





ARTICLE

Clay sealings from Perlis, Malaysia, and the wider world of the *Bodhigarbhāṅkārakṣa-Dhāraṇī*

Eng Jin Ooi¹  and Nasha Rodziadi Khaw² 

¹College of Religious Studies, Mahidol University, Salaya, Thailand and ²Centre for Global Archaeological Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

Corresponding author: Nasha Rodziadi Khaw; Email: rnasha@usm.my

Abstract

Multiple copies of a particular clay sealing bearing the Buddhist *Bodhigarbhāṅkārakṣa-dhāraṇī* (mantra) inscription were discovered in Gua Berhala—a cave in Perlis, Malaysia. These sealings can be roughly assigned to the tenth century and they appear to have been stamped with an identical seal. However, critical reading of the textual rendition of the *dhāraṇī* had not yet been done despite several attempts to study it. Therefore, based on several fragments of these sealings, this article provides a detailed reading and translation of the *dhāraṇī* and considers the cultural significance of their production. The article also examines the textual structure of this Perlis *dhāraṇī* and compares it with similar *dhāraṇīs* preserved in a palm-leaf manuscript and other materials found across Asia. This includes a survey on the wider transmission of the *dhāraṇī* in the continent. In this comparative exercise, the physical characteristics of the Perlis sealing appear to be unique and express a distinct artistic style, while its textual tradition is slightly compressed compared with others, with no identical equivalent found elsewhere. This observation suggests that Perlis, with its proximity to the Bujang Valley, participated in the wider network of *dhāraṇī* culture rooted in Eastern India and was just not a passive recipient of this practice.

Keywords: Perlis; clay sealing; *bodhigarbhāṅkārakṣa*; *dhāraṇī*; mantra; Śrīvijaya; Buddhist inscription; Ancient Kedah; Malaysia

Introduction

Towards the end of the nineteenth century CE, certain types of Buddhist clay sealings¹ were discovered by Vaughan Stevens in a cave in Perlis—a small state located on the north-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia.² Later on, more of these sealings were picked

¹ We use the term ‘sealing’ instead of ‘votive tablet’ as these sealings are generally meant as objects for merit-making rituals rather than objects offered in fulfilment of vows. For further discussion on the word ‘votive’ in this context, see P. Skilling, “‘Buddhist sealings’: reflection on terminology, motivation, donor’s status, school-affiliation, and print-technology”, in *South Asian Archaeology 2001. Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists*, Collège de France, 2–6 July 2001, (eds.) C. Jarrige and V. Lefèvre (Paris, 2005), ii, pp. 677–685; G. Schopen, ‘Stūpa and Tīrtha: Tibetan mortuary practices and an unrecognized form of burial ad sanctos at Buddhist sites in India’, in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, More Collected Papers*, (ed.) G. Schopen (Honolulu, 2005), p. 356. In this article, we use the terms ‘sealing’ and ‘tablet’ interchangeably.

² C. O. Blagden, ‘A Buddhist votive tablet’, *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 39 (1903), pp. 205–206.

up by Ivor H. N. Evans and H. D. Collings.³ In 1964, Alastair Lamb reported further discoveries in the same cave, called Gua Berhala, in addition to another cave nearby, known as Gua Kurong Batang.⁴ These sealings are usually circular or pear-shaped and come in several designs. Some are impressed with the figures of a 12-armed Avalokiteśvara and some show a seated Bodhisattva with his right foot on a lotus cushion or a Buddha seated in *dharmacakra mudra* (preaching the wheel of law gesture) surrounded by eight Bodhisattvas.⁵ Some of these sealings were also stamped with inscriptions on the reverse side. One particular type of sealing that is of interest to this article is the one stamped with an inscription containing a *dhāraṇī* found in Gua Berhala.⁶ These sealings were assigned as Type 1 tablets in Lamb's paper (Figure 1). He described them as:

Pear-shaped tablets, of sun-dried red clay, with an inscription of 16 lines in a deeply recessed circular cartouche. In some specimens of this type the inscribed area had been coloured with a red pigment (haematite?). The reverse side of these tablets, as also of many other red tablets from this site, showed impressions from some kind of bamboo matting. These tablets were by far the most common type in Gua Berhala, though only one complete specimen was discovered. A photograph of the inscription on this type of tablet was sent to Professor G. Cœdès in Paris; but he has not, at the moment of writing, been able to provide a translation of it, though he reports that it does not contain the *ye dharmma* formula.⁷

³ I. H. N. Evans, 'A search for antiquities in Kedah and Perlis', *Journal of Federated Malay States Museums* 15 (1931), pp. 43–50; H. D. Collings, 'An excavation at Bukit Chuping, Perlis', *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum, Singapore, Straits Settlements, Series B, I.2* (1937), pp. 115–116.

⁴ A. Lamb, 'Mahayana Buddhist votive tablets in Perlis', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37.2 (1964), pp. 47–59.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Dhāraṇī* is a text containing a mantra or mystical verse or charm. Some *dhāraṇīs* consist of only the mantra whereas others include prose passages as well. Davidson argues that '*dhāraṇī* is a function term denoting "codes/coding," and therefore, the category *dhāraṇī* is polysemic and context-sensitive, capable of being applied within all the various activities so often included within the method of *dhāraṇī*: memory, recitation, protective mantras, inspiration, summary texts, and extended Mahāyānist works' (p. 98); see R. M. Davidson, 'Studies in Dhāraṇī literature. I: Revisiting the meaning of the term *Dhāraṇī*', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37 (2009), pp. 97–147, <https://doi-org.ejournal.mahidol.ac.th/10.1007/s10781-008-9054-8>; see also G. Hidas, 'Dhāraṇī Sūtras', in Brill's *Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Literature and Language*, (ed.) J. A. Silk (Leiden and Boston, 2015), i, pp. 129–137; for another *dhāraṇī* that circulated in Southeast Asia, see T. Cruisjen, A. Griffiths, and M. J. Klokke, 'The cult of the Buddhist *Dhāraṇī* deity Mahāpratisarā along the maritime silk route: new epigraphic and iconographic evidence from the Indonesian archipelago', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 35 (2012) (1/2 (appeared in 2014)), pp. 71–157, <https://doi.org/10.2143/JIABS.35.1.3078162>.

⁷ Lamb, 'Mahayana Buddhist', p. 53, plates 19, 20; *ye dharmā* is a verse spoken by Aśvajit to Śāriputra, who requested the former to tell him the essence of the Buddha's teaching. This verse is found in canonical texts of various Buddhist schools. Quoting the Sanskrit *Mahāvastu* version, the stanza goes like this: '*ye dharmā hetuprabhāvā hetun teṣāṃ tathāgato āha // teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ //*', in E. Senart (ed.), *Le Mahāvastu, texte sanscrit publié pour la première fois et accompagné d'introductions et d'un commentaire* (Paris, 1897), iii, p. 62. It could be translated as 'the states arise from a cause, their cause the Tathāgata declares, as well as their cessation: this is the teaching of the Great Ascetic'. The *ye dharmā* verse is called the 'stanza' (*gāthā*) or 'heart' (*hṛdaya*) of the doctrine of Dependent Origination that is a fundamental Buddhist concept usually expounded in a sequence of 12 linked factors, starting from ignorance in describing the causes of suffering, and the course of events that lead a being through rebirth, old age, and death. For further discussion on the different versions of this *ye dharmā* stanza, see P. Skilling, 'A Buddhist inscription from Go Xoai, southern Vietnam and notes towards a classification of *ye dharmā* inscriptions', in **๘๐ ปี ศาสตราจารย์ ดร.ประเสริฐ ณ นคร, รวมบทความวิชาการด้านจารึกและเอกสารโบราณ** (on the occasion of the 80th-anniversary celebration of Professor Dr. Prasert na Nagara) (Bangkok, 1999), pp. 171–187. For the expression of Dependent Origination in the Buddha's discourse and its commentarial texts, see B. Bodhi (trans.), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston, 2000), pp. 516–520; and E. J. Ooi, 2022, 'Why is the

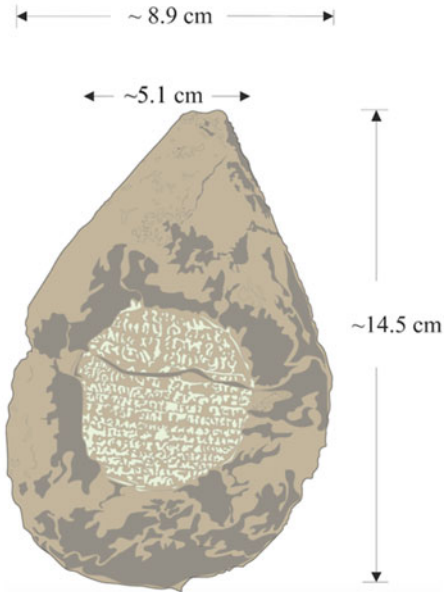


Figure 1. The shape of the sealing stamped with the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* recovered in Perlis, Malaysia—a hand copy from Plate 9 in A. Lamb, ‘Mahayana Buddhist votive tablets in Perlis’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37.2 (1964), pp. 47–59.

Earlier, in around the mid-1930s, fragments of this particular sealing, discovered by Collings, were also sent to Cœdès for interpretation, who was the Director of the *École française d’Extrême-Orient* in Hanoi. Cœdès wrote:

A, E, F, K, L, N, Q and R are fragments of an imprint from one mould, A, E, K, N, Q corresponding to the upper part of the text; F and R to the left and L to the right side. Unfortunately, the gathering of these fragments does not enable me to reconstruct the complete text. All that I can say is that it begins with the invocation: *Namo Bhagavato*, ‘Homage to the Blessed One!’ I can also read the word *Tathāgata* (an epithet of the Buddha) on two fragments. The text was evidently some sort of prayer or incantation in Sanskrit or more probably in Prākṛit. As regards the probable age of these tablets [including other types of sealing], they can hardly be anterior to the 10th century A.D.⁸

Even earlier, in 1864, the British Museum acquired six similar sealings with the acquisition notes as follows:

Book of Presents [512]: Department of Oriental, British, Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography, British Museum 11 November 1864. Mr. Bliss has the honour of reporting to the Trustees that six terra cotta impressions of seals with inscriptions in an old Pali character supposed to be Buddhist prayers and two fragments of terra cotta impressions of seals representing Buddhist deities found in a cave in the district of

forward sequence of Dependent Origination the wrong path? An annotated translation of the Commentary to the Nidānasamyutta’s *Discourse of the (Two) Paths*, *Journal of the Philosophy and Religion Society of Thailand* 17.1 (2022), pp. 40–57; for further examples of *ye dharmā* in epigraphy, see A. Griffiths, ‘Inscriptions of Sumatra: further data on the epigraphy of the Musi and Batang Hari river basins’, *Archipel* 81 (2011), pp. 139–75, <https://doi.org/10.3406/arch.2011.4273>; and for its roles in medieval cult practices, see D. Boucher, ‘The Prāṭītyasamutpādagāthā and its role in the medieval cult of the relics’, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14 (1991), pp. 1–27.

⁸ Reported in Collings, ‘Excavation at Bukit Chuping’, p. 116.



Figures 2 to 9. Fragments of clay sealings stamped with the *Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* found in Gua Berhala in Perlis, Malaysia. Photos by the authors.

Patania in the vicinity of Penang, have been received in the department for the Trustees, offered as presents by Mr. W. E. Jevons of 6 Rumford Place Liverpool. The subject of these inscriptions requires further investigations to elucidate their contents and copies have been made for that purpose.⁹

The sealings preserved in the British Museum are more intact compared with those documented in the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum (Figures 2 to 9) and the Kota Kayang Museum (Figure 10), though not all of them are complete without certain parts at the side broken off. The characters in the sealings in most cases are clearly visible but, yet again, none of them is complete without certain parts of the inscription having been chipped off or effaced. At the moment, we do not think that the British Museum's sealings were found in a cave in or near Penang due to a lack of any reports implying their archaeological contexts. These sealings most probably originated from Perlis and were sold in Patania, which could refer to the present-day Sungai Petani—a town in southern Kedah, just north of the Province Wellesley in Penang.¹⁰

The stamped inscriptions of all these sealings from the British Museum and those studied by Lamb and Collings are identical. They appear to have been impressed by the same stamp and most likely came from the same cave. The inscription does begin with *namo bhagavate* (not *bhagavato*). However, these earlier studies or records do not provide the complete reading of this inscription.

⁹ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_As1864-1201-4 (accessed 8 May 2023). Sealing registration numbers in the British Museum: As1864,1201.1–6.

¹⁰ The British acquired the island of Penang from Kedah in 1786 and part of the mainland next to the island in 1800 as well. They were named the Prince of Wales and Province Wellesley, respectively. Penang became a part of the Straits Settlements of the British (together with Singapore and Melaka) in 1826 and later merged into the Federation of Malaya in 1948. The federation gained independence from the British in 1957.

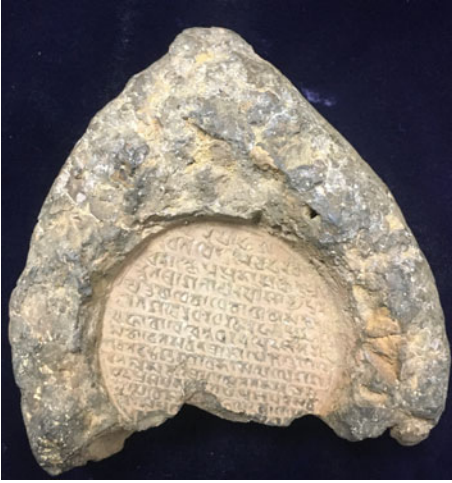


Figure 10. One of the three fragments of clay sealings stamped with the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* preserved at the Kota Kayang Museum in Perlis. Photo by the authors.

