

Translation Strategies for the *Cūḷa-Māluṅkya Sutta* and its Chinese Counterparts¹

Jayarava Attwood

jayarava@gmail.com

Translations of the *Cūḷa-Māluṅkya Sutta* provide some interesting comparisons of strategies used by contemporary English translations and 4th century Chinese translators, particularly with respect to rare and unusual words.

Introduction

The *Cūḷa-Māluṅkya Sutta* (MN 63; MN I.426-432) contains an allegory of a man shot by an arrow. He refuses treatment before finding out all the details of the person who shot him, and the weapon he was shot with, and dies because of the delay. Just so, the Buddha urges his followers not to dwell on unanswerable questions or trivial details. It does not matter whether or not the world is finite, or whether or not a Tathāgata exists after death. What matters is the business of liberation. This passage is found at MN I.429.

Previous studies of MN 63 have unsurprisingly focussed almost entirely on the compelling message of the text rather than the details of this allegory. Even Anālayo's (2011b) comprehensive study of the Chinese counterparts of the Pāli

¹I'm indebted to suggestions from Bryan Levman of the Yahoo Pāli Group in answer to questions posted there, and to Maitiu O'Ceileachair for comments on the blog post that formed the basis of this article, and for further clarifications on Middle Chinese usage. I'm also grateful to the anonymous reviewers and Richard Gombrich for their helpful comments. Any remaining errors and infelicities are, of course, mine.

Majjhima Nikāya makes no mention of the archery terminology. However, this passage contains a number of interesting and rare words related to archery.

A comparison of various translations highlights strategies used by translators faced by difficulties in their text. Translators ancient and modern adopt a similar range of approaches. The problem here is similar to the one dealt with by Murray B. Emeneau (1953: 77): “Philologists working with Sanskrit texts seem to have been quite innocent of [archery] knowledge”... reflecting a fairly general unconcern of the Indian authors.” Emeneau’s concern with realistic translation (1953, 1962) is one the present author shares. Paying attention to archery and casting our net a little wider allows us to propose new translations of some of the problematic Pāli terms.

This article will compare three English translations of MN 63 (Horner 1959; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 2001; and Gethin 2008),² with the two versions in the Chinese *Tripitaka*:³

箭喻經 *Jiàn yù jīng* (*Arrow Simile Sūtra*), T 1.26 (p0804a21), (二二一) 中阿含例品 (*Èr èr yī Zhōng ā hán, Lì pǐn*. *Madhyāgama* 221, Chapter on Examples.

佛說箭喻經 *Fú shuō jiàn yù jīng* (*The Buddha’s Teaching on the Arrow Simile Sūtra*) T 1.94 (p.0917c21)

Jiàn yù jīng (MĀ 221) was translated into Chinese by a Sarvāstivāda⁴ Tripitaka master called Gautama Saṅghadeva from Kashmir in the Eastern Jin dynasty ca. Dec 397 – Jan 398 CE. The consensus, based on transliteration of personal names and translation mistakes, is that that original text was in a Prakrit (Minh Chau 1964, Bapat 1969, Enomoto 1986, Anālayo 2011a); however, Oscar von Hinüber (1982, 1983) goes further and argues that the text was in the Gāndhārī language written in Kharoṣṭhī script. *Fó shuō jiàn yù jīng* (T 94) is also from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 CE), though the name of the translator and the exact date of translation are lost.

²Passing reference will also be made to translations by Tan (2003) and Thanissaro (2012).

³According to Anālayo (2011b: 353 and n.71) “some portions are also cited in **Mahāprajñā-pāramitā-(upadeśa-śāstras...* T 1509 at T XXV 170a8-b1, translated in Lamotte 1949/1981: 913-915.” However, the citations are more of a paraphrase and do not shed light on the problems addressed in this article.

⁴The attribution to the source text to the Sarvāstivāda is discussed by Minh Chau (1964) and Enomoto (1986).

Buddhaghosa’s commentary on this passage in the *Papañcasūdanī* (Ps iii.141-143) is only about one third as long as the passage itself. He limits himself to glossing some of the more obscure words, and then not always helpfully. The traditional *Ṭīkā* (MNT) says even less.

The extensive writings by G. N. Pant on Indian weaponry and particularly Indian archery point us to a number of potentially useful Sanskrit references. Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra* (AŚ) is a manual written for running an empire and provides us with several insights into the materials used for archery.⁵ Based on a traditional equation of Kauṭilya with Cāṇakya, a minister in the court of the Maurya king Candragupta, the text has often been dated to the 4th century BC. This identification is disputed, however, and the full text is more realistically dated early in the common era, though it includes older material.⁶ This is still broadly the same milieu as that in which the Buddhist texts were composed. Archery is also a popular topic in the Sanskrit epics, which provide some help with names. Pant also refers to the *Dhanurveda*, a text on archery and warfare that he dates to ca. 1000 BCE. Purima Ray (1991: 12) notes that the text is more likely to be from the 17th century CE,⁷ though it does seem to contain material similar in scope and content to the *Arthaśāstra*, and use traditional archery terminology.

The Text in my Translation

“Suppose a man was struck by an arrow thickly smeared with poison.⁸ His friends, colleagues and relations would engage an arrow-removing physician to treat him. And suppose the man would say: ‘as long as I do not know whether that man who shot me is warrior, priest, merchant, or peasant... his name and clan... whether he is tall, short, or middling... of dark, brown or fair complexion... and whether he comes from this or that village, town or city, I will

⁵Referenced by Singh (1965) and Pant (1970, 1978a, 1978b). There is a critical Edition (AŚ) and three published translations: Shamasastri (1951), Kangle (1963) and Olivelle (2013).

⁶Trautmann (1971) argues for ca. 150 CE and Olivelle (2013) for between 50 and 125 CE. On this subject also see Johannes Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the shadow of Brahminism*, esp. pp.67ff.

⁷It contains references to Tantric rites and mantras as well as astrology. It also contains reference to the term *chatrapati* i.e. *kṣetrapati* ‘Emperor’ which came into vogue with the Marāthā hero, Shivaji. However, the term does occur in the 12th-century *Hitopadeśa*.

