts seeing them beaten in front of him.”

Ladwig (2016: 63) reports from Laos the comment on Vessantara that, “the more he gives away, the more problematic and egoistic his generosity becomes. His drive for giving becomes a burden for other people and it produces considerable suffering. His excessive generosity is almost comparable to a kind of illness.”

The contrast between the doctrinal framework of the perfections to be cultivated by a bodhisattva and the story line of the Vessantara tale becomes further accentuated by the circumstance that the Theravāda tradition reckons this particular life to be the last in the series of human existences of the Buddha-to-be. This positioning implies that, by the time of this life, the bodhisattva must have already reached a high level in his cultivation of the perfections.

The Theravāda list of the perfections includes *mettā* as well as truthfulness, alongside giving. Yet it is not easy to conceive of Vessantara’s acts as springing from the mind of one who has already perfected *mettā* and truthfulness. The problem is not merely the giving away of his innocent and crying children to a cruel brahmin who mistreats them in front of his eyes. According to the Pāli report, when confronted with his distraught wife, who worries what has happened to the children, Vessantara at first just remains silent for quite some time, and when he finally speaks to her he is portrayed as intentionally using “harsh speech” to make her give

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. also the argument raised by a Sinhalese catechist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reported in Young and Somaratna 1996: 148, that Vessantara’s giving away his children and wife “was not a civilized act. Because of giving his children away, they were subjected to much suffering. What merit could one attain by making another suffer? Will any one of you in this audience give away your own wife to another just so that you could gain merit for yourself?”

up her sorrow.<sup>30</sup> Not only does he employ harsh speech on this occasion, but earlier Vessantara is on record as intentionally “deceiving” her.<sup>31</sup> Such depiction of his behaviour would be surprising if the story had originally been conceived as an illustration of a past life of the Buddha-to-be so close to his final lifetime that he had already accomplished the perfections of *mettā* and truthfulness to a high degree.

The commentary on the *Cariyāpiṭaka* (the root text of which also has a version of Vessantara’s deeds) proclaims that all perfections without exception have as their characteristic the benefitting of others, and as their proximate cause compassion and skilful means.<sup>32</sup> Vessantara’s generosity, however, seems to be carried out to benefit himself first of all, and any benefit to others would only result from his eventual attainment of Buddhahood in a future life. Compassion and the exercise of skilful means are certainly not conspicuous aspects of his conduct. In sum, the perfections to be cultivated by a bodhisattva do not seem to be the natural home for the arising of the story of Vessantara. If the original idea had been to portray the perfection of giving at its utmost extremes, this could still have been done without doing violence to the cultivation of the other perfections.

According to the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*, the bodhisattva’s exercise of truthfulness in previous lives formed the condition for his gain of two of the thirty-two bodily marks with which as a Buddha he was endowed.<sup>33</sup> Another deed leading to his endowment with another of the thirty-two marks was that in previous lives he kept reuniting families, uniting mother with child and child with mother, etc.<sup>34</sup> Such descriptions do not sit too well with the Vessantara tale as a depiction of the Buddha’s penultimate life as a human being.

Now the *Vessantara-jātaka* is at the same time “the last, longest, and most famous of the Pāli collection of Jātaka stories”, as noted by Norman (1981/1991: 172). Two

<sup>30</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 561,31: *kakkhaḷakathāya naṃ puttasaṃ jahāpessāmī ti cintevā imaṃ gātham āha*.

<sup>31</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 541,9 reports that, when Maddī tells Vessantara about a nightmare she just had, even though he clearly understands its implications, he intentionally deceives her to console and dismiss her, *mohetvā assāsetvā uyyojesi*. Collins 1998: 528 argues that actions of Vessantara seem to stand in contrast, at least to some extent, to each of the five precepts.

<sup>32</sup> Cp-a 280,16: *avisesena tāva sabbā pi pāramiyo parānuggahalakkhaṇā ... karuṇūpāya-kosallapadaṭṭhānā vā*; the Vessantara tale itself is found at Cp 7,1 (§9).

<sup>33</sup> DN 30 at DN III 170,15: *saccavādī saccasandho theto paccayiko avisaṃvādako lokassa*.

<sup>34</sup> DN 30 at DN III 160,18: *mātaram pi puttana samānetā ahosi, puttam pi mātārā samānetā ahosi*.

of the three aspects mentioned are closely interrelated, since the Pāli *Jātaka* collection proceeds from short to long *jātakas*, wherefore the *Vessantara-jātaka* as the longest is inevitable also its last and therefore the final member of its ultimate group of tales, the *Mahānipāta*.

According to Appleton (2010: 73f), whereas “the position of the *Vessantara-jātaka* ... is related merely to the number of the verses contained within it”, “ideas of chronology and biography were introduced to the collection later, after the order of the stories was fixed. If, therefore, the popularity of the *Vessantara-jātaka* is due to its status as the antepenultimate birth of the Buddha, and this in turn is due to a purely mnemonic ordering, then an inability to explain in what way the story embodies the highest achievements of the Bodhisatta is unsurprising.”

Appleton and Shaw (2015: 3f) explain that “the idea that *jātaka* stories illustrate the long path to Buddhahood is not found in the earliest layers of the text”, thus “the association between *jātaka* stories and the perfections came relatively late in the compositional history of the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*.” Appleton (2010: 147 and 149) points out that, although “*jātakas* were not originally conceived of as demonstrating the gradual perfection of the Bodhisatta”, “the framing as Bodhisatta-biography and Buddha-*dhamma* make the story more able to communicate Buddhist ideals such as the perfections, even where the central message of the story itself seems to be of little importance.”