It was not until 2013 that Nasha Rodziadi Khaw and Mohd Mokhtar Saidin published the first reading of the inscription.¹¹ As no single complete sealing was available to them, the reading is based on a collation of eight fragments of the tablets (which are reproduced in Figures 2 to 9). They found that the reading of this inscription resembles the textual content of certain sealings found in Hund, Pakistan.¹² Unfortunately, the reading of the Hund sealings was incomplete due to the fragmental nature of the tablets and effaced characters. However, they managed to identify the reading as a certain *dhāraṇī*, similarly to other north Indian clay sealings preserved in the British Museum in London and in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford through the work of Simon Lawson.¹³ Nevertheless, none of these papers was able to identify the *dhāraṇī*. But it has now become clear that the *dhāraṇī* that appears on the sealings of Perlis, Hund, and the British and Ashmolean Museums is the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* or the *dhāraṇī* of the Hundred Thousand Ornaments of the Essence of Awakening.¹⁴

This *dhāraṇī* seems to have been circulated quite widely in Asia. Its adaptations are preserved in the Chinese Buddhist canon as well as in various Tibetan Kanjurs that include a version thought to have been translated from Chinese.¹⁵ Furthermore, its Sanskrit original

¹¹ Nasha Rodziadi Khaw and Mohd Mokhtar Saidin, 'Votive tablets of Perlis deciphered and their parallelism with the Hund votive tablets from Gandhāra', *Gandhāran Studies* 7.1 (2013), pp. 23–24.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38; Ihsan Ali and Nasim Khan, 'Inscribed clay tablets and miniature stupas from Hund', *Ancient Pakistan* 12 (1997), pp. 77–85; on the archaeological significance of Hund, see Zarawar Khan, M. A. Durrani, and Mir Muhammad Khan, 'A note on the archaeological significance of Hund', *PUTAJ Humanities and Social Sciences* 19.1 (2012), pp. 77–92.

¹³ S. D. Lawson, 'Dhāraṇī sealings in British collection', in *South Asian Archaeology 1983, Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, (eds.) J. Schotsmans and M. Taddei (Naples, 1985), 2, pp. 703–717.

¹⁴ For the British Museum sealings that are identified with this *dhāraṇī*, see Lawson, 'Dhāraṇī sealings', pp. 709–711; and G. Hidas, 'Dhāraṇī seals in the Cunningham Collection', in *Precious Treasures from the Diamond Throne: Finds from the Site of the Buddha's Enlightenment*, (eds.) S. van Schaik, D. De Simone, G. Hidas, and M. Willis (London, 2021), pp. 87–94. For the Ashmolean Museum sealings, see S. D. Lawson, 'A Catalogue of Indian Buddhist Clay Sealings in British Museums' (D. Phil. thesis, Hertford College, Oxford, 1982), pp. 205–218.

¹⁵ See G. Schopen, 'The *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs* in Indian inscriptions: two sources for the practice of Buddhism in medieval India', in *Fragments and Fragments*, (ed.) Schopen, pp. 314–344; for a translation from Chinese by the Mongolian scholar mGon po skyabs dated 1743, see C. Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some *dhāraṇī* written on paper functioning as *dharmakāya* relics: a tentative approach to PT 350', in *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings*

was transmitted in different lengths and textual traditions.¹⁶ As such, this Perlis sealing would merit a more careful study in order to contribute to the repertoire of textual data of this *dhāraṇī*. In this research article, we will present a critical reading of the Perlis sealing. However, we will not conduct a systematic comparative study on the textual tradition of this *dhāraṇī*—the most recent of which was undertaken by Ingo Strauch in 2009—as our main aim is to present what was found in Perlis. Nevertheless, we will compare the structure of this Perlis *dhāraṇī* to a similar *dhāraṇī* named the *Ārya-lakṣa-nāma-dhāraṇī* found in a twelfth- to thirteenth-century Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript along with readings of other sealings found in India, as well as a gold foil that was recovered in Java, in present-day Indonesia. We will also conduct a general survey on the geographical distribution of this *dhāraṇī*, which will yield important insights into the extent to which this *dhāraṇī* has reached out to people in Asia and how Perlis came to be part of it.

The Perlis sealing

Perlis is the smallest and northernmost state of Malaysia, bordering the provinces of Satun and Songkhla of Thailand to the north and the state of Kedah to the south. Perlis was originally part of Kedah, which covered most of the north-western part of the Malay–Thai Peninsula before the nineteenth century CE. The state is situated approximately 110 kilometres from the Bujang Valley—a historical and archaeological complex in Kedah where numerous Hindu and Buddhist epigraphs, icons, and religious shrines have been unearthed.¹⁷ The Bujang Valley was the economic and political centre of Ancient Kedah—a maritime polity located at the entrance of the Strait of Melaka consisting of several riverine and coastal settlements on the west coast of the Malay–Thai Peninsula.¹⁸ Evidence of commercial activities and industry can be found in Bujang Valley that dates back to as early as the second or third century CE before it developed into an entrepôt from the seventh century onwards.¹⁹ Ancient Kedah was also situated at the entrance of several riverine trans-peninsular routes, such as one following the Muda River that crossed into Pattani on the east coast of the Peninsula in present-day

of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992, (ed.) P. Kvaerne (Oslo, 1994), ii, p. 714. The Kanjur (*bka' gyur*) is a corpus of collected teachings of the Buddha, translated into Tibetan, and it is generally considered as the Tibetan Buddhist canon.

¹⁶ I. Strauch, 'Two stamps with *Bodhiḡarbhālamkāralakṣa dhāraṇī* from Afghanistan and some further remarks on classification of objects with the *ye dharmā* formula', in *Prajñādhāra, Essays on Asian Art, History, Epigraphy and Culture in Honour of Gouriswar Bhattacharya*, (eds.) G. J. R. Mevissen and Arundhati Banerji (New Delhi, 2009), pp. 37–56.

¹⁷ For selected Buddhist inscriptions found in Bujang Valley and its surrounding areas, see J. Allen, 'An inscribed tablet from Kedah, Malaysia: comparison with earlier finds', *Asian Perspectives* 27.1 (1986–1987), pp. 35–57; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and Kamaruddin Zakaria, 'Recent archaeological discoveries in Sungai Mas, Kuala Muda, Kedah', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 66.2 (1993), pp. 73–80; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, 'Buddhism in the Bujang Valley, Kedah (5th to 10th century)', in *Nalanda, Srivijaya and Beyond: Re-exploring Buddhist Art in Asia*, (ed.) G. P. Krishnan (Singapore, 2016), pp. 101–128; P. Skilling, 'Sāgaramati-paripṛcchā inscriptions from Kedah, Malaysia', in *Reading Slowly: A Festschrift for Jens E. Braarvig*, (eds.) L. Edzard, J. W. Borgland, and U. Hüsen (Wiesbaden, 2018), pp. 433–460; H. G. Q. Wales, 'Archaeological researches on ancient Indian colonization in Malaya', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18.1 (136) (1940), pp. iii–85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41559946>.

¹⁸ For more information on Bujang Valley, see Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and Othman Mohd. Yatim, *Warisan Lembah Bujang* (Bangi, 1992 [2006]); S. Murphy, 'Revisiting the Bujang Valley: a Southeast Asian entrepôt complex on the maritime trade route', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28.2 (2018), pp. 355–389; for its early socioeconomic importance, see Nasha Rodziadi Khaw, 'Pensejarahan Kedah Tua: Satu Analisis Sosioekonomi' (unpublished MA thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2011).

¹⁹ See Nasha Rodziadi Khaw and L. J. Gooi, 'The Sungai Batu Archaeological Complex: re-assessing the emergence of Ancient Kedah', *Kajian Malaysia* 39.2 (2021), pp. 117–152.



Figure 11. Malay–Thai Peninsula with archaeological site of Bujang Valley, and Gua Berhala in Perlis.

Thailand to the Gulf of Siam²⁰ and another one from northern Kedah via Perlis to Songkhla, tracking between the Thammarat and Kedah Singgora ranges (Figure 11).²¹ Thus, the region was bustling with human activities, not only of commerce and trade, but also of culture as well as religious thought and practice. As such, Perlis, given its proximity to Bujang Valley and being one of the settlements of Ancient Kedah, might have actively participated in these exchanges in one way or another (more of this below).

As far as we know, this particular *Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* sealing of Perlis (hereafter the Perlis Bodhi sealing) was only discovered in Gua Berhala, in multiple copies, despite the fact that, in the same cave, there were other types of sealings that were also found in other areas in the Peninsula. These Perlis Bodhi sealings are pear-shaped, possibly emulating the structure of a *caitya* or *stūpa*.²² Given the variations in the sizes of these pear-shaped sealings, the lumps of clay would be made by hand and the seal impressed upon them.²³ They were dried either under the Sun or through the heat of a

²⁰ Wheatley listed 11 possible trans-Peninsula routes in early times from the upper part of the Peninsula at Kra Isthmus down to Johor; see P. Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur, 1961 [2017]), p. xxvii and Figure 4, p. xxvi.

²¹ See also Figure 2 in M. Jacq-Hergoualc'h, 'Archaeological research in the Malay Peninsula', *Journal of the Siam Society* 85.1&2 (1997), p. 125.

²² In this article, we use the terms *caitya* and *stūpa* interchangeably.

²³ This can be clearly seen from the different unbroken pear-shaped sealings preserved in the British Museum mentioned earlier.

small fire. Some specimens were well dried and some were not. In general, the length of a complete tablet is approximately 14.5 centimetres, the widest width is around 8.9 centimetres, and the diameter of the inscription area is around 5.1 centimetres (Figure 1).²⁴ The thickness is around 4.1 centimetres and the sealing weighs roughly 400 grams. The sealings presented in Figures 2 to 9 used to be preserved at the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum in Kedah. Another three fragments are kept at the Kota Kayang Museum in Perlis (the largest fragment among them is presented in Figure 10). As mentioned earlier, an additional six of them are preserved at the British Museum, but similar specimens could be kept at other museums as well.²⁵

In terms of age, these pear-shaped Perlis Bodhi sealings exhibit certain characteristics of a group of sealings classified by Coedès as the Type II *Phra Bimb* (or *Phra Phim*, พระพิมพ์, literally ‘sacred imprint’) among the sealings found in Siam.²⁶ According to Coedès, this group of sealings is found mainly in the caves of the Malay–Thai Peninsula and most of them are made of clay, are pear-shaped, and feature the characteristics of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Inscriptions, usually stamped on the reverse sides of the tablets, consist of the *ye dharmā* formula in the Nāgarī script. Based on the stylistic ground of the art of Śrīvijaya and the script used, Coedès argued that they could be dated to the tenth century CE.²⁷ Syed Ahmad Jamal and Othman Mohd. Yatim also indicate that the Perlis Bodhi sealing is an example of Śrīvijaya art in Peninsular Malaysia.²⁸ The art of Śrīvijaya might indicate an Indianised art style resembling the Pāla art of Bengal.²⁹ Even though the Perlis Bodhi sealings were not part of the Coedès analysis above, based on artistic styles, the design of the Perlis Bodhi sealing points date to around the tenth century CE.

On palaeographic grounds, the script used in the Perlis Bodhi sealings shows closer affinity to the Siddhamāṭṛkā, which is, at times, referred to as ‘early Nāgarī’.³⁰ The script of the sealings appears to closely resemble the Siddhamāṭṛkā script of the *Vimaloṣṇīsa-dhāraṇī* that was stamped on the clay sealings from Pejeng Village in Bali, Indonesia.³¹ On palaeographic grounds Arlo Griffiths estimates that the Bali sealings date to between 800 and 1000 CE.³² Another similar script sealing, also from Pejeng Village in Bali but with a *ye dharmā* inscription, now preserved in the National Museum of Thailand in Bangkok, is also estimated to date to between the ninth and eleventh centuries CE.³³ Siddhamāṭṛkā is a script that was developed in about the seventh to tenth centuries CE around northern India and was used as an epigraphic script not only in Northern and Eastern India, but also in the west and even the south, such as in the eighth-century Paṭṭadakal Pillar

²⁴ These measurements were estimated based on the photographs with measuring scale taken by Lamb, ‘Mahayana Buddhist’, plates 19, 20.

²⁵ For example, we are not certain, at present, where the sealings discovered by Lamb and Collings are located. There are some sealings preserved at the National Museum (Muzium Negara) in Kuala Lumpur but, at the time of writing this article, they are not accessible to us.

²⁶ G. Coedès, ‘Siamese votive tablets’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, 20.1 (1926–27), p. 7, plates VIII, IX.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13, 20, 21.

²⁸ Syed Ahmad bin Jamal and Othman bin Mohd. Yatim, ‘Śrīvijaya art in Peninsular Malaysia’, in *The Art of Śrīvijaya*, (ed.) M. C. Subhadradis Diskul (Petaling Jaya, 1980), pp. 45–49.

²⁹ Lamb, ‘Mahayana Buddhist’, p. 47; for further discussion on the art of Śrīvijaya, see Satyawati Suleiman, ‘The history and art of Śrīvijaya’, in *The Art of Śrīvijaya*, (ed.) Subhadradis Diskul, pp. 1–20.

³⁰ R. Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages* (New York and Oxford, 1998), p. 39, n. 112.

³¹ Putu Budiastra and Wayan Widia, *Stupika Tanah Liat Koleksi Museum Bali* (Bali, 1980–1981), p. 56, photo 9, reproduced in A. Griffiths, ‘Written traces of the Buddhist past: mantras and dhāraṇīs in Indonesian inscriptions’, *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 77.1 (2014), pp. 181–183 and Figure 12.

