

Divine Stories

दिव्यावदान *Divyāvadāna* PART I

CLASSICS OF INDIAN BUDDHISM



Translated by Andy Rotman

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Divine Stories

CLASSICS OF INDIAN BUDDHISM

The flourishing of Buddhism in South Asia during the first millennium of the Common Era produced many texts that deserve a place among the classics of world literature. Exploring the full extent of the human condition and the limits of language and reason, these texts have the power to edify and entertain a wide variety of readers. The *Classics of Indian Buddhism* series aims to publish widely accessible translations of important texts from the Buddhist traditions of South Asia, with special consideration given to works foundational for the Mahāyāna.

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THE DIVYĀVADĀNA

The *Divyāvadāna* is a large collection of Indian Buddhist stories written in Sanskrit from the early centuries of the Common Era. These stories have frequently been used in the moral education of monastics and laypeople, and they have often been considered to be the word of the Buddha himself. These stories have since spread throughout Asia, as both narrative and narrative art, leaving an indelible mark on Buddhist thought and practice. Representations of these stories can be found across Asia, from Kizil in China to Sanchi in India to Borobudur in Indonesia. It is not hyperbole to say that these are some of the most influential stories in the history of Buddhism. This volume contains the first half of the stories in the collection.



C L A S S I C S O F I N D I A N B U D D H I S M

Divine Stories

Divyāvadāna

PART 1

Translated by Andy Rotman



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To my teachers,
who have given me so much

विद्या नाम नरस्य रूपमधिकं प्रच्छन्नगुप्तं धनं
विद्या भोगकरी यशःसुखकरी विद्या गुरुणां गुरुः।
विद्या बन्धुजनो विदेशगमने विद्या परा देवता
विद्या राजसु पूज्यते न हि धनं विद्याविहीनः पशुः॥

—Bhartr̥hari, *Nīṭisataka*



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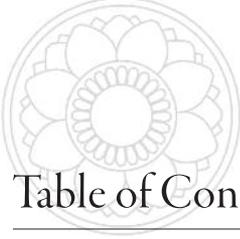


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Preface

Meritorious deeds are to be performed.
Not performing meritorious deeds brings suffering.
Those who perform meritorious deeds
can rejoice in this world and in the next.

—The *Divyāvadāna*

IT IS MY HONOR to have this translation of the first half of the *Divyāvadāna* presented as the inaugural volume in the new *Classics of Indian Buddhism* series. I believe that the *Divyāvadāna* is an excellent choice to launch the series, for it encapsulates much of what is distinctive and inspiring about classical Indian Buddhism. Here one is introduced to various people, places, and philosophies of the Middle Country, with the Buddha and his disciples as the star performers. Traveling through the kingdoms of Kośala, Magadha, and beyond, they encounter characters from all walks of life: animal, human, divine, and demonic. In these encounters, they teach the dharma by word and deed, generating faith and new converts, as well as illustrating for the listener the merits of the Buddhist path.

The *avadānas*, or stories, in the *Divyāvadāna* have traditionally served as a means of sharing Buddhist teachings with a broad audience of both monastics and laypeople, and this, too, makes the present volume a good choice for launching the *Classics of Indian Buddhism* series. The aim of the series is to present Buddhist texts that were influential

within classical India in a way that both specialists and more general readers can appreciate. To this end, translations are meant to combine accuracy with readability—a tall task indeed. I have tried to succeed on both accounts, providing readers with a glimpse of Indian Buddhism that complements and enriches the perspective gained from more contemporary works.

I first began studying the *Divyāvadāna* as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, and the critical study of the text that began as my dissertation is being published simultaneously by Oxford University Press (Rotman 2008). That book, *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*, can be read as a companion to this translation. In it I consider faith as a visual practice in Buddhism, and how seeing and faith function as part of overlapping visual and moral economies. In particular, I analyze the mental states of *śraddhā* and *prasāda*—terms rendered as “belief” and “faith” in this translation; how these relate to practices of “seeing” (*darśana*) and “giving” (*dāna*); and what this configuration of seeing, believing, and giving tells us about the power of images, the logic of pilgrimage, and the function of narratives in Buddhist India.

During the last twenty years, scholars with interests ranging from gender, ritual, and cultural studies to visual anthropology, intellectual history, and the sociology of religion have increasingly recognized and made use of the *Divyāvadāna* as an important repository of religious and cultural knowledge (e.g., Lewis 2000; Mroczek 2006; Ohnuma 2007; Rotman 2003b; Schopen 2004; Strong 1992; Tatelman 2000; Wilson 1996). Our work, however, has often been hampered by the lack of reliable translations of the stories in the collection—and in many cases, by the lack of any translation at all. Few of the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* have ever been translated into English, owing to the bias of scholars from previous centuries who favored philosophy over narrative, and owing as well to the text’s complex linguistic structure and idiosyncratic vocabulary. The present volume will help remedy this situation by offering translations of the first seventeen of the thirty-

eight stories in the *Divyāvadāna*. The remaining stories will be published later in this series in a second volume.

I have tried to be both colloquial and technical in my translations, for these stories are precise legal documents as well as popular tales. Whether they were legends incorporated into Buddhist scholarly discourse or Buddhist didacticism crafted into a folksy idiom, these narratives are certainly more than transcriptions of folklore. They're also fakelore—learned treatises posing as popular tales—and as such they need to be translated meticulously to capture their subtleties. In short, I have tried to refrain from translating this text into what Paul Griffiths (1981) has so poignantly referred to as “Buddhist Hybrid English.” My goal has been to produce a document in English that could be studied by specialists and appreciated by nonspecialists, yet still be entertaining to both. I hope I have been successful.

Acknowledgments

So many people and institutions have helped me with this project that I am humbled as I try to catalogue all the teaching, advice, and financial assistance that I have received over the years. At the University of Chicago, I was fortunate to read portions of the *Divyāvadāna* with Sheldon Pollock and Steven Collins. I was also fortunate to learn much about the complexities of Sanskrit from Wendy Doniger, David Gito-mer, Paul Griffiths, and Bruce Perry, and from A. K. Ramanujan, quite a lot about the art of translating. From my years in Chicago there are so many friends to thank for so many kindnesses: Nick Collier, Laura Desmond, William Elison, Arnika Fuhrmann, Caitrin Lynch, Erin O'Donnell, Elizabeth Pérez, and Amy Wescott, to name just a few, for kindnesses far too many to list.

In India, those who helped me can primarily be divided by region: those in and around Sarnath and those in Pune. In Sarnath, most of my work was done at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, and I am most thankful to Samdhong Rinpoche for facilitating my stay

there. During my years at the Institute, I read with K. N. Mishra, who patiently taught me the pleasures of Sanskrit narrative, and also on occasion with Ram Shankar Tripathi, whose breadth of learning in Buddhist Sanskrit was a wonderful resource. I was also fortunate to read Tibetan with many scholars at the Institute: Ramesh Negi and Pema Tenzin, who guided my work through Tibetan translations of Sanskrit avadānas, teaching me Tibetan as well as Sanskrit and Hindi, and Geshe Ngawang Samten and Lobsang Norbu Shastri, who helped me to make sense of many obscure passages, particularly those in part II of this translation, and whose hospitality never ceased to amaze me. I was also fortunate to have the help of John Dunne and Sara McClintock during part of my stay there. Both of them were enormously helpful, not just answering my questions about Tibetan grammar and linguistics, but offering me great warmth and friendship. I am also thankful to Abhaya Jain and his family for offering me food and refuge—a home away from home in Sarnath. In Varanasi, I was especially lucky in this regard, for there I was the recipient of much hospitality. Virendra Singh provided me with impromptu Hindi lessons and a role model for how to be a dedicated teacher. Ramu Pandit helped me so frequently and in so many ways, offering advice, encouragement, and always friendship. Andrea Pinkney offered me enormous kindness and counsel, all with a glorious view of the Ganga. Mat Schmalz (a.k.a. Prem Kumar) was always ready with paan and companionship, and Rabindra Goswami, with wonderful food and even better music.

My debts in Pune are also considerable. J. R. Joshi spent so many afternoons reading Sanskrit with me that I can't possibly calculate how much material we read together or how many of my mistakes he corrected. What M. G. Dhadphale gave to me is also difficult to measure. He taught me about the subtleties of Sanskrit, always answering my most difficult questions with a bravura performance. His enthusiasm for reading Sanskrit literature continues to inspire me. I would also like to thank Shrikant Bahulkar who first directed me to Pune and offered me friendship, guidance, and considerable help in Sanskrit. Others

