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A PADMAPĀṆI SPELL-AMULET FROM DUNHUANG: OBSERVATIONS ON OA 1919,0101,0.18

Henrik H. Sørensen

Abstract

This article throws light on a slightly unusual example of a trans-cultural artefact, namely a *dhāraṇī*-amulet, which in this case features the imprint and creative designs of both Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist cultures, even though its basic iconic components remain rooted in Indian Buddhism. Although not unique among the Dunhuang material, it is a fascinating and slightly curious example of how Buddhism served as a common denominator for Buddhist practitioners of both cultures during the period of the Tibetan rule of Shazhou (沙州), i.e. roughly between the late 750s/early 760s and 848. The example discussed here is from the collection of the British Museum, and has for unknown reasons hitherto escaped the notice of the scholarly community.

1. *Introduction*

Common to many of the major religious traditions of the world is the ability to expand and thrive beyond the original cultural borders that fostered them. In this regard Buddhism is among the more successful religious traditions, not so much because it was able to dominate and shape those cultures in which it was received, but because of its ability to integrate itself into their fabrics and effect gradual but significant changes to them. Hence, one way of conceptualising Buddhism is to see it as a powerful trans-cultural phenomenon, a truly globalising religion that not only left an imprint on the cultures which received it, but was itself radically transformed in the process.

One of the key features of the spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia was the transfer of cultural artefacts. This encompassed all aspects of material culture. One type of artifact was a special amulet to be carried on the person of the faithful for protection against calamities and dangers. When these Buddhist amulets began to appear in the cultural nodes along the Silk Road, they gradually underwent changes according

to the norms of the cultures embracing the Buddhist faith. This eventually produced a wide range of amulet-types.

This article throws light on a slightly unusual example of one such trans-cultural artefact, namely a *dhāraṇī*-amulet, which in this case features the imprint and creative designs of both the Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist cultures, at the same time as its basic iconography remains rooted in Indian Buddhism. Although not unique among the Dunhuang material, it is a fascinating and slightly curious example of how Buddhism served as a common denominator for Buddhist practitioners of both Tibetan and Chinese cultures during the period of the Tibetan rule of Shazhou (沙州), that is Dunhuang (敦煌), i.e. roughly 782–848, as well as in the following transitional period.[1] The example discussed here is from the British Museum's collection and has for unknown reasons hitherto escaped the notice of the scholarly community. I provide a detailed description of the piece, elucidate its various iconographical issues, identify its religious context, and finally try to date it. The significance of this particular spell-amulet is that it represents a conflation of two Buddhist traditions, both textually and iconographically, and as such it underscores the trans-cultural reality that unfolded in the Buddhist communities in Dunhuang during the middle of the Tang Dynasty (618–907, 唐).

[1] In recent years Tibetologists have argued that influences from Buddhism in Tibet continued unbroken in Dunhuang after the area was restored to Chinese control after 848. While it can not be denied that remnants of Tibetan culture, including that of Buddhism as expressed in Tibetan writing, remained in the Anxi (安西) region after the restoration of Chinese power, it is unclear to which extent Tibetan Buddhism continued as a living presence there and how. In any case the argument that Tibetan Buddhism should have existed as a thriving Buddhist tradition during the 10th century carries a variety of problems. It is evident that Tibetan was still being used as a means of communication in Dunhuang after the mid-9th century, but to what extent, and by whom is still not very clear. Hence, we need much more solid historical evidence, textual as well as material, in order to accept the idea that Tibetan Buddhism flourished in Shazhou into the 10th century. There is the question of the temples in which one supposes the Tibetan monks (and nuns) would have lived, none of which have actually been identified. Moreover, none of the Chinese census lists of monastics from the 10th century feature the names of Tibetan clerics.

2. *Concerning Written and Printed Dhāraṇī-Amulets*

Printed *dhāraṇī*-amulets are a form of Buddhist ritual artefact, that have received some attention in recent years. Although there have been many important observations about them and their usage, I shall briefly review the phenomena as a way of introducing the example that is the topic of this article.

It is not known exactly when the practice of producing these *dhāraṇī*-amulets first began. The earliest surviving examples from China date from the early 8th century and were drawn and written rather than printed. It is possible that it was the persuasion and power of the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyadhāraṇī*, as discussed extensively by Paul Copp in a recent study, that started the trend—or in any case stimulated the practice—but it may equally well have originated in a number of other cultic settings beyond that scripture, such as in the material associated with Avalokiteśvara in his many forms.[2] Even so, the practice took off in China during the middle of the Tang Dynasty and gradually spread to all parts of the empire and beyond.

