

INSCRIBED CLAY TABLETS AND MINIATURE STUPAS FROM HUND

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The rise of Buddhism took place at a time when not only India, but Greece, Persia and China were also experiencing a stir in religious matters. It seems that the history of Buddhism is the history of the development of religious thought in India during the sixth and the seventh century B.C.

The Origin of the various schools was rather a healthy sign of Tathāgata's religion. It was about a century after Buddha's death that we meet with the great division in the Buddhist church, a division between the conservative and the liberal, the hierarchic and the democratic. It is in this division that germs are traceable of the Mahāyānic doctrines, which, in the later history of Buddhism gained ground further and eclipsed the Hīnayānic School.

The ideal of the Hīnayāna was Arhatship, i.e., individual enlightenment. A man may attain this position by his own efforts and does not share with others his hard-won knowledge of the means for the attainment of *Nirvāṇa*. Among all the other Hīnayāna schools, the Mahāsāṅghikas who were more liberal in the interpretation of the rules of discipline, introduced some new doctrines in a few of their sub-sects, which opened up the way for the advent of Mahāyāna. The ideal of Mahāyāna was Bodhisattvahood, which aimed at universal enlightenment.

Mahāyānism gradually culminated into the Vajrayāna, which is more commonly known as Tantrism. As is always the case, the change occurred in the conception of *Nirvāṇa*. The tendency of the Mahāyāna was to bring religion closer to the people and in an easier way. To the common people, religion means something full of rituals, ceremonies and also some esoteric practices. For this reason, *Mantras* (spells), *Mudrās* (poses of the hands), *Mandalas* (mystic circles) were introduced into Buddhism and a number of philosophical texts explaining the origin, significance and function of all these were also written, thus forming another class of literature. Though the *Mantras*, etc., were introduced for the realization of the ultimate Truth, gradually they changed their color and air to be transformed into Tantrism.

The Tantrism Buddhist is esoteric. Their treatises put the accent on the importance of choice and the role of the teacher (*guru*). Yoga plays an essential role in the Tantric cult.

The origin of Tantric Buddhism dates back very early in time and seems to be linked up with the ancient magical and religious beliefs that have survived in India as elsewhere.

From 3rd century AD, the translation of Buddhist magic formulas into Chinese started. *Dhāranīs* and mystic charms which are the necessary elements of Tantrism had already made their appearance in the 5th century A.D. Sung Yun who visited India in the early part of the 6th century A.D. narrates the condition of Buddhism in India. In his time, Buddhism had become corrupt due the introduction into its code of the practice of magical art. The use of charms and the claim to magical powers, do not appear to have belonged to the original system¹. Another Chinese traveller who arrived in India in 630 A.D. was Hiuen-Tsang. He indicates that the monks of Uddiyana used the same formulas. In his story about a Buddhist teacher Bhavya, who lived inside a rock waiting to see Maitreya, he narrates: The pious devotee Bhavya desiring to see Maitreya for the solution of his problems, began to recite a *Dhāranī-mantra* before the image of Bodhisattva. Vajrapāni abstained from food for some days whereupon the Bodhisattva came before him and gave him another *Dhāranī-mantra* by which the cliff in the Asura's place would be cleaved and he would have to enter into it and wait; and thus his desire would be fulfilled. Bhavya did accordingly and threw some charmed mustard seeds due to which the rock was opened and he entered into it, a few other men following him².

At the beginning of 8th century A.D., the first great work of the new school was translated into Chinese by different teachers, and a little after, the famous Padmasambhava introduced, the Tantric Buddhism in Tibet. It seems that by the seventh century A.D. the Tantric movement had reached most of the regions of South Asia. The end of the 7th century A.D. saw the expansion of Tantric Buddhism and slowly and gradually this movement begun to expand in to the coming centuries, the Mahāyānism started declining.

According to the legend, the first prediction of Tantric doctrine would be owed to Nāgārjuna, to whom a number of works of this school were attributed.

On the basis of the dates of these Chinese translation, the most ancient text of Tantric character might be the short formulas charged with magic powers, the *Dhāranīs*. What are *Dhāranīs*? The most comprehensive definition is given by A. Bareau. According to him, "*Les Dhāranīs* ou "porteuses", appelées encore *Vidyārājñī*, "reines de science magiques", ou *Vidyādhāranī*, "porteuses de science magique", sont des *Sutras* généralement courts renfermant des formules magiques nommées *dhāranī* ou *vidyāmantra*, "formules de science magique"³. Most of them are grouped in special *Sutras* aiming to present them, to explain its

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1. Beal, Fa-Hien, Introduction.
 2. Watters 1904-05: 215-216.
 3. Bareau 1966: 151.

utilization and to praise its effectiveness. In these *Dhāranīs*, a symbolic language was used, which only the initiates could understand and to the common people the words carried an altogether different meanings. For example “*Oṃ mani padme hūṃ*” [Oh! the jewel is in the lotus].

