

From:

*The Art of Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent
in Cross Culture Perspective*,
edited by Anupa Pande, and Mandira Sharma.
New Delhi 2009
National Museum Institute-Aryan Books
International
p. 140–49 & 11 figs



17

RITUAL, INSTRUCTION AND EXPERIMENT ESOTERIC DRAWINGS FROM DUNHUANG

CHRISTIAN LUCZANITS

Although comparatively few in number, the esoteric drawings of Dunhuang¹ 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 *maṇḍalas* and their usage in the Buddhist context.² 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 *maṇḍalas*, 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
- *maṇḍala* depictions
- *maṇḍala* assemblies
- deities that are part of *maṇḍala* assemblies
- diagrams, implements, gestures, etc. to be associated with *maṇḍalas* and their ritual.

Sarah Fraser differentiates two groups among the relevant drawings, “diagrams for *maṇḍalas* 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”.³ However, if one takes the ritual and all its (possible) elements into account, in

particular the usage of a *maṇḍala* 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 MAṆḌALA

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 *maṇḍala* (Fig. 17.1).⁴ The form of the *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍalas* which are: Vajrāṅkuśa, who catches with the hook in the east, Vajrapāśa, who uses the noose to draw into the *maṇḍala* in the south, Vajrasphoṭa, who binds or chains in the west, and Vajrāveśa, who fixates with *vajra* and bell in the north.

While this description of the main features of the *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala*. 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 *viśvavajra* shown on the same side since both sword and *viśvavajra* 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 *maṇḍala*. 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 *maṇḍala* drawing functioned as actual ritual ground replacing a *maṇḍala* drawn with chalk or sand; but despite the mixture of symbolic and figural depictions of deities, it may well represent such a ritual *maṇḍala*. This can be concluded from the comparison to a *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* is laid out for the ritual on a white ground (Fig. 17.3).⁶ The *maṇḍala* 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 gate-keepers are represented figuratively. A garland along the outer wall and crescents at the corners are the only decorative details of the *maṇḍala*.

The National Museum diagram and the Musée Guimet painting both represent the *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* 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 Tāntrika understanding. The National Museum drawing combines the representation of a ritual *maṇḍala* with an explicit depiction of the ritual itself, a combination unique among the published examples surveyed.

MAṆḌALA 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 *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī* from the British Museum.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.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 *maṇḍala* or altar because of its unusual multi-cornered shape, but there are also drawings showing a proper ritual *maṇḍala* with an emphasis on the ritual implements to be distributed around it on the ritual ground. The series of four *maṇḍalas* depicted on P2012 from the Musée Guimet is particularly telling in this regard.⁹ This scroll represents the *maṇḍalas* 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 *maṇḍala*, for example, contains the symbols of the deities on the central eight-petalled lotus, again the symbols of the four Tathāgata families but now centred on Vairocana (Fig. 17.4). Lotuses in the corners and outer squares of the *maṇḍala* possibly represent seats for additional deities housed at the different levels of the *maṇḍala* (see below). Arrows stake out the *maṇḍala* palace at corners and doors; additional *vajra*-stakes are placed in front of the gates; *vajra*-chains covering the walls of the palaces are indicated by one *vajra* each below the south gates; *viśvavajra* secure the diagonals and possibly, also represent the diamond ground the palace is built upon,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 *vajra* and bell – and a wheel of thread at each gate,¹¹ and an offering plate at the east gate.

