



*Sman-gyi-bla Vaidur-ya  
'od-kyi-rgyal-po  
(Bhaisajya-guru-vaidurya-Prabharaja)*

# VAIDURYA

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## The Tibetan Medicine Buddha

THE COLOUR OF THE GEM *vaiḍūrya* plays a great role in Tibetan medicine. The Medicine Buddha is called *be-du-rya hod-kyi rgyal-po*, or 'King of the *Vaiḍūrya* Light'. In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* of about AD 200 he is only called 'King of Healing'. But in a Chinese medical text of AD 500 to 600, the *Sūtra on the Merits of the Fundamental Vows of the Master of Healing* in Hsüan Tsang's *Tripitaka* version, he is called the '*Vaiḍūrya* Radiance *Tathāgata*'.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese word is *liu-li*. In Tibetan *vai-ḍu-rya* or *be-ḍu-rya* and other variant forms remain untranslated loan words. According to Jäschke's *Tibetan-English Dictionary*,<sup>2</sup> *be-du-rya* means 'azure stone, lapis lazuli'. It quotes *Dzanglun* (i.e., *hdzans-blun*), a collection of legends, in which are mentioned the *Vaiḍūrya dKar.po*<sup>3</sup> 'White *Vaiḍūrya*' and *Vaiḍūrya sñon.po*<sup>4</sup> 'Blue *Vaiḍūrya*', which are titles of works on astronomy-astrology and on medicine, respectively. The *Tibetan-English Dictionary* of Chandra Das says:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Raoul Birnbaum, *The healing Buddha* (London: Rider, 1979), 151.

<sup>2</sup>H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English dictionary*, reprint of 1881 edition, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 371.

<sup>3</sup>Short title of *phug-lugs rcis-kyi legs-bśad mkhas-pa'i vaiḍur dkar-po'i do-sal dpyod-ldan sñiñ-nor*.

<sup>4</sup>Short title of *gso-ba rig-pa'i bstan-bcos sman-bla'i dgonis-rgyan rgyud-bñiñi gsal-byed bai-dür sñon-pohi mallika*.

<sup>5</sup>Rai Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English dictionary* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1902), 877.

*bai-du-rya* – malachite or chrysolite. There are three descriptions ... the yellow lapis-lazuli called *Mañjuri* [sic], the green lapis-lazuli called *Sugata*, the white lapis-lazuli called *Sūnya* [sic].

*Mañjuri* is probably an allusion to the Yellow Mañjuśrī, *Sugata* ‘having fared well’ is easily associated with green, the colour of growth, and the colour white with *Sūnya* ‘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 *Vaidūrya*’ and ‘Blue *Vaidūrya*’ to which can be added a book called ‘Yellow *Vaidūrya*’ 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 *vaidūrya* in nineteenth century dictionaries and come to the conclusion that the early nineteenth century ones favoured the meaning ‘lapis lazuli’,<sup>6</sup> and that those near the end of the nineteenth century preferred ‘cat’s eye’.<sup>7</sup>

## Beryl, cat’s eye or lapis lazuli?

What, then, does *vaidūrya* mean? Etymologically it is related to Pāli *veḷuriya* and Prākṛit *veḷuriya*, *verulia*, *velurya* and *veḷulia*.<sup>8</sup> Prākṛit *verulia* became Greek *βερυλλιον* whence came English ‘beryl’.<sup>9</sup> While Greek *βερυλλιον* and, from there, English *beryl* were derived from Prākṛit *verulia*, the Persian and Arabic words *billaur*, *ballūr* and *bulūr* meaning ‘crystal or beryl’ were also borrowed from India, but according to Alfred Master, they are not derived from Sanskrit *vaidūrya* or Pāli *veḷuriya*.<sup>10</sup> He does not sug-

<sup>6</sup>For example Horace Hayman Wilson, *Dictionary, Sanskrit and English* (Calcutta: Education Press, 1819).

<sup>7</sup>*L’Inde vue de Rome. Textes latins de l’Antiquité relatifs à l’Inde* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1986), 371–372, note 216.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Pischel, *Comparative grammar of the Prākṛit languages*, translated from the German by Subhadra Jhā, 2nd edition, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), 173. § 241 gives various Prākṛit forms.