Once we get to the end of the 8th century the thematic range of iconography associated with these *dhāraṇī*-amulets had multiplied. We also begin to observe the first printed examples. Stylistically and iconographically, most of these amulets follow the same basic template, a central divinity surrounded by the text of a given spell, in many cases set within a border consisting of Buddhist symbols or minor deities.[3]

[2] Cf. Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 60–140. This is generally well-researched and so far, the most extensive study on spell-amulets. However, in regard to the Dunhuang material, which the author uses extensively in his discussion, he confuses designs for the construction/making of *maṇḍala*s as ritual objects with amulets, in my view a rather critical error. Cf. ibid., 115–117.

[3] For a general study discussing the printed texts of spells, including spell-amulets, see, Su Bai 宿白, *Tang Song shi qi de diaoban yinshu* 唐宋史期的雕版印刷 [Studies on the Block Printings and Woodcuts of the Tang and Song Dynasties] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 192–195, pls. 7a–d, 27–29. A more detailed and focused attempt at dealing with the Dunhuang material can be found in Katherine R. Tsiang, "Buddhist Printed Images and Texts of the Eighth-Tenth Centuries: Typologies of Replication and Representation," in *Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang: Rites and Teachings for This Life and Beyond*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Sam van Schaik (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 201–252.

This latter type of amulet features an outer border of the kind one often sees in formal *maṇḍala*-designs, such as one finds in many examples from Dunhuang (fig. 1).

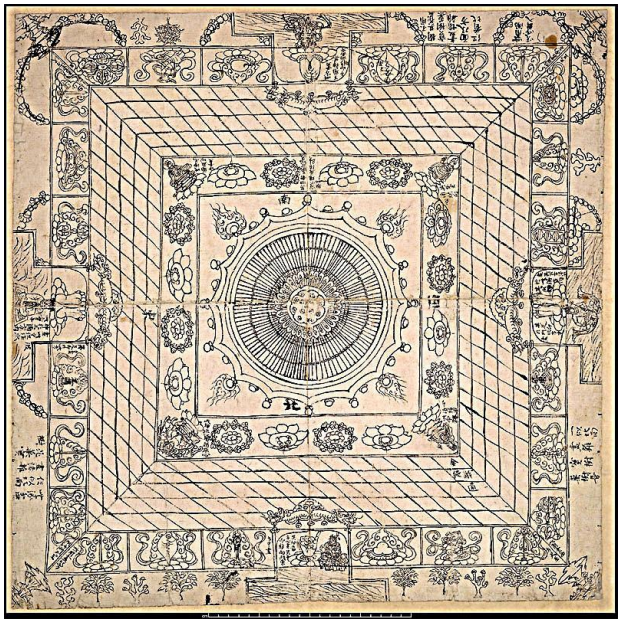

Figure 1. *Maṇḍala*-design. Dunhuang, possibly late 9th century. OA 1919,0101,0.172, BM.

One is therefore correct in observing that *maṇḍala*s and *dhāraṇī*-amulets do share a number of features in common, despite the fact that on the functional level they have quite distinct usages and purposes. When taking the temporal frame into consideration, there can, in my view, be little doubt that in terms of design it was the *dhāraṇī*-amulets that appropriated most of their structural elements from *maṇḍala*s, not the other way around. Once the printed format of the amulets became the norm, we begin to see a standardisation in design and typology. We also see a more formulaic and formalistic manner of representation and encoding (figs. 2 and 3).

Before ending this introduction, I would like to point out that there are salient differences in the manner the *dhāraṇī/spell*-amulets have been

conceptualised on the one hand, and the rendering of standard *maṇḍala*-designs on the other. The most immediate difference between the two is their respective central areas, and of course the text of the spell, which essentially has no room in a proper *maṇḍala*. In the spell-amulets, the central figure may or may not represent the primary deity invoked by the spell, whereas there is always a direct correspondence between the central figures (as well as the secondary ones) in a given *maṇḍala* and the corresponding spells to be uttered. Even so, both share certain common features: their square and round diagram forms; their outer borders, which in many cases may hold the similar symbols and secondary deities, often protectors and offering figures; and/or their representative seed syllables (Skt. *bīja*), commonly reproduced in ornate Siddhaṃ script. Functionally the two are quite different. *Maṇḍala*s are meant for use *in situ* within a formally established ritual space—whether in the form of structural diagrams or as votive paintings—whereas spell-amulets are primarily meant for carrying on one's person.

