

The Casting-off of Mādri in the Northern Buddhist Literary Tradition

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INTRODUCTION

In my previous analysis of the widely diffused legend of Prince Vessantara/Sudāna, I focused on the treatment in a few texts (most of them preserved only in Chinese) of the drama of the two children of the overly generous prince.¹⁾ I paid most attention to a version of the story by Saṃghasena (T. 153), in which, far from being passive, the son of Prince Viśvantara 一切持 argued with his father and his grandfather and expressed his personal appreciation for the brahmin who had enslaved him.

Here, again by comparing different versions of the same legend in Sanskrit and in Chinese, I will describe the representation of the trial suffered by Mādri, the wife of the generous prince. She loses in succession her opulent life-style, her children and her husband. Introduced in the previous article, the succession of episodes in the *Vinaya* material, the Sanskrit *Jātakamālā* and three independent Chinese *Avadāna* translations will be juxtaposed. The order of presentation of the literary documents will be slightly different from the order in the previous article: first the Sanskrit sources, then the Chinese translations for which Indian originals are not extant.

This analysis concentrates on the dominant themes of Mādri's drama, rather than exploring the multiple riches of every account. Only a complete synoptic study with translations of the different recensions could achieve such a goal.

As said before, we have to keep in mind that the legend of the couple Vessantara/Viśvantara/Viśvaṃtara/Sudāna and Maddī/Madri/Mādri was well known through oral and artistic transmission throughout the whole Buddhist world in the first millennium of the Christian era. Today this popularity remains unchanged in Sri Lanka and in the Buddhist countries of the Indo-china peninsula. It was the kind of tale for which the narrator had only to choose among an abundance of narrative elements with which his listeners, among them many women, had been familiar since their childhoods. Creativity consisted mostly in making a few minor additions and in elaborating on some details. Only some of these narrative elements could be represented in sculpture and in mural painting²⁾, and, at least for Central and East Asia, only a fraction of this art remains. In contrast, figurative representations of the tale of Vessantara and Maddī abound in South and Southeast Asia but they are rarely more than one or two centuries old.

From a literary standpoint, the situation is similar. Except for those preserved in Pāli, very few of the tales are extant in other Asian languages. It is thus natural that the Pāli *Vessantara Jātaka* should enjoy priority, due to its remarkable preservation of archaic elements and its literary refinement,³⁾ its compilers' intent to make the *Vessantara Jātaka* a Buddhist epic, and its unparalleled popularity in the Theravāda countries of South and Southeast Asia. As in the previous article, I will thus make several references to the Pāli *Vessantara-jātaka* tradition.

First, let me make a comment on the name of the heroine, Mādri. It refers to a fierce people of northwest India: the Madra country. Although *madra* as a neuter can mean "joy", when the word is used as the name of a woman, it conveys an impression of strength. In Indian literature, this name is not unique to our heroine, but she is known by this name in every version of the tale, including the Chinese translations

(in which she is called Manchi 曼祇 or 漫坻, consort of a prince Sudāna). Even in the Hindu version of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (in which the prince is called Tārāvaloka), her name does not change. In the *Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*, she is never named in the Chinese version of the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, but in the Chinese *Samghabhedavastu*, she is called Mandili 曼低離, often abbreviated to Mandi 曼低.

I

The Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin :
 Samghabhedavastu [ed. R. Gnoli (Ismeo 1978), II, pp. 119-133;
 T. XXIV, no 1450, j. 16, pp. 181 - 184]
 and Bhaiṣajyavastu [T. XXIV, no 1448, j. 14, pp. 64 - 68]

I will start my enquiry from the well-known account of the *Samghabhedavastu* of the *Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. In the nineteenth century, Schiefner translated this account from the Tibetan into German, and his translation became the basis for the famous *Tibetan Tales* translated into English by Ralston⁴. Let us first consider the Sanskrit original found among the manuscripts of Gilgit. The writing style of these manuscripts dates them to the sixth or seventh century, but their content is obviously much older. I will refer to Raniero Gnoli's edition of the Sanskrit text and to the Chinese translation by Yijing in the *Po-seng-shi* 破僧事 (*Samghabhedavastu*) section (T. 1450, j. 16) of the aforementioned *Vinaya*. There is no extant Sanskrit text for other version, which Yijing also translated in the *Yao-shi* 藥事 (*Bhaiṣajyavastu*) section (T. 1448, j. 14) of the same *Vinaya*.

We should remember that it took twelve years (700-711) for Yijing (635-713) to produce a partial translation of the huge *Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. The two Chinese translations adhere closely

to two Sanskrit texts that were probably very similar to the text found in Gilgit. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the two translations were made by the same person, there are slight but interesting differences.

First, there are often different choices of sentences translated into prose or into Chinese *gāthās*. The *gāthā*-style compositions (with groups of five, seven or eight characters) were intended to be sung in the monasteries. Additionally, the style of the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* translation is often more expressive but less refined than that of the *Samghabhedavastu* translation, which might have been produced later in Yijing's life. A third important difference is that a lengthy sentimental passage in the Sanskrit version, the "lamento of Mādri's losing her children", is translated fully in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* but is reduced to just one Chinese *gāthā* in the *Samghabhedavastu*. Other minor differences will be pointed out as we go along. When quoting from the Chinese, I will generally use the translation of the *Samghabhedavastu* abbreviated as "Sbhv."; quotations from the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* will be indicated with the abbreviation "Bhv."

