INSIGHT FOR EVERYONE? ON THE ROLE OF SPELLS IN LATER PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

A compelling entry on the Perfection of Insight in Brill's *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* – authored by the late Professor Stefano Zacchetti – effectively rendered much of Conze's *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature* obsolete. However, the latter is still useful as an access point into post-Gupta sources, which have received comparatively little attention. As part of the ongoing collective effort to improve our understanding of these later sources, the paper (re-)maps some of the available evidence, while also pointing out recent developments and discoveries.
In particular, the aim of the paper is to discuss South Asian developments in the interactions between Prajñāpāramitā and recitation-based spell practices. These, when studied along related composite manuscripts, can throw further light on the enduring appeal of the Perfection of Insight tradition, as well as on the tradition's complex roles within daily practices and domestic environments.

1. Introduction[1]

In the context of South Asian Mahāyāna, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptural tradition stands out for its longevity, with a remarkable trajectory spanning over about two millennia: from the beginning of the Common Era, across the Pāla period (ca. 800–1200), down to the present day, where it is preserved by the Newar Buddhism of the Kathmandu valley.[2]

[1] I would like to thank Alexander von Rospatt, Iain Sinclair, Gergely Hidas, and Péter-Dániel Szántó for their generous help and valuable suggestions. Thanks also to Christopher Jones for offering improvements to the English. The remaining mistakes and infelicities are mine only. The primary materials presented here are based on research for my DPhil dissertation (see Bianchini 2020), which was generously supported by an AHRC/St. John's College scholarship. Silk 2021 is one of the recently published articles that unfortunately could not be mentioned within the paper. Similarly, Hidas 2021 could not be properly surveyed.

[2] For an introduction to this scriptural tradition see Zacchetti 2015. In this compelling overview – now the standard reference work in this area – Zacchetti focused on the

Part of the reason for this trajectory was the tradition's ability to reshape its formats as well as update its messages.[3] The particular scriptural development to be taken up here is the post-eighth century redaction of a highly innovative group of sources that combine key Prajñāpāramitā teachings – typically in the form of extracted passages from earlier scriptures – with spells and related practices of protection and empowerment. In contrast to earlier textual developments linked to the expansion of "modular structures,"[4] here the characteristic feature is a tendency towards extreme conciseness.

Also relevant is the transmission of Prajñāpāramitā sources along with *dhāraṇī*[5] materials, e.g. as part of composite manuscripts (*Sammelhandschriften*). Early instances of this phenomenon have been observed in some fragments from the Hoernle collection, which included the *Vajracchedikā* and the *Anantamukhanirhāradhāraṇīsūtra*.[6] This represented a different typology of manuscript(s) when compared to collections based on Prajñāpāramitā materials, like the monumental *Da banreboluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (T220, hereafter DB). Both of these early formats continued to be developed in later centuries, albeit under different parameters.

It is appropriate to start the discussion with the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* (PPH), which reached its mature form around the seventh century.[7] Historically, its popularity was due to multiple reasons, not least the impact of Xuanzang's biographical accounts, which celebrated the Heart Sūtra's

pre-eighth century period. In the present article, post-eighth century developments are given centre-stage (hence the "later" of the title), with special reference to the South Asian tradition.

[3] Contrary to what one might expect, innovation did not only appear at the level of format. For example, see the Yogācāra elements in the Sanskrit text of the *Pañcaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā*, which was recently made available (Li and Fujita 2016).

[4] On this notion see Zacchetti 2005: 45.

[5] In this article, I will somewhat reluctantly use the term "spell" as a rendering of *dhāraṇī*. Where the primary sources use the term *mantra* or *vidyā*, this will be noted. In view of what I presently perceive to be a certain terminological fluidity, as well as overlap in liturgical functions, I will refrain from adopting more precise taxonomies with regard to spells and their varieties. For some useful considerations besides those of Davidson 2009, see e.g. Griffiths 2014a: 140 and Strauch 2014: 66–67.

[6] On MS Or.15009/46, see Wille and Karashima 2009: 122.

[7] On the complex textual trajectory of the PPH, see Watanabe 2009: 44–80.

protective efficacy (Mair 2002: 123). Typologically, the work is characterised by conciseness, the inclusion of key extracts from early Prajñāpāramitā literature, and the addition of a spell.[8] The origins of the PPH have been the focus of some scholarly debate,[9] and it has been suggested that it may have been composed in China.[10] This paper will not dwell on this, nor on the appropriateness of the term "apocryphon," which might seem obsolete in view of the developing picture of a pan-Asian Buddhism constituted of multiple and mutually influential centres. The point here is that the PPH exemplifies the huge potential of redacting concise Prajñāpāramitās and linking them to spell practices in various ways.[11] Therefore, one may ask whether the later South Asian tradition was at all receptive to innovations such as these, and in what ways it kept developing the relation between Prajñāpāramitā teachings and the practice of spells.[12]

There might be a tendency to associate post-eighth century Prajñāpāramitā works with influences from mature esoteric Buddhism, taking the Pāla-era version of the *Adhyardhaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* (AdhyP) as

[8] In East Asia, one of the ritual "uses" of the PPH, partly allowed by its concise size, was its appearance on *dhāraṇī*-pillars, alongside *dhāraṇī* works like the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā* see Kuo 2014 and Copp 2014: 145–154. Regarding Copp's fascinating book, I agree with a number of criticisms raised in a review article by Radich (2015). Another notable example are the *stūpa*-shaped texts of certain Dunhuang manuscripts (see e.g. Drège 2014).

[9] Without entering the complex definitions of terms such as "work" or "text" according to recent philological research (see Milikowsky 2006, quoted in Silk 2020), here the term "work" will simply refer to the abstract entity of which the various "texts" as found in manuscripts and prints could be considered instantiations.

