

# Canonical *Jātaka* Tales in Comparative Perspective—

## The Evolution of Tales of the Buddha's Past Lives

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### I. Introduction

With the present paper I investigate the development of some *jātakas* out of what originally appear to have been just parables or similes, instead of constituting records of past life experiences of the Buddha from the outset. After a survey of the significance of *jātakas* in general (II), I take up some *jātakas* found in the early discourses (III), followed by turning to *jātakas* in the *Vinayas* (IV). Then I examine the dynamics of such a shift from simile to *jātaka* (V).

### II. The Significance of *Jātakas*

The significance of the *jātakas* as a genre of text is well corroborated by their abundant representations in ancient sculpture and inscriptions,<sup>1</sup> and also by the circumstance that reciters of *jātakas* are reckoned as a class of *bhāṇakas* on their own.<sup>2</sup>

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\* The present article is an extract from Anālayo 2010: 55-71.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. the surveys in Sarkar 1990: 120-158, Ahir 2000: 1-31 and Skilling 2008: 59-63.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Adikaram 1946/1994: 25, Goonesekera 1968: 689, Mori 1990: 123 and Adhikari 1996. Abeynayake 1984: 94 concludes that these references show that the *Jātaka* reciters were part of an ancient division of reciters. The significance of this type of tales also stands out against the circumstance, noted by Skilling 2006: 113, that the *Jātaka* "as a genre ... is unique to Buddhism: it is

Tradition perceives the *jātakas* as records of the bodhisattva's experiences and struggles during his gradual acquisition of the qualities that would enable him to become a Buddha.<sup>3</sup> In fact the *Mahāvastu*, itself a repository of numerous *jātakas*, associates the delivery of such tales with the revealing of a bodhisattva's course of practice.<sup>4</sup>

A well-known feature of *jātaka* tales is the integration of various ancient Indian fables, anecdotes and parables, which become *jātakas* through the simple act of identifying one of the protagonists – usually though not always the most heroic and exemplary one – with the Buddha in one of his former lives.<sup>5</sup>

To mention just one example, a version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* found in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection presents the exploits of its hero Rāma as past life experiences of

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not found in Jaina or Brahmanical literature" (though the tales themselves often draw on a common ancient Indian narrative heritage). For a recent study of the *Jātaka* genre cf. also Appleton 2010.

<sup>3</sup> According to Feer 1875: 284: "les faits racontés dans nos jātakas tendent à un but unique: ... graver dans l'esprit une règle de conduite, appuyée ... sur l'exemple du Buddha". Kulasuriya 1996: 19 explains that in the *jātakas* "the Bodhisatta, by his thoughts, words and deeds, reveals the path to enlightenment". However, as pointed out by Cone 1977: xvii, the idea that "the Bodhisattva is throughout these lives developing ... [the] prerequisites for Buddhahood", "certainly postdates most of the stories" in the *Jātaka* collection. In fact, according to Cummings 1982: 20 "most Jātakas at the time of Bhārhut were simply used as parables in illustration of the Doctrine, and did not yet carry any specific significance as stories of the Buddha's previous incarnations"; cf. also Sarkar 1990: 5.

<sup>4</sup> Senart 1882a: 104,12: *bodhisatvacaritaṃ ... jātakāparamateṣu kovidā deśayanti ... īśvarā*, "the supreme ones [Buddhas], who are skilled in *jātakas* and other doctrines, teach the course of practice of a bodhisattva"; cf. also Edgerton 1953/1998: 240. On the bodhisattva career depicted in the Theravāda canonical *Jātaka* collection involving only males cf. the study by Appleton 2011.

<sup>5</sup> This tendency has been noted by several scholars. Thus e.g. Alsdorf 1977: 25 points out that the majority of the Pāli *jātaka* verses are, if not pre-Buddhist, at least non-Buddhist, "die übergroße Mehrzahl der Jātaka-Gāthās [ist], wenn nicht vor-, so doch jedenfalls unbuddhistisch"; cf. also Norman 1983: 79. Regarding *jātaka* prose, Franke 1906 offers a survey of narrative material shared in common between the Pāli *Jātaka* collection and the *Mahābhārata*. Kulasuriya 1996: 10 notes that "stories of the *Jātaka* Book occur in the *Pañcatantra*, *Kathāsaritsāgara* and other Indian story books. Some stories have parallels in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and still others in Jaina literature". Laut 1993: 503 sums up that most *jātakas* are popular tales with a Buddhist veneer, "bei den meisten Jātakas handelt es sich ... um volkstümliche Erzählungen ... denen der Buddhismus als Firnis aufgetragen wurde". According to Winternitz 1920/1968: 90, the tendency of turning popular tales into *jātakas* had the result that at times rather worldly narrations became 'Buddhist' even though they may have had little in common with Buddhist thought, "so konnte jede noch so weltliche, dem buddhistischen Ideenkreise noch so ferne stehende Geschichte zu einer 'buddhistischen' werden".