The context of the tales is also different. What matters for the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* is the bodhisattva Viśvantara's quest for the supreme *bodhi*. In the *Samghabhedavastu*, the legend of Viśvantara appears in the context of the censure against Devadatta for causing a rift in the Community. Devadatta's evil previous births are recounted at great length. It turns out that in one of his earlier incarnations, Devadatta was the evil brahmin Jujjuka who took the two children from their parents. As the anti-hero at the center of the plot, Jujjuka should be the main object of attention in this account, but one of the crucial points of the established tale is that there is never any meeting between the mother and the brahmin who took advantage of her absence to take away her children. It is thus possible to understand as a kind of compensatory feeling Mādri's exasperated denunciation of evil brahmins,

before and after the loss of her children. Although an anti-brahminic tone suffuses almost all versions of tale (including the *Kathāsaritsāgara*), Mādri's exceptional vehemence is the hallmark of the *Vinaya* tales. It is matched only by her fierce condemnation of her husband in Saṃghasena's narrative.

In the present account, there are four scenes in which Mādri acts and speaks. We can call them the four acts of Mādri's drama:

- 1) she learns in the palace of Viśvantara's banishment,
- 2) she journeys toward the place of exile,
- 3) she despairs, after having lost her children,
- 4) she is cast off by her husband who offers her to a pseudo-brahmin.

In the first act (Gnoli II: 123.13-122.16; T. 1450, 181c15-28; T. 1448, 65b23-c6), after her husband is sentenced to exile, our heroine shows her determination as a spouse (*bhāryā*) to follow her husband to the "penance-forest" (*tapovana*), called simply "mountain forest" 山林 in Chinese. In the *Samghabhedavastu*, it is Mādri who speaks the famous sentences about four incompatibilities that appear, with a few variations, in almost all the versions of the tale: impossible and to be rejected are, first, a moonless heaven (or snow in the *Bhv.*), second, a wheatless earth, third, a waterless lotus (lotus-pond in the *Sbhv.*, forest pond, in the *Bhv.*), and fourth, a husbandless woman (*bhartṛ-vihinā... nārī* 婦人無夫). Her husband cautions her about the inevitable separation (*viyoga*) that is the way of the world (*lokasvabhava* 世間常法必有離別), an argument often repeated by him in this account. He objects also that she is accustomed to a life of comfort. Even so, she vows to follow him wherever his decision should lead her (*āryaputra yathāśaktyā āham āryaputram anuvartisyā* 我隨聖子意). In those conditions, the prince enjoins her to keep that resolution.

The second act (Gnoli II: 121.28-124.5; T. 1450, 182a19-b8; T.

1448, 65c28-66a16) takes place as the prince, with his wife and children (*saputradāra*), rides on the chariot taking them to their place of exile. The intervention of Mādri, "having lost patience" (*sañjatāmarṣā*, *Bhv.*: 輕慢, 不忍), is described as a "brutal outburst" (*niṣṭhur-abhi-dhāna* 兇惡言詞) against the brahmin who, in the present tale, lacking any compassion (*kāruṇyam*, *Bhv.*: 無少慈), asks for the chariot and gets it with the horses. Criticizing her outspokenness, the prince comments sarcastically: if there were no craving people (*artharucayo pratigrāhakāḥ*), to whom would it be possible to give 若無求乞人, 我施誰當受? The family is thus forced to continue on foot, with the unusual distribution of the roles that appears only in the Sanskrit version³⁾: Mādri carries her son Jāli on her shoulders and it is their daughter Kṛṣṇājīnā whom Viśvantara carries on his shoulders.

The first climax of the drama, Viśvantara's gift of his two children to the old brahmin, is permeated by the absence of the mother, who has been sent to the forest to collect food (Gnoli II: 124.8; T.1450, 182b11; T. 1448, 66a17-18). An original twist, different from the rest of the tradition, appears in the *Bhv.*: this first brahmin is the god Śakra in disguise (66a18-19). All of the versions tell us that the other brahmin who requests Viśvantara's wife is actually Śakra in disguise. Here, it seems at least awkward or perhaps even nonsensical to cast Śakra in the role of both brahmins. As a consequence, the emancipation of the children at the end of the same *Bhv.* seems incongruent, because Śakra is said to have cast a spell on the brahmin to make him bring the children to their grandfather (T. 1448, 68a15-17).

When giving away his children, Viśvantara foresees the pain of separation that will be suffered by the children (Gnoli II: 124.23; T. 1448, 66b17) as well as by their mother (Gnoli II: 125.16; T. 1450, 182b 27, c16; T. 1448, 66b5). The children wait hopelessly for her return (Gnoli II: 126.18, 29; T. 1450, 183a14; T. 1448, 66c8-9), but, strangely

enough, in the *Vinaya* tradition, the brahmin remains silent about Mādri. A sextuple earthquake punctuates the gift of the children and their departure. We learn that a ṛṣi called Vāsiṣṭha (according to the *Bhv.*) explains the cause of the earthquake as the gift of the children, the sight of whom was a joy for everybody (T. 1448 66c1-5; T. 1450, 182b23-c1).

The third act (Gnoli II: 127.14-130.29, T. 1450, 183a25-c1; T. 1448, 66c27-67c6), Mādri's famous scene of despair, corresponds to the "Maddi" chapter in the Pāli version. She is almost always alone on center stage, first in the silent company of animals, then with her husband, who speaks only a few words on two occasions. Mādri's troubles start with the inauspicious earthquakes related to an excess of the perfection of generosity (*Sbhv.*) and with her encounter with a lioness that blocks her return home. Perhaps the most striking feature of that episode for a modern reader is the caste-consciousness with which the royal Mādri talks as an equal to the female lion, consort of the king of animals, in order to convince the lioness to let her pass.

