

Legends of the Buddhist Saints

Apadānapāli

TRANSLATED BY
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Vaṅgīsa

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[541. {544.}]¹ Vaṅḡisa²

The Victor, Padumuttara,
the One with Eyes for everything,
the Leader [of the World,] arose
a hundred thousand aeons hence. (1) [6118]

Just like the waves on the ocean,
[and just] like the stars in the sky,
thus the word of the [Sambuddha,]
is thought out by the arahants. (2) [6119]

The Supreme Victor, in a crowd
mixed with [Buddhist] monks and brahmins,
is honored by people along
with the gods, titans and snake-gods. (3) [6120]

The Victor, the World-Surpasser,³
illuminates⁴ the world with rays,
causing to open⁵ through his words
the tractable lotus[-people].⁶ (4) [6121]

The Supreme Person, Endowed with
the Four Perfect Confidences,⁷
Fear [and] Timidness Abandoned,⁸
is Confident,⁹ with Peace Attained.¹⁰ (5) [6122]

¹*Apadāna* numbers provided in {fancy brackets} correspond to the BJTS edition, which contains more individual poems than does the PTS edition dictating the main numbering of this translation.

²a historical monk, famous as a poet and foremost among those with ready expressions (*paṭṭibhānavataṇ*). See DPPN II: 802-803. The text understands the meaning of his name as both “Lord from Vaṅga” and “Lord of Speakers” (see v. 27 [6144], below)

³*lokantagū*, lit., “who has gone to the ends of the world” (understood by BJTS to refer to *bhavotpattiya*, the process of rebirth or re-existence itself)

⁴or “is coloring”: *anurañjanto*

⁵*vibodhento*, BJTS Sinh. gloss *pobayamin*, which refers to the “opening” of both minds (i.e., “enlightening” “teaching”) and of flowers (“en-lightening” like the sun, to whose rays lotuses open)

⁶*veneyyapadumāni*, lit., “lotuses that can be taught” or “lotuses that can be led”. I follow BJTS Sinh. gloss in taking the term to refer to people. I have explored a developed use of this metaphor in the introduction to *Vaṃsatthappakāsini*, in my “Buddhist History: The Sri Lankan Pāli Vaṃsas and their Commentary,” in Inden, Walters and Ali, *Querying the Medieval* (Oxford, 2000):126ff.

⁷*vesārajjeḥi sampanno cchatuḥi*

⁸*pahīna-bhaya-sārajjō*, lit., “with fear and timidity abandoned”

⁹*visārado*

The World-Chief is acknowledged as
the entire sphere of Buddhahood,¹¹
[which is] the Excellent Bull's place;¹²
there is no one who refutes [that]. (6) [6123]

When the Neutral One, [the Buddha],
fearlessly roars¹³ [his] lion's roar,
no god nor man nor God Himself¹⁴
exists who contradicts [his words]. (7) [6124]

Preaching the excellent *Dhamma*,
ferrying [the world] with [its] gods,
Confident among Multitudes,
he's turning the wheel of *Dhamma*. (8) [6125]

Praising the lofty virtue of
a well-regarded follower,
foremost among eloquent¹⁵ [monks],
he placed him in that foremost place. (9) [6126]

I then [lived] in Hamsavatī,
a brahmin [likewise] well-regarded,
born knowing all of the Vedas,
lord of speech,¹⁶ debater-crusher.¹⁷ (10) [6127]

Approaching him, the Great Hero,
having heard that *Dhamma*-preaching,
I obtained overwhelming joy,¹⁸
loving the follower's virtue. (11) [6128]

Inviting [him], the Well-Gone-One,
World's Delighter, with Assembly,
I served [them] food¹⁹ for seven days,

¹⁰*khemappatto*. BJTS Sinh. gloss takes "peace" to mean nirvana, and its attainment to be the very nature of the confidence of boldness exhibited by the Buddha.