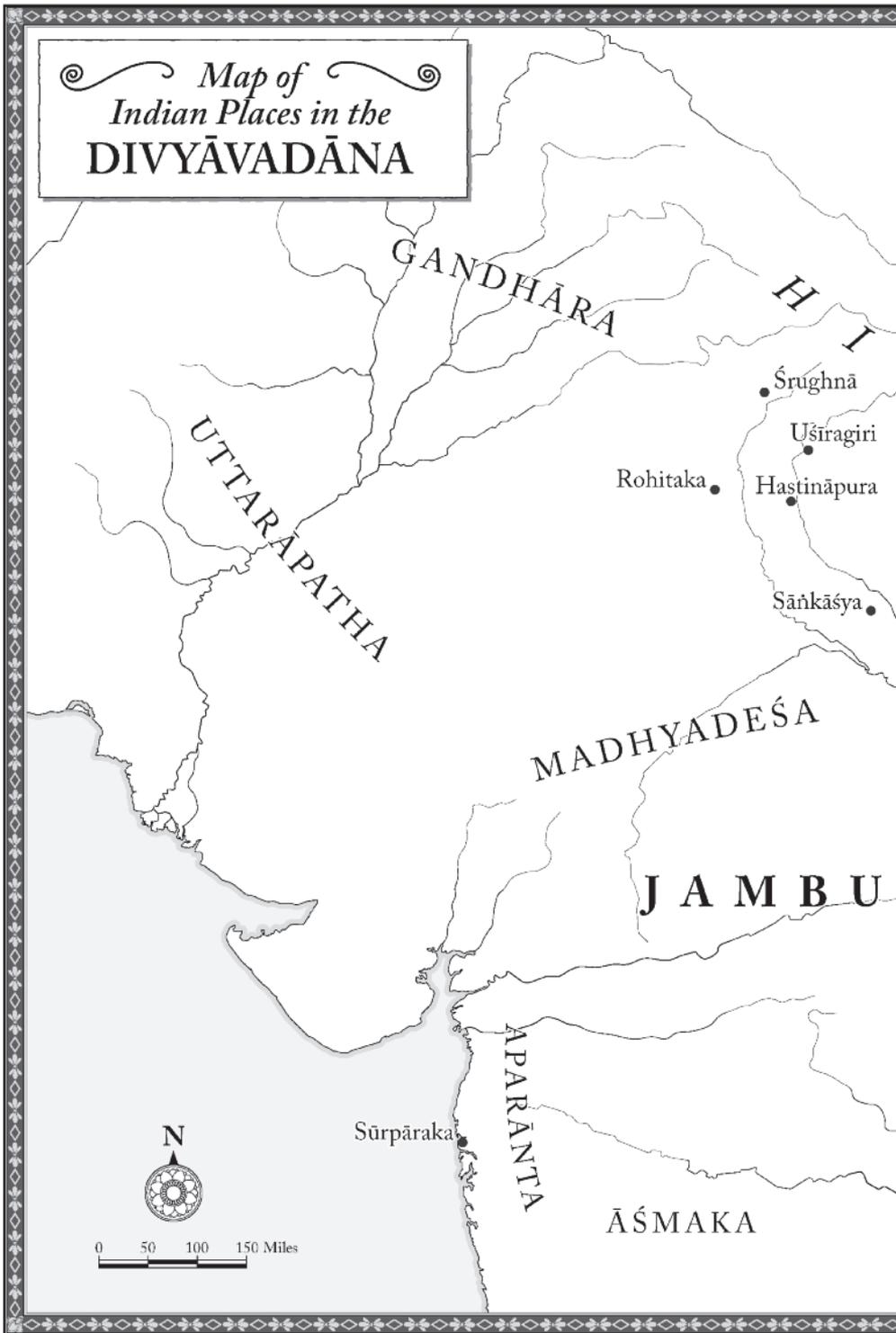
who helped me include Ramchandra Gadgil, who read various avadānas with me, Sucheta Paranjpe, who taught me spoken Sanskrit, and Mandeep Bhandar, Jeffrey Brackett, Gayatri Chatterjee, Sunila Kale, Suresh Nadkarni, Christian Novetzke, Parimal Patil, and Michael Youngblood, all of whom made Pune feel like home.

I also have many institutions to thank for the financial support that I received. A Fulbright-Hays grant allowed me to begin this translation project, three years worth of funding from the Rocky Foundation allowed me to extend my tenure in India, and two summers of financial support from Smith College allowed me to travel to India and Professor Dhadphale to travel to the United States for work on final revisions.

Closer to my current home, I'd like to thank my family and friends who have given me so much support. My parents, Arline and Barry, and brothers, Dave and Al, have been incredibly patient with my progress, and their constant encouragement and unstinting confidence have been invaluable. Numerous friends have also been exceedingly generous, with their time, their help, and their comments on my work. Over the years, the Five College Buddhist Studies faculty has kept me motivated and inspired, while those at Northampton Coffee have kept me caffeinated and inspired. I would also like to thank Christian Haskett for assisting me with some difficult passages in the Tibetan, Shilpa Sumant for correcting my errant transliterations, Connie Kassor for helping me organize the index, Paul Harrison for making some great suggestions about better readings and reconstructions, and David Kitzelstrom for his sage editorial advice and assistance. Laura Cunningham, Joe Evans, Tony Lulek, Tim McNeill, Rod Meade Sperry, and the rest of the folks at Wisdom Publications also deserve special recognition for their exemplary and tireless work.

Finally, I'd like to thank April Strickland for making my life so full of love and joy. Thanks everybody.

Map of
Indian Places in the
DIVYĀVADĀNA







Technical Notes

Sources

THE FOLLOWING TRANSLATION is based on the Sanskrit edition of the *Divyāvadāna* compiled by E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil in 1886 (= Divy). I also refer to the edition by P. L. Vaidya from 1959 (= Divy-V). Though for the most part Vaidya's edition just reworks Cowell and Neil's Roman-script edition into Devanāgarī, it does contain some welcome emendations as well as some unfortunate mistakes. I indicate the former in my notes and, on occasion, the latter as well. I include page numbers to Cowell and Neil's edition in square brackets within the translation. Fortunately, this pagination has been retained in the margins of Vaidya's edition. Vaidya's edition is also available online through the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gretil.htm#Divyav), but there Cowell and Neil's pagination has unfortunately not been preserved. In instances when versions of the stories from the *Divyāvadāna* are also contained in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*—in its Tibetan recensions, as in the Derge edition of the Tripiṭaka (= D), or in the Sanskrit of the *Gilgit Manuscripts* (= GM)—I do note some of the major discrepancies and preferable readings. For most of the Tibetan variants, I rely on the work of D. R. Shackleton Bailey (1950, 1951), who has compiled a list of many preferable readings in the Tibetan as well as their Sanskrit equivalents.

In my work on this translation, I have benefited enormously from the labor of previous scholars, though my debt to them can only partially be inferred from my footnotes. Cowell and Neil as well as Vaidya provided useful addenda to their editions, such as glossaries and notes; D. R. Shackleton Bailey, whom I just mentioned, as well as J. S. Speyer (1902) published critical remarks and corrections to the *Divyāvadāna*; Eugène Burnouf (1844), Kenneth Ch'en (1945–47, 1953), Joel Tatelman (2000), and James Ware (1928) produced translations and studies of some of its stories; and Franklin Edgerton compiled a monumental dictionary of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (1993) that contains many references to the text. Their work has made my work much, much easier.

Conventions

In my translation, I have tried to be consistent in following certain conventions. I try to translate prose as prose and verse as verse, though I do offset certain stereotypical passages for ease of reading. I do not translate proper names and place names, though the first time they occur in each story I include a translation in parentheses (if a translation is helpful and/or possible). Some of these names will be found in the glossary, though not the names of the heavens and hells. It would be difficult to say much of anything about many of them other than their relative positioning in the cosmos. I do include a table of the various realms of existence, however, in appendix 2.

Technical terms have been translated when possible, and when not, they have been left in the original Sanskrit and italicized. There are, however, some exceptions. Terms that have been adopted in vernacular English, such as *dharma*, *brahman*, and *samsāra*, have been left untranslated and unitalicized, as have terms that appear frequently and are part of the naturalized lexicon of the text, such as *arhat*, *bodhi-sattva*, and *tathāgata*. Conversely, some rather technical terms have been translated, such as *antigod* (for *asura*), *celestial musician* (for *gandharva*), and *great snake* (for *mahoraga*). Though all of these terms

could be usefully glossed, I think that the vernacular understanding of the former and the translations of the latter are sufficient for the reader to understand these stories in their complexity. These technical terms, whether translated or not, can be found in the glossary.

I have added subheadings within the stories to guide the reader. These interpolations, while not part of the text itself, nonetheless appear without brackets. As I note in the introduction, these stories were meant to be recited orally; hence, I understand abbreviations such as “and so on as before” (*pūrvavat yāvat*) to be instructions to the reciter to fill in the requisite missing words. I therefore translate abbreviated passages in full. In my efforts to remain faithful to the voice of text, I have also retained the repetitions and some of the idiosyncrasies of style in the Sanskrit text in my English translation.

In the Sanskrit, Pāli, and Tibetan passages in my notes, the use of [] brackets indicates a gap in the text that has been filled. The use of <> brackets indicates a restoration or reconstruction based on another source.

Abbreviations

Aśokāv	<i>Aśokāvadāna</i> . See Mukhopadhyaya 1963.
BHSD	<i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i> . See Edgerton 1993.
CPD	<i>A Critical Pali Dictionary</i> . See Trenckner et al. 1924–.
D	Derge edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka.
Divy	<i>Divyāvadāna</i> . See Cowell and Neil 1886.
Divy-V	<i>Divyāvadāna</i> . See Vaidya 1959a.
DPPN	<i>Dictionary of Pali Proper Names</i> . See Malalasekera 1995.
GM	<i>Gilgit Manuscripts</i> . See Dutt 1984.
L	Lhasa edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka.
MPS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra</i> . See Waldschmidt 1951.
ms.	manuscript
mss.	manuscripts
N	Narthing edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka.

P	Peking edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka.
PSED	<i>The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> . See Apte 1986.
PTSD	<i>The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary</i> . See Rhys Davids and Stede 1986.
SED	<i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> . See Monier-Williams 1990.
Skt.	Sanskrit
trans.	translator or translated

Sanskrit Pronunciation

The vowels and consonants in Sanskrit listed below are pronounced much like the italicized letters in the English words that follow them. Note that an “h” after a consonant is not a separate letter. It signifies instead that the consonant it follows is to be aspirated. The Sanskrit letters are listed in Sanskrit alphabetical order.

