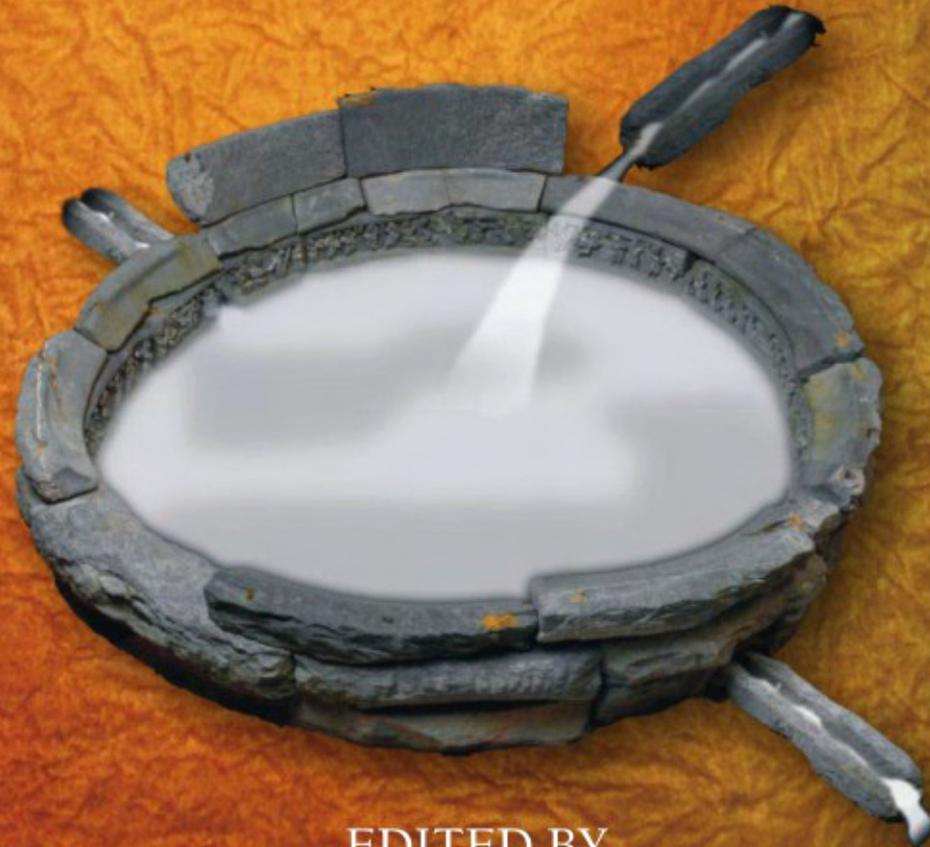


PRAJÑĀDHARA

Essays on

ASIAN ART HISTORY EPIGRAPHY AND CULTURE

in Honour of
Gouriswar Bhattacharya



EDITED BY

Gerd J.R. Mevissen and Arundhati Banerji

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Two Stamps with the Bodhigarbhālaṃkāralakṣa Dhāraṇī from Afghanistan and Some Further Remarks on the Classification of Objects with the *ye dharmā* Formula

4

INGO STRAUCH

PART 1: BUDDHIST STAMP SEALS WITH THE TEXT OF THE BODHIGARBHĀLAṂKĀRALAKṢA DHĀRAṆĪ

Previous discoveries

In 1985 Gregory Schopen published an extensive study on a yet unidentified dhāraṇī text which was found inscribed on objects from Nālandā and Cuttack and published already 1941-42 by A. Ghosh. He recognized this text as a “Sanskrit version of a short and virtually unknown text preserved in the various Kanjurs under the Tibetan title *Byan chub kyi sñin po 'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzuñs*” translated either as *Bodhigarbhālaṃkāralakṣadhāraṇī* or as *Bodhimaṇḍasyalakṣālaṃkāranāmadhāraṇī* (Schopen 1985: 119-122 <119-120> = 2005: 314-317 <314>).

At the same time, but independently, an article by Simon Lawson about “Dhāraṇī Sealings in British Collections” (1985) appeared where he presented eleven sealings with this text, five from Śrāvastī, six of unknown origin. Although Lawson did not succeed in identifying the text called by him “longer dhāraṇī” as that of the *Bodhigarbhālaṃkāralakṣadhāraṇī* (hence abbreviated *Bodhi*), he realized that it is virtually the same text as that from Cuttack and Nālandā.

With regard to the geographical and historical spread of this text among Buddhists in medieval India both authors had to conclude on the basis of the epigraphical evidence available to them, that its use was mainly restricted to or at least concentrated in East India.

Already in 1985, however, Schopen was forced to add an addenda to his article communicating a letter from Gérard Fussman. In this letter Fussman described « un cachet servant à imprimer une dhāraṇī sur une bulle de terre. Le cachet aurait été trouvé dans la région de Qunduz, en Bactriane afghane. Il est inscrit en brāhmī des V-VI^e siècles » (148). This welcome new find from another region of the Indian subcontinent remained, however, unpublished.

In 2003 we got some photographs from an art dealer in London depicting a rectangular soap stone seal corresponding basically with Fussman’s description. Although the present owner claimed it to be found “in one of the Bamiyan caves” – a quite popular find-spot at that time – we contacted Gérard Fussman for detailed information about the piece he had described almost twenty years ago. He kindly sent us not only the photograph of the seal but also his correspondence with additional information regarding its discovery.

According to a letter sent to G. Fussman in September 1982 by A.G. Ravan Farhadi, the seal was shown to the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan by Mr. Gholām Habīb Nawābī, « un vieux écrivain afghan », who had got it from a friend in Kabul. As we suspected, the photograph of the seal sent by Farhadi to Prof. Fussman depicts indeed the same piece as our photographs. Finally, the letter informs that the seal was returned to its owner in July 1981. Although the owner’s name and the further whereabouts of the piece remain obscure, it is certain that the seal we are going to publish originally hails from Afghanistan, according to G. Fussman most probably from Qunduz.¹

Another 1985 publication – Zwalf’s “Buddhism Art and Faith” (70) – added a further important object from the Indian North-West: a steatite stamp with the text of the Bodhi from the British Museum, London (OA 1880-168). It is especially important due to its peculiar shape which is almost identical with that of the Afghanistan stamp to be published here. For unknown reasons Zwalf points to a Kashmir origin of the piece.²

All this evidence was also evaluated by Schopen in the Addenda to the re-publication of his article in the volume “Figments and fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India” (2005: 338-340). Here he also gives some additional epigraphical data which escaped his attention when he wrote the original version of his article. Unnoticed by Schopen, however, remained some tablets from Hund published 1997-98 by Ihsan Ali and M. Nasim Khan. Although Nasim Khan did not identify the dhāraṇī with the Bodhi on the basis of Schopen’s article he recognized that its text coincides with the one given by Lawson as “longer dhāraṇī”. Contrary to Ihsan Ali & Nasim Khan’s reconstruction of the dhāraṇī texts the facsimiles clearly show that the text on the Hund sealings was not accompanied by the *ye dharmā* formula. According to the authors the script can be dated into the 7th/8th centuries AD (84).

