

545. Vidhura Jataka

Vidhura Pandita Jataka

Cowell No.545

A long time ago, a Bodhisatta came to earth in the person of the sage Vidhura with the intent to speak the truth in an eloquent convincing way, deserving the name of Vidhura – Pandita. For these qualities, he became the chief advisor of the rightful king Dhananjaya in the city of Indapatta. The sage's sweet voice and argumentations enchanted everybody.

The preamble of the story narrates Sakka, Varuna and Garuda discussing the values of virtues of asceticism together with King Dhananjaya and Vidhura. Vimala, the wife of the king of the *nagas*, in hearing her husband praising so much Vidhura, craved to see him. She had a problem: to bring him to the *naga* world would be impossible and she would never be allowed by her husband to go to the world of humans.

Therefore, she thought of a ploy: pretending to be very sick and that the only medicine that could cure her was the heart of Vidhura. Her daughter Irandati became aware of this situation and believed she could achieve the task. Her father suggested that if she could not do it by herself, she had to find a husband who could bring the heart of Vidhura. Excited by her father's suggestions, she adorned herself with flowers and perfumes began a sensual dance with a song inciting everybody, *yakkha*, *naga* or man, to become her husband and sleep with her.

It happened that at that same moment, a *yakka* general named Punnaka was flying over on his magic horse and recognized the Princess' sweet voice. Instantly he stopped his horse and descended to tell Irandati he would marry her and do whatever she asked. The King was impressed and planned to use Punnaka as a way to obtain the cure of his wife's illness by promising his daughter in marriage to Punnaka (at that time presenting himself as a handsome youth), provided he would kill and get the heart of Vidhura.

To obtain Vidhura's heart, Punnaka (who, at this time was human-looking) planned a gambling session with King Dhananjaya, known for being an excellent dice player. From the beginning of the game, Punnaka noticed that the king was winning because a guardian deva would mysteriously turn the dice in his favour. Not have anything more to bet Punnaka suggested Vidhura. Initially, the king was very reluctant to lose his best advisor, but in the end, he condescended. Punnaka would be receiving Vidhura as prize.

Vidhura, unaware of the plot, saluted the king and asked Punnaka to be given three days to give farewell to his family before leaving. Finally, after some remembrance of his life, Vidhura found Punnaka on his horse, ready to go. He told Vidhura: "just take hold to the tail of my noble steed" and took off at full speed. When Punnaka reached the top of the Black Mountain and deposited Vidhura with the knowledge he had to kill him, but did not know eventually he seized Vidhura with his fangs as to devour him. Vidhura was perturbed. Punnaka attacked Vidhura with ferocious lions and enraged elephants, but Vidhura expressed no fear. Finally, he sized Vidhura by the feet and whirled him around preparing to fling him into the abyss.

Vidhura calmly asked why he wanted to kill him. Punnaka replied that he had received the order from Irandati, with whom he had fallen in love. She wanted the heart of Vidhura to save her mother's life,

queen Vimala. At once, Vidhura understood exactly what happened. Queen Vimala did not ask for the physical heart but his teaching. He asked Punnaka to put him on the ground so that he could teach him the Law, converting him. Then he suggested going together to the *naga* realm, although dangerous for him, to resolve the misunderstanding. Placing Vidhura behind him, Punnaka rode to the place of the *naga* king. He had a long conversation with King Varuna inciting him to be generous as a king, virtuous in action and speech.

Later, as soon as Queen Vimala saw the sage of great wisdom, she greeted him with reverence and discussed at length Vidhura's sermons. She exclaimed that the heart of a sage is his wisdom and having met Vidhura her desire was satisfied. Punnaka offered to take Vidhura back to Indapatta to King Dhananjaya.

Punnaka placed Vidhura in front of him on the flying horse and rode to Indapatta where he escorted the sage to the dais where the king was waiting, disappearing soon after to return to the *naga*'s kingdom and marry Irandati. King Dhananjaya was overjoyed to have back his wise advisor. He ordered amnesty for all prisoners in his reign.