Vowels

a	<i>but</i>
ā	<i>father</i>
i	<i>pit</i>
ī	<i>see</i>
u	<i>foot</i>
ū	<i>drool</i>
ṛ	<i>rig</i>
ṝ	no obvious English equivalent; lengthened ṛ
e	<i>ray</i>
ai	<i>high</i>
o	<i>hope</i>
au	<i>round</i>

Gutturals (pronounced by slightly raising the back of the tongue and closing off the throat)

k	<i>kick</i>
---	-------------

kh	<i>blockhead</i>
g	<i>go</i>
gh	<i>doghouse</i>
ñ	<i>ring</i>

Palatals (pronounced with the tongue lying on the bottom of the mouth)

c	<i>chip</i>
ch	<i>matchhead</i>
j	<i>job</i>
jh	<i>hedgehog</i>
ñ	<i>injury</i>

Retroflex (pronounced by curling the tip of the tongue to touch the roof of the mouth)

ʈ	<i>try</i>
ʈh	<i>tart</i>
ɖ	<i>drum</i>
ɖh	no obvious English equivalent; strongly aspirated <i>ɖ</i>
ɳ	<i>tint</i>

Dentals (pronounced by placing the tip of the tongue against the back of the upper teeth)

t	<i>stick</i>
th	<i>anthill</i>
d	<i>dinner</i>
dh	<i>roundhouse</i>
n	<i>nice</i>

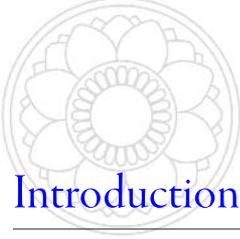
Labials (pronounced with the lips together)

p	<i>spin</i>
ph	<i>upheaval</i>
b	<i>bin</i>

bh	<i>clubhouse</i>
m	<i>mother</i>

Semivowels, sibilants, and additional sounds

y	<i>yes</i>
r	<i>drama</i>
l	<i>life</i>
v	a sound between English <i>v</i> and <i>w</i> (e.g., between <i>vine</i> and <i>wine</i>)
ś	<i>ship</i>
ṣ	retroflex ś
s	<i>sip</i>
h	<i>hope</i>
ṁ	<i>anusvāra</i> : nasalizes the preceding vowel
ḥ	<i>visarga</i> : an aspiration with an echoing of the preceding vowel (e.g., <i>devaḥ</i> as <i>devaha</i>)



Introduction

Ordé's words were the truth. You could see every image, feel every sensation he described. His metaphors (what we thought were metaphors) took on a palpable reality that hung in our nostrils, stuck in the back of our throats.

Halfway through any sermon I would notice that I was no longer listening to his words but instead experiencing the phenomena he described.

—WALTER MOSLEY³

THE *Divyāvadāna* (“Divine Stories”) is a large compendium of Indian Buddhist narratives written in Sanskrit from the early centuries of the Common Era whose stories have since spread throughout Asia, as both narrative and narrative art, leaving an indelible mark on Buddhist thought and practice. The stories in the collection were frequently used in the education of both monastics and laity in premodern Asia, exerting a powerful influence as moral exempla and legal precedent, and considered by many to be the word of the Buddha himself. These stories were likewise canonical in their influence on Buddhist art, and representations of them can be found across Asia, from Kizil in China to Sanchi in India to Borobudur in Indonesia. For scores of generations, these stories have been repeatedly recited, reworked, painted, and sculpted. It is not hyperbole to say

that these are some of the most influential stories in the history of Buddhism.

The text contains thirty-six *avadānas*, or stories, along with two *sūtras*, which chronicle the spiritual development of Buddhist devotees with special attention given to their karmic legacies. There are stories of kings and beggars, monks and prostitutes, gods and hell beings, how they came to their present circumstances, the futures they have created for themselves, and the pivotal role the Buddha and his teachings can play in their betterment.

Generally the *avadānas* presented here contain three elements: a story in the present tense in which characters discover the benefits of Buddhist practice and meet the Buddha;⁴ a story of the past detailing the deeds done by those characters in a previous lifetime that have now come to karmic fruition; and a juncture at which time the Buddha—who is quite literally an “omniscient narrator”—identifies the characters in the story of the past with those in the story of the present.⁵ Although some *avadānas* diverge from this tripartite structure,⁶ all of them tend to exemplify the inexorability of karma. As the Buddha often explains at the end of *avadānas* in the *Divyāvadāna*,

And so, monks, the result of absolutely evil actions is absolutely evil, the result of absolutely pure actions is absolutely pure, and the result of mixed actions is mixed. Therefore, monks, because of this, you should reject absolutely evil actions and mixed ones as well, and strive to perform only absolutely pure actions. It is this, monks, that you should learn to do.⁷

Yet these *avadānas* are much more than formulaic accounts of good and bad deeds and their repercussions. They also contain and embody rules and practices integral to a Buddhist identity; in fact, they are amalgams of rules, etiological accounts, and foretellings that function as a complex and interlinking moral code. This is not a moral code,

however, that can easily be distilled into pithy maxims, such as the Buddha’s observation above about the laws of karma. The moral universe embodied in these stories far exceeds such confines. Its complexity—the dexterity with which certain ideas are brought to life, then developed, nuanced, and imposed, all within a densely textured narrative—prevents such a distillation. These stories may be didactic in their intent, but along the way to their ultimate lessons they create diverse moral worlds, showing different ways of thinking and being, and portray characters interacting and commenting on their engagements with these worlds. The result is an argument—not through philosophical analysis or through poetry, but through really good stories. These are entertaining pieces of literature, with plenty of miracles and adventures across the cosmos, but they are also stories to live by, stories that demonstrate a variety of ways of living and the consequences of such behavior.

Not surprisingly these avadānas have circulated widely since their creation. Many of these stories are included in the monastic code (*vinaya*) of the branch of Buddhists known as the Mūlasarvāstivādins (“The Original Sarvāstivādins”), who flourished in the first half of the first millennium in northwest India. This legal code, which stipulates rules for personal behavior, private property, and social relations, helped regulate monastic and lay conduct in many parts of India for nearly a millennium. This text was then translated into Tibetan in the ninth century, and to this day functions as the only monastic legal code for Tibetan Buddhists, regardless of sectarian affiliation. The text was also translated into Chinese and Japanese, influencing economic policy and commercial relations in China between the fifth and tenth centuries (Gernet 1995) and guiding the revival of Buddhist monasticism in Tokugawa Japan, beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing to the present day (Clarke 2006).

Other avadānas in the text have been equally influential, though preserved in a more circuitous fashion. Versions of the *Pūrṇa-avadāna* (“The Story of Pūrṇa”) exist in Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and

Chinese, and images of the story were also painted in the caves at Ajanta outside of Bombay in the fifth century and in those at Kizil in China in the sixth century.⁸ Likewise, the *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* (“The Story of Śārdūlakarṇa”), which will appear in *Divine Stories, Part II*, was translated into Chinese four times between the second and fourth centuries, and then translated into Tibetan in the ninth century (Mukhopadhyaya 1954: xii–xiii). The first part of this story was translated into French by Eugène Burnouf in 1844, and this in turn inspired Richard Wagner, who in 1856 sketched out an opera, *Die Sieger* (“The Victors”), based upon it. Though he abandoned this work, doctrinal elements from it can be found in his great musical drama *Parsifal*.⁹ In 1882, Rajendralal Mitra (1981: 223–27) offered a summary of the work in English in his descriptive catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts in Nepal, and some fifty years later his friend, the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, wrote a play in Bengali called *Caṇḍālikā* retelling the story.¹⁰ Tagore later transformed the play into a ballet, for which he wrote the music, and it is still performed quite frequently. One performance took place in 1987 at Smith College where I teach and is still preserved on a video recording in our library.

Though most of the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* serve a legal function—to establish rules of ethical behavior, such as the prohibition against drinking, and to explain the etiology and importance of such rules (e.g., Divy 167–93)—the text defies simple genre classification, for the stories in the collection are eclectic. There are passages that focus on monastic regulations, practical wisdom, moral prescriptions, philosophical truth, metaphysical hypotheses, and even astrological calculations, and many such passages can be found in a single story. This hybridity of style may help account for the text’s enormous popularity across place and time, among both monastics and laity, and in painting, sculpture, and theater.

Despite this hybridity, the *Divyāvadāna* offers enormous insight into Buddhist history, both subaltern and royal. Many stories in the text depict a practice of faith (*prasāda*) that allows the disenfranchised

to accrue enormous reserves of merit, establishing them on the spiritual path and enabling them to leapfrog those who have been more fortunate, if not more virtuous, than they themselves have been (Rotman 2008, chaps. 3–6). This practice allows one with little material wealth, little knowledge, even little interest in Buddhism to embark on the Buddhist spiritual path with the promise of great results. One need only come into visual contact with an object that is an “agent of faith” (*prāsādika*), such as a buddha, an image of a buddha, an arhat, or a stūpa, and faith will invariably arise.

Charged with this form of faith, the downtrodden can make offerings of very little worth or utility and earn huge amounts of merit. The rich, conversely, are excluded from the practice, handicapped by their wealth and success. In the *Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna* (“The Story of a Woman Dependent on a City for Alms”), for example, a leprous beggar woman sees the venerable Mahākāśyapa, who “instills faith in her through his body and his mind,”¹¹ and then the woman offers him some rice gruel along with her rotten finger, which happened to fall in. From that single deed, however negligible the use-value of the gift, she earns enough merit to be reborn among the gods in Tuṣita heaven. This practice of faith, unattested in philosophical tracts and inscriptions, seems to have offered wonderful promise for the disenfranchised.

As for royalty, the second half of the text (*Divine Stories, Part II*) contains a story cycle that chronicles the life of King Aśoka (stories 26–29), the great ruler who controlled an empire in the third century B.C.E. that stretched across India and westward to present-day Afghanistan and Iran. This biographical account offers an important counter-history of Aśoka, one that complements yet complicates the Aśoka who can be gleaned from his famous edicts (Nikam and McKeon 1959). In this account, Aśoka becomes devoted to making donations to the monastic community, and though he achieves his goal of becoming the greatest giver in Buddhist history, he is “deceived by his own actions”¹² and dies imprisoned and in penury, his sovereignty lost and all his orders countermanded. This troubling story figured prominently in the Buddhist

(and Indian) imaginary for millennia, testifying to the great difficulties of being a virtuous king.

