

# Translation of the Reading Passages

## 1. The frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A

There once was in this world a king, a splendid universal ruler by the name of Vikramakeśarin, at whose feet thousands and thousands of kings served. He possessed wealth like Kubera, (consisting) of great amounts of jewels (like) sapphires, emeralds, rubies, diamonds, beryls, and pearls; he was beautiful in all limbs like Indra, whose praises the *vidyādhārīs* (constantly) sing. This king had, accompanied by able ministers (or: by vassals and ministers), become the ruler of the earth in all quarters, up to the edge of the ocean, and (now) spent his time enjoying the supreme joy of his rule. To this king, a *kāpālika* ascetic by the name of Kṣāntiśīla used to give a marvellous *bilva* fruit by the hand of the person who handed him the water when he washed his face before sunrise.\* When he saw this fruit, he became glad and handed it to his servant. Every day, (the ascetic) kept giving (him a fruit) in this manner.

## 2. The frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A (cont'd)

One day when he gave (him) the fruit, it fell down from the king's hand and was shattered to pieces. When he saw five very precious jewels inside the fruit, he became very glad and spoke: 'O minister, how marvellous! Even if one were to search with great effort, one could not find such a jewel in my treasury. Why does (he) give (me) such a precious jewel, when he has no obligation (towards me)? I have a great sense of obligation towards the giver of a marvellous jewel.† Bring all the bilva fruits that I have previously placed with you!' The servant brought them, and when he split them open and examined them, there were indeed five jewels in each and every bilva fruit. When he saw those precious jewels, (the king) rejoiced.

## 3. The frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A (cont'd)

He spoke to his servant: 'My friend, fetch the giver of the *bilva* fruits so that I may see him!' Then, when he came back and brought the *kāpālika*, he spoke: 'Your majesty, this *kāpālika* is the giver of the *bilva* fruits. May it please you

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\*) The translation of this sentence is rather too literal; a somewhat freer rendition would be: "When this king washed his face before sunrise, a *kāpālika* ascetic by the name of Kṣāntiśīla gave him a marvellous *bilva* fruit by the hand of the servant who handed the king the water."

†) Literally, "the giver of a marvellous jewel has a great obligation in my mind." MS D reads लल विचित्र बिबोया जेके तवो कार्ज दयुवो, lit. "the giver of a marvellous jewel has a great obligation in me".

to say what should be done.’\* Then, when he looked upon him, he became very glad. The *kāpālika* blessed the king. The king rejoiced. The king spoke to the *kāpālika*: ‘O *kāpālika*, wherefore have you been giving me (such) precious jewels in the guise of *bilva* fruits for (such) a long time?’ Again, the *kāpālika* spoke: ‘O king, I will tell (you) in private’, and all the people in the assembly withdrew. Then he spoke to the king: ‘O king, I am a *kāpālika* yogi by the name of Kṣāntiśīla. I have wandered the earth in the South. I have been searching for a great man who can be my assistant in order to obtain a corpse (inhabited by) a *vetāla*. Since I have not succeeded, I have come to you. Therefore, if you will be so good as to listen carefully, I will tell (you).’

When he had thus spoken, the king said: ‘O *kāpālika*, I will surely listen carefully.’ Then he spoke: ‘Say what (it is that) you need.’ The *kāpālika* said: ‘O king, I will be at the southern cremation ground. On the night of the fourteenth, you must come to me without anyone else seeing you. There, I will tell you what I require.’ – ‘I will surely come’, the king said, and the *kāpālika* went to the southern cremation ground.