The second *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala*, and offering plates are shown in cardinal and intermediary directions. *Maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍalas* (Fig. 17.5). The fourth *maṇḍala* is the most incomplete with the outer regions being only filled in one corner (Fig. 17.6).¹² Thus, the *maṇḍala* depictions show both the drawing of the ritual *maṇḍala* with its decorative details and the *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* drawing.¹³

BODY

Each of the four *maṇḍalas* in series P2012 is associated with an assembly of deities, whereby the main deities become increasingly fierce from *maṇḍala* to *maṇḍala*. 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 *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* has five fierce main deities performing the same *mudrās* on each side. Thus, in this *maṇḍala* the deities of the assembly do not fit in the geometry of the *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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 *Vajradhātumaṇḍala* of the Bibliothèques National de France (P4518.33) attributed to the 10th century makes the instructional purpose particularly clear (Fig. 17.9).¹⁶ The drawing shows the principal outlines of a 53-deity *Vajradhātumaṇḍala* 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 *Durgatiparīśodhanamaṇḍala* (Stein painting 173; Ch. 00428).¹⁷ 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 disproportionately 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.3579.¹⁸

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).¹⁹ 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*).²⁰

A similar observation can be made by comparing the *maṇḍala* and the texts written above and below the Musée Guimet drawing PT 389.²¹ 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-tathāgatoṣṇīṣasitātapatre-aparājitā-nāma-dhāraṇī*.²² 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.²³

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*.²⁴

MIND?

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.²⁵

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 (*vajrapaṇjara*). Such a cage is commonly indicated by a *vajra* chain surrounding the depiction.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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 (*bīja*) 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 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 Hārītī 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 *Amoghapāśa 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 Cintāmaṇicakravartin and a sixteen-armed form – an *Amoghapāśa 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.
4. Klimburg-Salter, 1982, pl. 72.
5. For full representations, see Nicolas-Vandier, 1974, no. 28, and Giès and Cohen, 1996, no. 281.
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.
9. Huang Yongwu, 1981, 112, 96-102.
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.
14. Whitfield, 1983, fig. 101, and Fraser, 2004, 112, fig. 3.2.
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.