The stories in the *Divyāvadāna* also offer great insight into the art-historical record. Representations from the text can be found throughout India, from Sanchi to Bharhut and Mathura, and there are particularly famous stories, such as the *Prātihārya-sūtra* (“The Miracle Sūtra”), which features a miracle competition at Śrāvastī, that are popular at Buddhist sites the world over.¹³ In this way, the text functions as a wonderful tool for deciphering and interpreting much Buddhist painting and sculpture. The text’s detailed descriptions of constructing stūpas (Divy 244ff.), decorating shrines (Divy 78ff.), and making Buddha images (Divy 547ff.) are all likewise enormously beneficial to art historians.

Although the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* offer significant insight into the history of early Buddhism, the history of the stories themselves is less clear. While the consensus among scholars has been that the *Divyāvadāna* was produced in northwest India between 200–350 C.E. by the Mūlasarvāstivādins,¹⁴ the dating of the text is too complicated to make such a straightforward pronouncement. We don’t really know when, where, why, or by whom the text was produced. So how does one put these stories into perspective? While these stories are compelling as literature and moral exempla, how does one make sense of them as part of Buddhism’s historical record?

The Historical Value of the *Divyāvadāna*

These legends [in the *Divyāvadāna*] scarcely contain anything of much historical value.

—MORIZ WINTERNITZ¹⁵

Many of the avadānas in the *Divyāvadāna* seem to be intentionally naturalized and dehistoricized, repeating stock phrases in lieu of historical descriptions of people, places, actions, and events: householders are

“rich, wealthy, and prosperous, with vast and extensive holdings...”;¹⁶ kingdoms are “thriving, prosperous, and safe, with plenty of food and crowds of people...”;¹⁷ young boys are “raised by eight nurses who nourish him with milk, yogurt, fresh butter, clarified butter, butter scum, and other special provisions that are very pure...”;¹⁸ and the list goes on. Since the dharma always holds true, regardless of time or place, the reliance on such tropes in these avadānas creates an aura of timeless truth—or perhaps a world of make-believe.¹⁹

Winternitz’s observation in 1913 about the lack of historical value in the stories of the *Divyāvadāna* is not completely untrue, but the great Indologist’s insight needs to be put in perspective. Scholarship on the *Divyāvadāna* has often involved attempts to extract historical data directly from its stories, with only somewhat successful results.²⁰ This scholarship is unfortunately marked by the positivism of its age—a tendency to read texts as unproblematically representing historical events. Even the most erudite scholars have occasionally confused narrative incident with historical fact. In discussing an avadāna from the vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins in which a doctor cures a woman of her venereal disease by inserting a piece of meat into her vagina to entice and capture disease-causing worms, one scholar remarks, “The story speaks for itself regarding the beliefs about venereal diseases and the cures thereof. It reveals the morals of rich, young widows of respectable families, and certainly provides a unique insight into the scruples of a young physician in his relationship with his patients” (Jaini 1989: 220). This practice of attempting to pick out the historical elements from the nonhistorical elements in Buddhist literature—what Louis de La Vallée Poussin called the “subtraction method”—has not, in my opinion, provided an effective methodology for scholarship on the *Divyāvadāna*. It has instead yielded dubious results, proving in part Winternitz’s observation.

Yet Winternitz’s assessment is limited in its purview. There are more ways to engage with these avadānas than merely trying to extract what Winternitz (1993: 277n4) refers to as “a historical nucleus.” History

can be narrated, but it can also be embedded within narrative, even among *avadānas* that share the same structure and stock passages, and that claim to reveal the past and predict the future. While on the surface the *avadānas* in the *Divyāvadāna* display an unambiguous Buddhist moral discourse—good and bad actions always have, respectively, good and bad results for laymen, monks, and buddhas in the past, present, and future—the reasoning and representation in these stories exposes an intricate and evolving Buddhist world beneath this apparently smooth surface. It is this inscribed representation of Buddhist consciousness—this complex world with its thoughts, desires, practices, and anxieties—which is the historical prize. And the dichotomy between historical and nonhistorical elements is not a principal concern when historicizing consciousness, because everything contained within it—the miraculous and the mundane—is already historically located in time and place.²¹

Even this revised methodological pursuit, however, is thwarted by the complex history of the *Divyāvadāna*. The *Divyāvadāna* is a compendium of stories most likely produced by multiple authors at different times, whose dates and sites of production are uncertain, whose intended audience is unclear, whose expected use is unknown, and whose intertextual relations are unresolved. A review of the manuscript history of the *Divyāvadāna* demonstrates these difficulties quite clearly.

Manuscript History

It is one thing to analyse footprints, stars, faeces (animal or human), catarrhs, corneas, pulses, snow-covered fields or dropped cigarette ash; and another to analyse writing or painting or speech.

—CARLO GINZBURG²²

In producing the first Western edition of the *Divyāvadāna* in 1886, E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil used seven manuscripts of the text. According to Cowell and Neil's (1886: vi) account, they are:

- A. Add. 865 in the [Cambridge] Univ. Library; 258 leaves, 14–15 lines, dated 1873. Fairly written in the ordinary Nepalese character, but not very correct.
- B. Our own MS., 283 leaves, 12–13 lines; very incorrect.
- C. Our own MS., 274 leaves, 14–15 lines; correct.
- D. The MS. given in 1837 by Mr. Hodgson to the Asiatic Society at Paris; 337 leaves, 9 lines. This is a very correct copy, and having been made for Mr. Hodgson more than 50 years ago, it in some places preserves the old text which has since become illegible in the original. Unlike the others, it is written in ordinary Nagari characters...
- [–]. The authorities of the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg kindly lent us for a short time their MS. (P.—272 leaves), which is a similar copy to ABC and contains the same omissions in the 34th avadāna.²³
- E. We were also similarly favored with the loan from the Bibliothèque Nationale of [Eugène] Burnouf's own MS...but as this is only like our other MSS. we made no use of it beyond collating it for the first few pages.²⁴
- F. In Appendix C [Divy 663–70], we have given some account of another MS...in the same Library, which was also kindly lent to us for a time.

Unlike many critical editions of Sanskrit texts, however, their edition is not a piecemeal reconstruction of some would-be original; instead, it is a slightly edited version of the single best manuscript.²⁵ As editors, they corrected spelling mistakes and offered alternate readings for unclear words and phrases, but as their footnotes make clear, the manuscripts with which they worked were nearly uniform. As Cowell and Neil (1886: vi–vii) observe,

All these MSS., except F, are thus only modern copies, made with more or less care from one original...Our MS. authorities

therefore go back immediately to only one source, and our various readings are simply the result of the greater or less care of the respective transcribers.

Cowell and Neil then conclude that this one source is the *Divyāvadāna* manuscript possessed by Pandit Indrānand of Patan, Nepal.

Though Cowell and Neil never saw this original manuscript, the noted Buddhistologist Cecil Bendall examined it, and he determined that the text was produced in the seventeenth century (Cowell and Neil 1886: vii). Even if Cowell and Neil had been mistaken about the genealogy of these various *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts, judging from their remarks and those of Bendall, it does seem that none of these *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts was written before the seventeenth century. Considering that there is also no mention of the *Divyāvadāna* by name in any extant Buddhist literature prior to the seventeenth century, the possibility exists that the *Divyāvadāna*, as the particular compilation of stories reproduced in these manuscripts, is not a third- or fourth-century artifact, but a seventeenth-century one.

An analysis of manuscript F, the only text not from this “single” manuscript tradition, shows that it is not simply a variant of the *Divyāvadāna* but a different text entirely. Cowell and Neil (1886: 663) write that the text is “evidently a modern transcript, very inaccurately written,” which partially agrees with the other *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts, but which is “plainly a distinct compilation.” According to the manuscript extracts that Cowell and Neil provide in their Appendix C, the text refers to itself throughout as the *Divyāvadānamālā* (“Garland of Divine Stories”). Four years previously, in 1882, Rajendralala Mitra (1981: 304–16) had provided an extended summary of another manuscript of the *Divyāvadānamālā*, though the two manuscripts preserve different stories. Most likely, these are examples of a medieval *avadānamālā* or “garland of *avadānas*”—one of the many anonymous retellings of earlier *avadānas*, mostly metrical in form with Mahāyāna characteristics, from some time between the fifth and eleventh centuries.²⁶

Compounding this problem of the singularity and non-antiquity of *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts is the possibility that the extant *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts are incomplete—that the title “*Divyāvadāna*” previously referred to a collection of materials other than the one that exists in these manuscripts. The coda “this is found in the glorious *Divyāvadāna*” (*iti śrīdivyāvadāne*) is also found once in manuscript F,²⁷ the “distinct compilation” that generally refers to itself as the *Divyāvadānamālā*, and in the colophon to the manuscript of the *Vīrakuśāvadāna* (“The Story of Brave Kuśa”) preserved in the Cambridge University Library (Add. 1538). The colophon of that text reads, “So ends *The Story of Kuśa* and *The Glorification of the Fast on the Eighth Day of the Waxing Moon*, which were selected from the glorious *Divyāvadāna*.”²⁸ Neither of these texts, however, occurs in any extant *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts.

In his introduction to the Devanāgarī edition of the *Divyāvadāna* in 1959, P. L. Vaidya explains that these references to the *Divyāvadāna* occur because at one time the *Divyāvadāna* was a larger text that incorporated these and perhaps other *avadānas*, while the present collection of *avadānas* in *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts is abridged. To support his hypothesis, Vaidya (1959a: ix) discusses the case of a Newari writer who translated nine of the thirty-two *avadānas* in the *Vicitrakarṇikāvadānamālā* (“The Garland of Stories of Vicitrakarṇikā”) into a separate volume.²⁹ Vaidya conjectures that perhaps the *Divyāvadāna* underwent a similar phenomenon—a few choice *avadānas* were selected from the larger collection and codified as a separate text—but that in this case the larger collection of *avadānas* that existed under the name *Divyāvadāna* was lost and only the abridged collection survived.

