Although comparatively few in number, the esoteric drawings of Dunhuang are quite diverse in terms of the subjects they depict. Since comparable early esoteric material has not survived in the Indian subcontinent, the Central Asian material has the potential to fill the gap in this regard. However, the diversity of the drawings indicates quite a complex picture concerning their possible function and their relation to rituals.

In a contribution to a conference on Mahāyāna Buddhism organized by the Tibet House in autumn 2005, I had shown that some of these drawings hint towards solutions for some of the most fundamental questions concerning the appearance of the earliest manḍalas and their usage in the Buddhist context. Here I will analyze a number of Dunhuang drawings, partly overlapping with those used already, in greater detail and discuss their possible functions. The consideration of the usage of such drawings is pertinent in understanding as to how far they can be exploited to complement our knowledge of early esoteric ritual and its communication.

The term “esoteric drawings” refers to drawings depicting manḍalas, deities, ritual implements, etc. that are to be associated with esoteric Buddhist ritual. Among these a number of main types can be differentiated that often also occur in combinations:

- ritual depictions
- manḍala depictions
- manḍala assemblies
- deities that are part of manḍala assemblies
- diagrams, implements, gestures, etc. to be associated with manḍalas and their ritual.

Sarah Fraser differentiates two groups among the relevant drawings, “diagrams for manḍalas and dhāraṇī” and “preparatory drawing for Tāntrika paintings” or alternatively “sketches used in the production of silk painting with Tāntrika subjects” and “monochrome drawings used in ritual practice”. However, if one takes the ritual and all its (possible) elements into account, in
particular the usage of a manḍala drawing in the ritual itself, it becomes clear that these two groups cannot always be clearly differentiated as there is a considerable area of overlap. Thus, rather than grouping the drawings by their possible functions, the following account tries to review them from a variety of perspectives to establish the intricate relationship of the drawings to each other and to their beautiful kin, the esoteric Buddhist paintings.

RITUAL MANḌALA

It can be assumed from the outset that a number of the esoteric drawings preserved at Dunhuang are in some way connected to ritual. Interestingly, some depict the ritual itself. A very clear example for such a drawing is in the National Museum, New Delhi (Ch.00379). It shows an exorcist ritual in front of a manḍala (Fig. 17.1).4 The form of the manḍala indicates that the ritual is of fierce nature: in the centre is a four-bladed wheel, the gates are protected by fierce animal-headed gate-keepers, and in the corners of the manḍala palace stand four armoured protectors. The deities on the four-bladed wheel are shown in the form of their symbols and refer to the five Tathāgatas of developed esoteric Buddhism. The vase in the centre must stand for a deity of Ratnasambhava’s family since his symbol, the jewel (triratna), is missing from the surrounding symbols that refer to the other four families. With regard to their attributes, the armoured protectors and gate-keepers refer in part to the standard gate-keepers of the Yoga Tantra manḍalas which are: Vajrāṇikuśa, who catches with the hook in the east, Vajrapāśa, who uses the noose to draw into the manḍala in the south, Vajrasphoṭa, who binds or chains in the west, and Vajrāvēśa, who fixates with vajra and bell in the north.

While this description of the main features of the manḍala shows that the depiction clearly refers to the more developed esoteric teachings organized according to the concept of five Buddha families, it needs to be stressed that the arrangement of the deities themselves is much less systematic than it appears at the first glance. There are numerous inconsistencies in the distribution of the symbols and deities within the manḍala. For example, the symbols on the four blades of the central wheel would have to be read anti-clockwise to be in the right succession, tempting to flip the image horizontally or vertically. The gate-keepers with noose (pāśa) and chain should be south and west, which fits again only if one assumes that the image is mirrored, but the vajra-holding gate-keeper should be in the north rather than the east. However, the flaming sword held by the gate-keeper in the proper right gate conforms to the viśva-vajra shown on the same side since both sword and viśva-vajra are symbols for the karma family. Further, the position of the noose and chain holding armoured-protectors is reversed in relation to those depicted in the gates.

If the vajra symbol is understood to represent the east, the ritual itself is shown to the west of the manḍala. Directly in front of the gate sits a priest and/or monk before his ritual implements, an emphasized vajra and a bell, and offerings represented by an incense burner and two offering plates on three-footed stands. That the issue concerned with is some kind of sickness appears to be indicated by the turbaned person resting on a mat with the hands on his stomach. In the corner is a troubled demon, probably personifying the sickness, with five spikes at his limbs and (finally) at the heart. The demon possibly represents a ritual effigy as they are still used today (Fig. 17.2).