Thus it seems fair to conclude that the *Vessantara* tale quite probably shares with many other members of the *jātaka* collection that it is a final product of an integration of various fables, anecdotes and parables, taken from the ancient Indian repertoire and incorporated into Buddhist narrative lore.<sup>35</sup> Its popularity may at least to some degree be the outcome of the fruitful tension that arises between the denouement of the story and Buddhist ideals.

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf., e.g., von Hinüber 1998: 190–192 and Anālayo 2010a: 55–71. Appleton and Shaw 2015: 28 explain that “the *jātakas* are the product of a broader Indian narrative scene, and the *Mahānipāta* stories [of which *Vessantara* is the last] in particular appear to have a strong relationship with Indian epic sources”; on this topic cf. also Lüders 1897/1940 and 1904/1940 as well as Gombrich 1985. That the same pattern applies to the present case has already been suggested by Fick 1926: 147, who comments that “wir haben es bei der ... *Vessantara*-Legende zweifellos mit einem gemeinindischen, im Volke weitverbreiteten und beliebten Stoff zu tun, der von Brahmanen wie von Buddhisten und Jainisten für ihre religiösen Zwecke verwertet, dichterisch weiterverarbeitet und mit Zügen ausgestattet wurde, die der Bearbeiter zum Teil aus anderen Sagenkreisen entlehnte.”

Another argument supporting the impression that the Vessantara tale did not originate in a Buddhist frame of thought has been presented by Alsdorf (1957: 61), who points out the prominent role of indulging in intoxicating drink in several episodes of the tale. The royal palace is described as a place where one is woken up with meat and liquor.<sup>36</sup> When Vessantara departs for his exile, he has strong drink distributed on his behalf.<sup>37</sup> When he returns home, each village along the way is to prepare a hundred jars with liquor for distribution.<sup>38</sup> Such recurrent celebration of the consumption of alcohol confirms that several aspects of the tale did not originate in a setting imbued with Buddhist ethical values.

#### 4) The ‘Buddhist’ Nature of the *Vessantara-jātaka*

Based on his detailed study, Alsdorf (1957: 70) then comes to the conclusion that the *Vessantara-jātaka* “is just as completely un-Buddhist or rather pre-Buddhist as the vast majority of the other Jātakas.” This has been criticized by Collins (2016: 4), who sees this conclusion “as a kind of cartoon sketch of an outmoded Orientalism: the natives, in their blindness, have all-unknowingly preserved as their favorite Buddhist text something that in fact, as revealed by the dogged philological labors of the rationalist Herr Professor in his European library, has in itself nothing to do with them.”

Although the formulation employed by Alsdorf is indeed too strong,<sup>39</sup> when considered in context it becomes clear that his statement is in reply to the suggestion by Winternitz that the *Vessantara-jātaka*’s “purely Buddhistic origin is unmistakable”, a quote with which Alsdorf introduces his assessment. Leaving aside the exaggerated expression “completely un-Buddhist”, however, and without in any way wanting to advocate a return to Orientalism, the qualification of the basic story line as not originally Buddhist seems to me to offer a meaningful perspective for understanding the evolution of the tale. If we want to give a fair hearing to tradition, alongside the popularity of the *Vessantara-jātaka* the various instances of criticism, surveyed above, need to be

<sup>36</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 483,5: *surāmaṃsappabodhane*.

<sup>37</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 502,11: *soṇḍānam detha*.

<sup>38</sup> Jā 547 at Jā VI 580,19: *sataṃ kumbhā merayassa surāya ca*, stressed again at Jā VI 580,23: *bahū surā*.

<sup>39</sup> Already Cone and Gombrich 1977: xxviii objected against Alsdorf’s classification of the *Vessantara-jātaka* as “completely un-Buddhist”; Schlingloff 2000: 201 opts for the preferable expression “originally non-Buddhist”. Alsdorf 1977: 25 again employs the expression “un-Buddhist”, but without the qualification “completely”, in a discussion of Jā 543.

taken serious as reflecting a continuous sense of unease with central elements of the tale.

Collins (2016: 4f) mentions the example of the “Buddhist virtue of *mettā*” to argue that “obviously the values of friendliness, kindness, beneficence, etc., can be found in any and every cultural context, both before and outside of Buddhist texts. So when a Buddhist acts in a kind, friendly manner toward a fellow human being, is he or she then being ‘completely un-Buddhist or rather pre-Buddhist?’”

Now the Pāli discourses and their parallels do present *mettā* as something that had been practised long before the advent of the Buddha. A case in point is the tale of Sunetta, a seer of ancient times who cultivated *mettā* with sufficient success to be reborn in the Brahmā world.

The same tale is also of interest to the topic of the evolution of *jātakas* in general, in as much as the relevant discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* does not identify Sunetta as a past life of the Buddha, an identification found in a *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.<sup>40</sup> This is one of several examples illustrating the same basic pattern, also evident in the *Vessantara* tale, of stories being not necessarily conceived of from the outset as former existences of the Buddha.