Illustrations of the Vidhura Jataka in Cambodia



Fig.1 – **Kampong Tralach Leu**. Very degraded murals showing the ogre Punnaka menacing to throw Vidhura down in the abyss. (probably painted around 1925)



Fig.2 - Kampong **Tralach Leu**. At the lower centre of the picture, totally degraded is a white image of a figure sitting on a stool possibly is Vidhura discussing with a man, a king, judging from the crown (see Fig5). This sort of sermon was that Queen Vimala at heart. In the meantime, the king in his palace plays dice gambling on everything he owns. Eventually, Vidhura has to be given as a price to the yakka Punnaka, who had received the order to kill him. On the top of the mountain, the King's daughter Irانداتي is dancing to seduce Punnaka. To the left is Punnaka on his flying horse with Vidhura hanging on the tail of the animal. Below left, Punnaka is whirling Vidhura (see Fig.1) but is soon converted by the eloquent sermon and pays respect to him (these murals were probably executed around 1925)

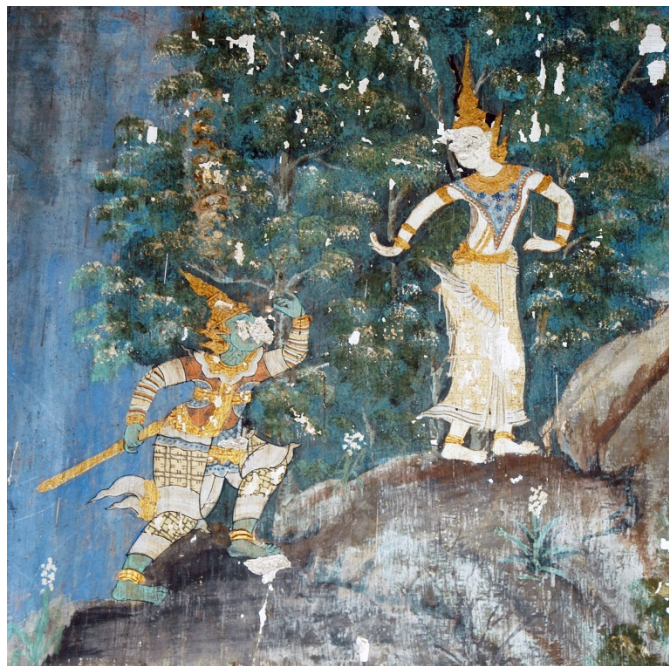


Fig.3 – Kampong **Tralach Leu**. Irانداتي dances to seduce the yakka Punnaka



Fig.4 – Kampong Tralach Leu. Left: detail of Vidhura hanging on the tail of Punnaka's flying horse.