It can be conjectured that this particular manḍala drawing functioned as actual ritual ground replacing a manḍala drawn with chalk or sand; but despite the mixture of symbolic and figural depictions of deities, it may well represent such a ritual manḍala. This can be concluded from the comparison to a manḍala drawing depicted in the bottom area of a Dunhuang silk scroll in the Musée Guimet, Paris, attributed to the 10th century (MG 17780).5 Among the ritual implements shown between the deity assembly above and the kneeling doors at the bottom, a drawing of a manḍala is laid out for the ritual on a white ground (Fig. 17.3).6 The manḍala has an eight-petalled
lotus in the central square with different symbols representing the main deities. The symbols in the corners probably stand for a variant of the eight offering goddesses. Only the fierce gatekeepers are represented figuratively. A garland along the outer wall and crescents at the corners are the only decorative details of the \textit{ma\={n}dala}.

The National Museum diagram and the Musée Guimet painting both represent the \textit{ma\={n}dala} together with ritual implements, offerings and an officiant who is not actively engaged in ritual. However, the Guimet scroll painting further contains the assembly of all the main deities in figurative and symbolic form; the symbols are distributed among the offerings, and the \textit{ma\={n}dala} is clearly part of the ritual implements. Further, the Guimet scroll also shows the donors who are, in contrast to the officiant, even identified by captions. While the National Museum drawing, focusing on the ritual alone and even hinting at its purpose, can be understood as purely instructional, the Guimet scroll cannot. This scroll represents an early version of a full \textit{ma\={n}dala} assembly depiction as found at a later stage in Tibet. What is peculiar about this depiction is its combination with, and emphasis on, ritual through the depicted implements. The details of the Guimet scroll may well derive from an educational drawing such as the one from the National Museum, but clearly excels it, also in aesthetic terms.

The two drawings of a ritual \textit{ma\={n}dala} share the combination of the symbolic depiction of the main deities with the figurative depiction of the protective deities around the central assembly, indicating a major conceptual difference between these two types of deities in early Buddhist Tântrika understanding. The National Museum drawing combines the representation of a ritual \textit{ma\={n}dala} with an explicit depiction of the ritual itself, a combination unique among the published examples surveyed.

MAN\={N}ALA RITUAL

Another type of drawing obviously related to ritual practice is exemplified by the well known diagram of the arrangement of ritual implements for the recitation of the \textit{U\={s}\={n}i\={s}avijayadhâra\={n}i} from the British Museum.\textsuperscript{7} Chinese captions not only indicate the content of the vessels distributed in the cardinal direction, but also the place of the ritual master and a fire-place.\textsuperscript{8} Another version of this diagram is found on British Library scroll Or.8210/S.2498 available online (http://idp.bl.uk/). These drawings thus focus on the layout of the ritual ground.

I hesitate to call these diagrams a \textit{ma\={n}dala} or altar because of its unusual multi-cornered shape, but there are also drawings showing a proper ritual \textit{ma\={n}dala} with an emphasis on the ritual implements to be distributed around it on the ritual ground. The series of four \textit{ma\={n}dalas} depicted on P2012 from the Musée Guimet is particularly telling in this regard.\textsuperscript{9} This scroll represents the \textit{ma\={n}dalas} and assemblies of four different but related rituals which become increasingly fierce in character. Despite the captions in Chinese, the depictions on the scroll are to be read left to right.