The *Dhāranīs*, an important aspect of Tantrism, having its beginning in a much earlier period, became very prominent in subsequent periods and gave rise to a bulk of literature.

Such *Dhāranīs* and creeds, in the shape of inscribed clay tablets, were commonly found in excavations and in casual finds in different parts of the World of Buddhism. But the number of inscribed clay tablets that we have collected, during our field work in 1996, were only from the site of Hund and have never been found, so far, in the region of Gandhāra. Among other antiquities, collected at Hund site, the most important are the miniature *stūpas* and the inscribed clay tablets.

The miniature clay *stūpas* are four in number and can be classified, according to their sizes and shapes, into two types. The first type (Figs. 1, 2) can be compared with Taddei (Type C, Figs. 8, 9). The second type (Fig. 3), is almost the same as the first except the lotus base which is missing here. As Fig. 10 shows, the sealings will almost always find inside miniature clay *stūpas*; in some cases more than one tablet can be found (Fig. 19).

The total number of the clay tablets, collected from Hund, are 20. Except a few, most of them are either damaged, defaced or broken into small pieces; the small pieces are so tiny that no idea can be developed about the writing on it but, the complete pieces can give us a good idea of the tablet as far as its text and palaeography is concerned. These tablets, round in shape and bearing on its plate surfaces⁴ ancient Indian writing, can be classified, according to their context, into two different groups.

Group A:

They are 12 in number. All the tablets, although different in size, keep in some respects the famous stance of the profession of Buddhist faith⁵:

ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teshāṃ tathāgato hy avadat/teshāñ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādi mahāśramaṇaḥ//

“The things which arise from a cause, the Tathāgata has explained the cause and their cessation, in this way or thus has been told, the great religious”.

4. The back side is either flat or convex.

5. Fussman 1978: 5.

Tablet No. 1 (Fig. 4)

*ye dharmā...
prabhavā hetuṃ teshāṃ
tathāgatā hyava+
teshāñ ca niro
dha evam vā++
+śra++*

Tablet No. 2 (Fig. 5)

*+dha...
+++++mtesham
+++++vādi
teshāṃ+niro
dha evam+++
[h]śra[va][ṇa]*

Tablet No. 3 (Fig. 6)

*ye dhama hetu
prabhava hetuṃ ++
tathāgatā hyava+
...
...
...*

Tablet No. 4 (Fig. 7)

*...
pra...hetuṃ...
[tathāgatā hya..
...niro...
...evam...
...
...*

Tablet No. 5 (Fig. 8)

*ye dharma he...
...he...
...hadha...
...evam va...
...
...*

Tablet No. 6 (Fig. 9)

*om ye dha...
...
...
...
...
+ evam va
...*

Tablet No. 7 (Fig. 10)

*Ye dharma...pra
bhava hetuṃ teshāṃ
tathāgatā hyava+
+shām ca niro
dha evam vādi ma
+śrava+*

Tablet No. 8 (Fig. 11)

*ye dharma hetuṃ pra
bhava...
tathāgatā hya+
...
...
...*

Tablet No. 9 (Fig. 12)

*...
...
...
...
dha evam...
haśra///*

Tablet No. 10 (Fig. 13)

*...
...hetu...
...
...
...
...*

Tablet No. 11 (Fig. 14)

*...
...
...
...
...evam va++
...śravaṇa*

Tablet No. 12 (Fig. 15)

*...
...
tathāgatā...
..ca nī...
dha evam vādi ma
ha śramaṇa*

Group B:

The second group is comprised of only three tablets. As compared to our Group A, they are relatively large in size. Only one of them is intact (Tablet No. 13). Some of the *aksharas* are still not readable. But a few of the missing or defaced *aksharas* can be reconstructed with the help of the other two tablets.

Tablet No. 13 (Fig. 16).

- 1) *Oṃ namo +++///*
- 2) *...prabhasa ++*
- 3) *...te ||*
- 4) *+naye///rhate samya[k]///*
- 5) *[tad yathā oṃ bo]dhi bodhi bo[dhi] sarva tathāgata go...*
- 6) *///[hara]ha[ra] prahara prahara paddhadha citta dha+*
- 7) *...raśmi samcodite+ sarva tathāgata*
- 8) *...guna ganamate tala*
- 9) *...*
- 10) *śama praśama ... praśamane ++*
- 11) *...hulu hulu mahabodhi...*
- 12) *samprasthite sarva tathāgata pratishthā śuddhe svā*
- 13) *+++ sarva tathāgatavya*
- 14) *...*
- 15) *...*

Tablet No. 14 (Fig. 17).