<sup>9</sup>J. Halévi, ‘Mélanges etymologiques’, *Mémoires de la Société Linguistique*, xi (1900), 82, thinks that the Prākṛit form *velurya* is a corruption from Greek *βερυλλιον*, diminutive of *βερυλλος* ‘beryl’ and that this word of Greek origin was imported into India either during the campaigns of Alexander the Great or later. This view does not hold water because the word *vaidūrya* is found in Sanskrit sources of as early as the *Adbhuta Brāhmaṇa* of 650 BC.

<sup>10</sup>Alfred Master, ‘Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, Section II’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xi (1943–46), 304–307.

gest a Prākṛit 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 *vaiḍūrya* is also 'beryl' according to Mayrhofer.<sup>11</sup> To corroborate his opinion he quotes A. Master who gives a chronology of the occurrence of *vaiḍūrya* and its Prākṛit and Pāli forms and asserts that the evidence for the meaning 'beryl' is conclusive for all of them.<sup>12</sup> But he mentions<sup>13</sup> that Mallinātha<sup>14</sup> of the fifteenth century identifies *vaiḍūrya* with lapis lazuli, and that Apte followed his example.<sup>15</sup> He also mentions that Sten Konow<sup>16</sup> and A. C. Woolner<sup>17</sup> translate Prākṛit *veḷuria*, *verulia* as 'cat's eye', and Dines Andersen does the same with Pāli *veḷuriya*.<sup>18</sup> The passage in which Mallinātha explains *vaiḍūrya* as lapis lazuli connects it at the same time with the meaning of 'cat's eye' as follows:<sup>19</sup>

The women are afraid of the rays of the moon coming through the window, which are reflected on the *vaiḍūrya* walls and therefore  
*biḍālekṣaṇabhīṣaṇābhyah*

which Buddruss explains as 'frighten like cat's eyes' and Master translates as 'make terrible cat's eyes'. Thakkura Pheru translates *vaiḍūrya* in this context as 'chrysoberyl' or 'cat's eye' saying that Māgha's use clearly indicates the chatoyancy of *vaiḍūrya*.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the difference in the dates is significant: Māgha wrote his work during the seventh century AD and

<sup>11</sup> Manfred Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen. A concise etymological Sanskrit dictionary* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), iv, 267.

<sup>12</sup> Master, loc. cit., 305.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>14</sup> Kolāchala Mallinātha, *Commentary on Māgha's Śiṣupālavadhā*, iii. 45. (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1923).

<sup>15</sup> Vaman Shrivram Apte, *Sanskrit English dictionary*, revised edition, (Bombay: Gopal Narayan, 1957-59).

<sup>16</sup> Rājaśekhara, *Rāja cekhara's Karpūramañjarī*, edited by Sten Konow, with notes and translation by Charles Rockwell Lanman, (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1901).

<sup>17</sup> A. C. Woolner, *Introduction to Prākṛit*, 3rd edition, (Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1939), § 58, pp. 24, 228.

<sup>18</sup> Dines Andersen, *Pāli Reader*, 4th edition, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1935).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from George Buddruss, 'Zum Lapis Lazuli in Indien', *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, v/vi (1980), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Thakkura Pheru, *Rayanaparikkhā, a Medieval Prakrit Text on Gemmology*, translated by S. R. Saṅma, (Aligarh: 1984), 67-68, verse 94. Pheru's reference to Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava*, i. 24 (fifth century AD) suggests the crystals of beryl. Pheru's book was not accessible to me, and I am indebted for this and other references to Dr Arion Roşu.

Mallinātha's commentary is of the fifteenth century. Louis Finot translates *vaiḍūrya* as 'cat's eye' because of the passage in Buddhahaṭṭa's *Ratnaparīkṣā*, 200, which says that the *vaiḍūrya* shows such a variety of brilliances that it gives the impression of flashing sparks.<sup>21</sup> The passage in the *Karpūramāñjarī* which Konow interprets as 'cat's eye' is taken by Lanman to mean 'beryl'.<sup>22</sup> Böhtlingk and Roth translate *vaiḍūrya* as 'beryl' without explaining why.<sup>23</sup>

## In the Pāli canon

Looking for *veḷuriya* in the Pāli Canon we find in *Dīghanikāya*, ii. 84:<sup>24</sup>

Just, O King, as if there were a *veḷuriya* 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 *veḷuriya* 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.<sup>25</sup> There is also the association of the Eightfold Path.