The first \textit{ma\={n}dala}, for example, contains the symbols of the deities on the central eight-petalled lotus, again the symbols of the four Tathâgata families but now centred on Vairocana (Fig. 17.4). Lotuses in the corners and outer squares of the \textit{ma\={n}dala} possibly represent seats for additional deities housed at the different levels of the \textit{ma\={n}dala} (see below). Arrows stake out the \textit{ma\={n}dala} palace at corners and doors; additional \textit{vajra}-stakes are placed in front of the gates; \textit{vajra}-chains covering the walls of the palaces are indicated by one \textit{vajra} each below the south gates; \textit{vi\={s}ovavajra} secure the diagonals and possibly, also represent the diamond ground the palace is built upon,\textsuperscript{10} and the crescent-shaped finials in the corners may also have protective function. On the doors we have ritual implements, three vases – the one at the second gate flanked by \textit{vajra} and bell – and a wheel of thread at each gate,\textsuperscript{11} and an offering plate at the east gate.
The second manḍala is dominated by circular elements. Besides the eight-petalled lotus in the centre, it has a vajra-chain and an eight-spoked flaming wheel. The two bottom crescents in the corners are shown with vajra ends, ritual daggers flank the gate instead of the vajra-stakes in the first manḍala, and offering plates are shown in cardinal and intermediary directions. Manḍala three is the most explicit, since it appears to be the only one that has been completed in all details. As such, it combines the elements noticed for the first two manḍalas (Fig. 17.5). The fourth manḍala is the most incomplete with the outer regions being only filled in one corner (Fig. 17.6). Thus, the manḍala depictions show both the drawing of the ritual manḍala with its decorative details and the manḍala ritual from staking out the ground to the different offerings to be placed around it. The instructional character of this series is further emphasized by the Chinese captions that sometimes identify a deity in the assembly, its colour, or an element in the manḍala drawing.

Each of the four manḍalas in series P2012 is associated with an assembly of deities, whereby the main deities become increasingly fierce from manḍala to manḍala. As mentioned above, the Chinese captions accompanying some of the assembly deities may contain iconographic details, but the depiction of the deities itself, too, hints towards a didactic purpose of this scroll. For example, the deities depicted with the fourth manḍala are only drawn in their outlines, but their hands and attributes are unusually detailed and disproportionately large (Fig. 17.6). Their depiction, thus, focuses on the hand gestures or mudrās and the implements of the deity including the position in which they are to be held. The drawings also show the posture of the deity and indicate a five Buddha crown when appropriate.

Further, the fourth manḍala has five fierce main deities performing the same mudrās on each side. Thus, in this manḍala the deities of the assembly do not fit in the geometry of the manḍala containing only circles of eight-spoked wheels. The same assembly of ten identical main deities is shown on another drawing, also in the Musée Guimet (PC 4009; Fig. 17.7). On this drawing the assembly of deities is arranged symmetrically and again there is an emphasis on gestures, attributes, posture and the position of arms. Other parts of PC 4009 and similar drawings may be much less clearly arranged, but the same elements are emphasized consistently, in particular the gestures. As the manḍala depicts itself these assemblies appear to have double instructional content by hinting towards the actual depiction of the deity and the ritual gesture to be performed by the practitioner. One may thus conclude that such drawings, as the P2012 series, were meant to be used by the trainee in esoteric ritual to learn the ritual performance, in this case the mudrās and how the different attributes are imagined to be held.

The emphasis on the respective mudrās reminds one of the importance of the symbolic gestures in the Vajradhātu-ritual, where the mudrās for all deities are performed in succession. In esoteric Buddhist understanding, the mudrās and their ritual performance stand for the body of the deity (karmamudrā). Today, the Vajradhātu ritual is rarely performed, but it has recently been reintroduced in Tabo monastery in conformity with the deities represented in the Assembly Hall of the historic main temple. I could witness the ritual during a visit in 2005 (Fig. 17.8).

The Dunhuang drawings also emphasize the attributes and how they are held. While in some cases the way the attributes are held is rather peculiar, such as holding a bow on the arms crossed in front of the breast or a sword held upright in the meditation gesture, others are familiar from a Yoga Tantra context, such as the sword held at the side and a vajra-net held in both hands in front of the body. All these elements that the drawings focus on – mudrā, attribute, position of hands and posture – are intimately connected in Yoga Tantra ritual. While the mudrā and the position of the hands have to be understood in relation to the attribute of the deity, the posture is
rather dependent on the deity type (primary deity, secondary deity, gate-keeper, fierce deity, etc.).

Stein painting 83, Ch. 00143, attributed to the late 9th century, is solely dedicated to mudrās by showing only the hands engaged in different gestures evolving at their wrist from a ring of lotus petals. Compared to the mudrās on the drawings mentioned so far, these gestures are reproduced in great detail with every segment of the finger carefully sketched and an emphasis on proportional relationship that cannot be explained in terms of ritual alone. Here, I think, one can safely follow Sarah Fraser’s notion that such drawings are (also?) guidelines for painters.