18. Nicolas-Vandier, 1974, no. 104; Klimburg-Salter, 1982, pl. 61; Giès, 1994, I, 99; Giès and Cohen, 1996, no. 284, and Fraser, 2004, pl. 22.
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:
 {1} bcom ldan 'das ma 'phags pa spyān ras gzigs dbang la phyag 'tshal lo / / bcom ldan 'das ma 'phags pa so sor 'brang ma chen mo la phyag 'tshal lo / {2} 'phags pa'i thugs rje'i byin gyi rlab skyis / / an lha skyes la bsrung zhing rgyin gyis brlabsu gsol / / bcom ldan 'das ma glang po che 'i lta stang skyis gzigs ma thams cad {3} du kun nas phyogs thams cad bcing x dang / rdo rje'i zhags pas bcing bas / bdag 'jigs pa chen po brgyad las bsbal du gsol / / va jra jva la vi shud dha / x ra ka ra / dr x x ntu ri / bha ga va ti / {4} ga rbha vati ga rbha va ti / ga rbha vi sho dha ni / ku kshi sam pu ra ni / jva la jva la / tsa la tsa la / jva la ni / / lha'i chus kun tu char dbab du gsol / / a mri ta var sha ni / de va ta / a va ta ra ni / / bde bar gshegs pa'i gsung rab bdud rtsi mcho x x sku dang ldan ba / / lha skyes la dbang {5} bskur du gsol / / 'thab pa dang / thab mo dang / rtsod pa dang / 'gye rba dang / rmyi lam ngan pa dang / ltam ngan pa dang / bkra myi shis pa dang / sdig pa thams cad rnam par sbyong ba / gnod sbyin dang / srin po dang / klu thams cad 'jom ba / x x x x s 'jigs skrag pa / lha skyes 'jigs {6} pa thams cad dang / gnod pa thams cad dang / nad 'go ba thams cad dang / nad thams cad las thams cad du rtag par bsrung du gsol / bsrung du gsol / / va la va la / va la va ti ja ya ja ya / / om a mri te / a mri ta x ce ba ra x x x xu da bhe hu'um phaṭ phaṭ svā hā / / a mri {7} ta / vi lo ki ni / ga rba sang rak kar ni / a kar sha ni hu'um hu'um phaṭ svā hā / / ōṃ vi ma le jay wa re / a mri te hu'um hu'um phaṭ phaṭ svā hā / / ōṃ bha ra bha ra / sam cha ra sam cha ra / in drī ya vi sho dha ni hu'um hu'um phaṭ phaṭ ru ru tsa le svā hā / / ōṃ ma ni bhir x x x hum phaṭ phaṭ svā hā / /
 The numbers in brackets indicate the line, *î* 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, spyān 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 *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* 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 *vajrapañjara* are rare. A late 13th or 14th century *Vajrayoginī 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 Lodrö (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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chandra, Lokesh, *A Ninth Century Scroll of the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala*, Śāta-Piṭaka Series, 343, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, 1986.
- , *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography*, 15 vols., Śāta-Piṭaka Series, Vols. 601-616, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, 1999-2005.
- Fraser, Sarah E., *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia*, 618-960, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004.
- Giès, Jacques, *Les arts de l'Asie centrale: La collection Paul Pelliot du musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet*, 2 vols., Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1994.
- Giès, Jacques and Monique Cohen (eds.), *Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha: Dix siècles d'art sur la Route de la Soie*, Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1996.
- Henss, Michael, “A Rejoinder to Amy Heller’s Book Review of Andreas Gruschke’s *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet’s Outer Provinces*”, Vols. I and II, 2001, *The Tibet Journal* 3 (2004): 101-02 (available in early 2006), and some more reviewing on the same author’s *Cultural Monuments of Tibet’s Outer Provinces, Kham*, Vols. I and II, Bangkok, 2004, *The Tibet Journal* 31 (2): 103-11.
- Huang, Yongwu (ed.), *Dunhuang bao zang (Tun-huang manuscripts)*, 140 vols., Taipei, 1981, Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi; 29 cm.
- Klimburg-Salter, Deborah E., *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path: Esoteric Buddhist Art on the Trans-Himalayan Trade Routes*, UCLA Art Council, Los Angeles, 1982.
- Lee-Kalisch, Jeong-hee (ed.), *Tibet – Klöster öffnen ihre Schatzkammern*, Essen, Kulturstiftung Ruhr, Villa Hügel, 2006.
- Luczanits, Christian, “Mandala: Form, Funktion und Bedeutung”, in Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch (ed.), *Tibet – Klöster öffnen ihre Schatzkammern*, Essen, Kulturstiftung Ruhr Essen, Villa Hügel, 2006, pp. 71-79.
- (at press), “On the Earliest Mandalas in a Buddhist Context”, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Mahayana: Philosophy and Art*, 2-5 November, 2005, New Delhi, Tibet House, New Delhi.
- Meisezahl, R.O., “The Amoghapaśaḥṛdaya-dhāraṇī”, *Monumenta Nipponica* XVII (1-4), (1962): 265-328.
- Nicolas-Vandier, N., *Bannières et Peintures de Touen-Houang conservées au Musée Guimet (Mission Paul Pelliot XIV [catalogue descriptif], Mission Paul Pelliot XV [planches])*, dir. de Louis Hambis, 2 vols, Paris, 1974.
- Schopen, Gregory, “Art, Beauty, and the Business of Running a Buddhist Monastery in Early Northwest India”, in Gregory Schopen (ed.), *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters. Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2004, pp. 19-44.
- Sharf, Robert H., “Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism”, in Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (eds.), *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, Asian Religions and Cultures Series, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001, pp. 151-97.
- Whitfield, Roderick, *The Art of Central Asia. The Stein Collection in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (2, Paintings from Dunhuang), Kodansha International, Tōkyō, 1983.
- Willson, Martin and Martin Brauen (eds.), *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism. The Zürich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See Bris sku mthoñ ba don ldan*, Wisdom Publication, 2000.



Fig. 17.1. *Maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* among ritual implements and offerings, Dunhuang, detail of the scroll Musée Guimet MG 17.780 (photo: C. Luczanits, 2003).