When Mādri finally reaches Viśvantara, who is alone and apparently unperturbed, she first fears that her children might be dead. Then, when her husband tells her what happened, she faints, and in this account Viśvantara does not lend her any help. Mādri is then likened to four examples of distress: a gazelle wounded by a poisoned arrow, a fish thrown out the water, a crane deprived of her young ones, and a cow whose calf is dead (a recurrent comparison).

In the Sanskrit text and in the Chinese *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (T. 1448, 67a24-c5), Mādri's sorrow is expressed in beautiful stanzas exalting her children's grace and deploring their current suffering and indignity. As said before, this long passage is reduced to two stanzas in the Chinese version of the *Samghabhedavastu* (T. 1450, 183b29-c1). In the developed *lamento*, the expression "my two children" (*putrakau, sutau, bāladāarakau*

我子、二子) associated with suffering (*duḥkha* under different forms, 苦) appears like a leitmotif. There is also the theme of bad (*pāpakam*) *karma* 罪惡業 due to her actions in past lives. Particularly expressive is the appeal for the deliverance of her children from slavery (*dāsabhāva-gamana* 卑身) expressed as a “word of truth” (*sātyavaca* 真實宣誓), the most solemn oath. It is launched by Mādri to the whole natural world, the leaves of the trees, the deer of the forest, all that may have seen traces of her children.

After that *lamento* culminating in an imprecation against the twice-born (i.e., brahmin), despicably noxious (*hāṇṛśaṃsa dvijottama*) —shortened in Chinese to the “brahmin of little benevolence” 婆羅門少慈—Viśvantara needs only a few words to gain Mādri’s resignation. In Sanskrit his short speech uses the radical *tyaj*, “renounce,” no less than eight times. In Chinese, there are six occurrences alternating two renderings of *tyaj*: 捨 “renounce” and 施 “give”. Mādri must keep the promise that she made in the first act. Echoing her husband’s statement that the renunciation of his wife and children is the supreme sacrifice (*ātma-putra-kalatramca tyaktvā paramadustyajam*) and that the supreme achievement is the giving of himself, wife and children (*dadyāṃ svān dārān vāhanam cāpi vittam*), she declares her readiness to become the next object of her husband’s profligate gift-giving. Her resolution is strongly expressed in Chinese: “If in the future you wish to give me, follow your idea, do not hesitate!” 若欲将我施, 隨意勿生疑!

In the three versions considered here, the fourth act (Gnoli II: 130.30-132.20; T. 1448, 67c6-68a14; T. 1450, 183c2-a18) in which Mādri is featured presents a second climax: Viśvantara’s gift of his wife to a brahmin. It has been observed that in most of the tradition the resignation of our heroine at this point generates a kind of anti-climax. Having accepted the giving away of her children, why should Mādri revolt against the gift of herself?

Surprisingly the *Samghabhedavastu* shows us a Mādri who is again, as in the second act, “taken by impatience” (*sañjatāmarṣā*) in the presence of a brahmin. The reader knows that the approaching brahmin is actually a god in disguise. He is Śakra Devendra, animated with good intentions and impressed by the excess of sacrifice (*atiduṣkara*) of Mādri and of her husband. Śakra is eager to protect Viśvantara from his own good intentions and to prevent his blind renunciation of his only assistant (*upasthāyaka*), his wife. But when Śakra asks Viśvantara for his wife, he uses the language of a libertine as part of his disguise. He starts to make a flowery ode to Mādri, more eloquent in Sanskrit than in Chinese: lovingly (*anuraktā*) faithful to her husband (*pativratā*), with limbs entirely without defect (*sarvānavadyāṅgi*), of excellent family (*kulaślāghyā*), before asking Viśvantara to give her in marriage (*saṃprayaccha!*) as “his own partner [sister] having to serve him” (*mama bhṛtyārthabhāginī*).

At that moment, we witness a new eruption of Mādri's strong temperament. In the Sanskrit and Chinese *gāthās*, she castigates this lowest of brahmins (*brāhmaṇādhamah* 婆羅門下劣) as completely shameful (*nirlajja* 無羞) and lustful (*Sbhv.*: *lubdha* 貪愛者; *Bhv.*: 多貪人) desiring her, a woman who delights in the good Law (*saddharma-niratā*) and is faithful to her husband (*pativratā*). The second part of the invective in *Bhv.* accuses the brahmin of being an “expert in lawless sexual practice to destroy me with my heart pure and faithful” 習性行非法, 壞我貞潔心. The Chinese *Sbhv.* avoids the ominous term “brahmin”; we find only “beggar” 乞人.

Before a word can be uttered by Viśvantara, who is described as a bodhisattva looking at his wife with his heart imbued with compassion (*karuṇāparigatahṛdayo* 慈心瞻視觀察), Mādri tells him that she is motivated not by consideration (*apekṣā*) for herself but by the fact that he could not survive without her: “If I follow this one,