[10] Nattier's 1995 unpublished reply to Fukui defends her arguments rather convincingly. In recent times, attention to the topic seems to have largely waned (although it has been taken up by Attwood, see e.g. Attwood 2018 and his contribution in the present volume, pp. 13-52).

[11] Of course, Prajñāpāramitā already had a rich and complex history of interaction with spells before the seventh century (a selection of early passages and relevant expressions can be found in Attwood 2017). In some liturgical environments, even scriptures like the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā* came to be associated with spell practices (see e.g. a Dunhuang example treated in Ding 2019).

[12] So far, the emphasis has often been placed on the PPH's reception within the commentarial tradition. Despite a certain uneasiness on part of commentators struggling outside the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* exegetical framework (Eckel 1987: 77), Jñānamitra does mention the usefulness of the PPH's spell in terms of protection from diseases etc. (Lopez 1996: 149).

prototypical of these interactions.[13] However, the issue of classification has become more problematic following the re-vindication of a more self-standing status for the ritual and scriptural undercurrent some have labeled "*dhāraṇī* Buddhism."[14] Rather than dwelling on the (largely artificial) complexities of these terminologies, it might be more rewarding to discuss some of the relevant textual as well as liturgical dynamics in light of recent findings.

First of all, not many of the works listed by Conze under the rubric of "tantric texts" share much at all with the Pāla version of the AdhyP.[15] Those with a more pronounced esoteric background are arguably the ritual works, including the *Foshuo guanxiang fomu banreboluomiduopusa jing* 佛說觀想佛母般若波羅蜜多菩薩經 "The Scripture preached by the Buddha on the Visualisation of Bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā Mother of the Buddhas" (T259) or the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayadhāraṇī* (CUL MS no. 1554).[16] Both works relate to a well-developed *maṇḍala* environment. The former, a late tenth century translation by Tianxizai 天息災 (*Deva[śānti?]), covers a self-anointment procedure and a visualisation practice centred on the bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā that employ two spells. These, when back-rendered into Sanskrit, match those found in a relatively well-known specimen among later Prajñāpāramitā sources, the *Svalpākṣarā*.[17] Apart from a description of the rare six-armed Prajñāpāramitā, what is striking about T259 is the vast retinue of deities, with a number of buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounding Prajñāpāramitā at its centre. Recently, scholars have started to notice parallels with certain rare *maṇḍala* murals from the Himalayan region in which the goddess occupies

[13] In particular, see the "tantric texts" section in Conze 1978: 79–92 as well as the works listed in Conze 1956. Note that the taxonomy employed in Conze 1993 is slightly different. This view is partly rooted in divisions of the Tibetan canon and related taxonomies (see Zacchetti 2015: 202). The classifications of Prajñāpāramitā works as "tantras" was sometimes a matter of debate in Tibet, see e.g. Silk 1994: 27–30.

[14] On the early uses of the expression see Davidson 2009: 102.

[15] On Xuanzang's version and the three spells found therein see Tomabechi 2009: xliv–xlv.

[16] Conze 1978: nos. 39 and 30. An attempt at translating the former can be found in Bianchini 2020: Appendix A.

[17] The spells can be found at Yuyama 1977: 287 (sections Vc and Vg). See T259 (Vol. 8) p. 854a11, a25, b05.

the central position.[18] Not too distant conceptually is a concise work bearing the rather common title of *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayadhāraṇī*, whose text as preserved in the Cambridge University Library manuscript describes the practice of what it calls *prajñāpāramitāyoga*, listing various seed (*bīja*) syllables (*svāṃ*, *hrī*, *tāṃ*, etc.) in connection with deities like Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddhi, Vairocana, Akṣobhya, etc.[19] Outside these *sādhana*s, one should also note the *Svalpākṣarā*'s statements about empowerment and *maṇḍala* practices, which will be discussed in detail below.[20]

2. Re-opening the "shorter Prajñāpāramitās"

Despite the above examples, most later Prajñāpāramitā sources appear to have little, if anything, to do with *maṇḍala* environments. These sources resemble more the PPH itself, consisting largely of a juxtaposition of textual materials extracted form earlier Prajñāpāramitā *sūtra*s with various

[18] These are being discussed as part of an on-going collaboration with Christian Luczanits. See in particular a unique Sumtsek *maṇḍala* described in Luczanits 2016 (figure 7).

[19] CUL MS 1554, folios e.g. 2b3, 3a2. I thank the library for providing me with a digital copy of the MS. I am currently not aware of an edition of this short text. Conze's brief description of this work is limited to noting the presence of invocations (1978: 87, no. 30).

[20] Materials for the study of Prajñāpāramitā "in tantric territory" are vast and complex. A good number of them are mentioned in Conze 1978. As for sources available in Chinese, pivotal is the Prajñāpāramitā section in the *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 (*Dhāraṇīsaṃgrahasūtra*, T991), part of which is translated in Shinohara 2014: 54–57. The *Renwang* ritual digests associated with Amoghavajra are dealt with at various places in Orzech 1998 (see e.g. p. 70, note 7).

The best-known materials in Sanskrit are arguably the Prajñāpāramitā *sādhana*s in the *Sādhanamālā* (Bhattacharyya 1968: 310–325). The *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* describes procedures for the recitation of Prajñāpāramitā works and for various *mudrā*s associated with the goddess. See for example Shastri 1920: 623,11 (from the *rājavyākaraṇa* section) or, more relevant, Shastri 1920: 38,11; 312,7; 424,7. See the *Pradīpodyotana*'s note (Chakravarti 1984: 49) on the *Guhyasamāja*'s "mother of Buddhas" (Matsunaga 1978: 15, V.7), referred to in Kim 2013: 156–157. Sources extant is Tibetan are no less compelling. Note the **Vajrārali* passage on the Buddhas residing in the vagina (*bhaga*) of Prajñāpāramitā (Sanderson 2009: 141, note 328). As for the **Prajñāpāramitāmaṇḍalopāyika* ascribed to Ānandagarbha (Toh 2654, not "2644" as in Conze 1978: 90), it seems to represent a Yogatantra stage in the development of esoteric Prajñāpāramitā rituals. The ritual sequence and its "ingredients" appear not too distant from those of the *Sarvavajrodaya*, although a closer look is needed in order to confirm this. For references to some Cambodian and Indonesian materials, see the closing section of this article.

spells. This observation is not particularly new and it was already partly reflected in the taxonomies of Prajñāpāramitā sources developed in Lehnert 1999 and, especially, Saigusa 1983, which listed most of the later works under the PPH heading, not the AdhyP's (Saigusa 1983: 118–119 and Lehnert 1999: 57–68).

