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Fausbøll and the Pāli Jātakas

by *Elisabeth Strandberg*

In 1879 the University of Copenhagen celebrated the 400th anniversary of its foundation by among other things conferring the degree of doctor honoris causa on a number of academicians. Among these was Viggo Fausbøll. The very same body of scholars who decided to honour Fausbøll in this way had a few months earlier voted against his candidature for the chair of Indology; it was due to the fortunate interference of foreign specialists that Fausbøll was after all appointed professor. One might therefore rather say that this appointment forced the Danish University administration to confer the degree on Fausbøll; he had not taken the chance of presenting any Pāli study for the Ph.D. The lack of a thesis from his hand is unimportant in view of the fact that his appointment to the chair enabled him to produce a series of pioneering editions of Pāli texts, which won him an indisputable position among the great Indological scholars of the world. Had the vote of his Danish fellow academicians prevailed, Denmark would have been without its most prominent Indologist. The much contested appointment to professor was only the last in an almost uninterrupted series of obstacles which Fausbøll had had to overcome to be able to realise the dream of his life: editing the Pāli Jātakas. One might even say that the more Fausbøll succeeded in his work, the harder the obstacles became. Since very little is known to the scholarly world about these things, a contribution to this chapter of the history of the research is presented here.

In spite of the many scientific and economic problems involved, Fausbøll had already in the fifties of the last century set his mind on the idea of editing the Pāli Jātakas. He had only one manuscript at his disposal, the one which Rasmus Kristian Rask had brought to Denmark from Ceylon some thirty years earlier. Fausbøll's teacher in Indology, Niels Ludvig Westergaard advised him to begin with an easier and more manageable project; Fausbøll followed his advice and the result was his edition of the *Dhammapada*.¹

The general recognition which he won by this work enabled him to secure financial support for a longer stay in London. From 1858 to 1860 he studied the Pāli manuscripts of the British Museum and the Royal Asiatic Society.

After his return to Copenhagen he continued his Pāli studies and by 1872 had published altogether 18 Jātakas.² His working conditions had improved slightly in 1861 when he was appointed as assistant in the University Library. Until then he made his living by giving lessons in secondary schools, his qualifications being a B.D. degree. And yet, Indology remained a spare time occupation for him.

In 1873 Fausbøll was ready to start on his complete edition of the Jātakas. Professor Childers had secured copies of a Sinhalese manuscript to compare with Fausbøll's, the London publishers Trübner and Co. had declared themselves willing to bear the cost of printing of at least the first part and, finally, the Danish government had granted 500 Rigsdaler³ as its contribution. At this stage Fausbøll appealed for further help to the Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters as below,

The publication will according to the estimates of the printer comprise 166 sheets, vide the enclosed sample printed with three sizes of types corresponding to the three different parts of the text (prose, verse, and commentary). I hope to be able to produce one volume of 16 sheets a year and thus bring the work to a completion within 10 years. Due to the big size of sheet I have chosen and the compressed way in which the text will be printed, each sheet will according to the estimates of the printer contain almost twice as much as an ordinary octavo sheet hitherto used by me; thus the sum granted to me by the government will give me merely 15 Rigsdaler per sheet. This is the reason why I dare to apply to the high Academy for further support.⁴

The Academy agreed to support Fausbøll's project with a sum of 300 Rigsdaler.

In 1877 Fausbøll finished the second and third part and summed up his position in the new application to the Academy thus:

The first part of my project was received with general acclaim both in the French, English and German scholarly world. (Professor Weber in Berlin called it 'eine fundamentale Leistung'). Since then I have finished the preparation of the second and the third parts (14 1/2 + 17 1/2 + 15, in all 47 printed sheets). The publishers have not withdrawn from the project, neither has the Ministry of Education. The embarrassment caused by the death of Professor Childers was overcome by the help

offered by M. Feer at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; he is willing to compare my Jātaka text with the Paris copy. The Buddhist priest Subhuti goes on sending me copies from Ceylon; this summer a missionary in Further India, Mr. Chard, seeing from my preface that I was in need of copies to compare, sent me via the English Resident in Mandalay a Burmese copy of the Jātakas. . . I took the liberty to mention these things in order to show that my endeavours have won support even at places from where I did not myself expect it. My deferential supplication to the Royal Academy of Sciences is therefore that it may grant me a similar support for parts two and three as it did for part one.⁵

What precisely happened to Fausbøll's application is not clear from the material preserved; yet, two drafts of letters from Fausbøll to Westergaard as given below throw some light on it. Westergaard was the head of the Academy committee appointed to decide on the fate of Fausbøll's application and his project.

To Westergaard who insisted on interpreting the Academy's report's use of the word 'volume' of the Jātakas as meaning 'two parts', I wrote the following letter to remind him of my application which must have been forgotten although it was composed in accordance with his own advice.