who can serve you?" 若我隨彼去，誰能奉事君？

Twice using the term "free from sorrow" (*viśoka*) to describe his quest and the attitude that Mādri must adopt, Viśvantara orders her to follow (*anusara!*) the brahmin. Elated, he is convinced that casting off (*parityajya* 捨妻) Mādri will be his last and supreme gift (*dānaṃ pascimam*) in the forest. Taking her by the hand and now in his own turn praising her as loving, obedient, elegant, and well-spoken (*bhāvānurakta-śuśruṣā sadvṛttā priya-vādinī*), he enjoins the brahmin to take her (*grhāṇa!* or more ceremoniously in Chinese: 願哀納受). The supreme renunciation of a wife (*patnī*) by a "[lord] with good teeth" (*Sudamṣṭra*)⁶ who aspires to achieve *bodhi* is once again greeted by a sextuple earthquake. Nevertheless, Mādri, now deprived of husband, son and daughter (*pati-putra-duhitṛ-rahitā* 既失男女子復離賢夫), is described (with an expression already used to describe the extreme sorrow of Viśvantara's father and children) as being blocked by tears and suffocated by stammering (*bāṣpa-uparuddhyamāna-gadga-kaṇṭhā*). It is not words of resignation or elation that issue from her mouth, but the same question that puzzled her children before they were given away by their father and that was expressed in her *lamento* in the third act: what evil (*anāryam*) *karma* in a former life has caused her to err like a cow whose calf is dead in a deserted forest?

Such is Mādri's situation when the happy ending arrives: Śakra discards his brahmin appearance and lets Viśvantara walk off with Mādri. Before paying attention to Viśvantara, who returns to his *aśrama*, Śakra says to Mādri that since he is not a brahmin, not even a human, the whole episode was meant to test her discipline (*vinaya*) and, following a habit much appreciated in the tradition, he offers to her grant her one wish (this offer is not made to Viśvantara, as is the case in the Pāli account). As expected, she asks Śakra to free her children from servitude (*dāśabhāva*, *Bhv.*: 奴婢身, *Sbhv.*: 賤身) and take them

to their grandfather. In the Sanskrit account, she addresses the god with utmost respect, using his two powerful epithets: the god with a thousand eyes and the chief of the thirty[-three] gods. The Chinese version of the *Samghabhedavastu* preserves only the name “god with a thousand eyes” 千眼天主.

The return of Mādri to Viśvantara is made with the same ceremony of taking her left hand with the condition that as keeper of Mādri, he will never be guilty (*garhita*) of a breach of trust (*nyāsa-droha*) by giving her to someone else, since she is now an assistant (*paricārika*) bestowed by the god. In the juridical Chinese of the Vinaya, this crime is called: infamy 嫌恥 toward a deposit 受寄 (*Sbhv.*) or a deposit that has to be used 受寄將餘用 (*Bhv.*).

In the last part of the story, which narrates the redemption of the children by their grandfather, the return of the bodhisattva to his kingdom and, in the *Samghabhedavastu* only, the last abuse of the brahmin Jujjuka⁷, Mādri is not mentioned, except in a eulogy by Viśvantara who becomes king “all-giver” (*sarvaṃdada*) famous for having renounced both his wife and children (*suta-dāra-parityāgaṃ kṛtvā*) (Gnoli II: 133.12, 19).

After having read the present account of Viśvantara’s venture in the *Vinaya*, one could draw the conclusion that the order of the episodes is rather similar to that in the well-known Pāli *Vessantara-jātaka*, although there are a few differences, such as the *Vinaya* reduplication of the gift of the royal chariot to the brahmins. Looking more deeply, one becomes convinced that the psychological portrayal of Mādri is diametrically opposed to that in the Pāli text. The Pāli tale presents a passive woman, whose unique personal choice is to follow Vessantara into exile, but who then endures all his capricious gestures, several of which are particularly vicious. Instead of this pathetic figure,

the *Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin* gives readers a proud lady whose sharp tongue produces some of the most striking anti-brahmin tirades of Buddhist literature. It is true that at the end of every confrontation she submits to Viśvantara's will, and to the ethics inherent to the *Jātaka* tales, but it is impossible to consider her submission as mere passivity. The contrast between the Northern and the so-called Southern tradition is more perceptible in the treatment of Mādrī than in the treatment of the children, which I investigated in the previous article. It is partly due to the fact that the boy Jāli is more outspoken in the Pāli tradition. Another reason for the self-effacement of Mādrī, who is promised to become in her next existence the unhappy consort of the Buddha Śākyamuni, is the fact that she is flanked in the first and in the last parts of the tale by the powerful presence of Phusatī, the queen-mother, whose destiny is to become Mahāmāyā the mother of the Buddha Śākyamuni. In another Pāli text on Vessantara, the *Cariyā-piṭaka*, Phusatī, who pronounces the verses 1-11⁹), overshadows again her daughter-in-law.

A more complete study would require an analysis of the "portrait" of Mādrī in a few other texts in the Sanskrit tradition, either in their original language or in early Chinese translations.

II

Āryaśūra: *Jātakamālā* chapter 9
[ed. P.L. Vaidya (BST, 1959), pp. 55-69]

The datation of Āryaśūra, the author of the *Jātakamālā* is still undetermined, but the influence of his work on Buddhist art makes it probable that he was active in the first centuries of the Christian era. It is not an easy task to use the ninth chapter "Viśvaṃtara-jātaka"

of the *Jātakamālā* to paint a portrait of the wife of the hero, here spelled "Madri". What can be said is that the text does not present Madri as a temperamental woman but as a princess who is completely her own master. The narrative focuses heavily on the hero whose name is written as Viśvaṃtara, a tender husband who does not violate common sense, clearly different from the Vessantara of the Pāli tradition, whose holiness is excessive, occasionally even horrendous. As a result of this more balanced presentation of the husband, the refined tale of the *Jātakamālā* seems to be rather neutral about Madri, a devoted wife. There is a tendency in this account to paint the relation between husband and wife as idyllically as possible.