A systematic survey of all the available epigraphical data concerning this dhāraṇī is still a desideratum. The following table will therefore list all the instances of inscribed objects with the text of the Bodhi together with the specification of their find-spot, material, technology of inscribing and their textual or pictorial contexts. Regarding the text of the dhāraṇī which will be discussed below one has to differentiate between objects bearing only the *mūlamantra*, *hṛdaya* and *upahṛdaya*, i.e. the spell itself (= paragraph [1] of the dhāraṇī text), and those containing longer extracts of the dhāraṇī including descriptions of its use and purpose. For the paragraph numbers [0]-[5] used here see Schopen’s critical edition (1985: 130-137 = 2005: 323-329). Paragraph numbers with an asterisk indicate the fragmentary character of the respective passage. The data concerning the text are verified – if possible – on the photographs or rubbings accompanying the editions.

The objects are arranged in chronological order with regard to their dates of publication.

1. Stone inscription in the Cuttack museum (Schopen 1985: SC)

Publication: Ghosh 1941-42 (+ rubbings)

Origin: Unknown

Text: *[1]-[2]-[3]-*[4]

Textual or pictorial context: none

Material: Stone slab

Kind of inscribing: Incised.

2. Nālandā, Archaeological museum, reg. no. 2-42 (Schopen 1985: SN)
 Publication: Ghosh 1941-42: 172, fn. 1. Not described in H. Sastri 1942 (1986), but see *ibid.*: 77.
 Origin: Stūpa 2, Nālandā
 Text: [1]-*[2]
 Textual or pictorial context: probably, *ye dharmā*³ formula
 Material: terracotta tablet
 Kind of inscribing: stamped
3. Nālandā, Archaeological museum, reg. no. 2-193
 Publication: Ghosh 1941-42: 172, fn. 1. Not described in H. Sastri 1942 (1986), but see *ibid.*: 77.
 Origin: Stūpa 2, Nālandā
 Text: [1]
 Textual or pictorial context: *ye dharmā* formula
 Material: terracotta tablet
 Kind of inscribing: stamped
4. Ratnagiri 1, reg. nos. RTR-1, 1111, 1112, 1113, 1114
 Publication: D. Mitra 1981-83, I: 43, plate XVIII. 1-4
 Origin: Stūpa 2, Ratnagiri
 Text: [1]
 Textual or pictorial context: none
 Material: terracotta tablets of the same stamp
 Kind of inscribing: stamped
5. Ratnagiri 2, reg. nos. RTR-1, 1107, 1108, 1109, 1110
 Publication: D. Mitra 1981-83, I: 99-100, plate L
 Origin: Stūpa 253, Ratnagiri
 Text: [1]
 Textual or pictorial context: *ye dharmā* formula
 Material: terracotta tablets of the same stamp
 Kind of inscribing: stamped

In his paper contributed to the *South Asian Archaeology* conference 1983 and published two years later Simon Lawson presented a number of dhāraṇī sealings, which are now preserved in the British Museum, London, and in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Out of the 29 sealings examined by him, 19 could be read. Eleven out of these 19 have the text of the first paragraph of the Bodhi. The remaining show the Vimaloṣṇīṣa dhāraṇī (cf. Schopen 1985: 141-145 = 2005: 332-336). Five of the Bodhi sealings come from Śrāvastī. The provenance of the others is unknown. Obviously, one of the Śrāvastī tablets (“a unique specimen 2 inches long by 1 ½ inches broad”) from Stūpa No. 5 is mentioned and depicted by Cunningham in his “Report of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar” (1880: 89, pl. xxviii,1; cf. Lawson 1985: 710 fig. 9). It was found “along with a broken stūpa of unburnt clay, in which it was most probably preserved.” Because of the small size of the akṣaras Cunningham could only identify the words *namā bhagavato, tathāgata, namo bhagavato sākya-*

muni and *pratiṣṭhita*, which seem to fit to the text of our dhāraṇī. The text is concluded by the *ye dharmā* formula.

It is possible that another one of the British sealings can be identified with the clay tablet found in the stūpa No.2 at Saheṭh-Maheṭh. According to Vogel's words, "the existing writing consists of portions of 12 lines in the <N>āgarī characters of the 8th or 9th century A.D. ... The 3rd and 4th lines read – *Tathāgatāya namō Bhagavatē Śākya namaḥ Tathāgatāy-Ārhatē samyaksambuddhāya* (Vogel 1911: 129 S. 31)."

Since the sealings are not separately described and pictures of only some of them are available it is not possible to provide the respective data for every single item. They are therefore subsumed under the following paragraph as

6-16. Eleven Sealings from British collections

Publication: Lawson 1985: 713 (figs. 9-12)

Origin: Śrāvastī (5), unknown (6)

Text: [1]

Textual or pictorial context: *ye dharmā* formula + stūpa (Lawson 1985: 710, fig. 9)

Material: terracotta tablets

Kind of inscribing: stamped

17. A stamp from the British Museum

Publication: Zwalf 1985: 70, no. 82 (+ 2 figures)

Origin: "Kashmir, 7th-8th century AD" (?)

Text: [1]

Textual or pictorial context: *ye dharmā* formula

Material: Soap stone, measuring 4.9 x 6,3 cm

Kind of inscribing: incised

18-20. Hund

Publication: Ihsan Ali & Nasim Khan 1997-98: 81-82 (figs. 16-18), cf. Ihsan Ali 2003: 47, 66 fig. 7.

