

WHERE IS GRAPE WINE?
ON GRAPES AND WINE
IN PĀLI BUDDHIST LITERATURE AND BEYOND*

BRYAN DE NOTARIIS

ABSTRACT

This article will review some passages concerning grapes and grape wine in Indian sources, taking the Pāli Buddhist texts as a starting point. Some social aspects related to the consumption of grape juice will be highlighted and, on the basis of evidence, the possibility that an autochthonous production of grapes and wine might have occurred in the Indian mainland, initially prompted by medical reasons, will be discussed. Grape wine could, indeed, be present in Pāli texts either as an element of a macro-category or implied through *madhu*, an ambiguous term that can mean “sweet,” “honey” and even “grape wine.” Eventually, an intriguing passage from the Pāli *Milindapañha* will be analysed to argue that it contains a hitherto unrecognised reference to the “grape wine” under the guise of *madhu*, being it one of the earliest clear references with such a use.

1. Starter

The recent seminal works of James McHugh have well demonstrated that, in the rich drinking culture of ancient India, grape wine was just one option among the many kinds of intoxicant beverages appreciated by the

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population in the sub-continent.¹ Furthermore, it has been argued that grape wine was not even one of the most indigenous among the drinks, as it was mostly imported. Thus, the question “Where is grape wine in early Pāli literature?” might sound, *prima facie*, a bit Eurocentric, and even vino-centric, using McHugh’s own words (2021a: 113). However, it is my belief that the value of a question should be judged from the resulting answer. In what follows, I will present my humble answer to such a question, and if there will be some worth: cheers!

2. What’s in a word?

When we use the word “wine” in English, we chiefly mean the fermented juice of grapes, but it can also indicate, more generically, any fermented juice from a fruit or a plant. Some ancient Indian words for alcoholic drinks seem to have suffered the same fate. This is the main problem in our search for grape wine in Pāli literature; in other words, the ambiguity, and the lack of definiteness of the main Indic terms to denote the grape wine. This point has been clearly made by James McHugh in his discussion of the Sanskrit and Pāli term *madhu*, which originally indicated something “sweet,” specifically “honey,” and later, in some contexts, came to also be used to indicate the “grape wine,” but still retaining the meaning of “honey” in other contexts. The adoption of *madhu*, a term already attested in early Vedic texts, seems to be mostly influenced by the Iranian cultural area, in which words related to **madu* were in use to indicate the grape wine. A common form adopted in the Gāndhārī language is *masu* and, generally speaking, we can say that all these terms derive from a Proto Indo-European **médhu-*, already connected with “honey” (McHugh 2021a: 121–122). The semantic connection between “honey” and “grape wine” seems to be their “sweetness” since

Sweet liquids and alcoholic liquids went hand in hand in the ancient world, where there was no refrigeration and pasteurisation. To be sweet is to

¹ The present contribution can only be considered as a side note to the seminal works on the drinking culture of ancient India recently published by James McHugh (2014; 2017; 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d).

become intoxicating, and to be intoxicating is to be sweet (McHugh 2021a: 122).²

An early and still common alcoholic drink derived from honey is known in English as “mead,” a term clearly connected with the Proto-Indo-European **médhu-*, and so often conveyed by Pāli terms such as *madhura* and *madhukaḷā*.

One among the earliest, if not the earliest,³ clear attestation of *madhu* as a signifier for grape wine can be found in the Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra*, a text that is well aware of the ambiguity of the term:

“*Madhu*” is the product of bees (*kṣaudra*; viz. “honey”) and the product of grape (*mārdvika*; viz. “wine”).⁴

In this passage, the semantic dichotomy has been made evident, a sign that the term *madhu* was circulating with both meanings. Therefore, to denote the grape wine with much more clarity, the text uses the word *mārdvika*, which results from the strengthening (in Sanskrit known as *vr̥ddhi*) of a basic form *mṛdvikā*, which unambiguously indicates either the “vine” or the “grape.” Further, the *Arthaśāstra* tells us another expedient to disambiguate *madhu*, namely the use of toponyms:

“*Madhu*” is the juice (*rasa*) of grapes (*mṛdvikā*). “Kāpiśāyana” and “Hārahūraka” are expressions of its place of origin.⁵

These two passages are as short as they are informative. Grape wine is mainly connected to geographical areas which are, with regard to India, located in the North-west. Therefore, in the cultural melting pot area known as Gandhāra, we not only have evidence of a well-developed wine-culture, but also signs of an involvement of the Buddhist culture of that region suspected to be part of the wine production system, if not even its consumption.⁶ However, Gandhāra will be not at the centre of

² On the importance of the sweetness, also see Miller 2008.

³ As suggested by McHugh (2021a: 118).

⁴ *kṣaudraṃ mārdvikaṃ ca madhu* (AŚ 2.15.16).

⁵ *mṛdvikāraso madhu / tasya svadeśo vyākhyānaṃ kāpiśāyanaṃ hārahūrakaṃ iti* (AŚ 2.25.24–25).

⁶ Recent studies that touch upon this topic are Brancaccio and Liu 2009, Falk 2009, Klimburg 2016, Filigenzi 2019. A study on the alcoholic drinks in Theravāda sources is

the present study, since I will consider a wider Buddhist ecumene, following the *fil rouge* of the Pāli texts – albeit not exclusively – which would locate our discussion in India.⁷ Indeed, despite the great amount of archaeological and material evidence from Gandhāra on the use and consumption of wine, early harbingers of the encounter between Buddhism and grape wine can certainly be detected in the Pāli texts⁸ and, in

provided by Kieffer-Pülz (2005), whereas a more recent discussion based on northern sources is that of Kano and Kramer (2020). Notably, Fumio Enomoto (1994: 364–365, n. 34) found references in Chinese sources about a country called Jībīn 罽賓 in which Buddhist monks drank a little of the intoxicant (*jiǔ* 酒) due to cold weather. Jībīn 罽賓 indicates, broadly speaking, an area in the Northwest India, including Kashmir, Gandhāra or even Kāpiśī, depending on the time period or the source (cf. Enomoto 1994 and s.v. Jībīn 罽賓 in DDB). The intoxicating drink *par excellence* in some of those areas was certainly the grape wine.

⁷ According to Dietz (2007: 62), the Buddhist schools present in the Greater Gandhāra, as attested in inscriptions since the second century BCE, were the Kāśyapīya, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivāda, and Mahāsāṃghika. These schools were also found by Xuánzàng 玄奘 in the seventh century CE. Thus, the use of the Pāli canon and its authoritative exegesis would take into account the records preserved by the Theravāda, a Buddhist school that spread in an entirely different direction, and so, at least in principle, less in connection with those northwestern areas in which the production of wine is so far believed to occur. Indeed, it would be of some significance to find evidence on grapes and wine in such a conservative Buddhist tradition. However, records from textual sources of other Buddhist schools (in their extant Chinese translations) will be taken into account in order to enrich our discussion.

⁸ Dating Pāli Buddhist literature with exact precision is notoriously difficult. Some scholars recognise a certain degree of closure for the Pāli texts, especially *Suttas* and *Vinaya*, around the first century BCE, the traditional date in which Pāli texts are believed to have been written down in Sri Lanka. Concerning the *Suttas*, Anālayo writes: “it seems to me reasonable to consider the Pāli discourses as fairly closed, in doctrinal terms, by the time of the Ist century BCE [...] I would assume that from that time onwards they were in existence in a form that roughly resembles what we currently have at our disposition. In terms of geographical awareness, and in terms of doctrinal development, they seem to go back even further into the past, allowing us to catch a glimpse of Buddhist thought predominantly from the pre-Aśokan period” (2012: 246). Concerning the *Vinaya*, Kieffer-Pülz writes that “Although it cannot be proven that the *Theravāda-vinaya* version we have today is identical with the version written down in the first century BCE, the similarity of some eight- and ninth-century Vinaya fragments from Nepal with the extant *Theravāda-vinaya* at least shows that there were only minor changes over the course of a 1000 years” (2020–2021: 156). In a more conservative view, much of the material can date back to the third century BCE during the reign of Aśoka, date in which Buddhism came to Sri Lanka, assuming that Buddhist literature was transmitted *en masse*. Only a few additions were found that were made in Sri Lanka (cf. Anālayo 2012: 224–225), and the almost total absence of Sinhalese influences on the canon was already highlighted

this search, a key role is played by the Pāli term for “grape,” clearly etymologically connected with the Sanskrit *mṛdvīkā*, namely *muddikā*.⁹

3. Grapes in Pāli literature and beyond

Considering our question “Where is grape wine in Pāli literature?,” we can say that we at least do know where “grape” is, while for the “wine,” we have to wait a little longer.

Early Pāli texts in some passages do refer to grapes, a fact that in our inquiry is certainly significant. Having grapes available means having the prime ingredient to make wine, and for a culture like that of India, well acquainted with many processes of alcoholic brewing, this means being potentially able to produce wine, at least in small quantities.¹⁰ A potential etymology of the Pāli *muddikā* and Sanskrit *mṛdvīkā* is quite telling, being connected to a Sanskrit root $\sqrt{mṛd}$ “to press, squeeze, crush, pound, smash” (s.v. *mṛd* in SED).¹¹ This should not be interpreted as exclusively indicating wine, given that alcohol-free juices are attested in the Buddhist monastic code in Pāli known as *Vinaya*:

Then, the Blessed one, on that occasion after having given a talk about the Doctrine, addressed the monks: “O monks, I authorise eight drinks: mango

by Norman on linguistic grounds ([1978] 1991: 34–37; 1997: 90). Indeed, it would seem that some elements would point to a certain degree of conservatism for the Pāli canon. To provide a further example, it was noted as early as the time of Rhys Davids ([1903] 1911: 174) that the Pāli discourses do not mention Aśoka, though the texts do not fail to mention other kings.