It is important to realise that there are exceptions to this rule, also from among the Dunhuang material. P. 4519 is a rare—although not unique—example of a spell-amulet that shows a complete merger between the format of a *dhāraṇī*-amulet and a *maṇḍala* (fig. 4). It has virtually all the structural parts of a *maṇḍala*, but at the same time it is thoroughly textual, i.e. over-written by the spell in question. Moreover, it features several different spells, and as such represents a new type of composite amulet. This type of composite amulet became increasingly common during the Northern Song (960–1126, 北宋), Khitan (907–1125, in Chinese sources known as Liao 遼), and Jurchen Jin Dynasties (1115–1234, 金).

Figure 2. Printed *dhāraṇī*-amulet. Dunhuang, dated 971. P. Skt. 1, BnF.

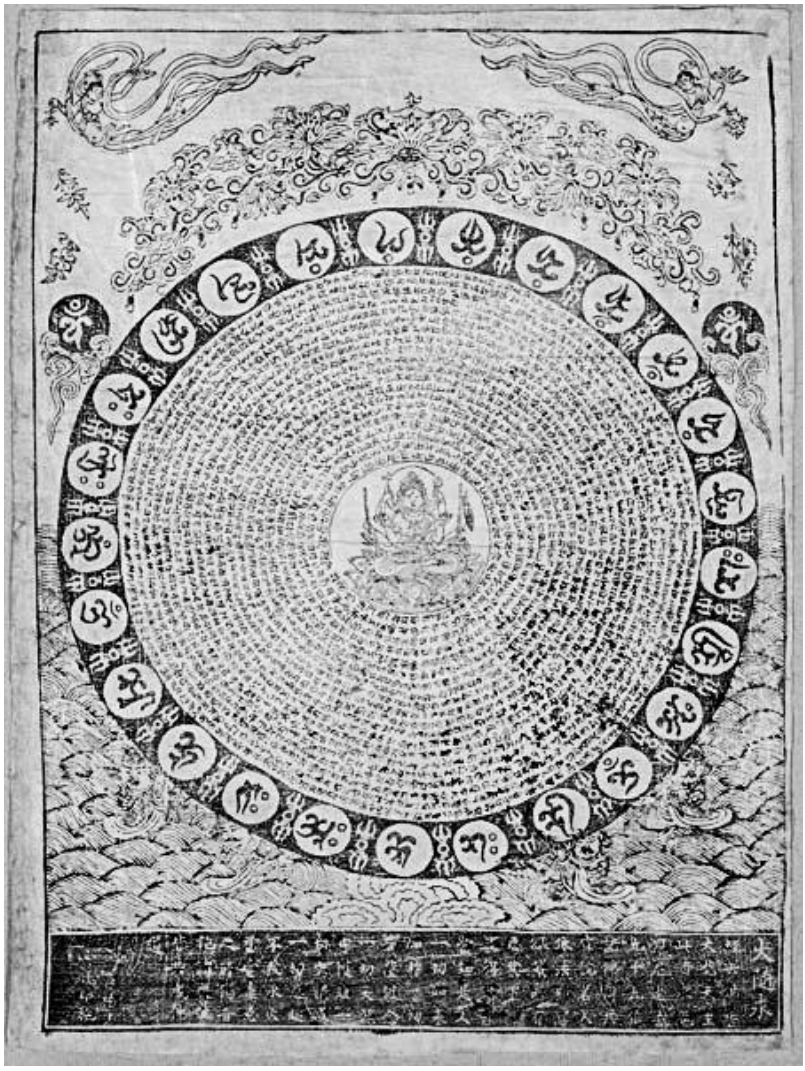

Figure 3. Printed spell-amulet with Mahāpratisarā as the main icon. Dunhuang, 10th century. P. 17689, BnF.