But Vaidya could be mistaken. Perhaps these references to the *Divyāvadāna* from other manuscripts simply tell us, as Cowell and Neil (1886: viii) note, that “the name was current in Nepal.” The author or scribe of the *Kuśāvadāna* may have employed the name of the *Divyāvadāna* because the text was well known or well regarded at the time,

and he wanted his text to share in that acclaim. If this were the case, then the extant *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts would be complete, though representing only one of the manuscript traditions by that name. Also possible is that they are complete but somehow not *really* the *Divyāvadāna*. Although the coda “this is found in the glorious *Divyāvadāna*” occurs at the end of each avadāna and at the end of the work as a whole in the two older manuscripts, D and E, there are no references to the *Divyāvadāna* anywhere in the more recent manuscripts, A, B, and C.³⁰ Did the scribes of these manuscripts not know what they were copying? Nevertheless, the possibility of Vaidya’s claim being correct frustrates any facile hypotheses about the completeness and ordering of the text.

There is also the possibility that the extant *Divyāvadāna* manuscripts contain accretions to what once was a core original. As Vaidya (1959: x) explains,

The literary qualities of these avadānas vary considerably, and contain elements of old tales in Purāṇa style, tales from the sacred literature, tales modelled on classical style with considerable dramatic element as in no. 26 [the *Pāṃśupradāna-avadāna* (“The Story of a Gift of Dirt”)], tales in the semi-classical style as in no. 22 [the *Candraprabhabodhisattvacaryā-avadāna* (“The Story of the Deeds of the Bodhisattva Candraprabha”)], and tales in purely classical style as in no. 38 [the *Maitrakanyaka-avadāna* (“The Story of Maitrakanyaka”)].³¹

The *Maitrakanyaka-avadāna* in particular appears to be a later composition that, as Michael Hahn (1992: 5) observes, then “found its way into the *Divyāvadāna*, where it does not belong at all.”³² Likewise, the *Prātihārya-sūtra* (“The Miracle Sūtra”) and the *Dānādhikaraṇa-mahāyānasūtra* (“The Mahāyāna Sūtra Dealing with the Topic of Giving”) are included in the *Divyāvadāna* even though, as is clear from their names, neither are avadānas. In addition, the latter is the only entry

that affiliates itself by name with the Mahāyāna. While the *Prātibhārya-sūtra* is at least narrative in form, the *Dānādhikaraṇa-mahāyānasūtra* is instead an enumeration of proper gifts and their results—a multiple anomaly to the collection.

Hence, not all the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* necessarily arose at the same time or in the same place or from the same hand. In addition to the possibility that the text contains accretions in the form of extraneous chapters, it is quite possible that the *Divyāvadāna* is “not an original book, but compilations from various sources” (Nariman 1923: 297). It is also possible that the text is an accumulation of narrative fragments from centuries of Indian discourse (Prakash 1970: 285), a collection of pre-Buddhist stories reworked and revised for many generations (Sarkar 1990: 163), or even a compendium of inspired derivations from an earlier canonical tradition (Lamotte 1988: 591).³³ Cowell and Neil (1886: vii, n1) make the point explicitly: “The stories evidently belong to various authors.”

Yet, even if, as G. K. Nariman (1923: 293) observes, “the component parts of the...[*Divyāvadāna*] are of unequal age,” this doesn’t necessarily mean that the *Divyāvadāna* had an original core that was vastly augmented. If Aśvaghōṣa could write his *Buddhacarita* in classical Sanskrit in the first or second century C.E., similarly classical compositions cannot be immediately dismissed as later accretions.³⁴ In fact, as I will discuss shortly, there is evidence for the early existence of the *Candraprabha-bodhisattvacaryā-avadāna*. Also possible is that the *Divyāvadāna* was compiled using materials of differing antiquities, as if the stories it contains were Buddhist heirlooms from different eras put together by a diligent curator. Perhaps, then, it may be better to think of the *Divyāvadāna* as the work of an editor or compiler, not of an author.³⁵

The historicity and unity of the avadānas in the *Divyāvadāna* is further problematized when one examines the occurrence of these avadānas in the Tibetan tradition. Twenty-one of the thirty-eight stories in the *Divyāvadāna* were translated from Sanskrit and are preserved within the Tibetan canon, in the vinaya section of the Kangyur.³⁶

These avadānas, however, only occur separately as individual texts; they aren't grouped together, and there is no mention anywhere of a text called the *Divyāvadāna*.

As a final cautionary tale for those trying to understand the *Divyāvadāna* historically, I will offer an account of one more manuscript. In the process of creating this present volume, I was fortunate to make use of a manuscript from the National Archives Nepal, labeled 5819, A120/5-121/1, which contained 303 leaves, fourteen lines to a side. The copy I examined was preserved in microfilm at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, and though I'm not able to attest to the manuscript's age, it is written reasonably clearly and accurately in Devanāgarī script. I refer to it throughout this volume as manuscript H.

First there is the question of the text that this manuscript preserves. While the title of the text doesn't occur at the end of any individual stories, at the very end of the manuscript the text identifies itself as the *Divyāvadānamālā*.³⁷ It does, however, contain some stories that differ from either of the texts by the same name described by Mitra or Cowell and Neil. This manuscript of the *Divyāvadānamālā* and manuscripts A, B, and C of the *Divyāvadāna* contain many nearly identical stories with nearly identical colophons, neither mentioning the name of the collection to which they belong. What differentiates these collections are the other stories that they contain and the final name appended to the manuscript.³⁸ It is as though the *Divyāvadānamālā* is just the *Divyāvadāna* with bonus stories.

One notable difference between manuscripts A, B, and C and this *Divyāvadānamālā* manuscript is the *treatment* of the colophons at the end of each story. Though they often bear similar inscriptions, those in the *Divyāvadānamālā* manuscript are always crossed out.³⁹ The one exception is the final colophon, which also includes the name of the manuscript. Since little else in the manuscript is crossed out, why cross out the names of the stories? Did the scribe who copied this manuscript have some question, hesitation, or denial about the names of the sto-

ries? And why leave the name of the manuscript intact? Was this a case of repackaging old stories with a new name? Was this an effort to create a new and improved collection?

While manuscript H does contain omissions that suggest a later provenance,⁴⁰ it also preserves certain unique and helpful readings,⁴¹ some of which may even predate those preserved in the manuscripts of the *Divyāvadāna*.⁴² Then again, maybe this text really is a *Divyāvadāna*—as opposed to *the Divyāvadāna*—regardless of what it says in the final colophon. Yutaka Iwamoto, for example, observes that, to quote Joel Tatelman (2000: 13; cf. Iwamoto 1978: 143–48), “there are only seven stories which occur in every manuscript [of the *Divyāvadāna*] and that, of these, only two, the *Koṭīkarnā-avadāna* and the *Pūrṇa-avadāna*, always occur in the same place, as the first and second stories respectively. In fact, Iwamoto defines *Divyāvadāna* as a collection of Sanskrit avadānas, the first two stories of which are *Koṭīkarnā-avadāna* and *Pūrṇa-avadāna*.” By this criterion, the manuscripts of the *Divyāvadānamālā* examined by Cowell and Neil, Mitra, and myself are all versions of the *Divyāvadāna*, rendering that designation less a title than a marker of genre. Perhaps the *Divyāvadāna* was a brand name that marked its contents as valuable, a veritable bible of stories, but only delineated some of the stories that it contained.

A Story of the Stories

The entire map of the lost will be candled.

—AGHA SHAHID ALI⁴³

Setting aside these doubts about the unity and historicity of the *Divyāvadāna*, other manuscript evidence exists that demonstrates that some of the avadānas in the form in which they exist in the *Divyāvadāna* date back to the Kuṣāṇa or Gupta periods. The *Śārdūlakarnā-avadāna* was first translated into Chinese sometime circa 148–70. Furthermore,

fragments from the *Svāgata-avadāna* (“The Story of Svāgata”) (Divy 183.21–185.7) and the *Saṅgharakṣita-avadāna* (“The Story of Saṅgharakṣita”) (Divy 336.22–339.5), which were found in Gilgit, in what is now northern Pakistan, in 1931, have been dated to approximately the sixth century (Lévi 1932: 16–20; cf. Bapat 1949). Also among the manuscript finds in Gilgit is a fragmentary *avadāna* collection that contains excerpts from six *avadānas* found in the *Divyāvadāna*. As Jens-Uwe Hartmann (1980: 251) notes, “The homogeneous script, the identical number of lines on all the folios, and—possibly—the corresponding size of the leaves all suggest that the different texts formed part of one collection.” Fortunately, one manuscript folio contains both the end of the *Sahasodgata-avadāna* (“The Story of Sahasodgata”) and the beginning of the *Candraprabhabodhisattvacaryā-avadāna* (Vira and Chandra 1995: f. 1487), linking these *avadānas* in the same order as they occur in the *Divyāvadāna* (nos. 21–22), though their date is uncertain. Less fortunately, however, as Hartmann (1980: 251) observes, “the stories, in so far as they are complete, give neither titles nor colophons, and there is no hint either as to the title of the collection, if any, or to the numbers of the preserved *avadānas*.”

In recent years, there have been additional large finds of manuscripts from Pakistan and Afghanistan that contain *avadānas*. The British Library Collection contains many collections of stories, dating from the first or second century C.E., “most of which,” as Richard Salomon (1999: 35) notes, “are explicitly labeled in the manuscripts as ‘*avadānas*.’” Representatives from the *Divyāvadāna* are unfortunately not among them. The Schøyen Collection, housed in Norway, which is even larger than the British Library Collection, also contains *avadāna* materials. In this collection, there are various fragments, perhaps from the sixth century, of all four *avadānas* in the Aśoka cycle (Wille 2000), as well as individual fragments from the *Dānādhikaraṇa-mahāyānasūtra* and the *Jyotiṣka-avadāna* (“The Story of Jyotiṣka”) (Baums 2002).⁴⁴ Hence, although there is no complete *Divyāvadāna* manuscript from before the seventeenth century, there are significant indications that many of

the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* have been circulating independently from the early centuries of the Common Era.