³² Griffiths, ‘Written traces of the Buddhist past’, p. 183.

³³ It is stated in the display note in the museum that the sealing and miniature *stūpas* were presented to the National Museum of Thailand on 22 November 1931.

biscript inscription detailing the donation of a Śiva temple.³⁴ In Southeast Asia, this script is not widely seen in inscriptions found in the Malay–Thai Peninsula or Mainland Southeast Asia.³⁵ However, it seems to be more frequently used in (Java) Indonesia.³⁶ Therefore, based on palaeographic grounds, in the absence of carbon dating, the Perlis Bodhi sealings could be dated to the period around the tenth century CE or slightly earlier. It is also noteworthy that the sealing stamp could have been made earlier than the sealings themselves. As such, the sealings could be far younger than the palaeographic dating, as the stamp could have been used over a longer period of time.

Readings of the Perlis Bodhi sealing

The inscription of the Perlis Bodhi sealing is presented in 16 lines within a circular cartouche in the Sanskrit language. The readings collated from the nine sealings (Figures 2 to 10) were transcribed as follows.³⁷

Transcription:

Line	Reading
1	na mo bha ga
2	va te vi pu la va da na kaṃ
3	ca no tki pta pra bhā sa ke tu mū
4	rdhe ta thā ga tā ya na mā śā kya mu na
5	ye oṃ bo dhi bo dhi bo dhi bo sa rve ta th(ā)
6	ga ta go ca re dha ra dha ra ha ra ha ra pra hā ra
7	ma hā bo dhi ci tta dha r(e) cu lu 2 śa ta ra (śm)i
8	saṃ co di te sa rva ta thā bhā śi te gu ṇa gu
9	ṇa va te bu ddha gu ṇā va bhā se mi li ga ga
10	ma ta la sa rva ta thā dhi (ṣ)ṭhi te (na) bha sta le śa
11	ma pra śa ma sa rva pā pa pra śa ma ne sa rva
12	pā pa vi śo dha ne hu lu 2 bo dhi mā

(Continued)

³⁴ Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, pp. 39, 71; see J. F. Fleet, ‘Pattadakal Pillar inscription of the time of Kirtivarman II’, in *Epigraphia Indica* III, (ed.) E. Hultzsch (Calcutta, 1894–1895), pp. 1–7.

³⁵ Note that some Sanskrit *dhāraṇī* inscriptions in *Siddhamātrkā* (or *Siddham*) script or close to it are found on tombstones and pillars in Yunnan—a province in south-western China bordering some Southeast Asian countries to its west and south. For further discussion of these inscriptions, see B. M. Mak, ‘Sanskrit *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī* inscriptions in Dali/Yunnan’, in *Investigating Principles: International Aspects of Buddhist Culture, Essays in Honour of Professor Charles Willemen*, (eds.) L. Shrivak and S. Rai (Hong Kong, 2019), pp. 245–276; O. von Hinüber, ‘Two *Dhāraṇī*-inscriptions from tombs at Dali (Yunnan)’, *Journal of the Siam Society* 77.1 (1989), pp. 55–59.

³⁶ Griffiths, ‘Written traces of the Buddhist past’, p. 161; for example, the *Siddhamātrkā* inscriptions found on the back of the bronze Buddha of Rejoso image (~ninth century), discovered near Candi Plaosan, Central Java, and the stone inscription of Kalasan (circa eighth century) in Central Java; see A. Griffiths, N. Revire, and Rajat Sanyal, ‘An inscribed bronze sculpture of a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* at Museum Ranggawarsita in Semarang (Central Java, Indonesia)’, *Arts Asiatiques*, 68 (2013), Figures 19, 20.

³⁷ We have selected certain readings from a sealing preserved at the British Museum (As1864-1201-2) when the readings of our sealings are not clear.

Figure 11. (Continued.)

Line	Reading
13	rga sam pra sthi te sa rva ta thā ga ta pra
14	ti ṣṭhi te śu ddhe svā hā na ma
15	sa rva ta thā ga ta vya va
16	lo ki te

The parentheses indicate that the reading is close but not entirely clear or is partial on extant fragments of the sealings.

Edition:

namo bhagavate vipula-vadana-kāṃcanotk[ṣ]ipta-prabhāsa-ketu-mūrdhe tathāgatāya | namaḥ śākyamunaye | oṃ bodhi bodhi bodhi bo[dhi] | sarve tathā[ga]tagocare | dhara dhara hara hara prahāra mahābodhicittadhare | culu 2 śataraśmisamcodite sarvatathā[gata]bhāṣite | guṇa guṇavate³⁸ | buddhaguṇāvabhāse mili gaganatala-³⁹ sarvatathā[gatā]dhiṣṭhite | nabhastale | śama praśama sarvapāpapraśamane sarvapāpaviśodhane hulu 2 bodhimārgasamprasthite sarvatathāgatapraṣṭhite śuddhe svāhā | namaḥ sarvatathāgatavyavalokite.

According to Lawson, the syntax of this basic mantra (from *oṃ bodhi* to the end), which sings praises, seems to be composed in feminine vocative (although not entirely the case here).⁴⁰ However, for consistency, we read the *dhāraṇī* in this manner and offer the following translation:

Homage to the Blessed One, the Tathāgata, whose broad face⁴¹ glows with a golden radiance and is surmounted by radiant flames⁴²

Homage to the Sage of the Śākyans

Oṃ! Awaken awaken awaken awaken!

O you who are the domain of all Tathāgatas

Hold hold! Take take! Strike!

O holder of the thought of the great awakening

Culu culu!⁴³

You, who are impelled by a hundred rays

³⁸ Cf. *guṇi guṇavati* MS1680 (G. Hidas, *Powers of Protection: The Buddhist Tradition of Spells in the Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha Collections* (Berlin and Boston, 2021), p. 40); *guṇe guṇavate* in Tibetan (Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhālaṅkāraḥkaṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇī*’, p. 352).

³⁹ *Gaganatala*. The word *pratiṣṭhite* (established) is omitted versus other versions; cf. *gaganatala-pratiṣṭhite* MS1680; *gaganatale pratiṣṭhite* Tibetan critical edition; *gaganatala-pratiṣṭhite* (sic.) Indonesian gold foil (Griffiths, ‘Written traces of the Buddhist past’, p. 163). But it is also omitted in the Tibetan PT555 manuscript (Scherrer-Schaub, ‘Some *dhāraṇī*’, p. 722, n. 67).

⁴⁰ Lawson, ‘*Dhāraṇī* sealings’, p. 714.

⁴¹ *Vipula-vadana*, cf. T1369a:21.885c17 面貌廣大.

⁴² *Ketu-mūrdha*, cf. Thai Pathamasambodhi’s *ketu-mālā*, a trail of brightly-ascending rays (*raśmi*) or flame upon the uppermost part of the Buddha’s head; see H. W. Woodward, ‘The Buddha’s radiance’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61.1 (1973), p. 188.

⁴³ Read from the repetition sign ‘2’ or ‘𑖀’ in the inscription.

Who is spoken of by all Tathāgatas

O Virtue!

O you who possess virtues⁴⁴

One who manifests the virtue of a Buddha

Mili!

O you [who are established in] the vault of the sky

Sustained by all the Tathāgatas

You are the overarching canopy of the sky!

Calm, calm! Appease!

O you who appease all evil! O you who cleanse all evil!

Hulu hulu!

O you who set out on the path of awakening

The one who is established by all Tathāgatas

O pure one, Svāhā!

Homage to you

The one who is gazed upon by all Tathāgatas.

Lawson is of the opinion that the basic mantra is addressed to a female deity who is the personification of *prajñāpāramitā*.⁴⁵ If it is in this context, the praise could be directed at *prajñāpāramitā*, the ideal of the Perfection of Wisdom itself, which is also in feminine gender. Jacob Kinnard argued that this *dhāraṇī* described by Lawson in clay sealings is a

⁴⁴ *Guṇavate*, read as a feminine vocative, *guṇavati*, instead of a masculine/neutral gender.

⁴⁵ Lawson, 'Dhāraṇī sealings', p. 714; *Prajñāpāramitā*, or the Perfection of Wisdom, designates a vast corpus of texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Perfection of Wisdom in anthropomorphic form as a goddess can be seen in various representations. One of the earliest forms is the ninth-century Pāla-style stone *Prajñāpāramitā* sculpture found in Bihar state (perhaps in Nālandā), India (now preserved in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco). In Southeast Asia, the *Prajñāpāramitā* deity sculptures can be seen in thirteenth-century East Javanese art through a statue uncovered in Cungkup Putri ruins near Singhasari temple, as well as in Khmer arts around the twelfth to thirteenth centuries found in both Cambodia and Thailand. For example, in Thailand, one *Prajñāpāramitā* statue of thirteenth-century Bayon style was found in Sai Yok District, Kanchanaburi Province (now preserved in the National Museum in Bangkok). For further discussion on *Prajñāpāramitā* in Southeast Asia, see Jinah Kim, 'Prajñāpāramitā and Esoteric Buddhism in Jayavarman VII's Angkor', in *The Creative South: Buddhist and Hindu Art in Mediaeval Maritime Asia*, (eds.) A. Aciri and P. Sharrock (Singapore, 2022), pp. 168–191; Swati Chemburkar, 'Prajñāpāramitā and Khmer Esoteric Buddhism in the 10th to 13th centuries', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Religion* (published online, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.760>.

‘textual object’.⁴⁶ He added that ‘stamping such verses in clay, carrying them about, and enconcing such *dhāraṇī* stones in *stūpas* constitute the habitus of the sculptural representation of texts’. He was alluding to the fact that this *dhāraṇī*, the *Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*, is a kind of *Prajñāpāramitā dhāraṇī*.⁴⁷

Comparative structure of the *dhāraṇī*

In terms of the structure and content of this Perlis *dhāraṇī*, as we can see above, it begins by paying obeisance to the Buddha and is followed by the root mantra (*mūlamantra*) starting with *oṃ bodhi* until *śuddhe svāhā*. This *dhāraṇī* ends with a single line of the so-called ‘heart’ (*hṛdaya*) of the mantra but without the ‘lesser heart’ (*upahṛdaya*) section (see below).⁴⁸ This structure will become clearer if we compare the Perlis *dhāraṇī* to a slightly longer version preserved in a twelfth- to thirteenth-century Nepalese Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscript, MS Add. 1680.8.3, which is now kept at the Cambridge University Library.⁴⁹ In this manuscript, the section that contains this *dhāraṇī* is called the *ārya-lakṣa-nāma-dhāraṇī* (the *Exalted Dhāraṇī Named A Hundred Thousand*), which is embedded in the group of manuscripts called the *Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha* (*Dhāraṇī Collection*).⁵⁰ This *ārya-lakṣa-nāma-dhāraṇī* is presented as the Buddha speaking to his attendant monk, Ānanda, and it can be divided into three parts. First, is the mantra itself, which closely resembles the *dhāraṇī* on the Perlis Bodhi sealings. The second part is the Buddha describing the merit of writing this *dhāraṇī* and interring it into a *caitya*. The last part is the Buddha indicating for whose sake he declared this *dhāraṇī*. This three-part *dhāraṇī* is also found elsewhere but with varying degrees of dissimilarities, such as in various Tibetan Kanjurs,⁵¹ on a stone slab inscribed in Sanskrit that was previously housed in the Provisional Museum in Cuttack, but now preserved in the Odisha State Museum in Bhubaneswar, India,⁵² as well as in the Chinese adaptation of this *dhāraṇī*.⁵³ The Tibetan critical edition of this *dhāraṇī* edited by Gregory Schopen has additional Parts 4 and 5. Part 4 is about the consequences of not reading and worshipping this *dhāraṇī* and Part 5 is a conclusion translated by Schopen as ‘The Dhāraṇī of the Hundred Thousand taken from “The Hundred Thousand Ornaments of the Essence of Awakening”’. In fact, according to the Tibetan tradition, this ‘longer’ version is just an ‘extract’ of a much longer *sūtra* that was also taught by the Buddha himself.⁵⁴

The three-part *dhāraṇī* of the Nepalese manuscript can be presented and translated as follows. The Sanskrit text here is based on the version edited by Gergely Hidas except for

⁴⁶ J. N. Kinnard, *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, 2001), pp. 156–157; he was referring to the clay sealings that were stamped with the *Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* mentioned by Lawson.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 157–158.

⁴⁸ For *mūlamantra*, *hṛdaya*, and *upahṛdaya* of this *dhāraṇī*, see Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, pp. 325–327.

⁴⁹ <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01680-00008-00003/1>, folios 13 verso and 14 recto (accessed 15 December 2023).

⁵⁰ This set of manuscripts has been edited by Hidas in *Powers of Protection*.

⁵¹ For the Tibetan critical edition of this *dhāraṇī*, *yang chub kyi snying po'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzungs*, see Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, pp. 314–332.

⁵² The Sanskrit text and its translation were provided by A. Ghosh, ‘A Buddhist tract in a stone inscription in the Cuttack Museum’, in *Epigraphia Indica* 26, (ed.) N. P. Chakravarti (Delhi, 1941–1942), pp. 171–174; see also Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, pp. 327–329. Although the stone slab is now preserved in Bhubaneswar, we will still refer to it as the ‘Cuttack stone slab’ in this article, as it is commonly known in the literature.

⁵³ T1369a and T1369b 百千印陀羅尼經 (*Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī of a Hundred Thousand Seals*).