#### 4. The frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A (cont’d)

On the night of the day of the new moon, the king took his sword and went alone, without anyone else seeing him, to the *kāpālika* in the cremation ground. When the *kāpālika* saw that the king had come, he praised the king joyfully: ‘O king, you are a most valiant hero and universal ruler. Lending the help of your sword, you have come to me in the cremation ground in the dreadful night of the new moon.’ The king spoke: ‘O *kāpālika*, I have come gladly in order to hear your story.’ Kṣāntiśīla spoke: ‘Today, I want to obtain a magic corpse. You must be (my) assistant. If we accomplish this, you and I will get *siddhi* powers.’ When he heard the words of the yogi, King Vikramakeśarin’s body hair bristled with joy, and he spoke to Kṣāntiśīla: ‘O *kāpālika*, you shall obtain what you desire. Tell me what I have to do as your assistant.’ The *kāpālika* spoke: ‘O king, by the banks of this river, there is a dead man hanging from the highest branch of a *śiṃśapā*-tree. You must fetch him while staying silent. By bringing him here into the complex *pūjāmaṇḍala* with manyfold rituals (or: the variegated complex *pūjāmaṇḍala*), we will obtain *siddhis*.’ When he had spoken, the king took up his sword, and in the deep darkness went towards the *śiṃśapā*-tree.

#### 5. The frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A (cont’d)

When (he) was about to seize the corpse, the corpse climbed upward. When he saw this, the king laughed and said: ‘Hey corpse, why do you flee upwards?’

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\*) Literally, “may you be pleased to command what is necessary”; a better translation would perhaps be “we await your orders”.

I will climb the tree and take you down’, and he climbed the tree, and when he had severed the rope that was binding the corpse with his sword, he threw him down. The corpse pretended to be hurt from the fall, and cried and wailed: ‘O man, what have I done to you? I was [so =] (just) staying alone on a tree in the woods. I am blameless! I got hurt when you threw me down like that. My bones and all are completely shattered!’ When he heard these words, the king came down from the tree, and as he was about to seize the corpse, it went to the top of the tree. Again, the king climbed up the tree and threw it down. As soon as he had climbed down himself, the corpse climbed up. In this manner, the king hurt it again and again. Later, when it was badly hurt, the king threw it down and sat astride its body. The king took the corpse that was wailing with pain on his shoulder, and proceeded to walk to the *kāpālika*.

#### 6. The frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A (cont’d)

Then the *vetāla* that was in the body of the dead man spoke to the king: ‘O king, do the two of us (really) have to go? If we have to go, I will tell a story, so that we [don’t feel =] don’t get tired from the walk. Kindly listen!’ – [one should not think: What kind of story is ... going to tell =] Why should I be surprised that a corpse that is bereft of life is going to tell a story? I have learnt all things, I have mastered the art of swordfighting!’ When he had thus spoken, the *vetāla* thought to himself: ‘How wonderful! The greatest hero of all is this king! What a great man he (is)! Although he hears a corpse speak, he has no fear (or) doubt.’ Having thought this, the *vetāla* spoke to the king: ‘When you hear the story I told, you will be immensely pleased. If you don’t say the answer to the story [while knowing =] although you know it, the five great sins will be on your head. If out of ignorance you stay silent, I will be in your power.’ – [The not-answering king =] Since the king doesn’t answer, I will make him break his silence under the pretence of telling the king a story’ – thinking this, he spoke: ‘O king, please listen carefully!’

### 7. The second story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS A

When again king Vikramakeśarin saw that the *vetāla* had gone, the king once more climbed the *śiṃśapā*-tree, took the corpse onto his shoulder and went on his way. Again, the corpse on his shoulder spoke: ‘O king, have faith in me! Listen to the story I tell you!’

On the banks of the Yamunā, there is a village called Brahmasthāna. In that village, there is an *āśrama* of brahmans each going about their own trade. In that village, there lived a brahman by the name of Agnisvāmin. He had a daughter by the name of Mandāvatī. When they saw her beauty and youth, three young brahmans spoke to the girl’s father, and entreated him: “Allow (us) to marry your daughter!” The girl’s father spoke: “You are handsome, learned, from good families, (and thus) suitable for marriage. Nevertheless, I have (only) one daughter; there are three of you. How can I give her (to you in marriage)?” Then one of them spoke: “Give that girl to me!” The other two spoke: “O brahman, if you don’t give that girl (to us), we will commit suicide before your eyes. That killing will be on your head!” When the three of them quarrelled in this way, he ended up giving (her) to none of them out of fear of (the sin of) brahman-killing.

At that time, as fate would have it, the girl died. After performing the girl’s obsequies, one of the brahmans became an ascetic with matted hair, smeared his body with her ashes, and took to wandering many countries. Another one of the brahmans gathered the girl’s bones and went to many sites of pilgrimage. Another one collected her ashes and dwelt in the cremation ground.