the bodhisattva.<sup>6</sup> The same holds for a Chinese version of this tale,<sup>7</sup> whereas another Chinese version does not take the form of a *jātaka*.<sup>8</sup> Similar variations can be found with other manifestations of this tale that have made their way into various Asian cultures, which only at times appear as a *jātakas*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This is the *Dasaratha-jātaka*, Jā 461, whose prose at Jā IV 130,<sup>19</sup> identifies Rāma with the bodhisattva. Jacobi 1893/1970: 84-93 (in reply to Weber 1870) offers several arguments for considering the prose narration of the *Dasaratha-jātaka* to be an adaptation of an already existing version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The two most salient points are: a) Sītā is introduced as Rāma's sister, even though from the outset she carries the epithet *devī* and at the end of the tale she marries Rāma (Przyluski 1936: 183, however, takes this to be an original element); b) the narration of the king granting a boon to his second wife becomes superfluous, as he does not comply with her request to make her son crown prince instead of Rāma. On this topic cf. also Senart 1882b: 317 note 1, Sircar 1976, Brockington 1985: 260 and Gombrich 1985: 434f. Lüders 1897/1940: 35-40 makes the important point that, what holds for the prose, does not apply to the verses; cf. also Winternitz 1908: 434. For pictorial representations of Rāma apparently just about to go into exile, documenting the popularity of this tale, cf., e.g., Longhurst 1938: 49-51 and plate 45a, Ray 1965 plate 18, Murthy 1987: 7-9, Lal Nagar 1993: 143-145 and plates 39-41 and Rama 1995: 108-110 and plate 40.

<sup>7</sup> T 152 at T 3, 27b<sub>11</sub>, trsl. Chavannes 1910: 178.

<sup>8</sup> T 203 at T 4, 447a<sub>16</sub>, trsl. Lévi 1903: 279-281 and Willemen 1994: 6-9, where none of the protagonists is identified with the bodhisattva.

<sup>9</sup> A Burmese version identifies Rāma with the bodhisattva, Thein Han 1963: 78. In Cambodian versions of the tale (trsl. Martini 1978 and Pou 1977 and 1982), though Rāma is a manifestation of Viṣṇu, cf. Hak 1969: 35, he is nevertheless also identified with the bodhisattva (this has been pointed out by Martini 1952: 68f and 1961: 354, cf. also Pou 1975: 356-359). An Indonesian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (summarized in Stutterheim 1925: 66-80) does not take the form of a *jātaka*. In a Japanese version, Rāma is identified with the bodhisattva, cf. Hara 1980/1989: 335. A Khotanese version (ed. and trsl. Bailey 1940: 376 and 571) is ambivalent since, though it probably does identify Rāma with the bodhisattva (cf. Bailey 1939b: 464 and Maggi 2009: 367), it could also be taken to imply that Rāma was Maitreya in a former life while his brother Lakṣmaṇa was the bodhisattva (cf. Warder 1988: 636). In any case, the Khotanese version does take the form of a *jātaka*. A Lao version does identify Rāma with the bodhisattva (cf. Dhani Nivat 1969: 86 or the trsl. in Sahai 1996: 326); whereas another Lao version (trsl. in Sahai 1976: 34-74; cf. also Deydier 1952) does not take the form of a *jātaka*. Malaysian versions (summarized in Stutterheim 1925: 28-63 or Zieseniss 1928: 7-64) do not take the form of a *jātaka* (though similar to the *Dasaratha-jātaka*, mentioned above in note 6, here Sītā is also Rāma's sister, cf. Kats 1926: 583). A Sri Lanka version described in Godakumbura 1946 also does not appear to be a *jātaka* (on the general dearth of *Rāmāyaṇa* tales in Sri Lanka cf. Bechert 1978: 230f). A Thai version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (trsl. in Velder 1962, summary in Puri 1940/1998) "is not presented as an incident in a previous life of the Buddha", as noted by Reynolds 1991: 56. Among the manuscripts of a Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Balbir 1963 and de Jong 1971/1994; cf. also the survey in Lalou 1936 and de Jong 1972/1994: 4-10), the final part of the story, which in *jātakas* usually provides an identification, is not preserved; de Jong 1983/1994: 57 notes that in a 15<sup>th</sup> century version of the tale, Rāma is identified with "a divinity of the Sa-skya school", which would thus exclude him being identified with the bodhisattva. A version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Uigur (on which cf. also Laut 1996: 198) does not provide an identification, though in this case this is due to the circumstance that the text only gives an abbreviated summary of the tale (ed. and trsl. Zieme 1978: 28 and 30). For a comparative survey of *Rāmāyaṇa* tales in Buddhist literature cf. e.g. Desai 1970; for a study of Jain

### III. *Jātakas* in the Early Discourses

For a proper appreciation of the formation of *jātakas*, of particular interest are those stories that are already found among the early discourses and in the *Vinaya*, which take us to the beginning stages of *jātaka* literature.<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I survey several examples that illustrate how some of these stories originated.<sup>11</sup>

In his study of the *jātaka* genre, Rhys Davids (1903/1997: 194) takes up a tale found in a discourse from the *Samyutta-nikāya*.<sup>12</sup> In agreement with its *Samyukta-āgama* counterpart,<sup>13</sup> this discourse reports the Buddha narrating how a quail strays outside of its proper resort and is thereupon caught by a falcon. The moral of the story is that, just as the quail should have kept to its proper resort, so the monks should keep to the practice of mindfulness as their proper resort in order to withstand Māra.