⁹ It is worth noting that not all the occurrences of *muddikā* in Pāli refer to grapes since there is the homophone *muddika/ā* from *muddā* (< Sanskrit: *mudrā*) with meanings related to “counting with fingers” or “seal ring” as a sign of authority (see s.v. in PED).

¹⁰ The picture of the rich Indian drinking culture that emerges from the work of James McHugh might suggest that it would hardly have been a problem to produce wine from grapes if the latter had been available. He, for instance, comes to the conclusion that “People in India manufactured a huge number of alcoholic drinks, managing the processes of obtaining sugars, fermentation, and flavoring in ingenious ways” (McHugh 2021d: 75).

¹¹ The exact etymology is still uncertain. Concerning the ancient origin of *muddikā/mṛdvīkā* and cognate forms, also see McHugh (2021a: 120–122, esp. n. 31) who argued for an Iranian origin and a connection with the Sanskrit *madhu* (from **madu*, cf. Avestic *maḍu*). Kimura (1961: 7) reports that in a comment on the *Amarakośa* the etymology of *mṛdvīkā* is connected with concepts like “softness” and “tenderness” (viz., from *mṛdu*).

drink, black plum drink,¹² plantain drink, banana drink, honey drink (*madhupāna*), grape drink (*muddikā-pāna*),¹³ edible lotus root drink, *phārusaka* drink.¹⁴ O monks, I authorise juices extracted from all fruits, apart from the fruits of cereals. O monks, I authorise juices extracted from all leaves, apart from vegetable juices. O monks, I authorise juices extracted from all flowers, except the juices extracted from Mahua flowers (flowers of *Madhuka longifolia*). O monks, I authorise the juice taken from sugarcanes.”¹⁵

These eight drinks could reflect something more than the monks’ mere need to hydrate themselves, and indeed might be connected with some social aspects, such as communal drinking and consumption of food. This is suggested by the *Kathāvattu* (Kv 552–553), which mentions the same list of eight drinks in a context in which a social gathering seems to be involved, one in which monks and laymen potentially had to consume food and drink together.¹⁶ The text testifies that this could be, at least for some, a point of controversy, although the Theravāda orthodoxy eventually legitimises it. The social facet of those drinks would not neglect their primary function to provide some nourishment to monks during the parts

¹² Following Wujastyk (2004), *contra* Horner ([1951] 2007: 339) who translates *jambupāna* as “rose-apple drink.”

¹³ We are legitimate to wonder whether the proximity of *madhupāna* and *muddikā-pāna* is accidental or due to the semantic convergence traced in the later attestations of *madhu*.

¹⁴ Even the recent volume of the DOP does not provide a definitive indication of what *phārusaka* is (see s.v. *phārusaka*), it only tentatively suggests it might be the Governor’s Plum.

¹⁵ *atha kho bhagavā etasmim nīdāne dhammikathaṃ katvā bhikkhū āmantesi: anujānāmi bhikkhave aṭṭha pānāni: ambapānaṃ jambupānaṃ cocapānaṃ mocapānaṃ madhupānaṃ muddikāpānaṃ sālukapānaṃ phārusakapānaṃ. anujānāmi bhikkhave sabbaṃ phalarasaṃ ṭhapetvā dhaññaphalarasaṃ. anujānāmi bhikkhave sabbaṃ pattarasaṃ ṭhapetvā dākarasaṃ. anujānāmi bhikkhave sabbaṃ puppharasaṃ ṭhapetvā madhukapuppharasaṃ. anujānāmi bhikkhave uccurasan ti* (Vin I 246, cf. Nidd I 372 and Kv 552–553).

¹⁶ This can be inferred by passages such as “are there not some who partake meals with the monastic order?” (*nanu atthi keci saṅghabhaddāni karonti*; Kv 552). In the account, we also find significant terms, such as “group-meal” (*gaṇabhojana*), a practice prohibited in the *Vinaya* under normal conditions and permitted only for certain occasions (Vin IV 71–75). Although *gaṇabhojana* refers primarily to a group of four monks (*gaṇabhojanaṃ nāma yattha cattāro bhikkhu*; Vin IV 74), we can see in the stories how often the social gatherings involved laypeople, as when laypeople, out of eagerness to give robes to the monks, invite them for meals (Vin IV 72), or when laypeople and monks are all travelling on the same boat (Vin IV 73).

of the day when solid food was not allowed (these juices are, notably, sweet drinks) and their medicinal uses (as we will see below). In all likelihood, there was, arguably, an enjoyable dimension in the consumption of those delicious drinks, as McHugh rightly highlights:

It would be easy for drinks made in this manner to ferment a little, though not to the extent of drinks like *āsavas* and wines, which were aged for several weeks. Even if they did not ferment, they would have been quite tasty, probably far better than many people could afford to make (McHugh 2021d: 237).

McHugh's remark could imply that the consumption of a proto-wine may potentially occur under theegis of the monastic code, and is thus perfectly legitimate. This does not mean it was made on purpose, but the inevitability of the chemical reaction may have led to an actual consumption of a slightly fermented beverage, regardless of whether the drinker was conscious of their action or not.¹⁷ Furthermore, we might note that if the grape juice was so important to be included in even a regulative monastic code of a Buddhist school which mainly survived in the South of India, namely in Sri Lanka, this is a fact that might suggest the presence of grapes was not so scant, and it was not an overly exotic fruit. At least, we might argue, although grapes were associated with border regions in the north/north-west, we cannot exclude that, once discovered, their use had been spread, so much so to have found its place in the Pāli *Vinaya*. Another important evidence on this topic is the often-quoted passage in the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasārvāstivādins,¹⁸ in its extant Chinese version known as *Gēnběn shuōyīqiè yǒubù pínàiyé* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事 (T 1448), where the Buddha was travelling in the north-west. Thus, so far, we have two *Vinayas* of two different Buddhist schools that would attest the presence and consumption of grapes and products derived from grapes:

¹⁷ In this regard, it is certainly worth considering an evidence from the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* discussed in the Appendix which seems to imply the grape juice fermentation.

¹⁸ This passage has been quoted by Tucci (1977: 34), Brancaccio and Liu (2009: 226) and McHugh (2021a: 123). They all refer to the French translation made by Przyluski (1914).

Then, the *yakṣa* Kutika (*qū dǐ jiā* 屈底迦) faithfully offered baskets (*kuāng qiè* 筐篋 [?]) completely filled with grapes (*pútáo* 葡萄) and other fruits, sent many *yakṣas* to carry them to Buddhist temples [located even] to the ends of the earth, leaving them in heaps. When the many monks etc. saw these fruits of all sorts, no one knew what they were [and then] they asked the Blessed One: “What fruits are these?” “When is the right time to consume them?” The Buddha replied: “[This is a] fruit that comes from the north, it is called ‘grape’ (*pútáo* 葡萄), to be properly eaten it must be purified/prepared (*zuòjìng* 作淨) with fire.” Then the many monks accepted the fruit, grape by grape was purified/prepared, [a task which] took a long time to be completed. When the Buddha saw [what was happening], he reproached [them]: “One must not purify/prepare them one by one like this, one must take a fiery coal to the gathered fruits and purify [all of them] in three spots¹⁹ [...]”²⁰

Further, the text also states:

When he had finished to eat grapes (*pútáo* 葡萄), as there were a lot of remains, the Buddha said: “You should squeeze them to get the grape juice (*pútáo zhī* 葡萄汁), heat the juice without cooking it completely (?),²¹ then promptly take it out and filter it.” The Buddha said: “It should be cooked by heating it, bottled/decanted (*chéng* 盛) and stored to be offered to the *saṅgha* outside the proper mealtime as a drinkable beverage (*jiāng* 漿; = *pāna*).”²²

In these passages, we find many interesting elements. First, we may note that grapes are a fruit which came from the north, and are associated with demigods known as *yakṣas*, beings often related to grapes, wine, viticulture and, broadly speaking, drinking scenes in iconographies.²³ The *yakṣa*

¹⁹ I am grateful to the anonymous peer-reviewer who enhanced the translation of this last phrasing. Since the Chinese passage 三處淨之 is not very clear, I was initially wondering whether the text implied a sort of “three phases” (三處) for the purification.

²⁰ 時屈底迦藥叉既奉信盛滿筐篋葡萄等果,令諸藥叉負送至寺地邊,積聚安置。諸苾芻等既見果子,悉皆不識請問世尊:“此是何果?”“如何服之時?”佛答言:“北方果子,名曰葡萄,以火作淨當可食之。”時諸苾芻受得果子,一一作淨,遂延時節。佛見,便訶:“不應如是一一作淨,應於果聚,取一火炭,三處淨之。”(T1448.24.0039c06–13).

²¹ Cf. s.v. *shóu* 熟 in DDB, the implied meaning might be “to not bring it to boil.”

²² 于時葡萄食訖,由尚多殘,佛言:“應可押取葡萄汁,煎汁不熟,遂便抒出。”佛言:“應可熟煎,盛貯供僧伽等非時漿飲。”(T1448.24.0039c17–19).

²³ “It seems clear that the *Yakshas* of the Kushān northwest had intimate associations with the vine and viticulture and that these connections were recognized prior to the Kushān era” (Carter 1968: 140). According to Pons (2011: 169) the *yakṣas* are closely

Kutika, it is reported, sent many other *yakṣas* to the ends of the earth to give grapes to monasteries settled even in remote areas. So, we might wonder whether this account, under its mythological guise, can testify for a widespread circulation of grapes in the past. After all, if grape juice had been listed among the eight drinks allowed to the monks in the Pāli *Vinaya*, grapes had to be reasonably known and available. But how was this made possible? A definite answer is hard to give, but we can at least suggest a fascinating hypothesis. We do know that in the middle of the third century BCE the great king Aśoka promoted many forms of social-welfare and one of them is of particular interest for our topic. We find in the Aśoka's edicts a striking claim, one in which the king states to have had plants, herbs and fruits with a certain medical relevance planted:

(A) Everywhere in the dominions of king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin, and likewise among (his) borderers, such as the Choḍas, the Pāṇḍyas, the Satyaputa, the Ketalaputa, even Tāmraparṇī, the Yona king Antiyaka, and also the kings who are the neighbours of this Antiyaka, – everywhere two (kinds of) medical treatment were established by king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin, (viz.) medical treatment for men and medical treatment for cattle. (B) And wherever there were no herbs that are beneficial to men and beneficial to cattle, everywhere they were caused to be imported and to be planted. (C) Wherever there were no roots and fruits, everywhere they were caused to be imported and to be planted. (D) On the roads wells were caused to be dug, and trees were caused to be planted for the use of cattle and men (Hultzsch 1925: 3–4).²⁴

In this regard, we can note that the eight drinks in the Pāli *Vinaya* occur in chapter six of the *Mahāvagga* which concerns medicines and medicaments. Thus, we may consider grapes as part of the Buddhist *materia*

related to the Greek Dionysian imagery and, as already noted by Coomaraswamy (1931: 24–25), *yakṣas* were subjected to offerings of food and intoxicants.

