Sman-rgyi-bla Vaidur-yas
od-kyi-rgyal-po
(shainjya-mtshur-vaidurya-Prabhutaraj)
VAIDURYA

- Marianne Winder

The Tibetan Medicine Buddha

The colour of the gem vaidurya plays a great role in Tibetan medicine. The Medicine Buddha is called be-du-rwa ho-lugs rgyal-po, or 'King of the Vaidurya Light'. In the Sādhanamālā, a list of about 200, he is only called 'King of Healing'. But in a Chinese medical text of AD 580 to 606, the Sūtra on the Merits of the Fundamental Vows of the Master of Healing in Hisan Tsang's Tspi-ka version, he is called the 'Vaidurya Radiance Thallagata'. The Chinese word is lu-li. In Tibetan vai-du-rwa or be-du-rwa and other variant forms remain untranslated loan words. According to Jäckle's Tibetan-English Dictionary, be-du-rwa means 'azure stone, lapis lazuli'. It quotes Dzangtun (i.e., bsad-gstis-blu), a collection of legends, in which are mentioned the Vaidurya dkar-po, White Vaidurya and Vaidurya sgom-pa, Blue Vaidurya, which are titles of books on astronomy-astrology and on medicine, respectively. The Tibetan-English Dictionary of Chandra Das 1986.

... the yellow lapis-lazuli called मात्यु (ma'thri), the green lapis-lazuli called सुगुट (suguta), the white lapis-lazuli called सिंप (sîmp).

मात्यु is probably an allusion to the Yellow Maithuci, Suguta 'having fared well' is easily associated with green, the colour of growth, and the colour white with सिंप 'empty'. However, there is no such thing as a white, green or yellow lapis lazuli. The colour blue is not mentioned by Chandra Das. The works called 'White Vaivartha' and 'Blue Vaivartha' to which can be added a book called 'Yellow Vaivartha' on history do not seem to mean 'lapis lazuli'. Even the title 'Blue Lapis Lazuli' would not make sense because of the tautology, as lapis lazuli can have no other colour. Jaques André and Jean Filliozat compare the meanings of vaivartha in nineteenth-century dictionaries and come to the conclusion that the early nineteenth century ones favoured the meaning 'lapis lazuli',6 and that those near the end of the nineteenth century preferred 'cat's eye'.7

Beryl, cat's eye or lapis lazuli?

What, then, does vaivartha mean? Etymologically it is related to Pāli veḷuva and Prākrit veḷuva, veḷuva, veḷa and veḷa.8 Prākrit veḷuva became Greek βελάλλον whence came English beryl.9 While Greek βελάλλον and, from there, English beryl were derived from Prākrit veḷuva, the Persian and Arabic words bīlar, bālīr and hālīr meaning 'crystal or beryl' were also borrowed from India, but according to Alfred Master, they are not derived from Sanskrit vaivartha or Pāli veḷuva.10 He does not sug-

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6For example Horace Hayman Wilson, Dictionary, Sanskrit and English (Calcutta: Education Press, 1819).
8Richards Pischel, Comparative grammar of the Prakrit languages, translated from the German by Subhadra Jha, 2nd edition, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), 173. § 244 gives various Prakrit forms.
9J. halévy, ‘Mélanges etymologiques’, Mémoires de la Société Linguistique, x1 (1900), 82, thinks that the Prakrit form veḷa is a corruption from Greek βελάλλον, diminutive of βελάλλον 'beryl' and that this word of Greek origin was imported into India either during the campaign of Alexander the Great or later. This view does not hold water because the word vaivartha is found in Sanskrit sources of as early as the Atharvaveda Brhamana of 650 BC.
gest a Prakrit form from which they could be derived. 'Crystal' can be a
generalised term for 'beryl' because the beryl occurs in crystalline form.