Then the one who had become an ascetic while roaming the earth in the South came to a certain town. He went to eat at (the house of) a brahman by the name of Rudraśarman. The brahman said “certainly”, and “please rest for a while.” At that time, when he saw that (his) son was crying, he angrily pushed him into the fire-pit. When he saw this, the ascetic who had come there spoke: “What an atrocity he has committed! What a barbarous brahman he is! Therefore, I do not wish to eat (here)”, and he turned to leave. When he saw that, the householder-brahman took his book of spells, and with a magic spell brought the son back to life. When he saw that, the guest was amazed. Then, when he had finished eating, he decided to steal the book. Accordingly, in the night he stole (the book) and took it (with him) to the cremation ground.

The three brahmans from before gathered right there, and by the power of a spell contained in the book they brought Mandāvatī back to life. When she was alive again, all three of them quarrelled with each other, saying “she is mine, she is mine!” One of them said: “She is no one’s but mine! Here’s why: She surely came to life through the power of my spell.” Another spoke: “If I

hadn't guarded her ashes, how would you have revived her? Therefore, I (have become=) am the one!" Another spoke: "She isn't yours, she isn't his. (She) surely (is) mine. Here's why: She came to life because I have carried her bones around to many sites of pilgrimage. Therefore, I am the one." While the three of them quarrelled in this way, her husband (could) not be ascertained.'

When he had told (him) this story, the *vetāla* spoke to the king: 'O king, which one of the three is the girl's husband? You have to tell (me)!' When he had spoken, the king said: 'The one who gave (her) life is not the husband, because surely he is the father. As for the one who carried (her) bones around the sites of pilgrimage, he has performed the office of the son and has therefore become (her) son. She has become the wife of the one who guarded her ashes.' As soon as he had thus spoken, the *vetāla* left the king's shoulder and went to stay atop the *śiṃśapā*-tree.

### 8. The fourth story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS E

Again the king set out to fetch the corpse. Once more the corpse spoke to the king: 'O king, listen carefully, I will tell a story.

In this world, there (once) was a glorious king endowed with all the marks of a king named Śūdraka. One day, when this king was holding court with his ministers, a prince named Vīrabala arrived at the palace gate together with his princess. When arrived there, he spoke to the gatekeeper: "O gatekeeper, having heard of the virtue of this king, we have come from the southern country in order to serve this king." – "I will announce you to the king and lead (you to him)", the gatekeeper said, and when he had been brought before the king, Vīrabala paid homage to him and spoke: "O king, I am a son of kings looking for employment. Having heard an account of your virtues I have come from the southern land. You must [feed me=] take me into your service." Then the king was perusing the gatekeeper's face. The gatekeeper understood the king's intention and spoke to Vīrabala: "O Vīrabala, what is needed for feeding you? Kindly speak!" Vīrabala spoke: "O gatekeeper, you must give me each day the precise amount of 125 gold *palas*." The gatekeeper told (this to) the ministers. When he heard that, the king spoke: "What implements do you have for serving the king? How many soldiers do you have? What I mean is: [How will I =] Why should I spend that much every day?" When he heard this, Vīrabala spoke: "O king, I have no other implements. One sword with two hands – [that much=] that's all I have." When they heard this, the ministers spoke: "Who will give you this much? Explain!" When he heard this, Vīrabala spoke: "I am a son of kings. I don't know how to say it again. May your glory increase. I will go elsewhere. Isn't there someone in this boundless world capable of feeding me?" With these words he paid his respects to the king and turned to leave.

When he had reached the door, the king spoke to his minister: “O minister, fetch this Vīrabala and give him (his) salary. If we don’t do that, it will reflect badly on us.” When he had thus spoken, Vīrabala was fetched and given (his) salary. Vīrabala took this salary of 125 *palas* and went to his quarters; he had the gods, the brahmans, and the monks fed at his own expense and without delay he proceeded, sword in hand, to stand at the king’s gate day and night.