Whether or not Sunetta is explicitly identified as a past life of the Buddha, this tale does imply that tradition itself considered *mettā* to be “pre-Buddhist” in the sense that its practice was already known and practised before Gotama Buddha started to teach. Such recognition even takes the form of pointing out in what way the practice of *mettā* taught by Gotama Buddha differs from the cultivation of *mettā* by his contemporaries.<sup>41</sup> The decisive difference is found in yoking *mettā* to the arousing of the awakening factors. In this way the example of *mettā* illustrates that to conceptualize certain ideas or practices as “pre-Buddhist” or “not originally Buddhist” is very much in keeping with a position at times adopted by the tradition itself.

---

<sup>40</sup> MĀ 8 at T I 429b29, reported after referring to his level of rebirth, which has a counterpart in AN 7.62 at AN IV 104,22; cf. also Anālayo 2010a: 70. A version in the Tibetan *Bhaiṣayavastu* can be found in D 1 *kha* 261b6 or Q 1030 *ge* 243a2; for a reference to a *Sunetra-jātaka* in the *Vyākhyāyukti-ṭīkā* cf. Skilling 2000: 343.

<sup>41</sup> A query in this respect by non-Buddhists is reported in SN 46.54 at SN V 116,29 and its parallels SHT IX 2051Vd, Bechert and Wille 2004: 69, and SĀ 743 at T II 197b27; cf. also the discussion in Gethin 1992: 177–182.

### 5) The *Vessantara-jātaka* in Historical-critical Perspective

Collins (2016: 5) continues his criticism of Alsdorf by stating that “much more important than the issue of unnecessary identity language is the fact that the search for an original ur-text, founded in Western classical scholarship on the written texts of Greek and Latin, misunderstands the narrative traditions of South and Southeast Asia, where a complex mixture and overlap of orality and literacy makes the search for origins quixotic at best.”

I am not sure if we need to dismiss Alsdorf’s study as being informed by a quest for the ur-text, or whether it could not rather be read as offering a historical-critical perspective that prevents mistaking the *Vessantara-jātaka* for an ur-text. An example is his suggestion that a misplacing in sequence of a verse seems to have led to the impression that, after the horses had been given away to begging brahmins, the chariot was still being drawn by draught animals. This then would have led to the arising of a prose narration according to which *devas* intervened, taking the form of deer to draw the chariot.<sup>42</sup> The suggestion by Alsdorf seems to offer a reasonable hypothesis and has been accepted as such, for example, by Cone and Gombrich (1977: xxxii), who comment that “this explanation appears to us convincing. The supernatural incident generated by a chance misunderstanding appealed to contemporary sentiment, and became embedded in the tradition.” The prose description resulting from this apparent error could then in turn have influenced Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā*, which has a similar episode.<sup>43</sup>

With all due awareness granted to the complexity of the interrelations and cross-fertilizations between different tellings of this story in the oral and eventually in the written medium, it is still possible to discern in a broad manner stages of development, such as to propose that a mix-up in the sequence of the canonical verses could have led to a particular prose description in the *Jātaka* commentary.<sup>44</sup> The type of historical perspective

<sup>42</sup> Alsdorf 1957: 36–38. The suggestion is that verse 215 has its proper place before 214; the prose description of the intervention by *devas* is found in Jā 547 at Jā VI 512,14.

<sup>43</sup> Kern 1891: 59,6 (no. 9 §45); the parallelism in this respect between the *Jātakamālā* and the *Vessantara-jātaka* has already been noticed by Fick 1926: 153.

<sup>44</sup> Collins 2016: 11f also comments that it seems to him that “*jātaka* stories were originally in prose and verse combined (in Sanskrit called the *campū* style), which the later tradition has bifurcated into canonical verses and prose commentary.” A close study of the *Udāna* collection as another text in the same *Khuddaka-nikāya* shows the existence of a versified nucleus accompanied



that emerges in this way shows that the *Vessantara-jātaka* is the product of a gradual evolution. In its present form the Pāli prose, and by implication also Āryasūra's *Jātakamālā*, show the incorporation of a later element. Versions that do not have the intervention by *devas* to pull the chariot stand a good chance of having preserved an earlier version of the account of the prince's journey into exile. This is helpful in so far as it counters a tendency, sometimes found even in contemporary scholarship, to conceive the Pāli version of a particular text as invariably the most original version at our disposition.<sup>45</sup>

This is in fact what Collins (2016: 6) does to some degree, when he refers to the *Vessantara-jātaka* as “the earliest and most prestigious telling we now have. But that does not make it an ur-text of which other tellings are versions or variants. Better than the chronological language of original and later versions is a distinction ... between ‘authoritative’ and ‘oppositional’ tellings.”<sup>46</sup>

It is hard for me to see how the *Vessantara-jātaka* could be considered the earliest telling we have.<sup>47</sup> There seems to be no *a priori* reason why the tale summarized above from the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, for example, or one of the other *jātaka* versions preserved in at times fairly early Chinese translations, might not have preserved more archaic elements. In fact none of these versions has the intervention of *devas* to pull the horse-less chariot, making it reasonable to assume that, at least in this respect, they

---

by a more fluctuating prose, which due to its later date of completion only became part of the canonical collection in some reciter traditions; cf. Anālayo 2009. Such a pattern, where a more fixed base text is accompanied by a commentary more open to variation and change, can also be seen at work in the relationship between the code of rules and the accompanying stories in *Vinaya* literature; cf. Schlingloff 1963. The same emerges from a comparative study of the early discourses; cf. Anālayo 2010b. In fact the same can even be discerned in the early stage of evolution of the Abhidharma; cf. Anālayo 2014a: 79–89. This pattern is so pervasive in Buddhist literature as to make it safe to conclude that the case of the *Jātaka* collection follows the same model, in that only the verses are canonical simply because they served as a more fixed base text whose more variable prose commentary only became fixed at a subsequent time, too late for it to become part of the canonical text.

