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How to Deal with Dangerous and Annoying Animals: A *Vinaya* Perspective

Ann Heirman

Centre for Buddhist Studies, Ghent University, Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium; ann.heirman@ugent.be

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Abstract: Against the background of guidelines on non-killing and developing ideas on the release of captured or domesticated animals, this study focuses on how *vinaya* (disciplinary) texts deal with dangerous and/or annoying animals, such as snakes, mosquitoes, and flies. Are there any circumstances in which they may be killed, captured, or repelled? Or should they be endured and ignored, or even protected and cherished, at all times? This paper discusses the many guidelines relating to avoiding—and, if necessary, chasing away—dangerous and annoying animals. All of these proposals call for meticulous care to reduce the risk of harming the creature. In this sense, animals, such as snakes and mosquitoes, seem to be assured a better life in comparison with domesticated or hunted animals. This distinction reflects the somewhat uncomfortable balance that Buddhist monastics must achieve between respecting the life of individual sentient beings, including all animals, and adhering to social conventions in order to safeguard their position in society.

Keywords: *Vinaya*; Buddhist normative texts; monks (*bhikṣus*); animals; insects

1. Introduction

One of the key concepts of Buddhism is the notion of non-killing, which has been extensively addressed in philosophical, as well as normative texts. With normative texts I refer to disciplinary texts that define the standard behavior expected of Buddhist monastics. Major debates have dealt with what killing or non-killing implies, with most attention paid to ending the lives of sentient beings—human beings and animals—rather than plants. However, that does not mean that all living creatures are treated equally, or that there are no differences between the killing of humans and animals, or indeed large and small creatures. Furthermore, since the concept of non-killing is connected to the idea of non-harming, subsequent questions arise regarding the extent to which living creatures—and especially human beings—are responsible for the lives of other sentient beings. Should a person help when an animal is in danger? Should they release a captured or domesticated animal?

Against this background of the concepts of non-killing and non-harming, this paper focuses on what disciplinary texts (*vinaya* texts) have to tell us about how Buddhist monks (*bhikṣus*) and nuns (*bhikṣuṇīs*) should behave when confronted with dangerous and/or annoying animals. In addition, it discusses the difficult balance monastics have to deal with when confronted, on the one hand, with ethical issues, such as non-killing and non-harming, and, on the other hand, with socio-economic realities they are expected to accept, such as lay ownership of animals. This research focuses on early Indian Buddhist disciplinary texts from various traditions, which provide the basis for monastic guidelines in the contemporary Buddhist world. The core text of each monastic tradition is a set of rules (*prātimokṣa*) that is introduced and discussed in detail in explanatory chapters, known as *bhikṣu-* and *bhikṣuṇīvivhaṅgas*. In addition to the *vivhaṅgas*, other chapters—traditionally known as *skandhakas* or *vastus*—contain long expositions on procedures, as well as numerous short guidelines on many aspects of monastic life. Taken together, the *bhikṣu-* and *bhikṣuṇīvivhaṅgas* and the *skandhakas/vastus* constitute what is generally termed “a full *vinaya*.”

During the long development of the *vinaya* rules, various traditions—each defined by its own *vinaya*—came into being. There are many similarities between these *vinayas*, but they sometimes exhibit remarkable differences in terms of practices or the interpretation of and attitudes toward those practices. Six full *vinayas* survive to this day, five of them in Chinese translation.¹ The sole exception is the Pāli *vinaya*, which is extant only in the Pāli language.² In chronological order of translation, the five Chinese *vinayas* are as follows:³ the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (*T* no. 1435, 23; Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*); the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (*T* no. 1428, 22; Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*); the *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (*T* no. 1425, 22; Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*); the *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (*T* no. 1421, 22; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*); and the *Genbenshuoyiqieyou bu pinaiye* 根本一切有部毘奈耶 (*T* nos. 1442–1451, 23–24; Yijing’s 義淨 (635–713) translation of large parts of the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*).⁴ The first four of these *vinayas* were translated in the fifth century CE, whereas Yijing translated the fifth much later, at the beginning of the eighth century. In the interim, however, a number of influential Buddhist masters had promoted the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律), and it became the principal reference point for monastic discipline in China from the eighth century onwards.⁵ Similar to the Chinese masters, I have used the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* as my main source of reference, while pointing out any relevant differences in the other *vinayas*.

As I discussed in a study on monastic bodily care (Heirman and Torck 2012, pp. 10–13), it would be wrong to consider *vinaya* texts as first-hand accounts of actual monastic practice.⁶ It is impossible to ascertain what exactly happened in each and every monastery. On the other hand, *vinaya* texts certainly merit attention. The objects mentioned in the *vinayas* must have been known to their compilers/authors, but also to their readers and wider society. The same could be said for the ideas and practices relating to those objects, which reveal the ways in which monastic masters wanted Buddhist practitioners to behave. Therefore, although the *vinaya* texts might not always express what monastics and lay people actually did or even believed—so one must be careful not to interpret them as direct reflections of historical reality—they do provide valuable information on practices that were at least imaginable and possibly familiar to their readers.

Indeed, the *vinaya* texts serve as a dual source of information. On the one hand, the disciplinary rules provide readers with a normative basis, an ideal monastic setting, defining the Buddhist community. To quote Shayne Clarke (2009a, p. 36), “Indian Buddhist monastic law codes provide us with rich insights into how the canonical authors/redactors, the monastic lawmakers, envisaged the Indian Buddhist experience.” On the other hand, the same texts include numerous references to objects and practices that Nattier (2003, pp. 63–69) terms “incidental.” Given that these rarely form part of the author’s primary agenda, we can have considerable confidence in their informative value. As mentioned above, at the very least, readers must have been able to imagine these items and how the monks and nuns used them, so they offer interesting insights into daily life in India at the beginning of

¹ Apart from these six *vinayas*, the chapter for nuns (*bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*) of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins is extant in a transitional language between Prākṛit and Sanskrit (Roth 1970, pp. lv–lvi). It has never been translated into Chinese.

² The first written version of this *vinaya* is said to go back to the first century BC in Sri Lanka (cf. Kieffer-Pülz 2000, p. 286). A Theravāda *vinaya*, also written in Pāli, was translated into Chinese at the end of the fifth century, but the translation was never presented to the emperor and was subsequently lost (see Heirman 2004, pp. 377–78; 2007, pp. 190–92).

³ The Chinese titles of the *vinaya* texts show considerable variety in the way they are composed. Some traditions have specific Chinese titles, as in *Shisong lü* 十誦律, *Ten-Recitation Vinaya* (*vinaya* of the Sarvāstivāda school) and *Sifen lü* 四分律, *Four-Part Vinaya* (*vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka School). By contrast, the title *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 is based on a transliteration of the name Mahāsāṃghika followed by *lü* 律 (*vinaya*). *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (the *vinaya* of the Mahīśāsaka school) is composed of *Mishasai* (in all probability a transliteration of Mahīśāsaka), *bu* (school), *hexi* (exact meaning unclear), *wufen* (in five parts—a Chinese reference to the *vinaya* of the Mahīśāsakas), and *lü*. Finally, *Genbenshuoyiqieyou bu pinaiye* 根本一切有部毘奈耶 is a literal translation of the title *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I have followed the convention of referring to each *vinaya* by the name of its tradition. For further details, see (Yuyama 1979; Clarke 2015).

⁴ A Tibetan translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*, as well as many sections written in Sanskrit are also extant. For details, see (Yuyama 1979, pp. 12–33; Clarke 2015, pp. 73–81).

⁵ See, among others, (Heirman 2007, pp. 192–95).

⁶ See also, among others, (Schopen 2004, pp. 1–3).

the Common Era, even though, as Nattier acknowledges, the lack of archeological evidence and an inability to locate the texts precisely in time and space inevitably limit the scope of our research.