¹¹*buddhabhumiṃ ccha kevalaṃ*

¹²*āsabhaṇ pavaṇaṇ ṭhānaṇ*, i.e., "the excellent best place"

¹³*nadato*

¹⁴*brahmā*

¹⁵*paṭibhānavataṇ*, lit., "possessing ready expression"

¹⁶*vāgīso*

¹⁷*vādisūdano*

¹⁸*pīṭivaraṇ paṭilabhiṇ*

¹⁹or "fed [them]"

[and] then I covered [them] with cloth.²⁰ (12) [6129]

Bowing with [my] head at [his] feet,
granted leave, hands pressed together,
happy, standing [off to] one side,
I praised the Ultimate Victor: (13) [6130]

“Praise to you, Leopard of Sages!²¹
Praise to you, O Best of People!
Praise to you, Chief of Every World!
Praise to you, Fearlessness-Maker!²² (14) [6131]

Praise to you, Confuser of Death!²³
Praise to you, Crusher of [False] Views!²⁴
Praise to you, Peaceful Comforter!²⁵
Praise to you, Gone Beyond Refuge!²⁶ (15) [6132]

Revered One:²⁷ Lord for the lordless,
Courage-Giver²⁸ for the frightened,
Resting Place for the exhausted,²⁹
Refuge for those seeking refuge.” (16) [6133]

Praising the One of Great Virtue,³⁰
the Sambuddha, in such-like ways,

²⁰i.e., “I gave robes to each of them”

²¹reading *isisaddula* [°saddūla] with PTS alt. for PTS *vālisaddūla* (“Furry Leopard”) and BJTS *vādisaddūla* (“Leopard among Debaters”) and BJTS alt. *vādimaddana* (“Debater-Crusher”), though any of these might indicate the original meaning (or not), and all of them (plus perhaps others, at least in the minds of audiences) have witness in the manuscripts, i.e., have been “the” meaning at least for some Buddhists through the generations.

²²*abhayaṅkara*

²³*māramathana*

²⁴*ditṭhisūdana*

²⁵*santisukhada*, lit “Giver of Peaceful Comfort” or “Giver of Peace and Comfort” or “Giver of Peace and Happiness”

²⁶*saraṇantaḡa*, lit., “Gone to the End of Refuge”

²⁷*bhavan*, BJTS reads *bhavaṃ*. This could be a nom. sing. or a voc. sing.; “The Revered One” or “O Revered One.”

²⁸*abhayappado*

²⁹reading *vissāmaḡbhūmi santānaṃ* with BJTS for PTS *vissāna* [=gift?] *bhūmisantānaṃ* (“Land of Gifts for the lineage” or “in continuity” ?); BJTS alt. *vissāsaḡbhūmi*, “place of confidence” “place to breathe easy”

³⁰*mahāguṇaṃ*

³¹*vādisurassa*, or “God of Debaters”. *Sura* is a word for “god” which invokes the cosmic battle with the titans (“not *suras*,” *asuras*), “The [Conquering] God”

I said to the God of Speakers:³¹
“I’m attaining that monk’s station.”³² (17) [6134]

He of Limitless Eloquence,³³
the Blessed One, said at that time:
“This one who worshipped³⁴ the Buddha
with followers for a week, and
uttered praises of my virtue,
[feeling well-]pleased by [his] own hands,
is wishing [to attain] the place
of the monk who’s god of speakers. (18-19) [6135-6136]

Very far into the future,
he’ll receive that delightful [place,]
enjoying, with nothing lacking,
happiness³⁵ among gods [and] men. (20) [6137]

In one hundred thousand aeons,
arising in Okkāka’s clan,
the one whose name is Gotama
will be the Teacher in the world. (21) [6138]

Worthy heir to that one’s *Dhamma*,
Dhamma’s legitimate offspring,
the one whose name is Vaṅḡsa
will be the Teacher’s follower.” (22) [6139]

After hearing that I was thrilled,
[and] then for as long as [I] lived ,
loving-hearted, I provided
the Thus-Gone-One with requisites. (23) [6140]

Due to that karma done very well,
with intention and [firm] resolve,
discarding [my] human body,
I went to Tāvatiṃsa [then]. (24) [6141]

And now, in [my] final rebirth,
I’m born in a mendicant clan.

