

THE SHWE DAGON PAGODA. Part 1

Copyright © JBRS Article

များပြားသဖြင့် လိုအပ်လျှင် UCL CHAPTER I—*Evidence of the Pali.*

မှတ်ချက်လေးပါးတည်း။

The story of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, unlike most legends connected with pagodas, can be connected with evidence adduced from books compiled outside of Burma. For Taphussa and Bhallika, the reputed founders of the Pagoda are mentioned in more than one book of the Pali scriptures, which were compiled in India. Thus in *Buddhavaṃsa*^a, a book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, the 5th division of the Sutta Piṭaka, it is said that "Taphussa and Bhallika were the chief attendants of the teacher Dīpaṅkara."

In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*^b of the Sutta Piṭaka occurs the passage: "Monks, supreme among my devout disciples who first took the refuge are the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika."

In a later portion of the same book^c we read "Monks, Tapussa the householder, having attained to perfection in the Tathāgata and beheld deathlessness and realized deathlessness walks about endowed with six qualities. Which are the six?—absolute faith in the Buddha, absolute faith in the Law, absolute faith in the clergy, noble virtue, noble knowledge, noble emancipation. Endowed with these six qualities, O monks, Tapussa the householder walks about, having attained to perfection in the Tathāgata and beheld deathlessness and realized deathlessness." The same is repeated of Bhallika.

And a discourse^d of the same book tells us that while the Buddha was dwelling with the Mallas "Tapussa the householder approached the Venerable Ananda and having approached him and saluted him said thus 'Reverend Ananda, we householders are partakers of sensual pleasure, enjoy sensual pleasure, delight in sensual pleasure, revel in sensual pleasure. And to us householders who partake of sensual pleasure, enjoy sensual pleasure, delight in sensual pleasure, revel in sensual pleasure, renunciation appears like a precipice. But I have heard that in this discipline of the Law the mind of many a young monk aspires to, settles on, rests on, attains freedom in emancipation regarding it as peace. Such, Sir, is the difference regarding emancipation between the young monks of the discipline of the Law and the mass of the people'". This outburst of Tapussa's forms the basis of a sermon by the Buddha.

A verse sung by Bhalliya (= Bhallika) is included in the *Theragāthā*^e, another book of the Sutta Piṭaka:

"Whoso hath chased away the death-king and his host,
E'en as a mighty flood the causeway of frail reeds,
Victor is he, selftamed. Fear cometh never more.
His is the goal supreme and utter steadfastness."

Bhalliya's verses included in the *Apadāna*, a book of the Sutta Piṭaka, are quoted below on page 5.

* The small letters of the alphabet inserted in italics in the body of the text indicate quotations from Pali and Mani works which are relegated to the Appendix.

How Taphussa and Bhallika became disciples of Gotama the Buddha is told in the Rājāyatanakathā of the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Piṭaka^a : "Then the Blessed One, at the end of those seven days, arose from that concentration of mind and went from the foot of the Mucalinda tree to the Rājāyatana tree. Having reached it, he sat down cross-legged at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree uninterruptedly for seven days enjoying the bliss of emancipation. At that time the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika were travelling on the road from Ukkala to that place. Then a deity, who had been a blood-relation of the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika spoke to them, 'Sirs, at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree dwells the Blessed One who has just become the Enlightened Buddha. Go and wait on him with rice-cakes and honey-food. This will be to your advantage and happiness for a long time to come'. Then the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika took rice-cakes and honey-food and went to where the Blessed One was. Having approached him and saluted him they stood on one side. Having stood on one side, the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika addressed the Blessed One, 'Lord, may the Blessed One accept from us these rice-cakes and honey-food that it may be to our advantage and happiness for a long time to come.' Then the Blessed One thought 'The Tathāgatas do not accept (food) with their hands. Now with what shall I accept the rice-cakes and honey food?' Then the four Mahārāja Gods knowing in their minds what had occurred to the Blessed One offered him four stone bowls from the four quarters of the globe saying 'Lord, may the Blessed One accept with these the rice-cakes and honey-food.' And the Blessed One accepted the newly created stone bowls and received the rice-cakes and honey-food and these he ate. Then the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika, when they knew that the Blessed One had removed his hand from the bowl, bowed down with their heads at the feet of the Blessed One and addressed him 'Lord, we take our refuge in the Blessed One and in the Law. May the Blessed One receive us as disciples who, from this day forth, have taken refuge as long as our life lasts'. They were the first in the world to become disciples by the twofold formula."

So far there is nothing in this Mahāvagga account or the other Pali extracts, which we can connect with the Shwe Dagon Pagoda. Ukkala is the classical name of Orissa¹ and is not necessarily to be identified with Ukkala, the old Hindu colony of Lower Burma, which derives its name from the former Ukkala in accordance with the usual custom in Burma of giving classical Indian names to towns and places, as Amarapura, Hamsavati, Saddhammanagara etc.²

1. Rhys Davids in *Buddhist Birth Stories* p. 110 translates Ukkala as Orissa. *Cunningham's Ancient geography of India* p. 733 says "Hence the Utkala country was the tract from Balasore to Lohardāgā and Sarguja (Pargiter)."

2. *Encyclopædia of the History of India and the Geography of British India* I