There is also significant linguistic and textual evidence that connects the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* with the Mūlasarvāstivādins. Most notably, more than half of the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* also occur in a similar form in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* (Huber 1906; Lévi 1907), an immense collection of monastic law and moral tales that is preserved partially in Sanskrit (Dutt 1984), more fully in Tibetan and Chinese translations, and was compiled perhaps as early as the first or second century C.E.⁴⁵

Since Edouard Huber (1906) first made this observation, Sylvain Lévi (1907), Heinrich Lüders (1926), and D. R. Shackleton Bailey (1950) have all concluded with him that these stories in the *Divyāvadāna* were deliberate abridgments of their counterparts in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. Though Jean Przyluski (1929) came to the opposite conclusion, suggesting as well that both might come from an earlier and no longer extant source, Satoshi Hiraoka (1998) has argued quite convincingly in the tradition of Huber that the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* that also appear in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* are reworked versions of the latter. With just a few exceptions, the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* even follow the same sequence as their counterparts in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* (Panglung 1981: xiv–xvii). In short, someone (at some time) abridged some stories from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and then compiled them together with stories from other vinayas, a few sūtras, and some other favorite narratives to create a “greatest hits” compilation known as the *Divyāvadāna*.⁴⁶

Since many of the stories in the *Divyāvadāna* have their origin in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, there are, not surprisingly, references to Mūlasarvāstivādin texts,⁴⁷ strongholds,⁴⁸ and perhaps doctrines,⁴⁹ though such proprietary claims are put into doubt because of the unclear relationship between the Mūlasarvāstivādins and the Buddhist sect known as the Sarvāstivādins. In the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (“Compendium of Training”), for example, an extract from the

Cakravartivyaḅṛta-avadāna (“The Story of One Foretold to Be a Wheel-Turning King”), which occurs in the *Divyāvadāna*, is introduced as a Sarvāstivādin text: “This is recited by the noble Sarvāstivādin.”⁵⁰ This could signify that this story was shared by the Sarvāstivādin and the Mūlasarvāstivādin, that the Sarvāstivādin wanted to claim it for themselves, or that the author of this passage considered the Mūlasarvāstivādin to be somehow the same as the Sarvāstivādin and not a separate sect. Much has been written about the relationship between the Mūlasarvāstivādin and the Sarvāstivādin—who was in Mathurā, who was in Kashmir, who came first, etc.⁵¹ I will nevertheless recuse myself, following Lambert Schmithausen (1987: 379), from making any definitive statements about the relationship between these two schools. As he remarks,

I cannot enter into the controversial question whether the Mūlasarvāstivādin were, originally, a Vinaya school of the Mathurā area, completely independent of the Sarvāstivādin (as advocated by Frauwallner on the basis of a comprehensive and thorough investigation of the Vinayas) or only a comparatively late offshoot of the Sarvāstivāda school with a Vinaya that is nothing but an enlarged and remodelled version of the Vinaya of the Sarvāstivādin (as Lamotte and Iwamoto seem to think, in opposition to Bareau and Gnoli who assert that the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin looks more archaic than that of the Sarvāstivādin).⁵²

And so, considering how little is known about the Mūlasarvāstivādin outside of the contents of their voluminous monastic literature, and since the possibility still exists that the *Divyāvadāna* was constructed not by the Mūlasarvāstivādin but by some other Sarvāstivādin sect or, more doubtfully, some other Buddhist sect at some later date,⁵³ it is more judicious to treat the *Divyāvadāna* not as a text created exclusively within a Mūlasarvāstivādin framework, but as one created

more generally within the context of early Indian Buddhist monastic culture—probably during the period of Sarvāstivādin Buddhism in Northwest India during the first half of the first millennium.⁵⁴

This context for interpreting the *Divyāvadāna* is, unfortunately, rather vague. But there are other contexts for making sense of the text. While it may not be possible to locate the origin of the avadānas in the *Divyāvadāna* or even the compilation of the text as a whole in a historical place or moment—for most avadānas resist such efforts—it may be possible to interpret these stories within the context of their own telling. Accounts of stories being told and heard in the *Divyāvadāna* may offer insight into the sociology and mechanics of how avadānas were used.

An Avadāna of Avadānas

“Everything comes from somewhere,” Haroun reasoned, “so these stories can’t simply come out of thin air...”

—SALMAN RUSHDIE⁵⁵

Although there is a degree of guesswork in determining the origin and use of the avadānas in the *Divyāvadāna*, we do know something about the status of avadānas among the Mūlasarvāstivādins. They came to identify certain stories as avadānas, constituents of a new division of Buddhist literature (Thomas 1933),⁵⁶ and they also created independent avadāna texts, such as the *Sthavirāvadāna* (“The Story of the Elders”) and the *Avadānaśataka* (“The One Hundred Stories”).⁵⁷ But why did the Mūlasarvāstivādins suddenly elevate the avadāna, a mode of composition long in circulation and yet not discussed in any traditional commentaries, to a new and canonical genre?

A number of possible explanations for the uses of these avadānas have been offered. They may have been used (1) to popularize Buddhism—“Aśoka’s preference for the life of an ideal *upāsaka* [lay disciple] as against that of a monk may have stimulated the Buddhist monks

to devise ways and means to popularize their religion, and as the result of the efforts of the monks in this direction, we have the large number of the jātakas and avadānas” (Dutt 1930: 20); (2) to inspire the laity—“As it is evident from the subject-matter of most of these stories, the avadāna purports to kindle faith and devotion in the ordinary believer by laying before him the fruits of good acts...and the bad consequences of evil acts” (Perera 1966: 397); (3) to educate the common people—“But the common people could not be made familiar with the glorious deeds of the world-famed heroes (*bodhisattvas*); they could not understand [that] what the great hero had done they too could do. So there was a need for something humbler, i.e., the glorious deeds of some ordinary humans with whom the common folk could make identity” (Sharma 1985: 19); (4) to educate young monks—“These avadānas...[were] put together for the ease and convenience of instruction of young monks” (Vaidya 1959a: xii); or (5) to offer preliminary teachings—“One begins to teach dharma by telling *avadāna* stories” (Tatelman 2000: 12).

While these hypotheses may very well be true, recent finds of avadāna manuscripts provide additional data that suggests a more specific sociology of practice. As Richard Salomon (1999: 36) observes, the terse form of the avadānas in the British Library Collection, with their instructions to expand upon various abridgments in their own specific idiom,⁵⁸ “give the impression that the texts are merely skeletons or outlines, which were evidently meant to be filled in and expanded by the reader or reciter.” This is also the case with both the *Divyāvadāna* and *Avadānaśataka*. Both contain numerous stereotypical passages that are often abridged with the expression “and so on as before” (*pūrvavat yāvat*).⁵⁹

Yet, as Salomon (1999: 35) also notes with regard to the British Library Collection, “an unusual feature of the texts of this genre is that nearly all of them are written in the same distinctive large hand.” Salomon (1999: 36; cf. 1999: 54) concludes from this that the scribe “evidently was a specialist in this genre,” lending support to the hypoth-

esis of John Strong (1985: 869) that there was “a general class of specialists concerned with avadāna literature.”⁶⁰ If this is the case, then the avadānas in the British Library Collection were for the use of avadānists, for only they could properly follow the terse instructions found in the manuscripts, and they were also copied and preserved by avadānists. Furthermore, they were also, it seems, composed by avadānists. Unlike their counterparts in the *Divyāvadāna*, which are primarily simplified narratives from the vinaya, “the specific content of these stories does not correspond to any previously known material” (Salomon 1999: 136).

This hypothesis that these manuscripts were composed, preserved, and used by avadānists is further supported by an examination of the genres represented therein. Among the fragments of the British Library Collection of Gandhāran manuscripts, there is “a total absence...of vinaya texts of any kind” (Salomon 1999: 163), and the same is true among Central Asian Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts before the fifth century C.E. (Sander 1991: 142; cited in Salomon 1999: 163).⁶¹ This raises the possibility that, as Salomon (1999: 163) notes,

At this relatively early stage of the written preservation and transmission of Buddhist texts, not all texts or genres of texts had yet been set down in writing...It appears that at this point in the development of the written tradition of Buddhist texts, writing was viewed primarily as a practical matter; texts were set down in written form only when this seemed necessary or useful, as for instance when, for one reason or another, a text was not firmly set in memory or was perceived to be in danger of being forgotten.

Considering the number of specialized abbreviations in the avadānas of the British Library Collection, it seems unlikely that these avadānas were written down because they were “perceived to be in danger of being forgotten”; instead, according to Salomon (1999: 165),

“the Gāndhārī avadānas seem to be more in the nature of notes of memory aids than of formal written texts. In other words, they fall somewhere between the strict division of written versus oral texts, serving, evidently, as written supplements to oral deliveries.”⁶² In short, these avadānas had a different mode of preservation from vinayas, indicating quite possibly a different status or function, and this difference may very well have involved oral recitation.

Yet the avadānas in the *Divyāvadāna* are not new compositions like those in the British Library Collection, and the reason for their compilation poses a different mystery. Following the traditions recorded by Kumārajīva, Seng-hu, and Hui-chiao during the fourth and fifth centuries C.E., Lamotte (1988: 174) surmises that various avadānas were excerpted from the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya because the latter had become unwieldy. As Strong (1985: 876) explains,

Apparently, the vinayadharas [vinaya masters] of Upagupta’s time could simply no longer handle the load; they opted to cut out the avadānas from their repertoire, but, I would argue, they did so not because they were thought to be non-essential or of dubious status canonically, but because there were other oral specialists around—the avadānists—who were already taking charge of them.