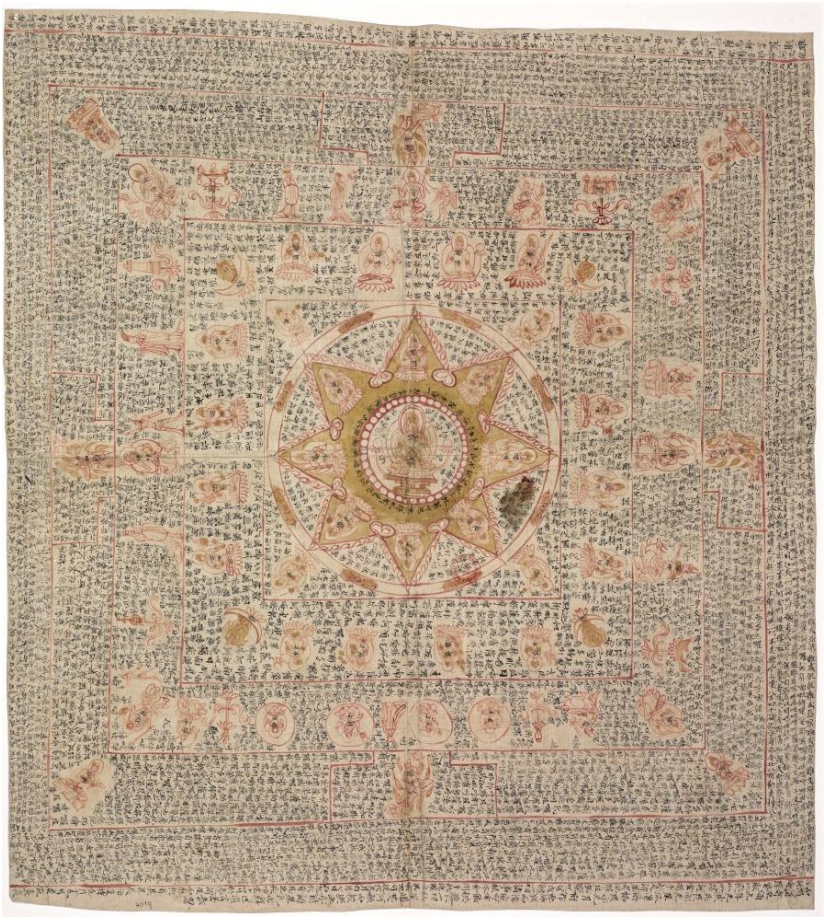

Figure 4. Composite spell-amulet in *maṇḍala*-form. Dunhuang, probably 10th century. P. 4519, BnF.

3. *Description and Analysis of OA 1919,0101,0.18*

Our spell-amulet belongs to the British Museum collection (OA 1919,0101,0.18). It is a rather tattered fragment with many parts missing

(fig. 5).[4] While this makes it difficult to address all the features and questions this intriguing piece presents us with, fortunately enough of it survives for us to get a fairly good idea of what it is and what it was meant to represent.

Figure 5. Drawn Tibeto-Chinese spell-amulet. Dunhuang, probably 9th century. OA 1919,0101,0.18, BM.

[4] British Museum numbering (Ch.xxii.0015). According to the data supplied by the IDP site, there is no catalogue text available for this piece, nor any meaningful documentation to be had. IDP, "OA 1919,0101,0.18," accessed September 23, 2018. http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=1819242149;recnum=40245;index=1.

This *dhāraṇī*-amulet has been drawn and written in black ink on a coarse form of fabric, probably a kind of pongee (a type of coarse silk). The entire bottom left and right corners of the design have been lost, and there have been a number of losses—mainly in the form of holes—throughout the piece. In addition, many parts are faded, which sometimes makes the identification of individual iconographical elements complicated.

While this particular amulet clearly represents a spell-amulet in typological terms, and as such belongs together with the more common printed versions produced by Chinese artisans discussed above, it also has certain features which are commonly used for proper *maṇḍala*s. This can most readily be seen in the manner in which the over-all design has been conceived. A circular centre contains the primary icon Padmapāṇi, a major form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and a kneeling donor (fig. 6). They are surrounded by the spell written in concentric circles and set inside a thin circle of stylised *vajra*s (fig. 5). This is set within a square frame which represents a lotus pond. In each of the corners of this inner square frame, *cintāmaṇi*s rest on open lotuses (fig. 5). A *vajra*-enclosure borders the inner square, followed by a square double border consisting of two registers of minor divinities and Esoteric Buddhist symbols. The bottom of the outer register reveals a gate or doorway. Due to the missing parts of the amulet, we are unable to verify whether there were four of these gates, as there should be, but it does appear that the outer frame of the design did indeed have four gateways. This is a salient feature typical of most formal *maṇḍala*s (fig. 5).

