

Ajātaśatruparidāpitāvadāna of the Kalpadrumāvadānamālā (MS Add.1590):
Some Preliminary Notes

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The Magadhan king Ajātaśatru is one of the most fascinating figures in the early history of Indian Buddhism. He is best known for his personality transformation from a paradigmatic criminal into a faithful Buddhist layman. Early on, instigated by the monk Devadatta who was the archrival of the Buddha, Ajātaśatru committed patricide, one of the five most serious crimes categorized in Indian Buddhist literature, i.e., the crimes of intermediate retribution [of descent into hell in the next birth]” (*ānantarya-karmāṇi*). Later, full of remorse he confessed his crime to the Buddha and took refuge in him. Given that Ajātaśatru represents perhaps the worst-case scenario within Indian Buddhist ethics, a close study of stories of the salvation of this criminal may open windows into different views of ancient Buddhist authors on morality and karmic responsibility, and into their different emphases in Buddhist soteriological discourses.

There are many stories related to the theme of the salvation of Ajātaśatru in Buddhist literature, which consequently comprise a narrative cycle. Among those stories, the *Ajātaśatruparidāpitāvadāna* (AŚPA) “Story of the Converted Ajātaśatru” appears to be one of the most distinctive, but so far remains little known. This story stands as the twenty-eighth chapter of the *Kalpadrumāvadānamālā* (KDAM) “Garland of Avadānas of the Wishing Tree”, a Sanskrit poetical collection which may have been compiled around the third century CE (Iwamoto 1967). As yet, a number of manuscripts of the KDAM have been identified, among which the two most complete are separately preserved in the Cambridge University Library (Add.1590 in Bendall 1883, procured by Dr. Wright) and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Nos.26-27 in Filliozat 1941, procured by Mr. Hodgson). There are also incomplete manuscripts of the KDAM held in the Tokyo University Library (No.79 in Matsunami 1965) or elsewhere, most of which do not contain the AŚPA mentioned above.

In this presentation, I will begin by outlining several main categories of legends of the salvation of Ajātaśatru in Indian Buddhist literature, which may provide a context for understanding the AŚPA and its position within the narrative cycle in question. Following this, I will introduce some basic information of the KDAM, including its composition, extant manuscripts and previous studies. I will then confine my focus to the AŚPA and compare it with other related stories, based on a summary of its content provided by Rājendralāla Mitra (1882). As the comparison will show, the AŚPA has a number of distinctive features rarely or not seen in other Pāli or Sanskrit stories of Ajātaśatru. The features include the healing of Ajātaśatru’s leprosy as one part of his spiritual salvation, the savior role of Bodhisattva Lokeśvara, the special function of *upośadha* fast, and the emphasis on the Buddhist kingship. As I will suggest, a better understanding of those features and their implications can only be made on the basis of a closer reading of the AŚPA in the future, especially within the framework of the KDAM.