The meaning of the Sanskrit word vaśīrūpa is also 'beryl' according to
Mañjñhara. To corroborate his opinion he quotes A. Master who gives a
chronology of the occurrence of vaśīrūpa and its Prakrit and Pali forms
and asserts that the evidence for the meaning 'beryl' is conclusive for all
of them. But he mentions that Mallināthā of the fifteenth century
identifies vaśīrūpa with lapis lazuli, and that Apte followed his example.
He also mentions that Sten Konow and A. C. Woolner translate Prakrit vaśīrūpa
vērāsī as 'cat's eye', and Dines Andersen does the same with Pali vērāsī.
The passage in which Mallināthā explains vaśīrūpa as lapis lazuli
connects it at the same time with the meaning of 'cat's eye' as follows:

The women are afraid of the rays of the moon coming through the
window, which are reflected on the vaśīrūpa walls and therefore
bhālakṣakapakhtamānīkāyān which Buddrus explains as 'frighten like cat's eyes' and Master translates
as 'make terrible cat's eyes'. Thakura Phero translates vaśīrūpa in this
context as 'chrysoberyl' or 'cat's eye' saying that Māgha's use clearly
indicates the chatoyancy of vaśīrūpa. Perhaps the difference in the dates
is significant: Māgha wrote his work during the seventh century AD and

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11Mañjñhara. Kurupaññatā etymologyches Wörterbuch des Abhindschen. A
comparable etymological Sanskrit dictionary (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), 4v, 367.
12Mañjñhara, loc. cit., 305.
13Ibid., 304.
14Kolechala Mallinātha. Commentary on Māgha's Śrīpadālokaṭha, iii. 65. (Bombay: Ni-
naya Sagar Press, 1923).
15Vaman Shrivām Apte, Sanskrit English dictionary, revised edition, (Bombay: Gopal
Parades, 1957-59).
16Rājadhānā, Rājā
17Tridhānā Karapunnamāna, edited by Sten Konow, with notes and translation by Charles
18A. C. Woolner, Introduction to Prakrit, 3rd edition, (London: Medill Banerjee,
1930), § 58, pp. 24, 228.
20Quoted from George Buddrus, 'Sam Lāpa Lāzuli in India', Studien zur Indologie
und Iranistik, v/1 (1930), 6.
21Thakura Phero. Rājānapariṇāke, a Medieval Prakrit Text on Gemology, trans-
Kumārajīvamālā, i. 24 (fifth century AD) suggests the crystal of beryl. Phero's book
was not accessible to me, and I am indebted to him for this and other references to Dr Atias
Boa.
Mallinatha’s commentary is of the fifteenth century. Louis Finot translates rājatāpasu as ‘cat’s eye’ because of the passage in Buddhaghosha’s Ratnapaścāda, 200, which says that the rājatāpasu shows such a variety of brilliances that it gives the impression of flashing sparks. The passage in the Kertiparamaṇaparīti which Xonow interprets as ‘cat’s eye’ is taken by Lamman to mean ‘beryl’. Bőhlingk and Roth translate rājatāpasu as ‘beryl’ without explaining why.

In the Pali canon

Looking for rājatāpasu in the Pali Canon we find in Dīghanikāya, ii, 84:24

Just, O King, as if there were a rājatāpasu gem, bright, of the purest water, with eight facets, excellently cut, clear, translucent...

Now, a lapis lazuli is opaque, and the whole purpose of this passage is to show that a coloured thread going through a translucent gem can be clearly seen, comparing it to a purified mind recognising the truth easily. Lapis lazuli is a rock and does not form crystals. The beryl is six-sided but the writer of this passage and similar ones may have regarded the two ends as two more sides. Otto Franke says to this passage that in other passages eight-sided columns are mentioned made of rājatāpasu and that the listeners’ ears may have got attuned to this so that the idea of eight facets are an assimilation to this habit of thinking. There is also the association of the Eightfold Path.

Vesagāpitaka, ii, 12 has:26

You are not, O Bhikkhus, to use bowls made of gold, silver, set with jewels, or made of beryl, crystal, copper, glass, tin, lead, bronze.