<sup>45</sup> For a more detailed criticism of the assumption that the Pāli version must invariably be the earliest textual witness at our disposition cf. Anālayo 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Collins 2016: 19–23 offers a detailed survey of translations of different versions of the tale, showing that his assessment of the Pāli version as the earliest and most authoritative was made in awareness of the extant parallels.

<sup>47</sup> Already Lienhard 1978: 139 suggested that the *Vessantara-jātaka* is the oldest version we have.

offer an earlier account of the episode of the gift of the horses and/or the chariot than the Pāli version.<sup>48</sup>

Nor is the distinction between ‘authoritative’ and ‘oppositional’ tellings necessarily more relevant, since Mūlasarvāstivāda reciters in India need not even have been aware of the Theravāda *Vessantara-jātaka*. Even if they had been aware of it, which is not particularly probable, they would not have considered it as authoritative and quite likely also not as oppositional.

In short, it seems to me that adopting a historical-critical perspective is a useful approach to the study of a particular tale, enabling us to explore the probable framework of conditions that would have influenced the coming into being of the text in its present form.<sup>49</sup> The wish to avoid the quest for an ur-text need not lead us to the opposite stance of disregarding that there have been pre-versions to the text we have in hand. Such an opposite stance can easily lead to ignoring historical layers in the development of a particular text, thereby potentially also ignoring the multiplicity of conditions, cross-fertilizations and other dynamics that have influenced the oral transmission of what we now access in the form of a written testimony of a particular instance of this complex process. Once the indeed unwarranted valorisation of anything early as intrinsically superior to later ‘degenerations’ has been left behind, the historical dimension as such offers an important tool for contextualization that should not be too easily dismissed.<sup>50</sup>

On this basis and without thereby in any way intending to turn a blind eye to the complexity of the range of conditions that would have influenced the genesis of the tale in its various manifestations, I propose the conclusion that the tale summarized at the beginning of this article quite probably originated in dialogue with the importance of unfaltering hospitality to brahmins. Its present form in the Buddhist traditions does appear to be comparable to the

---

<sup>48</sup> The *Saṅghabhedavastu* reports only a single gift of chariot and horses together; cf. Gnoli 1978: 123,29, D 1 *nga* 195a6 or Q 1030 *ce* 183b8, and T 1450 at T XXIV 182b6 (on versions of this tale in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* cf. the survey in Yao 2012: 1191 §11). In T 152 at T III 9a8 and T 171 at T III 420c15 the prince first gives away the horses and then pulls the chariot himself, before giving away the chariot as well. T 153 at T III 59b15 does not report that the prince departed into exile on a chariot drawn by horses, so that here the whole episode of giving these away is not found.

<sup>49</sup> With this I do not intend to take the position that there cannot be meaningful explorations of the *Vessantara-jātaka* apart from historical considerations, such as, e.g., the one recently offered by Shi 2015.

<sup>50</sup> On the unfortunate tendency to disregard the historical dimension in the academic study of Buddhism cf., e.g., Gombrich 2003: 4ff.

case of *mettā*, in that a practice or story has been adopted and imbued with Buddhist values by relating it to qualities concerned with awakening, be these the awakening factors in the case of *mettā* or the perfections in the case of the *jātaka* tale.

## 6) The Function of the Viśvantara Tale as a *Vinaya* Narrative

The suggestion that the tale of Viśvantara takes its basic plot from concern with hospitality to brahmins leads me to the question of its function in the Buddhist traditions. Whereas in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* the story serves to illustrate to the monks the evil nature of Devadatta, this is not the only context for this story to manifest in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*. Another telling can be found in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the same *Vinaya*.<sup>51</sup> In the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* the tale is addressed to a king and serves the function of illustrating the bodhisattva's practice of generosity undertaken for the sake of his full awakening.<sup>52</sup> As a result of this different setting, the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* concludes with the Buddha only identifying the generous prince as a past life of his, without any mention of Devadatta.<sup>53</sup>

The two settings conveniently illustrate how narratives can be put to different uses within a *Vinaya* framework. One such usage is to provide to the monks a narrative background to legal matters, here in particular schism, *saṅghabheda*. Another usage is for narratives to be employed when teaching laity the importance of generosity. Needless to say, for a mendicant community like the Buddhist monastic order both concerns are of considerable importance. Whereas stories

---

<sup>51</sup> Durt 2000: 138 notes a difference between the two Chinese version, as in T 1448 at T XXIV 66a19 not only the brahmin asking for the prince's wife, but also the one who asks for the children is an apparition caused by Śakra. This creates an internal inconsistency, as later this brahmin brings the children to the town where they are going to be ransomed by their grandfather, something he does on being influenced by Śakra, so that in this episode the two are clearly different protagonists; cf. T 1448 at T XXIV 68a15. The idea that Śakra was the one to ask for the children can also be found in a Newar telling of the story, Emmrich 2016: 191, and according to Tucci 1949: 469 in a Tibetan painting. A conflation of these two episodes could naturally occur in art, given that in pictorial depiction there is a tendency to portray successive episodes in a single image (cf., e.g., Schlingloff 1981), which could easily have led to the Śakra motif being mistakenly related to the previous gift of the children as well.