In contrast, the purely Chinese amulets feature outer borders variously occupied by deities, symbols—often in the form of ritual implements—and seed syllables in Siddhaṃ script. However, none of the examples I have seen contain outer rims reflecting the structure of a *maṇḍala*, complete with gates and corresponding divinities, as is the case with our Tibeto-Chinese amulet design. This means that typologically our amulet falls somewhere between the standard amulet-type primarily transmitted by the Chinese Buddhist tradition and the more formal *maṇḍala* shared by both traditions. Here, the underlying concept of this amulet-design combines the standard spell-amulet with the ritual concept of a formal *maṇḍala*. I do not consider this a sign that the amulet necessarily had a ritual function similar to that of a *maṇḍala*, but rather that its creator brought together two distinct types of designs for two originally distinct

practices, and encapsulated both within a single composition. There are other indicators that this is precisely what we have here, such as the figures in the frame outside the cordon of *vajra*s. They are meant to represent those bodhisattvas, gods, and guardians that belong together with the main icon invoked by the spell, and should belong to the ritual cycle of the deity in question. That is if the main icon and the spell belong together, of course.

Figure 6. Detail of OA 1919,0101,0.18.

The main icon of Padmapāṇi is seated on a high double-lotus throne with with right hand extended and left hand resting on the knee. The left hand also holds a lotus flower with a long stem. This icon reflects Indian

stylistic norms as transmitted via Tibet, and as such is similar to Buddhist images found on *tsa tsa*s (pieces of clay or medicine impressed with votive images) from elsewhere in Eastern Central Asia, such as in a Khotanese example from Domoko (fig. 7).[5]

Figure 7. Detail of OA 1919,0101,0.18 (left) in comparison with Padmapāṇi *tsa tsa* (right). Karayantak/Domoko, Khotan, 8–9th centuries. OA MAS 474, BM.

The spell surrounding the primary icon in the amulet is actually not that of Padmapāṇi, but rather belongs to Mahāpratisarā, a form of Āryāvalokiteśvara that gained popularity in Dunhuang and Central Asia after its cult spread in Tang China following the introduction of mature Esoteric Buddhism during the first half of the 8th century.[6] It would appear that the *dhāraṇī* itself is from the Tibetan translation of the *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇīsūtra* (Derge Tōhoku no. 561.[7] The

[5] Given that the Kingdom of Khotan (ca.1st c.?–1006), or major parts of it, was under Tibetan control during the late 8th century, one can easily imagine how a cross-fertilitation between Tibetan and local forms of Buddhism could have taken place. The author thanks Matthew Kapstein for pointing this out.

[6] See Charles D. Orzech, "Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang: From Atikuta to Amoghavajra," in *Esoteric Buddhsim and the Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen and Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 263–285.

[7] This is the Tibetan equivalent of Amoghavajra's translation in two rolls (T. 1153.20). For a full translation from the Sanskrit, see Gergerly Hidas, *Mahāpratisarāmahāvidyārājñi, the Great Amulet, Great Queen of Spells: Introduction*,

Mahāpratisarāvidyārājñīdhāraṇī is not among the most popular spells in the Tibetan material from Dunhuang, where it only occurs a few times. Moreover, the spell shows that it has been conceptualised together with, or as part of, the cult of Avalokiteśvara in one of his many forms, in this case Padmapāṇi.[8] In their discussion of IOL Tib J 388, Sam van Schaik and Jacob Dalton mention Tibetan accounts highlighting the powers of the *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇī* as a worn amulet.[9] Among these we find one account to the effect that carrying the spell on one's person can remove all suffering. This piece of evidence could refer to the very purpose for which our *dhāraṇī*-amulet was made, but that purpose ultimately goes back to the canonical sources in which special protection is promised to those who wear the amulet. In this sense our Tibetan spell accords with many of the extant Chinese spell-amulets, the majority of which are also devoted to Mahāpratisarā, who is an important female divinity.[10] This raises the possibility that the Tibetans originally adopted the practice of wearing amulets for protection from the Chinese.

In a recent study of a spell-amulet featuring the *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī*, Matthew Kapstein presents what he considers possibly the earliest printed amulet in Tibetan script. He argues convincingly for a 10th century dating of the amulet in question through careful philological comparison with the Sanskrit version of the spell, and typological comparison with similar 10th century printed Chinese amulets. Part of his argument follows the idea that some of the Tibetan materials found at Dunhuang were in fact made by Chinese Buddhists, who had acquired some degree of Tibetan skills during the Tibetan rule of Hexi (河西), and were still using the language, or at least the script, to produce writings during the 10th century. Kapstein's example is not

Critical Editions and Annotated Translation (New Delhi: Internat. Acad. of Indian Culture, 2012).