²⁴ (A) *sarvata vijitamhi Devānāmpriyasa Piyadasino rāño evamapi prachamtesu yathā Choḍā Pāḍā Satiyaputo Ketalaputo ā Taṃbapamṇī Aṃṭiyako Yona-rājā ye vā pi tasa Aṃṭiy[a]kas[a] sāmip[am] rājāno sarvatra Devānāmpriyasa Piyadasino rāño dve chikīchha katā manusa-chikīchhā cha pasu-chikīchhā cha* (B) *osudhāni cha yāni m[a]nusopagān[i] cha pasop[pa]gāni cha yata yata nāsti sarvatrā hārāpitāni cha ropāpitāni cha* (C) *mūlāni cha phalāni cha yata yatra nāsti sarvata hārāpitāni cha rop[ā]pitāni cha* (D) *paṃthesū kūpā cha khānāpitā vrachhā cha ropāpit[ā] paribhogāya pasu-manusānaṃ* (Hultzsch 1925: 3).

medica, possibly, since an early point in time.²⁵ As such, it became traditional in some northern areas (perhaps, even more in the northwest), following the Chinese *Vinaya* of the Mūlasārvāstivādins. The story of the *yakṣas* suggests grapes were exported from the northern areas and so, further, if we consider Aśoka's edicts we do find confirmation that plants and fruits with medical relevance were imported and cultivated in India. Aśoka's kingdom extends as far as the Greek ecumene, and thus we have mentions of Greeks (*yona*) in his edicts, as well as a bilingual edict written in Greek and Aramaic from Kandahar.²⁶ This is not only relevant for the importance that grapes and wine held in the ancient Greek culture,²⁷ but also because recent scholarship argued that there were some intellectual exchanges with the Greek speaking world, and these also involved the *materia medica*.²⁸ Therefore, the *Vinaya*'s account on Pilindavaccha's

²⁵ This fact is also supported by the *Dà Pílúzhēnà chéngfó jīng shù* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏 (also referred to as *Dàrì jīng shù* 大日經疏), a Chinese Buddhist text which is a commentary on the *Vairocanaḥisambodhi*, a Mantrayāna ("Tantric") text, by monk Yīxíng 一行, compiled on the basis of the oral testimony of Indian monk Śubhakarasiṃha (Shānwúwèi 善無畏; 637–735) around 724–727 (cf. Kotyk 2018: 11–12; 2021: 3, and 8–9, n. 8). In this text the therapeutic value of juices is praised, just as when it is stated that juices can be mixed with medicines (T1796.39.0659a05–06) or when the text establishes connections between Indian cuisine and medical practices (T1796.39.0659a09). Eight juices also occur in the *Vinayas* of other Buddhist schools extant in Chinese, such as in the Mūlasārvāstivāda *Vinaya* (*Gēnběn shuōyīqiè yǒubù pínàiyé* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事 cf. T1448.24.0001b03) in which among eight juices we also find the grape juice, see Chen 2021: 49–50. Similarly, we find the grape juice as one of eight juices in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (*Shísòng lǜ* 十誦律 cf. T1435.23.0193a29) and in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* (*Sīfēn lǜ* 四分律 cf. T1428.22.0873c05), these latter sources are also quoted in the *Sīfēnlǜ shānfán búquè xíngshì chāo* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (T 1804) of Dào xuān 道宣, see the translation of Pettit (2017: 135). The Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* (*Móhē sēngqī lǜ* 摩訶僧祇律 cf. T1425.22.0244c06) provides us a list of fourteen juices, which includes grape juice. The agreement among the *Vinayas* on the presence of grape juice in the list of juices suggests us that it was an element present in the early period.

²⁶ The Greek-Aramaic edict was first published by Schlumberger et al. (1958). An updated discussion of Aśokan edicts in Greek is provided by Rougemont (2012: 167–173).

²⁷ Grape wine is certainly a well-known and well-studied element of the Greek culture. On wine and health in ancient Greece, see the contributions in the supplement 40 of the *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* edited by Jouanna et al. (2002).

²⁸ I am here referring to the study of Kenneth G. Zysk (2021a) on the concept of disease-causation known as the "doctrine of the three-humours" (*tridoṣa-vāda*), common to ayurvedic literature and already present in Pāli texts, which has significant parallelisms with ideas found in ancient Greek texts. Besides, Zysk (2021b) also pursued an important

affliction (Vin I 204–205) is certainly intriguing. In such a story, a monk known as Pilindavaccha suffered from the so called “affliction of wind” (*vātā-bhāda*), a not clearly defined disease, that requires a decoction of oil (*tela-pāka*) mixed with an intoxicating drink (*majja*). If too much of the intoxicating drink was added into the mixture, the latter was allowed by the Buddha to be used as an unguent (*abbhañjana*).²⁹ We find, later, that oil was also used to cure a wound (*vaṇa-tela*; Vin I 206). All these elements can be of some comparative interest if confronted with the use of wine in Greek medicine. In the study of Jacques Jouanna (2012) on wine in Greek medicine we find some examples in which a mixture of wine, oil and, sometimes, other ingredients, is used in some treatments. For instance, a cannula of wine and oil is injected into an intercostal incision (2012: 191), wine and oil are some of the ingredients of a clyster; additionally, they are used to cure wounds, and as an ointment to substitute bathing (2012: 192).³⁰ The comparative value of these examples should be considered, at the moment, only in general terms, since a more accurate inquire would be needed to secure a more reliable connection. However, in terms of the presence of general exchanges occurring between the East and West, it can have its relevance. It is worth remembering here that a huge amount of traditional lore attested in Buddhist texts is suspected to have been influenced by Western countries. Some sort of “knowledge,” conveyed by the term *vijjā* often translated as “art” or even “science,”³¹ is mentioned in Pāli texts and resulted to

comparative study on the Greek *symposion* and the Indian *goṣṭhī*, showing that the Greek *symposion* might have influenced the Indians’ male social gatherings.

²⁹ On this episode, see also Zysk 1991: 92–93. Interestingly enough, this passage has been recently quoted by Falk (2023: 104), arguing that the flask in the Gandhāric representation of the future Buddha known in Sanskrit as Maitreya (= Pāli: Metteyya) is comparable with some vessels present in the Pāli *Vinaya* filled with medicinal ointments and, so, suggesting that one of the earliest functions of Maitreya was that of a healer.

³⁰ In the latter case, it seems to be tacitly implied that wine can perfume the body. Interestingly enough, there is a passage in a Buddhist *Jātaka* in which the “drink made from grapes” (*muddikapāna*) is called “fragrant drink” (*gandhapāna*) (Ja II 96). On this episode, see McHugh 2021a: 119.

³¹ This is not clearly the “science” in our sense of the term if we consider it as a knowledge tested through a scientific method. However, other more general uses of “science” in the sense of a “systematised knowledge” applied to disciplines not properly scientific (e.g.: “science of theology”) get closer to the meaning that *vijjā* seems to

be not exclusively Indian. A huge amount of these knowledges are grouped under the Pāli umbrella term *tiracchāna-vijjā*, a compound that can be translated literally as “beastly arts.”³² Practices included within the *tiracchāna-vijjā* category are varied, including divinatory arts of various kinds (e.g., oneiromancy, physiognomy, geomancy, astrology, etc.), ritual practices and, notably, medical practices, just to list a few. As highlighted by David Pingree (1992), there are compelling parallels with some Mesopotamian evidence, which could indicate a cross-cultural diffusion of such practices.³³ In light of this, it is significant that the people in the *Vinaya* who prescribe the oil mixed with the intoxicating drink to Pilindavaccha to cure his affliction of wind are called *vejja* (*vejja evaṃ āhaṃsu*; Vin I 204), a term connected to the Sanskrit *vaidyā*, namely “one versed in the *vidyā* (viz. science),” and so, considering the medical context, translated as “physician” or “doctor.”³⁴ Thus, it might be of

convey. The term *vijjā* derives from a root √*vid-* (hence the Sanskrit *vidyā*) and has a general meaning of “knowledge,” in the beginning it was probably intended as a visual experience, such as its derivation from the Proto-Indo-European **w(e)id* would suggest (Pokorny 1959: 1125–1127). In fact, there is an etymological connection with the Italian verb “*vedere*” (“to see,” from the Latin *vidēre*) and with the English words “witness” and “wisdom.” It is no coincidence that the Indian Veda is said to have been “seen” by seers (*ṛṣi*) (e.g.: “The seer [is so called] because he has vision” *ṛṣir darśanāt*; Nir 2.11; “Seers are direct witnesses of the Dharma” *sākṣātkr̥tadharmāna ṛṣayo*; Nir 1.20). It might seem we are facing an act of “knowing” that leads to knowledge which is hypostatized by the act of “seeing.” The result is a system of knowledge broadly and only partially connected with our concept of science. *Vijjā* cannot be limited to what we know as hard or natural sciences, but rather comes closer to a broader concept of science, such as that conveyed by the German *Wissenschaft*, which also includes the so-called human sciences.