⁸*Savisena gālhapalepanena*. References to arrows smeared with poison are common in Indian literature (Elmy 1969; Pant 1970: 63; Singh 1965: 106). The usual Sanskrit term for such poison was *alakta*; here the Pali is *visa* = Skt *viṣa*.

not take out the arrow.⁹ And as long as I do not know whether I was shot with a simple bow or a composite bow; whether the bow-string fibre was from giant milkweed, hemp, sinew, or mother-in-law’s tongue; whether the arrow shaft was *muñja* grass, bamboo or wood;¹⁰ whether the arrow was fletched with the feathers of a vulture, heron, falcon, or peacock; and bound with cow, buffalo, or deer sinew; and whether the arrowhead was a simple point, a blade, barbed, broad and flat, or leaf shaped, I will not take out the arrow.’ That man would die before all this was known, Māluṅkyaputta.” (MN i.429-430).

This translation reflects the comments below and attempts to smooth out some of the difficulties noted in earlier English translations and use real archery terminology.

Is there a Doctor in the House?

The first thing that strikes us is that the man’s friends and relations are said to ...*bhisakkam sallakattam upatthapeyyum*. The verb is *upatthapeti* a causative form of *upatthahati* ‘to stand near, to attend, nurse’; from *upa-* ‘near’ + $\sqrt{sthā}$ ‘stand’; and it’s in the optative mood so *upatthapeyyum* means ‘they would cause to attend’. Horner translates *bhisakkam sallakattam* as “physician and surgeon”; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (henceforth Ñ&B) render this as “brought a surgeon to treat him” (p.534), which as far as I can see leaves out the word *sallakattam* altogether; cf. Gethin (2008) “summon a doctor to see the arrow”, which acknowledges the *salla* part of *sallakattam*, but there is no verb ‘to see’ here!

In this passage *bhisakka* ‘a doctor’ is the patient of the verb. So his relations ‘would cause a doctor... to attend’. In a medical context Monier Williams defines *śalya* (Pāli *salla*) as “any extraneous substance lodged in the body and causing pain (e.g. a splinter, pine, stone in the bladder, etc.)”, and for *śalyakartṭṛ* gives “cutter or remover of splinters, a surgeon”.¹¹ PED sv. *salla* cites this passage (M I.429) for the

⁹We expect that the surgeon will be the one to remove the arrow and so Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (534-5) “I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow...” However this whole passage is in the first person: “As long as I don’t know (*yāva na... jānāmi*)... by who I was shot (*yen’ amhi viddho*)’ I will not take out (*na tāvāhaṃ... āharissāmi*) the arrow.”

¹⁰Here I have departed completely from the Pāli and adopted the reading of T 94 because the Pāli was not credible in this context.

¹¹My thanks to Richard Gombrich for helping me to simplify and clarify this discussion.

definition of *sallakatta* as ‘surgeon’. DOP confirms that Pāli *katta* in this context is Sanskrit *kartr̥* ‘one who cuts’. Thus, *bhisakkaṃ sallakattaṃ* ought to mean ‘a physician who is a surgeon’ or ‘an arrow removing doctor’. This is supported by MĀ 221 箭醫 *jiàn yī* ‘arrow surgeon’ and T 94 毒箭師 *dú jiàn shī* ‘a poisoned arrow master’

Now we will look at each of the parts of the bow and arrows as they appear in the text.

The Bow

The text describes two types of bow (*dhanu*): *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa*. Horner gives “spring-bow and cross-bow” (with an acknowledgement that this is a tentative translation)¹²; Ñ&B have ‘long bow or cross bow’; Gethin does not translate.

Dhanu (Skt. *dhanus*) means ‘an arc’ and *indradhanu* ‘Indra’s bow’ is a name for a rainbow. PED suggests it may be related to words for trees via Old High German *tanna* ‘fir tree’, cf. *dāru* ‘wood’ and *dārava* ‘wooden’. It is the most general term for a bow.

PED suggests that the word *cāpa*, by contrast, comes from a root meaning ‘to quiver’, ultimately from a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root **qēp*. Mayrhofer (1956) suggests **kēp* or **kamp*. The root **kēp* does not occur in standard PIE sources, but **kamp* does, and it means ‘to bend’ (AHD/IEL). However, in Pāli *cāpa* appears to mean ‘a type of bow’ as it is only used in this context.

A *kodaṇḍa* is according to PED a ‘cross bow’ though this is doubtful. Cross-bows were not much used in India (Emeneau 1953: 78). DOP merely has ‘a kind of bow’. MW and Böhtlingk & Roth both define it as ‘bow’ with no mention of ‘crossbow’. Mayrhofer makes the obvious point that *daṇḍa* is a stick, or staff,¹³ but adds that *ko-* here is a pejorative prefix (a form of Skt. *ku*) so that it must mean something like ‘bad stick’.¹⁴ The Chinese versions of the text do not mention

¹²“Spring-bow” is not a term in current use. I presume Horner means a self bow.

¹³Kuiper (1948: 77) speculates that *daṇḍa* might have originally meant ‘stripped of leaves’.

¹⁴Bryan Levman (personal communication) suggests that *kodaṇḍa* may be a loan word from Munda and may refer to the bows that Munda speaking peoples used. *Daṇḍa* is a loan word from Munda (Witzel 1999: 16; Kuiper 1948) and Mayrhofer suggests that the prefix *ko-* may also be. However, by the time MN 63 was composed, the word was thoroughly assimilated in Pāli and Sanskrit. There’s no suggestion that *daṇḍa* carries any connotation related to the word’s origin in Munda. Tan (2003) also takes up this idea and translates *kodaṇḍa* as “kodanda [a Munda bow]”. However, none of the sources he cites supports this: they don’t mention *kodaṇḍa*, only *daṇḍa*. Nor is his claim for the composite bow “appearing in 3rd millennium” [sic] supported by the source

the crossbow although the Chinese clearly had them by the time the translation was made. Alternatively, Pant (1970: 14) suggests that the shaft of the bow was specifically called *daṇḍa*, and *kodaṇḍa* may refer to this in some way. Another possibility is that it refers in some way to the *daṇḍa* as a unit of length of ca. 192 cm. There is no strong evidence either way.

DOP (sv *cāpa*) lists two other occurrences of the pair *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa* as types of bow, one in the *Vinaya* and one in a 12-13th century text, *Abhidhānapadīpikā*. The former could conceivably be influenced by this text, the latter seems definitely to reuse terms from this text, and thus they shed little or no light on our problem.

Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* says that bows are called *kārmuka*, *kodaṇḍa*, and *drūṇa*, which are made from *tāla*, *cāpa*, and *dārava* and *śārṅga* (wood and horn).¹⁵ However, these terms seem to be used in a variety of ways in different texts. Kauṭilya is usually interpreted as saying that the *kodaṇḍa* type of bow is made from *cāpa* (Sharmasastry 1951; Kangle 1963), which is problematic for interpreting MN 63. It's also possible that there were three types of bow, and three types of material that any of them could be made from. *Cāpa* is listed by Kauṭilya under types of *veṇu*, i.e. cane or bamboo (AŚ. 2.17.5).

Names for bows from the Epics include *dhanus*, *cāpa*, *śarāsana*, *kārmuka* and *śārṅga*. (Singh 102-3). Emeneau argues that 'horn' must mean 'composite' since bows made entirely from horn are impractical (1953: 80-81). The prose sections of the *Jātaka* mention bows made from ramshorn: *meṇḍakamahādhanum* (JA 2.88) and *meṇḍavisāṇadhanu* (JA 4.353).

MĀ 221 gives: Maclura tricuspidata aka silkworm thorn (柘 *zhè*), mulberry (桑 *sāng*) and zelkova tree (槻 *guī*); T 94 distinguishes three types of bows made from different kinds of wood (木 *mù*): *sal* (薩羅 *sà luó*), *tala* (多羅 *duō luó*), or 翅羅鶯掘梨 *chì luó yāng jué lí*.¹⁶

that he cites for it. In fact, Emeneau says with respect to when composite bows began to be used in India: "yet there is no evidence" (1953: 80).

¹⁵ *tālacāpadāravaśārṅgāṇi kārmukakodaṇḍadrūṇādhanūṃṣi*. AŚ 2.18.08. Kangle (1963: 151 n.8) explains that *dhanus* ought to be the general name for a bow, which leaves only three more specific types of bow to match the four materials. So either *dhanus* is a name for a bow made of horn, which is the solution chosen by Sharmasastry (1951); or, as Kangle himself interprets, *drūṇa* is a composite bow made from wood and horn (which would fit the reality of composite bows).

¹⁶ This name is almost certainly a transliteration of an Indic word (it makes no sense as Chinese). However, I've been unable to determine what kind of wood it is. 翅羅鶯掘梨 Middle Chinese pronunciation would be: *si ra anggu li*. (DDB) We would expect a Sanskrit word like **kilāṅguli*

A ‘simple bow’ made from a single piece of cane, bamboo or other wood is technically a ‘self bow’.¹⁷ Such bows are still in use in India. This can be contrasted with a bow which uses various backing and reinforcing materials, which is called a ‘composite bow’. This pair of terms make a plausible set of renderings of the Pāli *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa*.

The Chinese texts include a line about the binding of the bow (弓扎 *gōng zhā*), suggesting that they had composite bows in mind. The materials are MĀ 221: cow sinew (牛筋 *niú jīn*), roe deer sinew (獐鹿筋 *zhāng lù jīn*), and silk (絲 *sī*); while in T 94 we find: cow sinew (牛筋 *niú jīn*), sheep sinew (羊筋 *yáng jīn*), or yak sinew (犛牛筋 *máo niú jīn*).

Also after the bow string, with no Pāli counterpart, the Chinese texts mention the colour of the bow (弓色 *gōng sè*).¹⁸ The colours are in MĀ 221: black (黑 *hēi*); white (白 *bái*); red (赤 *chì*), yellow (黃 *huáng*); in T 94: white bone (白骨 *bái gǔ*), black lacquer (黑漆 *hēi qī*), or red paint (赤漆 *chì qī*). A composite bow requires protection from the elements because of the glues and sinews holding it together. Some were encased in leather; the Chinese apparently painted theirs.

Bow String

The choices of bowstring material are: *akka*, *saṅṭha* (or *saṅha*), *nhāru*, *maruvā* and *khīrapaṇṇin*. PED is quite good at identifying plant names, though some of them have been revised since it was written, so we have a good idea what most of these are.

Pāli *akka* (Skt. *arka*) is *Calotropis gigantean*. Various called in English ‘giant milkweed’, ‘calotrope’, ‘crown flower’, ‘swallow-wort’¹⁹, and ‘apple of Sodom.’ It is chiefly known nowadays for its milky sap, which has medicinal properties, and for its attractive flowers. In the past the leaves were used in Vedic ceremonies. It can act as a host plant for monarch butterflies. Buddhaghosa informs us that bowstrings were made from the bark (*vāka*) of the *akka* (presumably this is why N&B translate ‘bark’) though as a flowering shrub it doesn’t have true bark, so here it must mean the outer layers of the stems. Compare the no-

‘post-finger’ Cf Pāli *kīlāguḷa* ‘a ball for playing with’ (DOP). Skt. *karāṅguli* ‘a finger of the hand’ (MW); Marathi *karāṅgālī* ‘little finger’.

¹⁷ Also spelled ‘selfbow’ and ‘self-bow’.

¹⁸ In T 94 we find 弓把 *gōng bà* (bow grip) instead of 弓色 *gōng sè*: 把 *bà* (grip) may well be a mistake for 色 *sè* (colour).

¹⁹ However, if you look up ‘swallow wort’, *Calotropis gigantea* is not among the plants listed.

tion of ascetics wearing the *vākacīra*, usually translated as ‘bark garment’, which presumably is from cloth woven of rough fibre produced from this or a similar source. Bark-cloth might be compared with woven jute.²⁰ According to the *Udāna-Atṭakathā*, Bāhiya Dārucīriya (aka Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth Garment) used *akka* stalks (*akkanālāni*) to make a robe and shawl (*nivāsana-pāvuraṇāni*) to clothe himself.²¹

The next term is Pāli *saṅṭha*²² or *saṅha*.²³ The former is defined in PED as ‘a reed (used for bow strings)’; while the latter means ‘smooth, soft’. Thus, *saṅha* seems likely to be an error. However, I can’t find any more information on *saṅṭha* or a Sanskrit equivalent. It appears to be a *hapax legomenon* and PED has defined it from the context here. Ps glosses with *veṇuvilīva*: meaning ‘slivers of bamboo’. Bamboo is certainly a source of strong fibres that can be woven. MĀ 221 mentions bamboo (竹 *zhú*) as a material for arrow shafts, but not for bowstrings, though Kauṭilya does list it amongst materials for bowstrings (see below). I suspect that Buddhaghosa was also puzzled by *saṅha*. A strong possibility is that *saṅṭha/saṅha* are variations of *saṅa/sāṅa* (Skt. *śaṅa*): ‘hemp’ (*Cannabis sativa*), or ‘sunn’ hemp (*Crotolaria juncea*) aka ‘Bengal flax’. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Kauṭilya mentions *śaṅa* as a bowstring material (Pant 1978a: 116).