*Vinayapīṭaka*, ii. 12 has:<sup>26</sup>

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.

<sup>21</sup>Louis Finot, *Les lapidaires indiens*, (Paris: Bouillon, 1896), xlv-xlvii and 43.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. note 16.

<sup>23</sup>Otto Böhtlingk, and Rudolph Roth, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, (St. Petersburg: K. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1855-75).

<sup>24</sup>Translated by T. W. Rhys Davids, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. ii, reprint of 1899 edition, (London: Pāli Text Society, 1973), 87.

<sup>25</sup>*Quellen der Religionsgeschichte*, (Göttingen: Kgl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Religionsgesch. Kommission, 1923), 77, note 4.

<sup>26</sup>Translated by Max Müller, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xx, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 82. I. B. Horner also translated *veḷuriya* as 'beryl' in *Cullavagga*, 5th Khandhaka, 'On Minor Matters', *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. xx, (London: Luzac, 1952), 152.

Max Müller's note 1:

It is clear from verses 192–196 of the 13th chapter of the *Rājanighaṇṭu* written by Narahari in the 13th century (or according to B. Laufer, the 15th) that at that time *vaiḍūrya* 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 *Rājanighaṇṭu* later.

*Samyuttanikāya*, i. 643 has:<sup>27</sup>

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.

*Aṅguttaranikāya*, iii. 70, 24 has:<sup>28</sup>

Within this *cakkavāla* [sphere] there are pearls, gems, cat's eyes ... all these are not worth one sixteenth part of the merit resulting from a fast with eight vows.

Here again is the pre-occupation with the figure eight. Nyānatiloka's German translation has Türkisen for *veḷuriya*.<sup>29</sup>

*Aṅguttaranikāya*, ii. 19, 8 has:<sup>30</sup>

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

E. M. Hare's note to *veḷuriya*: 'the colour of bamboo, of the acacia flower' must be taken from a Pāli commentary. Here I thought I would find out what colour *veḷuriya* 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 *Rājanighaṇṭu*:<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Part I, chapter ii, section 3, *The Divers Sectaries Suttas*, 9, translated by Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), 89.

<sup>28</sup> *Tikaṇipāta, Mahāvagga*, translated by Edmund Rowland, reprint of PTS 1885 edition. (Galle: J. Gooneratne, 1913), 235.

<sup>29</sup> *Die Reden des Buddha aus dem Anguttara-Nikāya. Inhalt: Einer-bis Dreierbuch ...* 2nd edition, (München: Oskar Schloss, 1923), 348.

<sup>30</sup> *Aṭṭhanipāta, Mahāvagga*, translated by E. M. Hare, (London: Luzac, 1935), 137.

<sup>31</sup> *Die indischen Mineralien. Narahari, Rājanighaṇṭu, Sanskrit und deutsch herausgegeben von Richard Garbe* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882), xiii. 194.

The cat's eye can be recognised from three types of sheen, that is, when it slightly shimmers 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 *veḷuriya* with Pāli *veḷu* or *veṇu*, both meaning 'bamboo'. E. M. Hare, in spite of his note, 'the colour of the acacia flower', translates *veḷuriya* as 'lapis lazuli'. The reason for this is not far to seek. At the end of the enumeration in the *Anguttaranikāya* a new gem has appeared, the *masāragalla*, which Hare translates as 'cat's eye'.

While the *Rājanighaṇṭu* compares the sheen of the cat's eye to that of the bamboo leaf,<sup>32</sup> Hare's note to the passage in the *Anguttaranikāya* compares the colour of the *veḷuriya*, translated by him as 'lapis lazuli', to a bamboo.<sup>33</sup>

The *Rājanighaṇṭu* is a compilation of various works. Verse 194 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 and also compared to a peacock's neck as follows:<sup>34</sup>

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 *vaiḍūrya*.

