

TALISMANS USED BY THE UYGHUR BUDDHISTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHINESE TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

Talismans are one of the most popular mediums for fulfilling various needs which are familiar in daily life. The use of Buddhist talismans is often discussed in connection with the influence of Esoteric Buddhism. The Uyghurs, a Turkish speaking tribe, can also be counted among those who had a custom of using talismans. They established their kingdom in Central Asia in the second half of the 9th century and became Buddhists there by degree. This kingdom had a close relationship with its neighbouring oasis Dunhuang (敦煌), where unique Buddhist texts containing talisman images have been found. By comparison with those Chinese texts, some of the talisman images in Old Uyghur texts have been identified and they indicate the influence of Esoteric Buddhism among the Uyghurs in daily life.

1. Introduction

The use of talismans is not limited to a single religious community, for the practice is widespread among various religions in different parts of the world (e.g. Robson 2008: 130–132). James Robson defines talismans as “powerful objects that include esoteric diagrams or forms of writing emblazoned on paper, wood, clay, metal, or cloth,” and they are “usually ingested, worn or impressed on the body, buried, or hung up in a home, monastery, or burial chamber” (Robson 2011: 225). Talismans have

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“powers to impel what is desired and expel anything that is malicious or dangerous, including disease-causing demons or other harmful specters” (Robson 2011: 225).

In China, talismans were often connected with the Daoist tradition and have formed a significant part of Daoist practice since the Later Han Dynasty (25–220, 後漢) (e.g. Strickmann 2002: 1–57; Robson 2008: 135–139; Robson 2011: 225–226). In connection with Buddhism, talismans were already mentioned in texts composed in the 5th century. Still generally, their usage was considered as a Daoist practice and was regarded by Buddhists in a somewhat negative fashion in the early period (see, e.g., Robson 2008: 139–140).¹ Increasingly, however, Buddhist talismans became popular and are contained in texts composed from the 6th century onward. Most of those texts have been categorised in section *Mikkyō* (密教) [Esoteric] of the Taishō *tripiṭaka*.² Because of their close connection with the Daoist tradition, talismans are also one of the most often chosen topics to discuss when considering exchanges between the Daoist and Buddhist practices.³ It should also be stressed that they appear in Chinese apocryphal texts, some of which are also found in Dunhuang (敦煌), the oasis in Central Asia (Robson 2008: 140–141). There, various talismans have been found in both Buddhist and Daoist texts, and the way in which they were used reveals a close connection to the laypeoples’ individual needs, such as recovering from disease, alleviating the pains of childbirth, or protection against a variety of threats.⁴ Therefore, the inhabitants in

¹ Robson, furthermore, pointed out that research on Buddhist talismans and amulets was less regarded than other Buddhist practices because, for many scholars, talismans rather belong to the Daoist traditions and their magical characteristic was considered negatively in Buddhism. See Robson 2008: 133–135, 139.

² On the general overview of the texts preserved in the volumes 18 to 21 of the Taishō *tripiṭaka*, see, e.g., Giebel 2011. Robson lists some texts containing talismans. See Robson 2011: 227–229. Michel Strickmann and Robson pointed out the close relationship between the use of talismans and Esoteric Buddhism. See, e.g., Strickmann 2002: 153–161; Robson 2008: 143. Robson, however, calls attention to the fact that the classification of those texts within the category of Esoteric Buddhist literature is still in debate among scholars. See Robson 2008: 143; Robson 2011: 227.

³ Robson lists previous research on that topic. See, e.g., Robson 2008: 139–140; Robson 2011: 225.

⁴ Those talismans are, for example, collected and categorised by Gao Guofan. He gives an overview of this topic in his book. See Gao 1994: 260–262, 304–305.

Dunhuang seem to have widely accepted the use of talismans which accordingly took root in their daily life.

The Chinese, however, were not the only ones who used talismans and documented their practice in their texts. Also, the Uyghurs, a Turkish speaking tribe, believed in their efficacy. After the collapse of their nomadic empire in Mongolia in 840 CE, a large group of the Uyghurs migrated to the Eastern Tianshan (天山) area and there founded a new kingdom, the so-called West Uyghur Kingdom (second half 9th c. to 13th c.). One of its centres was located in Kočo (高昌), Turfan, the neighbouring oasis to Dunhuang.⁵ It is noteworthy that from the 10th century onward, the West Uyghur Kingdom stabilised its rule and established a continuous diplomatic relationship with the local government of Dunhuang, Guiyijun (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army).⁶ As a result of the active traffic between those two oasis states, the exchanges were promoted both politically and culturally and it is highly probable that the practice of talismans was shared as a popular element of folk culture throughout Central Asia, including Dunhuang and Turfan. In this paper, the occurrence of talismans in Old Uyghur texts is taken as the main topic, and their usage and relationship with those in the texts written by Chinese Buddhist practitioners, one of the most significant partners for the Uyghurs' cultural exchanges, are discussed.

2. Talismans in Old Uyghur Texts

The number of Old Uyghur texts which contain talismans is relatively small. The majority of these texts were brought from Central Asia to Europe through the archaeological expeditions at the beginning of the 20th century. Already, at that time, the materials containing talismans attracted the attention of scholars, one of whom was Gabdul Rašid Rachmati. He

⁵ For the migration of the Uyghurs and the establishment of the West Uyghur Kingdom, see, e.g., Moriyasu 2015b. This article was initially published in 1977. Moriyasu himself enlarged the new version. About the West Uyghur Kingdom, see also Zieme 2014: 1–29.

