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Mark Allon –University of Sydney

The closely connected accounts of the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika and of the gods giving the Buddha his first alms bowl have many interesting features. The merchants are the first to give the Buddha a meal after his enlightenment and are his first lay converts, while the Buddha compresses the four alms bowls the gods of the four directions give him into one, thereby ensuring that each god gains merit. The story also has a connection with relic worship: in some versions of the story the Buddha gives the merchants his hair and nail-parings to honour, while this alms bowl became an object of veneration in Gāndhāra. Further, the story was clearly a popular one, since it was a common subject of artistic representation, particularly in the art of Gāndhāra.

In this paper I will discuss a new Gāndhārī version of the story and its relationship to versions preserved in other languages, focusing on some of the more interesting features of the story.