³² I borrowed the vivacious translation made by Gombrich (1997: 175) and based on the literal translation of the term *tiracchāna* (cf. Sanskrit s.v. *tiryāñic* in SED) that usually indicates animals, as creatures that move horizontally. A commentarial interpretation of the compound *tiracchāna-vijjā* states that “the *tiracchāna-vijjās*, actually, are not salvific, they are the remaining sciences (*vijjā*) – such as physiognomy, omens, etc. – which are transversal (*tiracchānabhūta*) to the ways of heaven and liberation” (*tiracchānavijjā nāma aniyyānikattā saggamokkhamaggānaṃ tiracchānabhūta aṅgasattha-nimittādikā avasesā vijjā*; Nidd-a I 402).

³³ See also Guggenmos 2017 (esp. 178–180), who points out how these practices can also be recovered in Europe and describes how they arrived in China thanks to Buddhism. If we consider the physiognomics, Zysk (2018; 2019a; 2019b) has argued there were some exchanges between the Indian and Western worlds.

³⁴ According to Olivelle (2017: 11–12) the use of the term “*vaidyā*” aimed to elevate the status of the medical professional in ancient India.

some interest to note that in the chapter on the liquid substances in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, a fundamental Sanskrit text of Indian medicine, the first drink in a list of intoxicating drinks (Sanskrit: *madya* = Pāli: *majja*) is the *mārdvika*, viz. the “grape wine” (McHugh 2021d: 37).³⁵ This is significant at least for two reasons: (1) the most prominent intoxicating Indian drink was not wine, but was the *surā*, originally indicating an intoxicating drink made from grains and later came to be used as a macro-category or a general term to indicate an intoxicating alcoholic substance (McHugh 2021c); (2) generally speaking, we can say that medical literature constitutes one of the main sources in the study of alcoholic beverages – especially concerning their compositions and uses – and so we may wonder whether it would be telling to find grape wine listed first in an Indian source; shall we either assume a western influence or a growing importance of wine? Could we even assume both? What seems to be clear is that medical context is a suitable place to accommodate grape wine given that it is part of a set of worldly practices that were open to foreign influences. Generally speaking, we can say that not only wine, but a whole range of alcoholic substances, were part of the ancient Buddhist *materia medica*, as also testified by Chinese translations of Buddhist texts and accounts of early Chinese Buddhist doctors.³⁶

³⁵ Notably, in *The Bower Manuscript*, a Buddhist text in Sanskrit with an extensive section on medicine, there is a list of medicinal intoxicating drinks in which wine, viz. the “product of grape” (*mārdvika*), is listed first: “He may drink *mārdvika*, or *madhu*, or *madirā* and *madhu* in equal parts, or *ariṣṭa*, or *śīdhu*, or *jagala*, or *agaja*, or *maireya*, or whatever other strong liquor there may be” (Hoernle 1893: 13) (*piben mārdvikam vā madhu madhusaṃhāśac chātamadirām ariṣṭam śīdhuṃ vā jagalam agajaṃ maireyam api vā / ato 'nyad vā madyaṃ bhavati*; Hoernle 1893: 3). This passage has been also quoted by Chen (2021: 56), who also interestingly refers that some Sanskrit manuscripts found at Kizil include “a notice to provide the Sangha, specifically monastics, with alms of food. The notice describes *madhurapradāna*, the *dāna* of giving sweet goods, as including the giving of syrups, honey, sugar cane, grapes [...]” (2021: 58).

³⁶ Staying with Salguero (2015: 40), Buddhism was the principal vehicle for the transmission of Indian medicine in Asia even though we cannot expect to find a single model but rather multiple conflicting transmissions. Therefore, although it is possible to find many accounts with a negative attitude towards alcohol in Chinese Buddhist texts (e.g. the gravely ill monk Huiyuān 慧遠 refused to drink an intoxicating medicine, see Heirman and De Rauw 2006: 65), there are also notable exceptions which resemble, in spirit, the Indian attitude so far detected. For example, in the *Guóqīng bǎilù* 國清百錄 drinking intoxicants is in a set of forbidden actions which are, however, allowed for medical reasons

Furthermore, as Patrick McGovern highlighted (2003: 305–307), ethyl alcohol was an ancient analgesic and disinfectant, and grape wine was a prominent substance to produce it before the development of distillation.³⁷ Therefore, grape wine was used as an ingredient in the medical science of many ancient cultures and so it makes sense to assume that Indians would have also exploited the curative qualities of this remarkable substance, if available.

Thus, we can summarise our conjecture: it might be possible that Buddhist texts testify for an increasing diffusion of grapes and their derived products, a fact that can be historically contextualized during the social welfare policies implemented by Aśoka and fostered by him, apparently, for medical reasons (which is the context in which grape juice occurs in Pāli texts). This fact might have contributed to the diffusion of grape wine in the Indian sub-continent which would show, some centuries after Aśoka, an increasing presence in literary records. This, however, does not mean that grapes and grape wine were unknown in earlier times, but, at least in my opinion, only that grape wine did not have its own distinction as a specific drink, and was only considered a sort of intoxicating drink made by fruits (see below § 4). Indeed, knowledge about the possible natural habitat for grapes is attested in Pāli texts:

O monks, when a man has right view whatever bodily action is undertaken and performed in accordance with [right] view, whatever verbal action and mental action are undertaken and performed in accordance with [right] view, whatever volition, aspiration, resolution and intentional mental factors [he has], all these things lead to what is desirable, appreciated, satisfactory, beneficial, pleasurable. What is the cause of this? [Right] view, monks, is indeed a blessing.

Just as, o monks, a seed of either sugarcane, or rice, or grapes (*muddikā*) is planted in moist soil (*allāya pathaviyā*), whatever nutrients it absorbs from the soil and water, all these lead to sweetness (*madhuratta*), pleasantness

(T1934.46.0794a01–04), see Heirman and De Rauw 2006: 65. The use of intoxicating drinks was part of the medical knowledges of some early attested Chinese Buddhist physician-monks, in this regard see Wang 2022.

³⁷ McHugh (2020c) recently discussed the origin of distillation and he advocates for a later dating for its development than that generally accepted. The issue is, however, certainly worthy of further study.

and agreeableness (*asecanakattā*).³⁸ What is the cause of this? The seed, monks, is good.³⁹

This account, locating grapes in moist soil (*allāya pathaviyā*), parallels an evidence of the *Arthaśāstra* which situates grapes, together with other plants, close to the bank of a river, in flood areas.⁴⁰ This, notably, complies either with what we know as being a potential natural habitat for wild grapes⁴¹ or as a potential sign that the domestication process had already begun.⁴² The passage also refers to “rice,” which is significant if one takes into account Julia Shaw’s recent archaeological research on the interactions between Buddhist monasteries and the landscape, and the development of irrigation systems for agricultural purposes.⁴³ We do

³⁸ According to the PED, *asecanakatta* is defined through the term *anāsittaka*, which, according to the CPD (s.v. *anāsittaka*), means “where nothing needs to be poured into, needing no condiment.” The implied meaning is something along the “condition of not needing any adulteration.”

³⁹ *sammādiṭṭhikassa bhikkhave purisapuggalassa yañ c’ eva kāyakammaṃ yathādiṭṭhi-samattaṃ samādinnaṃ yañ ca vacikammaṃ...pe... yañ ca manokammaṃ yathādiṭṭhisamattaṃ samādinnaṃ yā ca cetanā yā ca patthanā yo ca pañidhi ye ca saṅkhārā sabbe te dhammā iṭṭhāya kantāya manāpāya hitāya sukhāya saṃvattanti. taṃ kissa hetu? diṭṭhi hi bhikkhave bhaddikā ti. seyyathāpi bhikkhave uccubijaṃ vā sālibijaṃ vā muddikābijaṃ vā allāya pathaviyā nikkhittaṃ yañ c’ eva pathaviraṣaṃ upādiyati yañ ca āporasaṃ upādiyati sabbaṃ taṃ madhurattāya sātattāya asecanakattāya saṃvattati. taṃ kissa hetu? bijaṃ bhikkhave bhaddakaṃ (AN I 32; cf. AN V 213).*

⁴⁰ “Where foam strikes [is good for growth] of creeper fruits; fringes of flood areas [are good for] long pepper, grapes (*mṛdvīka*) and sugarcane” (*phenāghāto valliphalānām, parivāhāntāḥ pippalimṛdvīkokṣūṇām*; AŚ 2.24.22).

⁴¹ “[*Vitis Vinifera* L. subspecies] *Sylvestris* grapes also occur in some more xeric woodland areas in the Near East arc and (in some localities) in Central Asia. Here, however, the vines are usually confined to gorges and to the vicinity of streams” (Zohary 1996: 22; square brackets mine).

⁴² “The first exploitation of *vinifera* would most likely occur in areas where the wild vine was part of the native flora. Two requirements were uppermost for grapevine domestication: a dependable source of water (if not naturally provided, then suitable for irrigation), and protection of the vine from grazing animals, principally goats and sheep. The first requirement was best met at fairly high elevations in mountain valleys where perpetual streams were fed by melting snows from very high mountain ranges during the summer” (Olmo 1996: 35–36).