The comparison of *veḷuriya* to a peacock's neck in Hare's note<sup>35</sup> can be substantiated with a passage in Jātaka no. 32, the *Naccajātaka*:<sup>36</sup> 'peacock, your neck in hue like lapislazuli ...' This translates *veḷuriyavaṇṇupanibhā*. Pāli *nibhā* means 'lustre', and *vaṇṇa*, Sanskrit *varṇa*, does not have to mean 'colour' but just 'beauty, appearance'. So the passage could equally mean,

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<sup>32</sup> Garbe, *Die indischen Mineralien*.

<sup>33</sup> Hare (tr.), *Mahāvagga*, 137.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 13,216.

<sup>35</sup> Hare (tr.), *Mahāvagga*, 137.

<sup>36</sup> Translated under the editorship of E. B. Cowell by Robert Chalmers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), i. 84.

'peacock, your neck has more lustre than the appearance of beryl'. The *Rājanighaṇṭu* may have borrowed the simile from the *Jātaka*.

Now, while Chalmers translated *veḷuriya* 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 *veḷuriya* as 'emeralds'.<sup>37</sup>

*idam suvaṇṇakāyūraṃ muttāveḷuriyā*

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 *veḷuriya* is translated as 'coral'.<sup>38</sup>

*tasmim̐ pana samudde vaṃsarāgaveḷuriyaṃ*

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

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 haul was coral, which is also the word used at the end of the story (*pavālo*). In fact, on the next page the sequence of precious substances found in the ocean, itself a fanciful notion, is:<sup>39</sup> diamonds, gold, silver, emeralds, *vaṃsarāgaveḷuriyaṃ*'; at the end of the passage it is: 'gold, silver, jewels, corals (this time *pavāla*), and diamonds.' Thus 'emeralds and *veḷuriya* the colour of bamboo' was replaced by 'jewels and corals'.

The *Dhammapada* is believed to be an early text. It is mentioned in the *Milindapañha* which belongs to the beginnings of the Christian era. The commentary to it is called *Dhammapadāṭṭhakathā* 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 *Sahassavaggo*, viii. 3, the line *ime suvaṇṇakāyūrā sabbe veḷuriyāmayā* is translated by Eugene Watson Burlingame as, 'Take these golden bracelets, all set with beryls'.<sup>40</sup>

The *Milindapañha*, i. 267 has an enumeration of precious substances in which *masāragallaṃ veḷuriyo* are juxtaposed.<sup>41</sup> I. B. Horner translates the two words as 'cat's eyes, lapis lazuli'.<sup>42</sup> Here is the same situation as in

<sup>37</sup> *Sulāsajātaka*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), 262.

<sup>38</sup> *Suppārakajātaka*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 89.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>40</sup> *Buddhist Legends Told from the Original Pāli Text of the Dhammapada Commentary*, (Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1921), 229.

<sup>41</sup> Edited by V. Trenckner, 1928 reprint of PTS edition, (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1880), 267.

<sup>42</sup> Translated by Isaline B. Horner, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. 23, (London: Luzac, 1963), 85.

the *Aṅguttaranikāya*. Again, *veḷuriya* is translated as 'lapis lazuli' because *masāragalla* is 'cat's eye' or 'beryl'.

The Dictionary of the Pali Text Society renders *masāragalla* as 'a precious stone, cat's eye' and compares Sanskrit *masāra* 'emerald' and Sanskrit *galva* 'crystal'.<sup>43</sup> Childers' Pāli Dictionary quotes the *Abhidhānappadīpika* as saying that the *masāragalla* is a stone produced in the hill of Masara (otherwise unknown).<sup>44</sup> Note 10 by E. M. Hare to the *Aṅguttaranikāya* passage explains *masāragalla* which he has translated as cat's eye, as a 'variegated crystal.'