Pāli *nhāru* is a variant spelling of *nahāru* (Skt. *snāyu*) meaning ‘sinew’, the connective tissues from animals, particularly tendons.

Pāli *maruvā* is a plant of the genus *Sanseveria* (also spelt *Sansevieria*) specifically *S. roxburghiana*. One of the characteristic plants of this genus is the ornamental ‘mother-in-law’s tongue’ (*S. trifasciata*). It is sometimes called ‘bowstring hemp’, though not related to the cannabis plant. Other names for the genus include: dragon’s tongue, jinn’s tongue, snake tongue, etc. Some species are excel-

²⁰Emeneau (1962) explores the parallel Sanskrit term *valka* in Sanskrit, which describes the clothing worn by Brahmin ascetics, and concludes that there are two possibilities for what this means. Both use the *bast* or inner bark of plants. On one hand, the fibres are pounded into cloth in the manner of the Pacific island tradition of ‘*tapa* cloth’; and on the other, the same fibres are used to weave a rough cloth. Both are known from Indian ethnographic studies. The *tapa* style cloth, however, is only known amongst some remote tribes in Assam, whereas woven cloth is relatively common amongst Munda speaking peoples. Birch bark is sometimes put forward as an explanation, but it is not realistic, as birch bark is too fragile to use for clothing. On balance, I think that a jute-like cloth is more likely.

²¹*akkanālāni chinditvā vākehi palivethetvā nivāsanapāvuraṇāni katvā acchādesi* (UdA 77).

²²Sri Lankan and Pali Text Society editions of the *Tipiṭaka*.

²³Sixth Council edition of the *Tipiṭaka*.

lent sources of fibre, and used for making rope (and bow-strings) in India and Africa.²⁴

The last item in the list is Pāli *khīrapaṇṇin*, but this is simply a synonym for *akka*; literally meaning ‘having leaves with milky sap’. All of the English translations treat this as a distinct term. Horner gives “a tree”; Ñ&B “bark”; Gethin “milk leaf tree”.

According to Kāuṭilya, bowstrings (*gyā*) were made of *mūrvā*, *arka*, *śana*, *gavedhu*,²⁵ *venu* (bamboo) and *snāyu*.²⁶ This is similar to the Pāli list. Apparently the *Atharvaveda* recommended silk²⁷ or, failing that, sinew from cow, buffalo or deer; cotton and bamboo fibres were the best substitutes, and hemp and *arka* were better than nothing (Pant 1970: 63). In MĀ 221 the bowstring (弓弦 *gōngxián*) might be made of sinew (筋 *jīn*), silk (絲 *sī*), ramie (紵 *zhù* = *Boehmeria nivea*) or hemp (麻 *má*); while in T 94, all the various plants are substituted with the kinds of sinew (筋 *jīn*) mentioned above for the bow binding.

Arrow Shaft

The shaft of the arrow (*kaṇḍa*) is the next thing that concerns us. Here we have two terms: *kaccha*²⁸ and *ropima*. PED suggests ‘reed’ (*kaccha*¹) which is consistent with what we would expect (given other sources), but this definition appears to be dependent on only this passage. DOP lists seven senses of *kaccha* none of which quite mesh with PED. However *kaccha*₁ is related to Skt. *kakṣa* which can mean ‘dry wood or grass’; *kaccha*₄ is ‘marshy ground’, where one might expect reeds to grow; or *kaccha*₅ ‘naturally grown’, which does seem to contrast *ropima*. Any of these might apply. Buddhaghosa comments “from mountain reeds or river reeds etc.” (*pabbatakaccha-nadikacchādīsu jātaṃ* Ps iii.142).

Pāli *ropima* means ‘what has been planted’. Buddhaghosa glosses “having sown, it is raised. [The arrow] was made after taking *sara* from a stand of *sara*.”²⁹

²⁴For an illustration of how fibres were obtained from such plants, see the website: primitive-ways.com.

²⁵*Coix barbata* Roxb. aka *Chionachne gigantean*. Common name ‘cane grass’ or ‘river grass’.

²⁶*mūrvārkaśanagavedhuvēnusnāyūni jyāḥ*. AŚ 2.18.09

²⁷It’s debateable when silk began to be widely used in India, but recent research shows silk production in India, using indigenous silk moths, dates from the Indus civilisation (Ball 2009).

²⁸CST has *gaccha* “a shrub or bush” in both MN 63 and Ps. PED *gaccha* ‘shrub, bush’ often in comparison with trees (*rukka*) and vines (*latā*). DOP points to a Skt. *guccha* (MW = *gutsa*) with the same meaning, but the additional connotation of ‘a bunch or bundle’.

²⁹*ropimanti ropetvā vaḍḍhitam. saravanato saram gahetvā kataṃ*. (Ps iii.142)

Pāli *sara* (Skt *śara*) is *Saccharum sara* (aka *muñja grass*) which sends up long (2m) tufted spears that can be made into arrows. The word *sara* can be used to mean ‘arrow’.

Horner translates *kaccha* and *ropima* as “reeds of this or that kind”; both N&B and Gethin, apparently following Ps, translate “wild” and “cultivated”. Granted that the words can be translated in this way, it is still hard to see how these two terms make sense here. Compare the Chinese translations.

MĀ 221 gives two kinds of arrow shaft (箭簞 *jiàn gǎn*): wood (木 *mù*) and bamboo (竹 *zhú*). T 94 has three options: *sara* wood aka *muñja* (舍羅木 *shěluó mù*), bamboo (竹 *zhú*), or *lāṅgālī* wood (羅蛾梨木 *luóélí mù*)³⁰. These are much more plausible materials for making arrows.