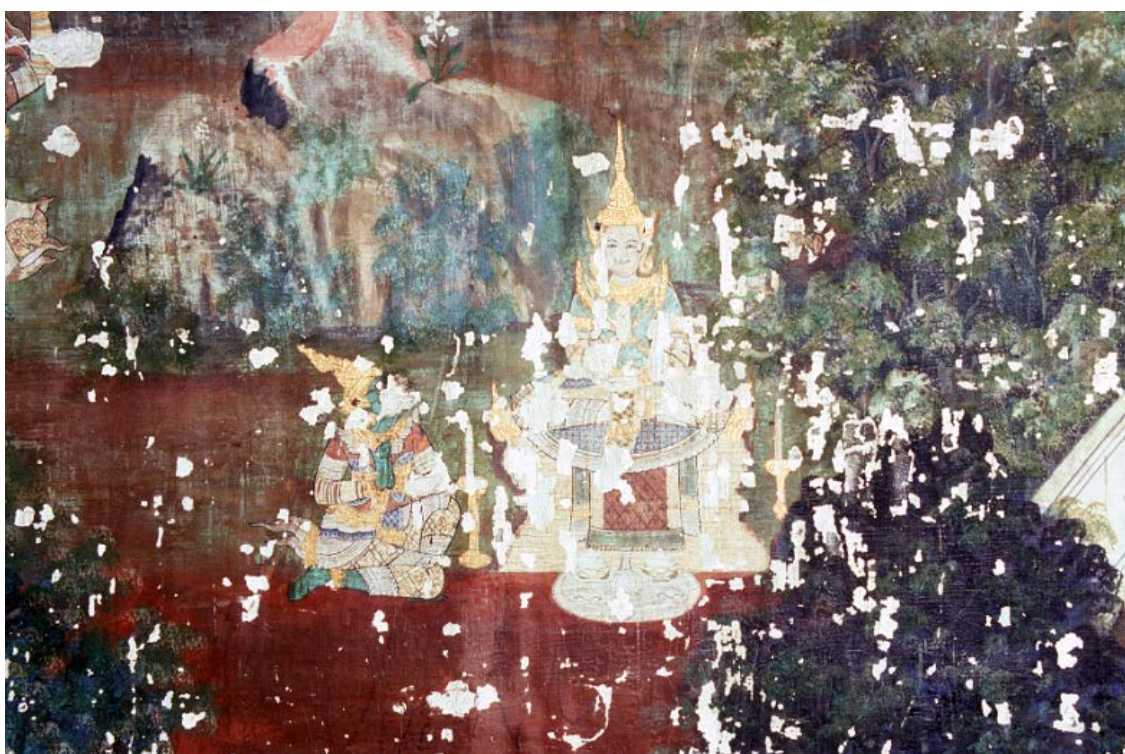


Fig.5 – Kampong Tralach Leu. Vidhura giving a sermon to an important figure (Sakka, Varuna or Garuda?)

Wat Sisowat Ratanaram





Fig. 7 – Sisowat Ratanaram. - All the main events of Irandati dances to seduce Punnaka the Vidhura Jataka are depicted in a single panel(Painted around the middle of 1900).TOP LEFT

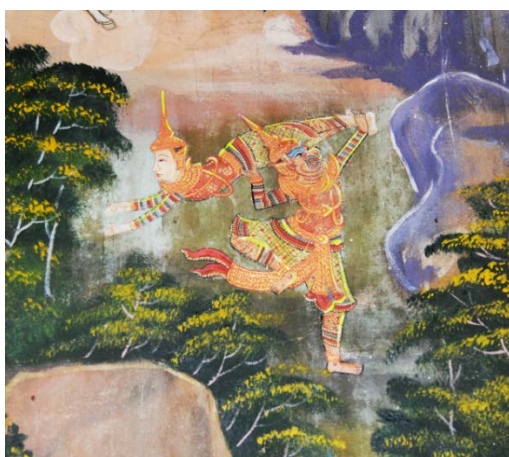


Fig.8 – Vidhura whirling Punnaka to throw Vidhura into the abyss.

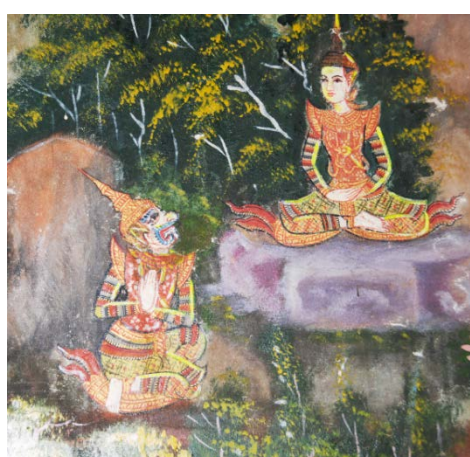


Fig.9.deatail of Punnaka venerating Vidhura who preaches him a sweet sermon.



Fig.10 – Wat Bakong. - Panel of the porch with scenes of the Vidhura jataka (before restoration)



Fig.11 – Wat Bakong. Detail of Irundati dancing for Punnaka



Fig.12 - Wat Bakong. Detail of Punnaka paying respects to Vidhura.



Fig.13 – Prei Weng. A colourful sequence of events of the Vidhura Jataka, when Vidhura is depicted as a general



Fig14 - Wat Kien Swai Krav. A panel under the roof illustrates Vidhura converting his executioner at the mountain top.



Fig.15- **Lovek Tep Pranam**.- Energetic mishandling of Vidhura by the yakka Punnaka



Fig.16 – **Bakong Village Vihara**-Two events are separate in time in the text 12) gigantic Punnaka, to the right, is holding Vidhura on his shoulder, 2)Punnaka listening to Vidhura sermon that did happen quite later than 1) (to the left of the picture painted in 2002)



Fig.17 - **Wat Einkosei**. The yakka Punna whirling Vidura (probably 1960s)



Fig.18 – **Phnom Bok**.



Fig.19 - **Kampomg Seyma**.(both painting are after 1975)



Fig.20 - Kampong Thom Museum.



Fig.21 – Keydon-(Vidhura pandita Jataka



Fig.22 - Wat Aunkosar.