Nevertheless, taking into account the *vinaya* guidelines on non-killing and evolving ideas on the release of captured or domesticated animals, we can learn a great deal about how monastic members of the Buddhist community, in their exemplary role, were encouraged to behave when confronted with dangerous and/or annoying animals, or with uncomfortable social exigencies. Are there any circumstances in which animals may be killed, possibly in self-defense? May they be captured or repelled? Or should they be cherished or at least protected at all times? Which tools and equipment, if any, should be used to deal with them, and in what way? Or should all animals simply be endured and/or ignored?

2. Non-Killing

All of the *vinaya* texts strongly condemn killing and clearly state that someone who purposefully deprives another person of life commits a *pārājika* offense—the most serious monastic offense, which is usually punishable by loss of monastic status.⁷ Moreover, this respect for life is extended to animals, although the *vinayas* consider killing an animal to be a lesser offense than murdering a human being:

If a *bhikṣu* deliberately breaks off the life of an animal, he commits a *pācittika* [an offense that needs to be expiated].⁸

若比丘故殺畜生命者，波逸提。

(Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, pāc. 61, T no. 1428, 22: 16.677a24–25)

The introductory story for this rule tells us that the honorable Kāḷodāyī did not like crows, so he killed many of them with a bow and arrow. He then made a pile of the birds in the monastery, much to the indignation of the local community. The monks were accused of not having kind hearts (*ci xin* 慈心; T no. 1428, 22: 16.677a5), because they should not deliberately kill an animal or compel someone else to kill one. By contrast, monks do not commit an offense if they *unintentionally* crush or stand on small insects (*xi xiao chong* 細小虫). Clearly, then, intention is a crucial factor in this story,⁹ because killing an animal unintentionally is not an offense.¹⁰

That killing an animal is a serious matter is also addressed in two passages in the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*. In the first passage (T no. 1421, 22: 28.184a29–b1), a monk is greatly troubled after killing

⁷ In non-Pāli traditions, a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* may be permitted to retain a minor position within the *saṃgha* (monastic community) after committing a *pārājika* offense; see (Clarke 2000, 2009a). On remaining a monk, albeit in another monastery, see (Clarke 2009b). For a recent critical response to Clarke’s hypothesis, see (Anālayo 2017). On atonement for *pārājika* offenses in China, see (Greene 2017).

⁸ A *pācittika* (or variants) is an offense that needs to be expiated through confession; it can be followed by some institutional measures taken against the offender (cf. Heirman 2002, pp. 141–47). Killing an animal is a *pācittika* offense in all five of the other *vinayas*, too: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin IV, pp. 124–25; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, T no. 1421, 22: 8.58a15–b9; Mahāsaṃghika *vinaya*, T no. 1425, 22: 19.377a26–378a26; Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1435, 23: 16.110b28–111a26; Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1442, 23: 40.847c18–848a16. Ohnuma (2017, pp. 15–16), in her work on the perception of animals in Buddhism, suggests that there is a clear distinction between human beings and animals in Buddhist ethics, because killing the latter is a lesser offense than killing the former. To my mind, this conclusion is indeed applicable to *vinaya* texts. On the superiority of human existence in comparison to that of animals, see also (Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi 2009, pp. 84–104).

⁹ On the role of intention and the degree of unwholesomeness in actions, see, in particular, (Harvey 2000, pp. 52–58). Harvey explains that “a bad action becomes more unwholesome as the force of volition behind it increases, for this leaves a greater karmic ‘trace’ on the mind” (p. 52). In that sense, as Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi (2009, pp. 55–56) point out, killing a large animal is worse than killing a small one, because the effort involved is more substantial. However, this distinction is not made in the *vinaya* passages on dangerous and annoying animals, so I shall not discuss it further here. For an interesting take on deliberate slaughter in a Tibetan context, see (Childs 2005, pp. 1–3).

¹⁰ By contrast, Jains are said to consider even the unintentional killing of “one-sense” living beings (*ekindriya jīva*; on this term and violent actions against them, see Maes 2010, pp. 86–90) as equally harmful to the faith of the perpetrator. However, Granoff (1992, pp. 32–37) and Balbir (2000, pp. 26–29) both argue that the distinction between “intentional” and allegedly “unintentional” violence is invalid in a Jain context. Instead, the focus should be on ignorance, carelessness (which automatically involves intention and is as strongly reviled as the harmful act itself), and violence arising from passion (even if the act itself has not been committed).

a monkey, probably because he fears that this action equates to killing a person (on account of the fact that monkeys resemble people). The Buddha explains that killing an animal is a *pācittika* offense, rather than a *pārājika* offense, and therefore less serious than killing a human being. In this sense, the Buddha maintains the ontological distinction between a monkey and a human being, even though they resemble each other.¹¹ More open for discussion is the preceding story about a monk who throws a stone at a snake but hits and kills a person by mistake (*T* no. 1421, 22: 28.184a26–28). The Buddha explains that the killing of the bystander is not a [*pārājika*] offense, but the monk has still committed a *duṣkṛta*¹² ('bad deed', i.e., minor) offense, because he threw a stone at the snake (presumably with the intention of killing it). In a *vinaya* context, an attempt to kill that ends in failure constitutes a lesser offense than a successful attempt. In this case, the *vinaya* compiler seemingly counted down the offenses from *pācittika* (for killing an animal) to *duṣkṛta* (for trying but failing to do so).¹³

Intention is also a crucial factor when the *vinaya* texts address the consumption of meat. Obviously, meat-eating necessitates the death of an animal. However, the killing is not done by a member of the monastic community, but by lay people living in towns and villages where the monks and nuns beg for alms. Therefore, as is well known, a member of the monastic community may accept a gift that includes meat and eat it. Importantly, though, he or she must not see, hear, or even suspect that the animal was killed for the specific purpose of being presented to them. Again, then, intent is the main issue.¹⁴

Although killing an animal is a lesser offense than killing a human being, and some meat-eating is permitted, monks and nuns must be very careful to avoid harming any animals, even those that are tiny and barely visible. Intent is less of a focus here; what is more important is the appreciation of the fact that careless actions may harm or even kill an animal. Still, intent is not out of the picture. One can consciously choose to be more or less careful. Hence, the *vinayas* stress that every monk and nun must behave with great prudence at all times to minimize the risk of killing any living creature, including a flea or an ant.¹⁵ The detailed guidelines on the use of water are especially striking in this context. If a monk knows or suspects that a source of water contains small insects, he should not pour it out over mud (*ni* 泥; *mṛttikā*) or straw/grass (*cao* 草; *trṇa*), as this could harm the creatures (*T* no. 1428, 22: 12.646b27–647a2).¹⁶ Once again, any monk who disobeys this rule—and therefore commits a *pācittika* offense, because he has deliberately injured a living being—is accused of not possessing a kind heart (*ci xin* 慈心; 12.646b29). Causing small creatures unintentional harm, because one is not aware of them is not an offense, but all monastics are encouraged to check water for the presence of

¹¹ On this distinction, see, in particular, Ohnuma (2017), pp. 5–23.

¹² Lit. "a bad deed"—a minor offense (cf. Heirman 2002, pp. 148–49). Rules, such as these, do not incur severe institutional measures. They rather function as a warning.

¹³ A failure to commit a *pārājika* offense is commonly classified as a *sthūlātyaya* offense. The latter is still a grave offense, but less serious than a *pārājika*. Under certain mitigating circumstances, both a *pārājika* offense and a *pācittika* offense may be reduced to a *duṣkṛta* (see Heirman 2002, pp. 156–60). Since the intention here was probably to kill the snake, we may surmise that the *vinaya* compiler started to count down from a *pācittika* offense. See also the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1442, 23: 8.668b18–c12, which explains that accidentally killing a person while trying to kill a mosquito does not constitute a *pārājika* offense.

¹⁴ See, for instance: (Kieschnick 2005; Heirman and Rauw 2006; Greene 2016; Barstow 2018). In addition to meat-eating, the use of silk is a matter of debate, because it entails the killing of silkworms. See, in particular, (Young 2017).