When Madri first appears, she speaks only a few stanzas (v. 31-39). After having declared that dying at the side of her husband is better than living without him, she lyrically describes the pleasures of natural life in the forest. We hear again an ecstatic Madri when the banished family reaches its hermitage in the forest: such a nice place is due to the superpowers of her husband (*prabhāvamati manuṣa*) (v. 46-47). During the scene of the gift of the children, both her husband and her children regret her absence and Viśvaṃtara rejects firmly the misogynistic insinuation of the evil brahmin, who describes her with the word *vāma* (v. 58) in the sense of "beauty" and of "obstacle."⁹ Madri's return from the forest, Viśvaṃtara's silence, the search for the children, Madri's fainting and being comforted by her husband, who sprinkles water on her before telling her the truth about the children—all these elements of the drama are described sensitively but rather tamely. In this refined literature we are far from the intensity of Mādri's *lamento* that we hear in the Pāli *Jātaka* and in the Sanskrit *Vinaya*. Perhaps the most striking representation of Madri in this poem occurs close to the end (v. 94), in the description of her before her marriage to Śakra: Madri is described not as angry and weeping but

as knowing the nature (*svabhava*) of her husband, looking (*prekṣamānā*) like a statue (*likhitā iva*) when being burdened (*bhārâturā*) by an as yet unsuffered pain (*apurvaduhkhā*).

III

Avadānakalpalatā, chapter 23

[ed. P.L. Vaidya (BST, 1959), I, pp. 172-175]

It is the grief of Mādrī as a mother and as a wife that is the most striking feature of the portrait of Mādrī in the fifty-four stanzas of “Viśvantarâvadāna”, Chapter 23 of the *Avadānakalpalatā* (by Kṣemendra, dated 1052). This short account, in which the evil brahmin is called Jambuka, seems to have been influenced by the *Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. The setting of Kṣemendra’s tale is very similar to the *Vinaya* version, including the reduplication of the gift of the royal chariot to the brahmins (v. 8-15, 29). In this short text, Mādrī is often alluded to and even described, but she never speaks. We thus miss the strong expressions that are a hallmark of the *Vinaya* tale.

IV

Samghasena: *Bodhisattva-avadāna*, chapter 3

[菩薩本緣經, T. III, no 153, j. 2-3, pp. 57-61]

The next text to be considered is the *Avadāna* of Viśvantara 一切持 attributed to the Sanskrit writer Samghasena whose works seem to be almost completely lost in their original language. I have dealt with the Chinese translation of this fine, linear and extremist literary piece in the previous article where the episodes were divided into ten

"sections." Up until the last episode, the hero's offering of his own eyes, the plot is presented in ten clearly delineated sections. Saṃghasena's version is, I believe, the composition in which the drama of the children receives the most attention. Nevertheless, the personality of the unnamed wife, generally called the spouse 妻 or the bodhisattva's spouse, is also conspicuous in this tale. Her assertiveness is evident but is here more directed toward her husband than toward the brahmin-beggars, as in the *Vinaya*.

Memorable, in the fourth section, are the three reprimands that she addresses to her husband when he tells her of his banishment: she asks what was his fault; she argues about a weakness that can be better attributed to her husband than to herself; and she proclaims her resolution never to leave him. In the sixth section, we have a hint of Viśvantara's callousness when he asks the brahmin to leave quickly with the children before their mother returns. The mother's sorrow at having lost her children constitutes the eighth section.

Missing is the episode of the mother's way being blocked by a lioness (or, as is more often the case, by three wild animals) on her way back to the hermitage. The inner trouble of the mother concerned about her two children is symbolized by her dropping on the ground two fruits that she has collected, as well as by milk bursting forth from her breast, a common emotional symbol of Buddhist literature. She fears that the children have been eaten by the three beasts or that, when playing, they have fallen in the mountains and died. Finally she reaches her husband who is sitting on a grass cushion near a rock. Thinking that he looks unconcerned, she asks him if the children are safe 安隱. Yes, he answers. She repeats her question and declares her anguish at not seeing her children. He then makes her sit down and he explains to her his promise to give his children to the brahmin. She faints, and the bodhisattva sprinkles water on her. After regaining

consciousness, she delivers, in eight Chinese *gāthās* with *padas* of five characters each (60b26-c12), a powerful invective against her husband's insensitivity. This invective contains the themes familiar from other *lamentos*: the suffering of the children and the despicableness of the brahmin (although he is not called a brahmin here). Still, her speech is first of all an exceptional woman's complaint against man's insensitivity. It deserves to be translated in full :

Alas, taking as the correct Law your practice of asceticism

When you were giving away the children, did not your heart feel any trouble ?

Is not your heart made of hard iron and already completely cut off from love ?

How can you use the children to make a gift to somebody ?

My children are young and small, beautiful and immature.

Their colour is like the lotus, their eyes like the *Udumbara* [flower].

They nourish themselves with water and fruit and they are not causing any trouble.

How could a being with no human feeling suddenly give them to someone?

The path is filled with pebbles and sand, with bushes and evil thorns.

This man is deprived of wisdom and charity, taking them to I don't know where.

You—are you blind, facing the deer and other animals,

Who seem to be coming and searching, pushing and seeking, while you, their father,

Do not see in this mountain that even the forest trees

All moan because I have lost my children?

All these trees have no heart or conscience

But if they are in such state, how could you be a man with heart ?