(Here follows a verbatim repetition of the wording of the technical details as given in the application of 1873). To this passage about his rigorously economising lay-out Fausbøll adds:

You (Westergaard) remember that everything which I did at that time was in agreement with your advice. Each sheet contains 24 quarters of pages of the manuscript. It takes me at least *30 hours* to rewrite it with variants. The reading of this takes *6 hours*. The proof reading must take, I am sure, at least *10 hours*. The Danish Society pays *25 Rigsdaler* a sheet (even for reprints), the . . . society pays *30* and the projected journal. . . is thinking of paying as much as *80 kroner*. Yours sincerely V. Fausbøll. Had the Academy kept my application apart it would have realised that there was no need to make an inquiry concerning the meaning of part and volume as long as the section, which it paid for, contained approx. 16 sheets in accordance with the enclosed sample.⁶

It is not known whether Westergaard replied to this embittered reminder. The fact is in any case that Fausbøll did not receive any support for his project at that advanced stage; it is all the more surprising when one considers the fact that the Academy willingly helped Fausbøll to start it.

In June the following year Fausbøll appealed to the Berlin Academy for support. His petition started with a summing up of the situation of his project:

Messrs Trübner in London hitherto took care of the publishing of the *Jātakassa Atthavaṇṇanā*, the Pāli work which I have started to edit. The firm, however, let me know that it will be forced to discontinue the publishing due to the slow sale of the first volume. The firm estimates that the cost of all five volumes will be £750. I would be very sad if my project had to be suspended, not merely because I have worked on it for thirty years; it is indeed with regret that one sees one's life's work lost, but especially because of the great importance of this Pāli work.

Fausbøll adduces four points to strengthen his argument. The *Jātakas* are valuable for

1. the depiction of social life in India in the Buddhist period. . .
2. its role in the history of world literature, esp. fables and tales. . .
3. the detailed exposition of the theory of the transmigration of souls. . .
4. its contribution to the knowledge of Pāli, that rich and hitherto practically unknown language.⁷

As a result of Fausbøll's various appeals, the editor could report to Trübner in October 1878 that he had secured a subvention of 1000 Marks from the Berlin Academy and £200 from the India Office Library.

In the meantime Professor Westergaard had died and as many as five applicants were interested in succeeding him. They were Fausbøll, B.D., assistant in the University Library, Vilhelm Thomsen, Ph.D., docent extraordinary in Nordic Philology, Ludvig Wimmer, Ph.D., specialist in Runology within Indo-European Comparative Philology and finally Edvard Brandes, B.A. and Søren Sørensen, B.D.

Thomsen and Wimmer applied at a stage when the University thought of turning the chair into a chair of Indo-European Comparative Philology, an idea which was, however, abandoned. The letters and drafts of letters preserved from these five applicants show that the intrigues among them were many and complicated. A merciless war of nerves was declared against Fausbøll by his opponents. The details, painful as they are, will be passed over.

Westergaard himself had already made it clear earlier in the year that he considered Sørensen as his likely successor, keeping at the same time his own close personal friend Wimmer interested in the chair.

Wimmer encouraged Fausbøll to withdraw, arguing that Pāli formed only part of Sanskrit Philology and that his qualifications therefore lacked width. Fausbøll replied by underlining that Pāli is part of Indian Philology.⁸

The Ministry of Education asked the Faculty of Humanities for an evaluation of the applicants; a majority of 6 voted for Wimmer as successor to Westergaard, whereas 5 preferred Fausbøll. A minority represented by Professor Johan Nicolai Madvig was against giving preference by vote to the applicants, mainly because Wimmer and Thomsen were members of the Faculty Board, while the other applicants were not. Fausbøll's closest supporter, Professor August Ferdinand Mehren, was prevented from giving his vote, being held back by illness in Italy. He reported to another member of the Faculty—and presumably to the Ministry—that the news of Westergaard's death reached him while he was taking part in the congress of Orientalists in Florence. Professor Weber of Berlin took this opportunity to pronounce it as his opinion that it would be only fair to make Fausbøll Westergaard's successor, because of the scholarly fame Fausbøll had won as the pre-eminent specialist of Pāli. Professor Mehren endorsed this standpoint, being well aware of the objections concerning Fausbøll's limited specialisation.⁹

Finally, a letter dated April 1879 from Fausbøll to Weber bears witness to the debt which Fausbøll owed to Weber:

I seize this opportunity (of recommending a Danish student) to thank you for your kind words about me to Professor Mehren. I do not doubt that they have had a share in my getting the professorship after Westergaard. I hope it will interest you to learn that the second volume of my Jātaka is finished. . .¹⁰

The Ministry of Education had thus decided to follow the opinion voiced by the minority of the Faculty, and appointed Fausbøll as Westergaard's successor, referring to the importance of Fausbøll's special field of studies and the incontestable reputation which it had won him abroad.¹¹

To Fausbøll's credit we may add that once the tension was over, he was able to joke about the drama and did his best to help his less successful competitors. To Fr. Hammerich, his first teacher of Sanskrit, he promised from then on

to work as if Death had already seized a tuft of my hair.¹²

Fausbøll's income was 3.500 kroner a year. When learning that his friend from Lund University in Sweden, E. Edgren, had gained the chair in Nebraska (with the help of Whitney) with a salary of 10.000 kroner a year, he entreated Edgren to find him a similiar tidbit.¹³

S. Sørensen was actively supported by Fausbøll in his ambitious *Mahābhārata* project, of which the index is still being used to this day.