In this section, I would like to survey some of the key works, pointing out their affinity with both the PPH and *dhāraṇī* literature at large.

One should note in passing that many of these sources are not full-fledged *sūtra*s and lack opening and closing narratives. Another side-note isthat many of the relevant sources are actually not extant in Sanskrit and while some of them might have formed within the Pāla milieu, this can be hard to prove. Dates of Chinese translations regularly provide a *terminus ante quem*, with most of the relevant sources having been translated towards the end of the tenth century (Lehnert 1999: 57–68). Occasionally Song-era catalogues might indicate an Indian origin of the copy available to the translators.[21]

An appropriate starting point for this survey is the **Prajñāpāramitā nāmāṣṭaśatakā* (PNA).[22] Note that the Chinese title of this work ends with *tuoluoni jing* (**dhāraṇīsūtra*) and also establishes a nominal association with the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.[23] Here too one notices the re-use of textual materials. In fact, the list of 108 names of Prajñāpāramitā consists of multiple sublists, some of which appear to be considerably ancient and were, to the best of my knowledge, not flagged as such by Conze.[24] The spell too, which starts with *prajñe prajñe mahāprajñe* […], is well-attested already in seventh-century sources.[25] The rest of the PNA is dedicated to the

[21] For example, one such catalogue links the **Prajñāpāramitā nāmāṣṭaśatakā* (PNA) to "central India" (中天), see Takeuchi 1975: 50.

[22] See the entries: Conze 1978: 84; Lehnert 1999: 61; Komine et al. 2015: 110.

[23] *Sheng baqian song banre boluomiduo yibaiba ming zhenshi yuanyi tuoluoni jing* 聖八千頌般若波羅 蜜多一百八名真實圓義陀羅尼經 (T230) which might be tentatively rendered as "the *dhāraṇī* scripture of true and complete meaning and the 108 names of the noble *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* Prajñāpāramitā."

[24] See the list of synonyms of *tathatā* (no. 12–18, T230 (Vol. 8) p. 684c17), which resembles those found in the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā* (T220 (Vol. 7) p. 59c25 and Kimura 2009: 27). See also the list of terms for "self" (no. 21–25) which again matches that of the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā* (Zacchetti 2005 [GZJ § 3.2]: 207).

[25] While appearing in the **Candragarbhaprajñāpāramitā* and the *Kauśikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Conze 1993: 151 and Conze 1956: 117 no. IX), it is already found in Atikūṭa's *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 (*Dhāraṇīsaṃgrahasūtra*), T901 (Vol. 18) p. 807a15.

work's own efficacy. Note that the Tibetan text promises protection to anyone (*su zhig*) who recites the PNA.[26] Enhanced cognitive abilities as well as positive karmic results are promised.[27]

Also significant is the manuscript transmission of the Tibetan text of the PNA, for in Pelliot Tibétain 45, it figures along with a series of *dhāraṇī* sources.[28] The co-attestation of Prajñāpāramitā and *dhāraṇī* sources is typologically reminiscent of earlier manuscript fragments from Central Asia referred to above.[29]

Similar dynamics are found in the five works comprising what might be called the "*Candragarbha* group," which are not extant in Sanskrit and survive only in Tibetan.[30] These works focus on the theme of training

[26] *su zhig shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa 'i mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad pa 'di 'don pa de ngan song thams cad las rab tu thar par 'gyur ro / sangs rgyas thams cad kyis kyang dgongs par 'gyur ro / byang chub sems dpa' thams cad kyis kyang rtag par rgyun du bsrung ba dang*, *skyob pa dang*, *sbed par byed par 'gyur ro* / (Q172 *rgyud*, *pa* 18a,4–[…]–18b,4ff. [Vol. 6, p. 279]) "Whoever recites these 108 names of the perfection of insight is fully delivered from all lower paths. All buddhas mentor him and all bodhisattvas constantly protect, defend and guard him" (cf. the translation in Conze 1993: 198). Note that the last statement on protection seems to reflect *rakṣāvaraṇaguptiṃ kariṣyanti*, a standard expression.

[27] [*dhāraṇī*-unit] *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa 'di 'dzin na*, *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa 'bum bzung par 'gyur ro / rtag tu bzlas brjod byas na de 'i las kyi sgrib pa thams cad 'byang par 'gyur ro / de nas shi 'phos nas kyang skye ba dran pa dang*, *yid gzhungs shing shes rab mtshungs pa med par 'gyur ro / dus gsum gyi de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi chos ma lus par bzung bar 'gyur ro / gsang sngags dang rigs sngags thams cad kyang bzungs par 'gyur ro / 'di nas shi 'phos nas kyang skye ba dran pa dang*, *yid gzhung shing shes rab chen por 'gyur ro* / (Q172 *rgyud*, pa 18a,4–[…]–18b,4 [Vol. 6, p. 279]) "If one takes up this perfection of insight, one will hold in mind (*bzung*) the perfection of insight in 100,000 units. Reciting it always, one's karmic impediments will be cleansed. Having departed from here, one will become one who has a recollection of past lives, is self-possessed and of unequalled wisdom. One will hold in mind (*bzungs*) all the dharmas without remainder of the *tathāgata*s of the three times, as well as all secret mantras and *vidyā*s. Having departed from here, one will become one who has a recollection of past lives, is self-possessed and of great wisdom" (cf. the translation in Conze 1993: 198).