Origin: Hund

Text: [1]

Textual or pictorial context: none

Material: terracotta tablets

Kind of inscribing: stamped

It can be suggested that there are still more published or yet unpublished objects bearing the text of the Bodhigarbhālaṃkāralakṣadhāraṇī. Some of them are briefly mentioned in archaeological reports. Thus in his report on the excavations at Pākna Bihār, a Buddhist monastery near Sankisa, Cunningham describes a type of seals "of a larger size, with 16 or 18 lines of writing ... They open with the words *Namo Bhagavato* ... and further on I can read *Tathāgato Namō Bhagavato Śākya Muni* ... I can also read the word *pratiṣṭhita*" (1880: 35). Another – yet unpublished – object is a fragmentarily preserved stamp with the text of the Bodhi and the *ye dharmā* formula. It will be published by Harry Falk in the forthcoming catalogue of the Aman ur Rahman collection.

The majority of the above listed objects, however, are estampages of the main portion of the dhāraṇī text (= [1]), in many cases accompanied by the so-called *ye dharmā* formula or Pratītyasamutpādagāthā.

Two stamp seals from Afghanistan

It is quite plausible that the number of stamps used for the fabrication of stamped objects is much more restricted. Nevertheless it is sometimes surprising to see the strange relationship between thousands of estampages, sealings etc. and the very small number of seals and stamps. Thus in the case of the very popular objects with the *ye dharmā* formula which were found in an abundant number all over India we know only a handful of stamps published so far (Strauch 2000: 219-220).

Against this background the two stamps of the Bodhi text – i.e. the British Museum piece and our Afghanistan stamp – bear a special importance. Moreover, as can be easily seen on the accompanying photographs (**Plates 4.3, 4.4**), they are so similar in shape and style that it is tempting to regard them as products of one and the same workshop. Both are of almost the same size and show on their back side a handle in the middle of a petal decoration. It seems therefore justified to treat them together, the more so as the British Museum piece has not yet been transliterated and properly studied. According to Michael Willis neither the documentation nor the accession number of the British Museum stamp gives an indication of the year of its acquisition or of its origin. It is therefore highly difficult to maintain the suggested Kashmir origin of this piece (Zwalf 1985: 70). It is not only the rather reliable evidence regarding the origin of the Afghanistan stamp that supports the assumption that both pieces hail from the same region, i.e. the North of Afghanistan. Another indicator is the characteristic shape of the handles of both stamps which can also be observed in the case of a *ye dharmā* seal made of soap stone originating from Afghanistan (drawing published in Wilson 1841: 51, pl. 1, figs. 2, 3) (**Plate 4.1**). The same type of a handle is also found on another yet unpublished piece in the British Museum which obviously comes from the same or at least a closely related workshop but is left uninscribed. Only later a rough design was carved into the flat surface of the seal (**Plate 4.2**).

Possibly, there existed another almost identical inscribed piece from this workshop. On the assistant keeper card Wladimir Zwalf wrote: “A v. similar stamp seal with slightly briefer and corrupt version of the same text was at Spink’s in 1978.” Unfortunately, the further whereabouts of this seal are unknown. But according to the date mentioned on the card it is improbable that it is identical with the Afghanistan stamp which appeared only three years later in Kabul.

Text edition

Afghanistan stamp, Steatite, 5.2 x 6 cm, Private Collection (**Plate 4.3**)

Transliteration

- 1 namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāṃcanot[kṣ]iptaprabhāsake
- 2 tumūrdhne tathāgatāya na[m](o) (bhagava)[te] [ś]ākyamunaye ta
- 3 thāgatāyār hate samyaksambuddhā<ya> tadyathā [oṃ] vodhi vodhi
- 4 vodhi vodhi sarvatathāgatagocara dhara dhara dhara hara hara
- 5 (pra)[ha]ra [ma]⁴hāvodhicittadhara ś(?)⁵ culu culu śatara[śmi]saṃco
- 6 (dite sa)r[v]atathāgatābhiṣikte guṇaguṇamate [vuddhagu]ṇā

- 7 (+ + +) [va]bhāse m[i]l[i] mil(i)⁶ gaganatale sarvata[thāga]tādhi
 8 ṣṭh(i)[t](e) [na]bhastale śama śama praśama praśama sarvapāpāpra
 9 śamane hulu hulu mahāvodhimārgasamprasthite sarva
 10 tathāgatapratīṣṭhitaśudhe svāhā [oṃ] sarvatathāgataḥ
 11 vyāvalokite⁷ jaya jaya svāhā⁸ [oṃ] huru huru jaya
 12 mukhe svāhā ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathā
 13 gata prāha teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ

British Museum stamp, Steatite, 4.9 x 6.3 cm, British Museum OA 1880-168 (**Plate 4.4**)⁹

Transliteration

- 1 namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāṃcanotkṣiptaprabhāsak[e]
 2 tu-mūrdhne tathāgat(ā)ya namo bhagavate ś[ā]kyamunaye tathāgatā
 3 y(ā)rhate samyaksambuddh(ā)ya tadyathā oṃ bodhi bodhi bodhi bodhi [sa]
 4 vatathāgatagocara dhara dhara hara hara prahara prahara ma
 5 h(ā)bodhicittadhara culu culu śataraśmisamcodite sarvata
 6 thāgat(ā)bhī[ṣ]i[kt]e¹⁰ guṇaguṇamate buddhaguṇāvabh(ā)se mi
 7 li mili gaganatale [sarva]tath(ā)gat(ā)dhiṣṭite nabhasta
 8 le śama śama praśama (pra)śama [sarva]pāpāpraśamane
 9 sarvapāpāviśodhane hulu hulu mah(ā)vodhim(ā)rgasampra
 10 sthita sarvatath(ā)gatapratīṣṭ(hi)ta śu sv(ā)h(ā) [oṃ] sarvatathāgata
 11 vyāvalokite jaya jaya svāh(ā) [oṃ] huru huru jaya mu
 12 khe sv(ā)h(ā) ye dharm(ā) hetuprabhav(ā) hetuṃ teṣ(ā)ṃ tath(ā)gata prā
 13 ha teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mah(ā)śramaṇa

The text as compared to the other versions

Gregory Schopen was the first scholar who identified the text of the Cuttack slab as “an incomplete Sanskrit version of a short and virtually unknown text preserved in the various Kanjurs under the Tibetan title *Byaṅ chub kyi sñiṅ po’i rgyan ’bum gyi gzuṅs*” (1985: 119 = 2005: 314). This text is itself only an extract of a larger work with the same Tibetan title. As Schopen has shown, the longer version as preserved in the Tibetan Kanjurs is, however, only a quite young translation from the Chinese. Thus the extract must have been prepared from another version which seemed to be lost at the time when Schopen prepared his article (138). Due to this state of affairs other inscribed texts like those from Nālandā were of special importance since most of them represented versions of this dhāraṇī which were obviously made not from the extract but from the large, supposedly lost text. Moreover, these inscribed texts were the only remains of the Bodhigarbhā-lamkāralakṣa dhāraṇī from India proper.

