1 Summary and Sources

1.1 Summaries

1.1.1 Story summary (and significance). The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu highlights that we should guard our actions throughout our life, during childhood, youth and maturity, especially by respecting life. The secondary theme is that we should be accountable for our karma by not repeating unwholesome acts, and by keeping the mind thoroughly wholesome. All of us have done bad karma before, but by following the Dharma, we will be able to at least attain streamwinning.1

1.1.2 Synoptic summary

1.1.2.1 The prince, the builder and the flying machine. Prince Bodhi has a palace built. Fearing that the builder will erect a similar palace for another, the prince determines to kill him. He confides his plan to his friend and assistant, Sañjikā,putta, who informs the builder. Forewarned, the builder secretly fashions a huge bird-shaped flying machine. When the machine is ready, the builder, his wife and children, escape in it.

1.1.2.2 The prince invites the Buddha for an alms-meal. Bodhi holds a festival in honour of the palace’s completion, and invites the Buddha. The prince, being childless, spreads white cloths over the palace floor: if the Buddha steps on them, he will have a child: otherwise, he will not. The Buddha stops at the palace entrance and refuses to step on the cloths.

When the Buddha looks at Ānanda, he at once understands and requests Bodhi to have the cloths removed. Bodhi escorts the Buddha in and makes the alms-offering. At the end of it, Bodhi asks the Buddha why he is destined to be childless. The Buddha explains by relating this past-life story:

1.1.2.3 The story of the past: The destroyers of birds. A ship is wrecked at sea, losing all on board, except a man and his wife (Bodhi and his wife then). They land on an island. Finding nothing else to eat, they feed on birds’ eggs, and then the birds themselves. Their bad karma of destroying life prevents them from having any children.

1.2 Sources and significance

1.2.1 The Introduction to the Dhona,sākhā Jātaka (J 353) makes a brief mention of prince Bodhi putting out the builder’s eyes for fear that he may build a similar palace for others. There is no reference, however, to the story of the flying machine.2

1.2.2 The story of the Buddha’s visit to prince Bodhi is derived from either the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 85) or the Cela,pattikā Vatthu (Cv 5.21.2) in the Vinaya.3 The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu, however,

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1 See SD 55.5 (3.3.2) (5).
2 J 353/3:157 f (SD 55.5).
has a few details which are not found in the other sources, including the Dhona,säkha Jātaka (J 353), thus:

- **Sañjikā,putta** saves the builder’s limbs and life [§§7-13];
- the builder’s fabulous bird-like flying machine; the builder (Kaṭṭha,vāhana) builds his Himalaya kingdom [§§13-18];
- we are told the reason for Bodhi’s covering the palace floor with white cloths: he is childless and wants a child [§19-21];
- Bodhi directly asks the Buddha why he does not step on the cloths; the Buddha explains [§§25-29];
- The Buddha relates the past existence of Bodhi and his wife, when they killed a large number of birds, and closes with Dh 157 [§§31-37];
- At the end of the Buddha’s teaching, Bodhi attains streamwinning [§38].

### 1.2.3 Dh 157

#### 1.2.3.1 Dh 157 [§37] has counterparts in the following texts:

- **Patna Dharmapada** (PnDh): verse 312 (Cone 1989:185) or verse 313 (Roth 1980b:125);
- the Sanskrit Udāna-varga (Uv): verse 5.15 (Bernhard 1965:143);

#### 1.2.3.2 The Chinese parallels of Dh 157 are found in verses T196 (T4.161a7), T210 (T4.565c21), T211 (T4.593b16) [1.2.3.3], T212 (T4.652b11), and T213 (T4.780a17). They differ in their second part and do not refer to the 3 watches (the 3 period of life).

#### 1.2.3.3 In T211, its verse is found in a different story about a monk contemplating suicide on account of his inability to find a breakthrough into the Dharma. T 211 (T4.593b24) concludes by saying that, inspired by the Buddha’s verses, he, in due course, becomes an arhat.

Aspects of this story are similar to the Dhammapada story of Cūḷa,panthaka (DhA 2.3). However, in Cūḷa,panthaka’s case, he does not contemplate suicide but is on the verge of returning to lay life.

### 1.2.4 Story significance: see SD 55.5 (3.3.2).

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3 V 2:127-129 (SD 55.3).
4 Esp the story of the past about Bodhi and his wife (J 353,8-31), SD 55.5, where also see (3.3).
5 Comys mention 2 persons named Kaṭṭha,vahana, both skilled in woodwork and were rajahs. DPPN names the builder of Bodhi’s palace as Kaṭṭha,vāhana 3; his namesake, Kaṭṭha,vāhana 1, was a previous life of Bāvari (the teacher of the 16 youths of Sn). On Kaṭṭha,vāhana 1 (who lived in the time of Kassapa Buddha, the buddha just before our Gotama, SD 49.8b (2)): AA 1:331,25-3321,23; SnA 2:575,3-580,8. See also ThaA 2:73; ApA 363. On Kaṭṭha,vāhana 3 (the builder of Kokaṇada, Bodhi’s palace): DhA 3:134,5-135,24 (SD 55.4).
6 For the parallel verses of Dh 157 in PDh 312 + Uv 5,15, see Ānandajoti 1007:92.
7 See also Willemen 1999:121 f.
8 DhA 2.3/1:239,14. For its sources, see DhA:B 1:299 n 1; also Analayo 2011:481 n199.