After these passionate *gāthās* followed by a huge shuddering of

the palm trees, the mother ends her invective in plain language with a denunciation of her husband's lack of compassion 慈愍. Viśvantara's long answer reflects a wish to placate his wife, whom he calls "Princess" 王女, as he has before, by praising her character: entering the mountain, she knew that she would have to suffer, but her energy makes her forget to liberate herself from the samsaric excesses. Her pain has to be transformed into joy. A reference to death, which ineluctably severs all bonds of affection, commonly appears in most of Viśvantara's discourses, but this argument is always connected with his aspiration to achieve *bodhi* (or its synonym, omniscience), with a mention of his wish to save all living beings. Here strangely enough, there is no mention of the Buddhist ideal, but the bodhisattva ends his reply to the infuriated *gāthās* of his wife with a quotation from an unidentified "Holy book of the Rṣi" 諸仙聖書, consisting of eight Chinese *gāthās* with *padās* of eight characters each. These verses talk about death and impermanence and have nothing to do with *bodhi*. His conclusion is written in plain prose. He needs serenity after discarding their children. She must thus get rid of her great affliction. Her silence is a resignation that explains her subsequent complete submission.

Samghasena's version of Śakra's transformation into a brahmin is more sophisticated than most of the other accounts. The pretend-brahmin does not ask bluntly for the bodhisattva's wife but rather asks him to "fulfill a wish". Viśvantara acknowledges that his only remaining possessions are his wife and his body and that he loves neither of them. When the faux brahmin asks for Mādri, Viśvantara asks her opinion. Given what we have seen of her so far, her answer is staggering: "Your wish is my command 隨意自在. I am here to assist you 我今屬君. How could I decide by myself 何得自從?" These are the only words uttered by the spouse in the two last sections. We do not witness here Śakra's immediate return to his genuine appearance. It is still the

pseudo-brahmin who entrusts his new wife to the bodhisattva for fear of taking her on arduous paths with many brigands. The ordeals of the spouse do not end here, because in the radical version of Saṃghasena there is no more question of a boon offered by Śakra nor of news about her children (who were rescued in the seventh section). Until the apotheosis of her husband, it seems that she has only to listen to his recriminations, as his request to be freed of his wife and of his eyes had not been granted.

V

“Collected Sūtra on the Six Pāramitās”, chapter 14

[六度集經, T. III, no 152, j. 2, pp. 7-11]

and “Sūtra of Prince Sudāna”

[太子須大拏, T. III, no 171, pp. 418 - 424]

The last two texts to be discussed in this article, which present an original image of Mādri, are the two interrelated *Avadānas* of *Sudāna* that I have called in my previous article the “Archaic version” (T. 152) and the “Monographic sūtra” or the “Monograph” (T. 171). Like the literary composition of Āryaśūra, the plots of these two sūtras have more in common with the Pāli *Jātaka* than with the two main accounts introduced above (i.e., the *Vinaya* tale and Saṃghasena’s literary composition). A common feature of these two Sudāna texts and the Pāli *Vessantara-jātaka* is that the conduct of the prince called here “Sudāna” affects not only his wife but also his mother, whose despair is described (8c20, 420b25). As said in the previous article, the “Archaic version” (translated in the late third century) and the “Monographic sūtra” (translated between 388 and 408) have been included in the two most influential anthologies of Chinese Buddhism,

respectively, the *Jing lü yi xiang* 經律異相 of the early sixth century and the *Fa yuan zhu lin* 法苑珠林 of the late seventh century.

In regard to the figure of Mādri, these two Sudāna texts focus on her vow to agree to her husband's generosity. This vow conditions all her attitudes. To reinforce this aspect, several scenes seem to be amplifications of or additions to the original canvas. One scene concerns the ṛṣi Accuta (present in the *Vessantara-jātaka*), and another one is related to the story of the foremost predecessor of Śākyamuni Buddha, the Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

Accuta (in the *Archaic version* 阿周陀道士; in the *Monographic sūtra* 阿州陀道人) welcomes Sudāna to the mountain. In the *Archaic version* (9a19-23), the candidate hermit is embarrassed to be accompanied by his wife and his children when asking for advice 誨 on how to study the Way 學道 and realize his intention 成吾志. In the *Monograph* (421a 18-28), when Accuta expresses surprise at seeing the aspiring practitioner with a wife and children, before the prince can answer, a vivacious Mādri observes that if for Accuta four or five hundred years were necessary to achieve wisdom 得道, then for people like her 計有吾我人者, it will be as long as for trees in the mountain! As we see later in the dialogue between the prince and Accuta, this meeting seems to have the purpose of letting the prince explicitly proclaim his belonging to the Mahāyāna (摩訶衍道, 421b3-4).

The *Monograph* (422c13-21) also inserts an extraneous story, told by the prince to his fainting wife after the loss of the children. This story is taken from the famous *Jātaka* about the Buddha Dīpaṃkara. Sudāna is to be seen as the reincarnation of the bodhisattva Sumedha (called here Vedavat 鞞多衛, in other texts: Sumati or Megha) and Mādri is the reincarnation of the girl who sold him flowers, called here Suratā 須羅陀 (or Xu-tuo-luo with an interversion in the order of the characters).¹⁰ There was an agreement that the girl would become the

bodhisattva's wife in all her future existences on the condition that she accept all his acts of generosity. In this *Monographic sūtra*, which extols filial piety, the bodhisattva exempts only his father and mother as possible gifts.