[8] It is interesting to observe that Padmapāṇi rarely occurs in the Chinese sources under this name, but is simply identified as Avalokiteśvara. It may have been for this reason that this otherwise important form of the bodhisattva is hardly mentioned in the now classic study by Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[9] Cf. *Catalogue of the Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang in the Stein Collection*, ed. Jacob Dalton, and Sam van Schaik (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 123–125. First electronic edition: IPD, 2005. http://idp.bl.uk 2005.

[10] The making of Mahāpratisarā spell-amulets for carrying on the person is described in some detail in the Chinese translation of the *sūtra* (T. 1153.20, 620c).

entirely similar in iconographical terms to the one presented here, although both share the same circular rendering of the spell in the central part of the amulet. In his example, the amulet does not feature a depiction of the deity or donor/supplicant, the latter of which is represented by name only.[11]

Returning to our spell-amulet, although several of the secondary images in the two outer registers are rendered in a generic manner, i.e. following a similar pattern, rather than as the individual deities they are actually meant to represent, it is nevertheless possible to identify some of them on iconographical grounds. Let us start by looking at the registers in the left side.

Beginning in the left side section, the upper row of figures we find there may represent bodhisattvas or divinities, none of which are immediately recognisable. The lower row depicts what appear to be two *nāga* kings (Skt. *nāgarāja*) holding *vajra*s (second and forth images from the right), while the third central figure looks like Yama, the lord of the netherworld. He can be identified by the *daṇḍa* staff he holds. The *nāga* kings are clearly indicated by the six snakes that surround them. The remaining two figures at the extreme ends of the lower row are unidentified, and are in any case generic figures (fig. 8).

Figure 8. Detail (left side section) of OA 1919,0101,0.18.

In the right side section there are only three extant figures in the upper row and three in the lower row. All of them are largely generic with the exception of the second figure from the right, which clearly represents a *nāga* king similar to those we have seen above (fig. 9).

[11] Cf. Matthew T. Kapstein, "The Earliest Example of Printing in the Tibetan Script: Remarks on a Dhāraṇī-amulet from Dunhuang," unpublished paper, forthcoming 2019. Many thanks to Matthew Kapstein for kindly sharing his unpublished paper with me.

Figure 9. Detail (right side section) of OA 1919,0101,0.18.

In the top section only the lower row of the spell-amulet-diagram remains. Of the seven figures represented here, two clearly depict generic *nāga* kings (third and fifth figures from the right), the seated figure on the left before the corner (from the viewer) must be Candra, the God of the Moon, due to the pair of flanking geese, while the one before the corner on the right the right appears to be the Sun God Sūrya on account of the pair of horses. The two farthest figures on either end are in all likelihood meant to be the Eclipse God Rāhu, who is represented by a large head, and his counter-part Ketu (fig. 10).

Figure 10. Detail (top section) of OA 1919,0101,0.18.

In the bottom section only three figures in each register remain. The central image in the gate of the top row is evidently meant to represent a bodhisattva or divinity. He is flanked by a pair of identical figures. They are similarly rendered, but their identities remain uncertain. The bottom row has three figures, two of which are generic *nāga* kings, while the central figure holding the *pipa* represents Sarasvatī (fig. 11).

Figure 11. Detail (bottom section) of OA 1919,0101,0.18.

A qualified guess would be that the unidentified and missing images may have represented a number of other gods, including Brahmā, Indra, and certain astral divinities, i.e. the personified planets. The latter may be inferred based on the depictions of Rāhu, Ketu, and the Gods of the Sun and Moon in the top panel.[12]

Coming back to the central area of the amulet, we should dwell for a while on the tiny and unpresuming image of a figure kneeling with his incense burner before the bodhisattva (fig. 12). The figure is dressed in Chinese garb—in fact, he wears a hat with pending flaps representing a lower-ranking Tang official—and is evidently a portrait of the donor, or the person for whom the spell-amulet was commissioned.[13] One may note differences between the rendering and placement of this image and the donor-images seen in 10th century votive paintings from Dunhuang. One important difference is the central placement of the donor next to the icon, a common feature in spell-amulets from the Tang, compared to

[12] These are all mentioned in the *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇīsūtra* (T. 1153.20, 621c).