[28] On palaeographical grounds, we are looking at an approximate date range between 850–950. This estimate was kindly offered to me by Sam van Schaik (personal communication October 2018). For relevant paleographical information see van Schaik 2014.

[29] The final colophon is very brief, and parts are illegible to me. After a preliminary reading, it would seem that it mentions *upāsaka*s (lay devotees), as well as the attainment of Buddhahood and of religious merit: (PT 45 folio 82r, 3f.): *dge bsnyan dge* [–/] 'o / *sangs rgyas sa* (xxxx) *grub par gyurd cig // bsod nams gyi tshogs*. As for MS Or.15009/46, see Wille and Karashima 2009: 122.

[30] See the entries: Conze 1978: 83–84; Komine et al. 2015: 104–105.

on the bodhisattva path, typical of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. The **Candragarbha* is the most elaborate, presenting a dense digest of discoursive teaching in typical Prajñāpāramitā language, not unlike the PPH.[31] In all five works, spells and/or stanzas are found in closing position, with occasionally elaborate descriptions of benefits. One of the more elaborate descriptions of these benefits is found in the **Vajrapāṇiprajñāpāramitā*, which focuses on karmic and "supramundane" benefits: "Whoever grasps this perfection of insight will acquire the dharmas of the buddhas of the three times. They will remember previous births. They will give up all inauspicious births (*mi khom pa*). They will obtain measureless fruits of merit. They will always be in the company of the venerable Buddhas. They will be endowed with the intent of awakening."[32] These benefits overlap significantly with those listed in the PNA and other later Prajñāpāramitā sources.

Rather peculiar is the case of the *Kauśikā Prajñāpāramitā* (KauP), the Sanskrit text of which survives, to the best of my knowledge, only in Central Asian manuscripts. The complete text as well as two more fragmentary sources are attested, although not as part of *dhāraṇī* collections.[33] The complete text is found on one side of a scroll that otherwise contains the text of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.[34]

[31] Similar imagery involving the sun or the moon is attested elsewhere in Prajñāpāramitā sources. See e.g. stanza XXIII.1–2 of the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* (Yuyama 1976: 84) which compares the bodhisattva's activity to how the sun and the moon dispel darkness with their light.

A related passage from the AS explains how the buddha knows all minds (*cittāni*), including those with outflows (*sāsravāṇi*) and without (*anāsravāṇi*). See Mitra 1888: 260,1.

Chains like the one starting here, based on a long list of qualifications of **sarvadharma*, are not uncommon in Prajñāpāramitā literature. The KauP itself presents a long passage with a parallel structure (see Conze 1956: 116, sec. II). But this kind of chain is also found in the AS, see e.g. Mitra 1888: 476,1.

[32] *su zhig shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa 'di 'dzin par byed na | dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas rnams kyi chos rnams gzung bar 'gyur ro || de skye ba dran par 'gyur ro || mi khom pa thams cad spangs par 'gyur ro || bsod nams kyi 'bras bu tshad med pa thob par 'gyur ro || sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnams dang dus rtag tu 'grogs par 'gyur ro || byang chub kyi sems dang ldan par 'gyur ro ||* (D29 *sher phyin*, *ka* 178a6–178b6 (Vol. 34), p. 356,3) (cf. the translation in Conze 1993: 152).

[33] Maggi and Martini 2012. IOL Khot S3/Ch.0044 is complete. P2925.58–59 and P5537.1–6 are fragmentary (see Bailey 1956: 102 and 118 [Khotanese Texts III]).

[34] This might represent a case of paper reuse. On the reuse of Chinese scrolls see van Schaik and Galambos 2012: 140. Note that the KauP is included in some Tibetan *Gzung 'dus*, along with the PNA referred to above and other PP-*dhāraṇī* sources. See e.g. Everding 2015: 304.

Unlike the PNA, the KauP's Chinese title does not end with *tuoluoni jing*, but with *xin jing* (心經) or "heart scripture." This provides a link with the PPH itself, as does the fact that the spell of the PPH – *gate gate* […] – is found among other spells that close the KauP (Conze 1956: 118 (XXI)). One of these spells is *arolik* (*svāhā*), which appears elsewhere in connection with Avalokiteśvara, the key character in the PPH itself.[35] As for the rest of the composition, we find the familiar reuse of lists and textual materials, highlighted by statements about their representing the meaning (*artha*) or the concise form (*saṃkṣipta*) of Perfection of Insight teachings.

The above remarks should suffice to indicate overlap with *dhāraṇī* literature on multiple levels. These Prajñāpāramitā sources also show structural similarities with *dhāraṇī* works of the *hṛdaya* variety and often the same spells appear in both scriptural groups.[36] Despite the tendency to associate spells with the quest for mundane benefits, the juxtaposition of these with karmic purification and spiritual advancement is a common feature of *dhāraṇī* works and is not exclusive of Perfection of Insight sources.[37]

3. The CTRC manuscript

As mentioned above, an improved understanding of 'later' Prajñāpāramitā literature is not possible without a study of the relevant manuscript sources, both in terms of text selection and the cultural background behind their commission. Striking is a Pāla-era composite MS that was brought to Tibet and is today made accessible by the China Tibetology Research Center

[35] Conze 1978: 82. A passage of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* associates *āroliku* with Avalokiteśvara (*avalokitasya hṛdayaḥ*), classifying the spell as *sarvakarmika* (all-purpose). See Shastri 1920: Vol. II, p. 384 (fourth line from bottom of the page).

[36] A preliminary attempt at identifying these can be found in my DPhil dissertation (Bianchini 2020: chapter 4).