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Max Müller’s note 1:

It is clear from verses 192–196 of the 13th chapter of the Rāja-
nighanta written by Narahari in the 13th century (or according
according to B. Laufer, the 15th) that at that time vajrāyana meant ‘cat’s
eye’. But it is uncertain that that was the only meaning… at
the time when this passage was composed.

I shall come back to the Rājānighanta later.

Samguptarnīkāya, i. 623 has:27

Even as a beautiful, illustrious berylstone of eight facets, well
polished, when laid on an orange coloured cloth shines and glows
and blazes…

Mrs. Rhys Davids’ choice of stone seems right since the implication is that
the gem is transparent and has facets.

Ariguttaramāya, iii. 70, 243 has:28

Within this cock-animal [sphere] there are pearls, gems, cat’s eyes
… all these are not worth one sixteenth part of the merit result-
ing from a fast with eight vows.

Here again is the pre-occupation with the figure eight. Nyanatiloka’s German
translation has Türkisen für vajrāya.29

Ariguttaramāya, ii. 19, 8 has:30

Lord, the mighty ocean has many and diverse treasures; there is
the pearl, the crystal, the lapis lazuli (vajrāya), the shell, quartz,
coral, silver, gold, the ruby and cat’s eye (masāṅgallā).

E. M. Hare’s note to vajrāya: ‘the colour of bamboo, of the acacia flower
must be taken from a Pali commentary. Here I thought I would find out what
colour vajrāya was: bamboo when young is usually dark green but turns into
yellow wood after one year, and the acacia flower is white or yellow. This
was inconclusive until I read the passage in the Rājānighanta.31

27 Part i, chapter ii, section 3, The Sutta Sutras Sutta, 9, translated by Caroline A.
(Galle: J. Gouwers, 1913). 235.
29 Die Reden des Buddha aus dem Anguttara-Nikāya. Inhalt: Enster-bis Ueberricht... 2nd
30 Alphonso, Mahāyāna, translated by E. M. Hare. London: Luzac, 1935, 137.
31 Die indischen Mineralien. Franksb. Rājānighanta, Sanskrit und deutsch terme-
The cat's eye can be recognised from three types of sheen, that is, when it slightly shines like a bamboo leaf, shines strongly like a peacock's neck or has the reddish-brown appearance of the eye of cats.

Apart from the fact that my favourite cat would object to the latter description, this seems to be a standard comparison unless it has been lifted out of the Pāli commentary used by Hare. The comparison with a bamboo is probably due to a conventional false etymology which associates vefurīya with Pāli veḷu or veḷu, both meaning 'bamboo'. E. M. Hare, in spite of his note, 'the colour of the acacia brown', translates vefurīya as 'lapis lazuli'. The reason for this is not far to seek. At the end of the enumeration in the Aṅguttaraṃnikāya a new gem has appeared, the maśārnapalla, which Hare translates as 'cat's eye'.

While the Rājanighantu compares the sheen of the cat's eye to that of the bamboo leaf, Hare's note to the passage in the Aṅguttaraṃnikāya compares the colour of the vefurīya, translated by him as 'lapis lazuli', to a bamboo. The Rājanighantu is a compilation of various works. Verse 184 combines the comparison to a peacock's neck with a comparison to the eye of a cat, and therefore in that passage clearly means the 'cat's eye' gem. In verse 216 in chapter 13, the lapis lazuli is described as also compared to a peacock's neck as follows:

That lapis lazuli must be regarded as genuine and auspicious which is without white flecks, is blackish or dark blue, smooth, heavy, pure, shining and like a peacock's neck.

This description of lapis lazuli corresponds to the mineralogical facts. The white flecks are caused by calcite. Here five Sanskrit words are translated by 'lapis lazuli', but not vefurīya.