While in the discourse versions in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and in the *Samyukta-āgama* the whole story takes the form of a parable, in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection the same tale is a *jātaka*, which identifies the clever quail with the bodhisattva.<sup>14</sup> Rhys Davids (1903/1997: 195) comments that "there can be no question as to which is the older document; for the *Jātaka* quotes as its source, and by name and chapter, the very passage in the *Samyutta* in which the fable originally occurs". A

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versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cf. e.g. Kulkarni 1990. Raghavan 1975: 161 concludes his comparative study of various versions of the tale by commenting that "in some of the areas of South-East Asia, a slight Buddhistic *adjustment*, by making Rāma a Bodhisattva, has been adopted", just as in other versions the tale is adjusted to Islamic thought; cf. also Barrett 1963.

<sup>10</sup> Von Hinüber 1998: 187 notes that such individual "Ur-jātakas" found in the Pāli discourses share as a distinct characteristic that they are entirely in prose. In contrast, the Pāli canon's *Jātaka* collection is in verse, with prose narrations provided only in its commentary.

<sup>11</sup> In the notes to my survey of selected *jātaka* tales, I do not mention well-known translations such as e.g. Cowell 1895-1907/2000 of the Pāli *Jātaka* collection or Jones 1949-1956/1973-1978 of the *Mahāvastu*, but only translations that I assume are less well-known. I also do not aim at an exhaustive survey of relevant publications, as in the context of the present paper I can only scratch the surface of the fascinating topic of how these *jātaka* tales developed in literature and art.

<sup>12</sup> SN 47.6 at SN V 146,18.

<sup>13</sup> SĀ 617 at T 2, 172c25.

<sup>14</sup> This is the *Sakuṇagghi-jātaka*, Jā 168 at Jā II 60,23.

version of this tale found in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese agrees with the two discourses in as much as it does not identify any of the animals in this story with the bodhisattva.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of a study of the history of the Buddhist canon, Oldenberg (1912: 192) draws attention to two tales found in the *Pāyāsi-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, which recur similarly in a *Dīrgha-āgama* and a *Madhyama-āgama* version of this discourse. The setting at the background of these two tales is a discussion between a sceptic and a Buddhist monk. During this discussion, the monk employs several examples to illustrate his arguments. One of these examples contrasts a clever caravan leader to a foolish one,<sup>16</sup> another describes how someone tries to cheat when playing dice.<sup>17</sup>

Both tales also occur in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, which identifies the chief protagonist in each parable with the bodhisattva.<sup>18</sup> As the *Pāyāsi-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel explicitly introduce these tales as "parables",<sup>19</sup> it can safely be assumed that they became *jātakas* only at a later time. For the

<sup>15</sup> T 212 at T 4, 695a12; cf. also T 2122 at T 53, 784b19 and T 2123 at T 54, 74a11 (here and below, unless otherwise indicated, references are to the beginning of the tale).

<sup>16</sup> DN 23 at DN II 342,20, DĀ 7 at T 1, 45c6 and MĀ 71 at T 1, 529c25.

<sup>17</sup> DN 23 at DN II 348,19, DĀ 7 at T 1, 46b21 and MĀ 71 at T 1, 530b28.

<sup>18</sup> These are the *Apaṇṇaka-jātaka*, Jā 1 at Jā I 106,9, and the *Litta-jātaka*, Jā 91 at Jā I 380,25. The identification of the clever caravan leader with the bodhisattva can also be found in T 203 at T 4, 466a2 (the trsl. by Chavannes 1911b: 32 does not include this final part); and in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, D 1 *kha* 245a2 or Q 1030 *ge* 229a4 (for a summary cf. Panglung 1981: 44). On the game of dice in ancient India cf. Lüders 1940. For a representation in art of game players that at times has been thought to be related to the *Litta-jātaka* cf., e.g., Cunningham 1879: 94f and plate XLV.9, Barua 1934/1979: 95-97 and plate 73/96, Coomaraswamy 1956: 93f and fig. 223, Lal Nagar 1993: 103 and plate 32; for the corresponding inscription cf. Hultzsch 1886: 63, Lüders 1963: 162f and Tsukamoto 1996: 555.

<sup>19</sup> MĀ 71 at T 1, 529c25 and T 1, 530b28 qualifies each tale as a simile, 喻, introducing them with the expression "just as if", 猶如. DN 23 at DN II 342,18 and DN II 348,17 also qualifies each of the two tales as a simile, *upamā*, though it introduces them as an event from the past, *bhūtapubbam* (on this expression cf. the study by Tanabe 2003). DĀ 7 at T 1, 45c6 and T 1, 46b21 similarly presents each tale as something from the past, using the expressions 久遠 or 昔者. A parallel to the first tale in T 45 at T 1, 834b1 begins with the indication that the monk who delivers this tale recalls this event from the past, 我念往昔. Though none of these versions is a *jātaka*, it is noticeable how what in MĀ 71 is a mere simile told by way of comparison ("just as if") tends to become more realistic by being presented as something that actually happened in the past and is then recalled. This in turn paves the way for their eventual evolution into an event recalled by the Buddha from one of his former existences.

second tale to become a *jātaka* is in fact not unproblematic, as this requires identifying one of the two dice players with the bodhisattva. Yet, one dice player is a cheat, while the other dice player poisons his opponent. The Pāli *jātaka* tale chooses the second player and solves the problem by reporting that, though the bodhisattva did poison his opponent, he then administered a cure to save the other player's life.<sup>20</sup>

Another relevant case would be the tale of a flying horse that saves a group of ship-wrecked merchants from being devoured by ogresses, which in the *Madhyama-āgama* is explicitly qualified as a simile.<sup>21</sup> A version of this tale in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese also does not take the form of a *jātaka*.<sup>22</sup> Yet, in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, as well as in a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, this story records a previous life of the Buddha.<sup>23</sup> The same is the case for several other versions of this tale, which differ, however, on whether the flying horse or the leader of the group of merchants should be identified with the bodhisattva.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Jā I 380,17.

