

# Introduction

This book examines the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra*, an important representative of early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature, and thereby contributes to the investigation of this literary genre. The *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra* is especially informative in terms of its textual history and development. This text will be approached by codicological, philological, and palaeographic methods, including a comparative textual study of all versions extant in Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. This work ultimately presents an edition, partial reconstruction, and translation of the two extant Sanskrit manuscripts found in Central Asia, as well as a critical edition and translation of the Tibetan version of the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra*. Special focus will also be given to the Chinese and Tibetan variants of the *mantras*. Moreover, it will highlight specific *rakṣā* elements, formal features, and linguistic and semantic patterns of the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra*. These are crucial for the understanding of the peculiarities of its language, as well as its textual development and classification among *rakṣā* literature. For this purpose, the general discussion of *rakṣā* cults, rites, and practices will not only take into account textual sources, but also archaeological and epigraphical evidence. It is the aim of this thesis to introduce this text, to explore its textual history, and to discuss its value for the understanding of early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature, placing it in the wider context of Buddhist textual and ritual practices.

In a ground-breaking article, which investigates the different classes of protective texts of the Śrāvakayāna literature, as well as the typical phraseology, popular cults, and rites of *rakṣā* texts, Peter Skilling (1992) introduced for the respective literary genre the term “*rakṣā* literature” meaning “protective literature”. In his article, Skilling characterizes the function of *rakṣā* texts as: “the invocation of protection against disease, calamity, and malignant spirits through the office of spiritual attainment, profession of truth, *mantras*, or deities.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, *rakṣā* texts function mainly to provide protection and to ward off malignant beings, dangerous animals, and all sort of calamities, first in form of moral sayings, which were later supplemented by *mantras*. *Mantras* then build the main core of later protective

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<sup>1</sup> Skilling 1992: 110.

texts and are credited with apotropaic powers to overcome calamities, dangers, and other evils.

For a long time, the Buddhist *rakṣā* literature was perceived as part of *dhāraṇī* literature, and the terms *rakṣā* and *dhāraṇī* were taken as synonyms.<sup>2</sup> It is, however, important to stress the fact that *rakṣā* texts are not a subcategory of *dhāraṇī* literature, or vice versa. Even though *mantras* play an immense role in both *dhāraṇī* and some *rakṣā* texts, the latter do not necessarily contain *mantras*. *Rakṣā* texts are defined by their protective or apotropaic function. In other words, *rakṣā* literature comprises texts, which can be considered protective because of their effect and not according to their content, style, or form. While some *dhāraṇī* texts are doubtless protective in nature, and can therefore be ascribed to *rakṣā* literature, the protective function is not a distinctive criterion of *dhāraṇīs*. *Dhāraṇī* scriptures exist in different forms as individual *dhāraṇīs* and *dhāraṇīs* in context, that is in narrative or ritual. Hidas distinguishes between three main classes of *dhāraṇī* scriptures: 1) Actual *dhāraṇī* scriptures of the Mahāyāna with the main focus on the use and benefit of the *dhāraṇī* (among them a significant number of protective texts), 2) texts referring to *dhāraṇīs* but which do not include spells and only mention them as mnemonic devices as part of the practices on the Bodhisattva path, and 3) scriptures containing *dhāraṇīs* but which are not centred on them.<sup>3</sup>

The term *rakṣā* can thus be seen as a functional term, and *rakṣā* literature invariably comprises texts with a protective function, whether they contain *mantras* or not, whereas *dhāraṇī* is a technical term arisen to preeminence in a Mahāyāna context, which refers on the one hand to the spell or incantation itself but on the other hand stands for a mnemonic device with the aid of *mantras*. Both textual genres – notably those *rakṣā* texts entailing *mantras* – can best be described as two distinct categories of what Hidas (2015) labelled Buddhist spell or incantation