⁴³ E.g., concerning the archaeological site of Sanchi, Julia Shaw preliminary wrote: “Massive irrigation dams were also discovered, datable to c. 2nd century BC by *in situ* pottery and associated sculpture. Preliminary hydrological analysis suggests a connection with the introduction of new agrarian patterns based on wet-rice cultivation. This new data provides an empirical basis for assessing the link between Buddhism and agrarian systems

indeed know from the much later travel reports (*Dà Táng Xīyù jì* 大唐西域記; T 2087) of the Chinese pilgrim Xuánzàng 玄奘, who in the seventh century CE travelled along the Silk road up to India, that in many countries (especially in the north) there was the cultivation of grapes.⁴⁴ Besides, he tells us that the religious actors in the ancient Indian religious environment, which is thus composed of wandering ascetics (Pāli: *samaṇa*; Sanskrit: *śramaṇa*) and the so called *brāhmaṇas*, were used to drink grape juice.⁴⁵ Over the centuries, there is therefore consistency in finding grape juice as a prominent beverage among *śramaṇas* (a general term for “ascetics” which also includes Buddhists). Interestingly, in Xuánzàng’s account, the grape and sugar cane juices of religious actors seem to be presented as the alcohol-free version of the high-class drinks of the *kṣatriyas* (Sanskrit; = Pāli: *khattiya*), the Indian warriors’ cast, since the intoxicating substances associated with them are based on grapes and sugar cane.⁴⁶ This fact prompts us a reflection. Among the social classes occurring in the Pāli texts, the foremost is that of the

of production in ancient India” (2000: 776). For a thorough discussion, see Shaw 2007, whereas a more recent one is Shaw 2022. Similarly, Buddhist communities were involved in the management of water and irrigation for agricultural purposes at Bir-kot-ghwandai (Barikot); in this regard see Olivieri and Vidale 2006: 131–136.

⁴⁴ See the references to “grape*” in the English translation made by Li (1996: 16, 17, 21, 22, 54, 71, 320, 323, 330).

⁴⁵ “*Śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* drink grape (葡萄) and sugar cane (甘蔗) juices (漿), [these] are not considered intoxicants” (沙門婆羅門飲葡萄甘蔗漿, 非酒醴之謂也; T2087.51.0878b05–06). Concerning this passage, Jeffrey Kotyk suggests in his blog that Buddhists might have drunk wine and sugar cane alcoholic beverages, avoiding to call them alcoholic drinks, so as to not break the prohibition of drinking intoxicants (<http://huayanrang.blogspot.com/2014/12/did-buddha-permit-grape-wine.html>, accessed December 28, 2023). In doing so, he understands the word *jiāng* 漿 as indicating a generic “drink” or “beverage.” It might be so, as we do know that juices can slightly ferment (see above § 3 and Appendix) albeit we are currently unable to determine the alcohol content of the beverages involved. Sticking to the text, it seems to me safer to regard these drinks as juices, which were “not considered intoxicant,” and if they were alcoholic, that is something we could not know.

⁴⁶ “Thus, there are intoxicants of many different tastes, distinctive liquid substances [for each group]. Grape and sugar cane [intoxicants] are for the *kṣatriyas* to drink” (若其酒醴之差滋味流別。* 葡萄甘蔗剎帝利飲也; T2087.51.0878b03–04). Notably, according to McHugh (2021d: 213) drinks from grapes and sugarcane, called in Hindu Brahmanical texts respectively *madhu* and *sīdhu*, are forbidden to *brāhmaṇas* but allowed to *kṣatriyas*.

warriors which is usually listed first, thus implying its superiority (n.b. the Buddha was a *khattiya*).⁴⁷ As suggested above, the Buddhist eight drinks of the Pāli *Vinaya*, as quoted in the *Kathāvatthu*, seem to be connected to convivial occasions and social situations in which monks and laymen had to interact and consume food together. Thanks to Xuánzàng’s account, we can add a piece to the puzzle since it suggests that some juices – such as that from grapes – might have held a social prestige. *Śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* drink as good as the highest caste, positing themselves on the same social level without violating religious norms.

Thus, considering the naturalistic descriptions of grapes’ habitat in Pāli texts and *Arthaśāstra*, in addition to Xuánzàng’s accounts which report the presence of grapes and grape based drinks, we might wonder whether these accounts might be considered as reliable testimonies of some sort of diffusion of grapes (bearing in mind that northern regions were somewhat favoured in growing grapes or in their wild presence).⁴⁸ This could be significant because where there are grapes there is also the possibility to have grape wine, but where can this be found in our Pāli texts? I argue, grape wine can hide within macro-categories.

4. A note on *surā* and *meraya* in Pāli sources

The Theravāda rule against drinking intoxicants is among the offences that require expiation once broken (*pācittiya*) in the *Pātimokkha(-sutta)*, a text that consists of a collection of 227 rules for monks and 331 for nuns, embedded and fully explained in the *Vinaya*’s section called *Sutta-vibhaṅga*.⁴⁹ In this ancient formulation, the drinks (*pāna*) referenced are two: *surā* and *meraya*. From their explanation in the *Vinaya*, it is clear

⁴⁷ See Ellis 2019: 59–60.

⁴⁸ We find in the Chinese translation of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (*Āpīdámó dà pípōshā lùn* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論) made by Xuánzàng that “In the northern states, poor people drink grape intoxicants, in the other states even a rich person cannot attain it” (北方貧人飲葡萄酒，餘方富者亦不能得; T1545.27.0060c04–05). However, we do not know precisely which states are included in this generic indication of “north.” Notably, one of the oldest vinicultural areas of the world is actually believed to be the Hindu Kush, see Spengler et al. 2021.

⁴⁹ On the *Pātimokkha*, see von Hinüber (1996: 9–12; 1998) and Kieffer-Pülz (2020–2021: 157–161).

they are not two specific beverages, but rather seem to be two umbrella terms to cover a wide range of drinks:

“In drinking *surā* and *meraya* there is [an offense requiring] expiation (*pācittiya*).”

“*Surā*” means the *surā* derived from flour (*piṭṭha*), from cake (*pūva*), from cooked rice/cereal mixture (*odana*), from having thrown yeast (*kiṇṇa*), the one prepared with herbal additive (*sambhāra*).⁵⁰

“*Meraya*” means the intoxicating extract (*āsava*) taken from flowers (*puppha*), fruits (*phala*), honey (*madhu*), sugar/molasses (*guḷa*), the one prepared with herbal additive.

“Would he drink (*piveyya*)” means he drinks even just [an amount which is like] the tip of a blade of grass, it is an offense that requires expiation.⁵¹

This description of the *surā* is in accordance with its early attestation as a grain-based product, far from the later account by *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* in which the *surā* is described as threefold, including drinks based on jaggery and *madhu* (perhaps grape wine) (McHugh 2021d: 205). These latter are implied in the *Vinaya* account through the term *meraya*. For our purposes, it would seem the so called *phalāsava* “intoxicating extract from fruits” represents the best candidate to embed the grape wine. Our guess appears to be confirmed by the late commentary of Buddhaghosa written in the fifth century CE:

The intoxicating extract from fruit (*phalāsava*) is made from the juice of the fruits of grapes etc. (*muddikāphalādāni*), after they have been crushed. The *madhvāsava* is made from the natural/genuine juice (*jātirasa*)⁵² of

⁵⁰ In the translation of the term *sambhāra*, I followed McHugh (2021d: 217). An example of what *sambhāra* can be is provided by McHugh (2021d: 51).

⁵¹ *surāmerayapāne pācittiyān ti. surā nāma piṭṭhasurā pūvasurā odanasurā kiṇṇapakkhittā sambhārasaṃyuttā. merayo nāma pupphāsavo phalāsavo madhvāsavo guḷāsavo sambhārasaṃyutto. piveyyā ti antamaso kusaggena pi pivati, āpatti pācittiyassa* (V in IV 110).

⁵² See PED s.v. *jāti*, in which similar meanings appear for *jāti* as the first member of a compound and which designates opposite meanings to those of “artificial” and “adulterated.” In our context, this detail is quite significant since in Indian literary sources the “authenticity” of wine as a pure substance and not mixed with anything else is a characteristic often exalted. In this regard, the Pāli use of *jāti* can be compared with later uses of *sahaja* (McHugh 2021a: 136–137; 2021d: 254–255).

grapes (*muddikā*); [some] say it is also made from bees' honey (*makkhikāmadhu*).⁵³

In the above exegetical clarification, grape wine occurs in the explanatory definition of two terms: *phalāsava* and *madhvāsava*. Concerning the first, we can say that we are quite lucky to have found a reference to grapes, given that the text implies a list of fruit, but only lists the first item. The word *ādi* at the end of a compound often indicates a list of things that starts with the element conveyed by the word attached to *-ādi*, in this case, the “fruits of grapes” (*muddikāphala*). We might wonder whether the grapes listed first might be an indicator of its pre-eminence among fruits, perhaps bolstered by a growing diffusion as that conjectured above (§ 3).⁵⁴ Concerning the *madhvāsava*, it would seem that the commentary here provides a new reading when it states that it is a drink made by the pure juice of grapes (*muddikānaṃ jātirasena kato*). Considering the root text in the *Vinaya*, we may note how all the compounds are X-*āsava*, where X is the element from which the intoxicating extract (*āsava*) is made; this is a *tatpuruṣa* compound in which the first member determines the second. In following the commentarial reading of *madhu* as a sort of “grape wine” we should read “an *āsava* which is *madhu*,” but this would be a *karmadhāraya* compound since *madhu* would be not processed to be transformed in an *āsava*, it is not the original substance from which the *āsava* is made but qualifies it. Further, it is unlikely that the root text is indicating the same drink through two different names. However, this forced interpretation is nonetheless significant since it might be symptomatic of the growing importance of grape wine. The interpretation of *madhvāsava* as an intoxicating extract made from bees' honey seems to be the safest reading;⁵⁵ while there are not many reasons to doubt that among the intoxicating extract from fruits (*phalāsava*), there

⁵³ *phalāsavo nāma muddikāphalādīni madditvā tesaṃ rasena kato, madhvāsavo nāma muddikānaṃ jātirasena kato, makkhikāmadhunā pi kariyāti ti vadanti* (Sp IV 859).

⁵⁴ I am referring here to the evidence provided by the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* as discussed by McHugh (2021d: 37).

⁵⁵ Notably, *madhvāsava* in the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 5.58.5) seems to be similarly read as an intoxicating extract from honey, see McHugh 2021d: 48, 61, 213.

was that from grapes since a very early period.⁵⁶ In light of this, we might wonder whether the specification occurred in the *Vinaya* in a specific context that *madhu* means “honey” (*madhu nāma makkhikāmadhu*; Vin III 251) is due to the fact that the ambiguity of the term *madhu* had already come into being.