<sup>21</sup> MĀ 136 at T 1, 644c7 concludes with the Buddha qualifying the tale as a simile, 喻.

<sup>22</sup> T 212 at T 4, 718c28 provides no identification and thus does not take the form of a *jātaka*.

<sup>23</sup> The *Valāhassa-jātaka*, Jā 196 at Jā II 130,21, concludes by identifying the flying horse with the bodhisattva, as does EĀ 45.1 at T 2, 770c4. EĀ 45.1 and T 212 additionally incorporate a narration found in the Pāli canon as Jā 96 at Jā I 393,16, where the bodhisattva is the leader of a group of merchants. The same happens with several other versions, which must have contributed to the below noted variations regarding which protagonist should be identified with the bodhisattva.

<sup>24</sup> Similar to Jā 196, the flying horse is identified with the bodhisattva in a tale in T 152 at T 3, 33c13 (trsl. Chavannes 1910: 226); in T 190 at T 3, 882b1 (trsl. Beal 1875: 340; on the title of this work cf. Durt 2004: 56); in stanza 24 of the Khotanese *Jātakastava*, Dresden 1955: 425 (cf. also Bailey 1945/1969: 201); in a stanza in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefman 1902: 169,1; in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 76,19 (prose) and 90,3 (verse); and in one of two versions of this tale in the Tibetan (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, D 1 *kha* 239b3 or Q 1030 *ge* 224b1 (summary in Panglung 1981: 42). Another version in the above-mentioned T 152, found at T 3, 20b3 (trsl. Chavannes 1910: 125), identifies the head merchant with the bodhisattva. The same is the case for another version in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 299,2 (prose) and 300,3 (verse); a tale in the *Divyāvadāna* in Cowell 1886: 528,14 and in the Chinese (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1442 at T 23, 891c6 (combined trsl. of both in Schlingloff 1981: 167-184; cf. also Huber 1906: 22-24), with its Tibetan counterpart D 3 *nya* 186b1 or Q 1032 *te* 173b6 (summary in Panglung 1981: 156). The same identification of the head merchant with the bodhisattva recurs in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* (fragm. 1607b1 in Mette 1997: 50 and Vaidya 1961: 285,1; summarized in Burnouf 1844/1876: 200; cf. also Majumder 1948: 296); cf. also the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* in Iwamoto 1967: 294,4. Xuánzàng (玄奘) in his travel records concludes a version of this tale by noting its *jātaka* nature, T 2087 at T 51, 934a9 (trsl. Beal 1884/2001: 246), without, however, providing any identification. A medieval Tibetan version does

#### IV. *Jātakas* in the *Vinayas*

In his detailed examination of the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, Von Hinüber (1998: 188) highlights a case where a tale in the Pāli *Vinaya* is presented as a story of a former life of the Buddha in the *Jātaka* collection.<sup>25</sup> This parable describes how a bird, a monkey and an elephant live together in harmony by giving foremost respect to the eldest among them, which turns out to be the bird.

According to the Theravāda *Vinaya* account, the Buddha had addressed this story to a group of notoriously misbehaving monks who had occupied all dwellings without leaving room for elder monks. The Pāli *Jātaka* collection concludes the same tale with the Buddha identifying the elephant and the monkey as former existences of his two chief disciples, while he was the bird in one of his past lives.<sup>26</sup>

Versions of the same tale in the Mahāsāṃghika, (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* agree with the Pāli *Jātaka* collection on presenting this tale as a *jātaka*. While the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* also identify the bird with the bodhisattva,<sup>27</sup> according to the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* he had

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not identify any of its protagonists with the bodhisattva, only indicating that the flying horse is a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara (ed. Kuznetsov 1966: 36; trsl. Wenzel 1888: 504 and Sørensen 1994: 119), an indication also made in several other versions where the head merchant is the bodhisattva. Both identifications are found in the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā-sūtra* (ed. Finot 1901: 23,13 and 26,13; cf. also T 310.18 at T 11, 462a12 and T 11, 462c12; T 321 at T 12, 5c8 and T 12, 6b9; and the trsl. in Boucher 2008: 133 and 135, stanzas 129 and 156). For studies of various versions of this tale or its representations in art cf. e.g. Jacobs 1896: 129f, Vogel 1909: 72 and plate 26c, Duroiselle 1912/1990: 104 and plate 24, Foucher 1921: 212f, Tucci 1922/1923: 617-630, Penzer 1926: 284, Goloubew 1927, Krom 1927: 133f, Le Coq 1928/1975: 54, Przulski 1937, Yazdani 1955: 82-95, Singh 1965: 29, de Jong 1968, Luce 1970 plate 325d, Giteau 1976: 145, Meech-Pekarik 1981, Schlingloff 1981: 161-187, Lienhard 1985, Schlingloff 1988: 256-265, Dehejia 1990: 390f, Lal Nagar 1993: 116, Lewis 1993 and 2000: 49-88 and Appleton 2006. For a Jain version in the *Nāyādhammakahāo* cf. Schubring 1978: 35-40 and the discussion in Lienhard 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Vin II 161,18 and the *Tittira-jātaka*, Jā 37 at Jā I 218,18.