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<sup>2</sup> In the earliest introductory article on the Buddhist *dhāraṇī* concept, Waddell (1912: 156) still confuses the terminology and uses the terms *dhāraṇī*, *mantra*, and *paritta* side by side. He states: “The ‘*Dhāraṇī*’ I would define as a ‘Buddhist spell of stereotyped formulas, an exoteric device of animistic origin, adapted by the Buddhists for the purpose primarily of protecting (*parittā*) superstitious humanity against specific fears and dangers in the external world by the outward means to which it had long accustomed’. It is the Buddhist analogue of the *Mantra* or secret sacrificial spell of Brahmanism, from which parent-religion it was directly derived eclectically, along with most of the other elements of Buddhism; and ‘*Mantra*’ is still occasionally used to designate the sets of cabalistic words within the larger *Dhāraṇī*.”

<sup>3</sup> For a list of texts attributed to these three groups, see Hidas 2015: 131.

literature.<sup>4</sup> This work will thus call texts belonging to this genre ‘Buddhist mantric scriptures’.

Buddhist spell literature represents a rich corpus of texts as diverse as can possibly be, and includes scriptures in all Buddhist languages. Mantric scriptures are, to put it simply, compilations containing *mantras*, whether centred on a spell or just referring to an incantation, whereby the nature of the various *mantras* is context sensitive. Consequently, Buddhist mantric literature comprises protective *mantras* of the Śrāvakayāna and early Mahāyāna *rakṣā* literature, and *mantras* – both protective and spiritual – of later *dhāraṇī* literature. *Dhāraṇī* scriptures and early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature are thus two separate categories of Buddhist mantric scriptures, yet with a considerable fluidity and a certain degree of overlap in structure and phraseology. They are closely related literary genres, which indeed share many common elements, but have to be discerned from each other. The vast literary body of early Buddhist mantric scriptures is not only very complex, it is also one of the least-studied genres of Buddhist literature in general.

*Rakṣā* literature is not an exclusive Buddhist phenomenon. Similar means of protection are well established in the Jain tradition. Like in the Buddhist tradition, the Jains seek protection against any malevolent forces and calamities, from dangerous insentient things and evil sentient beings. Jain protective texts share typological features with a number of Buddhist *rakṣā* scriptures. For the realization of protection, the Jains make use of protective devices and practices, which can also be found among Buddhists, such as the recitation of *mantras*, and the preparation and use of amulets and protective threads.<sup>5</sup> The connection between the two traditions can best be seen by reference to the *Vasudhārā-dhāraṇī* used among Buddhist and Jain circles alike. This text of clear Buddhist content represents a boundary case. Manuscripts of this text including an initial statement of homage to the Jain teaching have been found in Jain libraries.<sup>6</sup> A more detailed comparative study of Buddhist and Jain protective scriptures presents alluring prospects for further research, but is beyond the scope of this work.

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<sup>4</sup> Hidas (2015: 129): “[R]ecalling the fluidity of the usage of *dhāraṇī*, *mantra*, and *vidyā*, we find that *dhāraṇī* texts inevitably belong to a larger class of what may be labeled Buddhist spell or incantation literature.”

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive overview on the Jain protective tradition and its *rakṣā* texts, objects, and spells, see Balbir 2018.

<sup>6</sup> For an edition and short analysis of this text, see Jaini 1968.

## State of the art

Since western researchers have only recently differentiated between *rakṣā* and *dhāraṇī*, publications on both genres are of high value for this work. The history, content, and meaning of Buddhist *dhāraṇī* literature have long been the most neglected fields of Buddhist research. After the publication of two introductory essays on *dhāraṇīs* by Waddell (1912, 1914) and one article by Hauer (1927), the study of *dhāraṇīs* came to a hiatus. Many scholars considered *dhāraṇīs* as the most insignificant and unpleasant literary genre, which did not have any value for the Buddhist literature at all, and which is therefore not worth being studied. In his examination of the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī*, Müller commented on *dhāraṇīs* in the following way:

Most of these Dhāraṇīs are prayers so utterly devoid of sense and grammar that they hardly admit and still less are deserving of a translation, however important they may be palaeographically, and, in one sense, historically also, as marking the lowest degradation of one of the most perfect religions, at least as conceived originally in the mind of its founder. Here we have in mere gibberish a prayer for a long life addressed to Buddha, who taught that deliverance from life was the greatest of all blessings. While the beautiful utterances of Buddha were forgotten, these miserable Dhāraṇīs spread all over the world, and are still to be found, not only in Northern, but in Southern Buddhism also. [...] Here, as elsewhere, the truth of the Eastern proverb is confirmed, that the scum floats along the surface, and the pearls lie on the ground.<sup>7</sup>

The same attitude of disapproval is reflected in Winternitz' work. In his survey on one mantric passage of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*, where he sees the origin of Buddhist spell practice, he designated mantric scriptures as the most unpleasant branch of Mahāyāna literature:

Es war das Bedürfnis nach Mantras, nach Zaubersprüchen, im Volke vorhanden und diesem Bedürfnis mußte auch der Buddhismus Rechnung tragen. Um den Mantras der Zauberer entgegenzutreten, mußten auch die buddhistischen Mönche ihre ‚Mantras‘ haben. Zuerst waren diese Mantras noch moralische Sprüche wie Maṅgalasutta und Rattanasutta [...] denen nur das Formelhafte den Charakter von Zaubersprüchen [...] gab. Um die Mantras der Zauberer ‚zurückzuschlagen‘, brauchte man viele nach demselben Rezept gemachte Formeln und Sprüche, zu diesem Rezept

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<sup>7</sup> Müller [1884] 1972: 31f.

gehörten insbesondere die fortwährende Wiederholung und die Einführung unverständlicher, geheimnisvollklingender Silben wie om̐, hūṃ, vaṃ, ho, phaṭ usw. So entstand dieser höchst unerfreuliche Zweig der Mahāyānaliteratur.<sup>8</sup>

It was only in the last few decades that *dhāraṇīs* found the attraction of academics and finally got the treatment they deserve. Besides editions and studies of selected *dhāraṇī* texts,<sup>9</sup> publications include general studies on a contextualized and functional definition of the term *dhāraṇī*,<sup>10</sup> encyclopaedia entries,<sup>11</sup> as well as works dealing with the traditional understanding of *mantras* and *dhāraṇīs*.<sup>12</sup> In particular the Buddhist spell practice in the context of Chinese sources found great attention.<sup>13</sup>

The early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature was first systematically investigated by Peter Skilling (1992) in his article on the different classes of Śrāvakayāna *rakṣā* texts. Skilling continued his general study of apotropaic texts, which resulted in an extensive introduction to his edition of the Tibetan *mahāsūtra* collection (1997a), one of the classes of *rakṣā* texts he discussed in his 1992 article. While the earliest class of *rakṣā* texts, the Pāli *parittas*, has been comprehensively studied,<sup>14</sup> general studies on early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature remain scarce. Worthy of note are, however, von Hinüber's description of *rakṣā* spells ("Schutzzauber") among the Gilgit manuscripts (1981, 2018), and a short entry on *paritta* and *rakṣā* texts included in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (McDaniel 2004).

Others approached early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature through the study of a single text or manuscript, or a collection of texts. This category comprises a considerable number of publications, which focus on the edition and translation of a text, and analyse its content and characteristics. These works include the *Megha-sūtra* (Bendall 1880), the *Mahāsamāja-sūtra* (Waldschmidt [1932] 1979), the *Mahāsāhasrapramardana-sūtra* (Iwamoto 1937a), the *Āṭānāṭika-sūtra* (Hoffmann

<sup>8</sup> Winternitz 1912: 249.

<sup>9</sup> Editions and translations of selected *dhāraṇīs* include the *Ārya-mahābala-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra* (Bischoff 1956), the *Amoghapāśahṛdaya-dhāraṇī* (Meisezahl 1962), the *Anantamukha-nirhāra-dhāraṇī* (Inagaki 1987), and the *Mekhalā-dhāraṇī* (Tripāṭhī 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Especially valuable are: Bernhard 1967, Braarvig 1985, Gyatso 1992, Copp 2011, and Davidson 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hidas 2015, and Kariyawasam 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lamotte 1949–80: 1859–1864, and Braarvig 1985.