In the meantime, however, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub discovered “this ‘lost’ Tibetan translation of the original Sanskrit text” among the Dunhuang manuscripts of the Pelliot collection (Schopen 2005: 339). So far she communicated¹¹ only its main portion [1] in an article (1994) where she presented another important object which contributes additional information about the practical use of the Bodhi among Tibetan Buddhists. It is a paper manuscript (PT 350) “functioning as dharmakāya relics” and containing the text of

several dhāraṇīs, i.e. the Bodhigarbhālaṃkāra/Bodhimaṇḍālaṃkāra¹² dhāraṇī, the Āryoṣṇīṣavimala dhāraṇī and the Pratītyasamutpādagāthā. The text of the Bodhi is introduced by a paragraph stating:

“After the Bodhimaṇḍalakṣadhāraṇī has been written on paper, it is placed in its entirety [as an offering] into each shrine which contains a relic (Scherrer-Schaub 1994: 713).”

This instruction can be compared to the 2nd paragraph in the Tibetan extract (cf. Schopen 2005: 323-324) and the parallel passage in the Cuttack stone slab which contains the guidelines for the usage of the dhāraṇī and the expected rewards:

yaḥ kaścid bhikṣur vā bhikṣuṇī vā upāsako vā upāsikā vā anyo vā yaḥ kaś[c]i[t] śrāddhaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā [i]mām dhāraṇī[m] l[i]kh[i]tvā 'bhya[m]tara[m] prakṣipya caitya[m] [kari]ṣyati / tenaikena caityena kṛtena lakṣaṃ tathāgatacaityānām kṛtaṃ bhavati

“Whatever monk or nun or layman or woman, ..., after having written this Dhāraṇī, after having deposited it inside, will make a *caitya*, by that single *caitya* being made a hundred thousand *caityas* of the Tathāgata are (in effect) made (Schopen 1985: 136-137 = 2005: 328-329).”

A similar, but rather abbreviated form of this paragraph is found on one of the Nālandā tablets which adds to the *upahṛdaya* the passage

ekacaitya-kṛtena lakṣā kṛitā bhava[m]ti pratītyasamutpādatā (Ghosh 1941-42: 172, fn. 1).

Most of the texts, however, which contain a dhāraṇī do not cite these kind of instructional passages but give solely the *mantra* portions including the *mūlamantra*, *hṛdaya* and *upahṛdaya*. Like in the case of PT 350, however, very often we find the dhāraṇī text accompanied by the so-called *pratītyasamutpādagāthā*. This combination points also to the functional parallelism of both text (groups) as representatives of the Buddha's *dharmakāya*, i.e. as a relic.¹³ The connection of a dhāraṇī text with the *ye dharmā* formula can also be observed in the cases of other dhāraṇīs.¹⁴

The Bodhigarbhālaṃkāralakṣadhāraṇī (*mūlamantra*, *hṛdaya* and *upahṛdaya*) in its different versions: A synoptical view

(The texts of the main part of the dhāraṇī as established by Schopen on the basis of the Kanjur editions of the *Byaṅ chub kyi sñin po 'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzuñs* (1985: 130-133 = 2005: 323-325) and the Cuttack text (1985: 135-137 = 2005: 327-329) will be compared to the texts of our stamps. Only in cases where divergent variants of our texts agree with one of the other versions their readings are cited.¹⁵ For the sake of convenience editing signs like brackets etc. are omitted and purely orthographical variants like *va/ba* are adjusted.)

Critical Tibetan text	oṃ	namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāñcanotkṣiptaprabhāsaketu
*Cuttack text/Nālandā ¹⁶	oṃ	namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāñcanotkṣiptaprabhāsaketu
Afghanistan stamp		namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāñcanotkṣiptaprabhāsaketu
BM stamp		namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāñcanotkṣiptaprabhāsaketu
Ratnagiri 1	oṃ	
Ratnagiri 2	oṃ	
Lawson 1985	oṃ	
PT 350	oṃ	
PT 555		

Critical Tibetan text	mūrdhane	tathāgatāya	arhate	samyaksaṃbuddhāya	namo bhagavate	
*Cuttack text/Nālandā	mūrdhane ¹⁷	tathāgatāya			namo bhagavate	
Afghanistan stamp	mūrdhne	tathāgatāya			namo bhagavate	
BM stamp	mūrdhne	tathāgatāya			namo bhagavate	
Ratnagiri 1	pūrvva					
Ratnagiri 2	pūrvva					
Lawson 1985	pūrvva					
PT 350	murtay'e					
PT 555	murdhanas					
Critical Tibetan text	śākyamunaye	tathāgatāyārhate	samyaksaṃbuddhāya	tadyathā		
*Cuttack text/Nālandā	śākyamunaye	tathāgatāyārhate	samyaksaṃbuddhāya	tadyathā	oṃ	
Afghanistan stamp	śākyamunaye	tathāgatāyārhate	samyaksaṃbuddhāya	tadyathā	oṃ	
BM stamp	śākyamunaye	tathāgatāyārhate	samyaksaṃbuddhāya	tadyathā	oṃ	
Ratnagiri 1						
Ratnagiri 2						
Lawson 1985						
PT 350						
PT 555						
Critical Tibetan text	bodhi	bodhi	bodhini	bodhini	sarvatathāgatagocare	dhara dhara
*Cuttack text/Nālandā		bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	sarvatathāgatagocara	dhara dhara
Afghanistan stamp	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	sarvatathāgatagocara	dhara dhara dhara
BM stamp	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	sarvatathāgatagocara	dhara dhara
Nālandā		bodhi	bodhi	bodhi		
Ratnagiri 1	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi		
Ratnagiri 2	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi		
Lawson 1985		bodhi	bodhi	bodhi		
Hund		bodhi	bodhi	bodhi		
PT 350						
PT 555	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi	bodhi		
Critical Tibetan text	hara	hara	prahara	prahara	mahābodhicittadhare	culu culu śataraśmisaṃcodite
Cuttack text	hara	hara	prahara	prahara	mahābodhicittadhara	culu culu śataraśmisaṃcodite
Afghanistan stamp	hara	hara	prahara		mahābodhicittadhara śa	culu culu śataraśmisaṃcodite
BM stamp	hara	hara	prahara	prahara	mahābodhicittadhara	culu culu śataraśmisaṃcodite
Ratnagiri 1						
Ratnagiri 2						
Lawson 1985						
PT 350						
PT 555						