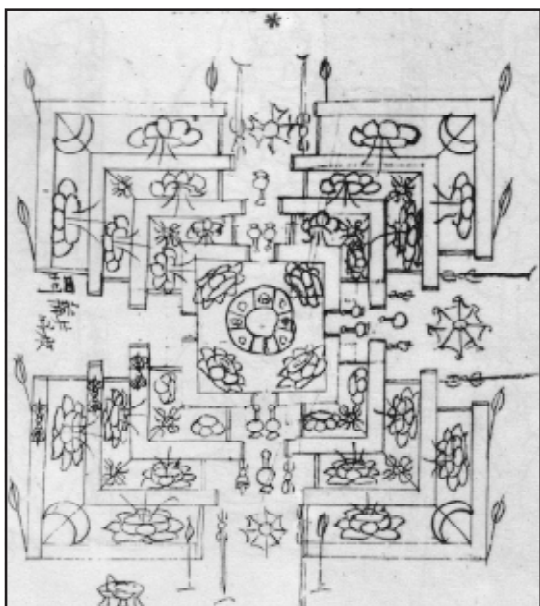


Fig. 17.4. First *maṇḍala*, Musée Guimet, PC 2012 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 101-102).

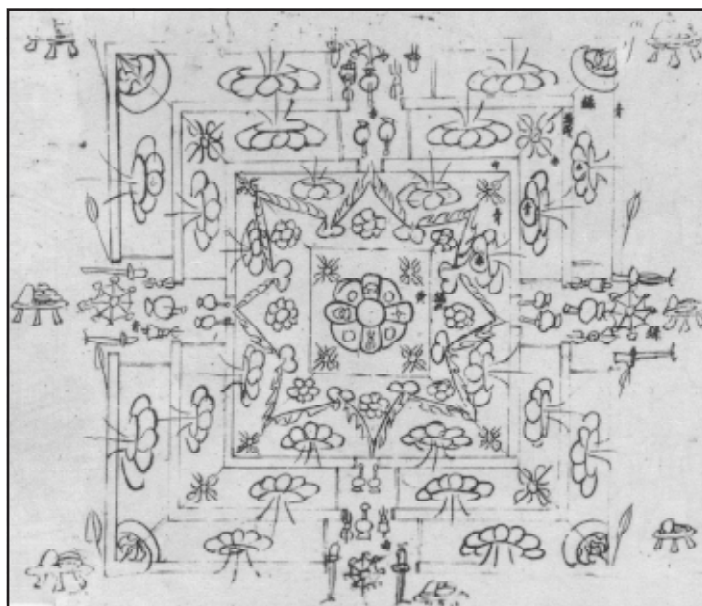


Fig. 17.5. Third *maṇḍala*, Musée Guimet, PC 2012 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 99-100).