¹⁵ Pāli *vinaya*, Vin I, p. 97 (monk); Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 17.120a28 (monk) and 29.188b22 (nun); Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 28.758a13–14 (nun), 35.815c3–4 (monk), 48.924b16–17 (probationer; *śikṣamāṇā*), and 48.925b27 (nun); Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1435, 23: 21.157a22 (monk), 45.326a21–22 (probationer), and 46.334a10–11 (nun). On the killing of ants, see also Schmīthausen and Maithrimurthi (2009), pp. 51–54). On the terminology and perceived behavior of ants in Indic (and particularly) Jain texts, see (Balbir 2003).

¹⁶ There are parallel *pācittika* rules in the other *vinayas*: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin IV, pp. 48–49; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 6.44c24–45a14 (which adds that water with insects is also used for washing and in food preparation); Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, *T* no. 1425, 22: 15.344c27–345a28 (which mentions other uses of water, such as washing); Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1435, 23: 11.79c3–29 (which states that monks who commit this offense do not have a compassionate heart (*lian min xin* 憐愍心) and thus clearly connects carefulness with compassion for all living beings); and Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1442, 23: 30.789b8–c5. Only the Pāli *vinaya* (Vin II, pp. 118–19) does not suggest straining the water to counter the problem, although it does advise the use of water strainers in another context.

insects, scoop out the larger ones gently with their hands (12.646c28–29), and then strain the water (*lu shui* 澆水; 12.646c29).

Another rule continues in the same vein: A monk commits a *pācittika* offense if he knows that water contains insects but drinks it regardless. Again, the monk should be punished, because he does not have a kind heart and has deliberately killed living beings. Instead of just drinking the water, he should remove large insects by hand and/or use a water-strainer (*T* no.1428, 22: 16.677b15–c15).¹⁷

In this context, it is hardly surprising that water strainers (*lu shui nang* 澆水囊) became important pieces of equipment in monastic communities, given that small creatures' lives may depend on their use. The Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 22: 52.954b10–17), for instance, stipulates that water should always be strained through a cloth and, if necessary, into a bottle. Moreover, if there is any suspicion that small insects might remain in the water, a very fine filtering bag (*sha nang* 沙囊) should be used to complete the straining process. Any insects that are removed in this way should then be placed in some water where they will come to no harm. Quite sophisticated instruments to filter water are also mentioned in the other *vinayas*, such as the Pāli *vinaya* (Vin II, pp. 118–19), which permits the use of a variety of strainers (*parissāvāna*), from a small piece of cloth to a large pot with a number of filtering pipes from which monks can extract water with a pitcher.¹⁸ If a strainer is unavailable, a monk may use a corner of his outer cloak. The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1421, 22: 24.173c1–2) and the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (*T* 1425, 22: 18.373a23–25) also advocate this technique, with the latter explicitly stipulating that the outer cloak should be used. The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* further specifies that a monk who ventures outside without a bag to strain water commits a *duṣkṛta*, and warns that one *bhikṣu* died of thirst, because he was unable to filter water that contained insects (*T* no. 1421, 22: 26.173b21–c2). A monk is allowed to disregard this rule and venture outside without a water strainer only if he plans to go no more than a short distance. The Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (*T* no. 1435, 23: 38.273a25–b8, 57.422c18–21) contains the same rule, but allows further exceptions if the water is clear, if there is a nearby river or other source of clean water, or if the monk is accompanied by a companion who does have a water strainer and is willing to share it.

The Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (*T* no. 1451, 24: 19.293b8–c4) explains how to attach a net (*luo* 羅) to a stick and use this contraption to filter water into a bottle. Interestingly, this *vinaya* also emphasizes that every effort should be made not to stress the insects during this process. The insects are trapped as the water flows through the net at high speed, so the Buddha suggests that some moist sand or cow dung should be deposited in the net prior to filtering to cushion the creatures. The net may be gently beaten with a small stick in the event of a blockage, and tiny insects that manage to pass through the strainer should be extracted with blades of grass. Furthermore, all of the captured creatures must be very carefully released from a storage vessel (*fangsheng qi* 放生器) into a water supply, such as a well. When pulling the vessel out of the water, special care should be taken to ensure that all of the insects have been released. If no vessel is available, a net may be used for the same purpose.¹⁹

The translator of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* added a lengthy explanatory note about this release vessel, because, as he mentions, while it was familiar to Indian people at the time, it was little known to the Chinese (*T* no. 1451, 24: 19.293c4–19). Yet, according to Yijing, it is impossible to obtain

¹⁷ There are parallel *pācittika* rules in the other *vinayas*: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin IV, p. 125 (on the interpretation of the rule, see also (Horner 1938–1966, vol. III, p. 3)); Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1435, 23: 14.97b6–29 (as above, this *vinaya* states that monks who commit this offense do not have a compassionate heart (*lian min xin* 憐愍心)); Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1442, 23: 37.828b15–c10; and Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, *T* no. 1425, 22: 18.372c18–373b24 (which warns monks not to drink at a donor's residence if they suspect that the water has not been strained; if necessary, they may strain the water themselves). Interestingly, the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (18.373b13–15) also mentions that a monk should think, "Enter the big sea"—that is, spur insects on to freedom—if the creatures have been washed away by excessive rainfall. All of the *vinayas* discuss other uses of water, such as washing; and all aside from the Pāli *vinaya* advise straining the water to counter the problem (see note 16).

¹⁸ For a brief description, see (Horner 1938–1966, vol. V, pp. 162–63).

¹⁹ The *vinaya* adds that a large cauldron may be used to filter a large volume of water (*T* no. 1451, 24: 19.293c27–294a4).

enlightenment (*wu you xiaowu* 無由曉悟)²⁰ without the use of such receptacles. He explains that every monk should carry a small vessel when begging in the lay community in order to scoop water out of a well, filter it, then return the trapped insects to the well. Within the monastery, a similar device may be left at the well, to enable the safe return of filtered insects. Yijing suggests that saving insects is the basis of Buddhist compassion (*ci bei* 慈悲), so this considerate act generates a lot of good karma and helps a monk to obtain rebirth in the “pure land” (*jing tu* 淨土). Nevertheless, he complains that only a handful of Chinese monastics bother to filter their water and asks how they can hope to transmit the Buddhist philosophy of compassion to lay people in light of that fact.²¹ When a butcher brings a sheep into the monastery, countless monks will attempt to save the animal’s life, and they are rightly praised for their compassion in lay society, yet they do not care what they kill when drinking water. Moreover, they do not care about the many creatures that die during agricultural work. This apathy has terrible consequences, because the careless monk might be reborn in hell, as a hungry ghost, or as an animal. Even if he is reborn as a human being, his life will be short and he will experience much suffering.²² These comments highlight intriguing links between Buddhism as it developed in India and the perception and gradual dissemination of the religion in China. Yijing frequently laments that his fellow Chinese monks do not follow the Buddha’s guidelines as they should,²³ but here he suggests that their negligence has even more serious consequences than usual, because they are condemning themselves to potentially terrible rebirths.²⁴

In any case, both the *vinaya* compilers and Yijing focus on the importance of preserving life in all its manifest forms, including small and seemingly insignificant animals. But what about when animals are dangerous or extremely annoying? Should their lives always be spared? Is one permitted to defend oneself or adopt measures that might harm other living creatures? One text, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1435, 23: 53.395b18–20), explicitly addresses the issue. It literally says: “Question: ‘[I]f a *bhikṣu* kills an evil animal or a venomous snake, and so on, he does not commit a *pācittika*, does he?’ Answer: ‘He commits a *pācittika*. If he kills other, good, animals, he equally commits a *pācittika*.’” The *vinaya* thus concludes that a *bhikṣu* commits a *pācittika* even if he kills an “evil animal or a venomous snake.”²⁵ But then how is he meant to protect himself against dangerous animals? And how should he deal with mosquitoes, flies, ants, bedbugs, and other annoying—although not necessarily life-threatening—creatures? Should he just patiently let them do whatever they want, or is he allowed to take some measures against them? But before we handle these questions, let us first have a look at the guidelines on releasing animals, often mentioned in a context of domestication, hunting and slaughtering.