The vicissitudes of Mādri are almost the same in the two texts. It is only in the *Monograph* (419a18-20) that she is introduced in the prologue of the tale. In contrast, in the *Archaic version* readers do not meet Mādri until the scene in which the prince informs her of his banishment. In both texts, this scene includes a lively dialogue between husband and wife (*Archaic*: 8b22-c19; *Monograph*: 420a28-b24). As in Saṃghasena's version, Mādri's first question is: what is your misdeed? (*Archaic*: 罪; *Monograph*: 過咎). In her second intervention, though wishing the best for the kingdom, she expresses her wish to go to the mountain to realize (成道, *Archaic*) or to seek (求道, *Monograph*) the Way. After the prince describes the mountain in horrific terms, Mādri claims that she does not need luxury, that a wife has to be the flag 幟 of her husband, like the banner for a king or smoke for fire, and that in his absence, unable to practice giving, she would die. Her fourth intervention is to make a solemn vow never to fail in her will to give. This is for these two texts the most fundamental aspect of the figure of Mādri.

In the odyssey to the mountain, Mādri's silent gift of her precious dresses to a vagrant brahmin occurs before the gift of the horses and of the chariot in the *Archaic version* (9a5-6) and after these two gifts in the *Monograph* (420c21-22). Only the *Monograph* (420c27-421a13) mentions the following two incidents: the vision of a city offering respite for the travellers and the obstacle of a stream that blocks their progress. Both times, Mādri suggest that they take some rest, but Sudāna insists that they proceed and rejects such "unfiliality" 非孝子, as he has to obey the will of his father. The fictitious city seems to be

a faint echo of the episode of the city of the Cetas in the *Vessantara-jātaka*.

The meeting with Accuta has already been mentioned. As in the rest of the tradition, much of the dramatic character of the arrival of the brahmin (called 梵志 in the *Archaic version* and 婆羅門 in the *Monograph*) begging for the children is accentuated precisely by the absence of the mother to whom the children are calling for help. They anticipate that her missing them like a cow looking for her calf will drive her crazy (*Archaic*: 9b7-c2)

Next comes a description of the despair of Mādri, often compared to craziness 狂 in the *Archaic version* (10a3 and 18). She is first afflicted by dark omens: troubles with her left foot, her right eye, and milk bursting from her breast. The obstacle caused by the wild animals under Śakra's influence is described in the *Archaic version* (10a3-9) as the arrival, one after the other, of a lion, a white wolf and a tiger.¹¹⁾ The lion and the tiger, but not the white wolf, are known in the *Vessantara Jātaka*. In the *Monograph* (422b22-25), there is only a lion (Śakra in disguise) with whom Mādri converses, as in the *Vinaya* tradition. The *Archaic version* (10a21-25) is the only text studied here that mentions Mādri's dream, which plays an important role in the *Vessantara-jātaka*. The ugly image she sees in her sleep (her breasts being cut by an old and poor brahmin) contributes to the horror of a scene in which first the silence, then the concession of Sudāna lead Mādri to fall into an eruption of folly 癡狂. We miss here Mādri's vehement invectives against her husband and against the brahmin, but we get closer to the human tragedy brought on by the rigidity of the husband, who in these two texts is never called bodhisattva but only prince.

The last scene involving Mādri is her repudiation and her marriage to a pseudo-brahmin as ugly as the one who stole her children. Mādri who has been reminded of her resolution by her husband, seems

to be completely passive, although her husband, who is reluctant to take her back, praises her asceticism and her beauty in the *Monograph* (423a4-8). The happy ending arrives only after the god has revealed his true identity and (in the *Archaic version* [10b16-19]) offered one boon to the prince and three boons to Mādri (1. that the children be led to redemption in their own country, 2. that they not suffer hunger or thirst, 3. that she and the prince should reintegrate their country) followed by (in the *Monograph* [423a9-14]) a boon for the prince.

CONCLUSION

This two-part discussion of several antique versions of what has been considered the most extreme bodhisattva's sacrifice, the *Vessantara Jātaka*, we first centered our attention on the drama of the children. This second article has focused on their mother, the wife of Prince Vessantara, thereby putting the very popular story in a new perspective.

We have seen that in most of the texts there are four scenes in which Mādri is in the spotlight: 1. still in the palace she is told by her husband of his sentence to exile, 2. during the hard journey from the capital of the kingdom to the place of penance in the mountains, 3. after the gift of her children to a beggar, she crosses the forest, reaches the empty hermitage and utters what I have called her *lamento*, 4. a faux brahmin asks for her and her husband repudiates her.

Throughout the tradition, Mādri is presented as a victim. She is drawn into the dilemma of her husband who cannot reach the bodhisattva ideal of omniscience and saving all beings without subjecting himself and his family to unbearable pressure. Mādri is a half-consenting victim, since it is often recorded that she voluntarily shares her husband's vow of generosity. Her character as a victim is emphasized especially in the Pāli *Vessantara Jātaka* by the callousness

of her husband, a callousness that takes on an original aspect in the Saṃghasena tale.¹²⁾ Especially in the Pāli *Vessantara Jātaka* and in the two related *Avadānas* (called here the *Archaic version* and the *Monographic sūtra*), we can see that Mādri is driven almost to madness. The two Chinese texts use the expression “eruption of folly” 發狂. An element of most of the tradition but especially of these three works is the parallelism between Mādri’s suffering and a distress affecting nature and inanimate objects: the animals, the trees of the forests, the water of the stream, the animal-shaped toys left by the children. There is more to say about this aspect, very conspicuous in this tale, of a hostile nature and a benevolent nature often juxtaposed.