According to Kautilya, arrow shafts were made from bamboo, *muñja* grass, sticks, half iron, or wholly of iron (*veṇu*, *śara*, *śalākā*³¹, *daṇḍāsana*,³² or *nārāca*).³³ ‘Reed’ is also mentioned (Pant 1970: 63; Singh 1965: 104).³⁴ In fact, *veṇu* seems to refer to reed, cane or bamboo.

The Pāli is here puzzling at best. And very different from the Chinese texts, which, despite an uncertain transliteration, more closely reflect the *Arthaśāstra* and are more plausible generally. I have adopted a reading from T 94 in my translation.

³⁰ 羅蛾梨木 *luóélí mù* seems to be related to the word for ‘plough’ (Skt *lāṅgala*). The characters 羅 *luó* and 梨 *lí* are used to transliterate *ra/la/ṭa/ḍa* and *ṛ/ra/ri/li/ṭi/ḍa* sounds respectively. The Middle Chinese pronunciation of 蛾 *é* was *nje*, representing Skt *ṅga*. *Lāṅgala* derives from Proto-Munda **la-ṅal* or *na-ṅal*, since the Pāli form is *naṅgala* (Kuiper 1948: 127). Witzel claims borrowing must have been via a language local to the Panjab (and he claims to the Indus Civilisation) with the form **laṅgal* (1999: 25). Translation as ‘plough’ is confirmed by T 54.2130 (p0990c13) 羅蛾梨木 (應云耶伽梨 譯曰耕也) “羅蛾梨木 (should be transcribed as 耶伽梨, translated as plough 耕.)” *Lāṅgālī* occurs in AŚ, where it is thought by Shamasastri to mean Creeping primrose willow: *Jasseina repens* [sic] i.e. *Jessiea repens* aka *Ludwigia stolonifera* Olivelle (2013: 446). However, this plant is a native of South America and unsuitable for making arrows. Cf MW sv *lāṅgala* (ī) where none of the suggested plants are potential arrow shaft materials.

³¹ *śalākā* would seem to mean a small *śala* ‘staff, spear’. Olivelle (2013: 449) “If it does not refer to a particular kind of tree then it probably refers to splinters or strips of wood.”

³² According to Kangle, who edited the *Arthaśāstra*, *daṇḍāsana* means *ardhanārāca* ‘half-iron’. From the point of view of etymology, *daṇḍa* is ‘stick’, and *āsana* might be *Terminalia elliptica*, the Asna or Saaj tree.

³³ *veṇuśaraśalākādaṇḍāsanānārācāś ceṣavaḥ*. AŚ 2.18.10

³⁴ The type of reed is probably *Phragmites australis*, which grows in many places around the world. The stems can be 2–6 metres, and when dried are woody and rigid enough to make into arrows.

Fletching

For an arrow to fly true it needs to be fletched, that is, to have some stabilising fins or vanes, usually made from feathers, attached at its base. In our allegory, the feathers might have come from a vulture (*gijjha*), heron (*kaṅka*), falcon (*ku-lala*), peacock (*mora*), or *sithilahanu*. The first four are quite straightforward, but the last is a mystery. Horner gives “some other bird”. Ñ&B translate *sithilahanu* as ‘stork’, which we must give some closer attention. Gethin leaves the word untranslated.

The name *sithilahanu* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Canon. Buddhaghosa merely says “a bird of that name” (*evaṃnāmakassa pakkhino* Ps iii.142), suggesting he didn’t know the bird referred to.³⁵ The word is listed in PED, viz. *sithilahanu* ‘a kind of bird’ (based on this passage). Pāli *sithila* means ‘loose, lax’ and *hanu* means ‘jaw’. However, *Sithilahanu* is not in DOPN; nor is the Sanskrit (*śithirahanu/śithilahanu*) in MW or Apte. Searching PED electronically reveals no occurrence of the word ‘stork’ in the definitions. Buddhadatta’s *English-Pāli Dictionary* sv. stork gives ‘*bakavisesa*’ (i.e. a kind of heron); while Apte’s *English-Sanskrit dictionary* gives nothing like *sithilahanu* for ‘stork’.

If we now turn to the Chinese texts MĀ 221 translates 飄鷲毛 *piāo fǎng máo*,³⁶ eagle feathers (鷲鷲毛 *diāo jù máo*), rooster feathers (鷄雞毛 *kūn jī máo*),³⁷ crane feathers (鶴毛 *hè máo*). These are typical Chinese birds. T 94 records the birds as peacock (孔雀 *kǒngquè*), black crane (鶴鶴 *cāng hè*), or eagle (鷲 *jù*). 鶴鶴 is the black or grey crane (*Grus monacha*). So 鶴鶴 could correspond to heron or stork,³⁸ and indeed *G. monacha* could be said to more closely resemble a heron than a stork. And since the other birds don’t particularly match the Pāli list, there is no reason to assume that the Indic texts for MĀ 221 or T 94 had the same list of birds.

Ñ&B translated ‘stork’, and there is a suggestion that *sithilahanu* refers to the Asian open-billed stork (*Anastomus oscitans*). The Envis Centre on Avian Ecol-

³⁵The sub-commentary (MNṬ 2.64) has *sithilahanu nāma dattā kaṅṅo pataṅgo*. Tan (2003) translates “A silly angular winged being (?)”. Pāli *pataṅga* is not in PED, but the CST dictionary lists ‘a bird’ (c.f. Skt. *patanṅa* ‘flying; any flying insect’). *Pataṅga* only occurs in the later commentarial texts. The problem here is that *dattā*, if it is PED *dattā*, is not in the same case as *kaṅṅo* or *pataṅgo* and thus cannot be an adjective of either.

³⁶I have not found a plausible translation of 飄鷲.

³⁷“August Rooster” and “Chinese phoenix” is a mythical bird that is made up of parts of many different birds.

³⁸Tan (2003) overlooks this possibility and gives only 鶴 *hè* ‘crane’ as the Chinese counterpart.

ogy in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society lists “*shithil hanu bak*” as the Sanskrit name of the *A. oscitans*.³⁹ This is obvious a Hindi speaker’s reading of the Devanāgarī and ought to be *śithilahanubaka*. But where has this come from? The Pāli name *sithalahanu* means ‘slack jawed’, which might plausibly be a reference to the open billed stork since its lower beak does not fit the upper, leaving a gap in the middle. Ali & Ripley, in their authoritative guide to India birds (2001), give the Hindi name of *A. oscitans* as Gūnglā, Ghonghila, or Ghūngil. The Bengali names are given as Thonte Bhānga, Shāmukh Bhānga, Shāmukh Khol.⁴⁰ The Tamil name is *Naththai kuththi narai* ‘Snail Pecking Stork’. The Bihari name is given as *Dokar*. None of the modern Indian names of the bird resembles *sithilahanu*, either in form or content.