⁵⁴ Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, pp. 314–332.

a part that has the word *hr̥daya* where we think a sentence could have been omitted before the word and, because of that, we have selected the reading from the Cuttack stone lab.⁵⁵

The Sanskrit text in the manuscript:

[1]

[18]⁵⁶ namo bhagavate vipula-vadana-kāñcanotkṣipta-prabhāsaketumūrdha-tathāgatāya namaḥ śākyamunaye [tathāgatāyār̥hate samyaksambu]ddhāya | tadyathā bodhi 2 sarva-tathāgatagocare dhara 2 hara 2 mahābodhi-pratiṣṭhite | mahābodhi-cittadhare culu 2 sahasrara[śmi]saṃcodite sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte guṇi guṇavati | buddhaguṇāva-*bhāse | gaganatalapraṭiṣṭhite sarvatathāgatādhi[ṣṭhi]te svāhā | nabhastale śama 2 praśama 2 sarvapāpa-*⁵⁷praśamane | sarvapāpaviśodhane hulu 2 mahābodhimārgasaṃprasthite | sarvata [tathāgatapraṭiṣṭhi]te śuddhe svāhā | [mūlamantraḥ | sarvatathāgatagocaravyalokite⁵⁸ jaya jaya svāhā]⁵⁹ hr̥dayam | kuru 2 jayamūle svāhā | upahr̥dayam |

[2]

yaḥ kaścid bhikṣur vā | bhikṣuṇī vā | upāsako vā upāsikā vā | anyo vā | yaḥ śrāddhaḥ kulaputro vā | kuladuhitā vā | imāṃ dhāraṇīṃ likhitvā ekam api caityaṃ kariṣyati tasya caityasyābhyantare | imāṃ dhāraṇīṃ sthāpayiṣyati | tenaikacai<14r>tyaṃ kṛtvā lakṣacaityāḥ kṛtābhavanti | tena sarvacaityāḥ pūjitā bhavanti | divyai gandhadhūpair mālyavilepana-cūrṇacīvaracchattra-dhvajapatākābhīś ca | na kevalaṃ caityāḥ pūjitā bhava++ buddharatnaṃ pūjitaṃ bhavati | evaṃ dharmaratnaṃ pūjitaṃ bhavati | evaṃ saṃgharatnaṃ pūjitaṃ bhavati | vividhair upakaraṇaiḥ pūjitā bhavanti |

[3]

evaṃ mayānanda saṃ[kṣi]ptena deśitaṃ mandapuṇyānām aśraddhānām mithyādr̥ṣṭikānām vaimatikānām naimittikānām ānantaryakāriṇām alpāyuskānām narakapreta-tiryagyama++[parāyaṇānām] sattvānām arthāya | ≤ iyaṃ dhāraṇī bhāṣitā || ||

Ārya-lakṣa-nāma-dhāraṇī samāptā || ||

Translation of the Sanskrit text:

[1]

Homage to the Blessed One, the Tathāgata, whose broad face glows with a golden radiance and is surmounted by radiant flames. Homage to the Sage of the Śākyans, the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Perfectly Awakened One.

[The *dhāraṇī*] is as follows.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Hidas, *Powers of Protection*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Indicating the eighteenth text in manuscript Add.1680.8.3.

⁵⁷ *...* p.c. (post-correctionem) written in the lower margin of the manuscript.

⁵⁸ -gocara- only occurs in the Cuttack and the Udayagiri II (reg. no. 70/01-02) stone slabs.

⁵⁹ *mūlamantraḥ* ... *svāhā* taken from Cuttack stone slab (observed side), lines 7 and 8; see Ghosh, 'Buddhist tract', p. 173; and Schopen, 'Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa and Vimaloṣṇīśa Dhāraṇīś', p. 327.

⁶⁰ *Tadyathā* (is referring to the *dhāraṇī*). In the longer *sūtra* preserved in the Tibetan tradition, the Buddha tells his monks that 'there is a *dhāraṇī* ... that causes all roots of merit to be produced' (see Schopen,

Awaken awaken! O you who are the domain of all Tathāgatas.

Hold hold! Take take! O you who are established in the great awakening!

O holder of the thought of the great awakening!

Culu culu! O you who are impelled by a thousand rays!

O virtue! O you who possess virtue!

O one who manifests the virtue of a Buddha!

O you who are established in the vault of the sky

Sustained by all Tathāgatas, Svāha!

You are the overarching canopy of the sky!

Calm calm! Appease appease!

O you who appease all evil! O you who cleanse all evil!

Hulu hulu! O you who set out on the path of awakening

who are established by all Tathāgatas

O pure one, Svāha! [This is] the root mantra.

You are gazed upon in all the domains of Tathāgatas! Win win, Svāhā! [This is] the heart.⁶¹
Kuru kuru! O you are the root of victory,⁶² Svāhā! [This is] the lesser heart.

[2]

‘Whosoever monk or nun, or lay male or female disciple, or other devout son or daughter of a good family, after having written this *dhāraṇī*, would also make a single *caitya* [and] place this *dhāraṇī* inside that *caitya*—by having made that single *caitya*, a hundred thousand *caityas* [in effect] have been made. By that, all [those] *caityas* are venerated [as if together] with celestial fragrances, perfumes, flowers, ointments, aromatic powders,

‘*Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, p. 330). In the Chinese adaptation, the Buddha tells the gathering of monks that there is a *dhāraṇī* named the *Dhāraṇī of a Hundred Thousand Seals*, cf. T1369a:21.885c12.

⁶¹ *Hṛdaya*. Here, the palm-leaf manuscript is different from other versions, e.g. the Sanskrit version of the Cuttack stone slab and the one recorded in the Tibetan tradition. In these two versions, after the *śuddhe svāhā* (O pure one, *svāhā*), they have the word ‘*mūlamantraḡ*’ ([This is] the root mantra). It is then followed by, in Tibetan: ‘*Om sarvatathāgatavyavalokite | jaya jaya svāhā | This is the essence*’ (Schopen, ‘*Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, p. 325); in the Sanskrit Cuttack stone slab: ‘*sarvatathāgatagocaravyavalokite jaya jaya svāhā | hṛdaye |*’ (Ghosh, ‘*Buddhist tract*’, p. 173). Even the Chinese version has ‘爾時世尊。復為大眾說心呪曰。唵 薩婆坦他揭多吠婆盧吉帝 社耶社耶薩婆訶 (At that time, the Lord spoke the heart of the *dhāraṇī* (心呪) to the assembly: ‘*Om, sar va ta thā ga ta vi-ya lo ki te ja ya ja ya su-vā hā*’) (T1369b:21.886b7). Therefore, there could be a lacuna in the Nepalese manuscript in which the sentence ‘*mūlamantraḡ sarvatathāgatavyavalokite | jaya jaya svāhā |*’ is omitted. Earlier in the manuscript, there is a *post-correctionem* reading due to a missing line and it was supplied by an insertion in the lower margin. A similar situation may have happened here but the redactor failed to pick it up.

⁶² *Jayamūle*, cf. *Jayamukhe* in Tibetan (Schopen, ‘*Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, p. 325) and Sanskrit version of the Cuttack stone slab (Ghosh, ‘*Buddhist tract*’, p. 173).

robes, umbrellas, flags, and banners.⁶³ Not only are the *caityas* venerated, [even] the Jewel of the Buddha is [in effect] venerated. In this way [also] the Jewel of the Dharma is [in effect] venerated, [and] the Jewel of the Community is [in effect] venerated by articles of these various kinds.’

[3]

‘Thus, O Ānanda, [this] was taught by me in brief, for the sake of living beings whose merit is weak, who are without faith, who hold wrong views, who are consumed by doubts, who interpret signs and omens, who have committed acts of immediate retribution, who have short lifespans, and who [are destined] to go to the hells, [realms of] hungry ghosts, animals [and the world of] Yama.’⁶⁴ This *dhāraṇī* has been spoken.

The *Exalted Dhāraṇī Named A Hundred Thousand* is completed.

As we can see from the reading of the manuscript above, the Perlis Bodhi sealing *dhāraṇī* contains the root mantra (*mūlamantra*), which is in close agreement with the manuscript and a portion of the ‘heart’ (*hṛdaya*) sentence, and it ends there without the ‘lesser heart’ (*upahṛdaya*). If the Perlis *dhāraṇī* were to be compared with other sealings carrying the same *dhāraṇī*, such as those found at Nālandā (Bihar) and Ratnagiri (Odisha) and those in the Eastern Gangetic Plains, then these Indian sealings contain the three sections of the *mūlamantra*, *hṛdaya*, and *upahṛdaya* but do not actually use these three words.⁶⁵ Furthermore, most of these other sealings end with the *ye dharmā* stanza instead of moving on to Parts 2 and 3 (see below). Therefore, the Perlis *dhāraṇī* is slightly shorter compared with the others. At the moment, we do not find readings of other sealings that are either identical to the textual tradition of this Perlis *dhāraṇī* or similar in shape and size to the stamped inscription. As such, these Perlis sealings were most likely produced locally. This is supported by Lamb’s observation that the red clay of the sealings appeared to be the same as the material that made up much of the floor of the cave.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, while the sealing might have been a local production, the stamp used for the impression could have been made somewhere else earlier on, as stamps are a highly movable type of artefact.

The merits of stamping this *dhāraṇī* can be seen in Part 2 of the manuscript reading above. Venerating *caityas* or *stūpas* is considered a meritorious deed capable of yielding good karmic fruits in the future. The ritual of venerating *caitya* has been a focal point of many Buddhist traditions.⁶⁷ In the Tibetan tradition, *dhāraṇī* is seen as a relic of the Buddha’s *Dharmakāya* (Dharma-body), which is valued as much as or even more than a

⁶³ Cf. *Divyāvadāna* (divine stories); see E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds.), *The Divyāvadāna: A Collection of Early Buddhist Legends—Now First Edited from the Nepalese Sanskrit Mss. in Cambridge and Paris* (Cambridge, 1886), pp. 78–79, in which the Buddha is said to have uttered that the hundreds of thousands of gold coins or nuggets are not equal to one, faithful in mind, who places a single lump of clay, pearls, or lovely flowers at the *caitya* of a Buddha. The merit for placing oil lamps is worth more than hundreds of thousands of millions of gold pieces or nuggets, and for raising up umbrellas, flags, and banners, the merit is worth more than hundreds of thousands of gold mountains equal to Mount Meru; see A. Rotman (trans.), *Divine Stories Divyāvadāna* (Boston, 2008), i, pp. 155–159.

⁶⁴ Yama = God of death.

⁶⁵ Nālandā sealings (2-42 and 2-193) were found in Stūpa 2 (Ghosh, ‘Buddhist tract’, pp. 171–172); Ratnagiri sealings (RTR-1, 1111–4, and 1107–1110) were found in Stūpas 2 and 253, respectively (D. Mitra, *Ratnagiri (1958–61): Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* 80 (New Delhi, 1981), pp. 44, 99–100).

⁶⁶ Lamb, ‘Mahayana Buddhist’, p. 53.

⁶⁷ P. Harvey, ‘The symbolism of the early stūpa’, *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7.2 (1984), pp. 67–93.

corporeal relic.⁶⁸ Moreover, as mentioned in the longer *dhāraṇī* itself, writing this *dhāraṇī* on a sealing and interring it in a *caitya* are regarded as venerating the *caitya* and the three Jewels. The beauty is that, even if it is just a sealing, the merit generated would be multiplied 100,000-fold. Thus, it would be no surprise that those who seek merit, whether for future benefits or for protection, would participate in this ritual of stamping this *dhāraṇī* on clay tablets and then placing them into a *caitya*. Examples of this *dhāraṇī* found in a *caitya* or *stūpa* are those sealings found in Nālandā and Ratnagiri (see below).

This ritual of stamping multiple copies of sealings and making aspirations for future benefits can be seen in an archaeological record of a tablet from Pagan, Myanmar, dated *circa* 1113.⁶⁹ The tablet depicts the Buddha seated with legs suspended, while the *verso* has nine lines of Pāli incised in Mon script. Luce interprets the inscription as follows:

[This] therā, like Nāgasena, takes keen delight in learning (or who shines out in wisdom). By [this] work [in making] a thousand Buddhas, [may he become] a Buddha in [his] future existence. The work was done by the monk named Sumedha, with his own hand, for the sake of Deliverance.⁷⁰

Sumedha here refers to the monk who stamped those 1,000 tablets of ‘Chitsagôn’. In this case, the merit generated by Sumedha by stamping these multiple tablets was considered vast enough for him to make an aspiration to become a future Buddha.⁷¹ In the Tibetan tradition, the Buddha is recorded to have said to a brahmin (who wishes to obtain a child) that ‘by this *Bodhimaṇḍālaṃkāra-nāma-dhāraṇī* you will increase the roots of auspicious dharma and all your wishes will be fulfilled’. And, together with it, the Buddha expounded on the ritual and benefits of introducing it in a *stūpa*.⁷² Similarly, this could be the case for those who want to seek merit of their own with the Perlis Bodhi sealings. They either stamped those sealings themselves or caused it to be done through donations. Moreover, impelled by the notion ‘the more the merrier’, those who could afford it would pay for multiple copies of these sealings to be made. This would partly explain why numerous copies of these sealings were found in the cave.

The next question is: Why are the *dhāraṇī* sealings found in the cave in Perlis rather than in a *caitya*? In our opinion, there could be several possibilities. First, there could have been a *caitya* inside the cave that was made by heaping up soil or mud. The sealings were made on-site and placed inside the *caitya* or stacked up next to it, but the soil-made *caitya* did not survive the test of time.⁷³ A second possibility is that there could have been a *caitya* somewhere outside the cave, but too many sealings were made or sponsored for the *caitya* and the additions were either brought back to or remained in the cave for keeping, as one could not just throw such sealings away after a ritual. On top of that, an isolated cave that

⁶⁸ Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhāṅkāraṅkalakṣa and Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*’, p. 317; and Scherrer-Schaub, ‘Some *dhāraṇī*’, pp. 717–718.