Critical Tibetan text	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte	guṇe guṇavate sarvavuddhaguṇāvabhāse mili mili	
Cuttack text	sarvatathāgatābhiṣekābhiṣikte	guṇaguṇamate vuddhaguṇāvabhāse mili mili	
Afghanistan stamp	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte	guṇaguṇamate vuddhaguṇāvabhāse mili mili	
BM stamp	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte	guṇaguṇamate vuddhaguṇāvabhāse mili mili	
Nālandā	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte		
Ratnagiri 1	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte		
Ratnagiri 2	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte		
Lawson 1985	sarvatathāgatābhiṣikte		
PT 350	sarbatathāgathābhośagte		
PT 555	sarbatathagataabiṣigte		

Critical Tibetan text	gaganatale pratiṣṭhite	sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhite	nabhastale śame śame
Cuttack text	gaganatalapriṣṭhite	sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhite	nabhastale śama śama
Afghanistan stamp	gaganatale	sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhite	nabhastale śama śama
BM stamp	gaganatale	sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhite	nabhastale śama śama
Nālandā	gaganatala		
Ratnagiri 1	gaganatale		
Ratnagiri 2	gaganatalapriṣṭhite		
Lawson 1985	gaganatalapriṣṭhita		
Hund	gaganatalapriṣṭhite ¹⁸		
PT 350	ganataliphriṣṭhite		
PT 555	gaganatsale		

Critical Tibetan text	praśame praśame sarvapāpaṃ praśamane	sarpapāpaṃ viśodhane	hulu hulu
Cuttack text	praśama praśama sarvapāpaṃ praśamane	sarpapāpaṃ viśodhane	hulu hulu
Afghanistan stamp	praśama praśama sarvapāpapraśamane		hulu hulu
BM stamp	praśama praśama sarvapāpapraśamane	sarpapāviviśodhane	hulu hulu
Ratnagiri 1			
Ratnagiri 2			
Lawson 1985			
PT 350	sarpapapapraśamane	sarpapapabhiśodhane	
PT 555	praśamane	sarpapapabhiśodhane ¹⁹	

Critical Tibetan text	mahābodhimārgasaṃprasthite sarvatathāgata	supriṣṭhitaśuddhe	svāhā
Cuttack text	mahābodhimārgasaṃprasthite sarvatathāgata	priṣṭhitaśuddhe	svāhā
Afghanistan stamp	mahābodhimārgasaṃprasthite sarvatathāgata	priṣṭhitaśudhe	svāhā
BM stamp	mahāvodhimārgasaṃprasthita sarvatathāgata	priṣṭhitaśu	svāhā
Ratnagiri 1			
Ratnagiri 2			
Lawson 1985			
PT 350			
PT 555			

Critical Tibetan text	rtsa ba'i sngags so	oṃ sarvatathāgata	vyavalokite	jaya jaya svāhā
Cuttack text	mūlamantṛaḥ	oṃ sarvatathāgatagocara	vyavalokite	jaya jaya svāhā
Afghanistan stamp		oṃ sarvatathāgata	vyāvalokite	jaya jaya svāhā
BM stamp		oṃ sarvatathāgata	vyavalokite	jaya jaya svāhā
Nālandā		sarvatathāgata	vyavalokite	
Ratnagiri 1				
Ratnagiri 2				
Lawson 1985		oṃ sarvatathāgata	vyavalokite	
PT 350		sarbatathāgath'a	byacolokite	
PT 555				
Critical Tibetan text	sñiñ po'o	oṃ huru huru jayamukhe svāhā	ñe ba'i sñiñ po'o ²⁰	
Cuttack text	hṛdayaṃ	oṃ huru huru jayamukhe svāhā	upahṛdayaṃ	
Afghanistan stamp		oṃ huru huru jayamukhe svāhā		
BM stamp		oṃ huru huru jayamukhe svāhā		
Ratnagiri 1				
Ratnagiri 2				
Lawson 1985				
PT 350				
PT 555				

The synoptical view clearly shows that the texts of our stamps are closely related to each other. Deviations from Schopen's text are either due to errors like e.g. haplographical mistakes resulting in omitted syllables or words or can be evaluated as rather unusual and isolated variants of the Cuttack version which are not shared by the other texts (*sarvatathāgatābhiṣekābhiṣikte*, *sarvatathāgatagocaravyavalokite*). The only case where we indeed can observe a more coherent pattern of versions is the phrase *gaganatalapṛatiṣṭhite* which is sometimes found abbreviated as *gaganatala/e*. The texts from the Derge Kanjur and the epigraphical texts from Nālandā, Ratnagiri 1 and our stamps do show this abbreviated variant against the texts of the other Kanjurs, from Cuttack and Ratnagiri 2. It seems that both variants were used within the Tibetan traditions: While PT 555 shows the short *gaganatale*, PT 350 uses the longer form with *pṛatiṣṭhite*. In the present stage of research I can only guess about the significance of this divergence. But it is possible that the Cuttack text and the Tibetan variants of the *Byaṅ chub kyi sñiñ po'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzuñs* – with the exception of Derge 509 and Derge 920 – represent the variant as used by the extract. It is quite obvious that the Cuttack text must have been prepared from an extracted version of the dhāraṇī which is very similar to that of the Tibetan Kanjurs. PT 555, however, which is the Tibetan translation of the large Skt. original, indicates that here only *gaganatale* has to be read like in those Indian epigraphical texts which were obviously done from the same version. The divergences within the Tibetan traditions can be explained by mutual influences which both versions certainly had upon each other as long as both were current.

Hopefully the forthcoming edition by Scherrer-Schaub will help to establish a reliable stemma for these texts – a task which cannot be undertaken here.