<sup>26</sup> Jā I 220,12.

<sup>27</sup> Dutt 1984: 125,16, with its Tibetan counterpart at D 1 *ga* 192a4 or Q 1030 *nge* 183b5, translated in Schiefner 1876: 112 (the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda account differs in as much as it speaks of four animals instead of three); and T 1435 at T 23, 242c9; cf. also T 1509 at T 25, 146c7 (trsl. Lamotte 1949/1981: 718), and T 2053 at T 50, 235c19. Xuánzàng (玄奘) refers to a stūpa that commemo-

been the elephant.<sup>28</sup> Versions of this tale in the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *Vinayas*, as well as a in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese, do not identify any of these animals with the bodhisattva, so that here this tale does not take the form of a *jātaka*.<sup>29</sup>

In principle, such variations could be the result of a parable turning into a *jātaka* or else of a *jātaka* becoming a parable. Yet, the context shows that the purpose of the story was to deliver a teaching on the need of according proper respect to elders. For this purpose, the form of a parable would suffice, without needing any of its protagonists to be identified with the bodhisattva.

Given that those *Vinayas* that do present this tale as a *jātaka* differ in regard to the animal with which the Buddha should be identified, it seems safe to assume that these identifications are a later feature. In fact, in the thought-world of the early discourses the Buddha's former lives usually involve human rebirths instead of rebirth as an animal,<sup>30</sup> making it more probable that the tale of the harmonious living together of these animals was originally not meant to record former experiences of the bodhisattva.

Another comparable *Vinaya* instance revolves around the theme of contentment. According to the Theravāda *Vinaya*, some monks had been asking for this and that from the local population to such an extent that at the mere sight of a monk people would quickly take another road or even run away. To teach these monks a lesson, the Buddha delivered the tale of a *nāga* king who used to visit a

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rates this tale, T 2087 at T 51, 906a9 (trsl. Beal 1884/2001: 49); on the localization of *jātakas* cf. also Appleton 2007. For studies of various versions of this tale, references to it or representations in art cf., e.g., Clouston 1887: 91-93, Grünwedel 1897: 82f and fig. 64, Fournereau 1908: 80f, Ecke 1935: 58, Bailey 1939a: 855 (stanza 9), Lamotte 1946, Foucher 1955: 90 and Schwarzbaum 1979: 358f.

<sup>28</sup> T 1425 at T 22, 446b5.

<sup>29</sup> T 1428 at T 22, 940a8; T 1421 at T 22, 121a11; and T 212 at T 4, 686a6; the same is the case for a version of this tale in T 2121 at T 53, 247b2 (trsl. Chavannes 1911b: 272f).

<sup>30</sup> According to Rhys Davids 1903/1997: 196, "in no one of these instances of the earliest compositions that were called *Jātakas* is the Buddha identified in his previous birth with an animal"; though, as already pointed out by Peris 2004: 56 note 26, the counterpart to the *Nandivīsāla-jātaka* in Vin IV 6,1, discussed below (cf. note 41), would be an exception to the pattern described by Rhys Davids. For a survey of the bodhisattva's rebirths as an animal in the *Jātaka* collection cf. Jones 1979: 15-19 and Laut 1993: 503-504.



*ṛṣi* regularly, but stopped his visits and never came again when the *ṛṣi* asked to be given the *nāga's* jewel.<sup>31</sup>

The Mahāsāṃghika and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* agree with the Theravāda *Vinaya* in presenting this tale as a parable.<sup>32</sup> In the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *Vinayas*, as well as in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, this story records a past life of the bodhisattva.<sup>33</sup> In this case, too, the tale need not originally have been a record of a past life of the Buddha to serve its purpose, so that those versions that do not identify the protagonist with the Buddha in a past life may be more original in this respect.

Yet another *Vinaya* case is concerned with the topic of patience. The Theravāda *Vinaya* reports that a bitter quarrel had broken out among the monks of Kosambī in relation to a minor issue of proper conduct. In order to inspire the disputing factions to patience, the Buddha delivered the tale of a prince who, wishing to avenge the cruel killing of his father by a king who had conquered their kingdom, enrolled in the services of this king without being recognized. When an occasion arose to carry out his plan, however, he decided to spare the king.

Versions of this story in the *Madhyama-āgama* and the *Ekottarika-āgama*,<sup>34</sup> in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese,<sup>35</sup> as well as in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka and Theravāda *Vinayas*, do not take the form of a *jātaka*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For a pictorial representation that could be depicting the request for the jewel cf. Coomaraswamy 1956 pl. 51 fig. 247-248, with a description in *ibid.* 96. Zin 2003: 123 note 18 points out that the identification of this sculpture with the *Maṇikaṇṭha-jātaka* is uncertain. On this and other possible representations of the *Maṇikaṇṭha-jātaka* cf. also e.g. Cunningham 1879: 27, 99 and plate XLII.1, Rouse 1895/2000: 197 note 1, Grünwedel 1897: 58f and fig. 41, Taw Sein Ko 1906/1990: 131 and plate 253, Hultsch 1912: 407, Foucher 1919: 8 and plate I.6, Barua 1934/1979: 110f and plate 78/106, Luce 1970 plates 102b and 174e, Lutzker 1977: 6 and Lal Nagar 1993: 97, 196f and plate 28.