[37] See for example Davidson 2014: 30 or Castro Sánchez 2011: 59–62. The *Tathāgatoṣṇīṣasītātapatra* mentions a vast range of benefits (see Gongkatsang and Willis 2018). The extremely concise Prajñāpāramitā *dhāraṇī* edited by Filliozat (1941: 41) deserves to be quoted here. Its statement on benefits reads: *anayā dhāraṇyā śatasahasryāprajñāpāramitāvacanāt phalaṃ labhate* "with [the recitation of] this *dhāraṇī*, one attains the [karmic] fruit [generated] from the recitation of the Prajñāpāramitā in one hundred thousand units."

(CTRC).[38] The sources collected are not *dhāraṇī* scriptures so much as various Prajñāpāramitā and Prajñāpāramitā-related works, many of which appear to be associated with Yogācāra scholasticism.[39] In fact, *dhāraṇī* scriptures are not even found in closing position, a phenomenon observed in, for example, an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* manuscript that ends with the *Uṣṇīṣa-vijayā*.[40] The only link with *dhāraṇī* sources is in fact "archival," for the same box no. 8 at the CTRC also contains folios of what, in line with Tomabechi's earlier suggestion, I can confirm to be the *Pañcarakṣā*.[41]

Therefore, as a composite manuscript, the CTRC exemplar might actually resemble the DB in its collecting a range of Prajñāpāramitā sources, albeit this time focusing on the shorter works. Note that the DB sequence proceeded from larger to increasingly shorter works, whereas here the shorter works are found at the beginning. Thus, the longest one, the *Saptaśatikā*, is found at the end. At the codicological level, one should note that miniatures of Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara can be found at the end of the manuscript, with buddha life-scenes depicted on the opening folios (Danzeng 2011: 145–146). This is a feature of Pāla manuscripts known from a number of *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* witnesses. The depiction of tantric deities is therefore not due to a particularly esoteric background behind the commissioning of this manuscript, a fact that is confirmed by the rather standard colophon.[42]

Apart form the PPH itself, the CTRC manuscript also includes the following works relevant to the present discussion: the *Ekaślokikā* (EkaP),

[38] This is the MS described in Tomabechi 2009. I would like to thank Birgit Kellner and CTRC director Dramdul for inviting me to study a copy of this MS in Beijing in August 2018.

[39] Note i.a. the presence of the *Avikalpapraveśa*(*nāma*)*dhāraṇī* (Meinert 2003), the *Saptaśatikā* (Masuda 1930: first half), and Kambala's *Navaślokī* (Tucci 1956). Some of these works have received the attention of scholars of the calibre of Kamalaśīla. His commentary on the *Avikalpapraveśa*(*nāma*)*dhāraṇī* is being currently investigated by a research group at the IKGA (Vienna), under the direction of Birgit Kellner.

[40] This MS had been wrongly catalogued as a "*dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*." See Kim 2013: 80 (referring to research by Eva Allinger).

[41] See Tomabechi's remarks under note 23, p. xxvi (Tomabechi 2009). Unfortunately, I was unable to locate the missing folios of the Prajñāpāramitā MS within the *Pañcarakṣā* bundle during my visit to the CTRC in 2018. This was despite the former being easily identifiable due to the more regular and polished writing style.

[42] For the colophon see Tomabechi 2009: xxix–xxx. Note, however, that the MS gives the word *vijaya* between *kalyāṇa* and *rājye*, as per the usual formula.

the *Saptaślokikā* (SaŚlP) and the *Svalpākṣarā* (SvalP). Note that the third of these is actually titled *ardhaśatikā* in the colophon and should not be confused with the *Ardhaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* listed in Conze 1978 as no. 9 (p. 66).[43] Let us look briefly at each of these three specimens. The EkaP is one of the most concise Prajñāpāramitā works available. It consists of a homage to the goddess; the spell *oṃ dhīḥ hrīḥ śrīḥ śrutismṛtivijaye svāhā*; the famous stanza (found in some versions of the *Vajracchedikā*) *tārakā tīmiram* etc.; and a final sentence that describes sentient beings, the conditioned world and *nirvāṇa*.[44] Typologically, we again see a symbiosis between older materials and spell units. However, the EkaP offers nothing regarding practice or benefits of its recitation.

A different case is that of the SaŚlP. Here we do find the outline of a recitation practice and a short description of its benefits. After a series of vocatives addressing the goddess, one finds the spell *araḍe karaḍe araḍakaraḍe mahāprajñāpāramite svāhā*. The list of benefits clearly emphasises the earning of good karma and prosperity in future births.[45] But then a statement is made to the effect that reciting (*uccārya*) over a period of days and nights, the practitioner will eventually get to see the buddha and the latter will be seated in the lotus posture.[46] So far, I have

[43] Before I could confirm this once more during the CTRC visit, the correct identification was already mentioned in Komine et al. 2015: 97 (in Japanese).

[44] The relevant folios are reproduced in Danzeng 2011: 145–146. I prepared an edition of this short text as part of my DPhil dissertation (see Bianchini 2020: Appendices). Iain Sinclair kindly informed me of the presence of at least one text in Tibetan translation in which the same spell and stanza are co-occurent (personal communication Sept. 2021). This indicates that the EkaP might have a rather complex textual history.

[45] […] *kalpasahasropacitaṃ karmāvaraṇam ekavelām anusmārya sarvaṃ vrajati* (folio 2a4) *saṃkṣayaṃ buddhasahasropacitakuśalamūlo bhavati* […] *jātiparivarte* (em. Komine et al., MS: *partivartta*) *cakravarttirājasahasraṃ pratilabhate / maraṇakāle samaye buddhasahasraṃ pa*(2a5)*śyati* (em. Komine et al., MS: *paśyatiḥ*) *pariśuddhabuddhakṣetreṣūpapadyate* (Komine et al. 2015: 108–109). "Having brought this to mind just one time, all the karmic impediments collected over thousands of *kalpa*s are destroyed, [and one becomes a person] possessing the wholesome roots collected by thousands of buddhas. […] Upon obtaining a new birth, one obtains the thousand-fold kingship of a *cakravartin*. At the time of death, one sees thousands of buddhas and obtains (rebirth) in pure buddha-fields."