As a first step towards a reliable Sanskrit version of this text we would like to propose a generalized text of the *mūlamantra*, *hṛdayamantra* and *upahṛdaya* on the basis of the available epigraphical sources. Deviations from Schopen's Skt. text based on the Cuttack slab are given in bold italics. Significant variants within the epigraphical texts which might claim the character of an independent and widely accepted version are given in square brackets.

namo bhagavate vipulavadanakāṃcanotkṣiptaprabhāsaketumūrdhne tathāgatāya
 namo bhagavate śākyamunaye tathāgatāyārhatē samyaksambuddhāya tadyathā
 oṃ bodhi²¹ bodhi bodhi ***bodhi*** [om. bodhi] sarvatathāgatagocara dhara dhara hara hara prahara prahara
 mahābodhicittadhara culu culu śataraśmisaṃcodite sarva ***tathāgatābhiṣikte*** guṇaguṇamate
 buddhaguṇāvabhāse mili mili ***gaganatale*** [add. pratiṣṭhite] ***sarva***tathāgatādhiṣṭhite nabhastale śama
 śama praśama praśama sarvapā***pa***praśamane sarvapā***pa***viśodhane hulu hulu mahābodhimārga-
 saṃprasthite sarvatathāgatapraṭiṣṭhitaśuddhe svāhā [add. mūlamantraḥ] oṃ ***sarvatathāgatavyavalokite***
 jaya jaya svāhā [add. hṛdayaḥ] oṃ huru huru jayamukhe svāhā [add. upahṛdayaḥ]

The Pratīyasamutpādagāthā or *ye dharmā* formula

The text of the Pratīyasamutpādagāthā is cited here in a version which is characteristic for objects from the North-West of India up to Central Asia. Instead of the usual *hy avadat* it contains the lexical variant *prāha*. This variant is now well documented (cf. Strauch 2000: 226-227) and seems to be restricted to this area. Thus it provides a valuable tool for categorizing objects with *ye dharmā* formulas according to the project proposed by Peter Skilling (1999).²²

The palaeography and dating of the stamps

The alphabet used on both stamps can be attributed to Sander's „Gilgit/Bamiyan-Typ II“ or Proto-Śāradā script dating from the beginning of the 7th to the 10th century AD.²³ Certain akṣaras, however, show archaic features which associate them to slightly earlier alphabets, particularly to the Northern Gupta Brāhmī of the 6th century AD. Some of these early features are common to other varieties of the Gilgit/Bamiyan type II like, e.g., the old shape of the letter *k* when combined with subscribed signs (*-u*, *-ū*, *-r*, subscribed consonants in ligatures) and the tripartite *ya*. Others, however, are usually remote to this alphabet and are clear indicators of a quite early or even transitional stage of the alphabet used in our stamps.

Thus the tripartite *ya* – although known in the Proto-Śāradā – does more resemble the earlier type used e.g. in Sander's Gupta alphabet I, datable to the 6th century AD. Whereas the Gilgit/Bamiyan type II has the tripartite *ya* with its left bend written from left to right, the Gupta alphabet I uses the tripartite *ya* with the left bend written from right to left. Other cases which point to more archaic alphabets are the *ṇa* (cf. Sander 1968: 145 and table 21), the shape of the *la* with its still prolonged vertical which, however, does not exceed the height of the neighbouring akṣaras (cf. Sander 1968: 141), and the use of vowel diacritica in the case of *ṇā*, *le* and *lo*. These characteristics associate the script of our stamps clearly with the earlier Gupta alphabets, especially with the variety called by Sander „Alphabet I“ and dated into the early 6th century (1968: 154).

Thus I would like to place the script into the end of the transitional phase from late Gupta Brāhmī to Proto-Śāradā, i.e. most probably into the time from the middle of the 6th to the beginning of the 7th centuries

AD. It is representing a stage of the development of the Proto-Śāradā script shortly prior to its introduction into the Gilgit/Bamiyan scribal traditions where it replaced the earlier „Rundtyp“ (“calligraphic ornate script” / „Gilgit/Bamiyan-Typ I“) around 630 AD (cf. Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 37-40).

If this dating can be accepted, both steatite stamps contain the earliest known versions of the Bodhi-garbhālaṃkāralakṣa dhāraṇī.

The following table will illustrate the degree of the relationship of our stamps’ alphabet to Sander’s Gilgit/Bamiyan type II. Only in cases where a closer association to the Gupta alphabet I can be observed its respective signs are added.²⁴

	Afghanistan stamp	British Museum stamp	Gilgit/Bamiyan type II	Gupta alphabet I
ki				
kya				
ja				
ṇa				  (ṇi)
ṇā				
thā				
na				
ya			 	
la				
le			 	 
lo			 	
ha				

Although such stamps certainly travelled along the pilgrims’ routes of Buddhist India and could be brought by travelling monks or pilgrims to quite remote places it seems that in our case this travel was restricted to the Indian North-West where the workshop of both stamps has to be looked for.

PART 2: SOME REMARKS ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF OBJECTS INSCRIBED WITH THE *ye dharmā* FORMULA

Confronted with the extremely large number of objects inscribed with the so-called “Buddhist creed”²⁵ or *ye dharmā* formula it is certainly recommendable to work out a systematic scheme for documenting this type of artefacts. Peter Skilling (1999) has proposed a text-oriented classification of inscriptions, dividing them according to their language affiliation (Pāli/Sanskrit) on the one hand, and according to their word order resp. lexical use on the other hand.²⁶ This is an important first step, however, one might question whether this systematic approach should not be extended to other categories considering not only the internal textual evidence but also the context in which these texts occur.

As a further step towards a workable systematics I would like to propose here a fivefold classification, which describes each object

- A) according to the technology
- B) according to the textual context
- C) according to the pictorial context
- D) according to its text
- E) according to its find-spot.

These headings may be extended with regard to the actual object being described. Generally it would be advisable to involve also palaeographical data. But this can only be done at a later stage when a coherent terminology and dating method have been developed.

Based on my own rather limited knowledge I can list the following subdivisions for the given categories. As an illustration I will give for some of the less well-documented subcategories at least one published example. Of course, this survey is by no means exhaustive and far from complete.

A According to the technology

1. Estampages

1a Seals²⁷

+ material (stone, bronze)

- > Soap-stone seal from Afghanistan (cf. above, **Plate 4.3**)
- > Bronze seals from Swat: Strauch 2000 (with references for other objects).
- > Seal from Sankaram, “1 ¼" in height with a *dāgoba* surmounted by an umbrella, two attendant figures at the sides, and three lines of writing below” (170, no figure, for estampages of this seal see below C 6), Rea 1911: 170-172.

1b Sealings

1b1 terracotta plaques/tablets

- > Gilgit: Taddei 1970; Hund: Ihsan Ali & Nasim Khan 1997-98.

1b2 miniature stūpas

- > Stein collection, National Museum New Delhi: Taddei 1970: 81, figs. 12, 13.