The last depictions discussed show that the deity assembly is depicted outside the maṇḍala or even independently and within the maṇḍala the deities are represented by symbols. Another type of maṇḍala drawing shows the assembly of deities in the maṇḍala itself, although in this type of depiction the deities are commonly executed in considerably greater detail than on P2012 and related drawings iconographic details – in particular mudrās and attributes – remain to be stressed and the drawings themselves retain an instructional character.

A sketch of a Vajradhātu maṇḍala of the Bibliothèques National de France (P4518.33) attributed to the 10th century makes the instructional purpose particularly clear (Fig. 17.9). The drawing shows the principal outlines of a 53-deity Vajradhātu maṇḍala in three squares with even the attributes of the deities indicated and the position in which they are to be held. For the five Tathāgatas in the centre the animal vehicles are specified by drawing one to the left of the throne, probably because it was feared that those drawn on the throne base cannot be recognized. The decoration of the maṇḍala – such as the interlocked vajra dividing the central circle into nine fields, the vajra-chains along the squares and the gates and the garland surrounding the whole maṇḍala – is only indicated exemplarily. In addition, the colours of the quarters and some of the deities are indicated by coloured dots applied with a brush, interestingly not following the later conventions.

Commonly, maṇḍala drawings with deities are somewhat more sophisticated, such as the well known British Museum drawing of a Durgatiparīṣodhanamāṇḍala (Stein painting 173; Ch. 00428). The colour indications of the Bibliothèques national de France drawing, the more proportional depiction of the deities on this type of drawing – mudrās are not disproportionally enlarged anymore – and the more aesthetic rendering of the drawings themselves indicate that they served a different purpose than the P2012 series. As with the more sophisticated depictions of the mudrās, the drawings appear to instruct painters or ritual specialists responsible for the maṇḍala depiction about the most important details of the maṇḍala to be drawn or painted. As such, they may also be interpreted as instructions to execute more decorative maṇḍalas such as the Amoghapāśa maṇḍala depicted on Musée Guimet scroll EO.3579.

**SPEECH**

A number of Dunhuang drawings contain text, often written in a spiral around the central deity, as is the case on a fragmentary Avalokiteśvara maṇḍala on silk in the collection of the British Museum (Ch.xxii.0015). The deity in the centre – a two-armed form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara – is seated on a lotus and accompanied by a donor holding an incense burner. This group is encircled by a ring of lotus petals, a Tibetan text to be read from inside out and a chain of jewels and pearls. The central square is framed by a row of vajras and flaming jewels fill the corners. Of the two palace squares forming the outer part of the maṇḍala, only fragments are preserved. Surprisingly, the Tibetan text around the centre – a protective prayer with the appropriate mantras – does not refer to Avalokiteśvara, but to Mahāpratisarā and her retinue, together known as the five protective goddesses (pañcarakṣa).

A similar observation can be made by comparing the maṇḍala and the texts written above and below the Musée Guimet drawing PT 389. This drawing shows a maṇḍala of 33 deities around
a meditating form of Vairocana on an eight-spoked wheel. On the maṇḍala itself, almost all deities are identified and/or their mantras are given. In addition, an om is written on the breast of each deity as a sign of consecration. The mantras make it clear that the ritual concerned serves the release from the lower realms of rebirth. The two pieces of text at the top and bottom of the drawing, however, are again not directly concerned with the depicted topic since the top text can be identified as a version of the Ārya-tathāgatoṣṇiṣasitātapatrebhāci-nāma-dhāraṇi. Thus, while the mantras written on the painting itself represent the speech form of the deities depicted, the accompanying text is only loosely related to the depiction through the association of long life and rebirth.

I assume that the Chinese texts associated with maṇḍala depictions show a similarly loose relationship to the topic of the depiction itself. An example may be British Library Or.8210/S.6348 (Ch.00219), which is said to contain the Chinese text of eleven sūtras written around a fully developed maṇḍala depiction.

In general, one may summarise from the examples surveyed here that the usage of texts has quite a wide range from explanatory and/or instructional texts and captions, via the actual speech form of the deity, its mantra, to the representation of ritual texts, sādhana, or parts thereof, that may, but not necessarily, refer to the depiction itself. Certainly this aspect merits a more detailed study. Regardless of which type of text it is, functionally the text adds an additional level of information. While explanatory captions are obviously instructional, the presence of mantras does not exclude that the drawing had a function in the ritual itself. The added mantras and in particular the accompanying texts not directly referring to the depiction hint towards a talismanic function of the drawing. This latter interpretation is also supported by the fact that diagrams with a similar emphasis on text have been printed for mass production, such as the diagram in the British Museum (Ch.xliii.004) containing an eight-armed form of Avalokiteśvara and the Mahāpratisarādhāraṇī.