³²*gatim pappomi*

³³*anantapaṭibhānavā*

³⁴lit., “did *pūjā*”

³⁵or “fortune”: *sampattiṃ*

Birth was behind [me] when I was
[only] seven years past [my] birth. (25) [6142]

I'm born knowing all the Vedas,
confident among speech-teachers,
lovely-sounding, varied speaker,
trampling out other speeches. (26) [6143]

Born in Vaṅga, I'm "Vaṅga Lord,"³⁶
or [I'm known as] "the lord of words;"³⁷
"Vaṅgīsa" [thus] became my name,
which is honored throughout the world. (27) [6144]

When I had attained discretion,
still³⁸ in the first stage³⁹ of [my] youth,
then in lovely Rajgir [city]
I saw [the monk] Sāriputta, (28) [6145]

The Twenty-Fifth Recitation Portion
wandering about for alms food,
bowl in hand, very self-composed,
eyes undistracted, of few words,⁴⁰
not looking [beyond] a plough's length.⁴¹ (29) [6146]

Having seen him, being awestruck,
I spoke as was fitting for me,
[in eloquent] verses and feet,
free of spots of [mere] fleeting thoughts.⁴² (30) [6147]

Then he, the wise one, the hero,
spoke back [thus] to me in response:
"The one described my Teacher,

³⁶ *Vaṅgīsa*, the protagonist's name.

³⁷ *vacchane issaro ti vā*, a second etymology for his name

³⁸ *ṭhito*, lit., "remaining," "standing" "fixed"

³⁹ or "prime" or "first bloom": *paṭhamayobbane*

⁴⁰ *mitabhāsiṇ*, lit., "of limited speaking"

⁴¹ *yugamattaṇ nirikkitaṇ* [BJTS reads *nirikkhakam*], both variants on the typical construction with *pekkhati* rather than *ikkhati*), lit., "looking ahead the extent of a plough," i.e., just a little, keeping his eyes on the ground in front of him

⁴² reading *kaṇikam thānaracchitam* with BJTS for PTS *kaṇṇikāraparicchitaṇ* ("heaping up [metaphors of?] dinner-plate [trees]"), though it is tempting to read in the latter a mild criticism of the frequency of such metaphors in earlier poems by the appropriately, and especially skilled poet of the present *apadāna*

the Sambuddha, the World's Leader." (31a-b) [6148]⁴³

[He then] made an impassioned speech,
hard to encounter,⁴⁴ ultimate.
Pleased by⁴⁵ [that] colorful⁴⁶ speaking
by the neutral [Sāriputta],
bowing with [my] head at [his] feet,
I said, "give me⁴⁷ ordination." (31c-d, 32) [6149]⁴⁸

Then he, the one of great wisdom,
led me to the Best of Buddhas.
Bowling with [my] head at [his] feet,
I sat in the Teacher's presence. (33a-b) [6150]⁴⁹

The Best Debater⁵⁰ said to me,
"Vaṅṅīsa, do you know any
art at all?" I spoke about it
and [then] I said [to him] "I know". (33c-d) [6151]⁵¹

"Through your distinction in knowledge,
if you can, [then now] speak about
a dead skull thrown out in the woods,
even [after] twelve years [have passed]." (34) [6152]

When I agreed [saying], "Yes, [Sir,]"
he showed three [such dead] skulls [to me].

⁴³here PTS seems to omit the first two feet of the verse, provided in BJTS: *ācchikkhi so me satthāraṃ/Sambuṃddha lokanāyakaṃ*. PTS provides BJTS [6148c-d] as its (31a-b); it then makes BJTS [6149a-b] into its (30c-d). BJTS presents the subsequent verse as a six-footed one, making up the difference, but the problem recurs below

⁴⁴lit., "hard to see," reading *duddasaṃ* with BJTS (and PTS alt.) for PTS *uddayaṇ* ("profit"?)