### 9. The fourth story of the *Vetūlapañcaviṃśati*, MS E (cont’d)

Later at night the king’s servants paid their respects and went each to his own quarters. Vīrabala, according to the king’s order, went to his own quarter. Then King Śūdraka, exhausted from lovemaking, went to the top of the palace in order to enjoy the cool air. When, having gone up there, he heard the sound of a woman wailing at midnight from the south, the king spoke: “Who is [here=] this?” When (he had thus) spoken, the [majesty-guarding =] guardian soldier spoke: “In such a dark night, there is no one else there. Only Vīrabala is there, sword in hand.” When (he had thus) spoken, (the king) spoke: “Fetch Vīrabala hither”, and he was fetched. The king spoke: “O Vīrabala, from the south the sound of pitiful wailing is heard. You go and listen (for it).” Keeping the king’s order in mind, he set off. The king thought to himself: “Where indeed will he go? I too shall follow him and have a look.” And so, the king went (after him).

When he saw a young woman endowed with the thirty-two auspicious signs crying, Vīrabala spoke (to her): “O woman, why are you crying? What is the reason of your distress? Whose wife are you?” And: “I will accomplish what you desire. Whatever you want, say it.” The woman spoke: “For a long time, I have happily been King Śūdraka’s chief queen. Today at daybreak, the king is about to die. For this reason, I don’t know where to go now – that’s why I’m crying.” When he heard her words, Vīrabala spoke: “My lady, if you know that the king will die, you will surely know if there is a means (to prevent it).” The queen spoke: “I do know the means (to prevent it). However, although I know it, there is no man in all the three worlds capable of saving him.” When he heard this, Vīrabala spoke: “Please say it anyway. It will be possible to find such a man.” The queen spoke: “O Vīrabala, listen. Such a man is needed: himself a son of kings, his wife a daughter of kings. If the mother holds (their) son by his feet and the father grabs him by the hair, and the father cuts off (the boy’s) head with his sword in the presence of the Goddess and [gives =] makes an offering of it, then King Śūdraka will be brought back to life. All this must happen before sunrise.” When he heard this, Vīrabala spoke: “Your majesty,

I will surely do what you desire.” When he had thus spoken, the queen disappeared into her abode. The king followed\* without letting himself be seen.

### 10. The fourth story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS E (cont’d)

Vīrabala called his wife and son and told them what was required (of them). Then Vīrabala spoke: “We are sons of kings. We have been [eating=] receiving so many things from this noble king. If we cannot bring this king back to life, then what is the point in having servants like us?” When he heard these words, his son spoke: “O father, if this is the case, sacrifice *me* to the Goddess.” When she heard this, the daughter spoke: “As a result of sins committed in a previous life I have been come to be born a woman. If I was a man, I would attain this glory.” When she had thus spoken, (Vīrabala) together with his family went to the Goddess.

Vīrabala spoke to the Goddess: “O Goddess, accept this boy (as an offering) to you. King Śūdraka must be saved.” When he had thus spoken, the mother grabbed him by his feet and the father grabbed him by his hair, and with his sword he cut off his head and gave it (to the Goddess). Then all three of them, Vīrabala and his wife and daughter, each cut off their own heads and gave them (to the Goddess). When the king saw all this, he felt great pity, and seeing Vīrabala’s loyalty, he thought to himself: “What a man he is! For the sake of my life (he) has taken the life of (his) entire family. Therefore, I, too will sacrifice my body to the goddess”, and he took his sword and was about to cut off his own head. Then the Goddess, laughing loudly, spoke: “O king, I am satisfied. Do not act like that. Ask for a boon!” The king spoke: “I want no other boon for myself. Please revive these, the entire family.” The Goddess spoke: “O king, I will revive (them). You go home!”, and the king went to his abode. Vīrabala and his entire family were revived and went to their abode.

Later, Vīrabala went [to the king’s gate=] to the king and spoke: “Your majesty, it was the matter of a woman crying. When she saw me, she retreated.” The king spoke: “That I know. Go home and rest.” Then, on the next day, Vīrabala came [to the king’s gate =] before the king. When he saw him, the king told the ministers all that had happened during the night. When they heard (it), they were greatly amazed. Then the king gave Vīrabala many elephants, horses, villages and (much) treasure, and made him king in the south.’