When finally in 1886 Wimmer gained the chair of Nordic Philology, Fausbøll congratulated him; a few years later Fausbøll made a final comment on the whole affair in these words:

I agree with you when you stress how fortunate it was for both of us that I, and not you, got Westergaard's chair, not because I got the best of it on that occasion, but because I am afraid that if the issue had been different, two human beings would have been ruined; it would have been definitely all over with Runology and Nordic Philology in your case. . . Furthermore it would hve been all over with Pāli studies in my case. I would most probably have lost energy and died a slow death. Thank God that things went the way they did.¹⁴

In 1888 after the completion of volume four of the *Jātakas*, Fausbøll was awarded the Bopp prize by the Berlin Academy. In 1890 he was appointed an honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society. In the years 1881 to 1894 Fausbøll had translated and edited the *Suttanipāta*¹⁵ and finally in 1897 his goal was reached, *the complete edition of the Jātakas in seven volumes*.¹⁶ His production comprises also a book on *Indian Mythology*¹⁷ in 1902 and a whole series of publications in Danish on Danish Folklore and popular literature, thematically in line with the Buddhist *Jātakas*. Towards the end of his life Fausbøll became almost blind from more than fifty years of work with palm leaf manuscripts.

In 1879, on the occasion of the conferring of the honorary doctor's degree, Fausbøll was invited by the University to write his biography. When looking back on his life Fausbøll considered his stay in England the richest period in his life.

The English are right (he concluded) when they claim that there is a world of a difference between the English and continental principles. Everything essential in England has its source in the individual and aims at the individual whereas on the Continent it is the state, the society which occupies this double function.¹⁸

Fausbøll completely avoided Copenhagen's social life; he was characterized¹⁹ as a quiet, modest, most pleasant and equally endearing

learned old scholar, shunning publicity but enjoying world recognition, when he retired as professor in 1902 at the age of 81. He died six years later.

NOTES

1. *Ex tribus codicibus Hauniensibus Palice edidit, Latine vertit, excerptis ex commentario Palico notisque illustravit V. Fausbøll, Copenhagen 1855.*

2. Five Jātakas, containing a Fairy Tale, a Comical Story, and Three Fables. In the Original Pāli Text, with a Translation and Notes, Copenhagen 1861.

Two Jātakas. The original Pāli Text, with an English Translation and Critical Notes. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, December 1870.

The Dasaratha-Jātaka, being the Buddhist Story of King Rāma. The Original Pāli Text with a Translation and Notes, Copenhagen 1871.

Ten Jātakas. The Original Pāli Text with a Translation and Notes, Copenhagen 1872.

3. In 1873 100 Danish Rigsdaler = 200 Danish Kroner were worth £ 11 sterling.

4. NKS 3871,4°, Autumn 1873. All the letters and drafts quoted belong to the manuscript department of the Royal Library, Copenhagen.

5. NKS 3871,4°,05.12.1877

6. NKS 3871,4°,31.12.1877

7. NKS 3871,4°,07.06.1878

8. NKS 3871,4°,02.10.1878

9. Add 1013,4°,12.11.1878, to J.L. Ussing.

10. NKS 3871,4°,14.04.1879

11. National Archives of Denmark, Copenhagen:

Allerunderdanigst Forestilling om Besættelsen af det ledige Professorat i den indisk-orientalske Philologi og Literatur, Ministeriet for Kirke- og Undervisningsvæsenet, 10.12.1878

12. NKS 3871,4°,23.12.1878

13. NKS 3871,4°,01.01.1885, to E. Brandes.

14. NKS 3871,4°,03.05.1888

15. *The Sutta-Nipāta, a Collection of Discourses, being one of the Canonical Books of the Buddhists. Translated from Pāli. Oxford 1881, Sacred Books of the East, vol. X, part 2. 2nd Edition, revised, 1898, ibid. The Sutta-Nipāta, being a collection of some of Gotama Buddha's dialogues and discourses. Part I. Text, 1884; Part II. Glossary, 1894, Pāli Text Society, London.*

16. The Jātaka together with its Commentary, being Tales of the anterior Births of Gotama Buddha. For the first time edited in the original Pāli. Vol. I, Copenhagen 1875–1877; Vol. II–VI, 1879–1896; Vol. VII: Index to the Jātaka and its Commentary, containing a complete Index of Proper Names and Titles, together with a List of the introductory Gāthās and an Index of Parallel Verses, by Dines Andersen. Copenhagen 1897. Postscriptum by V. Fausbøll, pp. I–XII.

17. *Indian Mythology according to the Mahābhārata in outline. London 1902.*

18. *Levnedsbeskrivelser af de ved Københavns Universitets 400Aarsfest promoverede Doktorer, Copenhagen.*

19. *The Copenhagen paper Illustreret Tidende, 30.03.1902.*