All in all, it appears that when comparing the ancient *Vinaya* root text with its later exegesis, the presence of grapes and grape wine is not only made more explicit but is also forcibly inserted. Therefore, we are facing a situation in which *madhu* acquired a strong meaning closer to the grape wine than to the honey-mead. This would definitely make sense if we would consider a geographical area like that of Gandhāra, in which Harry Falk (2009) argued there was Buddhist involvement in the production and perhaps consumption of grape wine, whereas it is a little more striking to find it in a work composed in Sri Lanka, such as a Pāli commentary. Explanatory reasons could be many. First, we should consider that Pāli commentaries were not written from scratch, but were based on older materials and, generally speaking, the act of commenting was part of the Buddhist attitude since the very beginning (Norman 1997: 149–150). This means that even if the version of the actual Pāli commentaries was redacted in Sri Lanka, the information they embedded could have come from the Indian mainland. Second, we should consider that Buddhist communities were not isolated entities without connections to each other as the Pāli version of the *Milindapañha* would demonstrate, a text most likely composed in Gandhāra and originally written in Gāndhārī which then travelled from north to south. What if something more than texts travelled from Gandhāra through a sort of Buddhist network?⁵⁷ Lastly, as

⁵⁶ In this regard, it is worth noting that in some later texts we have grape wine described through the term *āsava*, such as in the *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṅgraha*, in which there is a reference to a “Kāpiśāyana *āsava*” (McHugh 2021a: 135), or in the *Mānasollāsa* in which the “juice of grapes” (*mṛdvīkārāsa*) is called *drākṣa-āsava* (*drākṣa* also means “grapes”) (McHugh 2021d: 54). Compelling to our discussion, there is also a reference in the *Mahābhārata* of a *madhu* that came from fruits (*phalajaṃ madhu*; MBh 2.47.11), and so was most likely wine since honey was regarded as the product of bees (McHugh 2021d: 54).

⁵⁷ The idea of a Buddhist network through which the *Milindapañha* travelled has been recently sustained by Ooi (2022: 70–71 and n. 12), on the basis of the works of Cousins (2001) and Wynne (2018). Notably, according to Salguero “It was not only texts. Also circulating widely across Asia were Indian medicinals” (2015: 43).

already highlighted by McHugh (2021a: 116–119), from a certain period (approximately, around the turn of the common era) there is an increasingly consistent use of *madhu* in Indian texts as a term to indicate “grape wine”⁵⁸ and, so, our case would be part of the same tendency, which would be pan-Indian and well-established at the time of redaction of the actual Pāli commentaries, whose redaction certainly retained connections with the mainland.⁵⁹ Thus, it would be interesting to find in Pāli texts a clear use of *madhu*, specifically meaning our grape wine.

5. A fascinating occurrence of *madhu* in the *Milindapañha*

In searching for ambiguous *madhus*, we can consider an interesting occurrence in the *Milindapañha*, the “Questions of Milinda.”⁶⁰ The context is that of a simile presented by the monk Nāgasena to the king Milinda in the midst of a debate on the existence of an entity that can be defined as a “knower” (*vedagū*), viz. a sort of soul, capable of experiencing the outside world. However, according to Buddhism, there is no soul who knows the world (the so called *anattan* doctrine), but the experience of reality is the result of a process and requires certain elements to be involved. For example, the eye or the faculty of sight (*cakkhu*) must come into contact with a visible object (*rūpa*), and only then a vision-consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*) will be produced. However, if the part of the body capable of receiving the sensory stimulus were in some way blocked, the sensory information could not be retrieved, there could not

⁵⁸ McHugh especially states that in discussing the *Arthaśāstra* passage and suggesting that it “may well be the earliest attestation of the word in that sense” (2021a: 118). However, he recognises former occurrences of wine in other guises: “we now have enough references to grapes and wine to state they appear in the Indic textual record a few centuries BCE. The words most commonly used in this period are of the *mṛdvikā* form, and, typically, grape *drinks* are mentioned” (McHugh 2021a: 119). Early occurrences of grapes in Indian literature were also discussed by Kimura (1961).

⁵⁹ As Oskar von Hinüber ([2013/2014] 2015: 356–358) highlights, not only was Buddhaghosa, the initiator of the actual Pāli commentarial tradition, of South Indian origin, but also some of the people (three monks and one layman) who requested Buddhaghosa to compose the commentaries on the four principal Nikāyas had connections with South India.

⁶⁰ Adopting the title translation of Rhys Davids (1890).

be an entity able to use other sense-doors to know the sense-object in the outside world. Out of this debate, the following simile given by Nāgasena arises:

“Suppose, sire, some man had a hundred jars of honey [*madhu*] brought to him, had a vessel filled with honey and, covering (another) man’s mouth, should cast him into the vessel of honey – would that man know whether the honey were sweet or not?”

“No, revered sir.”

“Why not?”

“Because the honey could not get into his mouth, revered sir” (Horner 1969: 78; square brackets mine).⁶¹

The simile aims to empirically demonstrate that if the mouth is closed and a substance cannot reach the tongue, a person would not be able to know the taste. Hence, there would not be an internal entity known as the “knower” capable of perceiving the outside world through any one of the remaining bodily openings. The substance involved is the so called *madhu*, which is translated by Horner as “honey,” a rendition already adopted by Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1890: 88). However, this interpretation is not supported by the Chinese translation of the *Milindapañha*, the so called *Nàxiān bǐqiū jīng* 那先比丘經 (T 1670 versions A and B), the “Sūtra of the Monk Nāgasena,”⁶² which provides us with an alternative reading:

Nāgasena said, “It is as if a person buys delicious/sweet (*měi* 美) wine/liquor (*jiǔ* 酒) and places it in a large vase (*dàqì* 大器). Promptly, he shuts a man’s mouth and plunges him upside down into the wine to let him taste the wine. Then, could that man know the wine’s taste?”

The king replied: “The man could not know it!”

Nāgasena said: “Why would he not know its taste?”

⁶¹ *yathā, mahārāja, kocid eva puriso madhughaṭasataṃ āharāpetvā madhudoṇiṃ pūrāpetvā purisassa mukhaṃ pidahitvā madhudoṇiyā pakkhipeyya, jāneyya, mahārāja, so puriso madhu sampannaṃ vā na sampannaṃ vā ti? na hi bhante ti. kena kāraṇē ti. na hi tassa, bhante, mukhe madhu pavīṭṭhan ti* (Mil 56).

⁶² The translation of *jīng* 經 as “sūtra” is based on the observations already expressed in De Notariis 2022: 112–113 and n. 5.

The king replied: “[The taste] would not enter the mouth and would not come over the tongue, therefore he would not know the taste.”⁶³

In this version of the passage, the substance involved is definitely not honey, but something defined as *jiǔ* 酒, a Chinese term that indicates intoxicant drinks in general terms.⁶⁴ The occurrence of the term *měi* 美 (“sweet,” a translating term for the Indian *madhu* or *madhura*) close to *jiǔ* 酒 (美酒) might prompt us to suspect, *prima facie*, that the original Indian formulation was something along *madhvāsava*. However, considering the absence of *měi* 美 in the other occurrences of *jiǔ* 酒 and its function in another compelling passage that we will read soon, it would seem safer to read it as just “delicious/sweet.” Yet, the conundrum of how to read *jiǔ* 酒 still remains, given that it can potentially indicate many kinds of intoxicating substance. One of them is certainly our grape wine, a drink that the Chinese version B of the *Nāxiān bīqiū jīng* 那先比丘經 is clearly aware of in a section describing the city of Sāgala (= Chinese: *Shèjié* 舍竭):

At the edge of the market, various and delicious (*měi* 美) rice soups were sold to the hungry ones to satiate them, and assorted grape (*pútáo* 葡萄) wine (*jiǔ* 酒)⁶⁵ to the thirsty ones to quench their thirst; there was an unspeakable joy.⁶⁶

This passage suggests to us that the grape wine (*pútáo jiǔ* 葡萄酒) was part of the geographical context in which the text was composed, and thus could potentially be an available intoxicant. As a side note, we may highlight how the word *měi* 美, in referring to the rice soups, means “delicious.” Thus, turning again to the interpretation of *jiǔ* 酒 in the former simile, we can advance an argument from the field of linguistics. The current opinion concerning the original composition of the Buddhist text extant in Pāli – widely known as *Milindapañha* – and in two Chinese

⁶³ 那先言：“如人沽美酒著大器中。急塞一人口倒置酒中令啗酒。其人寧知酒味不？”王言：“其人不知！”那先言：“何以故不知味？”王言：“未入口到舌上，故不知味。”(T1670B.32.0713a05–08).

⁶⁴ On the etymology and meaning of *jiǔ* 酒, see Tursi 2022: 2–5; Xie 2022: 517–527.

⁶⁵ Former translations as those of Demiéville (1924: 92) Guang (2007: 125) and Anālayo (2021: 123) already detected this grape wine occurrence.

⁶⁶ 市邊羅賣諸美羹飯飢即得食，渴飲葡萄雜酒樂不可言。(T1670B.32.0705b08–09).

versions – known as *Nàxiān bǐqiū jīng* 那先比丘經 – is that it was originally written in Gāndhārī.⁶⁷ Therefore, assuming an archetypical Gāndhārī formulation of the simile we read in Pāli and Chinese, we should find a term that can justify the two renditions we found, viz. *madhu* and *jiǔ* 酒. The safest solution is to infer a Gāndhārī underlying word along the attested *masu*,⁶⁸ which indicates grape wine, especially in the Nīya documents.⁶⁹ *Masu* understood as “wine,” especially that from grapes, can explain both renditions: the Chinese adoption of the general term *jiǔ* 酒 to indicate an intoxicating drink, and the Pāli term *madhu* (literal equivalent of *masu* with the Pāli phonetic).

