

Towards a new edition of the *Vessantara-Jātaka*

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As is well-known, the *Vessantara-Jātaka* is one of the most influential and popular narratives in the Buddhist world. Among its many versions in different languages the Pāli text transmitted as the final chapter of the Theravāda school's collection of *jātakas* (the *Jātakatthavannanā*) has an outstanding position as the most ancient and detailed version of the story. The text has been edited for the first time by the Danish Indologist Viggo Fausbøll who completed his monumental edition of the *Jātakatthavannanā* in 1896. Given the scarce material on which this edition could be based at that time, it is a remarkable piece of philology and scholarship. Still, the text bristles with difficulties and problems that obstruct a proper understanding in many places. The editions of the *Jātakatthavannanā* in the extended Buddhist canons published in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand in the countries' respective scripts sometimes help in dealing with textual problems, but more often they create additional confusion and uncertainty. Therefore, a new edition based on a broad basis of reliable textual witnesses is called for. After a short introduction into the main characteristics of the *Vessantara-Jātaka*, the lecture will give an overview over the ongoing project of establishing such a new edition. This will include glimpses of textual problems met with in the available editions, a sketch of the text's complicated transmission, a presentation of important manuscripts and other textual witnesses, and a discussion of select problems that have appeared during the course of work.