Following Salomon’s notions about the orality of avadānas and Strong’s hypothesis about the avadāna specialist, I would like to suggest another possibility for the creation of the *Divyāvadāna* and the use of its stories. Here the text itself is our best guide, for it describes the telling of stories in detail—who tells them and to whom, and when they are recounted and where.⁶³ Although I don’t claim that these accounts are historically referential, they do offer traces of past beliefs from which, it seems, a number of storytelling settings and audiences can be identified.

Stories about Telling Stories

This was how she would learn about the world, in sentences at meals; other people's distillations amid her own vague pain, dumb with itself. This, for her, would be knowledge—a shifting to hear, an emptying of her arms, other people's experiences walking through the bare rooms of her brain, looking for a place to sit.

—LORRIE MOORE⁶⁴

In the stories in the *Divyāvadāna*, the Buddha, and occasionally one of his disciples: (1) tells a story to the monastic community to resolve their doubts and questions; (2) tells a story to a lay follower or audience who happens to approach him; or (3) tells a story to a lay audience in a lay disciple's home after having been invited there for a meal and consuming it. In the first instance, the stories that are told are often accounts of someone's deeds, both previous and future, that are integral to his or her karmic history. In the second instance, the stories that are told are often referred to as “discourses on the dharma.”⁶⁵ And in the third instance these stories are referred to as either “discourses on the dharma”⁶⁶ or “dharma stories.”⁶⁷ One suspects that Buddhist monks had a penchant for expounding, telling stories rather than giving moral directives or performing rituals. This is even parodied in the *Saṅgharakṣita-avadāna*, with Buddhist monks being shunned and chastised for being “great talkers.”⁶⁸

Now, this last scenario—a monk is invited to a layperson's home for a meal, consumes the food offered to him, and then offers some instruction in the dharma—is well represented in the *Divyāvadāna*, and examining the rules for lay and monastic behavior that are preserved in other Buddhist sources, one finds regulations that, when enacted, are in accordance with it. In the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, for example, among the duties prescribed for a Buddhist householder are inviting monastics to one's home for a meal (ii, 65) and listening to dharma teachings

(iv, 209).⁶⁹ Considering that householders composed a large percentage of lay disciples (Dutt 1940: 166) and were the group most responsible for providing the monastic community with its material needs (Chakravarti 1987: 65–93), it is not surprising that this relationship between householders and the monastic community would be well regulated and well represented.

Intrinsic to this relationship is an exchange—laypeople offer food to monastics, and monastics in turn offer those laypeople merit. This “food for merit” exchange is made explicit in the *Sahasodgata-avadāna*. A solitary buddha who is traveling through the countryside arrives at a park on the outskirts of a town but then decides to go elsewhere. A householder sees him and says,

Noble one, why are you turning back? You are in want of food, and I, of merit. Take up residence here in this park and I’ll support you with alms without interruption.⁷⁰

But on such occasions, with food given and merit assigned, if dharma teachings were to be given, which ones would they be? It is often said that the Buddha, after finishing a meal that had been offered to him, “instructs, incites, inspires, and delights”⁷¹ the listener with dharma stories. This indicates that these stories were instructive and entertaining, but suggests little else with regard to their specific content.

Two passages in the *Dharmaruci-avadāna* (“The Story of Dharmaruci”) offer some additional insight. Early in the story, it is said that as a baby, Dharmaruci was insatiably hungry and thirsty and could only be appeased when listening to the stories told by monastics:

From time to time monks and nuns would enter that house for alms and tell a roundabout story. The boy would listen to that roundabout story, and at that time he wouldn’t cry. He’d listen attentively and silently to their stories about lis-

tening to the dharma. When the monks and nuns would depart, he would again experience the suffering of thirst and begin to cry.⁷²

In this case, the monastics tell a “roundabout story” (*parikathā*),⁷³ an apparent variant of the “dharma story” (*dharmīkathā*). Though its exact meaning is unclear, it may mean “involved story,” “intricate story,” or even “story cycle.” More clear, however, is the notion of listening to stories about listening to the dharma. This involves the mimetic act of listeners listening to stories of others doing what they themselves are already doing.

Later in the story, in response to some monks’ queries about Dharmaruci’s insatiable hunger, the Buddha asks them, “Do you want to hear a dharma story about the former karmic bonds of Dharmaruci?”⁷⁴ They assent, and the dharma story that the Buddha tells is a chapter in Dharmaruci’s dharma history when he was a powerful fighter capable of battling a thousand men. These “karmic bonds” (*karmaploti*) are, in fact, the “connective thread” (*ploti*) that ties together one’s karmic history; hence the dharma story in this instance is a dharma case study.

But what were these roundabout stories, the dharma biographies, which were presumably instructive and entertaining, that featured characters benefiting from listening to the dharma?

The most likely answer is—these avadānas themselves. The structure of avadānas, with their stories of the present, then of the past and future, all unfolding in an interactive process between teller and listener is far more roundabout than jātaḥka tales or stories in the sūtra literature. Furthermore, the instructive value of these stories is thematized within the stories themselves, most notably in what I referred to previously as the first scenario. On those occasions, the past and future stories that the Buddha tells are prompted by a query from some inquisitive monks who are unsure how a particular event came about or how a particular prediction will come true. As it is frequently said, “Those monks in doubt asked the Lord Buddha, the remover of all

doubts...⁷⁵ And, one presumes, since the Buddha is here introduced as “the remover of all doubts,” his stories have precisely that effect. As Ānanda says to the Buddha on multiple occasions,

O you who are resolute, an ascetic, and an excellent victor,
 you know at once with your mind the desires of your listeners.
 Destroy their doubts that have arisen, O best of sages,
 with words excellent, enduring, and virtuous.⁷⁶

Instructive as well is the way that many *avadānas* exemplify the utility of making offerings to monastics, with the donor being promised great rewards in the future.⁷⁷ Listening to such stories would naturally reinforce the “food for merit” exchange, a give-and-take that is as essential for the physical survival of monastics as it is for the karmic development of the laity.

Since most *avadānas* also feature the “doubt removal” scenario, listening is necessarily thematized, for the very structure of these *avadānas* involves monks listening to stories that the Buddha tells. The above extract from the *Dharmaruci-avadāna* testifies to this experience—Dharmaruci listens to a story about others listening to the dharma. And since the Buddha can remove the doubts of his monks, shouldn’t his *avadānas*, or even his stories within *avadānas*, do the same for the listener? Would one be in error if they didn’t? Hence, shouldn’t any doubts about the utility of the “food for merit” exchange between monastics and the laity be removed by listening to the numerous stories that exemplify the utility of making offerings to monastics, with the donor being promised great rewards in the future? Perhaps, then, the reason that the content of the dharma stories told in the “post-mealtime” scenario is never revealed is that these stories are the *avadānas* themselves. In short, the dharma stories alluded to are already being heard.

In most Buddhist *vinaya* literature, the description of a monastic rule is accompanied by a story recounting the event that necessitated

the enactment of that rule, but in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, far more stories are included, creating an even stronger connection between the establishment of rules and the telling of stories. In the *Divyāvadāna*, this connection between rules and stories is clarified by placing both within a larger frame-story that narrativizes the entire process. A common scenario finds the Buddha telling a story to the monastic community in order to explain a particular phenomenon and to exemplify proper behavior, but all of this is placed within a larger story depicting the process of educating the monastic community. This larger story allows the audience to view the process of rule-giving and storytelling within a more elaborate context. For example, unlike the version of the Svāgata story in the Pāli vinaya (*Vinayapīṭaka* ii, 108–10) which recounts the drunken exploits of Svāgata and the rule discerned from this story (i.e., drinking liquor is an offense requiring expiation), the *Svāgata-avadāna* includes the story of the Buddha telling that larger Svāgata story—the tale of his drunken exploits and the rule against drinking—as well as a sequence in which the monks question those actions of Svāgata. Then, in response, the Buddha tells a story about Svāgata’s past life as a householder when he both abused and served a solitary buddha and the results of these actions.

In the Pāli, vinaya rules appear to be determined from stories: a story is told, a judgment is offered, a rule is established. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and in the *Divyāvadāna*, rules are also determined from stories, but then secondary stories are used to explain the phenomena and karmic connections within those primary stories. These layered stories allow one to view the process of how rules are taught, through stories of origin and stories of explanation, and to see how the intertwining of stories and rules can allow stories to embody rules and, perhaps, even supplant them. In the *Divyāvadāna*, there are examples of rules being determined from stories, as in the Svāgata story in the Pāli vinaya, and even more examples of rules and stories being intertwined, with the latter functioning as something between a complementary moral code and a contentious one, what A. K. Ramanujan

(1999: 446) referred to as a “counter-system.”⁷⁸ But more often stories themselves seem to replace rules, as though the latter was the preferred form of moral guidance, in style if not in content. These stories offer moral exempla, possibilities for ethical action that, as Ramanujan (1999: 456) explains of oral literature, provide “forms, presumptions of meaning, that are filled out by later living.” One wonders if this is what the reciters of *avadānas* had in mind when, later in the *Dharmaruci-avadāna*, the monks respond to the Buddha’s offer to tell a story about Dharmaruci’s former karmic bonds. As they say, “Let the Blessed One tell the monks a dharma story about Dharmaruci. Hearing such a story from the Blessed One, the monks will keep it in mind.”⁷⁹

Now if a Buddhist monk in premodern India were to tell a didactic story to educate a group of householders, what kind of story would he tell? What kind of story would he have known? A Mūlasarvāstivādin monk, for example, would presumably have known stories from his *vinaya*. Considering the strong connection between rules and stories in his *vinaya* and the critical position of the *vinaya* to Buddhist identity—disputes over *vinaya* rules were the main cause of schisms among early Buddhist sects, and differences over *vinaya* rules the fundamental distinction between these groups (Lamotte 1988: 290–92)—a Mūlasarvāstivādin monk would most likely have learned *vinaya* stories while learning the rules that defined his order.⁸⁰ Certainly one of the fundamental distinctions between the Mūlasarvāstivādins and the Sarvāstivādins was the content of their respective *vinayas*. Considering as well that *vinaya* stories contain the genealogy of problems and their solutions (do not commit such-and-such an act, which such-and-such a person previously performed), a narrativization of this process would have provided those uneducated in Buddhist monasticism with a mimicked account of the educational process itself.