⁶⁹ G. H. Luce, *Old Burma, Early Pagan. Volume Two: Catalogue of Plates Indexes* (New York, 1970), p. 41.

⁷⁰ | | *thero yathā nāgaseno pañāya adhirocati sahassa | buddha kamma buddho tassa anāgate || sumedho nāma bhikkhunā kato | vimuttatthaṃ sahatthenevāti*, translation adapted from *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷¹ For more examples of donors’ aspiration to become future Buddhas recorded in Thai manuscripts, see E. J. Ooi, ‘Aspiring to be a Buddha and life before liberation: the colophons of the Siamese *Questions of King Milinda*’, *Manuscript Studies: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies* 7.1 (2022), pp. 104–129.

⁷² Excerpt taken for a longer Tibetan text, *Bodhimaṇḍālaṃkāra-nāma-dhāraṇī-upacāra* (PT555), believed to be translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan, which has the *Bodhigarbhāṅkāraṅkalakṣa-dhāraṇī*; see Scherrer-Schaub, ‘Some *dhāraṇī*’, p. 716.

⁷³ Numerous examples of building *stūpas* or *caityas* inside caves can be seen in India, e.g. the rock-cut monuments in Bhaja and Karla (Western Deccan) in India.

was far away from human activities was considered clean and pure for the keeping of such sealings.⁷⁴ Third, the pear-shaped sealing with a slightly elongated top that ends with a narrow tip might have been meant to emulate a *caitya*, even though it is in a two-dimensional miniature form. Therefore, stamping the *dhāraṇī* onto this *caitya*-like clay sealing would have been considered equivalent to installing this *dhāraṇī* into a proper *caitya*.⁷⁵

The title of the *dhāraṇī*

So far, we have discussed the practical aspects of the *dhāraṇī* but, before we move on to its transmission, we would like to re-examine its title, which may give us further perspective regarding its purpose. The Sanskrit title *Bodhigarbhālankāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* seems to be recorded only in the Tibetan texts as the Indic title that is paired with the Tibetan title *byang chub kyi snying-po'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzungs*, according to a formulaic style that, at least ideally, places the paired Indic–Tibetan titles at the head of every translated text.⁷⁶ Other *dhāraṇīs* in the Tibetan tradition that carry this mantra (Part 1) but with slight variations are the *Bodhimaṇḍalākṣa-dhāraṇī* (*byang chub snying po 'bum kyi gzugs* or PT350) and the *Bodhimaṇḍālānkāra-nāma-dhāraṇī-upacāra* (*byang chub kyi snying po'i gzungs-kyi cho-ga* or PT555).⁷⁷ The Sanskrit versions of this *dhāraṇī* found in Indian scripts do not assign a name to this *dhāraṇī*, except for the Nepalese manuscript, which, as we have seen, calls it the *Ārya-lakṣa-nāma-dhāraṇī* (the *Exalted Dhāraṇī Called a Hundred Thousand*), and one of the Sanskrit texts in the Siddhamātṛkā script brought by Kūkai to Japan, which records the *dhāraṇī* under the title 菩提莊嚴陀羅尼 (*Dhāraṇī Adorned with Awakening*).⁷⁸ Its Chinese adaptation is 百千印陀羅尼經 (*Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī of a Hundred Thousand Seals*, T1369a and T1369b) (more about these texts below). As we can see, there is inconsistency in assigning (or not assigning) a name to the *dhāraṇī*. The title *Bodhigarbhālankāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* is not verified by any Sanskrit evidence, so it is possibly a back-translation by the editors of the Kanjur.⁷⁹ Nor is the compound *bodhigarbha* independently verified in available lexicons.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ P. Skilling, 'Writing and representation: inscribed objects in the Nalanda Trail Exhibition', in *Nalanda, Srivijaya and Beyond*, (ed.) Krishnan, p. 85.

⁷⁵ The practice of creating *caitya* or *stūpa* of any sort, regardless of size and shape, is described in detail in several *sūtras*; see P. Skilling, *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sūtras* (Somerville, 2021), pp. 260–262. A miniature *stūpa* has the same component parts as any *stūpa*. Thus, creating miniature *stūpas* and then installing sealings with an inscription inside became common practice across regions. For example, the Balinese Pejeng Village's miniature *stūpas* were inserted with sealings stamped with inscriptions of *Vimaloṣṇīśadhāraṇī* (Griffiths, 'Written traces of the Buddhist past', p. 181) or *ye dharmā* inscription (which are now preserved in the National Museum of Thailand). Miniature *stūpas* are also found in Hund, Pakistan, with sealings inserted inside them (Ihsan Ali and Nasim Khan, 'Inscribed clay tablets', pp. 79–91). See also Titi Surti Nastiti, 'Miniature *stūpas* and a Buddhist sealing from Candi Gentong, Trowulan, Mojokerto, East Java', in *Buddhist Dynamics in Premodern and Early Modern Southeast Asia*, (ed.) D. C. Lammerts (Singapore, 2015), pp. 120–37, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/42001>.

⁷⁶ For further discussion of this title in the different editions of the Tibetan Kanjur, see Schopen, 'Bodhigarbhālankāralakṣa and Vimaloṣṇīśa Dhāraṇīs', pp. 314–316.

⁷⁷ Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some *dhāraṇī*', pp. 717–727, n. 67. We have standardised the Tibetan transliteration to Wylie style compared to the ones given in the references for easy comparison.

⁷⁸ H. Hase (長谷寶秀), *Daishi go-shōrai bonji shingon shū* 大師御請来梵字真言集 (Tokyo, 1938 [1997]), pp. 343–345.

⁷⁹ For further discussion on the authenticity of Sanskrit titles given in Tibetan translation, see P. Skilling, 'Kanjur titles and colophons', in *Tibetan Studies*, (ed.) Per Kvaerne, ii, pp. 768–780.

⁸⁰ According to David Higgins, the term *bodhigarbha* is not attested in Indian Buddhist texts, although *byang chub* [*kyi*] *snying po* is used to render the Sanskrit *bodhimaṇḍa*, referring to the 'seat of enlightenment', as both an actual and metaphorical place where a Buddha attains awakening; see D. Higgins, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet: Investigating the Distinction Between Dualistic Mind (sems) and Primordial Knowing (ye shes)* (Wien, 2013), p. 176, n. 449.

The Sanskrit title feels awkward and unnatural, and this enforces the idea that it may be a back-translation.⁸¹

Bodhi—awakening or enlightenment—is a goal and inspiration that framed Buddhist practice over many centuries. It is the motivation that energises an individual’s spiritual development through ritual and the contemplative practice of *bodhicitta*—the aspiration and determination to realise *bodhi*. If the *dhāraṇī* proper does not use the title internally or is used to explain the term *bodhigarbha*, it does employ the word *bodhi* several times in the mantra (Part 1), as well as the terms ‘great *bodhicitta*’ (*mahā-bodhicitta*) and ‘great path to *bodhi*’ (*mahā-bodhimārga*). It seems safe to say that the notion of *bodhi* is a driving force in the *dhāraṇī*.

What, then, is *bodhigarbha*, and how does it relate to the *dhāraṇī*? If an Indic form ever existed, it is rare or absent in extant documents. What sense can we make of the title, either in its Indic form or in Tibetan and its Chinese adaptation? Does the *dhāraṇī* itself offer any suggestions or solutions? As seen earlier, in Part 2, we read: *imāṃ dhāraṇīm likhitvā ekam apī caityaṃ karisyati tasya caityasya abhyantare imāṃ dhāraṇīm sthāpaviṣyati...* as ‘after having written this *dhāraṇī*, one would also make a single *caitya* [and] place this *dhāraṇī* inside that *caitya*—by having made that single *caitya*, a hundred thousand *caityas* [in effect] have been made’. By that, it means that making a single *caitya* is equivalent to making an ornament of 100,000 *caityas* dedicated to awakening. The *caitya* is the *womb* or *shrine* (*garbha*) that holds the *dhāraṇī* dedicated to *bodhi* and hence is a *bodhi-garbha* in the same way as a *caitya* that holds or enshrines corporeal relics (*saśārīra*) is a *dhātu-garbha*.

The Tibetan title, *byang chub kyi snying po’i rgyan ’bum gyi gzungs*, consists of standard equivalents such as *byang chub* as *bodhi*, *rgyan* as *alaṅkāra* (ornament), and *’bum* as *lakṣa* (100,000).⁸² The difficulty lies in the polysemic term *snying po*, which has several possible equivalents.⁸³ If the Sanskrit *bodhigarbha* is not met in Buddhist or Indian literature, in contrast, Tibetan *byang chub (kyi) snying po* circulated in Tibetan writing, especially of the Nyingmapa school, and was often associated with the *Tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha nature) literature (in Tibetan, *Tathāgatagarbha* is *de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po*).⁸⁴ But we do not think that the term *bodhigarbha* in this *dhāraṇī* is used in this context. As such, we might interpret the title *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* as ‘the *dhāraṇī* [which when recited, stamped, or copied creates] an array of one hundred thousand *caityas* dedicated to awakening’.⁸⁵

Transmission of the *dhāraṇī*

The presence of this *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* in Perlis indicates that the Malay–Thai Peninsula has taken part in the wider world of *dhāraṇī* transmission, in this case, since towards the end of the first millennium. The transmission of *dhāraṇī* of different genres is wide and complex, and it is beyond the scope of this article. However, we will conduct a review and general survey on the transmission of this particular *dhāraṇī* in order to give us an initial idea of its geographical distribution and how Perlis came to be part of it.

⁸¹ Cf. P. Skilling’s opinion that ‘titles were conveniences; they were practical devices that identified texts. Different titles could be used by different local or textual communities or teacher’s lineages, emphasising different aspects, purposes, or uses of the text. This is true for the anonymous *sūtra*, didactic, and narrative literature and especially for liturgical and ritual texts’ (personal communication by email, dated 1 July 2023).

⁸² Note that the *kyi* between *chub* and *snying* is the genitive particle within the compound *bodhigarbha*. As such, it may not always appear, as it could be easily understood through its grammatical usage.

⁸³ In the *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary*, *byang chub snying po* could be read as *bodhigarbha*, *bodhimaṇḍa* (the site of awakening), or *bodhimūla* (the root of awakening); see L. Chandra, *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary, Supplementary Volume 5*, ५ - ६ (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 1268–1269.

⁸⁴ Higgins, *Philosophical Foundations*, pp. 173–182.

⁸⁵ We would like to thank Peter Skilling for sharing his ideas on the interpretation of this title.

At the moment, we do not know when and where this *dhāraṇī* was composed or was first written down, either as an independent *dhāraṇī* later compiled to be part of a longer text or originating from a larger text. The basic assumption is that the original language is Sanskrit, which suggests a (greater) Indian provenance. So far, from the information that we have, this *Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*, in various degrees of variations in its textual tradition, was widely transmitted, spanning several regions across Asia, in different languages, adaptations, scripts, materials, kingdoms, and cultures (Figure 12 and Table 1). This *dhāraṇī* is found from Eastern India⁸⁶ to the greater Gandhāra region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It also moved eastward, perhaps via the Silkroad and Central Asia into the Tarim Basin, heading to central China, Inner Mongolia, and even into the Korean Peninsula and Japan. To the north of India, it was found in the Kathmandu Valley and the Tibet Plateau. To the south-east, the *dhāraṇī* has found its way to the Malay–Thai Peninsula and farther down to Java Island in Maritime Southeast Asia.

India

In India, this *Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* was discovered mainly in Odisha and the Eastern Gangetic Plain. In Odisha, stone slabs and sealings carrying this *dhāraṇī* were found concentrated in an area now called the Buddhist Diamond Triangle of Ratnagiri-Udayagiri-Lalitagiri archaeological complex.⁸⁷ One stone slab with unknown provenance, previously preserved in the Cuttack Provisional Museum in Odisha (thus the name ‘Cuttack stone slab’), was dated approximately to the tenth century, with partial records of the mantra (Part 1) in Sanskrit including Parts 2 and 3, and a portion of Part 4.⁸⁸ Another stone slab inscription dated to around the ninth century, also in Sanskrit, was found in the *Caityagrha* complex of Udayagiri. This stone slab bears Part 1, the mantra, and ends with the *ye dharmā* formula.⁸⁹ On the eastern side of this complex, a further stone slab bearing a 21-line inscription was also recovered. The inscription starts with the *ye dharmā* verse, followed by the *Bodhigarbhālāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* (Part 1) and two other *dhāraṇīs*.⁹⁰

On another site, just a few kilometres to the east of Udayagiri, four terracotta sealings stamped with this *dhāraṇī* dated to the ninth to tenth centuries were found in Stūpa 2 in Ratnagiri and another four oval-shaped terracotta sealings, also dated to around the ninth century, if not earlier, were recovered in Stūpa 253 nearby. The *dhāraṇī* of Stūpa 253 sealings also ends with the *ye dharmā* stanza.⁹¹

In the Eastern Gangetic Plain, in the modern states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, several terracotta sealings carrying this *dhāraṇī* were discovered in Nālandā, Śrāvastī, and other areas. In Nālandā, two terracotta sealings with legible inscriptions stamped with this *dhāraṇī* were recovered among 603 sealings in Site 2 of the southern monastery.⁹²

⁸⁶ Eastern India in this article refers roughly to the region of today’s states of Bihar, (West) Bengal, Odisha, and Jharkhand, including the Eastern Gangetic Plain (part of Uttar Pradesh).