The Pāli *Jātaka* collection, however, identifies the prince with the bodhisattva.<sup>37</sup> A Chinese *Jātaka* collection instead identifies the father of the prince with the bodhisattva, indicating that the prince was Ānanda in a past life.<sup>38</sup> The disagreement between the two *Jātaka* collections on who should be identified with the bodhisattva and the absence of any such identification in the other versions gives the impression that this tale was probably not a *jātaka* from the outset.<sup>39</sup>

While in the cases surveyed so far, the Theravāda *Vinaya* version differed from the *Jātaka* collection of the same tradition in that it does not identify the respective tales as *jātakas*, it does so in another case. The story in question is about an ox that refuses to perform a particular feat because its owner has addressed it in insulting words. According to the *Vinaya* report, the Buddha had delivered this tale in order to stop monks from abusing each other.

The way the Theravāda *Vinaya* concludes this story implicitly indicates that this ox was the bodhisattva in a former life,<sup>40</sup> hence in this case the Thera-

<sup>32</sup> T 1425 at T 22, 277b7 (trsl. Chavannes 1911a: 318-320); T 1442 at T 23, 854c5; D 3 *nya* 4b3 or Q 1032 *te* 4a5 (summary in Panglung 1981: 144); and Vin III 145,37.

<sup>33</sup> T 1428 at T 22, 584c4, T 1421 at T 22, 13b7, and the *Manikaṅṭha-jātaka*, Jā 253 at Jā II 286,6, identify the one who gave counsel to the *ṛṣi* as the bodhisattva in a former existence. On this tale from the perspective of the significance of a *nāga's* jewel cf. Gaeffke 1954/1965: 581f and 592, from the perspective of *nāgas* in general cf. Vogel 1926: 148f.

<sup>34</sup> MĀ 72 at T 1, 535b14 and EĀ 24.8 at T 2, 629a1 (due to the length of the tale, references here and below are to the conclusion of the tale).

<sup>35</sup> T 212 at T 4, 694c18.

<sup>36</sup> T 1428 at T 22, 882b6, T 1421 at T 22, 160a5 and Vin I 349,5. Winternitz 1920/1968: 91 notes the discrepancy between the Pāli *Vinaya* and the Pāli *Jātaka* collection and concludes that this tale was only subsequently turned into a *jātaka*; cf. also Lamotte 1946: 650.

<sup>37</sup> The prince is identified with the bodhisattva in one of his former lives in the *Dīghitikosala-jātaka*, Jā 371 at Jā III 213,5, and in the *Kosambī-jātaka*, Jā 428 at Jā III 490,10. For representations of this tale in art cf. e.g. Duroiselle 1912/1990: 98 and plate 7, Longhurst 1938: 55 and plate 47a, Ray 1965: 23 (plate 26), Lal Nagar 1993: 178 and plate 72 (cf. also plate 41), Rama 1995: 118 and plate 43 and Ahir 2000: 21.

<sup>38</sup> T 152 at T 3, 6a14 (trsl. Chavannes 1910: 45); an identification also recorded in T 161 at T 3, 387b21.

<sup>39</sup> Tanabe 2003: 53 concludes that there is a tendency for "parables for teaching monks [found] in [the] *Vinaya* Piṭaka of the Pāli Canon" to be turned into "previous lives of Śākyamuni-Buddha"; on the different strata in the evolution of this material in the case of the *Vinaya* cf. Hirakawa 1960: 14, on the same in general cf. Vetter 1988: 96-97.

<sup>40</sup> According to Vin IV 6,1, at the conclusion of this story the Buddha states that already "at that time insulting and deriding was displeasing to me", *tadāpi me, bhikkhave, amanāpā khuṃsanā*

vāda *Vinaya* is in agreement with the corresponding Pāli *jātaka* tale.<sup>41</sup> Versions of this story in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas*, as well as in a Chinese *Udāna* collection, do not have such an identification.<sup>42</sup>

The present tale in the Theravāda *Vinaya* appears to be the sole instance within the corpus of Pāli discourses and canonical *Vinaya* texts where a former life of the Buddha as an animal is recorded. Given that in other *Vinayas* the tale does not appear as a *jātaka*, it is possible that at some point during oral transmission the wording of the present passage in the Theravāda *Vinaya* was influenced by the tendency – clearly apparent in the earlier surveyed instances – of considering tales from the past as records of former existences of the bodhisattva.

## V. The Shift from Simile to *Jātaka*

The logic behind this tendency of identifying such tales as records of past experiences of the bodhisattva would have been based on the assumption that, when delivering teachings, the Buddha drew on such tales based on recollections from his previous lives.<sup>43</sup> When considered from this perspective, it would not be

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*vambhanā*, where, as already pointed out by Oldenberg 1912: 188 and von Hinüber 1998: 188, the use of the personal pronoun indicates that the tale should be reckoned a *jātaka*.

<sup>41</sup> This is the *Nandivīsāla-jātaka*, Jā 28 at Jā I 193,18, which explicitly identifies the ox with the bodhisattva in a former life. On some elements of this tale found already in the *Ṛg-Veda* cf. Franke 1894; for representations of this tale in art cf. e.g. Grünwedel 1897: 63f and fig. 46, Taw Sein Ko 1906/1990: 129 and plate 28, Luce 1970 plate 98a and Lal Nagar 1993: 44f.