All this is not to say definitively that the *Divyāvadāna* was the creation of Mūlasarvāstivādin monastics who needed dharma tales to tell, particularly on those occasions when they were invited to someone’s house for a meal, but this possibility is given significant support.

This hypothesis would also explain the strong genealogical connection between the avadānas in the *Divyāvadāna* and their counterparts in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, as well as the erasure and marginalization of some of the legal content in the *Divyāvadāna* versions of these stories. For example, while the Meṇḍhaka story in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* contains a technical discussion regarding the propriety and mechanics of accepting certain kinds of offerings (see appendix 1), this section is elided completely in the *Divyāvadāna*. A similar elision also occurs in the *Svāgata-avadāna*. As Satoshi Hiraoka (1998: 423–24) observes,

It seems virtually certain that...the compiler of the Divy. skillfully omitted the sections of the establishment of the Vinaya rule and the commentary on it, directly connecting the part quoted above with the story of Svāgata's past. Thus he produced a story that looks natural and preserves the typical style of an avadāna.

Taking all of this information into account, perhaps the development of these avadānas can be explained as follows: With the routinization and increase in lay-monastic interactions, or at least with the desire for such ends, there came the need for good, easily accessible stories to be told on those numerous occasions when monks were enjoined to discourse on the dharma.⁸¹ Since these monks were familiar with the stories found in their vinaya, they reworked these very narratives—transforming them from accounts of the origins of monastic rules to accounts of the workings of karma—to meet the didactic needs of preaching to novice monks and lay disciples. One can speculate that since these stories were not easily accessible for monks to learn and consult because of the tremendous size as well as lack of systemization and revision of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* (Schopen 1994b: 69), they were eventually anthologized into more accessible volumes.⁸² It is also possible that these stories were frequently recited, and as the need to

recount them grew, they were codified into their own collections to canonize those stories that were considered appropriate or efficacious to tell.⁸³ These stories became known as *avadānas* and, judging by the name of the present collection, the *Divyāvadāna*—“Divine Stories”—this collection was one of great importance, or at least had pretensions to be so. Regardless of whether this text was really important, or merely self-important, it offers the reader an excellent and entertaining way of engaging with early Buddhist moral thought.



A Summary of the Stories

1. The Story of Koṭikarṇa

Koṭikarṇa-avadāna

The caravan leader Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa encounters people from his hometown who have been reborn as hungry ghosts and sees them experiencing the results of their karma. Asked to intercede on behalf of their family members who aren't following the true dharma, Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa returns home, does as he has been instructed, and eventually becomes a monk. Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa later meets the Buddha and, following the directions of his instructor, the venerable Mahākātyāyana, asks him questions about monastic regulations.

2. The Story of Pūrṇa

Pūrṇa-avadāna

A wealthy merchant with three sons suffers a serious illness before being cured by a slave girl. As per her request, she bears him a child, who is named Pūrṇa. This son of a slave girl is mistreated by some of his half-brothers, and the household soon splits apart. Though Pūrṇa is now destitute, he is diligent and clever, and in time becomes a wealthy merchant and friend to the king. Pūrṇa eventually becomes a monk, receives teachings from the Buddha, and travels to Śroṇāparāntaka. The rest of the monastic community later meets him in Sūr-pāraka, where they have been invited for a meal.

3. The Story of Maitreya

Maitreya-avadāna

The Buddha has the sacrificial post of King Mahāpraṇāda unearthed so that it can be glimpsed by the monastic community, but the monk Bhaddālin barely notices it. In response to questions about Bhaddālin's behavior, the Buddha tells the story of how and why in the past King Mahāpraṇāda disposed of the sacrificial post. The Buddha then tells a story about the future concerning the Buddha Maitreya and the disappearance of the post, and then another story about previous events that will culminate in Maitreya becoming a buddha.

4. The Story of a Brahman's Daughter

Brāhmaṇadārikā-avadāna

A brahman's daughter sees the Buddha and, filled with faith, offers him some barley meal as alms. The Buddha then explains that as a result of her offering she will eventually become a solitary buddha. The woman's husband hears of this prediction and approaches the Buddha in angry disbelief. The Buddha, however, proves to him the truth of his words, and the brahman becomes a stream-enterer.

5. The Story of a Brahman's Panegyric

Stutibrāhmaṇa-avadāna

A brahman sees the Buddha and, filled with faith, praises him with a verse. The Buddha then explains that as a result of his offering he will eventually become a solitary buddha. In response to questions about this course of events, the Buddha tells the story of how this brahman in a previous life had likewise offered a verse of praise.

6. The Story of a Brahman Named Indra

Indrabrāhmaṇa-avadāna

A brahman named Indra is told by the Buddha where he can find a post of sandalwood the height of the Buddha. The brahman retrieves it and, with the permission of the Buddha, uses it to celebrate a festival that comes

to be known as the Indramaha. In what follows, the Buddha travels to Toyikā and there sits down upon the spot where the Buddha Kāśyapa lies buried, hence creating a site that is doubly venerable. Pilgrims come to venerate the shrine, and the Buddha explains the value of their offerings. A festival is established there that comes to be known as the Toyikāmaha.

7. The Story of a Woman Dependent on a City for Alms

Nagarāvalambikā-avadāna

The venerable Mahākāśyapa accepts the offering of a leprous beggar woman, allowing her to earn great merit. Śakra tries to do likewise, but is thwarted by Mahākāśyapa. Hearing of the results of the leprous beggar's actions, King Prasenajit tries to replicate her success, but is thwarted by a bowl-carrying beggar, leading to a peculiar assignation of merit by the Buddha. The Buddha then tells of King Prasenajit's deeds in a past life that resulted in his becoming king.

8. The Story of Supriya

Supriya-avadāna

After paying off a thousand robbers who repeatedly rob the monastic community, the Buddha converts those robbers, and they become monks. The Buddha then tells the story of when he trained those robbers once before in a previous life. He was the great caravan leader Supriya, and after being robbed by those same one thousand robbers, he undertook the arduous journey to find riches that could satisfy everyone's needs.

9. The Chapter on the Great Fortune of the Householder Meṇḍhaka

Meṇḍhakagr̥hapativibhūti-pariccheda

The householder Meṇḍhaka and his family possess great merit, and so the Buddha sets off to their home in the city of Bhadrāṅkara to teach them the dharma. Hearing of this, some heretics enact a plan to ruin Bhadrāṅkara and make sure that no one meets the Buddha when he arrives there. Nevertheless, the Buddha circumvents their plans and offers teachings to the community that has amassed there.

10. The Story of Meṇḍhaka

Meṇḍhaka-avadāna

The Buddha explains the deeds performed by Meṇḍhaka and his family in a past life that led them to their present condition. The Buddha tells of a famine in the past when Meṇḍhaka and his family offered the little food they had to a solitary buddha and, as a result, came to possess magical powers.

11. The Story of Aśokavarṇa

Aśokavarṇa-avadāna

A bull about to be butchered breaks free and comes to the Buddha for protection, and the Buddha purchases his freedom. The Buddha explains that since the bull cultivated faith in him, he will eventually become a solitary buddha. The Buddha then tells of deeds done by the bull in his previous life as a robber that led him to be reborn as an animal.

12. The Miracle Sūtra

Prātibhārya-sūtra

Prompted by the evil Māra, six heretics challenge the Buddha to a competition of miracles in the city of Śrāvastī. The Buddha accepts the challenge and agrees to meet after seven days. Meanwhile, King Prasenajit's brother Kāla is falsely accused of consorting with one of the king's wives, and his hands and feet are cut off. Ānanda restores them by the power of his words. On the seventh day, the Buddha displays a miracle at Śrāvastī that defeats the heretics. After the heretics flee, the Buddha offers teachings to those who have assembled before him.

13. The Story of Svāgata

Svāgata-avadāna

In the city of Śuśumāragiri, the householder Bodha has a son named Svāgata who turns out to be ill fated, causing death and destruction for his family. Svāgata goes to Śrāvastī and is forced to join the ranks of beggars, suffering greatly because of his bad karma. Svāgata meets the

Buddha, who arranges for him to overcome some of his bad karma and become a monk. The Buddha, Svāgata, and the monastic community then travel to Śuśumāragiri, where Svāgata defeats an evil nāga and then returns back to Śrāvastī, where he unknowingly consumes liquor and gets drunk. The Buddha observes this and explains to the other monks what Svāgata did in a past life that has resulted in the difficulties he has faced in this lifetime.

14. The Story of a Wretched Pig

Sūkarika-avadāna

A divine being about to fall from heaven and be reborn as a pig laments his fate, and Śakra, out of compassion, convinces him to take refuge in the Buddha. As a result of his taking refuge, the divine being is reborn among the gods of Tuṣita heaven, a realm even higher than the one Śakra inhabits.

15. The Story of One Foretold to Be a Wheel-Turning King

Cakravartivyākṛta-avadāna

The Buddha observes a monk performing rituals at a stūpa and explains to the other monks that, as a result of this deed, this monk will become a wheel-turning king in a future life. The other monks, not wanting such a fate, refrain from such practices, and then the Buddha offers them instructions.

16. The Story of Two Parrot Chicks

Śukapataka-avadāna

Two parrot chicks who frequently receive Buddhist teachings are killed by a cat, but not before taking refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the community. In response to a question about their fate, the Buddha explains that they have been reborn among the gods and will one day be reborn as solitary buddhas.

17. The Story of Māndhātā

Māndhātā-avadāna

After making the decision to enter final nirvāṇa, the Buddha tells the story of King Māndhātā. The king, full of hubris, conquered the earth and then the heavens, but then his magical powers were destroyed. The Buddha goes on to explain some of the deeds that Māndhātā did in past lives that resulted in his successes in this one.