1c Paper prints

2. Inscribed Texts

2a Metal plates

2a1 Copper Plates

- > Except the interesting piece from the Schøyen collection published by Sander (2002) there are some further copper plates with the *ye dharmā* formula. One of them was found in front of the Nirvāṇa caitya in the ancient city of Kuśinagara, near the modern Kasia. Carlleyle (1883: 70) describes a “small plate of copper, about 4 ½ inches in length by about an inch in width, with the Buddhist profession of belief inscribed in three lines, in characters of about the fifth century of the Christian era. I read the inscription as follows: – “*Ye dharmmā hetu prabhavā hetu teshāin Tathāgatāhya Vadata teshāncha yo nirodha evaṃ vādi Mahāśramanaḥ.*””
- > Another copper-plate comes from Bodhgayā. It was found inside a stucco-image (Oriental Antiquities Department British Museum 1892.11-3.4, Cunningham collection): Willis 2000: fig.1, opp. p. 64.

2a2 Gold plates

- > Maunggun plates: Maung Tun Nyein 1898-99: 101-102.
- > Gold plate inscription from Go Xoai, Southern Vietnam: Skilling 1999: 171-172; Skilling 2002: 169-172.
- > Gold plate from the Musée Guimet: Skilling 2003-04: 284.

2b Stones (plaques, tablets, sculptures etc.)

- > Cuttack: Ghosh 1941-42.
- > Ratnagiri khondalite slabs: Mitra 1981-83, II: 413-420, pls. CCCXVII-CCCXXII.
- > Sankaram, inscribed stone, possibly umbrella post of a small stūpa: Rea 1911: 172, no. 11, pl. LX, fig. 12.
- > Sārnāth: stone slab “containing conventional representations of scenes of the Buddha’s life” with the *ye dhammā* formula on its back, 3rd/4th c. AD: Konow 1907-08: 293 + plate.
- > Bodhgayā: sculpture of the seated Buddha with *ye dharmā* formula on its back: Willis 2000: fig. 2, opp. p. 64.

2c Graffiti

- > An interesting wall painting has been found in one of the rock-shelters near the stūpa of Satdharā, near Sāñcī. Here the text of the *gāthā* is written on the picture of a stūpa. The text is much abraded but the characters point to the early Gupta period: *Indian Archaeology 1992-93 – A Review* (New Delhi, 1997): 114, 28, pl. XXXIII,A; Agrawala 1997: 411-412, fig. 10.

2d Bricks

- > Nālandā: Ghosh 1942: 171-172.
- > Pāli inscription from Angkor Borei, Kambodia: Skilling 2002: 159-167.
- > Inscribed bricks from Yunnan (South China): Liebenthal 1947: 31-34, 36.

2e Terracotta objects

- > Sankaram: Inscribed terracotta plaques: Rea 1911: 172, pl. LX, fig. 8 + 11.

2f Paper

- > Tibetan manuscript PT 350: Scherrer-Schaub 1994.

B According to the textual context

1. Isolated
2. With the Pratītyasamutpāda Sūtra
 - > Ratnagiri, Khondalite Slabs: cf. above under A 2b.
3. With one or more dhāraṇī texts
 - > Bodhi: see above (**Plates 4.1, 4.3, 4.4**).
 - > Vimaloṣṇīṣa dhāraṇī: Sankisa(?): Lawson 1985: 708f., fig. 8.
4. With other texts²⁸
 - > + *yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā* verses: Pāli inscription from Angkor Borei, Kambodia (Skilling 2002: 159-167).
 - > + *dukkhaṃ dukkhasamuppāda* verse + mantras: Gold plate inscription from Southern Vietnam (Skilling 2002: 169-172).

C According to the pictorial context

1. without any picture: see above (**Plates 4.1, 4.3, 4.4**)
2. with a Buddhist symbol (*cakra, triratna*, etc.)
3. with a stūpa
 - > Satdharā, near Sāñcī: cf. above A 2c.
 - > Gūdul-i Āhangarān, clay tablets: Taddei 1970: 74 Type A, fig. 14, 15.
 - > Bodhgayā: Lawson 1985: 708 fig. 7.
 - > Sankisa: Lawson 1985: 708 fig. 8.
4. with a Buddha or Bodhisattva
 - > Vādirāja, form of Mañjuśrī: Lawson 1985: 706 fig. 4.
 - > Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi: Lawson 1985: 706 fig. 5.
 - > Gautama + 2 standing figures: Lawson 1985: 707 fig. 6.
5. with a depiction of the *bodhimaṇḍa*²⁹
 - > numerous references in Boucher 1991: 7 and notes.
6. with several of the above mentioned items (e.g. 6 [2, 4])
 - > Seal and sealings from Sankaram with Buddha + stūpas: Rea 1911: 170-171, 2b, pl. LIX, fig. 20.
 - > Clay tablets from Central Vietnam with Buddha + stūpas: Skilling 2003-04: 285-287.

D According to the text (after Skilling 1999: 177-183, *IS)

1. Pāli
 - 1a *tesaṃ* group
 - 1b *yesaṃ* group
 - 1c Unclear
2. “Hybrid Pāli”
 - 2a *avaca* group

*2b *avoca* group

> cf. Konow 1907-08: 293: *tesaṃ hetuḥ tathāgato avoca*.

2c Unclear

3. Sanskrit

3a *hy avadat* group

3b *avadat* group

3c *uvāca* group

*3d *prāha* group

3d1 with *mahāśravaṇa*

3d2 with *mahāśramaṇa*

> Swat: Strauch 2000 (with references).

*3e *avocat* group

> Sankaram, estampage (Rea 1911: 170, pl. LX, fig. 3); reading according to the facsimile:
*ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathagato voca[tt]eṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī
mahāśramaṇaḥ*.

3f Unclear

4. Not identified language (e.g. unpublished and not transliterated inscriptions)

E According to the find-spot³⁰

1. Stūpa context (large/miniature)

1a Inside a stūpa

1b On the surface of a stūpa

2. Sculptural context

2a Inside a sculpture

> copper-plate from Bodhgayā, cf. above A 2a.

2b On the surface of a sculpture

> Inscription on back of standing Buddha image, Wat Mahathat, Ratchaburi province, Thailand: Skilling 2003-04: 274-275.

> Buddha image inscription from Sung Noen District: Skilling 2003-04: 276-278.

> Inscription on back of halo of bronze Tārā: Skilling 2003-04: 282.