The comparison of vefurīya to a peacock's neck in Hare's note can be substantiated with a passage in Jātaka no. 32, the Naracūḍiśaka: 'peacock, your neck in hue like lapis lazuli ...' This translates vefurīyaṃ upuṇṇānibbā. Pāli nibba means 'lustre', and upuṇṇa, Sanskrit upaṇa, does not have to mean 'colour' but just 'beauty, appearance'. So the passage could equally mean,

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32Garbe, Die indischen Kapralien.
33Hare (tr.), Mahāvagga, 117.
34Ibid., 33.216.
35Ibid., 33.216, 117.
36Translated under the editorship of E. B. Cowell by Robert Chalmers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), l. 84.
'peacock, your neck has more luster than the appearance of beryl'. The *Rajanghāyoga* may have borrowed the simile from the *Jātaka*.

Now, while Chalmers translated *vēḷūra* in *Jātaka* no. 32 as 'lapis lazuli', H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil, the translators of volume three, still under Cowell's editorship, translated in *Jātaka* no. 419 *vēḷūra* as 'emeralds'.

*çonaḥ svetatākāryam mātīrte vēḷūra*

Here is a golden necklace and emeralds and pearls.

In volume four of the same edition, translated by W. H. D. Rouse, in *Jātaka* no. 463, the word *vēḷūra* is translated as 'coral'.

*taṁmaṁ pana samudde vāṃśārāgavēḷūrapam*

Now, this ocean was full of coral the colour of bamboo.

Rouse's note says: 'the scholiast explains that the sea was red, like the reeds called 'scorpion-reed' or 'crab-reed', which are red in colour.' He adds that the hali was coral, which is also the word used at the end of the story (pradha). In fact, on the next page the sequence of precious substances found in the ocean, 'itself a fanciful notion, is: diamonds, gold, silver, emeralds, vāṃśārāgavēḷūrapam; at the end of the passage it is: 'gold, silver, jewels, corals (this time pataśa), and diamonds.' Thus 'emeralds and vēḷūra the colour of bamboo' was replaced by 'jewels and corals'.

The *Dhammadāśada* is believed to be an early text. It is mentioned in the *Milindapātra* which belongs to the beginnings of the Christian era. The commentary to it is called *Dhammadāśadaṭṭhakathā* and is attributed in its colophon to Buddhaghosa which fixes its date to about AD 400 even if Buddhaghosa was not himself the author. In the part commenting on *Sallastamgga*, viii, 3, the line *ime svetatākārya sāke vēḷūrapam* is translated by Eugene Watson Burlingame as, 'Take these golden bracelets, all set with beryl'.

The *Milindapātra*, i, 267 has an enumeration of precious substances in which *māsāruṇgaḷam vēḷūra* are juxtaposed. I. B. Horner translates the two words as 'cat's eyes, lapis lazuli'. Here is the same situation as is...
the Aṣṇutramaniṇḍaya. Again, ṣeṣṣuras is translated as 'lapis lazuli' because maṣṣaragala is 'cat’s eye' or ‘beryl’.

The Dictionary of the Pāli Text Society renders maṣṣaragala as ‘a precious stone, cat’s eye’ and compares Sanskrit maṣṭra ‘emerald’ and Sanskrit gāla ‘crystal’. Children’s Pāli Dictionary quotes the Abhidhammapadipika as saying that the maṣṣaragala is a stone produced in the hill of Maara (otherwise unknown). Note 10 by E. M. Lasse to the Aṣṇutramaniṇḍaya passage explains maṣṣaragala which he has translated as cat’s eye, as a ‘variegated crystal’.

There does not seem to be any necessity for maṣṣaragala to be regarded as ‘cat’s eye’. Recapitulating, one can say that the translators of Pāli usually rendered ṣeṣṣuras as ‘cat’s eye’ or ‘beryl’, except when mentioned together with maṣṣaragala which for unknown reasons came to be translated as ‘cat’s eye’, and then ṣeṣṣuras was translated as ‘lapis lazuli’.

Something very special

For Sanskrit, Monier Williams’ dictionary says:

Voidūṛa – a cat’s eye gem; at the end of a compound anything excellent of its kind.