- 1) *///+*
- 2) *///pula +*
- 3) *///te ||*
- 4) *///*
- 5) *///*

- 6) ...hara...prahara paddhadha...
- 7) ...sarva tathagata
- 8) ... ++ gagana tala pra
- 9) prati++ sarva tathāgatādhishthite nabhastale śa//
- 10) ++ praśama praśama sa+rah pa prasāmane śa//
- 11) ///hulu hulu mahabodhi [ma]rga
- 12) ...pratish[thi]te///
- 13) ...///
- 14) ...///
- 15) ...///

Tablet No. 15 (Fig. 18).

- 1) ///...///
- 2) ///...///
- 3) ...
- 4) +naye tathagātāyār hate sam//
- 5) +++ tad yathā oṃ bodhi bodhi bodhi sarva +///
- 6) ++ dhara hara hara prahara prahara mahabo//
- 7) ++ [cu]lu śata raśmi saṃcodite sarva tathā//
- 8) ...gana tala ++[s]thita sarva ta//
- 9) ///...
- 10) ///śama praśama sarva pāpa pra[śa]///
- 11) ///[vi]śodhane hulu hulu maha//
- 12) ///+++++++///
- 13) ///tathāgata//

These three tablets of Group B keep the same *dhāranī* text as we have in the Ashmolean and British Museums⁶. With the help of these published *Dhāranīs*, the text of the present sealings can be reconstructed and read as follows:

6. For example, Simon Lawson 1985: Fig. 12.

Oṃ namo bhagavate vipula vadana kāñchaṃ ākshipta prabhāsa ketu purvva tathāgatāya namo bhagavate Śākya Munaye tathāgatāyār hate saṃyak saṃbuddhāya tad yathā oṃ bodhi bodhi bodhi sarva tathāgata gocara dhara dhara hara hara prahara prahara paddhadha citta dhare culu culu śata raśmi saṃcodite sarva tathāgatābhishikte guna ganamate Buddha gunāvahāse mili mili gagana tala pratishthita sarva tathāgatādhishthite nabhastaleśama śama sarva pāpa praśamane sarva pāpa viśodhane hulu hulu mahābodhi mārga saṃprasthite sarva tathāgata pratishthita śuddhe svā hā oṃ sarva tathāgatavyavalokite jaya jaya svā hā oṃ huru huru jaya mukhe svā hā ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teshāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teshāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādi mahāśramaṇaḥ.⁷

“Oṃ! obeisance to the Blessed One, to the Tathātagata who is preceded by the radiant banners shed by the gold of his numerous faces; Obeisance to the Blessed One, Sage of the Śākyas, Tathāgata, the Arhat who is fully enlightened, in the following manner: ‘Oṃ! Perfect, perfect, perfect Wisdom! O you, who bear, who bear all the Tathāgatas, hara hara prahara prahara, O you, great enlightened One, supporter of intelligence, culu culu, O you who have been stirred up by the sun, consecrated by all the Tathāgatas, who possess innumerable good qualities, who have the brilliance of the Buddha’s qualities, mili mili, O you who are established in the heaven, firmly settled in the sky by all the Tathāgatas, śama śama, O you who lay all evil to rest, who purify all sin, hulu hulu, O great enlightened One, who has set out along the Path, O pure one, firmly established by all the Tathāgatas, Hail, Oṃ! You who behold all the Tathāgatas, jaya jaya, Hail, Oṃ! huru huru, O source of all victory, Hail! All things arise from a cause, the Tathāgata has explained the cause, this cause of things has been finally destroyed; such is the teaching of the Great Śramaṇa’.

The above *Dhāranī* text consists of three parts. Part first takes up the first four lines, consisting of the formulas of obeisance to the Buddha. The second part which is the main part of the *Dhāranī*, starts with *tad yathā* meaning (in the following manner). Buddha is approached via unknown female diety (may be Prajñāparamitā)⁸. At the end is the *Gāthā*.

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* *

Different types of inscribed clay tablets have been so far discovered in different parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, etc. They have been classified by Simon Lawson into four

7. The *mantras* are written in roman script.

8. On her identity, see Simon Lawson 1985: 12.

different types⁹: a) *dharmā śarīra* sealing, b) Monastic sealing, c) votive plaque and, d) *dhāranī* sealing. Following Hiuen-Tsang, the tablets as of Group A type are called *dharmā śarīra* sealings “relic of the law sealings” and it is said to be used for consecration, usually of model *stūpa*¹⁰. As far as Group B is concerned, it belongs to type (d) or *dhāranī* sealing. According to Waddell, such type of sealings were concerned with the magical power of the text impressed on them, which gave either protection or power¹¹. The manuscripts coming from Eastern Turkestan, dated from the 7th-8th century A.D., show that wide use was made of *dhāranīs* which can be further classified into three different types¹²:

- (1) Magic formulas addressed to the local deities. The most important *Dhāranīs* of this type are *Pañca-rakshā-dhāranīs*, addressed to five goddesses, the chief of which was called Mahāmāyuri.
- (2) Magic formulas of the Vajrayāna type, addressed to Vajrapāni and other tantric deities of the *vajra* holder category (*vajra-dhara*).
- (3) The Mahāyāna magic formulas addressed to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The inscribed clay tablets and miniature *stūpas* are the objects that one can find frequently in buddhist sites. As Fussman explains, they are very common in the world of Indian Buddhism and can be found in different parts of the subcontinent and elsewhere. He says, “Ces empreintes de terre crue et ce *stūpa*-miniature sont donc, dans le monde du bouddhisme indien, des objets d’une grande banalité”¹³.

The sealings belonging to our group A “*Dharmā śarīra* sealings” are very common and are already reported from different parts of the north and north-west region of Pakistan, especially in Gilgit¹⁴, Skardu¹⁵, and different localities of Gandhāra region¹⁶; whereas the *dhāranī* sealings are concerned, the above three examples are the first of its kind to be found so far in this part of the subcontinent.

The tablets do not mention any date but on the basis of comparison with already dated tablets and according to the palaeographic data, the seals can be dated from the 7th-8th centuries A.D.

9. Simon Lawson 1985: 703-705.

10. Simon Lawson 1985: 705.

11. Waddell 1925: 156-7.

12. Bongard-Levin 1986: 320.

13. Fussman 1978: 7.

14. Fussman 1978: 5-7.

15. Qamar 1990.

16. A single example has been excavated in the site Damkot (Rahman 1969: 161).

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FIG. 1

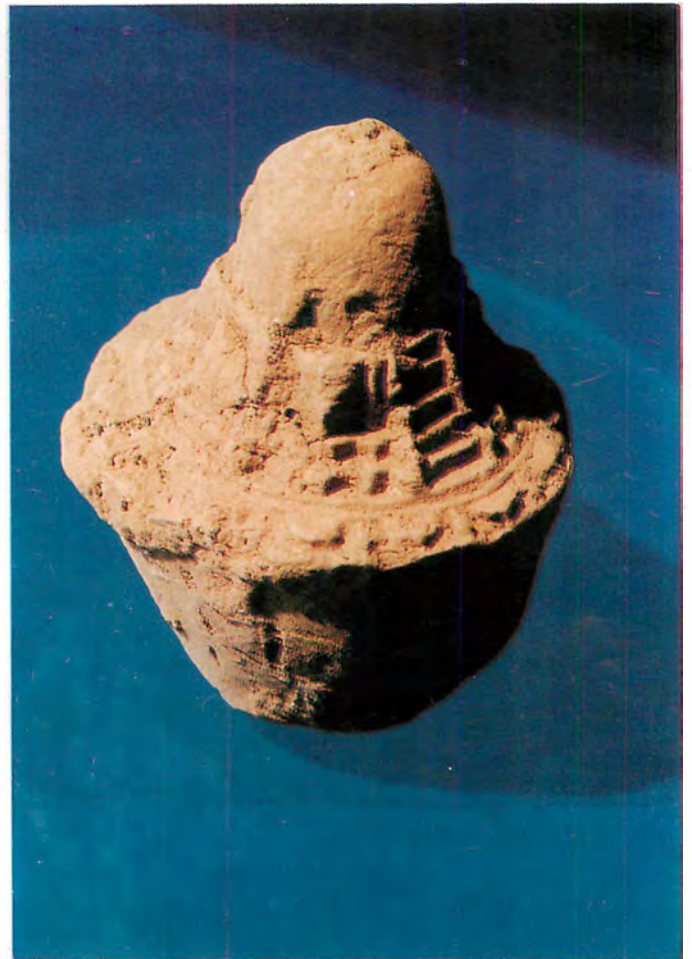


FIG. 2

Figs. 1, 2. Hund. Miniature stūpa, (Type I)



Fig. 3. Hund. Miniature stūpas, (Type II)



FIG. 4



FIG. 5

Figs. 4, 5. Hund. Inscribed clay tablets (Group A)



FIG. 6



FIG. 7



FIG. 8



FIG. 9



FIG. 10

Figs. 6--10. Hund. Inscribed clay tablets (Group A)



FIG. 11



FIG. 12



FIG. 13



FIG. 14



FIG. 15

Figs. 11--15. Hund. Inscribed clay tablets (Group A)



FIG. 16



FIG. 17

Figs. 16--17. Hund. Inscribed clay tablets (Group B)



Fig. 18. Hund. Inscribed clay tablet (Group B)



Fig. 19. Hund. Back side of the tablets (Group A)