<sup>52</sup> D 1 *kha* 219a6 or Q 1030 *ge* 206b2 and T 1448 at T XXIV 64c26. The Tibetan *Bhaiṣajyavastu* has a second telling of the tale, summarized in Yao 2012: 1190–1192; for corresponding Sankrit fragments cf. the survey in Yao 2015: 297.

<sup>53</sup> D 1 *kha* 227b2 or Q 1030 *ge* 214a2 and T 1448 at T XXIV 68b13.

of monastic misconduct would not have been apt for public consumption,<sup>54</sup> tales of the heroic exploits of the Buddha-to-be, like the Viśvantara narrative, would have furnished Mūlasarvāstivāda monastics with convenient material for preaching purposes.

Such uses explain why *Vinaya* literature can incorporate so many tales, a tendency particularly evident in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, but also apparent in the *Vinaya* texts of other schools. *Vinaya* texts as the source for rules to train monastics in behaviour and etiquette naturally lend themselves to the incorporation of other material considered relevant for training monastics, such as training their teaching skills. This almost inevitably leads to the integration of various stories, which not only serve to attract (and entertain) potential monastic reciters by providing narrative background to legal actions, but also equip them with material that can be employed in teaching activities.

Understood in this way, a legalistic discussion of a rule and a *jātaka* found side by side in a *Vinaya* text are not as surprising as this may seem at first sight, since they express closely related concerns. Thus a collection of tales like the *Mahāvastu*, as argued convincingly by Tournier (2012), is indeed a *Vinaya* text.

According to Haribhaṭṭa's *Jātakamālā*, the delivery of *jātakas* falls into place, once a sermon has been given, by way of illustrating the teaching in additional detail, comparable to the light provided by a torch, thereby becoming a source of happiness for the audience.<sup>55</sup> This points to a function of *jātakas* in order to flesh out abstract teachings and, needless to say, at the same time also entertain the audience. The edifying and entertaining aspects of *jātaka* literature are also noted by the Chinese pilgrim Yijing (義淨),<sup>56</sup> who is credited with translating the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* into Chinese.

In modern days, as pointed out by Ladwig (2016: 57), “‘giving’ moral precepts and explaining virtuous models of behavior ... is considered one of the main tasks of a Buddhist monk. An important part of sermon making is its performance and aesthetics.”

Combined with the setting in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, this helps to explain another dimension of the success of the Viśvantara tale in different Buddhist cultures.

<sup>54</sup> The Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* explicitly states that *Vinaya* material is to be taught to monastics, not to laity; cf. T 1442 at T XXIII 672c4: 毘奈耶教是出家軌式, 俗不合聞。

<sup>55</sup> Hahn 2011: 4,27 (§8): *dhārmakathiko hy āṛṣasūtram anuvarṇya paścād bodhisattvajātakānuvarṇanayā citrabhavanam iva pradīpaprabhayā sutarām uddyotyati śrotṛjanasya ca manasy adhikāṃ prītim utpādayatīti.*

<sup>56</sup> T 2125 at T LIV 227c29.

Such success does not appear to be in spite of its unusual encouragement of relentless giving, which has a more natural home in the *Mahābhārata*, but quite probably precisely because of this feature. Alongside the fruitful tension this depiction creates with Buddhist ethical values, the basic portrayal of the Buddha-to-be engaging in such giving can serve to encourage doing the same, albeit on a lesser scale.<sup>57</sup>

Cone and Gombrich (1977: xxv) note that “Buddhist monks replaced brahmins as an economically parasitic class”. Thus a tale that portrays uncompromising willingness to give to brahmins can easily be employed to encourage generosity to Buddhist monastics as those who have replaced the brahmins in Buddhist societies. Regarding the need for monastics to encourage giving, Findly (2003: 337) explains that “several strategies are devised in order to capture donors’ attention within the marketplace of current young religious movements, and to bind their attention to this particular movement for the long term. The most important of these strategies is the development of a doctrinal soteriology for householders that deals with proper acquisition and use of wealth and that provides a clear status-producing system of merit for those who give to the Saṅgha.”

The suggested function of the tale that emerges from the type of setting depicted in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* accords with the results of research done on teachings of the *Vessantara-jātaka* in Theravāda societies. Spiro (1970/1982: 108) explains that “taught to every schoolboy, alluded to frequently in conversation, recounted repeatedly in sermons ... the story of Prince Vessantara is probably the best known and most loved of all Buddhist stories. Its sacrificial idiom provides the charter for and reinforces the Burmese belief in the religious efficacy of giving.” Ladwig (2016: 60) reports from Laos that “monks like to employ it in order to point out the meritorious character of giving, refer to the great rewards Vessantara received through his generosity, and motivate the laypeople to follow his example on a more moderate level and make regular donations to the temple.”