[46] […] *ekaviṃśatidivāni triṣkṛte* (em. Komine et al., MS: *triṣkṛto*) *rātrau triṣkṛte divā uccārya ekaviṃśatidivase* (em. Komine et al., MS: *ekaviṃśativatsa*) *buddhaṃ bhagavantaṃ padmāsananiṣaṇṇaṃ paśyati | pariśuddhabuddhakṣetropapattim* … (Komine et al. 2015: 108–109, cf. the text at MBB III 53, folio 246r,1) "Having uttered over twenty-one

not come across the description of a vision of this kind in any of the later Prajñāpāramitā sources mentioned thus far.

Finally, there is the SvalP, which is better known thanks to Yuyama's 1977 edition and to Conze's theory that it would represent a kind of counterpart to the PPH itself (Conze 1978: 81). That here too Avalokiteśvara figures as the main character deserves to be noted. Two statements mention how listening to the SvalP can help in the success of one's mantra practice (*mantrasādhana*) and in fact bring about benefits equal to those that result from having been anointed in all *maṇḍala*s.[47] Among the notable variants of the CTRC text is the reading *sarvamaṇḍalapraviṣṭa* for Yuyama's *sarvamaṇḍalābhiṣikta*, which happens to match the wording of the Chinese translation.[48] The hyperbole seems to extend the potential benefit of Prajñāpāramitā spell practice well beyond the now familiar world of karmic purification into that of advanced empowerment practices. However, the final portion of the SvalP insists on targeting less advanced practitioners and one cannot but notice a similarity in this regard with the strategy adopted in some *dhāraṇī* sources, e.g. the *Bodhigarbhālaṃkāralakṣa* of the Cuttack stone inscription.[49]

days, three times at night [and] three times by day, on the twenty-first day one sees the venerable buddha seated in the lotus posture [and one obtains] birth in the pure buddha-fields."

[47] *ye ca sattvā mantrasādhana udyuktās teṣāṃ cāvighnena mantrāḥ sidherann iti* (Yuyama 1977: 286, IIIa/IIIb) "Those beings who are engaged in mantra-practice will have their mantras succeed without any obstacles." Compare: 若有眾生發至誠心，受持讀誦此真言者，隨所求願，決定成就，無諸魔難 (T08n0258p0853a11) "If beings were to produce the thought of whole-heartedness and hold and recite this mantra, they would definitely reach the goal in accordance with their wishes" (Yuyama 1977: 298, IIIa). To this one should add "and without difficulties."

[…] *anayā paṭhitamātrayā sarvamaṇḍalābhiṣikto bhavati*, *sarve ca mantrāḥ abhimukhā bhavanti* (Yuyama 1977: 287, Vh) "By the mere recitation of this [*prajñāpāramitā* (in the form of mantra)] one becomes consecrated in all *maṇḍala*s, and all mantras become present [to him]." Compare: 若能受持讀誦此陀羅尼者，便同入一切曼拏攞中，得受灌頂。又如受持一切真言，皆獲成就 (T08n0258p0853c12) "if (they) hold and recite this *dhāraṇī*, (they) will enter together into the entire *maṇḍala* and be able to be consecrated. Moreover, accepting all the *mantras*, (they) will attain their goal" (Yuyama 1977: 300, Vh).

[48] See previous note, second passage.

[49] A key statement clarifies that all beings who are "less proactive" (*mandotsāha*) will become stable in their quest for awakening by merely reciting, writing down, etc., the present work (Yuyama 1977: 287, section VIb). The SvalP then mentions that this teaching is being revealed for the benefit (*arthāya*) of those beings who are *mandapuṇya*, i.e. "who

4. Nepalese *dhāraṇī* collections

Most of the remaining manuscript sources come, unsurprisingly, from Nepal. Here, the rich tradition of *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s (DSs) offers great opportunities for research in the field of later Prajñāpāramitā sources.[50]

All of the relevant DSs that I have so far identified are large, post-seventeenth century paper manuscripts, collecting hundreds of *dhāraṇī* works. Contrary to the lavish Pāla example from the CTRC, most of them are visually unassuming and would not have been particularly expensive to commission. This may be taken as a sign of a wider circulation of Prajñāpāramitā sources. Some colophons mention the involvement of a number of Vajrācāryas.[51] One may wonder whether the less polished look of these manuscripts could be linked to the fact that copies were commissioned for personal use by officiants. The colophon of *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha* CUL 1326 lists the donor along with a number of family members, before stating that the book was established in a domestic environment (*gṛhe ṣṭhāpitā*).[52] The colophon also mentions the awakening of all beings as well as concrete benefits, such as the overcoming of obstacles and diseases.

have gathered less merit," or are perhaps simply "unfortunate" (Yuyama 1977: 287, section VIIa). See the Cuttack stone inscription: *evaṃ mayānanda saṃkṣiptena deśitaṃ mandapuṇyānām apariśuddhānāṃ mithyādṛṣṭivaimatikānāṃ ānāntaryakāriṇām alpāyuṣkāṇāṃ narakatiryagyoniyamalokaparāyaṇānāṃ sattvānām arthāya* "Thus by me, Ānanda, was (this) taught in brief for the sake of living beings who have little merit, who are impure, who have false views and doubts, who have committed acts with immediate retribution, who are short lived and are destined for hells, animal births and the world of Yama" (Schopen 2005: 329).

[50] I would like to thank Gergely Hidas for kindly pointing this out to me and for engaging in various discussions on this topic (see Hidas 2021). Following his suggestion, I consulted the sources described in Matsunami 1965 (Tokyo); CUL add. 1326 (Cambridge); Manuscript no. 62 in Filliozat's 1941 catalogue, MS no. 6 in the *Kṛtibodha* series (National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi); as well as catalogue entries in the *Bṛhatsūcīpatra*. However, I focused on the MS collection of the Institute for the Advanced Study of World Religions (IASWR). An exemplar of the microfiche collection was kindly lent to me by Andrew Skilton.