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

## Something very special

For Sanskrit, Monier Williams' dictionary says:<sup>45</sup>

*Vaiḍūrya* – 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 *vaiḍūrya* which is to express something very special though different from 'diamond' which in Sanskrit is *vajra*. Berthold Laufer maintains that not only *liu-li* was the Chinese word for *vaiḍūrya*, but that the whole word was *pi-liu-li* which occurs on a Han bas-relief and is a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit word.<sup>46</sup> This is borne out by Stanislas Julien's list of loan words from the Sanskrit where, indeed, the syllable no.1374, *pi*, is shown to correspond regularly to Sanskrit *vai*, and *liu* corresponds to Sanskrit *rū*, and *li* to Sanskrit *rya*.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup>(Chipstead: Pali Text Society, 1925), ii. 249.

<sup>44</sup>Robert Caesar Childers, *A dictionary of the Pali language*, reprint, (London: Kegan Paul, 1974).

<sup>45</sup>(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), 1021.

<sup>46</sup>Publication 154, Anthropological series, volume x, (Chicago: Chicago Field Museum of Natural History, 1912), 111.

<sup>47</sup>Stanislas Aignan Julien, *Méthode pour déchiffrer et transcrire les noms sanscrits qui se rencontrent dans les livres chinois* (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1861), 168.

It seems not unlikely that in some Sanskrit dialect the word was *vairūrya* from which the Prākṛit form *verulia* was derived. The 'cat's eye' is called in Chinese *mao tsing* 'cat's essence'. Laufer does not favour the 'lapis lazuli' translation though that is advocated by the books of Eitel<sup>48</sup> and F. Porter Smith,<sup>49</sup> which he quotes.

## Chrysoberyl and aquamarine

Isidorus of Seville (560–636) mentions that beryl comes from India and is pale green, but that in chrysoberyl, i.e., cat's eye, a gold-coloured lustre can be observed.<sup>50</sup> Laufer decides it should be 'chrysoberyl' because this stone has an opalescent sheen. He also remarks: 'How could the Tibetan authors distinguish blue, green, white and yellow *vaidūrya* if the word should denote the "cat's eye"?'<sup>51</sup> 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 Laufer's 'chrysoberyl'. There are yellow, green and white beryls, and the blue beryl is the aquamarine. It must be due to this that the Tibetan doctor Yeshe Donden and his translator Kelsang Jhampa were using the phrase 'King of Aquamarine Light' for the Medicine Buddha.<sup>52</sup>

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 *bKa'-than sde lna*<sup>52a</sup> (Five sections of the reports of Padmasambhaya'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 khu-byug-ni  
sku-mdog bai-dur mthin kha'i-mdog chags-pas  
hams-cad zil-gyis-non-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 lapislazuli.

<sup>48</sup> E. J. Eitel, *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism* (London: Trübner, 1888), 191.

<sup>49</sup> F. Porter Smith, *Contributions towards the Materia Medica of China* (London: Trübner, 1871).

<sup>50</sup> *Etymologiae*, xvi. 7. 5–7: *Beryllus in India gignitur, gentis suae lingua nomen habens, viriditate similis smaragdo, sed cum pallore . . . Chrysoberyllus dictus eo quod pallida eius viriditas in aureum colorem resplendet. Et hunc India mittit.*

<sup>51</sup> Laufer, op. cit. in note 46, 111.

<sup>52</sup> *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra, with annotations by Yeshe Donden*, translated by Jhampa Kelsang, (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1977), 15 and *passim*.

<sup>52a</sup> In : Helmut Hoffmann, *Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bon-Religion*, in *Proceedings of the Academy of Science and Literature*, Mainz, 1950, pp.348 and 250, quoting *bKa'-than sde lna* "Five sections of the reports of Padmasambhava's words", chapter 22, item d, *bLon-po bka'i than-yig*.'