²⁰ In *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸法傳, *Account of Buddhism Sent from the South Seas* (T no. 2125, 54: 1.208a12–b29), Yijing mentions that he witnessed Buddhist monks taking great care not to injure small insects when drinking water and describes the use of a strainer in detail. Interestingly, he also mentions that in China, in order to make such a strainer, fine silk may be used, a product that in fact involves the killing of many silkworms. For a translation, see Li (2000, pp. 29–32).

²¹ Stuart Young (2017) highlights this double argument—monastics should aim to adhere to the highest moral standards not only for personal reasons, but also because doing so helps them to achieve high social status and therefore spread the Buddha’s teaching—in his discussion on the use of silk in medieval Chinese monasticism.

²² Here, Yijing cites an “ancient text” (*gu jing* 故經). The Chinese master Daoshi 道世 (?–683) articulates a similar argument in his discussion of the killing of living beings in *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, *Forest of Gems in the Garden of Law* (T no. 2122, 53: 69.815b21–c2), where he cites the *Dichi lun* 地持論, a standard translation of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, which details the various stages that must be completed before enlightenment. I was unable to find the exact quotation in the extant Chinese versions of this text, although it is replete with discussions of karmic effects. For more information on this topic, see Pu (2014, pp. 12–14).

²³ Yijing routinely complains that Chinese teachers and disciples are far from assiduous in following the *vinaya* rules (T no. 2125, 54: 3.219b15–17). He therefore pleads for strict adherence, although he accepts that some deviations may be permitted in extreme circumstances (see Heirman 2008, pp. 266–71).

²⁴ On the awful karmic consequences of meat consumption, see, among others, Kieschnick (2005, pp. 193–208), and Heirman and Rauw (2006, pp. 62–71). On the doctrine of rebirth and its relation to attitudes toward animals, see, in particular, Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi (2009, pp. 78–84). However, the *vinaya* texts rarely attribute a specific karmic effect to any action.

²⁵ As Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi (2009, p. 54) point out, the (Mūla)sarvāstivāda school categorizes killing dangerous and annoying animals as “killing out of confusion (*moha*)” (see also Dessein 1999, Part I, p. 194).

3. Releasing Animals

As we saw in the previous section, the *vinaya* texts provide guidance on the release of some captured animals, namely insects trapped in water strainers. However, a more commonly debated topic in all of the *vinaya* texts is the release of domesticated animals, such as dogs and pigs, as well as animals caught by hunters.²⁶ In this context, exhibiting kindness toward the animals is frequently linked to stealing other peoples' property. Two stories from the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* illustrate this point well. In the first, a small dog (*xiao gouzi* 小狗子) is tied at a householder's gate. When a monk arrives at the house, begging for alms, the dog makes a sound. Out of kindness (*ci min* 慈悲), the monk releases (*jie fang qu* 解放去) the animal. Later, at another house, the monk has sex with a woman, because he reasons that he has already committed a *pārājika* offense by releasing the dog and thereby stealing it, so he might as well commit another.²⁷ However, the Buddha declares that releasing the dog was not a *pārājika* offense, even though the monk should have left the animal alone as it was someone else's property (*T* no. 1428, 22: 55.974a13–20).

In the second story, another monk arrives at a house where a young pig (*tunzi* 豚子) is lying in the mud. It makes a sound and the monk frees it (*chu fang qu* 出放去) out of kindness. Then, as in the previous story, he goes to another house and has sex. Again, the Buddha states that releasing the animal was not a *pārājika* offense, but the monk should not have done it (*T* no. 1428, 22: 55.974a20–26).

Therefore, in both stories, a monk releases an animal, assumes that this act equates to stealing (which is prohibited in the second *pārājika* rule), because the animal was someone else's property, then commits a subsequent *pārājika* offense (having sex with a woman), because he presumes that he will be punished anyway. However, while the Buddha discourages the release of animals, he declares that doing so is not an offense. It is not entirely clear whether his ruling is that no offense whatsoever has been committed, or whether he specifically means that the monks have not committed a *pārājika* offense, since on the one hand he says, "It is not an offense" (不犯), whereas on the other he adds, "One should not release another's dog" (不應放他狗子去) and (in the second story), "One should not do such a thing" (不應作如是事). Either way, the message is that monks should not release other people's animals, even though they may be motivated to do so out of kindness.

Furthermore, stealing animals is explicitly included in the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* explanatory commentary on the *pārājika* offense of stealing, irrespective of whether the animal in question has no legs or walks on two, four, or more legs. If the animal in question is someone else's property, and a monk intentionally takes it for himself, then he commits a *pārājika* offense (*T* no. 1428, 22: 1.573c13–14, 1.574c25–575a5).²⁸ However, it could be argued that releasing an animal is different from taking an animal with the intention of keeping it, which would explain why the Buddha does not consider the release of someone else's dog or pig to be a *pārājika* offense.²⁹

The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* also discusses the release of animals in the context of the *pārājika* offense of stealing. First (*T* no. 1421, 22: 28.183a7–12), it relates the story of a monk who sees a wild boar that is

²⁶ On the historical background of animal release, see, among others, Pu (2014), pp. 101–32).

²⁷ One may wonder why the monk decides to have sex. Why does he commit a second serious offense? The *vinaya* offers no answer. Maybe it shows the hopelessness of the situation as perceived by the monk. Since he obviously will be reduced to lay life he can as well go against the other (*pārājika*) rules that lead to exclusion from the monastic status. The other three rules (apart from stealing) concern sexual intercourse with a woman, killing a human being, and (as a monk) wrongly boasting about supernatural forces one claims to have. The latter two rules are not feasible, since killing is never allowed, and since he can no longer boast as a monk. So, the only option that also clearly identifies him as a lay person, is intercourse.

²⁸ Similarly, the Pāli *vinaya* (Vin I, p. 52), which does not provide more details in the *pārājika* section. See below for the other *vinayas*.

²⁹ In this context, it is interesting to note that the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* advocates the release of animals kept by monastics, but not on the basis of kindness. Rather, the reasons given are much more pragmatic. For instance, when some monks kept parrots (see, in particular, Ohnuma 2017, pp. 31–33; Chen 2018), the birds made a lot of noise and disturbed the meditation sessions, so the Buddha states that such birds should not be kept in captivity (*T* no. 1428, 22: 53.961a15–18). Similarly, dogs should not be kept in the monastery, because their barking may be distracting (*T* no. 1428, 22: 53.961a19–20). Finally, bears should not be kept as pets, because they might destroy the other monks' possessions or even attack them (*T* no. 1428, 22: 53.961a21–23).

struck by an arrow while standing in a field. When the hunter arrives and asks the monk whether he has seen the boar, the monk replies: “Where is the boar? Whose boar is it? There is no boar.” However, the monk then wonders if he has done the right thing. Has he committed an offense by refusing to disclose the boar’s whereabouts? The Buddha answers that the monk did not commit an offense (*bu fan* 不犯). He adds that it is fine to say “other things” (*yu yu* 餘語), not responding to the question of the hunter. He further clarifies: “There is no offense at all” (*jie wu zui* 皆無罪). It thus seems reasonable to suggest that, in this case, the monk did not commit any offense, because the boar did not belong to anyone yet. Moreover, he saved a life by withholding information from the hunter.

This conclusion is corroborated by the next story in the same *vinaya* (*T* no. 1421, 22: 28.183a12–15). A monk sees a hunter catching a deer and then tying it up and leaving it bound in the field. Out of sympathy (*lian min xin* 憐愍心), the monk releases the animal (*jie fang* 解放), but then wonders if he has committed a (presumably *pārājika*) offense. The Buddha says that he has not, but then adds, “one should not release someone else’s animals [lit. ‘things’] just like that” (然不應於他物方便放之).³⁰ Indeed, this constitutes a *duṣkṛta* (minor) offense. This story seems to suggest that no monk should ever deliberately release an animal that belongs to someone else (in this case the hunter), regardless of their sympathy for the creature. However, contravention of this rule is a minor rather than a serious offense.³¹

The Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* insists that stealing animals constitutes a *pārājika* offense.³² Interestingly, though, if a monk scolds the owner of a snake for keeping it in captivity and then opens the cage to allow it to escape, he commits a less serious *vinayātikrama* offense (*T* no. 1425, 22: 3.247b21–23).³³ Presumably, this ruling is based on the fact that the monk had no intention to steal the creature; rather, he freed it out of compassion.