[51] See e.g. the colophon of MBB III 53, folio 314v.

[52] CUL 1326, folio 224c4–5. See Hidas 2021: 298, 17. See also https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01326 (accessed May 2020) andthe following entry by Hidas: https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/mom/2015_06_mom_e.html (accessed Dec 2020).

The colophon of another *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*, Tokyo MS 418, mentions its value in counteracting obstacles and diseases, along with the consequences of the five great sins (*pañcamahāpāpa*).[53] Most other colophons I have consulted are not particularly detailed. In the case of Paris MS 62 (Filliozat 1941), there is no colophon, this being in all likelihood a copy commissioned by Hodgson and later sent to Paris.[54] Be that as it may, it is no surprise that *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s, as objects that were intended to be kept at home and recited on certain occasions, would also have served a range of apotropaic purposes.

These manuscripts include a number of Prajñāpāramitā sources. First of all, one should note that shorter Prajñāpāramitā *sūtra*s not linked to spell practices are also to be found. For example, the *Saptaśatikā* appears often – although not always – as the first work in the collections.[55] If we are allowed to speculate, this might be linked to the fact that its main character is Mañjuśrī, who occupies a position of prominence in myths of the origin of the Kathmandu valley (von Rospatt 2014: 52).

Besides the SvalP, another specimen commonly encountered in *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s is the *Ardhaśatikā*. This work does not actually contain spells, although within these collections its title as attested by its colophon sometimes ends with *-dhāraṇīsūtra*. As noted by Conze, here we see a continuation of the tendency to extract key materials from traditional Prajñāpāramitā literature (Conze 1978: 66). More importantly, a passage highlights the difficulty that less gifted bodhisattvas have in grasping the Perfection of Insight. This again seems to stress how the composition of these sources aimed at wider accessibility.[56]

[53] There is an entry on this MS in Matsunami 1965: 148.

[54] I thank Vincent Tournier for suggesting this to me. Jerome Petit of the BNF was kind enough to send me a photographic reproduction of the closing folios, which clearly look like a later copy.

[55] For surveys of extant MSS of the *Saptaśatikā* see Sato 2011 and 2014. The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* is also occasionally found in later DSs.

[56] *yathā vadasi duradhimucyā prajñāpāramitā anabhiyuktena parītakuśalamūlena durmedhasā anarthikena aśrutena pāpamitropastabdhena pāpamitrasaṃsargabahulena *pāpamitrasamādāyakena śraddhāmātrakasamādāyakena ādikarmmikena abhavyarūpeṇa aparipṛcchakajātīyena kuśīdena hīnavīryeṇa *hīnasattvena hīnādhimuktakena *(kuśaleṣu dharmeṣv anabhiyuktena) tasmāt tarhi subhūte duradhimucyā prajñāpāramitā ucyate |* (from CUL 1326 folio 40b lines 4–6, with corrections (*) after comparisons with MS Matsunami 1965: 418, folio 48b lines 3–4; see also Shakya 1998). "[…] thus is this, as you

These late *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s often include individual Prajñāpāramitā spells, such as the one edited by Filliozat on the basis of Paris MS 62.[57] Here, a single spell is followed by a brief statement explaining that its recitation will result in the karmic benefit equal to that of the recitation of the entire *Śatasāharikā*.[58] Thus, the exponential increase in karmic benefit comes with a simplification of the actual practice, a framework quite common in *dhāraṇī* literature.

Finally, a fascinating subset of *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s can be found in the microfiche collection of the former Institute for the Advanced Study of World Religions (IASWR). The typology of these sources is similar to that of other post-seventeenth century *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s, with vast numbers of short *dhāraṇī* works dispersed over around 250–400 folios.[59] Luckily, some of the manuscripts include tables of contents written in the same script, and so appear to be an integral part of the manuscript themselves.[60]

One specimen is particularly striking, as it includes the Sanskrit text of the *Saptaślokikā*, which to the best of my knowledge was otherwise believed to exist in Sanskrit only in the CTRC manuscript mentioned above. The text appears slightly more corrupt than that of the Pāla version quoted above.[61] Also worth noticing is that this manuscript appears

say. The perfection of insight is hard to focus on by one who is not fully dedicated, who has limited (read *parītta*?) wholesome roots, who is dull, not intent on the good, of little learning, who takes support in evil friends, who has extensive connection with evil friends, who has adopted (?) evil friends (CUL 1326: *saṃpradāyakena*; Edgerton: *samādāyaka* misreading for *samādāpaka*?), who has adopted (?) little faith, who is a beginner, who is not worthy, not inquisitive, lazy, of little energy, of inferior being (CUL 1326: *hīnastvena*), of inferior resolve, who has not practiced the wholesome dharmas (CUL 1326: *kuśalena parameṣuparibhraṣṭena* [?]). For this reason, oh Subhūti, the perfection of insight is said to be hard to focus on." Cf. Hidas 2021:114–115.

[57] Filliozat 1941: 41. These are also common in Tibetan *dhāraṇī* repositories (Meisezahl 1957 and 1964).

[58] *anayā dhāraṇyā śatasahasrāprajñāpāramitāvācanāt phalaṃ labhate* (slightly modified from Filliozat 1941: 41, who read *-sahasryā*) "with [the recitation of] this *dhāraṇī*, one attains the [karmic] fruit [otherwise generated] from the recitation of the Prajñāpāramitā in one hundred thousand units."

[59] In the case of MBB I–7, the date given as *saṃvat* 100(1)2 is probably to be read as 1012. [folio n. 362v, 5].

[60] One table of contents was, however, prepared by the IASWR team, that of MS MBB I–7, found in the first microfiche.