Alongside an encouragement to generosity, the dramatic setting of the tale, as a result of a fertile friction between a Brahminical trope and Buddhist values,

---

<sup>57</sup> Das Gupta 1978: 32 reasons that “even in its original pre-Buddhist form this legend must have been an excellent example of charity, and this was the fact which encouraged the Buddhist monks to adopt this legend for preaching charity. They not only adopted the existing tale, but also magnified the idea of charity prevailing already in this pre-Buddhist legend and developed it into a Buddhist legend by amalgamating it with the Buddha, bodhi and bodhisattva” notions.

also speaks to the audience at several levels. Emmrich (2016: 191) explains one of the functions of the story to be “to encourage the female listeners to picture themselves as Madrī and to put them into a position where they are forced to negotiate among the pressures of their own household duties, their own affective marital expectations, and the anxieties produced by the aspirations of their more or less bodhisattvalike husbands ... the telling of this story is as much an appeal to domestic piety as an occasion when domestic unhappiness, its relentless and seemingly unchangeable nature, finds a public place of articulation.” Heim (2003: 538) notes that “the text gives direct cues — and permission — to its hearer to feel apprehension and ambivalence”.

These features taken together provide a meaningful background to the success of the tale in the Buddhist traditions. Besides being apt for popular teaching, however, the occurrence of the same tale in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* points to the fact that entertaining stories were not lost on the monastic reciters and their brethren.<sup>58</sup>

Here it also needs to be kept in mind that Mūlasarvāstivāda monastics would quite probably have perceived the story of Viśvantara as a factual account of something that actually happened, comparable to a background story in the *Vinaya* that purports to explain why the Buddha promulgated a particular *pārājika* rule. Both would have been experienced as equally “real”.

In relation to the tale that depicts the promulgation of the first *pārājika* rule concerning celibacy, I have argued that the differences that emerge from a comparative study of this story in various *Vinayas* show that this type of narration has to be understood in terms of their teaching function in the context of legal education, in the sense that such stories reflect the needs and concerns of those responsible for the teaching, transmission, and codification of the different *Vinayas*, but not necessarily what actually happened on the ground.<sup>59</sup>

The present study, together with another study of the background narration to the *pārājika* on killing and assisting in suicide,<sup>60</sup> further confirms the need to consider *Vinaya* narrative on its own terms. Viśvantara’s exploits form part of the narrative embedding of what for the early Buddhist monastic community

---

<sup>58</sup> The attraction of entertainment evident in *Vinaya* narrative can fruitfully be related to art, where Zin 2015: 136 observes that “one of the main characteristics of early Buddhist art is the placement of ... representations relevant for enlightenment ... next to depictions of a merely auspicious nature, which are propitious for material prosperity but not for enlightenment.”

<sup>59</sup> Anālayo 2012: 416 and 424.

<sup>60</sup> Anālayo 2014b.



appears to have been a major crisis: the schism attempt by Devadatta. It thus stands on a par with the narrations related to the *pārājika* rules on celibacy and killing. Nevertheless, the story of Viśvantara hardly gives us a historically accurate picture of events that took place in ancient India. What it does offer, instead, is a window on the concerns, needs, and attitudes of those responsible for the transmission and final shape of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, and by extension of *Vinaya* literature in general. It therefore seems to me vital that a mode of reading *Vinaya* narrative is found that proceeds beyond the naïve literalism with which at times this type of literature is approached and which is able to accommodate similarly the depiction of events leading to a monastic misdeed as well as a *jātaka* like the one studied in this paper.

## Conclusion

Basic elements of the tale known in the Pāli tradition as the *Vessantara-jātaka* appear to reflect the influence of a setting imbued with brahminical values and stand in conversation with that, in particular with the trope, recurrent in the *Mahābhārata*, of the host's duty to provide all and everything a begging brahmin might ask for. The adoption of this story in the Buddhist tradition naturally finds its home within the scheme of perfections a bodhisattva is expected to achieve during the path to Buddhahood. As a result of this adoption, some aspects of the story contrast to the early Buddhist normative ethical perspective.

The popularity of the tale among monastic teachers would quite probably have been inspired by the potential of employing the tale's depiction of relentless generosity to encourage giving among lay supporters. The attraction held by the same tale among Buddhist audiences would to some extent be the result of the fertile field of friction caused by the transposition of the basic plot into the setting of the perfections, allowing room for the articulation of ambivalence and the cathartic experiencing of related emotions.

The employment of the tale in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* points to twin concerns of monastic story telling: fleshing out legal concerns through narrative embellishment and providing a convenient stock of tales for preaching purposes, especially for ensuring the continuity of a mendicant tradition by encouraging generosity. Together with the background narration to various rules, the occurrence of *jātaka* tales in *Vinaya* literature reflects related aspects in the training of monastics and alerts to the potential as well as the limitations of such tales for reconstructing the actual situation on the ground.