The earliest source I can find with *sithilahanu* = stork is a book on bird names by the celebrated Indian scholar Raghu Vīra (1949). He lists (entry 2215, p. 426) *Anastomus oscitans* as *ghomghāsā śithila-hanu* and then slightly below as *śithila baka*. Vīra does not list any Sanskrit sources, but in his notes he refers to an unpublished book by K. N. Dave seen in manuscript, which referred to the stork by this name. This book was subsequently published (posthumously) in 1985 as *Birds in Sanskrit Literature*. Dave tentatively, and speculatively, proposes a number of other candidate names for *A. oscitans* from Sanskrit literature, but these are by no means certain (1985: 395-6). Significantly, he does not list any Sanskrit text containing the name *śithilahanu*. However, he has noticed the Pāli bird name *sithilahanu*, which he translates as “having a lower mandible loose or relaxed” and says:

“I need hardly add that शिथिलहनु [*śithilahanu*] is a most fitting name and a correct rendering of the English name Open-bill for the bird.”
(396)

Dave makes the connection between the English and Pāli names then invents a connection to Sanskrit. This poetic leap is given the imprimatur of Raghu Vīra, becomes a ‘fact’, and is repeated in standard sources such as Dave’s own book. Pāli translators faced with an unusual word consult standard sources and thus *sithilahanu* comes to mean ‘stork’. But as far as I can tell, the relationship only ever existed in the imagination of K. N. Dave.

³⁹<http://www.bnhsenvis.nic.in/forms/subjectwisearea.aspx?MID=29&lid=883>

⁴⁰Meaning ‘beak beaker; mollusc breaker; or mollusc hollow (?)’. I’m indebted to a young Kolkata naturalist called Doro for help with the Bengali names: <http://doroanimalworld.blogspot.co.uk/2010/06/asian-openbill.html>

In Vedic texts “feathers of crow, swan, peacock, hawk, eagle, etc” were used to fletch the arrows (Pant 1970: 63). Singh (1965: 105) also mentions vulture feathers. Vulture is *gijjha* in Pāli (Skt *ḡḍhra*). Indeed, it seems that any large bird would suffice. We get no help here in finding our missing bird. The word *sithilahanu* appears to be lost to us unless some new evidence should emerge. I dropped the term in my translation since its absence does not affect the sense of the passage and the idea of a variety of donor birds is adequately conveyed without it.

Arrow Binding

Next, our man wants to know about the binding used for the feathers, and again we are left with some mysteries. The choices are the sinews of the cow (*gava*), buffalo (*mahimṣa*), something called *roruva* (or in CST *bherava*), and something called *semhāra*.

Roruva means ‘deer’. The two parts of this name are both from the root \sqrt{ru} ‘roar’. Male deer do roar in the rutting season, to attract mates and warn off rivals. *Roruva* is also the name of a hell realm (DOPN). Skt. *ruru* is a kind of antelope, but can refer to savage animals in general. The CST reading is *bherava* ‘fearful, terrible’, which Ps glosses as *kāḷasīha* ‘black lion’ (the Asiatic lion can apparently be a mottled black in colour). The syllable *bhe* seems to be an ancient misreading of *ro*.

Under *semhāra* PED says “some sort of animal (monkey?)”, noting that it is explained as *makkata* (monkey) by Buddhaghosa’s commentary. English translators all follow Buddhaghosa. The Sanskrit *markata* is also ‘the Indian crane, a spider, and a sexual position’ (MW). *Semhāra* is also a *hapax legomenon* in the Canon. There is no Sanskrit equivalent that I can find, unless *semhāra* is related to, or a dialectical form of, the Sanskrit *siṃha* ‘lion’ (Pāli ‘e’ is both the *guṇa* and *vṛddhi* grade of ‘i’); though note that the standard Pāli spelling is *sīha*. Like *sithilahanu*, the original meaning of this word seems to be lost to us.

Arrow bindings seem not to have been much of a concern for Vedic authors so we have no parallels to refer to here.

Arrowhead

The arrowheads have produced the least informative translations, but it’s possible to reconstruct what the terms might have meant by casting our net a bit wider

than PED, and by looking at the shapes that arrowheads traditionally take. In Pāli we have: *salla*, *khurappa*, *vekaṇḍa*, *nārāca*, *vaccha-danta*, and *karavīra-patta*. Horner reduces this list to “an (ordinary) arrow or some other kind”; Ñ&B are more adventurous and give “hoof-tipped or curved or barbed, or calf-toothed or oleander”, ignoring *salla* and *nārāca*. Gethin offers: “a barb, a razor-point, a *vekaṇḍa* type, iron, a ‘calf-tooth’, or an ‘oleander leaf’” Tan (2003) and Thanissaro (2012) largely follow Ñ&B, though Thanissaro takes “curved arrowhead”, which is just about comprehensible, and makes it “a curved arrow”, which is not.⁴¹ Buddhaghosa has no comment on this section of the text.

Of these terms, *nārāca* ‘iron’ seems to be the odd one out, since the name reflects the material rather than shape, and can be safely left out of the list. The specific mention of iron suggests that it was still a novel material for arrowheads, though the use of iron arrowheads is recorded much earlier.

The other names seem to concern the shape of the arrowhead. A diagram of the most likely shapes is included below (fig. 1).⁴² For example, *salla* is probably a simple point, possibly just a sharpened wooden shaft, hardened by fire (fig 1.1).

Khurappa (PED ‘hoof’) is, in fact, the Epic Skt. *kṣurapra* ‘knife edged’ arrow (Singh 1989: 105), and hence Ñ&B have read this too literally, or been misled by PED. Cone’s new DOP lists it under *khura1* ‘a razor or sharp blade’. Singh understands this to be “knife shaped” (fig 1.2) though Pant, on the basis of the *Dhanurveda*, reconstructs this as a half-circle with a straight leading edge. Such arrowheads are known; rather than being designed to pierce deeply, they slice and make a large entry wound like the ‘calf’s tooth’ (fig 1.4).