> Inscription on halo and back of bronze Kuvera: Skilling 2003-04: 283.

3. Unknown

According to this classification our dhāraṇī stamps (**Plates 4.3, 4.4**) could be categorized in the following way:

A 1a

B 3

C 1

D 3d2

E 3

Although I am fully aware that the proposed classification is just a first, quite incomplete attempt waiting for improvement it can hopefully show that the collection of material in a digitalized data bank organized according to this or a similar scheme would provide easy access to related objects and cross-references over big distances of space and time.

Notes

1. G. Fussman in a letter to Simon Lawson dated 1982-10-6.
2. Possibly the script of the stamp (Proto-Śāradā) was responsible for this ascription. The text of the stamp remained unpublished. Zwalf's paraphrase reproduces rather Ghosh's translation of the Cuttack stone than the text on the stamp itself.
3. According to Ghosh this text ends, after the *upahṛdaya*, “*ēkachaitya-kṛitēna lakshā(ksham) kṛitā bhava[m]ti pratīyasamutpādātā* five illegible letters, followed by a symbol denoting *vajra*” (1941-42: 171-172, fn. 2). This could be regarded as a kind of abbreviation citing not the verse itself but only its essential concept *pratīyasamutpāda*.
4. Akṣara resembles *pra*.
5. Superfluous syllable, perhaps erroneously written because of the following *śataraśmi*^o.
6. The diacritics for *i* are not correctly copied by the engraver. Either they appear in a fragmentary shape or they are omitted altogether.
7. Read: *vyaavalokite*.
8. *svā* resembles *svam*.
9. For the permission to publish the British Museum material I am most grateful to the British Museum, London. Special thanks go to Michael Willis for his valuable help during my stay in London in May 2007.
10. The engraver seems to have written *ṣṭikte*, possibly influenced by the frequently occurring expressions ending in *ṣṭ(h)ite*.
11. = PT 555. The main portion (= [1]) is cited in a preliminary reading from fol. 18a5 of PT 555 (Scherrer-Schaub 1994: 722, fn.67). An edition and study of the complete text is under progress (*ibid.*: 714).
12. For a discussion of the diverging Sanskrit titles cf. Scherrer-Schaub 1994: 720, fn. 44.
13. In the case of the *Pratīyasamutpādagāthā* this has been convincingly shown by Boucher (1991).
14. Cf. Lawson on the *Vimaloṣṇīṣa dhāraṇī* tablets from Sankisa(?) where the *dhāraṇī* text is preceded by the *gāthā* (1985: 708f., fig. 8).
15. This caution is also due to the generally bad quality of editions of this kind of texts which are mostly difficult to read and invite for the unfortunately widespread custom of “copying” already published versions. Whenever possible I tried to check the textual variants on the facsimile reproductions.
16. The Cuttack text is incomplete. It starts only with *dhara dhara*. The beginning portion is supplied from the *Nālandā* tablets.
17. The reading *mūrdhane* established by Schopen only on the basis of the Tibetan version (Ghosh/Mitra/Lawson read *pūrvva*) may be corrected to *mūrdhne*, which is the correct grammatical dative of Skt. *mūrdhan*.
18. This reading can be deduced from the several transliterations (Ihsan Ali & Nasim Khan 1997-98: 81-82).

19. The writer of the text of PT 555 committed a similar mistake to that of the Afghanistan stamp. While the first jumped from the last *praśama* immediately to the *praśamane* of *sarvapāpa*^o and omitted this compound the latter missed the second compound beginning in *sarvapāpa* due to an error. In any case the reading of an ungrammatical anusvāra suggested by Schopen on the bases of the Tibetan texts and the faksimile of SC seems unjustified.
20. The Tibetan text adds: *om vajrāyuṣe svāhā*.
21. Although Schopen reads *vodhi* and *vuddha* it seems advisable to adjust the orthography of the inscriptions to the usual Sanskrit phonology. This is done by Schopen in the case of *mahābodhi* and I see no reason for avoiding it in the case of other derivatives of this root.
22. See part 2 of this article.
23. For the discussion on the date of the introduction of Proto-Śāradā cf. Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 37-40. Cf. now also Sander 2007: 126-131 on the disputed terminology. She now proposes the designation “Siddhamāṭṛkā” for the Gilgit/Bamiyan-Typ II.
24. The sample letters are copied from Sander’s tables 21-26 as represented in Sander 1968: Tafel 21-26.
25. Although this term is doubtless a misnomer it is widely used in secondary literature.
26. For the religious meaning of the use of Buddhist sealings and its evaluation as a “social practice” cf. now Skilling 2005.
27. Strictly spoken in terms of technology, seals would of course mostly belong to the group of inscribed objects. But it seems to be advisable to include them together with the sealings into the category of estampages.
28. Especially this category would need a more detailed analysis. Thus the subcategory B 4 comprises mainly texts which are somehow related to the *prāṭīyasamutpāda sūtra* and the *dhāraṇī* genre.
29. The close connection of the *gāthā* and the seat of enlightenment in Bodhgayā was convincingly shown by Boucher 1991.
30. This category is up to a certain degree connected with C, i.e. the pictorial context. It seems, however, advisable to differentiate between the primary context of the text in shape of another text or a pictorial programme and its secondary context dependent on its use on or in certain objects. Thus category E is more appropriate to give an indication of the purpose of the text, e.g. as a means of consecration either of a *stūpa* or a statue (cf. for this aspect Skilling 2002: 172-174).

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Plate 4.1: Soap-stone seal from the British Museum, London, acc.no. OA 1880-167.
 Courtesy & photography British Museum.

The text of the *ye dharmā* formula reads:

ye dharm(ā) hetu
 prabhav(ā) hetus teṣ(ā)ṃ ta
 thāgata pr(ā)ha teṣ(āṃ) ca y(o)
 nirodha evaṃv(ā)dī
 mahās(r)maṇa(h)



Plate 4.2: Uninscribed soap-stone seal from the British Museum, London, acc.no. OA 1995 1-26.5; 5.5 x 5.2 cm.
 Courtesy British Museum, photography Ingo Strauch.



Plate 4.3: Afghanistan stamp with the text of the Bodhigarbhālamkāralakṣa dhāraṇī from a private collection. Photo B: courtesy Gérard Fussman.



Plate 4.4:
British Museum stamp
with the text of the
Bodhigarbhālamkāralakṣa dhāraṇī,
acc.no. OA 1880-168.
Courtesy & photography British Museum.