[61] A diplomatic edition of the text was prepared as part of my DPhil dissertation (Bianchini 2020: Appendix D).

closely linked to a more pronounced esoteric environment than the other *dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*s mentioned so far. This is on the basis that other works included in the manuscript often mention in their titles deities like Cakrasaṃvara, Heruka, and Hevajra.

At this point, one may ask why Prajñāpāramitā materials – including longer specimens such as the *Saptaśatikā* – were regularly inserted into these collections. Arguments based on a need for legitimation or increased prestige do not appear fully convincing. While only a preliminary answer is possible at this time, particularly promising are manuals that outline daily practices, especially those addressing foundational practices (*ādikarmika*) particularly relevant to novices and beginners. The recitation of Prajñāpāramitā works appears to have been an important part of *ādikarmika* practice.[62] This could, over time, have facilitated the penetration of relatively short Prajñāpāramitā materials into Nepalese spell collections.

5. Closing remarks

It is clear that the Prajñāpāramitā tradition underwent significant changes in the post-Gupta period. This adaptability was surely key in ensuring the longevity of the tradition in the South Asian context. As outlined at the beginning of this paper, interactions between Prajñāpāramitā and mature esoteric Buddhism were significant and diverse. However, a more ancient tradition of combining Prajñāpāramitā with mainstream *dhāraṇī* practices continued to flourish. South Asian sources can be fruitfully studied in this regard, especially in view of a comparison with better-known materials from Central and Eastern Asia.

It should be clarified here that the developments outlined above represent only a part of the larger picture of post-Gupta Prajñāpāramitā. As is well-know, the tradition continued to play a major institutional and educational role, especially – but not exclusively – in the monastic environment of Pāla-period Northeastern India. Equally, the very texts mentioned in

[62] I thank Alexander von Rospatt for pointing me to these sources. See for example a passage from the *Ādikarmapradīpa* in La Vallée Poussin 1898: 186 (stanza no. 7). The *Ādikarmapradīpa* also includes a *dhāraṇī* linked to Prajñāpāramitā, as part of a wider ritual procedure (1898: 203). See also Wallis 2003, translation section 24.9.

For some general remarks on *ādikarma* practices and sources see von Rospatt 2015: 821–822.

this paper do have a semantic dimension that deserves to be fully taken into account and explored.

Nevertheless, in my view the evidence presented above points to a significant process of 'domestication' of the Perfection of Insight, whereby spells and teachings are made easily accessible and can be memorised and recited outside – or alongside – highly institutionalised contexts, learned societies, and social groups accessed primarily through initiation. One of the catalysts for such a development could have been the role played by the Perfection of Insight in daily and domestic practices, as outlined in some of the manuals on 'foundational practice' (*ādikarma*).

Regrettably, there seems to be a paucity in South Asia of other kinds of material sources, besides composite manuscripts, which could shed more light on this particular dimension of the tradition. Clay sealings which combine depictions of the goddess with actual Prajñāpāramitā spells can be found in Tibet (Namgyal Lama 2013: 14), but so far I have not come across parallel examples from South Asia. Similar remarks go for the fascinating Prajñāpāramitā materials linked to *dhāraṇī* pillars and amulets found in East Asia, although in this instance some Southern counterparts are indeed available.[63]

Clearly, art-historians play a key role in uncovering the various dimensions of Prajñāpāramitā practices. This is because a study of the personified form of Prajñāpāramitā – the "mother of buddhas" mentioned in scriptures as well as in South/Southeast Asian inscriptions[64] – offers insights into both exoteric and esoteric aspects of the tradition.[65] Indeed, already in a famous

[63] See the works by Copp and Kuo quoted above. One should be aware of some Southeast Asian inscriptions which may include Prajñāpāramitā-related materials, such as those described in Griffiths 2014a: 146–147 (possibly linked to the *Vajracchedikā*) or Griffiths 2014b: 217–218 (from the Sumatran site of Padang Lawas).

For a recent take on the engraved *Pañcaviṃśatisahāsrikā* fragments from Sri Lanka see Drewes 2007: 132.

[64] The characterisation is found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (see Mitra 1888: 253) before appearing in some Indian inscriptions (Schopen 2005: 18–19, notes 7–8), eventually becoming relatively common in Southeast Asian ones (for some references to Khmer inscriptions addressing the goddess, mostly as part of opening hymns, see O'Naghten 2016).

[65] For Prajñāpāramitā in South Asia see Kinnard 1999. O'Naghten 2016 offers an overview of the dynamics in the Khmer context. I would particularly recommend Reichle 2007 as an introduction to Prajñāpāramitā in pre-modern Nusantara (some of the relevant

seventh-century Gilgit bronze, the open book held by the goddess was inscribed with the words *oṃ namaḥ prajñāpāramitāyai* (see von Hinüber 2007: 39), in a striking prelude to some of the later developments.

Abbreviations

AdhyP	*Adhyardhaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā*
AS	*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CTRC	China Tibetology Research Center
CUL	Cambridge University Library
D	Derge Kanjur
DB	*Da banreboluomiduo jing* (T220)
DS	*Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*
EkaP	*Ekaślokikā Prajñāpāramitā*
GZJ	*Guang zan jing* (see Zacchetti 2005)
IASWR	Institute for the Advanced Study of World Religions
IOL	India Office Library
IKGA	Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia of the Austrian Academy of Sciences
KauP	*Kauśikā Prajñāpāramitā*
MBB	Manuscript siglum, Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
PNA	*Prajñāpāramitā Nāmāṣṭaśatakā*
PPH	*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*
PT	Pelliot Tibétain
Q	Peking Kanjur
SaŚlP	*Saptaślokikā Prajñāpāramitā*
SvalP	*Svalpakṣarā Prajñāpāramitā*
T	Taishō

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textual passages from the *Deśavarṇana*, the *Sutasoma* and other works are also discussed by Reichle).

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