<sup>13</sup> See particularly: McBride 2005, Copp 2005, 2008b, 2014, and Shinohara 2014.

<sup>14</sup> For references, see De Silva 1981.

[1939] 1987, and Sander 2007), the *Upasena-sūtra* (Waldschmidt [1957] 1967b), the *Daśabala-sūtra* (Waldschmidt 1958, and Hartmann/Wille 2010), the Tibetan *mahāsūtras* together with their Pāli and Sanskrit parallels (Skilling 1994a), the *Nagaropama-vyākaraṇa* (Bongard-Levin et al. 1996), the Chinese translation of the *Mahāmāyūrī-vidyārājñī* (DesJardins 2011, and Sørensen 2006), the *Mahāpratisarā-mahāvīdyārājñī* (Hidas 2012), the *\*Manasvi-nāgarāja-sūtra* (Strauch 2014), the *Mahāśītavātī* (Hidas 2017), and the Tibetan *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* (Holz 2017). Moreover, a recently edited volume (Cicuzza 2018) deals with the Pāli *Uṇhissavijaya-sutta* as it appears in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia and its Sanskrit parallel the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī*. One chapter of this volume is dedicated to the study of the protective aspects in the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgha* from Thailand.

## Outline

Chapter 1 discusses the current state of research on early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature and thereby first presents Skilling's classification of *rakṣā* texts and then discusses one possible source from which apotropaic texts could be derived from. It traces the origin and spread of Buddhist *rakṣā mantras* and their distribution beyond the Indian subcontinent to Central and Southeast Asia. Moreover, it deals with the question of how protective texts become efficacious, leading to a discussion of the concepts of *maitrī* and *saccakiriyā*. It is believed that friendliness towards all sentient beings, and the formulation of an act of truth can both bring about protection. Yet, the texts mention limitations to their potency and thereby give an explanation in the event that the intended effect does not automatically occur. Similarly, the scriptures issue warnings to the supplicant not acting in accordance with the spells' specific instructions.

Chapter 2 introduces the different versions of the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra* in Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. This chapter gives special attention to the four extant Pāli discourses, which provide the canonical core for all other recensions, even if they do not contain any linguistic *rakṣā* elements.

Chapter 3 investigates the two Sanskrit manuscripts of this discourse found or obtained in Qizil and Kashgar, Central Asia. It provides an edition, translation, and partial reconstruction of the fragmentary manuscripts with the help of Pāli and Tibetan parallels. It furthermore studies the textual structure, as well as language and writing of the manuscripts in paragraphs on palaeography, orthography, phonology, and morphology.

Chapter 4 discusses the Chinese and Tibetan translations of the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra*. It explores the mantric passages of the Chinese version and tries to reconstruct the underlying Indic sound of the *mantras* rendered into Chinese. Additionally, this chapter presents a critical edition and annotated translation of the Tibetan version.

Chapter 5 brings this book to a conclusion with a general discussion of all recensions of the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra* in a synoptic way. It presents some historical considerations on the textual history and transmission of the text and studies the textual development of the discourse by focussing on the canonical core, the textual structure, and specific *rakṣā* elements. The chapter closes with a discussion of formal characteristics and linguistic patterns, which appear in a multitude of apotropaic scriptures and can thus be seen as distinctive *rakṣā* elements. Protective *mantras* soon became the key element of *rakṣā* texts and the correct recitation of their sound value is credited with the attainment of protection, welfare, and other benefits. Next, this paragraph attempts to shed light on some further aspects of early *rakṣā* literature and tackles the sources of spells, the sources of protection, and what conduct the recipients of spells must undertake in order to achieve the positive effect. *Rakṣā* literature is rich in ritual instructions, which tell us how the texts and spells should be applied in everyday practices, thereby giving some indications of their widespread use among Buddhist circles.