Finally, both the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (*T* no. 1435, 23: 1.6b22–c20) and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (*T* no. 1442, 23: 4.646b17–c26) agree that stealing any animal—whether it has no legs, two legs (including birds and human beings), four legs, or more—always constitutes a *pārājika* offense. However, the former text adds that a monk who releases a domesticated animal with a “kind mind” (*kuai xin* 快心) commits only a *sthūlātyaya* offense (*T* no. 1435, 23: 52.381a23–25). In other words, the monk’s misdemeanor is less serious, because he had no intention to steal. Furthermore, if a monk should come across a stolen cow that the thieves have tied to a tree and releases it “out of kindness” (*lian min* 憐愍), he commits an even lesser—*duṣkṛta*—offense (*T* no. 1435, 23: 58.430c17–21). Presumably, the *vinaya* editors felt that this particular cow had no legitimate owner, so releasing it is only a very minor offense.³⁴

In sum, it is always unacceptable to release an animal that has an owner, although some *vinayas* downgrade the seriousness of the offense in specific circumstances.³⁵ But that still leaves the question

³⁰ Here, *fang bian* 方便 (lit. “just like that”) presumably refers to the fact that the monk acted on impulse to save the deer, but had no intention of keeping it for himself. Shortly afterwards, the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1421, 22: 28.183a18–19) presents a third, slightly different scenario. A monk sees someone else’s cow and deliberately takes it; however, he then feels ashamed and releases it. On this occasion, the Buddha’s ruling is that the monk has committed a *sthūlātyaya* offense, which is more serious than a *duṣkṛta* but less grave than a *pārājika* or a *saṃghāvaśeṣa*, presumably because he intended to steal the cow but then made partial amends by releasing it (see Heirman 2002, pp. 157–60).

³¹ The Pāli *vinaya* (*Vin* III, pp. 61–62), which discusses releasing a pig or a deer from a trap, or a fish from a weir, is more indulgent: As long as the monk does not intend to steal, but merely releases the creature out of compassion for it, he has committed no offense whatsoever (see Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi 2009, p. 58).

³² *T* no. 1425, 22: 3.247a21–27 on animals with four legs; 3.247b13–25 on snakes; 3.248b15–c10 and 3.249b8–c4 on domesticated animals; 3.248c10–23 on birds in cages and animals captured by hunters.

³³ *Yuepini zui* 越毘尼罪 (*vinayātikrama*), a lesser offense, equivalent to a *duṣkṛta* in the other *vinaya* traditions (see Hirakawa 1982, pp. 105–6, n. 10; Nolot 1991, pp. 384–86).

³⁴ The same story is presented in the *Sapōduobu pini modeleqie* 薩婆多部毘尼摩得勒伽 (*T* no. 1441, 23: 4.587c17–19). See Clarke (2015, pp. 80–81), who argues that the *Sapōduobu pini modeleqie* (*Sarvāstivāda *nikāya Vinaya* mātṛkā*) is closely affiliated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*. Interesting to mention in this context is that the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* explicitly states that the act of stealing is committed only if the monk is stealing with a clear intention to steal (*dao xin* 盜心, *T* no. 1442, 23: 3.638a23–24).

³⁵ It should be added that, while the animal release is discussed in some Indian monastic texts (*contra* Shiu and Stokes 2008, pp. 182–85, who argue for a Chinese origin of the practice), the *vinaya* texts offer no guidance on collective animal release.

of what to do with animals that threaten or distract members of the monastic community. This issue is discussed in the following section.

4. Protecting Oneself against Dangerous or Annoying Animals

4.1. Dangerous Animals

When addressing the subject of dangerous animals, all of the *vinaya* texts focus primarily on snakes, which are often discussed in conjunction with scorpions, centipedes, and venomous insects.³⁶ In general, the guidelines on how to deal with these creatures fall into three distinct categories: How to behave when entering buildings; where and how to construct buildings and/or organize meetings; and the measures to take when confronted with a dangerous animal.

First, as the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* clearly states (*T* no. 1428, 22: 49.931a23–25), one should always check that no dangerous animals are inside a room before entering. If such an animal is present, one must ensure that it leaves safely. Moreover, special care should be taken in toilets and washing places, as these are particularly dangerous areas.³⁷ Before entering them, one should check for snakes, scorpions, centipedes, and venomous insects. If any are present, they should be chased away (*T* no. 1428, 22: 49.932b12–13; 49.932a22–23).³⁸ Snakes and insects are also likely to hide in robes and sleeping mats. Therefore, these items should be shaken before use.³⁹

Second, every effort should be made to avoid places where snakes and venomous insects tend to congregate and/or to make it difficult for these creatures to endanger one's life.⁴⁰ For instance, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* warns monastics not to spend the rain retreat anywhere that is known to house snakes (*T* no. 1428, 22: 37.834b9–12). In the same vein, the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1421, 22: 18.127b2–6) asserts that the *poṣadha* ceremony (a ceremony at which the *prātimokṣa* list of disciplinary rules, is recited; it is held every two weeks) may be truncated if dangerous animals (*e shou* 惡獸), venomous insects, or snakes threaten the participants.⁴¹ Similarly, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* cautions monastics to avoid places that might house snakes or venomous insects. When constructing a monastery or choosing a location for the rain retreat, there should be no danger of venomous bites, mosquitoes, or flies, no big winds or oppressive heat, and silence throughout the day and night (*T* no. 1435, 23: 34.244c1–11; 56.416c1–6; 57.421b6–12). No snakes, centipedes, or venomous insects should be living between the bricks of a monastic building (34.243c11–12). Bathrooms are always humid, so they must be constructed with efficient drainage systems to discourage infestation by insects and snakes, as well as drain holes that these animals cannot use (37.270c8–12). Monastics should also ensure that snakes and insects do not enter their clothes while they are bathing (38.277b25–29). When constructing a toilet block, the cesspit should be buried in the ground so that animals (such as cows, horses, apes,

³⁶ Other animals, such as tigers and dogs, are also mentioned, but nearly always in the context of meat-eating: Consuming the flesh of these animals is deemed dangerous, as they are likely to attack members of the monastic community if they fear they will be killed for their meat (see Heirman and Rauw 2006, pp. 60–61). In addition, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 22: 3.585b21–22, 3.586c5) defines a place where there are tigers and wolves, lions, bears and evil animals, including ants, as dangerous.

³⁷ On the construction of toilets and washing places, see (Heirman and Torck 2012, pp. 27–107; Kieschnick 2013, pp. 107–38).

³⁸ Similarly, Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 27.177a24–25.

³⁹ See, for instance, Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 33.801c14–19 on snakes, bees, and vicious insects; 33.802a1–3 on snakes, scorpions, centipedes, and vicious insects; 34.905a20–22 on snakes, scorpions, and venomous insects; 49.932c22 and 49.933c28 on snakes and insects; Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1451, 24: 35.381a18–b9 on snakes.

⁴⁰ The precautions that the *vinayas* advocate sometimes seems excessive. For instance, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 22: 49.935b6–10; 49.945a25–27) suggests that a begging bowl should always be washed before use because a snake may have spat in it. Similarly, the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1421, 22: 28.180a26–b1) relates the story of a monk walking back to the monastery after begging, whereupon a bird dropped a snake into his begging bowl. Therefore, begging bowls should be carefully covered at all times. The Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (*T* no. 1435, 23: 41.297b29–c3) also warns monks to cover their food containers so that snakes cannot enter them.