When he had told (him) this story, the *vetāla* spoke to the king: Which one is more heroic: King Śūdraka or Vīrabala?’ When he heard this, the king spoke:

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\*) The context of the preceding sentence would suggest that the king follows the queen; however, in the following paragraph it becomes clear that he followed Vīrabala.

‘O *vetāla*, listen! The king is the greater hero. Here’s why: Under any circumstance, a servant will give up his life in service of his master. The king gave up such a happy reign and was about to give up his life for the sake of his servant. Therefore, the king is the greater hero.’ As soon as he had thus spoken, the *vetāla* went (back) to his place.

### 11. The eleventh story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS E

When once more the king fetched the corpse, the *vetāla* spoke: ‘O king, don’t be cross. I’ll tell a story, listen!

In a city called Kāñcanapura, there once was a king by the name of Dharmadhvaja. This king had three queens who were endowed with utmost youth and beauty. Indulekhā, Tārāvātī, and Mṛgānkavatī – these were (their) three names.

One day, he was making love to Indulekhā in the garden pavillion. Then, when the king was in amorous sport, a petal of the lotus blossom on (his) head fell down and landed on her body. From the impact of the falling (petal) she fainted. Then the king had the doctor etc. summoned, and by performing a cooling treatment, he managed to revive her with great difficulty. Then, accompanied by her retinue, he had her led to the royal palace and (had her) looked after.\*

After that, one day when he was making love to Tārāvātī in the crystal palace, the light of the moon shone on Tārāvātī’s body, and blisters appeared on her body where it was struck by the moonlight. The king was amazed and summoned the doctor, and he cured her.

After that, one day when he was making love to Mṛgānkavatī, she heard from far the sound of a rice-mortar, and blisters appeared on Mṛgānkavatī’s hand. When he saw that happening, the king was much amazed.’

When he had told him this story, the *vetāla* spoke to the king: ‘O king, which of the three has the most delicate body?’ When he heard this, the king spoke: ‘O *vetāla*, listen. The one on whose hands blisters appeared because of the sound of the rice-mortar is to be called delicate of body. Here’s why: With the body of those (other) two, there was contact. With her body, there was no

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\*) Although in Skr., **nidāna** is more often than not used in the technical sense “diagnosis”, in CN **nidāna yāye** it is well attested in the meaning “to take care of s.o.”.



contact. She only heard the sound, therefore hers is the most delicate body.\*  
As soon as he had thus spoken, the *vetāla* went (back) to his place.

## 12. The closing of the frame story of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, MS B

The *vetāla* spoke: ‘O you king Vikramāditya, I am very pleased. Therefore, you will acquire *siddhi* when you make an offering to this *kāpālika*.

I give you some more advice, listen: a lamp will be lit on my head. When the *maṇḍalapūjā* is being performed, the *kāpālika* will order you to prostrate yourself. When you perform the prostration, he will cut off your head and (thus) acquire *siddhi*. Therefore, when he orders you to prostrate yourself, you must speak thus: “I am a king, I haven’t (ever) bowed to anyone. I don’t know how to. You do it! When I have seen you do it, I will surely do it (too).” Then, when he bows down, you must cut off his head and acquire the *siddhi* of Tāla and Vetāla.” When he had thus spoken, the *vetāla* left the corpse and went away.

Then the king took up the corpse and went to the *kāpālika*. The *kāpālika* performed *maṇḍalapūjā* in various ways and spoke to the king: “O king, prostrate yourself in this *maṇḍala*!” When he heard this, the king spoke: “O *kāpālika*, I don’t know how to. You do it and show me!” When he heard these words, the *kāpālika* prostrated himself, and the king cut off his head and made an offering (of it) to the deity. At that moment, there was a rain of blossoms from the sky. The Deity appeared with the sound of drums etc. Then Tāla and Vetāla came and spoke: “O king, we are both at your command.” When he had thus acquired *siddhi*, King Vikramāditya happily went to his own kingdom, became the king of all the world, and lived happily (ever after).

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\*) That is to say, only from hearing the sound of the rice-mortar, her hands became blistered as if she had been working the implement herself.