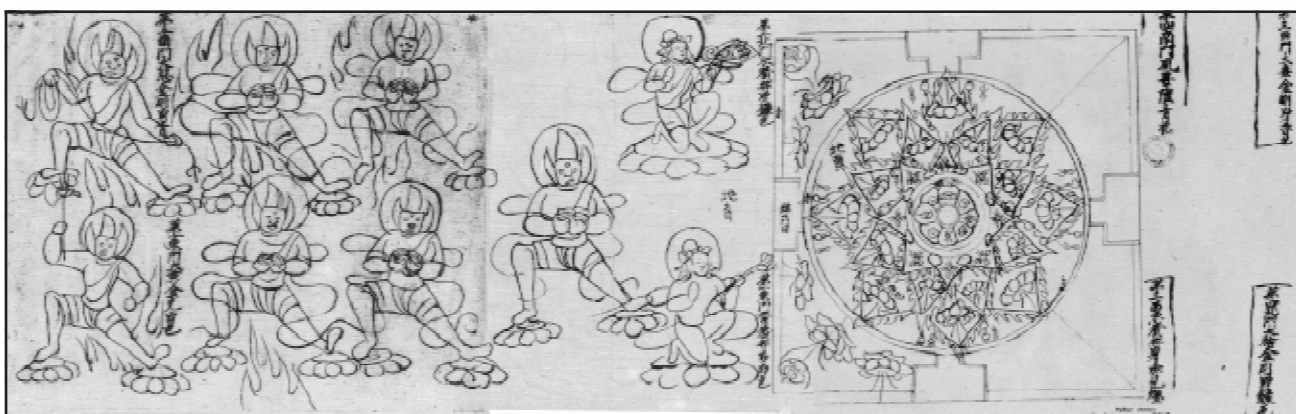


Fig. 17.6. Fourth *maṇḍala* with assembly, Musée Guimet, PC 2012 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 96-97).

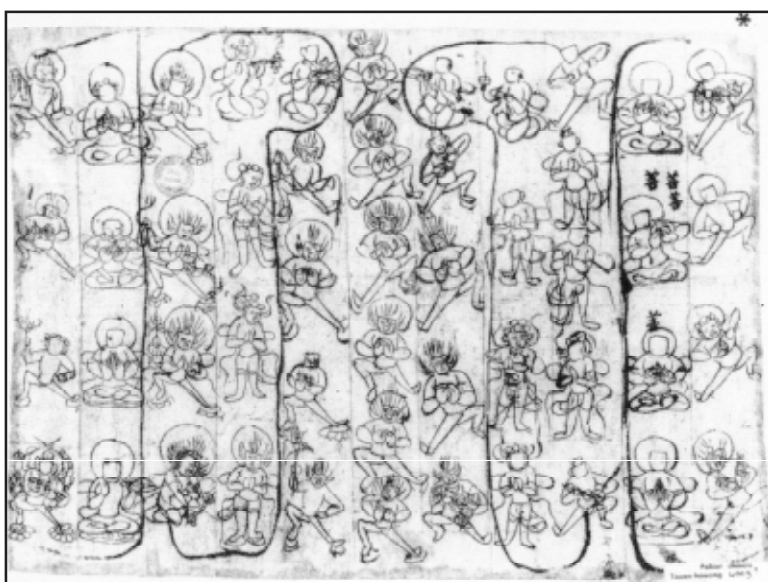


Fig. 17.7. Assembly of *maṇḍala* deities, Musée Guimet, PC 4009 (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 132, 477b).



Fig. 17.9. Drawing of a *Vajradhātu maṇḍala* 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 Vajranṛtyā (rDo-rje-gar-ma) during the *Vajradhātu* ritual, Main Temple, Tabo Monastery (photo: C. Luczanits, 2005, D3574).

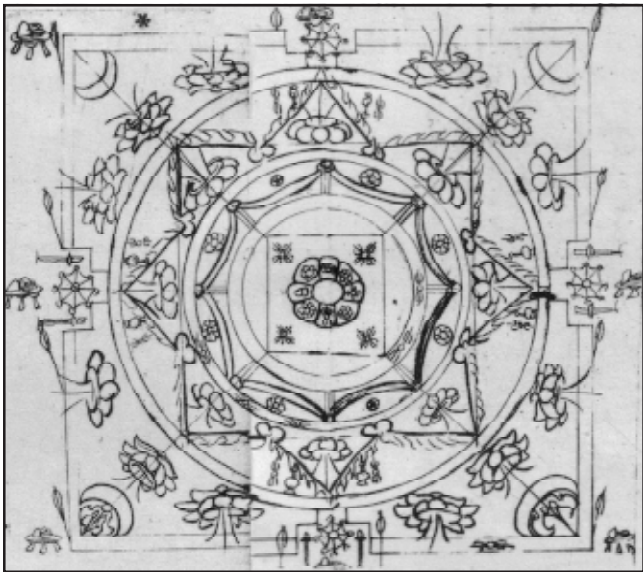


Fig. 17.10. Second *maṇḍala*, Musée Guimet, PC 2012, (after *Dunhuang bao zang* 112, 100).



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