⁴¹ The same *vinaya* (*T* no. 1421, 22: 19.130b1–5) also states that the rain retreat may be cut short in the event of problems, due to fire, inundation, (threatening) rulers, bandits, non-human beings, lions, tigers and wolves, venomous insects and ants, water, and wind.

and dogs) cannot disturb it; it should also be well covered so that snakes and insects cannot enter it and lie in wait for the monks (38.276a26–b1).⁴² The Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 50.942c9–12) asserts that the path for walking meditation should be paved to minimize the risk of attack from snakes, scorpions, or centipedes.⁴³ Finally, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1442, 23: 12.688b29–c1) clearly states that any place where snakes, scorpions, insects, or ants (*yi* 蟻) congregate is unsuitable for monks.⁴⁴ Places that house thieves are categorized as “dangerous” (*jing* 驚); those that are inhabited by tigers, leopards, and wolves are “dreadful” (*bu* 怖); and those that are blighted by mosquitoes and flies, snakes and scorpions, or wind and heat are “perilous” (*weinan* 畏難; T no. 1442, 23: 12.688b29–c1). Therefore, ideally, monasteries should be built in quiet places that are not susceptible to excessive wind or heat and where there are no mosquitoes, flies, snakes, or scorpions (T no. 1450, 24: 8.139c9–11).

Houses and rooms should also be constructed in such a way that snakes and venomous insects cannot enter. For instance, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 50.937c2–6) suggests that doors should include a small hole for fresh air, but this should be fitted with a cover to prevent the entry of snakes and harmful insects.⁴⁵ Further safeguards should be incorporated into furniture. For instance, beds must have legs to reduce the risk of snakes and venomous insects lying in wait on the sleeping surface (T no. 1428, 22: 50.937b15–17).⁴⁶ However, care should be taken not to harm snakes. For instance, burning wood is a *pācittika* offense, because snakes hiding in the woodpile might be injured or killed by this practice (T no. 1428, 22: 16.675a17–c7).⁴⁷

In the event of a bite from a venomous snake, the Buddha allows the use of a magic spell to counteract the venom.⁴⁸ In the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* version (T no. 1428, 22: 42.871a5–7), the spell reads as follows: “Now I have a kind heart; remove all venom; now calm down; break off, extinguish and remove the venom; honor to the Bhagavat.” In the same *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 42.870c29–871a1), the Buddha also permits cutting the wound with a knife to release the venom and the use of medicine. Interestingly, though, he suggests that the monk would not have been bitten if he had displayed kindness to all living creatures.

Finally, the *vinayas* offer advice on the correct course of action when confronted by a snake or a venomous insect. Generally, they should be removed safely, without causing them any harm.⁴⁹ The Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 42.870c13–16), for instance, allows monks to surprise a snake and catch it in a tube (*tong* 筒) or tether it with a rope prior to release (*qi* 棄). Of course, the rope should

⁴² Mud is used for washing after the use of the toilet facilities (see Heirman and Torck 2012, p. 71).

⁴³ See Heirman and Chiu (n.d.) for further information on walking meditation infrastructure.

⁴⁴ See also T no. 1450, 24: 8.139c9–11: Monastic dwellings should be quiet, with moderate amounts of heat and wind, and no mosquitoes, flies, snakes, or scorpions.

⁴⁵ Similarly, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1451, 24: 10.250a14–17) states that windows are permitted, but these should be covered with netting to prevent birds flying in, and a kind of fan should be used at night to discourage the entry of snakes and scorpions. The Pāli *vinaya* (Vin II, p. 152) advises the construction of a canopy to prevent snakes falling from the roof and onto the monks’ heads. Finally, the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 25.167b19–20) simply insists that houses should be built in such a way that snakes and rats (*shu* 鼠) cannot enter.

⁴⁶ See also Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1435, 23: 39.280b12–19. On beds’ legs and the symbolic value they acquired in Buddhist monasticism, see Heirman (2017, pp. 103–8). The Pāli *vinaya* (Vin II, p. 150) specifies that couches’ legs should be sufficiently high to stop snakes climbing onto the seating surface. Similarly, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1442, 23: 49.895a29–b12; T no. 1443, 16.996a15–b8) insists that sleeping on a very low bed is dangerous, because a venomous snake might kill the occupant. Monks should not wash their feet in front of a bed for the same reason.

⁴⁷ Parallel rules are stipulated in the other *vinayas*: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin IV, pp. 115–16; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, T no. 1421, 22: 9.64b12–c21; Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1435, 23: 15.104b29–105a4; Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1442, 23: 38.835a2–837c27. On the development of this rule, and the hypothesis that it might have been drafted to minimize the risk of killing small insects that live in dry grass or wood, see Schmithausen (1991, pp. 54–57).

⁴⁸ Pāli *vinaya*, Vin II, pp. 109–10; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, T no. 1421, 22: 26.171a16–28; Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, T no. 1428, 22: 42.870c22–871a8. The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 26.174a20–21) includes another spell to subdue bees (*feng* 蜂), snakes, and other venomous animals. On bees, particularly in China, see Pattinson (2019).

⁴⁹ A guideline in the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 21.146c3–8) was also seemingly motivated by a desire to minimize the risk to snakes. A monk walking in wooden clogs accidentally steps on a snake and kills it, so these items of footwear are subsequently banned throughout the precincts of the monastery, aside from in washing places and toilets. By contrast, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* allows monks who have seen a snake on the street to wear wooden clogs (T no. 1447, 23: 2.1055b15–16). Clearly, the latter *vinaya* prioritizes the safety of the monks, whereas the former is more concerned with the wellbeing of the reptiles. On the use of shoes in monastic environments, see, in particular, Heirman (2016a).

not be tied too tightly, to minimize the risk of harming the animal.⁵⁰ After hearing of monks' fear of scorpions (*xie* 蠍), centipedes (*wugong* 蜈蚣), and "common house centipedes" (*youyan* 蚰蜒) in their living quarters, the Buddha suggests that these creatures should be corralled using rubbish (*bi wu* 弊物), mud (*ni tuan* 泥團), or a broom (*sao zhou* 掃帚), then released (*jie fang* 解放), always ensuring that they do not come to any harm in the process (T no. 1428, 22: 42.870c19–22). Similarly, if rats (*shu* 鼠) enter a room, they may be caught and subsequently released. A wooden cage may be used for this purpose, and, again, great care should be taken that they leave the trap safely (T no. 1428, 22: 42.870c16–19). During a walk, a monk is permitted to chase away snakes and insects with a cane (*xizhang* 錫杖) or disperse them by rattling a receptacle containing small stones or shaking some pieces of bamboo (T no. 1428, 22: 52.956a6–8).

4.2. Annoying Animals

While venomous and other dangerous wildlife may pose a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of monastics, annoying creatures have the capacity to plague their lives on a daily basis from the moment when they first enter the monastery. For instance, a novice may be confronted by crows that steal his food, especially if he is too small to put up much resistance. While these birds usually become less of a burden as the novice grows up and learns how to shoo them away, other irritations may be more persistent, most notably mosquitoes.

4.2.1. Crows

All of the *vinayas* discuss the age at which a young boy may be deemed fit to enter the monastic community (*saṃgha*) as a novice (*śrāmaṇera*). Interestingly, in the context of this study, crows (Pāli *kāka*; Chinese *wu* 烏) have a significant role to play in this calculation. For instance, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 34.810c21–811a3) states that the minimum age for entry into the *saṃgha* is twelve, unless a younger boy is sufficiently strong to chase away crows, eat once a day, and uphold the precepts. By contrast, the Pāli *vinaya* (Vin I, pp. 78–79) specifies a minimum age of fifteen, but similarly adds that a boy who can chase crows may be allowed to go forth earlier. The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 17.117a16–28) explains why having this ability to repel crows is so important: The Buddha heard of a seven-year-old and an eight-year-old who managed to chase away a group of crows that were trying to steal their food, so he was reassured that they were strong enough to survive the rigors of monastic life and allowed them to go forth. The Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1435, 23: 21.151b23–c1) similarly states that a novice cannot be younger than fifteen unless he displays an ability to disperse crows, and so protect the food of the *saṃgha*. However, no novice should be younger than seven, regardless of his strength. The Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1453, 24: 7.484c4–9) also declares that a novice must be at least seven years of age and have the capacity to chase away crows in order to protect his food. Finally, the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (T no. 1425, 22: 29.461b9–12) divides novices into three categories: Those aged between seven and thirteen; those aged between fourteen and nineteen; and those aged between twenty and seventy. The first group is known as "śrāmaṇeras who can chase away crows" (*qu wu shami* 驅烏沙彌).