Vekaṇṇa ‘barbed’ is straightforward: the point has backward facing barbs making it difficult to withdraw (fig 1.3).

Vaccha-danta ‘calf’s tooth’ (Skt *vatsa-danta*) is mentioned in the epics and said to be in the shape of a calf’s tooth and extremely sharp (Singh 1989, p.105). The idea seems to depend on the outline of bovine front teeth seen front-on. The business end of this type of arrowhead is broad, flat and with a leading edge rounded rather than pointed; it must be designed to cut and slice rather than pierce (fig 1.4).

⁴¹ Arrows must be straight to hit their target reliably. Compare his translation of Dhammapada 33: “Quivering, wavering, hard to guard, to hold in check: the mind. The sage makes it straight — like a fletcher, the shaft of an arrow.” Thanissaro (2011)

⁴² I’ve consulted a range of sources for these drawings, including Elmy (1969) and Pant (1970, 1978a, 1978b), but have favoured forms from archaeological finds rather than the rather fanciful reconstructions in the *Dhanurveda*.

Finally we have *karavīra-patta* or ‘oleander leaf’. The shape of the oleander leaf is technically described as ‘narrow lanceolate’, i.e. a narrow, elongated oval coming to a sharp point at one end (fig 1.5). Such arrows were often designed to pierce armour.

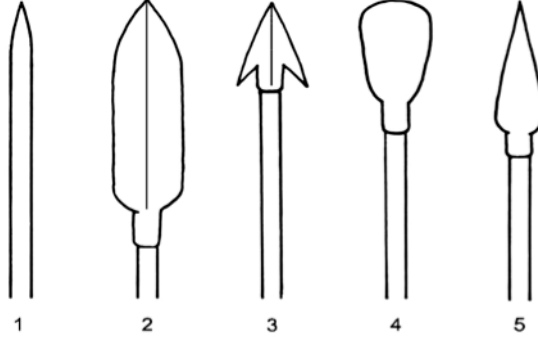


Figure 3

In Vedic literature, arrowheads (*mukha*) came in a variety of shapes and sizes for different purposes. The literary lists seem to be vastly more various than the archaeological finds and some seem rather fanciful (Pant 1978a: 97-11). Types from the epics include *kṣurapra* ‘blade’, *ardhacandra* ‘halfmoon’, *vatsadanta* ‘calf’s tooth’ and *bhalla* ‘spearhead’ (Singh 1965: 105). These and more are also listed in the *Dhanurveda* (Pant 1970: 56), which includes some fanciful representations of what the arrows might have looked like. Kauṭilya records arrowheads being made of iron, bone or wood in order to cut, slice or pierce, though he does not mention the shape of arrow heads.⁴³ Copper or bronze may still have been in use also.

MĀ 221 list three kinds of arrowhead 箭[金*適]⁴⁴: arrowhead (錐 *pī*), spear (矛 *máo*) and spear-knife (鉞刀 *pī dāo*). T 94 has iron (鐵 *tiě*), calf [tooth] (婆蹉 *pócuō*), 婆羅 *póluó*, 那羅 *nàluó*, or 伽羅鞞 *jiāluóbīng*. Of these, only ‘iron’ is clear. However, 婆蹉 *pócuō* appears to be a transliteration of Sanskrit *vatsa* ‘calf’, suggesting a counterpart of Pāli *vaccha-danta* ‘calf’s tooth’ (Burnouf & Bufetrille 2010: 518). 婆羅 *póluó* is found transliterating *bhara*, *pāla*, *pari*, *bāla*,

⁴³ *teṣāṃ mukhāni chedanabhedanatāḍanānyāyasāsthidāravāṇi*. AŚ 2.18.11

⁴⁴ [金*適] is CBETA’s way of displaying characters not found in Unicode, a frequent problem for Buddhist texts that often use archaic characters. 金 indicates that the word is to do with metal and 適 is the phonetic element. This character is a variant of 鎗, which means ‘arrowhead’.

vāra, *pāra*, and so on (DDB). Unfortunately, even with considerable ambiguity, this does not seem to suggest any of the Pāli terms from MN 63. 那羅 *nàluó* looks like a transliteration of *nara/nala* (vowel length uncertain) which suggests it might be an inadvertent repetition of *nārāca* or ‘iron’. 伽羅鞞 *jiāluóbǐng* may well be a transliteration of Sanskrit *karavī(ra)* and thus correspond to Pāli *karavīra-patta* ‘oleander leaf’.

Conclusion

I’m all too aware that the message of the text in question is that these are inconsequential details, which one ought not to spend time pondering instead of pursuing liberation. However, the subject of this article is Buddhist philology, not Buddhism *per se*.

In dealing with rare and unusual words, translators all seem to use a mix of strategies. This was just as true in the Eastern Jin Dynasty in China as it is in the modern West. There are some basic approaches: non-translation, elision and substitution.

Examples of non-translation include Gethin’s transliterated Pāli terms and the many transliterations found in T 94. While this approach appears to absolve the translator of responsibility for an untranslatable term, it is detrimental to readability. What is the reader to make of untranslated terms like *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa*? An ordinary Chinese speaker (of any era) trying to read T 94 would most likely find this passage incomprehensible. It is only through possessing the Pāli version, being alert to transliteration, and having a store of comparable examples that T 94 can be read at all. Even then, some of it has become extremely opaque with time. The examples of *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa* also show that even scientific etymology has limitations with proper names. When a word is very common, such as *dharma*, or already Anglicised, this strategy works well enough, but for rare terms it simply produces confusion.

Often a difficult word is simply left out or elided. This is not a common strategy but can be seen in Horner’s “reeds of this or that kind”. Ñ&B appear to leave *sallakatta* out, though perhaps because it appeared to represent a redundant repetition. We might expect overlooking to reduce over time, as when Ñ&B fill in the gap left by Horner. However there are times when leaving a word out of the translation improves the sense of the text – as when we leave ‘iron’ out of a list of arrowhead shapes, or overlook the untranslatable *sithilahanu*. One might argue that what a reader does not know cannot hurt them. Sometimes where elision

would make sense, translators avoid it. For example in the case of the synonyms for giant milk-weed, *akka* and *khīrapañṇin*, it would have made sense to translate it once, but translators cast about for a way to include both terms.