## Chinese interpretations

The Chinese *pi-liu-li* usually appears just as *liu-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 apologues*: 'des parures de *vaidūrya* (*lieu-li*), d'or et d'argent'.<sup>53</sup> But by 1921 he has made up his mind: 'des parures de béryl, d'or et d'argent'.<sup>54</sup> Demiéville in 1924 thinks it designated a purely mythical substance.<sup>55</sup>

E. Burnouf in his translation of an incomplete version of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarika* from the Sanskrit enumerates the seven precious substances *suvarṇa*, *rūpya*, *vaidūrya*, *sphaṭika*, *lohitamukti*, *açmagarbha*, *musāragalva* [sic], interpreting them as 'gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, red pearls (connecting *mukti* with *mukta*), emerald, cat's eye'.<sup>56</sup> W. E. Soothill in his translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika* from the Chinese, has gold, silver, lapis lazuli, moonstones, agates, coral, amber'.<sup>57</sup> In his note, Burnouf informs us that he is following the *Abhidhānappadīpika* in using 'lapis lazuli', and that, according to A. Rémusat, *musāragalva* means to the Chinese a blue and white stone, perhaps 'ammonite'.<sup>58</sup>

## Babylonian appreciation of lapis lazuli

A recent author dealing with Chinese scriptural accounts on the Medicine Buddha, in translating texts from the Chinese *Tripitāka*, consistently translates *liu-li* with 'lapis lazuli'. Raoul Birnbaum in his *The Healing Buddha*,<sup>59</sup> gives the reason for his choice, saying the Gandhāra 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 thankas as the back curtain or back plate

<sup>53</sup> Édouard Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripitāka chinois et traduits en français*, 4 vols., (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910-34), iii. 362, no. 500.

<sup>54</sup> Chavannes, *Contes et légendes du Bouddhisme*, (Paris: Bossard, 1921), 151.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Demiéville, review of Hong-Tchang *Lapidarium Sinicum*, *Bulletin d'école Française d'Extrême-Orient*, xxiv (1924), esp. pp. 276-283. John Irwin in his article 'The Lāt Bhairo at Benares (Vārāṇasī)', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, cxxxiii (1983), 328, f.n. 20, subscribes to this opinion.

<sup>56</sup> *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1852), 319-320.

<sup>57</sup> *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), xiv. 187.

<sup>58</sup> Burnouf, *Bonne Loi*, 319-320.

<sup>59</sup> London: Rider, 1979, 60.

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.<sup>60</sup> 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 Mediaeval Latin *lazulum* from Arabic *lāzaward* from Persian *lāzhuward* 'lapis lazuli'. From this was derived the Sanskrit word *rājavarta* for 'lapis lazuli'. About this, the *Laghuratnaparikṣā*, verses 19–20, says: 'it is without white spots and the colour of a peacock's neck'.<sup>61</sup> According to the *Rājanighaṇṭu*, xiii. 215, *rājavarta* used against bile diseases is soft and cool, while *vaiḍūrya*, according to *Rājanighaṇṭu*, xiii. 193, is warm. The English word *azure* goes back to the same Arabic word *lāzaward* 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 *vaiḍūrya*, *veḷuriya* and *liu-li* mean 'beryl', and that Pāli *veḷuriya* is interpreted as 'lapis lazuli' when juxtaposed with Pāli *masāragalla*, while Chinese *liu-li* and Tibetan *be-ḍu-rya* 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 Baikal were discovered, and because it resembled the night sky with its stars, the most exalted symbol of the divine.

If 'beryl' translates *vaiḍūrya*, and the Medicine Buddha is traditionally surrounded by a blue radiance, it would have to be called 'blue beryl radiance.' According to Dongthog's *New Light English-Tibetan Dictionary* the Tibetan word for 'aquamarine' is *pu.shka.ra*, a loan word from a Sanskrit word for 'blue lotus'.<sup>62</sup> But as a blue beryl is an aquamarine, 'aquamarine radiance' still seems to be the best translation for Tibetan *be.du.rya.hod*. Why *puṣkara* is the Tibetan word for 'aquamarine' is another question. Is the colour of the blue lotus aquamarine?

<sup>60</sup>Ernst Darmstädter, 'Der babylonisch-assyrische Lasurstein', in *Studien zur Geschichte der Chemie, Festgabe für E. O. von Lippmann* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1927), 2.

<sup>61</sup>Edited by Louis Finot, in *Les lapidaires indiens* (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1896), 201.

<sup>62</sup>T. G. Dongthog, (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973), 21.