⁸⁷ Umakanta Mishra, ‘*Dhāraṇīs* from the Buddhist sites of Orissa’, *Pratnatattva, Journal of the Department of Archaeology, Jahangirnagar University* 22, June (2016), pp. 73–74.

⁸⁸ Ghosh, ‘Buddhist tract’, pp. 171–174.

⁸⁹ P. K. Trivedi, *Further Excavations at Udayagiri-2, Odisha (2001-03): Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* 104 (New Delhi, 2012), no. 30, p. 255, and plate CLXVI.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 27, p. 253 and plate CLXIII; for a revised Romanised transliteration of the inscription, see T. Kimiaki 田中公明, ‘オリッサ州ウダヤギリII出土の石刻陀羅尼について’ [A newly identified *Dhāraṇī-Sūtra* from Udayagiri II], *The Memoirs of Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia* 166 (2014), pp. 134[151]–124[161]; Kimiaki identifies the other two *dhāraṇīs* as the *Ārya-sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhāna-hṛdaya-guyha-dhātu-karaṇḍa-mudrā-nāma-dhāraṇī* and the *Vimaloṣṇa-dhāraṇī* (*ibid.*, pp. 153–156). We want to thank Arlo Griffiths for bringing this inscription to our attention.

⁹¹ Mitra, *Ratnagiri (1958-61)*, pp. 43, 99–100, and plates XVIII and L.

⁹² D. B. Spooner, *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, Eastern Circle, 1915-16* (Calcutta, 1916), p. 36.



Figure 12. Map showing the provisional transmission of the *Bodhigarbhāṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* in different regions in Asia. The shaded areas indicate where the *dhāraṇī* is known to have circulated. Place names are given in modern 'international' forms.

Table 1. Provisional transmission of the *Bodhigarbhālakāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* in different regions and its various presentations

No.	Location (reference, with corresponding note number in this article)	Materials	Date (circa)	Dhāraṇī Part I			Parts				
				M	Hṛ	U	2	3	4	5	Ye
India											
1.	Cuttack stone slab, Odisha (Ghosh, 1941–1942 (note 52 in this article), pp. 171–174; Schopen, 2005 (note 1), pp. 322–329)	Stone slab (~46 × 36 × 10 cm)	~ 10th	p ^a	x	x	x	x	x	p ^b	–
2.	Ratnagiri I, Stūpa 2, Odisha, four plaques, reg. nos. RTR-I, 1111–1114 (Mitra, 1981 (note 65), p. 43 and plate XVIII, 1–4)	Terracotta plaques (8.8 H × 7 W ^c cm)	9th–10th	x	x	x					
3.	Ratnagiri II, Stūpa 253, Odisha, four oval plaques, reg. nos. RTR-I, 1107–1110 (Mitra, 1981 (note 65), pp. 99–100 and plate L)	Terracotta plaques (6.9 H × 5 W cm)	<9th	x	x	x					x
4.	Udayagiri II stone slab, in Caityagrha complex area, Odisha, reg. no. 653/02–03 (Trivedi, 2012 (note 89), p. 255 and plate CLXVI)	Stone slab (25 × 25.5 × 4.5 cm)	~9th	x	x	x					x
5.	Udayagiri II stone slab, eastern site of monastery No. 2, Odisha, reg. no. 70/01-02 (Trivedi, 2012 (note 89), p. 253 and plate CLXIII; Kimiaki, 2014 (note 90), pp. 151–161)	Stone slab (49 × 64 × 16.5 cm)	10th–11th	x	x	x					x ^d
6.	Nālandā sealings, southern monastery site No. 2, Bihar, reg. nos 2-42, 2-193 (Ghosh, 1941–1942 (note 52), pp. 171–172 and n. 1 on p. 172; Spooner, 1916 (note 92), p. 36)	Terracotta sealings	6th–9th ^e								
	2-42			x	x	x	s				
	2-193			x	x	x					x
7.	British Museum, 11 sealings, Śrāvastī/Eastern Gangetic Plain from Budaun (Badaon), Uttar Pradesh to Bihar (Lawson, 1982 (note 14), pp. 357–372, 384–388, 390–392; Hidas, 2021 (note 14), pp. 90–94)	Terracotta sealings									
	1887.0717.104a, 104c, 104d, and 104e	(D 5–7 cm)	8th–11th	x	x	x					x
	1887.0717.104b (Śrāvastī)	(D 6 cm)		x	x	x					x
	1887.0717.107a, 107b, and 107c	(D 5–5.5 cm)		Unread							

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

No.	Location (reference, with corresponding note number in this article)	Materials	Date (circa)	Dhāraṇī Part I			Parts					
				M	Hṛ	U	2	3	4	5	Ye	
	1887.0717.108	(D 7 cm)		Unread								
	1887.0717.170	(D 4 cm)		Unread								
	1887.0717.109	(D 5 cm)		Unread								
8.	Ashmolean Museum, six oval sealings, unknown provenance (Eastern Gangetic Plain?), museum nos X2330–X2335 (Lawson, 1982 (note 14), pp. 205–218; 1985 (note 13), p. 709) (Only the text of X2330–X2332 was read)	terracotta sealings (H 5.6–7.6 × 6.0–6.4 W × 1.4–2.0 T cm)	8th–10th	x	x	x						x
Nepal												
9.	Cambridge Nepalese manuscript, Kathmandu Valley, Cambridge Uni Lib. no. MS Add. 1680.8.3 (Hidas, 2021 (note 38), p. 40)	Palm-leaf	12th–13th	x	x	x	x	x				
Tibetan Plateau												
10.	<i>byang chub kyi snying po'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzungs</i> available in a critical edition, edited by Schopen from Derge, Peking, Lhasa Kanjurs (Schopen, 2005 (note 1), pp. 314–344)	Tibetan editions	NA ^f	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Pakistan (Gandhāra)												
11.	Hund, three fragmental clay sealings, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ihsan Ali and Nasim Khan, 1997 (note 12), pp. 77–85, sealing nos 13–15 or Figures 16–18)	Clay sealings	7th–8th	x	x	x ^g						
12.	Gandhāra broken seal, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in Śāradā script (object no. 08.04.01 in Aman ur Rahman and Henry Falk, 2011 (note 109), pp. 27–28, 119; Strauch, 2012 (note 110), pp. 605–606)	Broken metal seal (3.9 × 3.1 × 2.0 cm)	~6th	x	x	x						x ^h
Afghanistan (Bactrian)												
13.	Afghanistan stamp (in private collection) in Proto-Śāradā script (Strauch, 2009 (note 16), pp. 37–56, plate 4.3)	Steatite (stone) stamp (5.2 × 6.0 cm)	6th–7th	x	x	x						x
14.	British Museum Afghanistan stamp in Proto-Śāradā script, museum no. OA 1880.168 (Strauch, 2009 (note 16), plate 4.4; Zwalf, 1985 (note 113), p. 70, no. 82)	Steatite (stone) stamp (6.3 × 4.9 cm)	7th–8th	x	x	x						x

China							
15.	Turfan fragment of the Turfan Collection of Berlin (Ch/U 6357b verso in Uyghur letters and half is missing) (Zieme, 2023 (note 115), p. 273, Figure 3, and plate 25)	Paper scroll	8th–13th?	x	?		
16.	PT 350 Dunhuang Pelliot Tibetan Collection in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Scherrer-Schaub, 1994 (note 15), pp. 711–727)	Paper scroll	8th–9th ⁱ	x	x	x	x ^j
17.	PT555 Dunhuang Pelliot Tibetan Collection, in Bibliothèque nationale de France incomplete fol. 18a5 ^k (Scherrer-Schaub, 1994 (note 15), pp. 714, 722, n. 67)	Paper scroll	8th–9th	x	?		
18.	T1369a, 百千印陀羅尼經 (<i>Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī of a Hundred Thousand Seals</i>), Cháng'ān (長安) (Xian) translated by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀	Kao-Li (Koryō) edition (1151)	7th–8th	x	x	x	x
19.	T1369b 百千印陀羅尼經 (<i>Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī of a Hundred Thousand Seals</i>), Cháng'ān (長安) (Xi'an) translated by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀	Ming edition (1601)	7th–8th	x	x	x	x
20.	Khara-Khoto, fragment 3 of the block print SI 6576, inv. no. 6632, Inner Mongolia (only half of the block print has survived) (Lundysheva, 2015 (note 119), plate 2, pp. 31–41)	Block-printed paper	~12th	x	x	x	
Korea							
21.	<i>Baeg-cheon-in-dalanigyeong</i> (百千印陀羅尼經) written on the Golden Manuscript (Nam and Seok, 2018 (note 125), pp. 261–310) ^l	Black paper manuscript	13th	x	x	x	x ?
Japan							
22.	Two Sanskrit versions in Siddhamātrkā script brought back to Japan from Táng China by Kūkai (空海) (Hase, 1938 [1976] (note 78), pp. 343–345; Miyasaka, 1983 (note 127), pp. 107–109; Giebel, 2012 (note 127), p. 216)	Paper manuscripts	Early9th				
	<i>Bodai shōgon darani</i> 菩提莊嚴陀羅尼			x	x	x	
	in <i>Sanjūjō sasshi</i> 三十帖冊子			x	x	x	
Southeast Asia							

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

No.	Location (reference, with corresponding note number in this article)	Materials	Date (circa)	Dhāraṇī Part I			Parts					
				M	Hṛ	U	2	3	4	5	Ye	
23.	Indonesian gold foil of Candi Plaosan Lor, Central Java (Griffiths, 2014 (note 6), pp. 159–164)	Thin gold foil (5.2–5.8 × 25.5 cm, 7.9 grams)	8th–9th	x	x	x						
24.	Malaysian Perlis Bodhi sealings (Nasha Rodziadi Khaw and Mohd Moktar Saidin, 2013 (note 11), pp. 117–152)	Pear-shaped clay sealing (~8.9 × 14.5 cm)	~10th	x	p							

This table is provisional because we have no doubt that further instances of the *dhāraṇī* will come to light over the course of time; M = *mūlamantra*, Hṛ = *hr̥daya*, U = *upahr̥daya*, Ye = ends with the *ye dharmā* stanza, H = height, W = width, T = thickness, D = diameter, NA = not available, p = partial, s = condensed version.

^aOne-third is missing from the beginning.

^bOnly a few words.

^cWidest width.

^dThe inscription starts with the *ye dharmā* verse.

^eSchopen writes: 'These tablets are written in 'early medieval Nāgarī characters' and probably date from the sixth to about the ninth centuries'—see G. Schopen, 'The *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāra* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs* in Indian inscriptions: two sources for the practice of Buddhism in medieval India', in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, More Collected Papers*, (ed.) G. Schopen (Honolulu, 2005), p. 331.

^fThere is no colophon to indicate when the text was translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan (Schopen, 'The *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāra* and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*', p. 318).

^gText illegible.

^hParts of the text were reconstructed by I. Strauch, 'Seals, sealings and tokens from Gandhāra. By Aman Ur Rahman and Harry Falk. (Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie, Band 21). Pp. 222. Weisbaden, Reichert, 2011', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22.3–4 (2012), pp. 605–606, based on the estimated size of the seal and the extant reading of the broken seal.

ⁱS. van Schaik, 'The Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts in China', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65.1 (2002), p. 129.

^jBetween the *dhāraṇī* and the *ye dharmā* (*Pratītyasamutpādaḥṛdaya*) is the *Uṣṇīṣavimala-dhāraṇī*. The *ye dharmā* formula is the penultimate formula in PT350.

^kA longer Tibetan translation from Sanskrit. An edition of the *Bodhimaṅḍalaṅkāra-nāma-dhāraṇī-upacāra* (PT555) is being prepared (C. Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some *dhāraṇī* written on paper functioning as *dharmakāya* relics: a tentative approach to PT 350', in *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992*, (ed.) P. Kvaerne (Oslo, 1994), ii, p. 714).

^lIn this Korean manuscript, the 百千印陀羅尼經 is longer compared to T1369a, and it could be in combination with other texts.

According to Schopen, these two sealings, 2-42 and 2-193, were written in early medieval Nāgarī script and probably date from the sixth to the ninth centuries.⁹³ Ghosh provided the readings of these two sealings earlier, but the *dhāraṇīs* in them end differently; Sealing 2-193 ends with the *ye dharmā* formula, while 2-42, after the *upahr̥daya* section, has instead a condensed version of Part 2 with just one sentence, *eka-caitya-kṛtena lakṣā (kṣam) kṛtā bhava[n]ti* (by making one *caitya*, 100,000 *caityas* are made), then followed by the word *pratītya-samutpādātā* with five illegible letters after that.⁹⁴ As the *ye dharmā* formula is considered to be the heart (*hr̥daya*) of *pratītya-samutpāda* or the law of Dependent Origination,⁹⁵ sealing 2-42 also ends with the essence of the *ye dharmā* but in a different way.