Substitution is a very common approach to difficult words, whether it is an informed choice made for comprehensibility or a guess in the absence of anything better. Examples include Horner’s “spring-bow and cross-bow” for *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa*; and the many substitutions employed in MĀ 221. If we follow K. R. Norman’s stricture to go beyond ‘What does it mean?’ and ask ‘Why or how does it mean it?’ (1997: 14), then we can say that the sentence means that there were several kinds of bows. In such a case listing some alternative types of bow that might be familiar to the reader, but also appropriate to the time and place, is a perfectly good solution to the problem of *cāpa/kodaṇḍa*. And in this light Gethin’s solution is less satisfactory, because while the average English speaking reader will easily cope with “long bow or cross bow”, what are they to make of “was it a *cāpa* type or a *kodaṇḍa* type?”

A guess will sometimes suffice. With respect to *cāpa* and *kodaṇḍa*, Horner guesses spring-bow and cross-bow, which are not bad, though with hindsight not very realistic. “Spring-bow” is no longer in current use or meant something else, and the cross bow was never popular in India. Emeneau is less forgiving when he refers to unrealistic translations such as ‘bark-garment’ and ‘bark’ as ‘retrogressive’ and showing a lack of understanding and even curiosity about realistic possibilities (1962: 170).⁴⁵ For example when we read, let alone propose as translation, a “curved arrow”, or “an oleander leaf” arrowhead, or a bow string made of “bark”, there is (or ought to be) cognitive dissonance because such things are extremely unlikely.

This still leaves us with the problem that our text is Iron Age. Do we strive to make it authentic by substituting archery terms from Europe’s Iron Age? At what point do anachronisms become incomprehensible to a contemporary reader? Would contemporary archery terms be any better? Are people shot by bows these days? In the case of the cross bow, some background reading shows that it was never a weapon that found much use in India, so is unlikely to crop up in a Pāli text. However, by drawing the distinction between some kind of hand pulled bow and

⁴⁵The use of this cloth amongst Munda speakers, where almost every other group in India adopted cotton for clothing, raises an interesting question about the origin of ascetics wearing *valka*. Were they perhaps doing so in imitation of Munda speaking hunter-gatherer tribes, or as a result of some more substantial interaction? Or was it simply an anachronism?

a cross bow the meaning is adequately conveyed. How far do we go in our quest for authenticity? Would it be sacrilege to frame this story in terms of a man shot by a gun? And to have him request details of the calibre and so on?

Some of these words, *sithilahanu* for example, lost their meaning quite early on. Buddhaghosa is already at a loss to say any more than we can work out from the context: i.e. it is a bird. We might have thought to recover the meaning of the words from the Chinese counterpart. But this text shows that it will not always be possible, because the Chinese translators were not reading the Pāli text and because the translators used the same strategies as modern translators, often making reconstruction of the Indic template impossible. While some light is shed, we end up with Chinese mysteries as well as, and/or instead of, Indic mysteries. Even knowledge of Classical Chinese is not a full qualification for reading Buddhist Hybrid Chinese, with its many transliterations and Indic idioms.

The problem of how to interpret these terms seems to have been just as difficult in 18th-century Japan, judging by 翻梵語 *Fān fàn yǔ* (T 54.2130), a Sanskrit-Chinese translation guide composed in Japan in 1741. The glosses provided for some transliterations are far from realistic or convincing.

Comparisons with non-Buddhist texts, especially Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, were fruitful. Particularly as the author of the Indic text, or the translator into Pāli, was not very well versed in archery terms. This is an interesting observation in light of later legends of the Buddha excelling in archery in his youth; or was it that time degraded what was once clear. In any case, it argues for looking beyond the Buddhist Canonical and commentarial works when we encounter difficulties with Pāli words. It seems Buddhologists are still too reluctant to employ texts from outside the Buddhist sphere when dealing with philological problems. Kauṭilya for example informs us that *cāpa* is a type of cane or bamboo. Indian bows were made from such materials, and amongst the hunter gatherer tribes that persist in India they still are.

The point about Buddhist Hybrid English has been well made by Paul Griffiths (1981) but is perhaps not yet entirely assimilated. MN 63 is an example of how we can go wrong as translators. Probably the most convincing translation from its audience's point of view is MĀ 221, which routinely translates Indic terms into the idiom of its readers, without any loss of meaning. N&B in my view have produced the best English translation, but seem to abandon the principle of substituting for clarity when translating arrowhead shapes and the use of "bark" as a bow string material. Similarly, all the bow string materials produce 'fibre', so listing it as a

separate material is unhelpful.

We ought to beware of leaving jarring words and phrases in our translations. Being clear about who the audience is, and what they can reasonably be expected to know, or to find out, is essential to producing usable translations. With the English translations, each has its good and bad points, but with respect to this passage, they merely rearrange the words rather than solving the problems revealed in previous translations. Sometimes they regress to a less intelligible state. If one goes to the trouble of publishing a new translation it ought to be an improvement on what has gone before.

Abbreviations

AHD	Watkins, Calvert. <i>American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots</i> . Houghton Mifflin Company.
AŚ	<i>Arthaśāstra</i> by Kauṭilya. (Kangle Ed). 2nd ed. University of Bombay, 1969.
CST	<i>Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka</i> . Version 4.0. 1995. Vipassana Research Institute.
DOP	Cone, Margaret. (2001, 2010) <i>Dictionary of Pali</i> . Pali Text Society. Vol. I & II.
DOPN	Malalasekera, G. P. (1997) <i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> . Pali Text Society.
IEL	Slocum, Jonathan. (2012) <i>Indo-European Lexicon</i> . http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/ielex/PokornyMaster-X.html
JA	<i>Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā</i> .
MĀ	<i>Madhyāgama</i> . T 1.26.
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> . Vol. I (V. Trenckner, Ed.) Pali Text Society, (1888)
MNṬ	Dhammapāla (ca. 6th C) <i>Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhā</i> . [via CST].
MW	Monier-Williams, M. (1899) <i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> . Asian Education Services, 2008.
PED	Rhys Davids, T.W. and Stede, William. (1921-25) <i>Pali-English Dictionary</i> . Pali Text Society: 1999.
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī nāma Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā</i> . Part III. (I B. Horner, Ed.). Pali Text Society, 1933.
T	<i>Taishō Tripiṭaka</i> . CBETA.

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