6. Conclusion

In our search for grape wine, we have to admit that grapes are certainly easier to trace than the widely known alcoholic drink made from them. But, at least potentially, when there are grapes, there is also the possibility to have wine, especially if we consider that “[i]n ancient, early, and later medieval India, people – those who drank, that is – produced and consumed a huge variety of alcoholic drinks, possibly more than in any other world region” (McHugh 2021d: 44). In such a context, it would be reasonable to assume that an exquisite source of sugars, like grapes, would hardly escape from the Indian brewing-ethos emerged in McHugh’s studies. But then, where is the grape wine in early sources, especially those Buddhist in Pāli? To answer, I want to put forward a simile. Let us think about two trees, one stands in a desert and the other in a forest. The first stands out against the desolate landscape, while the second would be hidden among the multitude of trees, hardly distinguishable from the mass, like a drop in the ocean. This second situation is that which we find in ancient Indian literary sources, before the emergence of specific terms denoting “wine” specifically. What was wine before being “wine”? This question implies a tacit assumption, namely that

⁶⁷ A list of bibliographical references is provided in De Notariis 2022: 118, n. 17.

⁶⁸ S.v. *masu* in DG.

⁶⁹ “Though, Gāndhārī *masu* is only attested in this sense in texts from Nīya, *not* the Gandhāra region itself” (McHugh 2021a: 122, n. 35). In this regard, this evidence from the *Milindapañha* would be quite compelling.

things exist even before we bestow them a name, a discriminative action which aims to individualise a thing and separate it from an indeterminate mass. This should coincide with the growing importance that a thing has gained in the mind of the speakers. Thus, we might discuss some conclusions reached by James McHugh, namely that “[i]n ancient India, grape wine was assimilated into a pre-existing, varied drinking culture. Unlike other drinks, wine was made elsewhere, and varieties were named after foreign sources” (2021a: 137). A point well stressed in McHugh’s works is that wine was an imported, and so a somewhat exotic, product. However, I argue, we must consider at least a further possibility, namely that what was exotic was not the alcoholic beverage extracted or produced from grapes, but its prestige. Wine as a notable drink is associated with exoticism, since in the Indian context other drinks were much more widespread and easier to brew due to the greater availability of their needed *materia prima*. Wine was also producible from dried grapes and molasses, two derived products from fresh grapes which are not hard to trade.⁷⁰ In Pāli texts we found references to grapes and grape juice, a sign that grapes had to be somehow available. That being the case, how can we combine the idea that the wine was imported and the grapes were available? We can, if we assume that the imported wine was a “quality wine,” so much so that it started to be named metonymically by its place of production (in a way no different from what happens today for some renowned wines, think of Italian Valdobbiadene or Chianti). Foreign wine was held in high esteem, as it was produced by professional wine-makers, whereas local wine was one among the many intoxicating extracts made from fruits, just like a tree in a forest. By way of comparison, we might note that in the case of juices, there was a similar process of production, that is to say grapes did not receive a special treatment but followed that of the mango juice: “grape drink (*muddikāpāna*) is the drink made like mango drink, after having squeezed (*madditivā*) the

⁷⁰ “[G]rapes are a copious source of sugar that need processing when they ripen, or they will eventually rot. This might mean producing raisins, wine or cooked-down must. These storable forms of stabilised grape sugars are also suitable for trade. To make wine, you need grapes, fresh or sometimes partially dried, to increase sugar. It is also possible to dilute and ferment grape concentrate/syrup. It is also possible to use raisins that have been reconstituted in water” (McHugh 2021a: 132).

grapes in water” (*muddikapānan ti muddikā udake madditvā ambapānaṃ viya katapānaṃ*; Sp V 1102). Notably, it seems that this passage implied fresh fruit and not dried grapes or molasses.⁷¹ Similarly, it might be that the ancient Indian wine was one among the many intoxicating extracts made from fruit (*phalāsava*), without any exceptional status. As such, it could be also used as an ingredient for a more complex and mixed drink like the *meraya*, a composite beverage that according to the Pāli *Vinaya* can actually be made of intoxicating extract from fruits. If that were the case, we can say that there was wine in ancient India, albeit it was not “wine” in our sense of the term. As time goes by, we find grape wine emerging from the literary records as a distinct drink and often presented as foreign. The latter aspect is stressed by McHugh who regards it as a key point to understand the grape wine status in ancient India, just as when he states that “even if some wine was made within India, it was still often presented as foreign, as demonstrated throughout this article” (2021a: 132, n. 91). McHugh’s observation that the wine was imported does not necessarily contradict the hypothesis of an indigenous production. Acknowledging that wine was not considered a special drink and assuming that it suffered from an amateurish brewing, we might well justify its absence or low-key profile in ancient sources (even if the grapes were either cultivated or present somewhere in India and some sorts of wine produced). Further, it is not just plausible, but perhaps even likely, that the wine produced instead by specialised countries or areas acquired prestige and was regarded in high esteem. Even today, if we consider the whole gamut of wines, we have cheap and low-quality wines that are almost undrinkable and are barely fine to use for cooking (just as when one simmers with wine)⁷² or to mix with other alcoholic beverages,⁷³ while there are some wines regarded as high-quality that are

⁷¹ The same implication can be read at Sp IV 859.

⁷² This is allowed also in the Pāli *Vinaya* since the use of intoxicants is permitted when cooking broth (*sūpasampāka*) or meat (*maṃsasampāka*) (Vin IV 110).

⁷³ As a former Italian student, I know quite well that bartenders often tend to prepare Spritz with low-quality prosecco for students in university areas since the other ingredient (being it a bitter like Aperol, Campari or Select) is quite strong in taste and so mostly covers the wine taste, making the use of a good wine superfluous since its refined qualities would be anyway lost. In such a context, no one would use a well-known wine since high-profile wines are usually drunk unmixed.

extremely expensive and bear a well-known name. This is especially true if we consider that the contexts in which we have found grapes in our sources were not always connected to enjoyable aspects, but rather practical, such as those medical. Thus, we advanced the hypothesis that the medical context might have served as a sort of Trojan horse that increased the use and presence of grapes in India. If we would believe Aśoka, that plants and fruits with a medical use were imported and planted in India, then this event leaves open the possibility that this also happened for grapes. Medical knowledge was regarded by Buddhists as one of the “bestly arts” (*tiracchāna-vijjā*), a set of practical knowledges which were open to foreign influences, especially those from the West as is the case for the attested Mesopotamian and Greek influences. Although the Mesopotamian civilisation is known for its consumption of a grain-based alcoholic drinks similar to beers,⁷⁴ it nonetheless made use of grapes, apparently using the fruits as a sweetener, rather than producing grape wine.⁷⁵ This situation is similar to that reflected by our Pāli references to grapes. Therefore, it is plausible that Buddhists adopted quite early grapes to produce one of their eight allowed juices and, as Harry Falk (2009) has argued, in Gandhāra were also involved in the production of wine; it is but a short step. If a sort of Buddhist network allowed the diffusion of grapes and wine, then this is something worthy of further analysis in the future (n.b. the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasārvāstivādins suggests a diffusion from north “to Buddhist temples [located even] to the ends of the earth”). Certainly, the social use of the grape juice advanced in the present article could bolster the hypothesis that there was a sort of wine consumption early in the past, since if the Buddhist juices might be regarded as the alcohol-free counterpart to the elites’ intoxicant drinks, it might be that one of them was a sort of wine. Furthermore, if grapes were available to produce juice, they could also be used to make wine. A central role in the diffusion of wine in the Indian social context may have been played by the influence exerted by the Greek symposium on

⁷⁴ By way of comparison, we might note a similar status for the grain-based *surā* in ancient Indian culture.

⁷⁵ See Powell 1996 as quoted by Miller: “Mesopotamian texts of the third and second millennia support the view that their vineyards produced grapes for fruit, not wine” (Miller 2008: 944).

Indian social male gatherings (Zysk 2021b), which took place in a period that effectively coincides well with the emergence of the use of the term *madhu* in Indian literary sources. Thus, the use of *madhu* as indicating grape wine in the Pāli *Milindapañha* is certainly among the first uses of the term with such a meaning and a clear indication that such a use broke into Pāli literature. Fundamental to detecting such a meaning for *madhu* has been the comparison with the Chinese version of the *Milindapañha* known as *Nàxiān bǐqiū jīng* 那先比丘經, a text that clearly indicates that in an archetypical version of the passage at stake, the word *madhu* was an intoxicating drink.⁷⁶ Since such a drink was probably called *masu*, the best interpretation of the kind of drink it was seems to be our coveted grape wine. Thus, in an attempt to answer to the question put in the introduction, namely “Where is grape wine in early Pāli literature?,” we can at least point to a direct reference to grape wine, albeit we know that the *Milindapañha* is not among the earliest Pāli texts.⁷⁷ Our records are much more explicit concerning the references to grapes and grape juice. However, if grape juice was important enough to end up on a list of eight beverages, grapes could not be so scarce or considered an overly exotic fruit. The lack of a direct reference to wine may be due to the fact that Buddhist texts are not interested in a taxonomic listing of all alcoholic beverages, but, for their purposes, the use of macro-categories is sufficient, namely those of *surā* and *meraya*. Clearly, ancient India did not have a democratic drinking culture based on wine, a fact that prompts us to exclude a large-scale production of grapes and wine. However, a small-scale production cannot be ruled out, but rather seems to be a good interpretative line to explain the existence of grape based products prepared from fresh fruits, such as those attested in Buddhist sources. Therefore, we might advance a working hypothesis for future studies, namely that

⁷⁶ The fact that the Chinese translations of Buddhist texts convey an implicit exegesis is something already argued by Zacchetti (1996: 357–358), whereas on the usefulness of Chinese texts to translate some Pāli words, see Kuan 2019.

⁷⁷ There is an earlier canonical reference to the *madhu-pītā* “*madhu*-drinkers” occurring in verses at Thī 54–56 and SN I 212, although it seems hard to establish with any certainty whether *madhu* in that context indicates “grape wine” or “honey-mead.” In this regard, see McHugh 2021a: 118, n. 16.

the cultivation of grapes was pursued in Indian gardens,⁷⁸ being them artificially created places in which exotic plants could be accommodated (and so special care and a proper irrigation system can be assumed).