4.2.2. Mosquitoes and Other Insects

The *vinayas* also specify a minimum age for full ordination. In this instance, though, they are all in agreement: A monk or nun cannot be ordained before the age of twenty. One of the main reasons they give for this stipulation is that younger boys and girls will be unable to endure the hardships of

⁵⁰ On the other hand, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* forbids the tethering of snakes with ropes. Instead, it advocates placing the creatures in a basket, carrying them to a distant, unpopulated place, and releasing them (T no. 1435, 23: 38.279a10–11). The Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* also disagrees with the use of ropes, and suggests that captured snakes should be released close to a cave (T no. 1451, 24: 15.271c13–272a3).

monastic life, including pestering from insects. For instance, in the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, the Buddha explains to his disciple Ānanda:

One should not give the full ordination to someone who is not yet twenty years old. Why is this? When one is not yet twenty years old, one cannot endure cold and heat, hunger and thirst, violent winds, mosquitoes [*wen* 蚊] and flies [*meng* 虻], venomous insects [*du chong* 毒虫], and abusive language [*e yan* 惡言].⁵¹ When the body is undergoing all kinds of suffering, one cannot endure it. One cannot observe the rules, and live with one meal. Ānanda, you should know. When one is twenty years old, one can endure all such things.

不應授年未滿二十者大戒。何以故？若年未滿二十者，不堪忍寒熱、飢、暴風、蚊虻、毒虫，及不忍惡言。若身有種種苦痛不能堪忍，又復不堪持戒、不堪一食。阿難當知，年滿二十者，堪忍如上眾事。

(Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, (T no. 1428, 22: 17.679c18–23; similarly 34.808b25–c2)

Clearly, the message is that monastic life is hard, so monks and nuns must be able to cope with a variety of difficulties, including harassment from mosquitoes and flies.⁵² The other *vinayas* concur. The Pāli *vinaya* (Vin I, p. 78), for instance, explains that cold, heat, hunger, thirst, the stings of gadflies (*ḍaṃsa*) and mosquitoes (*makasa*), wind and sun, creeping things (*sirimsapa*; i.e., reptiles), and abusive and hurtful language must be endured—a feat that is possible only from the age of twenty onwards. The Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1435, 23: 21.150b9–25; 16.116b7–28) and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1444, 23: 3.1032b22–c6) reach the same conclusion: Monastics will face many difficulties, such as cold and heat, hunger and thirst, mosquitoes and flies, fleas and lice (*zao shi* 蚤虱), snakes and venomous stings, abusive language, and physical suffering, so the minimum age for ordination must be twenty. In the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (T no. 1425, 22: 1.231c23–26), when a monk considers abandoning the monastic life and admits his weakness,⁵³ he complains that he suffers in the wind and the sun during the daytime, and from the bites of mosquitoes, flies, and venomous insects at night. A monk who has no lodgings and lives under a tree experiences similar problems (T no. 1425, 22: 2.238b6–9; 23.414a15–17).⁵⁴ Finally, the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* does not refer to insects when establishing the most appropriate age for full ordination, but it clearly defines mosquitoes and flies as nuisances (*nao* 惱; T no. 1421, 22: 7.46b3; 12.84c10–11; 12.84c29–85a1), a burden (*kun* 困; 18.121c8; 18.122b29), and a cause of suffering (25.167a23).⁵⁵

However, while all monks and nuns must be prepared to endure hardship, including the irritations of mosquitoes and flies, they are not obliged to ignore them passively. On the contrary, all of the *vinayas* suggest that such nuisances should be avoided if at all possible, for instance by building monasteries in locations that are not plagued by insects.⁵⁶ In that context, it is not surprising that the donor Anāthapiṇḍada offers the monks a calm place with no mosquitoes, flies, or bees as the site for their new residence (Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, T no. 1428, 22: 50.939b16–26). Moreover, if insects still prove problematic, monastics are allowed to take certain measures against them, as long as they ensure

⁵¹ For a discussion on abusive speech in the *vinayas*, see Heirman (2009).

⁵² Just as in China, it is the annoyance caused by these creatures that is emphasized, and not the threat caused by, for instance, mosquitoes as potential transmitters of various diseases, an aspect that was not yet scientifically understood (see Milburn 2017, pp. 1–2).

⁵³ Expressing weakness with regard to the Buddhist training is one of the prerequisites for formal withdrawal from the monastic community (see Kieffer-Pülz 2015; Heirman 2016b, pp. 163–71).

⁵⁴ Monastic clothing, on the other hand, provides protection against the cold and heat, mosquitoes and flies, and means that a monk does not live in shame (T no. 1425, 22: 8.291a26–28).

⁵⁵ A radically different approach to mosquitoes and flies is evident in the context of extreme ascetic practices, where the donation of the human body to insects is a common feature of “self-immolation” (for details, see, among others, Benn 2007, pp. 8–9, 81ff.). However, such practices lie beyond the scope of this research.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, T no. 1428, 22: 50.936c24–937a18.

that the creatures do not come to any harm.⁵⁷ The first suggestion is to use a mosquito net (*wen chu* 蚊廚).⁵⁸ The *vinayas* also mention that a fan (*shan* 扇) may be used for cooling or to keep away insects, but it must be made in such a way that it does not injure them.⁵⁹ Equally, a fly whisk (*fu* 拂) may be used for the same purpose.⁶⁰ The Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* specifies that monks should never swat away stinging creatures—such as centipedes, wasps, and scorpions—with their bare hands (*T* no. 1425, 22: 22.406b25–c7), and it provides detailed guidelines on the use of fans and whisks to deter mosquitoes during meditation (*T* no. 1425, 22: 32.488a13–b8). A fan should be neither ostentatious nor shabby. Therefore, extravagance is criticized but so are displays of privation, as both demean the dharma.⁶¹ The fans may be made out of bamboo, reed, or leaves, but cloth versions should be avoided, because they make a lot of noise, like an elephant flapping its ears. Colors should be discreet.⁶² Whisks must be as silent as possible, too. They should be made out of straw or bark, and again the colors should be subtle. The Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* equally states that when using a fan or a whisk, it is important for monastics not to wave as prostitutes do. In sum, monks and nuns must remain acutely aware of their social status and conduct themselves in an exemplary fashion at all times.

In addition to mosquitoes, the *vinayas* offer advice on how to deal with other annoying creatures, such as ants (*yi* 蟻).⁶³ The Pāli *vinaya* suggests putting alms bowls in bags (Vin II, pp. 113–14) and hanging the bags on pegs in the wall to protect the contents from white ants (*upacikā*) and rats (*undura*) (Vin II, p. 152).⁶⁴ Monks should also sit on solid wooden benches rather than grass mats (Vin II, pp. 148–49), as the latter attract ants.

Finally, several *vinayas* address the issue of bedbugs (*bi shi* 壁虱). The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* advises that a protective cloth should be placed on the sleeping surface,⁶⁵ while the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (*T* no. 1451, 24: 19.294a5–9) insists that even these most annoying creatures should not be harmed. As lice (*shi* 虱), bedbugs, and similar insects may get stressed and die if they are captured and placed on the ground, the Buddha decrees that they must not be simply thrown away. Rather, they should be

⁵⁷ Several *vinayas* also mention the Nāga King's wish to protect the Buddha from cold and heat, wind and sunburn, and mosquitoes and flies while he sits in meditation: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin I, p. 3; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 15.103b11–17, 20.139b4, 21.140b22; Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 21.786b9–12 and 21.786b21–24.