Fig.23 – Angkor Wat southern monastery



Fig.24 - Tep Thidararam.



Fig.25 – Prei Duong Heum.

(All panels painted after 1975)



Fig.26 – Wat Lolei. Vidhura preaching Punnaka (painted in 2002)



Fig.27 – Wat Lolei . (2002). A lady princess listening to Vidhura's sermon.



Fig.28 – Wat Nokor - a modern illustration of the events of the Vidhura Jataka (Painted in 1968)

Illustrations of the Vidhura Jataka in Thailand



Fig.29 - **Wat Chong Nonsi**. (Bangkok)- Various scenes of the Vidhura Jataka. At the top, in the village where many activities are taking place, Vidhura gives farewell to his children while Punnaka prepares his white horse that was waiting in a corral.

Notice that when Punnaka brings Vidhura back to the king of the nagas, Vidhura is sitting behind Punnaka. At the end, mission accomplished, when he flies away with Irandati and Punnaka, he is sitting at the front, revealing a hierarchy of riding. (Probably painted from the end of 1600 to mid 1700 restored gently several times)



Fig.30- Wat Chong Nonsi. Detail of the village scenes of the previous picture and Vidhura embracing his children



Fig.31 – Wat Chong Nonsi. Vidhura hanging on the tail of Punaka's flying horse
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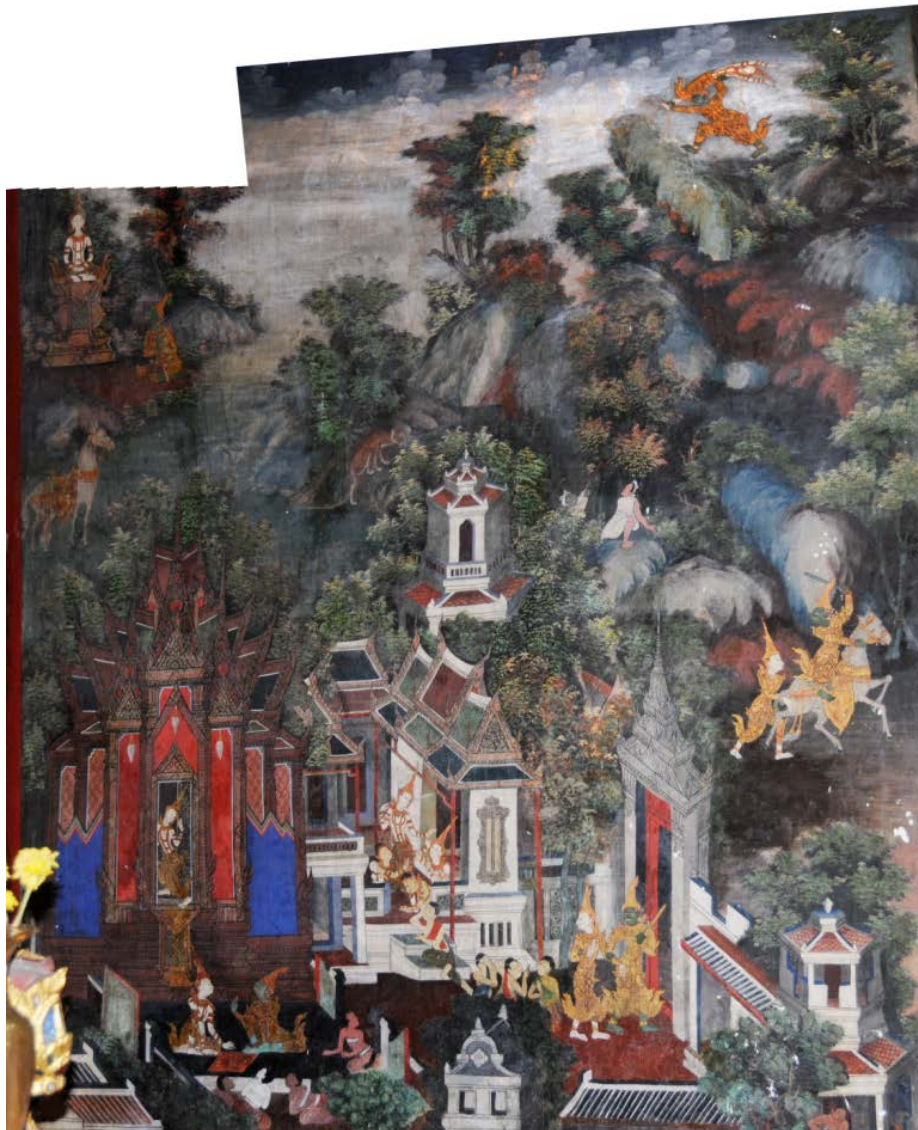