[13] For a discussion of donor images as found in the Dunhuang paintings, see Edith Wiercimok, "The Donor Figure in the Buddhist Painting of Dunhuang," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 1 (1990): 203–226. See also the full-length study by Lilla Russell-Smith, *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

the printed ones from the Song, where the donor is usually absent.[14] Self-representations are commonly encountered in the visual material from Dunhuang, whether in the form of wall paintings or as votive banner paintings. One might see the donor image of the amulet as a form of pictorial self-recording that depicts the ritual of worship within the ritually prepared icon. Not only does the donor perform a good karmic deed by having the religious object made, he also represents himself as a pious worshipper. In other words, this donor image is a form of pious self-promotion in the hope of future spiritual (or material) benefits. As such our amulet is similar to European medieval depictions of patrons in the process of doing so-called 'good work,' although unlike European depictions which usually appear adjacent to icons in a church or chapel setting, the amulets are meant to be carried on the person or perhaps even displayed on the wall in one's home (?).

Figure 12. Detail of OA 1919,0101,0.18.

[14] See the example in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery ('Tantric Buddhist Charm'), 1955.7.1a. Reproduced in Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 76.

4. *Text and Context of the Padmapāṇi dhāraṇī-Amulet*

Now that we have more or less convincingly solved most of the riddles which the *dhāraṇī*-amulet poses, we still need to determine what its iconography actually signifies. The amulet is meant to provide the wearer with protection from Avalokiteśvara in the form of Padmapāṇi, based on the central circle of the composition. But for unknown reasons the spell surrounding the primary icon actually invokes Mahāpratisarā. The presence of the other secondary divinities appears to function as additional insurance or protection from the astral divinities. They assist in averting natural and astrological dangers, fear of which we know was widespread in medieval Chinese and Tibetan cultures.

It is hardly a coincidence that astral deities are so prominently present in the *dhāraṇī*-amulet, where they signify protection from disasters caused by baleful asterisms and the twenty-four moon mansions. Padmapāṇi and the gods of the constellations do not enjoy a particular textual, cultic, or ritual relationship, whereas they are in fact directly associated with Mahāpratisarā, whose spell is featured in the amulet. For this reason, I am inclined to read the dual nature of the amulet, i.e. its peculiar iconography and text, as having a sort of a double function. It signifies protection from hardships and calamities, with Padmapāṇi lending his form to what is otherwise a spell belonging to Mahāpratisarā. A similar representational strategy may also be observed in the amulet-spell from Jing Sitai (荊思泰) in China (8th century?), where we find a *vajra* protector (Chin. *jingang lishi* 金剛力士) serving as the main icon but the spell is that of the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyadhāraṇī*.[15] The discrepancy between icon and text could also be explained by the simple fact that an image of Avalokiteśvara as Padmapāṇi is easier to draw than the more complex Mahāpratisarā. Another example of this discrepancy between icon and text is a printed *dhāraṇī*-spell (MG 17688) that features a central image of a Buddha with his hands in the *dharmacakramudrā* instead of Mahāpratisarā, whose *dhāraṇī* is reproduced in Siddhaṃ script (fig. 13).

The dating of our spell-amulet is an issue that may potentially cause discussion, even debate. I tend to see it as an example of the confluence

[15] For a detailed description of this spell-amulet, see Copp, *The Body Incantatory*, 96–98.

of both Tibetan and Sinitic Buddhist beliefs and conceptualisations. Therefore, I find it most likely that it was produced under the Tibetan rule of Dunhuang, but in any case, not later than the 9th ninth century. Here one should also take into account the iconographical and compositional issues that I have already raised above.

I compared the style of writing in the amulet with early styles of Tibetan from Dunhuang, mainly looking at the examples provided by Sam van Schaik's paleographic study on Tibetan writing.[16] Although admittedly tentative, I tend to see the text of the amulet as reflecting an early style consistent with the 9th century. However, it cannot be ruled out that different styles of Tibetan writing existed simultaneously, and continued in use over extended periods of time, wherefore the application of paleographic analysis may not necessarily be as straightforward as one would like to think.[17]

[16] See Sam van Schaik, "Dating Early Tibetan Manuscripts: A Paleographical Method," in *Scribes, Texts and Rituals in Early Tibet and Dunhuang*, edited by Brandon Dotson, et al. (Weisbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2013), 119–135. The text of the spell-amulet seems to be a closer match to van Schaik's Imperial-period square style 1 than any of the other examples he discusses.