Are any of these drawings useful for visualization, for imagining the mind form of the deity and its abode? This question is difficult to answer since it concerns the general issue whether imagery is used for meditation – which in terms of esoteric Buddhist practice may be identified with visualization – and in which case it is commonly assumed that imagery is used that way, but there is hardly any proof for it. In fact, the few references we have on the usage of sculptures and images consider these rather in terms of veneration while maṇḍalas appear to have their main function in ritual.

The most common visualization practice features an idealised reinvention of the world in the form of a single palace on a cosmic ground that is also protected towards the sky by a vajra-cage (vajrapāṭiyāra). Such a cage is commonly indicated by a vajra chain surrounding the depiction. In the Dunhuang drawings such a chain is commonly (also?) depicted around the central assembly. One may wonder if the net between the two palace walls shown on a rather puzzling Dunhuang drawing hints towards the vajra-cage. The drawing on paper referred to is again in the British Museum and available online. Whatever the explanation for the net in this maṇḍala may be, it is clear that it represents something that did not succeed. If it was meant to represent a cage, it may have to be understood as an unsuccessful experiment on the subject. This drawing features another puzzling element, namely, the scalloped circle between the two central circles that could represent a garland on stakes or a valance. A similar circle is represented on maṇḍala two of P2012 (Fig. 17.10).

Another element that could be explained in terms of visualization practice is the frequent representation of empty lotuses found on many of these maṇḍala drawings, such as British Museum.
Ch.00189 and the maṇḍalas on PC 2012. In visualization it is commonly the empty lotus that is to be imagined first. The lotus settles the place where the deity is to be imagined and may then sequentially be imagined as occupied by the seed syllable of the deity (bija) and its bodily representation that emerges from it. The deity, however, may also be represented by its symbol, commonly the characteristic attribute of the deity. On PC 2012 we have both, the symbols for the main deities and empty lotus seats in the outer sections of the maṇḍala, making it unlikely that both stand for the deity in the same manner. The abundance of lotus blossoms on this drawing actually reminds us on the fact that blossoms may also be strewn – in this case rather distributed – on the maṇḍala during ritual.28

None of these possible mind elements is absolutely convincing and it, therefore, has to remain open if elements of visualization occur on the drawings at all.

EXPERIMENT

The consideration of the mind element has already shown that the Dunhuang maṇḍala drawings contain a number of unusual elements that cannot be explained easily. Exceedingly puzzling is the following maṇḍala drawing on silk, again in the Musée Guimet (Fig. 17.11).29 The maṇḍala is focused on a fierce deity who is shown in the central circle in an aggressive pose directed towards two kneeling donors. The space between this central circle and the surrounding square is filled with Chinese text. The four successive squares of the maṇḍala around are filled with symbols, ritual implements, deities as well as body parts on lotuses. There are no doors as such, but there are sections set off in the cardinal directions, curiously containing seven Buddha heads each placed on lotuses. The symbols are commonly set on lotus pedestals and sometimes arranged in larger configurations – note the crossed element surrounded by four swords in the upper right corner of Fig. 17.11. Among the deities represented in the fourth square quite a few can be identified as Hindu and pan-Indian deities. In Fig. 17.11 we may have representations of Brahmā, Umā-Maheśvara, Agni, Sūrya, a pig-headed god with sword (possibly the earth) and Gaṇeśa, while Hārîti with her children is represented in another section.30

From the earlier examples one may surmise that the hands and feet on lotuses stand for the mudrās and postures to be performed by and for the deity, since this form of depiction is common in East Asian esoteric schools of Buddhism. Equally, the attributes and/or ritual implements on lotuses may stand for deities. As on the first maṇḍalas we looked at, symbolic representations and figurative ones are found side by side; the figurative ones are either wrathful – the central deity – or protective – the Hindu deities in the fourth square and the armoured protectors in the fifth. I cannot judge what the text represented in the centre says, but it is obvious that this in no explanatory note or caption. This unusual representation combines many of the elements that could be observed on other drawings as well but in an abundance that appears to be unusual. As the more text-centred drawings mentioned above, this depiction most likely had a talismanic function too.