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Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Vatthu
The Story of Prince Bodhi
DhA 12.1

[134]

1. Atthañ ce’ti. This Dharma teaching was spoken by the Teacher while he was staying in the Bhesakalā forest in connection with prince Bodhi.

1a. The prince, the builder and the flying machine

2. It is said that he had a palace named Kokanada (blue lotus) built like no other on the face of the earth, which, as it were, seemed to float in the air. He asked the builder:

3. “Have you ever built a palace like this before, or is this your first accomplishment?”

4. “This is my first accomplishment, your majesty,” he replied.

5. Prince Bodhi thought: “If this man were to build another palace like this for anyone else, then, there would be nothing fabulous about this palace. I will kill him, or have his hands and feet cut off, or have his eye gouged! That way he will never build another palace for anyone else!”

6. Now, he told this to an intimate friend, the brahmin youth, Sañjikā,putta, who thought:

7. “For certain, this builder will perish! How can I silently look on, seeing such skill destroyed! I will give him a hint about this.”

8. He went to the builder and asked:

9. “Have you finished your work on the palace or have you not?”

10. “My work is done,” he replied.


12. “Master, it’s good that you have told me this. Now I know just what to do.”

9. Ke attañ ce piyām jaññā (ie Dh 157a).

10. On Sañjikā,putta, see SD 55.2 (4) esp (4.3).

13. Now, when the prince asked the builder:

14. “Friend, have you finished your work on our palace?”

15. “No, your majesty,” replied the builder, “my work is unfinished. Much remains to be done.”

16. “What is it that remains to be done?” he asked.

17. “I will tell you all about it later. Right now, please send me some timber.”

18. “What kind of timber do you need?”

19. “Dry timber, your majesty, with all the sap dried out.”

20. The prince had them delivered to him.

21. Then, the builder said to the prince:

22. “Your majesty, from hereon, no one should see me; for, when I’m engaged in delicate work, it is distracting for me to engage in conversation. At meal-time, only my wife will bring me my food.”

23. “Very well,” said the prince, in agreement.

24. Thereupon, the builder sat down in a certain room, and using the timber fashioned a wooden garuda bird, large enough to hold him, his wife and children.
14 When meal-time came, he told his wife:
   “Go sell everything in the house and bring me back the money [silver and gold] you receive.”

15 Now, the prince, to ensure that the builder would not leave the house, surrounded it with a strong guard.

16 As for the builder, as soon as the bird was finished, he said to his wife:
   “Today, gather our boys and wait.”

17 Immediately after breakfast, he placed his wife and children inside the bird’s belly. Then, the bird soared through the window and was gone.

18 When the guards saw the bird flying away, they cried out:
   “Your majesty, the builder has escaped!”

But by then, the builder had made good his escape. Landing in the Himalayas, he created a city to live in. Thereafter, he was known as king Wooden Vehicle (kaṭṭha,vāhana,rāja).\(^\text{13}\)

1b. The prince invites the Buddha for an almsmeal

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19 The prince decided to hold a palace festival\(^\text{14}\) to celebrate its completion and invited the Teacher.

20 First, he smeared the palace walls with the 4 kinds of fragrances.\(^\text{15}\) Then, he spread cloth-strips over the floor, starting at the threshold.\(^\text{16}\)

21 It is said that he was childless. For this reason, he had spread the floor-covering, thinking:
   “If I will have a son or a daughter, the Teacher will tread on this.”\(^\text{17}\)

22 When the Teacher arrived, the prince saluted him with the fivefold rests,\(^\text{18}\) took his bowl, and said:
   “Please enter, bhante,” but the Teacher refused to enter.

   For a second time and a third time, he requested him to enter. The Teacher, however, did not enter, but then looked at the elder Ānanda.

23 The elder at once knew the look to be a sign that the Teacher did not wish to tread on the cloths.\(^\text{19}\)

24 Promptly, he bade the prince to have the cloths folded away, saying:
   “Noble prince, let them fold up the cloths. The Blessed One will not step on the cloths. The Tathāgata has regards for posterity.”\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^{11}\) A garuda (garuḍa; Skt garuḍa) is a mythical bird, harpy (MA 2:196 = Nc 235, 3 f; Vism 206; VvA 9 = supaṇṇa; DhA 1:144, 279; see SD 27.5a (6.2.0) n. Also called suparna (eg J 1:203.12’: SD 52.1 (11.2.1.1) n. The garudas are the mortal enemies of the nagas (serpent-beings): see eg Uraga J (J 31/2:12-14). See Magha V DhA 2.7,95 (SD 54.22).