[17] Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer, two noted specialists in the field, have expressed uncertainty as to whether it is actually possible to date the text of the spell-amulet on the basis of the handwriting alone. Cathy Cantwell has further pointed to the old-fashioned use of *huṃ*, and the long *oṃ* in the spell, which is used by many Nyingma (Tib. *rnying ma*) texts. These textual discrepancies may have come about because the transliteration in question originally derived from a Chinese translation rather than directly from the Sanskrit. This possibility can not be overlooked, given the fact that the transmission of the Mahāpratisarā cult in all probability entered Tibet via Dunhuang, where it enjoyed great popularity during the late Tang, as signaled by the many associated Chinese manuscripts and wall paintings. Personal comunication, January 2019.

Figure 13. Printed spell-amulet. Dunhuang, Northern Song Dynasty (960–1126, 北宋), MG 17688.

5. *Conclusion*

Now, what does the Padmapāṇi/Mahāpratisarā *dhāraṇī*-amulet tell us? On the basis of the findings presented here, we are now in the position to pass judgement on it as follows: It is clear that the design of the amulet,

i.e. the collapse of the *dhāraṇī*-amulet format with the structural ordering of a *maṇḍala*, does not represent an orthodox iconographical composition, neither a Tibetan one nor one that developed in the context of Chinese Buddhism. It is, to all intents and purposes, a composite design created locally in Dunhuang, reflecting multi-cultural and multi-religious integration.

Stylistically the amulet does not follow Sinitic norms, but would appear to reflect those of Tibetan Buddhism. However, in formal iconographical terms, we may observe a certain similarity in the manner the minor gods are represented in our amulet and, and how they appear in the celebrated Dharmadhātu Maṇḍala (which incidentally only survives in Japan and dates from the first half of the Heian Period (794–1185, 平安時代). This means that the iconography reflected in our amulet's design represents original Indian Buddhist icons, which have passed through the cultural filters of both Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism.

It is common for examples of material culture from border regions to reflect mutual influences from the cultures that inhabit those spaces. However, in this case our *dhāraṇī*-amulet reflects more than mere influences; it represents a case of full-blown cultural and religious fusion. It is an object that carries both Sinitic and Tibetan cultural and religious concerns, which in one way of reading, may be said to transcend both cultures to arrive at a new, integrated cultural formula. In a way our example can be compared to the celebrated Maṇḍalas of the Two Worlds, i.e. the Dharmadhātu and Vajradhātu Maṇḍalas of Japanese Shingon (真言) Buddhism, which represent in more or less equal fashion, Indian and Chinese cultural languages interpreted through a Japanese Heian lens.

Should I venture a guess as to the time when our amulet was produced, I would suggest that it belongs to the period of the Tibetan domination of Dunhuang, i.e. pre-848, or at least not much later. In other words, I believe it is a product of the 9th century, a period when Tang Dynasty iconographical trends were still strong in Dunhuang. My primary reason for this is that we here have a successful combination of a Chinese official in Tang garb (a norm that persisted into the the Five Dynasties period (907–978, 五代), set within an iconographical composition that clearly reflects Tibetan stylistic features, but which would nevertheless seem to have appropriated certain structural aspects from *maṇḍala*s that we also know were current in Tang China during the 8–9th centuries.

Finally, there is the issue of the icon of Padmapāṇi inserted into a spell-amulet featuring the *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇī*. I suggest that this came about because whoever produced it did not have access to, or were otherwise not familiar with, the formal iconography of Mahāpratisarā, and therefore ended up producing the hybrid amulet we now have. The fact that the artisan who produced our amulet did not have a good idea of how Mahāpratisarā was to be depicted, indicates that the amulet was produced prior to the availability of the printed sheets with the *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇī* that we know from 10th century Dunhuang. This provides support for the view that the amulet was produced prior to 848, or at least before the end of the Tang Dynasty, when the goddess' cult arose in the Sinitic cultural sphere.

Abbreviations

BnF	Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris
BM	British Museum in London
Derge Tōhoku no.	Ui, Hakuju et al. *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons* (Bkah-hgyur and Bstan-hgyur). Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University, 1934.
IDP	International Dunhuang Project at the British Library in London
MG	Musée Guimet Collection in Paris
OA	Oriental Arts Section of the British Museum in London
P.	Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque National in Paris
P. Skt.	Pelliot Collection of Sanskrit Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque National in Paris
T.	Takakusu Junjirō 高順次郎 et. al., ed. *Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Taishō Tripiṭaka]. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935.

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