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Cp	<i>Cariyāpiṭaka</i>
Cp-a	<i>Cariyāpiṭaka-aṭṭhakathā</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i>
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
Pj	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i>
SHT	Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)

## References

- Alsdorf, Ludwig 1957: “Bemerkungen zum Vessantara-Jātaka”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens*, 1: 1–70.
- Alsdorf, Ludwig 1977: “Das Bhūridatta-Jātaka. Ein anti-brahmanischer Nāga-Roman”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 21: 25–55.
- Anālayo 2009: “The Development of the Pāli Udāna Collection”, *Bukkyō Kenkyū*, 37: 39–72.
- Anālayo 2010a: *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal*, Hamburg: Hamburg University Press.
- Anālayo 2010b: “The Influence of Commentarial Exegesis on the Transmission of Āgama Literature”, in *Translating Buddhist Chinese, Problems and Prospects*, K. Meisig (ed.), 1–20, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

- Anālayo 2012: “The Case of Sudinna: On the Function of Vinaya Narrative, Based on a Comparative Study of the Background Narration to the First Pārājika Rule”, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 19: 396–438.
- Anālayo 2013: “A Note on the Term Theravāda”, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 30.2: 216–235.
- Anālayo 2014a: *The Dawn of Abhidharma*, Hamburg: Hamburg University Press.
- Anālayo 2014b: “The Mass Suicide of Monks in Discourse and Vinaya Literature”, (with an addendum by Richard Gombrich), *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 7: 11–55.
- Anālayo 2016: “Selected Madhyama-āgama Passages and their Pāli Parallels”, *Dharma Drum Journal of Buddhist Studies* (forthcoming).
- Appleton, Naomi 2010: *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism, Narrating the Bodhisatta Path*, Surrey: Ashgate.
- Appleton, Naomi and S. Shaw 2015: “Introduction”, in *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha, The Mahānipāta of the Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, N. Appleton and S. Shaw, 1–49, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Bechert, Heinz and Wille, K. 2004: *Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden, Teil 9*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner.
- Benveniste, Émile 1946: *Vessantara Jātaka, texte sogdien, édité, traduit e commenté*, Paris: Paul Geuthner.
- Black, Brian 2007: *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upaniṣads*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Black, Brian 2011: “Ambaṭṭha and Śvetaketu: Literary Connections Between the Upaniṣads and Early Buddhist Narratives”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79.1: 136–161.
- Chandra Das, Sarat and P.H.M. Vidyabhushaṇa 1888: *Avadāna Kalpalatā, A Collection of Legendary Stories about the Bodhisattvas by Kshemendra*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.
- Chavannes, Édouard 1911 (vol. 3): *Cinq Cents Contes et Apologues, Extraits du Tripiṭaka Chinois et Traduits en Français*, Paris: Ernest Leroux.
- Collins, Steven 1998: *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities, Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Collins, Steven 2016: “Introduction, Dramatis Personae, and Chapters in the Vessantara Jātaka”, in *Readings of the Vessantara Jātaka*, S. Collins (ed.), 1–35, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cone, Margaret and R. Gombrich 1977: *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara, A Buddhist Epic*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Das Gupta, Kabita 1978: *Viśvantarāvadāna, Eine buddhistische Legende, Edition eines Textes auf Sanskrit und auf Tibetisch, Eingeleitet und übersetzt*, Ph.D. thesis, Berlin: Freie Universität.
- Dresden, Mark J. 1955: “The Jātakastava or ‘Praise of the Buddha’s Former Births’, Indo-Scythian (Khotanese) Text, English Translation, Grammatical Notes, and Glossaries”, *Transactions of the American Oriental Society, New Series*, 45.5: 397–508.
- Durgāprasād, Pandit and K.P. Parab 1930: *The Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadevabhata*, (revised by W.L.S. Paṇṣīkar), Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press.
- Durt, Hubert 1999: “The Offering of the Children of Prince Viśvantara/Sudāna in the Chinese Tradition”, *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies*, 2: 266–231.
- Durt, Hubert 2000: “The Casting-off of Mādrī in the Northern Buddhist Literary Tradition”, *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies*, 3: 133–158.
- Dutt, Nalinaksha 1984: *Gilgit Manuscripts, Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayavastu, vol. III part 4*, Delhi: Sri Satguru.
- Emmrich, Christoph 2016: “Vessantara Opts Out, Newar Versions of the Tale of the Generous Prince”, in *Readings of the Vessantara Jātaka*, S. Collins (ed.), 183–209, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fick, Richard 1926: “Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Vessantara-Jātaka”, in *Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte Indiens, Festgabe Hermann Jacobi zum 75. Geburtstag (11. Februar 1925) dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern*, W. Kirfel (ed.), 145–159, Bonn: F. Klopp.
- Findly, Ellison Banks 2003: *Dāna, Giving and Getting in Pali Buddhism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Gabaude, Louis 2016: “Readers in the Maze, Modern Debates about the Vessantara Story in Thailand”, in *Readings of the Vessantara Jātaka*, S. Collins (ed.), 37–52, New York: Columbia University Press.