TO SUM UP

Opening considerably more questions than providing answers, this survey though brief, nevertheless provides the ground for some interesting observations. First of all, there is no indication for any of the drawings surveyed, that they have been used in ritual itself or have been made for a ritual. A considerable number of the drawings – most clearly visible on P2012 – have an instructional function and there is a considerable range of instruction to be gained from the drawings. While the simpler ones are to be associated solely with ritual practice, more detailed depictions of mudrās and maṇḍalas may also have served as model for a ritual-specialist drawing the maṇḍala during a ritual or a painter producing a more decorative version of the maṇḍala.
Interestingly, there is a clear functional difference between the coarse Dunhuang drawings and the more sophisticated and decorative Dunhuang scrolls, even if they do share common elements. An example for the latter is the *Amoghapāsā maṇḍala* depicted on Musée Guimet scroll (EO.3579) mentioned already. This famous painting is divided into three parts, an assembly of the five Tathāgatas flanked by two esoteric forms of Avalokiteśvara – the four-armed Cintāmanicakravartin and a sixteen-armed form – an *Amoghapāsā maṇḍala* of 17 deities, and a depiction of the officiant and donors in the bottom part. In the *maṇḍala* depiction itself, only the two offering plates to the side of the bottom offering goddess may be associated with ritual, all other details are integrative of the *maṇḍala* itself.

What is most interesting about the drawings is their varying association with ritual. I think it is important to note that in the Chinese context the *maṇḍala* became a fixed feature of ritual with a distinctive platform used for it. One may imagine these platforms similar to those permanent *maṇḍalas* used in Newar Buddhism. As such, the Dunhuang drawings definitely do fill a gap concerning the evidence for early esoteric practice in India, but they neither fill it entirely nor can their evidence be considered conclusive in all aspects.

The considerations presented here can only be regarded as preliminary, since I cannot evaluate the drawings with Chinese captions and texts beyond the information available to me in the secondary literature in Western languages. A full evaluation of the esoteric drawings preserved at Dunhuang, thus, can only be done in cooperation with somebody fully versed in Chinese language and esoteric Buddhism. I hope this will be possible in future.

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. I am particularly grateful to Amanda Goodman who originally brought the most relevant Dunhuang drawings to my attention and also provided me with a photocopy of PT 389 and to Michael Henss who provided a digital image of a *maṇḍala* he published.
2. See Luczanits, at press.
3. Fraser, 2004, 149.
6. I wonder if the unusual white ground is supposed to refer to chalk.
7. Stein painting 174, Ch. 00186, attributed 10th century; Whitfield, 1983, fig. 81; Fraser, 2004, 156, fig. 4.15.
8. I assume here that “stove or burner”, as translated by Fraser, 2004, 155, is meant in the sense of a ritual fire-place.
10. In later Tibetan *maṇḍalas*, this *viśvavajra* ground is represented by the differently coloured prongs flanking the doorways.
11. It is assumed that the implements missing at the south gate – there is a short Chinese caption instead – are meant to be complemented.
12. The fourth *maṇḍala* is also reproduced in Fraser, 2004, 153, fig. 4.12.
13. The captions of this series are studied in detail by Amanda Goodman who also brought this drawing to my attention.
15. Comparative depictions of *mudrā* become customary in East Asia to explain the iconographical details of a deity, see Lokesh Chandra, 1986, or any volume of 1999-2005.
16. Fraser, 2004, pl. 23.
17. British Museum: 1919, 0101, 0.173 (Stein painting 173), Dunhuang Mogao (Ch. 00428), available at http://idp.bl.uk/, attributed to the late 9th century; Whitfield, 1983, fig. 78; Klimburg-Salter, 1982, pl. 69; Fraser, 2004, 151, fig. 4.11, and Luczanits, 2006, Abb. 1.

19. See British Museum: 1919, 0101, 0.18, Dunhuang Mogao (Ch.xxii.0015) available at http://idp.bl.uk/; Whitfield, 1983, I, fig. 50.

20. The text begins in the east, underneath the central figure:


The numbers in brackets indicate the line, [a reversed i-vowel sign (gi gu log), underline an uncertain but likely reading, x the loss or illegibility of a letter or letter-cluster.

I do not intend to evaluate the text critically, but some observations are certainly interesting. In the first line, spyan ras gzigs dbang is obviously an epithet of Mahāpratisarā. In general, the text and mantras refer to different purifications and the overcoming of all kinds of mental and physical miseries as well as the effects of dangerous lower beings such as yakṣa, rākṣasa and nāga. The mantras at the end refer to all five goddesses (cf. Willson and Brauen, 2000, no. 429).