Eventually, it might be interesting to note how within the Pāli texts there is an articulated language connected to the culture of drinking that even creeps into the culmination of the path of liberation, in which the mind is freed from intoxicating mental influxes called *āsava*.⁷⁹ Even if, it has been argued that the original concrete metaphor on which the concept of *āsava* is based was something along “outflow,” “discharge” or “pus” rather than our intoxicating drinks,⁸⁰ the *āsavas* are nonetheless described by the commentarial literature as sort of negative mental states (*dhamma*) that when stay or dwell for a long time are like intoxicating drinks left to ferment for a long time,⁸¹ their extinction is even equated with the attainment of the *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*) (Sv I 224). Therefore, recalling once again the Buddhist involvement in the production of wine envisaged by Falk (2009) in Gandhāra, we cannot but appreciate the paradoxical situation we are facing once we compare data from

⁷⁸ “Gardens clearly served several purposes for the early Indian élite. One function which will not be taken up in this essay is their provision of various objects for either consumption within the household or exchange in local markets. Plant products, including fruits, flowers, leaves, sap and bark, had a variety of culinary, medicinal, cosmetic and decorative uses” (Ali 2003: 223). Notably, Schopen (2006) well highlighted as there was a sort of assimilation between Buddhist monasteries and gardens.

⁷⁹ A recent study on various versions of the Buddhist path in Nikāyas and Āgamas is provided by Gethin (2020).

⁸⁰ In this regard, see Schmithausen (1992: 123–129, esp. n. 91), who quotes some interesting Japanese scholarship.

⁸¹ “In the world, [people] call ‘*āsava*’ intoxicating drinks (*madirā*) etc., which have fermented for long time (*cirapārivāsika*). And if by the [implicit] meaning of ‘staying for long time’ are [called] *āsava*, these [*ete*, viz. *dhamma* ‘mental states’] are also worthy of being [called *āsavas*]” (*lokasmiṃ hi cirapārivāsikā madirādayo āsavā ti vuccanti. yadi ca cirapārivāsikaṭṭhena āsavā ete yeva bhavitum arahanti*; As 48 = Ps I 61, Mp II 183, It-a 114, Paṭi-a I 37, cf. Ud-a 94). The passage plays on the compound *ciraparivāsika*, which literally refers to something that “dwells for a long time” and, so, in the case of intoxicating drinks most likely refers to the act of “fermenting,” which gives to the drink the power to intoxicate and so to contaminate the natural state of a human being. Similarly, if negative mental states dwell in a human being, its natural state can be affected negatively. The Buddhaghosa’s awareness of the double meaning of *āsava* is also highlighted by McHugh (2021d: 305, n. 37), quoting the above passage. See McHugh 2021d: 47–50 for a discussion on *āsava* in Indian sources.

different fields. Looking at the literary tradition from a different perspective, beyond the doctrinal precepts, one sees a lived life that transpires from the texts, made up of material culture and sociality. Intriguingly, we might have had members of Buddhist clergy in different times and spaces, or perhaps even coexisting, who tried to extinguish their inner *āsavas*, others who brewed them and some others who drank them. Thus, hoping to have stimulated thirst for further research on these topics as we began, so we conclude: cheers!

Appendix: A compelling evidence from the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya and the fermentation of juices

The Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* (*Móhē sēngqí lù* 摩訶僧祇律; T 1425) provides us a compelling passage on forbidden intoxicants which also mentions the grape wine. Nattier and Prebish (1977) considered such text to be the earliest *Vinaya*, although the question is still open within the scholarship (e.g. Cousins 1992: 48 and n. 45, and Kieffer-Pülz 2020–2021: 168). Nonetheless, we can regard the following account as one of the earliest records and, notably, it includes the grape wine:

Drinking intoxicants from grains (*gǔ jiǔ* 穀酒; viz. *surā*) and intoxicants from sugar[-base] (*shímì jiǔ* 石蜜酒; viz. *meraya*) is [an offense requiring] expiation (Sanskrit: *pāyattika* = Pāli: *pācittiya*), drinking an intoxicant from grapes (*pútáo jiǔ* 葡萄酒) is a transgression of the *Vinaya* (越毘尼罪 = Sanskrit: *vinayātikrama*).⁸²

The first intoxicant seems to unproblematically correspond to the Indian grain based drink widely known as *surā*, while the second intoxicant is variously interpreted by the DDB (s.v. *shímì jiǔ* 石蜜酒) pointing to interpretations that include “honey or sweetness” (*madhu*) and “sugar” (e.g. *phāṇita*, *guḍa*, *śarkarā*). In my opinion, it corresponds to the *meraya* (= Sanskrit: *maireya*), a composite drink made from a sugar base (cf. McHugh 2021b). It is worth noting that, according to the DDB, *maireya* is commonly translated in Chinese as *mùjiǔ* 木酒 and *mǐlǐyé* 迷麗耶 (or *mǐliyé* 迷隸耶), the latter being an attempt to resemble the Indic

⁸² 飲穀酒石蜜酒波夜提, 飲葡萄酒越毘尼罪 (T1425.22.0387b17–18).

pronunciation. None of these Chinese translations of *maireya* occur in the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* (T 1425). My reading would suggest that this is a Chinese version of the *pācittiya* rule against intoxicants attested also in Pāli: *surāmerayapāne pācittiyaṃ* (Vin IV 110; see the discussion above at § 4). However, the Pāli rule does not openly include grape wine. Therefore, to support such a reading of the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*'s passage, it is worth noting that in a text of the Sarvāstivāda *Abhidharma* known as the *Āpídámó fǎyùn zú lùn* 阿毘達磨法蘊足論 (= **Abhidharmadharmaśāstra*; T 1537) there occurs a list of three kinds of intoxicants which would present us virtually the same list of three beverages, namely *surā*, *meraya* and grape wine: “The term ‘variety of intoxicants’ refers to *sùluó* 窣羅 (*viz. surā*), *mílíyē* 迷麗耶 (*viz. maireya*), and *mòtuó* 末沱 (*viz. madhu*).”⁸³ The translation of the intoxicating drinks’ names is clearly an attempt to resemble the original Indian pronunciation. The text itself later specifies that *madhu* indicates the grape wine: “The term *mòtuó* 末沱 refers to the intoxicant [made from] grapes (*pútáo* 葡萄).”⁸⁴ Thus, we have virtually found the same threefold list of intoxicants in which the grape wine is added to *surā* and *meraya*. Notably, in the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* context, the degree of violation for drinking grape wine is less severe (on the *vinayātikrama* versus *pāyatika*, see Heirman and De Rauw 2006: 61 and nn. 13, 14) and so we can wonder why? My hypothesis is that the wine can be drunk by accident, while the other two intoxicating drinks cannot. In the case of the grain-based *surā*, we have already read in the Pāli *Vinaya* how juices made from cereals were forbidden (Vin I 256). Moreover, we do know that the *maireya/meraya* was a drink made of many ingredients, it should be assembled. Therefore, both drinks cannot be drunk by accident. Conversely, grape juice was allowed and we do know that juices stored at atmospheric temperature in India would ferment pretty quickly. Perhaps, for this reason there is a rule in the *Vinayamāṭṭikā* (*Pínímǔ jīng* 毘尼母經; T 1463) that seems to prevent the consumption of fermented juices:

The Buddha said: “I allow to press and squeeze [the fruits] to obtain the juice that by the first watch of the night can be drunk. If not [drunk] by the

⁸³ 言諸酒者謂：窣羅酒，迷麗耶酒，及末沱酒 (T1537.26.0458a02–3).

⁸⁴ 言末 * 沱者謂葡萄酒 (T1537.26.0458a07–8).

first watch of the night [viz. the juice lasts all the night (or maybe more)] the juice's flavour becomes different, bitter and intoxicating. It cannot be drunk, indeed."⁸⁵

A mention to this passage also occurs in the *Sifēnlǜ shānfán bǔquè xíngshì chāo* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (T 1804) of Dào xuān 道宣, and the part relevant for our discussion is translated by Pettit as: “But if the juice is left out at night and forms a bitter alcohol, he or she is not permitted to drink it” (2017: 135). In summary, there seems to be recognition that juices can ferment and this can justify the fact that drinking grape juice is judged as a less severe violation by the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*.

Primary sources and abbreviations

All Pāli citations are from Pali Text Society editions, unless otherwise noted.

AN	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
AŚ	<i>Arthaśāstra</i> (see Kangle 1960)
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i> (= <i>Dhammasaṅgaṇi-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
CPD	Critical Pāli Dictionary (see Trenckner et al. 1924–2011)
DDB	Digital Dictionary of Buddhism (http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb/)
DG	A Dictionary of Gāndhārī (https://gandhari.org/dictionary)
DOP	Dictionary of Pāli (see Cone 2020)
It-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> (<i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Ja	<i>Jātaka</i>
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
MBh	<i>Mahābhārata</i> (see Sukthankar 1933–1959)
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i> (<i>Aṅguttaranikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Nidd I	<i>Mahāniddesa</i>
Nidd-a I	<i>Saddhammapajjotikā</i> (<i>Mahāniddesa-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Nir	<i>Nirukta</i> (see Sarup 1967)
Paṭis-a	<i>Saddhammappakāsini</i> (<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
PED	Pali-English Dictionary (see Rhys Davids and Stede [1921–1925] 2015)
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i> (<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
SED	Sanskrit-English Dictionary (see Monier-Williams 1899)
SN	<i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i>

⁸⁵ 佛言：“聽捺破取汁至初夜得飲。若不至初夜汁味有異成苦酒者。不得飲也” (T1463.24.0817b16–18).

Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā (Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsini (Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> (大正新修大藏經). Digital edition. (https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php?lang=en)
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Ud-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī (Udāna-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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