Fig.32 – **Wat Dararam**. Collage of photographs with events of the Vidhura Jataka. On the lower left part, kind Dhananjaya is playing dice with Punnaka, losing everything he had, including his advisor Vidhura who belongs now to the yakka Punnaka. The sage gives farewell to his family before exiting the city wall, a prisoner of Punnaka. Then to the right Vidhura hangs on the tail of Punnaka's horse flying to the top of a mountain where Punnaka whirls Vidhura tempted to throw him down the abyss, but he is restrained from talking to Vidhura, leading to his conversion to the Law. On the upper left of the picture, Punnaka venerated Vidhura in the forest of the mountain.



Fig. 33— **Wat Yai Intharam**. Detail of the departure of Vidhura hanging on the tail of Punnaka horse.
Detail of Vidhura tied to a rock to avoid being thrown into the abyss by Punnaka



Fig.34 – **Wat Saket** (Bangkok). Detail of the Vidhura Jataka painted between the windows of the *ubosot*. In the main door of the royal palace, princess Irandati is shown with a distressed attitude. At the base of the mural, king Dhananjaya is having a dice game with Punnaka (Cut out from the picture) To the right of the city wall's gate starts the mishandling of Vidura by Punnaka. Vidura, by now slave on Punnaka, is hanging on the tail of the ogre's white horse. Then, at a distance, Punnaka at a distant scene, Punnaka is whirling Vidhura, menacing to throw him into the canyon below. Finally, on the top left, Punnaka is converted and kneels in front of the Bodhisatta, while the white steed is grazing, before going into the naga's realm.



Fig.35— **Yai Intharam** - Detail of Punnaka whirling Vidhura and then venerating Vidhura after having been converted by him, after attempting to fling Vidura from the mountain



Fig.36 - Ratchburi. Preserved fragments of the Vidhura Jataka



Fig.37 – Details of the above panel



Fig.38 – Details of the above panel. Punna venerates Vidhura after listening to his sermon



Fig.39 – **Bangkok Natyional Library.** The dice game.



Fig.40 – **Bangkok Natyional Library.** Vidhura hanging to the tail of Punnaka flying horse.



Fig.41 – **Bangkok National Library.** Irandati dances on a hill while Punnaka flies over her. In this episode, Vidhura should not hang to the horse tail.