- Gethin, Rupert 1992: *The Buddhist Path to Awakening: A Study of the Bodhi-Pakkhīyā Dhammā*, Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Gnoli, Raniero 1978 (vol. 2): *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17<sup>th</sup> and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- Gombrich, Richard F. 1971/2008: *Buddhist Precept and Practice, Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Gombrich, Richard 1985: “The Vessantara Jātaka, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Dasaratha Jātaka”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105.3: 427–437.
- Gombrich, Richard F. 2003: “Obsession with Origins”, in *Approaching the Dhamma, Buddhist Texts and Practice in South and Southeast Asia*, A.M Blackburn and J. Samuels (ed.), 3–15, Seattle: Pariyatti Editions.
- Hahn, Michael 2011: *Poetical Vision of the Buddha’s Former Lives, Seventeen Legends from Haribhaṭṭa’s Jātakamālā*, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.
- Heim, Maria 2003: “The Aesthetics of Excess”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 71.3: 531–554.
- Hopkins, E. Washburn 1932: “The Oath in Hindu Epic Literature”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 54.4: 316–337.
- Insler, Stanley 1989/1990: “The Shattered Head Split and the Epic Tale of Śakuntalā”, *Bulletin d’Études Indiennes*, 7/8: 97–139.
- Jamison, Stephanie W. 1996: *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer’s Wife, Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kern, Hendrik 1891: *The Jātaka-mālā or Bodhisattvāvadāna-mālā by Ārya-çūra*, Boston, Mass: Ginn & Company.
- Ladwig, Patrice 2016: “Emotions and Narrative, Excessive Giving and Ethical Ambivalence in the Lao Vessantara Jātaka”, in *Readings of the Vessantara Jātaka*, S. Collins (ed.), 53–80, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lamotte, Étienne 1949/1981 (vol. 2): *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste.
- Lenz, Timothy 2003: *A New Version of the Gāndhārī Dharmapada and a Collection of Previous-Birth Stories, British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments 16 + 25*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- Lienhard, Siegfried 1978: “La légende du prince Visvantara dans la tradition népalaise”, *Arts Asiatiques*, 34: 139–149 and 151–156.
- Lüders, Heinrich 1897/1940: “Die Sage von Rṣyaśṛṅga”, in *Philologica Indica, Ausgewählte kleine Schriften von Heinrich Lüders, Festgabe zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 25. Juni 1939 dargebracht von Kollegen, Freunden und Schülern*, 1–43, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Lüders, Heinrich 1904/1940: “Die Jātakas und die Epik. Die Kṛṣṇa-Sage”, in *Philologica Indica, Ausgewählte kleine Schriften von Heinrich Lüders, Festgabe zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 25. Juni 1939 dargebracht von Kollegen, Freunden und Schülern*, 80–106, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Matsumura Hisashi 1980: *Four Avadānas from the Gilgit Manuscript*, Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University.
- Mukherjee, Biswadeb 1966: *Die Überlieferung von Devadatta dem Widersacher des Buddha in den Kanonischen Schriften*, München: Kitzinger.
- Norman, K.R. 1981/1991: “Notes on the Vessantara-jātaka”, in *Collected Papers, Volume II*, K.R. Norman (ed.) 172–186, Oxford: Pali Text Society.
- Sakaki Ryōzaburō 1916/1962: 翻譯名義大集, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation.
- Sander, Lore and E. Waldschmidt 1980: *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden, Teil IV*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.
- Schlingloff, Dieter 1963: “Zur Interpretation des Prātimokṣasūtra”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 113: 536–551.
- Schlingloff, Dieter 1981: “Erzählung und Bild: Die Darstellungsformen von Handlungsabläufen in der europäischen und indischen Kunst”, *Beiträge zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie*, 3: 87–213.
- Schlingloff, Dieter 2000: *Ajanta Handbook of Paintings, Narrative Wall-paintings, Vol. I Interpretation*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Shaw, Sarah 2015: “The Birth Story of Vessantara (Vessantara-jātaka), Introduction”, in *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha, The Mahānipāta of the Jātakatthavaṇṇanā, Volume Two*, N. Appleton and S. Shaw, 507–534, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Shi Huifēng 2015: “Chiastic Structure of the Vessantara jātaka, Textual Criticism and Interpretation through Inverted Parallelism”, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 32.1: 143–159.



- Silk, Jonathan A. 2007: “Good and Evil in Indian Buddhism: The Five Sins of Immediate Retribution”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 35: 253–286.
- Śivadatta, M.P. and K.P. Parab 1901: *The Bṛihatkaṭhāmañjarī of Kshemendra*, Bombay: Nirṇaya-sāgara Press.
- Skilling, Peter 2000: “Vasubandhu and the Vyākhyāyukti Literature”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 23.2: 297–350.
- Spiro, Melford E. 1970/1982: *Buddhism and Society, A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tournier, Vincent 2012: “The Mahāvastu and the Vinayaṭīka of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins”, *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, 15: 87–104.
- Tucci, Giuseppe 1949 (vol. 2): *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, Roma: Libreria dello Stato.
- von Hinüber, Oskar 1998: *Entstehung und Aufbau der Jātaka-Sammlung, Studien zur Literatur des Theravāda-Buddhismus I*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.
- Witzel, Michael 1987: “The Case of the Shattered Head”, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, 13/14: 363–415.
- Yao Fumi 2012: “Problems in the sTog Palace Manuscript of the Bhaiṣajyavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya”, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, 60.3: 1189–1193.
- Yao Fumi 2015: “A Preliminary Report on the Newly Found Sanskrit Manuscript Fragments of the Bhaiṣajyavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya”, *Indian Logic*, 8: 289–303.
- Young, R.F. and G.P.V. Somaratna 1996: *Vain Debates, The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien.
- Zin, Monika 2015: “Pictures of Paradise for Good Luck and Prosperity: Depictions of Themes Irrelevant for Enlightenment in the Older Buddhist Tradition (with Special Reference to the Paintings of Ajanta)”, in *Mani-Sushma Archaeology and Heritage, Dr. B.R. Mani Festschrift, Vol. 1*, V. Kumar and B. Rawat (ed.), 125–147, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.