⁴⁵lit., "in"

⁴⁶or "varied": *vicchitta*

⁴⁷reading *maṃ* with BJTS for PTS *c'*

⁴⁸BJTS presents this as a six-footed verse; PTS breaks it into one and a half verses, probably misled by the omitted line (see the note on the previous verse numbers)

⁴⁹here too PTS seems to omit a line, which BJTS reads as: *nipaccchcha sirasā pade/ nisīdiṇ satthu santike*.

⁵⁰*vadatarṇ seṭṭho*. I read *kaccchchi vaṅṅīsa jānasi* with BJTS for PTS (and BJTS alt.) *saccchcharṇ Vaṅṅīsa kaccchchi te* ("O Vaṅṅīsa, what is the truth?"), though both versions convey a similar sense to the Buddha's rhetorical question

⁵¹here too PTS seems to omit a line, which BJTS reads as: *kiñcchi sippan ti tassāhaṃ/ jānāmi ti ccha abravīṃ*. I follow BJTS Sinh. gloss in parsing the grammar here.

⁵²reading *avācchayīṃ* with BJTS for PTS *avācchayi* ("he said")

I said⁵² that they were [now] reborn
in hell, as a man,⁵³ with the gods. (35) [6153]

At that time the Leader showed [me]
the skull of a Lonely Buddha.
After that, without a basis,⁵⁴
I requested ordination. (36) [6154]

After going forth, I praised the
Well-Gone-One in this [and] that place.⁵⁵
Therefore the monks became annoyed
at me, “he has a poet’s mind.” (37) [6155]

Therefore in order to test [me],
the Guide, the Buddha said to me:
“Are these verses thoughtful figures,⁵⁶
or are they spoken groundlessly?” (38) [6156]

“Hero, I’m not poet-minded;
they are spoken by me with grounds.”
“In that case, [then,] O Vaṅḡsa,
you sing your praises of me now.”⁵⁷ (39) [6157]

At that time I praised the Hero,
the Seventh Sage, with [my] verses.
Then at once, [becoming] happy,
the Victor placed me as foremost. (40) [6158]

Through [my] speaking and through [my] mind
I then despised [some] others who
were well-behaved.⁵⁸ Stirred up⁵⁹ by that,
I attained [my] arahantship. (41) [6159]

“No other one at all is found who’s
foremost among the eloquent

⁵³reading *nara* with BJTS for PTS *atho* (“then”)

⁵⁴*vigatārambho*. BJTS (and PTS alt.) reads *vihaṭṭo* (“being one with basis destroyed”).
The point is that despite his great wisdom, Vaṅḡsa cannot see where the Lonely
Buddha has gone, since he (the Lonely Buddha) has not been reborn anywhere

⁵⁵or “here [and] there”: *yahiṇ tahiṇ*

⁵⁶reading *takkitā patimā gāthā* with BJTS for PTS *takkitānam imā gāthā* (“are these
verses of thinkers”?)

⁵⁷reading *tena hi dāni* with BJTS for PTS *tena dānena* (“through that alms-giving”)

⁵⁸reading *pesale tena* with BJTS for PTS *pesal’ etena*

⁵⁹*saṇviggo*

as is this monk [named] Vaṅgīsa;
so should you consider⁶⁰ [him], monks.” (42) [6160]

Karma done a hundred thousand
[aeons hence] showed me [its] fruit here:
well-liberated, arrow-quick,
I have destroyed my defilements. (43) [6161]

My defilements are [now] burnt up;
all [new] existence is destroyed.
Like elephants with broken chains,
I am living without constraint. (44) [6162]

Being in Best Buddha’s presence
was a very good thing for me.
The three knowledges are attained;
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (45) [6163]

The four analytical modes,
and these eight deliverances,
six special knowledges mastered,
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (46) [6164]

Thus indeed Venerable Vaṅgīsa Thera spoke these verses.
The legend of Vaṅgīsa Thera is finished.

⁶⁰*dhāretha*, lit., “carry” “recall” “remember” “regard”