During his excavations at Śrāvastī in Uttar Pradesh, Alexander Cunningham found some burnt sealings in Stūpa No. 5, and one of them has a small *stūpa* image and 18 lines of writing on it. Originally, this sealing was interred inside a miniature *stūpa* but it was disinterred during the excavation process.⁹⁶ At that time, Cunningham managed to read only some parts of that sealing, which was stamped with the *Bodhiḡarbhālānkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*. This sealing is now preserved in the British Museum. In the British Museum register, on the same page as the entry of the Śrāvastī sealing, there are also another four entries for sealings with this *dhāraṇī* but of unknown provenance. They are slightly different in design compared with the Śrāvastī one but they also have a small *stūpa* image in the middle of the tablets. These five sealings were recorded on the same page, coincidentally or not, and this has led Lawson to suggest that these four sealings might have come from the same area—and that is in Śrāvastī.⁹⁷ All of them end with the *ye dharmā* formula. The British Museum preserves another six sealings of unknown provenance that are stamped with this *dhāraṇī*.⁹⁸ Hidas indicates that these six sealings might have come from the Eastern Gangetic Plain.⁹⁹ Further to that, in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, there is also another group of six oval-shaped sealings stamped with this *Bodhiḡarbhālānkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* but regrettably they are also of unknown provenance. One of them (Museum no. 2330) was read by Lawson and it also ends with the *ye dharmā* stanza.¹⁰⁰ Based on the paleographic grounds, the sealings kept at these two British museums were estimated to date from the eighth to eleventh centuries.¹⁰¹

From the accounts above, it is likely that, by the second half of the first millennium to the early centuries of the second millennium, perhaps peaking between the eighth and eleventh centuries, Buddhist communities in Odisha and the Eastern Gangetic Plain in India were quite familiar with this *dhāraṇī* and its ritual. However, it is noteworthy that at least three types of *dhāraṇī* sealings have been recovered from a *stūpa* site in Chotti Barauni, south of Gwalior in central India (Madhya Pradesh). Unfortunately, they are much abraded and have not been read so far. Although the *dhāraṇī* cannot be

⁹³ Schopen, 'Bodhiḡarbhālānkāralakṣa and Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs', p. 331.

⁹⁴ Ghosh, 'Buddhist tract', pp. 171–172 and n. 1 on p. 172.

⁹⁵ Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some *dhāraṇī*', pp. 715, 717.

⁹⁶ A. Cunningham, *Report of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar, in 1875–76 and 1877–78* (New Delhi, 1880 [2000]), pp. 88–89 and plate XXVIII.

⁹⁷ Lawson, 'Catalogue of Indian Buddhist Clay Sealings', pp. 357–372. There is a similar terracotta sealing impressed with a *stūpa* image in the middle and 18 lines of text recovered in Kutila Murā *stūpa* complex in Maināmatī, Bangladesh. The text on the sealing has not been read or published. The date of the sealing is not yet clear but it was suggested to be around the seventh century; see V. Lefèvre and M. F. Boussac, *Chefs-d'oeuvre du delta du Gange, Collections des musées du Bangladesh* (Paris, 2008), p. 56.

⁹⁸ Lawson, 'Catalogue of Indian Buddhist Clay Sealings', pp. 384–388, 390–397.

⁹⁹ Hidas, 'Dhāraṇī seals in the Cunningham Collection', pp. 90–94.

¹⁰⁰ Lawson, 'Catalogue of Indian Buddhist Clay Sealings', pp. 205–218.

¹⁰¹ Lawson, 'Dhāraṇī sealings', p. 709.

identified, these sealings show that the practice of stamping *dhāraṇī* was also followed in the Vindhya.

Nepal

Farther to the north of the Gangetic Plain in Nepal, as mentioned earlier, the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* is found in a bundle of 46 palm leaves called the *Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*, in Ms. Add. 1680.8. There are around 59 different texts in this manuscript bundle. On a paleographical basis, this manuscript dates to the twelfth to thirteenth centuries.¹⁰² According to Hidas, manuscript Add. 1680.8 carries the features of both Eastern Indian and Nepalese manuscripts. While the hook-topped script is likely to indicate Nepalese origins, the two surviving illustrations including the string-hole decoration point towards Eastern India.¹⁰³ This suggests that there was mutual influence or exchange between the Kathmandu Valley and Eastern India with regard to this *dhāraṇī* collection. This is very likely, as we have seen earlier that Eastern India was familiar with *dhāraṇī* culture, too.

Tibetan plateau

In Tibetan traditions, the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*, under the Tibetan title *byang chub kyi snying po'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzungs*, is preserved in various versions in different Tibetan Kanjur editions, such as in the Derge, Lhasa, and Peking editions. Schopen has edited this *dhāraṇī* based on these editions, including the Sanskrit readings from the Cuttack stone slab and the Nālandā sealings. He has discussed at length this *dhāraṇī* in his work that was first published in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* in 1985, vol. 29 (pp. 119–149) and was reproduced in 2005 (pp. 314–344); we refer to the latter version here. Moreover, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub also published further work on this *dhāraṇī* in the Tibetan tradition in 1994 (pp. 711–727). As such, we will not discuss further the *dhāraṇī* in the Tibetan tradition here except by mentioning briefly the possible date of its transmission.

Unfortunately, according to Schopen, the Tibetan Kanjur editions that he consulted do not have a colophon to indicate when this *dhāraṇī* was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the earliest possible indication that this *dhāraṇī* was known to the Tibetan tradition is through its listing in the *Lhan kar ma* catalogue, which was compiled in around the first quarter of the ninth century, as '*Phags pa byañ chub sñiñ po rgyan 'bum gyi gzuñs* in 250 *Ślokas*.'¹⁰⁵ A further sign indicating this date is the discovery of the Tibetan Dūnhuáng manuscripts of the Pelliot collection that bear this *dhāraṇī*.¹⁰⁶ This group of Dūnhuáng manuscripts is estimated to date from the eighth to ninth centuries.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, if the date estimation is correct, then the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* would have circulated in central Tibet, or at least have been attested there, in the eighth to ninth centuries, if not earlier.

¹⁰² Hidas, *Powers of Protection*, p. 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Schopen, '*Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa and Vimaloṣṇīsa Dhāraṇīs*', p. 318.

¹⁰⁵ Spelling of the title as given in item 341 in A. Herrmann-Pfandt, *Die Lhan Kar Ma: Ein früher Katalog der ins tibetische übersetzten buddhistischen Texte* (Vienna, 2008), pp. 189–191. Note the different transliterations from Tibetan to Roman systems used by the author quoted here.

¹⁰⁶ PT350 and PT555 in M. Lalou, *Inventaire des Manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale (Fonds Pelliot tibétain)*, nos 1–849 (Paris, 1939), i, pp. 90, 428.

¹⁰⁷ S. van Schaik, 'The Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts in China', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65.1 (2002), p. 129.

Pakistan (Gandhāra)

In 1996, some 20 clay sealings and miniature *stūpas* were recovered from a site in Hund and among them are fragments of three sealings stamped with the *Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṅī*. Hund is a Gandhāran archaeological site, situated on the right bank of the river Indus in the Swabi district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in present-day Pakistan. On paleographical grounds, they are estimated to date from the seventh to eighth centuries.¹⁰⁸ As the sealings are broken and certain parts of their surfaces are erased, it is difficult to ascertain whether the stamped *dhāraṅī* ends with the *ye dharmā* formula. Besides these clay materials, a broken piece of metal seal measuring 3.9 by 3.1 by 2.0 centimetres that bears the *Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṅī* was also recovered in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. The script is identified as the Śāradā and is estimated to date to around the sixth century.¹⁰⁹ However, only about a quarter of the seal is extant. Based on the readings available, and assuming the unbroken seal to have been slightly oval-shaped, Strauch has reconstructed the text of the seal. Part of the surviving portion and the reconstructed text indicates that the *dhāraṅī* ends with a *ye dharmā* stanza.¹¹⁰

Afghanistan (Bactria)

In the north of Afghanistan, perhaps in the region of Qunduz, two steatite rectangular stamps, measuring 5 by 6 centimetres, were recovered. One is now preserved in the British Museum (OA 1880.168)¹¹¹ and another is in a private collection. Strauch has reviewed these two stamps in detail and has provided the readings of the *Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṅī* on the stamps, which also end with the *ye dharmā* formula.¹¹² A suggestion has been made that the British Museum stamp is of Kashmiri origin but Strauch argues that, based on the characteristics of the stamp and also the lack of its acquisition information, the suggestion is difficult to sustain. In turn, he is of the opinion that both these stamps hailed from north Afghanistan, and perhaps even from the same workshop tradition.¹¹³ He further hypothesises that the script used in these stamps is of those in the transitional phase from late Gupta Brāhmī to Proto-Śāradā, thus dating the stamps to the time from the middle of the sixth to the beginning of the seventh centuries.¹¹⁴ If this is the case, the Afghanistan stamps, perhaps together with the broken metal seal mentioned above, are among the earliest surviving artefacts of this *dhāraṅī*.

China

Moving east from Central Asia, tracking by the edges of the sandy Taklamakan desert, the *dhāraṅī* found its way into the Tarim Basin. A small fragment bearing the Sanskrit version of the *Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṅī* in Uyghur letters was recovered from Turfan oasis.

¹⁰⁸ Ihsan Ali and Nasim Khan, 'Inscribed clay tablets', pp. 77–85.

¹⁰⁹ Item 08.04.01 in Aman ur Rahman and H. Falk, *Seals, Sealings and Tokens from Gandhāra* (Wiesbaden, 2011), pp. 27–28, 119.

¹¹⁰ I. Strauch, 'Seals, sealings and tokens from Gandhāra: by Aman Ur Rahman and Harry Falk. (Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie, Band 21). Pp. 222. Weisbaden, Reichert, 2011', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22.3–4 (2012), pp. 605–606.

¹¹¹ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1880-168 (accessed 15 December 2023).

¹¹² Strauch, 'Two Stamps', pp. 37–56, plates 4.3, 4.4.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 41; W. Zwalf (ed.), *Buddhism: Art and Faith* (London, 1985), p. 70.

¹¹⁴ Strauch, 'Two stamps', pp. 47–48. The stamp is in a private collection; we suspect that it could be the stamp that Fussman mentioned to Schopen in a letter dated 4 November 1984 regarding a stamp from Bactrian Afghanistan inscribed in Brāhmī of the fifth to sixth centuries CE (Schopen, 'Bodhiḡarbhālaṅkāralakṣa and Vimaloṣṇiṣa Dhāraṅīs', p. 338).

It is now preserved in the Turfan Collection of Berlin (Ch/U 6357b verso).¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, the other half-page of the fragment is missing. The surviving portion shows that the *dhāraṇī* ends in the *mūlamantra* section. The date of the fragment at the moment is unclear.

Farther down from Turfan to the south-east, in another oasis containing a crescent lake and singing sand dunes, are the Dūnhuáng (敦煌) caves that once preserved the Tibetan paper scroll manuscripts that carry this *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*. The texts that bear this *dhāraṇī* in these scrolls, as mentioned earlier, are entitled *byang chub snying po 'bum kyi gzungs (Bodhimaṇḍalākṣa-dhāraṇī)*¹¹⁶ and a longer *byang chub kyi snying po'i gzungs-kyi cho-ga (Bodhimaṇḍālākāra-nāma-dhāraṇī-upacāra)*, or PT350 and PT555, respectively, in the Pelliot Tibetan collection now preserved in Paris.¹¹⁷ They also probably date to the eighth or ninth centuries. At the moment, we do not know whether these manuscripts were brought from central Tibet or translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan in Dūnhuáng.

Moving farther down the south-east direction via the Héxī Corridor (河西走廊), the *dhāraṇī* reached the ancient capital of China—Cháng'ān (長安), present-day Xī'ān (西安). The Chinese adaptation of the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* appears as 百千印陀羅尼經 (*Bǎi qiān yìn tuóluóní jīng* or *Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī of a Hundred Thousand Seals*) in the *Taiśhō Tripiṭaka* (T), T1369a based on the Koryō or Gāolí (高麗) edition compiled in 1151 CE, and T1369b based the Míng (明) edition compiled in 1601 CE. In the record, 百千印陀羅尼經 was translated from Sanskrit by Śikṣānanda (實叉難陀) between the first year of Zhèng Shèng (證聖) and the fourth year of Cháng'ān during the Táng Dynasty (唐), and that was between 695 and 704 CE.¹¹⁸ According to the footnote in T1369b, because of the differences between these two versions (even though they both seem to have been translated by Śikṣānanda), they are reported separately in the *Taiśhō Tripiṭaka*. Both of these Chinese versions only have Parts 1 and 2 of the *dhāraṇī* text. Similarly to the Tibetan versions and the Turfan fragment, the mantra section of the *dhāraṇī* in 百千印陀羅尼經 was not translated into Chinese, but was transposed from the Indian writing system into the Chinese in an attempt to maintain the sounds of the original. The Chinese adaptation continues with the same message of writing this *dhāraṇī* and placing it inside a *caitya*. In this case, the Chinese text has the word *tǎ* (塔), which generally refers to a pagoda. However, stamping this *dhāraṇī* on clay sealings did not seem to have become common practice among Chinese Buddhists. Instead, they either hand-copied the *dhāraṇī* onto paper or block-printed multiple copies.

Far to the north-east of Cháng'ān, a Sanskrit paper fragment of a block print bearing this *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* was recovered in Khara-Khoto (黑水城) in Inner Mongolia.¹¹⁹ It was printed in an Indian script and Olga Lundyshva assigned it as a Pāla script.¹²⁰ However, only half of this white-paper block print survives. Nevertheless, it is enough to deduce that it contains Part 1 of the *dhāraṇī*, or up to the

¹¹⁵ P. Zieme, 'Notes on the *Uṣṇīṣvijayādihāraṇī* and the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa dhāraṇī* according to Old Uyghur versions', *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University for the Academic Year 2022* (ARIRIAB) XXVI (2023), p. 273, Figure 3, and plate 25.

¹¹⁶ For the discussion of the names of the texts that carry this *dhāraṇī*, see Schopen, 'Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa and *Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs*', pp. 314–317; and Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some *dhāraṇī*, p. 712, n. 44. An edition for PT555 is forthcoming, *ibid.*, n. 66.

¹¹⁷ Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some *dhāraṇī*', pp. 711–727, n. 67; Lalou, *Inventaire des Manuscrits*, pp. 90, 428.

¹¹⁸ T2154:55.566a:17.