⁵⁸ Pāli *vinaya*, Vin II, p. 119 (*makasakuṭikā*); Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 20.137b6–10, 20.138a20; Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, *T* no. 1425, 22: 30.474c29–475a1; Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 40.857b13–14; Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1451, 24: 19.293a27–b7 (*wen dao* 蚊廚). In these guidelines, it is clear that the net should be hung over the body, and it must not contain any holes through which mosquitoes may enter.

⁵⁹ Pāli *vinaya*, Vin II, p. 130 (*makasavijānī*, “a mosquito fan”; see (Horner 1938–1966, vol. V, p. 180, n. 7); by contrast, a chowry-fan (*camaravijānī*, a fly-flapper or whisk that was originally made from the bushy tail of a yak) is prohibited, maybe because it has the potential to harm the insects; the fan may be made out of bark, khus-khus, or peacocks' tail feathers); Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 26.174a6–9 (see next note); Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, *T* no. 1425, 22: 32.488a13–26 (a fan may be used to discourage mosquitoes); Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 52.956a13–27 (a fan may be used in hot weather); Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1435, 23: 38.274a2–4, 56.417b5–6 (no reason suggested); Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1451, 24: 6.229a24–b6 (a fan may be used in hot weather).

⁶⁰ Pāli *vinaya*, Vin II, p. 130 (*tālavanta*, a palmyra whisk); Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1421, 22: 26.174a6–9 (the Buddha allows the use of a fan and a whisk (*shan fu* 扇拂) in a humid place where there are many mosquitoes and flies, but the whisk may not be made out of a horse's tail as it might kill the insects); Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, *T* no. 1425, 22: 32.488a26–b8 (a whisk may be used to discourage mosquitoes); Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, *T* no. 1428, 22: 52.956a27–b2 (a whisk may be made out of grass, bark, leaves, rags, pieces of silk, or an animal's tail); Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1435, 23: 38.274a4–13, 56.417b6–7 (no reason suggested; however, contrary to the Pāli *vinaya* and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, a *mao niu wei fu* 犛牛尾拂 (“yak's tail whisk”) may be used at a *stūpa* of a Buddha or an *arhat*); Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, *T* no. 1451, 24: 6.229b7–16 (a whisk may be used if monks are “eaten” by mosquitoes (諸芝芻為蚊蟲所食), resulting in pain and continuous scratching; the handle should contain no pearls, nor should the whisk be made out of a yak's tail; rather, sheep's wool, hemp, scraps of cloth, broken items, and the tips of branches should be used).

⁶¹ For a discussion on achieving this difficult balance in monastic clothing, see Heirman (2014).

⁶² On colors, see Heirman (2014, pp. 475–77).

⁶³ Dogs can also be annoying, especially when they run off with a pair of shoes. Therefore, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* urges monks to place their shoes under their mats (*niśīdanas*) while sleeping (*T* no. 1428, 22: 39.846a28–b2).

⁶⁴ The Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 22: 50.937b29–c1) similarly stipulates that lamp oil should be stored carefully to prevent ants from drinking it.

⁶⁵ *T* no. 1421, 22: 20.138a20 on a cloth to protect against bedbugs (*fang bishi yi* 障壁虱衣); 20.139b4–5 on a single sheet to cover bedbugs (*zhe bishi dan fu* 遮壁虱單敷); 20.140b22 on a cloth against bedbugs (*zhe bishi yi* 遮壁虱衣).

carefully deposited in a safe place, such as on some grass or a piece of old silk, or within a hole in a branch or a crack in a wall.

5. Conclusions

Buddhism's disciplinary texts provide extensive guidelines on how to deal with dangerous snakes and venomous insects, as well as annoying mosquitoes, flies, and ants. Specifically, the *vinayas* offer plentiful advice on the measures that may be taken to avoid or, if necessary, repel them. These instructions contain a wealth of detail on material culture relating to animals, especially those that are unwelcome in monastic environments. Yet all of them prioritize care to reduce the risk of causing harm to these creatures. In this context, it is not surprising to see a strong focus on non-killing, and especially on the safe release of annoying or dangerous animals. These injunctions go beyond the simple preservation of life—they are designed to secure futures for the animals in question. However, some of the measures seem to assure a better quality of life for animals, such as snakes and mosquitoes, in comparison to domesticated or hunted creatures. This is the inevitable result of the *vinayas'* efforts to achieve a balance between, on the one hand, respect and compassion for the life and wellbeing of every sentient being and, on the other, strict adherence to the conventions of lay society to safeguard the *samgha's* status. One of these conventions is that legitimate ownership cannot be contested, so taking someone else's animal—even out of kindness—is forbidden in both civil and monastic codes. The situation is less clear with respect to animals that are being chased by hunters, as well as stolen animals, as it is debatable whether such creatures have rightful owners.

Another distinction is evident between useful and less useful—or potentially harmful—animals. While a boar, a deer, a pig, or a cow may be slaughtered and cooked for meat consumption (at least in lay society), and a dog may be used to guard a property, mosquitoes and flies serve no useful purpose to human beings. Therefore, while the value of the first category of animals is instrumental, those in the second category have no value at all, which is precisely why monastics commit no offense when releasing them.⁶⁶ By contrast, the *vinaya* lawmakers acknowledge that domesticated or captive animals should remain in the hands of their rightful owners, even though the creatures may suffer (or continue to suffer) as a result, because their lives are useful for human purposes.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, eating their flesh remains problematic as this always involves the animal's death, and usually its deliberate slaughter.

Snakes occupy something of an intermediate category, at least in the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, where a monk argues that it is reprehensible to keep such an animal in a cage. Although the snake's usefulness is less obvious than that of a dog, it must have some potential purpose, because its owner has decided to keep it in captivity, presumably with a view to training it.⁶⁸ In any case, the discussion of the snake's plight revolves around whether it was suffering unnecessarily. The conclusion is that it was, so the monk's release of the animal is viewed as a minor rather than a grave offense.⁶⁹ Therefore, causing needless suffering to animals is condemned, but this condemnation is counterbalanced by due consideration of ownership and usefulness. There are fewer difficulties when a wild snake is spotted and subsequently captured inside a house, or when insects are trapped in a water strainer. In such circumstances, all of the creatures should be released carefully, so as not to cause them any harm. Indeed, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* goes one step further and insists that insects should be

⁶⁶ Interestingly, as discussed in detail by [Chen 2009](#), pp. 35–41, the Chinese *vinaya* master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) extends the discussion on usefulness of animals to the monastic community, making a distinction between animals that are useful for economic purposes in the monastery and those that are not (Daoxuan, *Liang chu qing zhong yi* 量處輕重儀, *Ritual of Measuring and Handling Light and Heavy Property*, T no. 1895, 45: 1.845b22–27).

⁶⁷ On the instrumental use of animals, and specifically elephants, see [Waldau \(2000\)](#), pp. 101–3).

⁶⁸ Alternatively, the owner might have kept it to for its venom, which in a small dose is considered a valuable medicine (see [Somvanshi 2006](#), p. 138).

⁶⁹ [Waldau \(2000\)](#), p. 87) suggests that tamers' and charmers' methods rely on cruelty (see also [Rhys Davids and Woodward \[1922\] 1952](#), Part II, p. 172, n. 1).

protected from suffering any stress during their rescue. In this sense, it implies that insects experience human-like emotions, such as anxiety. This kind of empathy for all animals is apparent throughout Yijing's commentary on the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*.

From a *vinaya* perspective, the relations between human and non-human beings, in this case, animals, have to be considered in the light of a careful balance between the interests of all participants in the ethical, social and economic life of both the monastic and the lay communities. In this sense, virtues of compassion and non-killing are both actively promoted, as well as placed against the realities of lay-monastic interactions, critically taking into account the surrounding social context in which monasteries operate and on which they depend.

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