This may well be the clue to the change in interpretation in Chinese and Tibetan: because lapis lazuli seems to be something very precious to the Chinese and the Tibetans they want to give this meaning to voidūṛa which is to express something very special though different from ‘diamond’ which in Sanskrit is vesṇa. Berthold Laufer maintains that not only .sha-ši was the Chinese word for voidūṛa, but that the whole word was pi-sha-še which occurs on a Han bas-relief and is a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit word. This is borne out by Stanislas Julien’s list of loan words from the Sanskrit where, indeed, the syllable no.1374, ši, is shown to correspond regularly to Sanskrit vi, and ši corresponds to Sanskrit ri, and it to Sanskrit rya.

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52 (Chippested: Pāli Text Society, 1925), ii. 249.
54 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), 1021.
55 Publication 154, Anthropological Series, volume x, (Chicago: Chicago Field Museum of Natural History, 1912), 111.
It seems not unlikely that in some Sanskrit dialect the word was ṛṣīṛgṛs from which the Prakrit form ṛṣīṛga was derived. The 'cat's eye' is called in Chinese mao tsing 'cat's essence'. Lauffer does not favour the 'liapis lascii' translation though that is advocated by the books of Eitel and F. Porter Smith, which he quotes.

Chrysoberyll and aquamarine

Isidorus of Seville (566-636) mentions that beryl comes from India and is pale green, but that in chrysoberyll, i.e., cat's eye, a gold-coloured lustre can be observed. Lauffer decides it should be 'chrysoberyll' because this stone has an opalescent sheen. He also remarks: 'How could the Tibetan authors distinguish blue, green, white and yellow naivируют if the word should denote the "cat's eye"'51. Thus, the cat's eye can be of only one colour and always has a sheen; while the beryl can be of many colours and without a sheen though it may have a sheen as Lauffer's 'chrysoberyll'. There are yellow, green and white beryls, and the blue beryl is the aquamarine. It must be due to this that the Tibetan doctor Yeshi Donden and his translator Kelsang Jampa were using the phrase 'King of Aquamarine Light' for the Medicine Buddha.

Also, they were, no doubt, aware that vaidurya must have meant 'aquamarine' in early Tibetan writings as is testified by the three lines from the bkā' 'cham po lha'i sgags (form sections of the reports of Padmasambhava's words, chapter 22, item d) which is believed to have been composed during the lifetime of Padmasambhava and edited later.

'dab-chags rgyal-po gyu bya khyung-oi sko-mdog bai-dus mthim kha'i-mdog chags-pa hams-cul zil-gyis-nor-pa bya'i rgyal-po

'the king of the birds, the turquoise bird, the cuckoo, which surpassed all because it was born with the colour of the blue vaidurya'. Here the colour of the blue vaidurya is at the same time the colour of the turquoise bird. This could well apply to the colour of the aquamarine which is a transparent bluish green while the turquoise itself is opaque bluish green but it could never apply to the dark blue opaque topazvzul.

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51 F. Porter Smith, Contributions towards the Materia Medica of China (London: Tübner, 1871).
52 Upanisadagam, sv. 7, 5-7: Berylus in India pipātus, gentis suo lingus sidem habens, viriditate simul auro, sed cera pallore ... Chrysoberyllus dictus ad eodem pallido eius viriditate in aurem colorem spectatibus. Et haec India matit.
53 Lauffer, op. cit. in note 49, 111.
54 The Ambrosia Heart Sutra, with annotations by Yeshi Donden, translated by Kelsang Kelsang, (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1977), 15 and passim.
55 Ms. Helmut Schlaefer, Quellen zur Geschichte der altindischen Zoroastriken, in Proceedings of the Academy of Science and Literature, Maastricht, 1956, pp.348 and 250, quoting Ma' rā' sā'ān abu-Isāʿaḥī "Five sections of the reports of Padmasambhava's words" chapter 22, item 6, Khams-po bka' 'bdun-rgya.
Chinese interpretations

The Chinese pi-lu-li usually appears just as lu-li because the Chinese are as fond of abbreviating as are the Tibetans. Édouard Chavannes is cautious in the 1912 volume of his Cinq cents contes et apoloques: "des parures de veïïyûng (šes-wû), d’or et d’argent". But by 1921 he has made up his mind: "des parures de bêstî, d’or et d’argent".34 Demiéville in 1924 thinks it designated a purely mythical substance.55