¹¹⁹ Fragment 3, plate 2, SI 6576, inventory no. 6632, Serindian Fund of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences in O. Lundyshva, 'Fragments of *Dhāraṇī* blockprints from Khara-Khoto (Serindian Fund of IOM, RAS) with appendix by Alla Sizova', *Written Monuments of the Orient* 1.2 (2015), pp. 31–47.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

upahṛdaya section. Interestingly, the text was written on the upper portion of the block, occupying around a quarter to a third of the printed area. Below the printed text is decorated with multiple *stūpa*-shaped designs. This pattern could symbolise the power of this *dhāraṇī*—that is, a written *dhāraṇī* in a *stūpa* is equivalent to having built multiple *stūpas* and the merits that come along with it. Based on the type of paper, characters, and features of this block print, Lundyshveva estimates that it dates to around the twelfth century.¹²¹

Korea

As we have seen above, one version of 百千印陀羅尼經, T1369a, listed in *Taishō Tripitaka*, is based on the Korean Koryō (高麗) edition. The Chinese started to catalogue and compile Buddhist texts and treatises as early as the fourth or fifth centuries, which led to the increasing formation of notions of canon and canonicity. The initial circulation of the Chinese Buddhist canon was rather limited, as it was copied by hand. However, towards the end of the first millennium, the first printed version of the Chinese canon called the *Kāi Bǎo Zàng* (開寶藏) by the Song Dynasty became available and was distributed widely in China as well as in Korea and Japan.¹²² The first Korean Koryō (高麗) edition, which was based on the Song's *Kāi Bǎo Zàng*, was then compiled and finished in around the eleventh century.¹²³ The 百千印陀羅尼經, which was part of the *Kāi Bǎo Zàng*, was then transmitted to Korea. Besides being preserved in the Koryō canon (*Tripitaka Koreana*),¹²⁴ the 百千印陀羅尼經 (*Baeg-cheon-in-dalanigyeong*) was also found in the golden manuscript commissioned by the Koryō royal court in the thirteenth century.¹²⁵

Japan

Farther to the east on the islands of Japan, at around the beginning of the ninth century, Kūkai (空海) brought 42 Sanskrit texts written in Siddhamātrkā script (御請來目錄, *Go-shōrai mokuroku*) back from Táng China after two years of sojourn and, in 806 CE, he presented a catalogue of these texts to the imperial court.¹²⁶ He also brought back notebooks of copied texts—the *Sanjūjō sasshi* (三十帖冊子). One of the 42 Sanskrit texts, 菩提莊嚴陀羅尼 (*Bodai shōgon darani*), numbering 29 in his notebook, bears the mantra of the *Bodhigarbhālankāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* in Siddhamātrkā script.¹²⁷

Based on these short accounts, the adaptations of *Bodhigarbhālankāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* were transmitted to China in around the seventh to eighth centuries and, at the turn of the first

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹²² Bhikshu Huimin, A. Tu, B. X. Zhou, and Z. P. Wang, 'Techniques for collating multiple text versions in the digitization of classical texts: the CBETA Taishō Buddhist Canon as an example', *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 8 (2005), pp. 301–302.

¹²³ J. Wu and G. Wilkinson (eds.), *Reinventing the Tripitaka: Transformation of the Buddhist Canon in Modern East Asia* (Lanham, 2017), p. xv.

¹²⁴ The Koryō edition was carved into more than 80,000 wooden printing blocks. In the fourteenth century, these blocks were sent to Haeinsa monastery (海印寺) for keeping and printing.

¹²⁵ K. H. Nam and H. Y. Seok, 'A bibliographical study of the Book of Texts 『百千印陀羅尼經(合部)』, which originated in 1284 with the wishes of King Wonseong and Princess Wonseong', *Bibliographical Studies* 74 (2018), pp. 261–310.

¹²⁶ T2161:55.1064a2.

¹²⁷ Hase, *Daishi go-shōrai bonji shingon shū*, pp. 343–345; Y. Miyasaka, *Indo koten ron* インド古典論 (Tokyo, 1983), i, pp. 107–109; R. W. Giebel, 'Notes on some Sanskrit texts brought back to Japan by Kūkai', *Pacific World, Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 14 Fall (2012), p. 216.

millennium, the *dhāraṇī* and its adaptations were widely distributed in China, including Korea and Japan.

Southeast Asia

On the other side of India, towards the south-east direction, perhaps sailing down along the coast facing the Bay of Bengal and through the Strait of Melaka, the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* made its presence in the Island of Java, Indonesia. In 1993, a gold foil, measuring 5.2–5.8 by 25.5 centimetres and weighing 7.9 grams, with five lines of Siddhamātrkā script, was discovered at the south-east corner of the central chamber of the northern Candi Plaosan Lor main temple in Central Java.¹²⁸ The gold foil, datable to the eighth and mid-ninth centuries, was inscribed with the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* and Griffiths has provided its reading and translation.¹²⁹ The textual tradition on this gold foil is in agreement with the Perlis reading but with some differences; for example, the gold-foil version has a shorter text on paying obeisance to the Buddha and it finishes with the *upahṛdaya* section while the Perlis one ends earlier at the *hṛdaya* section. Therefore, even within Southeast Asia, the textual tradition of the *dhāraṇīs* varies. Indonesia is home to numerous archaeological sites where a variety of Buddhist *dhāraṇī*, mantra, and *gāthā* inscriptions were recovered.¹³⁰ However, at the moment, the Candi Plaosan Lor gold foil is the only epigraphic material known to bear the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*.

Śrīvijaya was the leading power in the straits around the late seventh to eleventh centuries. It exerted its dominance over a string of coastal and riverine settlements in the Malay–Thai Peninsula, most of which were part of the Ancient Kedah polity. Its main port located in the Bujang Valley came under the political, economic, and cultural influence of Śrīvijaya, possibly serving as one of the main centres for exchange and production. Numerous premodern cultural remains related to Buddhism were discovered in Ancient Kedah, including images, *stūpas*, and inscriptions containing Buddhist texts. We have mentioned earlier that the Perlis sealings exhibit certain features of Śrīvijaya art that, in turn, resemble the Pāla Indian art style. Several scholarly works have been published on the historical artistic relationships between South and Southeast Asia, especially the link between the Pāla regions (750–1174 CE) and Śrīvijaya in their mutual exchanges as well as local adaptation in the development of art styles.¹³¹ There was also a strong religio-political connection between the Pāla Kingdom and Śrīvijaya, according to Hermann Kulke:

The P[ā]la [K]ingdom of Bihar and Bengal in the ninth and tenth centuries was the most powerful state of northeast India, and its Buddhist art strongly influenced Śailendra art and architecture in Central Java The donation of a *vihāra* (monastery) at Nalanda (in Bihar) was certainly the best choice for [Śailendra Dynasty's King] Bālaputra's (reigned from the mid-ninth century) ritual policy, enhancing not only his status as a newcomer in Śrīvijaya, but also Śrīvijaya's fame in Buddhist Southeast and East Asia.¹³²

¹²⁸ Griffiths, 'Written traces of the Buddhist past', p. 161 and Figure 7 on p. 162.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 161–163.

¹³⁰ For more examples of *dhāraṇīs*, mantras, and *gāthās*, see Griffiths, 'Written traces of the Buddhist past', pp. 137–194; see also A. Griffiths and C. D. Lammerts, 'Epigraphy: Southeast Asia', in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, (ed.) Silk, pp. 988–1009.

¹³¹ See G. P. Krishnan, 'The roots and legacy of the art of Nalanda as seen at Srivijaya', in *Nalanda, Srivijaya and Beyond*, (ed.) Krishnan, pp. 153–200.

¹³² H. Kulke, 'Śrīvijaya revisited: reflections on state formation of a Southeast Asian Thalassocracy', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* 102 (2016), pp. 45–95.

In view of this, the Śrīvijaya features of the Bodhi Perlis sealing could safely indicate its root to be Eastern India.¹³³ The sealing also exhibits the characteristics of local adaptation; for example, the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* was stamped on a pear-shaped sealing, and this design combination is not found in any other regions.

The influence of Northern and Eastern India on Southeast Asia goes beyond just artistic materials, extending to ritual practice, too. Skilling, through the example of the *ye dharmā* stanza, states that

[r]itual practices of enlisting the stanza developed across South and Southeast Asia, peaking in the late Pāla period, during which the stanza became integral to the installation of relics and the consecration of sites, painted scrolls, manuscripts, and images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other figures. The practice seems to have been largely restricted to Northern India and to Southeast Asia.¹³⁴

Even though the Perlis Bodhi sealing does not end with the *ye dharmā* stanza similarly to sealings found in India, it is found in the vicinity of sealings with the *ye dharmā* stanza. For example, the sealing with an image of a Buddha seated in *dharmacakra mudra* surrounded by eight Bodhisattvas stamped with five *ye dharmā* impressions on its reverse side was also found in Perlis.¹³⁵ Near Perlis, the *ye dharmā* stanzas are found inscribed on other materials in Kedah, such as the Bukit Choras stone tablet and the Bukit Meriam tablet.¹³⁶

Another shared ritual practice between Eastern India, including Odisha and Southeast Asia, with reference to the Perlis Bodhi sealing was the stamping of *dhāraṇīs* on prepared clay surfaces. We have discussed earlier that the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* sealings were found in Odisha and over the Eastern Gangetic Plain. Stamped sealings of other types of *dhāraṇī*, such as the *Vimaloṣṇīṣa-dhāraṇī*, were also widely found across northern India.¹³⁷ Generally, the letters on these sealings are small or even tiny, making the *dhāraṇī* difficult to read. More often than not, they were not meant to be read; rather, their production was driven by the quest to accrue merit. Skilling points out that ‘Merit is a much-desired personal and social commodity and a currency of multiple value systems. A donor gained physical and spiritual blessings in the present life and in future rebirths’.¹³⁸ Further to this, the merit made is believed to be transferrable to family members, including departed relatives and those beyond the family circles, too. Moreover, this merit-making ritual is not known to be restricted to only those who regarded themselves as Buddhists. Therefore, the ritual of stamping *dhāraṇī* could have been a means for travellers in Perlis, merchants, residents, and seafarers to seek merit at that time, either for blessing, safety at sea, protection, or the granting of boons for themselves or those they cared for.

¹³³ Note that the regions of Bihar and Bengal in this article are considered parts of Eastern India; see n. 86.

¹³⁴ Skilling, ‘Writing and representation’, p. 72; for further examples of ritual practices and merit-making in mainland Southeast Asia, see N. Revire, ‘Glimpses of Buddhist practices and rituals in Dvāravatī and its neighbouring cultures’, in *Before Siam: Essays in Art and Archaeology*, (eds.) N. Revire and S. A. Murphy (Bangkok, 2014), pp. 240–271.

¹³⁵ This tablet is preserved in the Kota Kayang Museum, Perlis. Another example of this *dharmacakra mudra* sealing having multiple stamps of the *ye dharmā* stanza on the reverse side was recovered on the Trang coast of the Southern Thai Peninsula.

¹³⁶ Allen, ‘Inscribed tablet from Kedah’, pp. 44, 47; Nasha Rozaidi Khow, ‘Pensejarahan Kedah Tua’.

¹³⁷ Lawson, ‘Catalogue of Indian Buddhist Clay Sealings’, pp. 33–35; P. Skilling, ‘Buddhism and the circulation of ritual in early peninsular Southeast Asia’, in *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange*, (eds.) P. Y. Manguin, A. Mani, and G. Wade (Singapore, 2011), pp. 371–384.

¹³⁸ Skilling, ‘Writing and representation’, p. 59.

Conclusion

The discovery of the Perlis Bodhi sealings demonstrates that the Sanskrit *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī* circulated in Perlis in around the tenth century. Multiple copies of the *dhāraṇī* were stamped onto distinctive *stūpa*-like pear-shaped clay sealings and were stored in a cave. The textual tradition of the Perlis *dhāraṇī* is unique, too, and is generally slightly shorter compared with its counterparts found elsewhere. This indicates that the Perlis sealings could have been designed and produced locally, and are thus standing witnesses to the expressions of a mature and active Buddhist culture in the Malay–Thai Peninsula during that time in the context of Ancient Kedah’s development as a port polity. It is not surprising that Perlis, as part of Ancient Kedah, which was strategically located along the ancient maritime trade routes of South and East Asia, participated in a particular *dhāraṇī* culture that once spanned today’s South, East, and Southeast Asia. Exchanges between the regions of Eastern India including Odisha and the Malay–Thai Peninsula, especially with regard to this *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-dhāraṇī*, are particularly noteworthy. The presence of this type of *dhāraṇī* ritual demonstrates in part that, at around the turn of the first millennium, people in Perlis sought to accrue merit, too. The ideology of merit-making in Buddhism by way of specific ritual practices is shared across regions and cultures. Even though the rituals might involve different expressions in different locations, the quest for merit in desiring a better life, protection, cleansing of bad deeds, and gaining spiritual attainment has remained a common aspiration to many over the centuries and is still relevant today.

Acknowledgements. We thank Peter Skilling, Rolf Giebel, and Mattia Salvini for their input and suggestions. The writing of this article was supported by the FRGS Grant (FRGS/1/2022/WAB06/USM/03/2) and, for that, we would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Our appreciation also goes to the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum, and the Kota Kayang Museum for providing pictorial copies of the Perlis sealings. We are grateful to Arlo Griffiths and another anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments and corrections on previous versions of this article, and to Vijaya Samarawickrama and Rosemarie Oong for their assistance.

Conflict of interest. None.

Cite this article: Ooi EJ, Khaw NR (2024). Clay sealings from Perlis, Malaysia, and the wider world of the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa-Dhāraṇī*. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000087>