<sup>42</sup> T 1428 at T 22, 635b2; T 1421 at T 22, 38a9; and T 1442 at T 23, 765b23, with its Tibetan counterpart D 3 *cha* 232b1 or Q 1032 *je* 215a3 (summary in Panglung 1981: 135). In these passages, the Buddha refers to the ox as an "animal", without any indication that this tale records one of his past lives. The same is the case for T 212 at T 4, 667a22 (trsl. Chavannes 1911a: 233). The relevant passage in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T 23, 64b19 (summary in Rosen 1959: 124) is ambivalent, since even though there is no explicit identification of the ox with the bodhisattva, T 1435 at T 23, 64a21 introduces this tale as a narration of former lives, 本生因緣.

<sup>43</sup> According to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Wogihara 1971: 397,11, the Buddha's ability to recall former lives is in fact the source of his knowledge and teaching of *jātakas*, *pūrvanivāsānusmṛtijñāna-balena tathāgataḥ ... jātakāṃś ca smṛtvā ... deśayati*. Foucher 1955: 70, comments that "la connaissance surnaturelle prêtée au Bouddha de ses vies antérieures ... assume avec le temps un rôle de plus en plus considérable dans la tradition ... on en vint vite à penser qu'il n'avait pu garder pour lui seul un pareil trésor d'expérience". Ohnuma 2004: 401 explains that "the existence of the *jātaka* genre is based on the notion that the Buddha, on the night of his enlightenment, attained the recollection of his previous lives, which then, throughout his life, he often had occasion to relate in order to illustrate a point, drive home a moral lesson, or shed light on some situation". A shift from

surprising if during oral transmission some of the above tales should have acquired a more explicit statement of what tradition had come to believe to be anyway implicit in them, namely that each of these tales records a past life experience of the Buddha.

The reasoning underlying such assumptions can be seen in the *Kūṭadanta-sutta* and its parallels, which report the Buddha describing a magnificent sacrifice undertaken in the past by a king and his Brahmin chaplain. One hearing this description, an eminent Brahmin present among the audience wonders if the circumstance that the Buddha does not claim to have heard of this event could imply that he had witnessed this sacrifice himself.<sup>44</sup> The Buddha confirms that this is indeed the case.

This tale thus gives canonical sanction to the reasoning that, when the Buddha relates a tale without explicitly indicating that he has heard it from somewhere, then this narration can be assumed to be the record of an event he remembers from his own past.

In addition to providing this precedent, the *Kūṭadanta-sutta* and its parallels also exemplify the above-described pattern underlying the formation of some *jātaka* tales, as the Pāli version identifies the bodhisattva with the Brahmin chaplain who led the sacrifice, the Chinese version instead identifies him with the king on whose behalf the sacrifice was undertaken.<sup>45</sup> Sanskrit fragments of this discourse identify him with both,<sup>46</sup> a rather surprising presentation that is perhaps

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parable to *jātaka* may also have been facilitated by a tendency in ancient Indian thought for the symbolic and the literal to overlap, blurring a clear distinction between them, with the symbolic at times being endowed with a power that has quite 'real' consequences.

<sup>44</sup> DN 5 at DN I 143,15, DĀ 23 at T 1, 100b21 and fragment 408r2 in von Criegern 2002: 35; for a study and translation of DĀ 23 cf. Meisig 2011.

<sup>45</sup> In DN 5 at DN I 143,26, the Buddha explains that he was the Brahmin chaplain, *purohito brāhmaṇo ahoṣiṃ*. In DĀ 23 at T 1, 100b25, the Buddha first asks the rhetorical question if the warrior king for whom that great sacrifice was undertaken was someone else, 刹利王爲大祀者, 豈異人乎, followed by indicating that one should not see it like this, as he was [that king] himself, 勿造斯觀, 即吾身是也.

<sup>46</sup> Fragment 408r4-5 in von Criegern 2002: 35 reports the question whether the venerable Gautama at that time was the head-anointed warrior king or the Brahmin chaplain, *kin nu bhavāṃ gautamas tasmīn samaye rājā kṣa[tr]iyo mūrdhābhiṣikto ... āho svid brāhmaṇapurohita*, which then receives the puzzling reply by the Buddha that he remembers having been both of them, *ubhayam apy*

best understood as the result of a conflation of two traditions similar to what now is found in the Pāli and Chinese version. The tale itself has evident comic traits which,<sup>47</sup> together with its absence from the Pāli *Jātaka* collection and the variations among the parallel versions on who should be identified with the bodhisattva, make it safe to assume that it was not a *jātaka* from the outset.

Nevertheless, with some of the other cases discussed above a degree of uncertainty prevails, since one may wonder if the mere lack of explicit identification makes it really certain that the tale was from the outset not conceived of as a *jātaka* – except for those cases where these tales are explicitly introduced as parables.