In these three works, as in the rather tame account of the *Jātakamālā*, Mādri seems to have no outlet for her misery. Such is not the case in the other accounts, in which her strong temperament is expressed with a tonic vehemence, rather uncommon for a woman in Buddhist texts. On several occasions, her husband reprimands her for her harsh words. Saṃghasena’s tale¹³⁾ introduces us to one of her outbursts: when her husband cautions her about the hard life in solitude for which she is not prepared, she replies that he himself is “soft as a *campaka* flower”! Later in the same tale, her sorrow after the loss of her children culminates in an eruption of rebuke to her husband. In the *Vinaya* tradition, we have appreciated Mādri’s outbursts against the greediness of the brahmins on three occasions: 1. the second time the brahmin begs the prince for the chariot; 2. when she imagines the distress of the children mistreated by the brahmin; and 3. when the pseudo-brahmin asks her husband to give her to him.

In the antique tradition, the repudiation of Mādri is not effective because Śakra immediately bestows Mādri as a “deposit” to her husband. In the most extreme tale, written by Saṃghasena¹⁴⁾ but also familiar to the author of the *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論, Viśvantara reluctantly

accepts the deposit of his wife and of his eyes. The usual happy ending consisting of the couple's return to their kingdom is replaced here by an apotheosis of the bodhisattva only. In a Newar scroll of the early nineteenth century, studied by Siegfried Lienhard¹⁵⁾, we read in one of the last captions (partly influenced by the *Jātakamālā*) that Śakra does not give Mādri back to her husband, but rather that Mādri and her children are put under the protection of her father-in-law in the capital of the kingdom.

Although the edifying tales of the *Jātaka* and of the *Avadāna* are built on a settled foundation and are filled with stereotypical and especially hagiographical patterns, they have a literary quality that has been underappreciated but rewards attention. On the one hand, it is not impossible to glimpse the literary merit of the Indian originals through the Chinese translations, especially in the case of a gifted author such as Saṃghasena. On the other hand, these tales can also be understood as echoes of their different audiences. As the tale move from standard Buddhism to Mahāyāna as well as from India to China, we can see an evolution in the attitudes toward the actions of protagonists and others. This was clear in my first article, "Two interpretations of human-flesh offering: misdeed or supreme sacrifice,¹⁶⁾" which analyzed differing evaluations of the act of giving away one's own flesh. In my second article and in this third article, both focused on lesser known versions of the *Vessantara-jātaka*, I have tried to capture the voices, if not of Mādri and of her two children, at least of the authors of the tales in the sometimes sympathetic, sometimes disapproving recounting of their ordeal within a story that mostly exalts the bodhisattva Viśvantara's sacrifice of his two most beloved possessions—his wife and children.

Note

- 1) "The Offering of the Children of Prince Viśvantara/Sudāna in the Chinese Tradition," *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 2(1999):147-182[hereafter "The Offering"]. The bibliographical references of this article are made to the main collections of Buddhist Texts: PTS (Pāli Text Society, London), BST (Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, Darbhanga), T (Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō, Tōkyō). Further references could be found in the aforementioned article.
- 2) After Alfred Foucher, *L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhāra*, T. I, Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1905, pp.283-285, Higata Ryūshō 千渴龍祥 has attempted to collect the archeological evidence of the *Jātakas* in *Jātakagaikan* ジャアタカ概観, Tōkyō: Suzuki gakujutsu zaidan, 1961, pp.122-162. This book complements the two volumes of his useful *A Historical Study of the Thoughts in Jātakas and Similar Stories*, 本生經類の思想史的研究, Tōkyō: Tōyō Bunko, 1954.
- 3) Steven Collins presents a new reading of this *Jātaka* in *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pāli Imaginaire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.497-554.
- 4) *Tibetan Tales Derived From Indian Sources*, translated from the Tibetan by F. Anton von Schiefner into German and from the German into English by W.R.S. Ralston(1882). New edition with a preface by C.A.F. Rhys Davids, London: Routledge, 1925. Repr. Taipei: SMC Publ. 1990, pp.257-272.
- 5) "The Offering," p.174. According to the Schiefner-Ralston's version(p. 262), Kṛṣṇa should be the name of the prince and Jālinī the name of the Princess.
- 6) This term was already used in a previous passage(Gnoli II: 123.1). In the corresponding passage in *Bhv.* (T. 1448, 65c20) we find Sudana 蘇達那. This occurrence supports the supposition that a deformation of Sudamṣṭra in a Central Asian language might have been the origin of the name

"Sudāna" given to Viśvantara in several Chinese versions of the tale.

7) "The Offering," p.176, the reference to the edition of Gnoli, p.133, should be inserted before 24-26.

8) *Buddhavaṃsa and Cariyāpiṭaka*, New Edition by N.A.Jayawickrama, PTS 1974, p.8.

9) "The Offering," p.181. n.28.

10) Lamotte, *Traité I*, p.248, n.2 furnishes an abundant bibliography on that legend, which he calls "one of the most venerable of Buddhism."

11) The meeting with animals—either sent by a god or metamorphoses of Śakra—is a famous feature of most of the tradition. The animals may be a lion, a lioness or three wild beasts: lion(*siha*), tiger(*vyaggha*), leopard (*dīpin*) in the Pāli *Vessantara-jātaka*, p.556.1518. Is it more than a coincidence that a lion, leopard and wolf are the threatening animals of Jeremiah V.6 and of the *Divina Comedia* I.v.32-49: *lonza, di "pel maculato", leone, lupa?*

12) "The Offering," p.159.

13) "The Offering," p.157.

14) "The Offering," p.165.

15) "La légende du prince Viśvantara dans la tradition népalaise," *Arts Asiatiques* XXXIV, 1978, pp.146-149.

16) *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 1 (1998), pp.57-83.

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