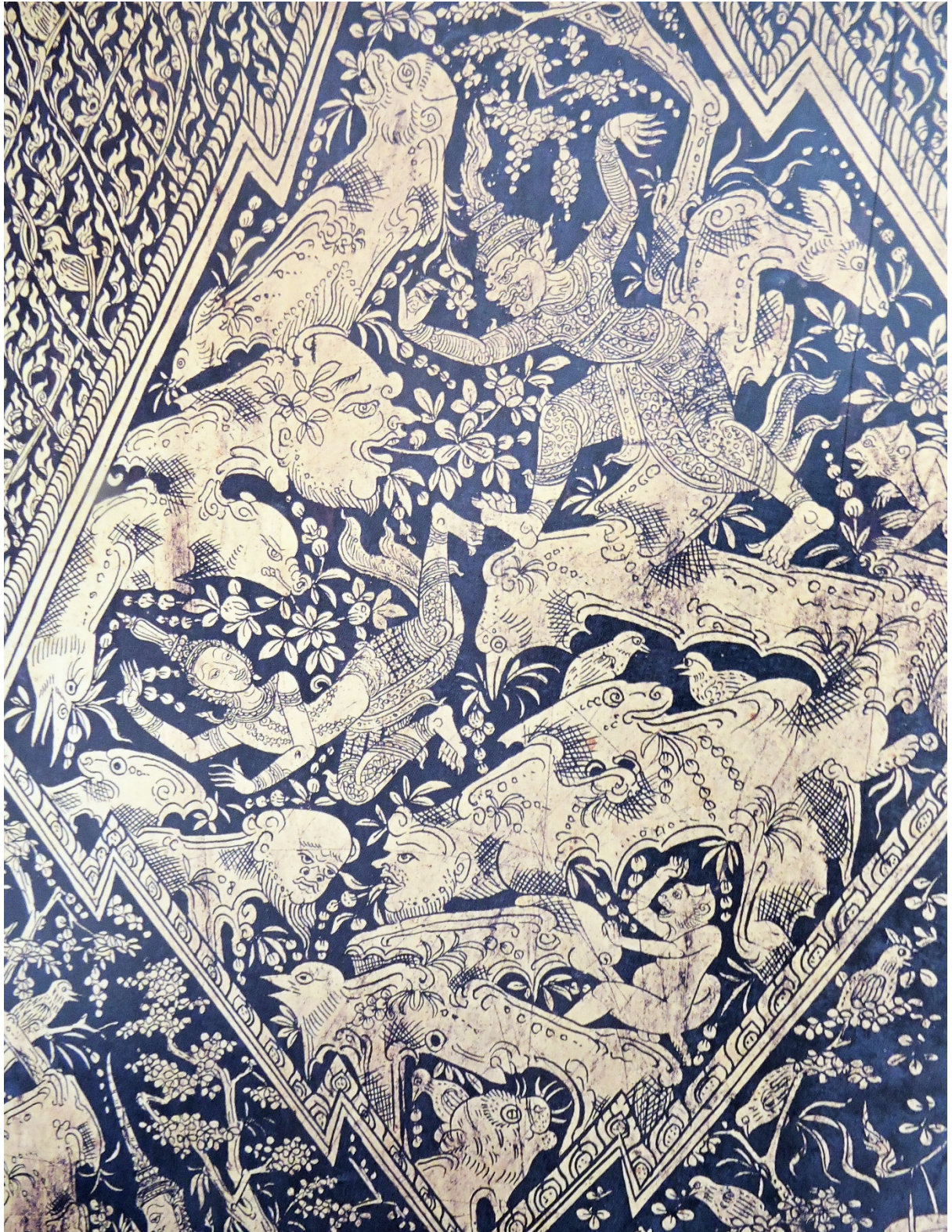


Fig.42 – Bangkok National Library – This scene of the life-frightening adventures of Vidhura are worth any modern nightmare. Vidura is painted falling into the abyss,

Illustrations of the Vidhura Jataka in Burma



Fig43 - Royal Palace Mandalay. Wood-carved gilded reliefs of the Vidhura Pandita Jataka



Fig.44 – Royal Place Mandalay. Vidhura is shown hanging on the tail of Punnaka's horse (above the golden knob). On the carving, Punnaka venerates Vidhura seated in the lotus position while the horse is grazing. This is shown over a transversal line composing the ground for Vidhura, Punnaka and his horse. Below there is a row of kneeling soldiers holding flags. The isolated simply dressed figure looking standing on a rock in the void is that of Irandati in sensual dance singing sexy songs..



Fig.45 – *Kammavaca* with golden-leaves designs illustrating the Vidhura Jataka. Illustrated here are at the center the center of the royal palace, the game of dice; then to the right of the door, Vidhura meets Punnaka for the imminent departure.



Fig.46 – *Kmmavaka* with golden-leaves designs illustrating the Vidhura Jataka. Shown here are 4 episodes: 1) Vidhura hanging on the tail of Punnaka; 2) Punnaka whirling Vidhura; 3) the conversation Vidhura-Punnaka and 5) the final veneration of Vidhura sitting on the royal platform.



Fig.47 – Detail of the dice game between King Dhananjaya, known for being an excellent dice player and Punnaka



Fig.48 – Detail of Vidhura hanging on the tail of Punnaka's horse, then of Punnaka whirling Vidhura



Fig.49 – Detail of Punnaka listening Vidhura's sermon

Illustrations of the Vidhura Jataka in Laos



Fig.50 – Wat Xien Thong – gold stencils with essential elements of the Vidhura Jataka



Fig.51 – Wat Momnorom. Top right of the picture is Punnaka whirling Vithura to frighten him to death.



Fig.52 – Vidhura whirling Punnaka to throw Vidhura into the abyss. Punnaka is also painted in meditation in a mountain.