\(^{12}\) Aja sabbe pi dārake gahetvā āgaccheyyāsīti bhariyāṁ vatvā,

\(^{13}\) On the builder who became king (kaṭṭha,vāhana rājā) and his country (kaṭṭha,vāhana rāṭṭha), see at (1.2.2).

\(^{14}\) “Palace festival,” pāsāda,maha.


\(^{16}\) Ummārato paṭṭhāya cela,pattikami paṭṭhari.

\(^{17}\) Sacāhām puttam vā dihtarām vā lacchāmi satthā imam akkamissati cintetvā patthari.

\(^{18}\) “Saluted him with the fivefold rests,” pānca,patthihitena vanditvā.

\(^{19}\) Therō olokitara,saññāyeva vattānaṁ anakkaman,bhāvānāhītāṁ, bhāvāṁ nātvā,\)

\(^{20}\) Pacchima, janatama tuṭṭhagato oloketi. In Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S (M 85,7.6) Ce Ee Se read apaloketi (he looks, regards) (SD 55.3), which is practically synonymous: but see vl there.
The prince having had the cloths folded up, escorted the Teacher into the palace. He served him with alms of rice-porridge and hard foods. Then, he saluted the Teacher, and sitting at one side, said to him:

“Bhante, I am your benefactor. Thrice have I gone for refuge. Once, I was told, it was when I was still in my mother’s womb. The second time was when I was a mere boy; and the third time, when I’ve reached the age of reason.

This being the case, why did you not step on my floor-covering?”

“Noble prince, with what thought did you spread those cloths over the floor?”

“Bhante, this thought was in my mind: ‘If I shall have a son or a daughter, the Teacher will step on these cloths.’”

“It was for that very reason that I did not step on the cloths.”

“But, bhante, is it because I will have neither a son nor a daughter?”

“It is, noble prince.”

“When was that, bhante?”

“In a former birth, you lapsed into heedlessness towards other beings.”

“Noble prince, if in a single one of the 3 periods of your life in that birth, you and your wife had been heedful, you would have obtained a son or a daughter in one of the 3 periods of your present life. Furthermore, if either of you had been heedful, on that account, too, you would have obtained a son or a daughter.

Noble prince, when a person considers his life dear, he should guard it with heedfulness during the 3 periods of his life.

1a. The story of the past: The destroyers of birds

Once upon a time, it is said, several hundred people went out to sea in a large ship. When they reached mid-ocean, they were shipwrecked. Everyone perished, except for the husband and wife, who, clinging to a plank reached a nearby island.

Now, on that island lived a large flock of birds. Both husband and wife, overcome with hunger, and seeing nothing else to eat, cooked the birds’ eggs over hot coals and ate them.

When the eggs were insufficient to satisfy their hunger, they caught the birds and their young and ate them, too. Thus, did they eat them in their youth, in mid-life and in old age.

In not a single period of life were they heedful. Neither of the two was heedful.”

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21 “Benefactor,” upakāraka, i.e., a lay supporter. A better known term is upatthāka (Ānanda, D 1:206,2; Nāgīta, A3:31,2); less commonly, upatthāka (of Citta and Hathiḍālavaja, B 3.16; Ghatikāra (of Kassapa Buddha, B 25.12).

22 Kucchi,goto kīramhi ekāvāram sarānaṁ gato. Apparently, upakāraka is more often merely a lay alms-donor, while upatthāka is a monastic attendant.

23 Dutiyaṁ taruṇa,dārakālē, tatiyaṁ viññūbhāvaṁ patta,kale. The cpd taruṇa,dāraka,kale is an accidentally shortened form (a haplology) of taruṇa,dāraka,kale, where one of the repeated syllables is lost; DhA:Be 2:86 gives taruṇa,dāraka,kale. The cpd taruṇa,dāraka occurs at AA 2:236; J 1:338,3:38, 6:219; VbhA 447.

24 Purimaka,satta,bhāve jāyāya saddhim pamādam āpannattātī.

25 In keeping to the context of the story, I have taken sakuna-c,chāpe as dvandva, tr it as “the birds and their young.”

26 The 3 periods of life are: (1) childhood, (2) youth and (3) adulthood.
Failing that, he should at least guard himself during one of the 3 periods of his life.”

36 When the Teacher had thus spoken, he pronounced the following verse”:

37 Attānañ ce piyaṁ jaññā
rakkheyya nam surakkhitam
tīṇṇam aṅañataram yāmaṁ
patijaggeyya pañdito’ti

(Dh 157) [1.2.3] the wise would be watchful. [138]

[The Commentary has been omitted.]

38 At the end of the teaching, the prince was established in the fruit of streamwinning. The congregation, too, gained various benefits from the teaching.27

— evaṁ —

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27 Sampatta, parisāya pi sāthikā desanā ahosīti.