E. Burnouf in his translation of an incomplete version of the Saddharmapundarîka from the Sanskrit enumerates the seven precious substances su-çruta, rôpaka, veïïyûng, ñapaîka, lobitamukti, ofampavîka, musînapavîka [sic], interpreting them as: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, red pearls (con-necting multi with muktisa), emerald, cat’s eye.56 W. E. Soottih in his translation of the Saddharmapundarîka from the Chinese, has gold, silver, lapis lazuli, moonstones, agates, coral, amber.57 In his note, Burnouf informs us that he is following the Abhidharmapadipika in using ‘lapis lazuli’, and that, according to A. Rémusat, musînapavîka means to the Chinese a blue and white stone, perhaps ‘ammonite’.58

Babylonian appreciation of lapis lazuli

A recent author dealing with Chinese scriptural accounts on the Medicine Buddha, in translating texts from the Chinese Tripitaka, consistently translates lou-li with ‘lapis lazuli’. Haoul Birmbaum is his The Healing Buddha,59 giving the reason for his choice, saying the Gandhêras is near the only source of lapis lazuli in the ancient world (i.e., Afghanistan) and that these images are noted for their emphasis on the depiction of light and flames emanating from the form of the Buddha. As lapis lazuli is opaque dark blue it is not the best colour to depict light or flames, although dark blue pervaded with golden rays often appears on thakhas as the back curtain or back plate

54Chavannes, Contes et légendes du Rouddhanî, (Paris: Boudard, 1921), 151.
55Paul Demiéville, review of Hong-Tihang Lapidarism Sisacum, Bulletin d’ecole Francaise d’Estime Orient, xxiv (1924), esp. pp. 276-283. John Irwin is in his article ‘The Lai Bhairo at Benares (Varnavati)’, Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, cxviii (1983), 328, i.e. 20, subscribes to this opinion.
58Burnouf, Bonne Loi, 318-320.
of a deity. The gold flecks in lapis lazuli which are caused by pyrite were the reason why it was highly prized by the ancient Babylonians who compared them to the stars in the night sky. The etymology of lapis lazuli directs us also to Persia. The word occurs first in the fourteenth century as a compound of Latin lapis 'stone' and Medio-ven Latin lazurium from Arabic lazaward from Persian laxaward 'lapis lazuli'. From this was derived the Sanskrit word rājavarata for 'lapis lazuli'. About this, the Laghumaparikṣa, verses 19-20, says: 'it is without white spots and the colour of a peacock's neck' According to the Rājapuranā, xiii, 215, rājavarata used against bile diseases is soft and cool, while vaisāra, according to Rājapuranā, xiii. 193, is warm. The English word azure goes back to the same Arabic word lazaward through Old French and Old Spanish, omitting the initial l which was mistakenly regarded as an Arabic article.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, it seems that vaisārā, refūria and liu-li mean 'beryl', and that Pāli rēputa is interpreted as 'lapis lazuli' when juxtaposed with Pāli mātraṇagallā, while Chinese liu-li and Tibetan be-du-rwa are often translated as 'lapis lazuli' because lapis lazuli was an extremely rare and special stone which could only be obtained from Afghanistan before the rocks near Lake Buikal were discovered, and because it resembled the night sky with its stars, the most exalted symbol of the divine.

If 'beryl' translates vaisārā, and the Medicine Buddha is traditionally surrounded by a blue radiance, it would have to be called 'blue beryl radiance'. According to Dongshog's New Light English-Tibetan Dictionary the Tibetan word for 'aquamarine' is yul-kha.rma, a loans word from a Sanskrit word for 'blue lotus'. But as a blue beryl is an aquamarine, 'aquamarine radiance' still seems to be the best translation for Tibetan be-du-rwa.hed. Why yul-kha is the Tibetan word for 'aquamarine' is another question. Is the colour of the blue lotus aquamarine?