21. Again, I owe the knowledge of this maṇḍala to Amanda Goodman who also provided me with photocopies of the drawing large enough to decipher its inscriptions to a large extent.

22. Compare the text of a Dunhuang manuscript in the India Office Library (IOL Tib J 364) available on http://idp.bl.uk/ and identified by Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik.

23. For a majority of the deities depicted within the maṇḍala also the names or their mantras are given; Fraser, 2004, 155, fig. 4.14.

24. See, e.g. British Museum, Stein painting 249, Ch.xliii.004; woodblock print on paper; Whitfield, 1983, fig. 151; and Fraser, 2004, fig. 4.16.

25. The question of the function of images and artistic decoration in a Buddhist context is extremely interesting and probably needs to be reconsidered at a grand scale. As Gregory Schopen has pointed out, in the Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya are even statements that indicate that a monastery or temple may only have been painted to attract lay followers and pilgrims, because there is no immediate use for imagery in the practice of the monks (see Schopen, 2004). On the other end of the spectrum Robert Sharf has drawn into question that visual imagery and maṇḍala depictions have been used for visualization in Shingon Buddhism (Sharf, 2001). For Tibetan Buddhism, too, the actual function of imagery in esoteric practice needs to be reviewed.

26. Other forms of depictions hinting towards the vajrapaṇḍja are rare. A late 13th or 14th century Vajrayogini thangka, likely excavated or found in the main temple of Tholing monastery in West Tibet, may indicate such a case by the white dots surrounding the field of the main deity and the valance motive above (see Lee-Kalisch, 2006, cat. no. 58).

27. British Museum: 1919, 0101, 0.172 (Stein painting 172), Dunhuang Mogao (Ch.00189) available on http://idp.bl.uk/, attributed to the late 9th century; Whitfield, 1983, figs. 79, 80, Fraser, 2004, pls. 24 and 154, fig. 4.13.
28. See e.g. the short description in Meisezahl, 1962, pp. 299-300.
29. For the full depiction see Giès, 1994, I, 50.
30. A similar experimental maṇḍala in a New York private collection is said to have been found at the tomb site of Dulan. It is said to depict “a monk-donor, the All-knowing Gelong Lodrø (Tibetan inscription), kneeling in front of a central vajra-holding crowned bodhisattva in a royal Tibetan robe.” Henss, 2006, 109 and fig. 7. Sadly, neither the published picture nor the digital image Henss kindly provided to me does allow to discern any details beyond the basic composition, the deity and the donor on the central lotus, a Tibetan text spiraling around it, two squares with deities, one square with four doors and symbols and an outer vajra-border. The deities represented also appear to be protectors of the Hindu pantheon.

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Fig. 17.1. Māndala and ritual drawing, Dunhuang, Ch.00379, H. 42.8 x 30.1 cm, (courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi).
Fig. 17.2. Effigy of dough used in Tibetan Buddhist ritual, Lamayuru, Ladakh, 2003 (photo: C. Luczanits, CL03 32a, 23).

Fig. 17.3. Ritual mandala among ritual implements and offerings, Dunhuang, detail of the scroll Musée Guimet MG 17.780 (photo: C. Luczanits, 2003).
Fig. 17.4. First *maniṭala*, Musée Guimet, PC 2012 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 101-102).

Fig. 17.5. Third *maniṭala*, Musée Guimet, PC 2012 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 99-100).

Fig. 17.6. Fourth *maniṭala* with assembly, Musée Guimet, PC 2012 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 96-97).

Fig. 17.7. Assembly of *maniṭala* deities, Musée Guimet, PC 4009 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 132, 477b).

Fig. 17.9. Drawing of a Vajradhātu *maniṭala* with colour indications, Bibliothèques National de France, P4518.33 (after Fraser 2004: pl. 23).
Fig. 17.8. Monks likely performing the *mudrā* of the goddess Vajranātṛī (rDo-rje-gar-ma) during the *Vajradhātu* ritual, Main Temple, Tabo Monastery (photo: C. Luczanits, 2005, D3574).

Fig. 17.10. Second *mandala*, Musée Guimet, PC 2012, (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 100).

Fig. 17.11. Detail of a *mandala* drawing, Musée Guimet (after Giès 1994: I, 50).