Another somewhat ambivalent example would be the story of the Brahmin Mahāgovinda. In the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama* versions of this tale, the Buddha identifies the story of the Brahmin Mahāgovinda as a record of one of his former lives.<sup>48</sup> In an individual translation of the same discourse, however, no such identification is found.<sup>49</sup>

This leaves open the possibility that Mahāgovinda was identified with the bodhisattva only at a later stage, thereby turning this story into a *jātaka*. In fact, references to the same Brahmin in a discourse in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* do not present his tale as a record of a former life of the Buddha; the same is also the case for a *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.<sup>50</sup> In the case of another teacher, mentioned similarly in this *Āṅguttara-nikāya* discourse and in other Pāli discourses without

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*ahaṃ bhāradvāja samanussarāmi api rājā kṣatṛyo mūrdhābhiṣikta evaṃrūpasya yajñasya yaṣṭā  
api brāhmaṇaḥ purohitaḥ evaṃrūpasya yajñasya yājītā.*

<sup>47</sup> Cf. e.g. Rhys Davids 1899: 160-166, Ling 1973/1976: 82-85, Gombrich 1988: 82f and Collins 1998: 479f.

<sup>48</sup> DN 19 at DN II 251,9 and its parallel DĀ 3 at T 1, 34a10; cf. also the *Mahāvastu* version, Senart 1897: 224,5.

<sup>49</sup> T 8 at T 1, 213c14 concludes by stating that "the Blessed One delivered this narration about the past", 世尊宣說往昔因緣事, without reckoning it a *jātaka*.

<sup>50</sup> AN 6.54 at AN III 372,1 (where the Brahmin is referred to by his proper name Jotipāla, not by the honorific Mahāgovinda that was accorded to him as per DN 19 at DN II 232,24) and its parallel MĀ 130 at T 1, 619c17. The contrast between AN 6.54 and DN 19 in this respect has already been noted by Law 1930: 173 and Gokuldas 1951: 50.

being identified with the bodhisattva,<sup>51</sup> the parallel version in the *Madhyama-āgama* does provide such identification.<sup>52</sup>

Another ambiguous case can be found in relation to the Discourse about [the Brahmin] Velāma, the *Velāma-sutta*. The different versions of this discourse describe the lavish offerings made by a Brahmin in the bygone past, highlighting that through lack of adequate recipients the merits of this fabulous offering were no match to an act as simple as taking refuge in the Buddha.

In the Pāli version and most of its parallels, the Buddha concludes the tale by indicating that he had been that Brahmin in the past.<sup>53</sup> Yet, one version preserved as an individual translation does not provide such an identification.<sup>54</sup> Thus it seems at least possible that the tale of this Brahmin and his sumptuous offerings may not always have been recognized as a past life experience of the Buddha.

## VI. Conclusion

<sup>51</sup> The tale of Sunetta is given in AN 6.54 at AN III 371,16 in the same terms as for Jotipāla. Other discourses with the Sunetta tale are AN 7.62 at AN IV 103,24 and AN 7.69 at AN IV 135,9, none of which takes the form of a *jātaka*. However, the description of Sunetta's practice of loving kindness in AN 7.62 at AN IV 104,22 (not mentioned in AN 6.54 or AN 7.69) has a counterpart in AN 7.58 at AN IV 89,4, which records the Buddha's practice of loving kindness undertaken during a past existence.

<sup>52</sup> MĀ 8 at T 1, 429b29 (parallel to AN 7.62). The same identification is also recorded in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 9 in Pradhan 1967: 472,3 and in a *sūtra* quotation from Śamathadeva's commentary on this work, edited in Dietz 2007: 98,32 (for quotations in other works cf. the survey in Lamotte 1944/1981: 520 note 5). In another parallel to AN 7.62, T 30 at T 1, 812c5, this teacher of former times is himself a Buddha, 過去世有佛出現, 名妙眼如來, who surprisingly is nevertheless identified as the present Buddha in a past life at T 1, 812c17: 往昔妙眼如來者, 非別有佛即我身是. A parallel to AN 7.70, MĀ 160 at T 1, 684a25, provides an identification with the bodhisattva, though in this case in relation to another of those teachers of former times.

<sup>53</sup> AN 9.20 at AN IV 394,11, MĀ 155 at T 1, 678a7, T 73 at T 1, 879c19, T 74 at T 1, 882a13 and EĀ 27.3 at T 2, 645a9.

<sup>54</sup> T 72 at T 1, 878c11 relates the tale of the Brahmin, but does not provide any identification, although this could be due to the circumstance that this version is rather brief, compared to its parallels. A quotation of this tale in D 4094 *tu* 195b5 or Q 5595 *ju* 169b5 also does not identify any of its protagonists with the Buddha, which in this case is simply because the quoted extract does not cover the passage that usually provides such identification.

In sum, despite some ambiguity prevailing in certain cases, the instances surveyed above do point to a tendency for parables and similes to become *jātakas* by identifying one of their protagonists with the bodhisattva.

A growing interest in *jātaka* and *avadāna* narratives appears to be common to the different Buddhist traditions, although this interest did not remain without opposition. A discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama* expresses a rather dismissive attitude towards stories of former lives. According to this discourse, a group of monks had been discussing the deeds performed in their previous lives. When the Buddha found out, he rebuked the monks and told them that to spend their time talking about former lives would not be beneficial for them and would not lead them onwards to awakening.<sup>55</sup>

### Abbreviations:

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SHT	Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

<sup>55</sup> SĀ 414 at T 2, 110a26: 此非義饒益, 非法饒益, 非梵行饒益, 非智, 非正覺, 不向涅槃. This discourse conveys a rather critical attitude towards tales about past lives, be these of the Buddha or of monks.

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