⁶ See, e.g., Moriyasu 2000, 2015c; Rong 2001. There is the Japanese version of Moriyasu 2000, which was enlarged by the author himself in 2015. His other article, which is here quoted as 2015c, is also an enlarged version. The original version was published in 1987.

presented the results of his philological research on two manuscripts, both of which bore the annotations indicating their finding place, T II Y 61 and T II Y 51, dealing with them together with other texts, the contents of which he identified as non-religious.⁷ The first manuscript, T II Y 61, consists of two double leaves which had been initially in the form of a stitched book in the European manner, while the latter manuscript, T II Y 51, was a scroll with a length of 190 cm and width of 30 cm.⁸ According to Peter Zieme, who re-investigated these manuscripts, a few fragments from the former manuscript, T II Y 61, are now preserved under inventory numbers Ch/U 6786 and Ch/U 6785 + Ch/U 6944.⁹ The latter manuscript was believed lost during World War II, and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin only possesses photographs which bear the signatures B 2288, 2289, 2290, and 2291.¹⁰ However, as the result of cooperative research between German and Russian scholars, it became clear that this manuscript is actually preserved in the State Hermitage under the Russian inventory number ВФ-4203 (Pchelín/Raschmann 2016: 8–9).

With regard to the date and reason for their making, the fragments offer no clue. The Uyghur script in those fragmented pieces of manuscript shows the characteristics of the block or rather a half-block script. While the former type has been continuously used and does not indicate any date, the latter type is one of the relevant features by means of which the production

⁷ TT VII, text No. 27, 37–38. As Rachmati noted, a small part of the text from the manuscript T II Y 51 was deciphered by Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Müller, who published some lines together with their attached talismans. He, however, did not remark anything about their religious affiliation, although he quoted them in connection with the discussion on the reading of the Old Uyghur word *vu* “talisman, amulet” in a Buddhist text on the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. See U II, 99–100.

⁸ The size is given in TT VII, 73, comment to 27.

⁹ The images of these fragments were published both by Rachmati and Zieme. See TT VII, Abb. VI, BT XXIII, Abb. 187–196. It is also available in the Digitales Turfan-Archiv, accessed on September 7, 2020, http://turfan.bbaw.de/dta/ch_u/dta_chu_index.html.

¹⁰ Zieme published the images of this manuscript. See BT XXIII, Abb. 197–200. The given original inventory numbers, however, differ from the original ones which are visible at the margin of the photographs. The image MIK III B 2288 in BT XXIII, Abb. 197, is B 2291, while that of B 2289 in Abb. 198 is B 2290. The image which is given as MIK III B 2290 in BT XXIII, Abb. 199 is B 2289. In the case of the MIK III B 2291 given as Abb. 200, the inventory number is not visible, but it has to be 2288. In this paper, the images are presented with the numbers on the original photographs. See also the catalogue entry, VOHD 13.25: 197–199, No. 250–253.



Fig. 1. Fragment B 2288, found in Yarkhoto, date unknown
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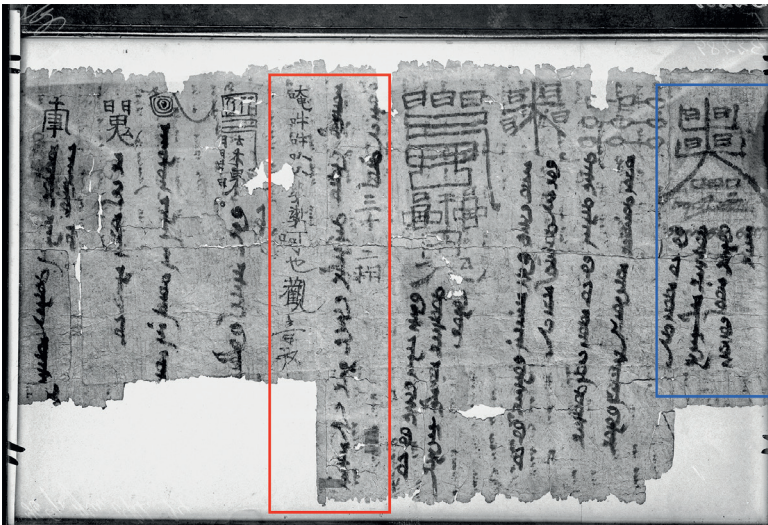


Fig. 2. Fragment B 2289, found in Yarkhoto, date unknown
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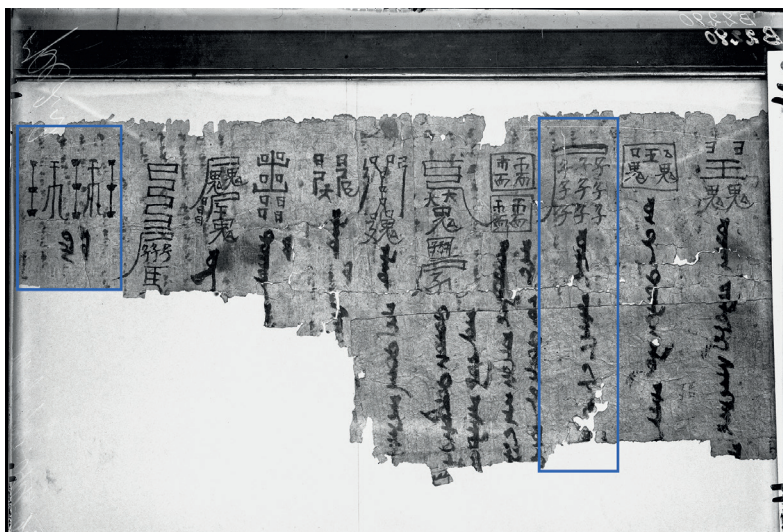


Fig. 3. Fragment B 2290, found in Yarkhoto, date unknown
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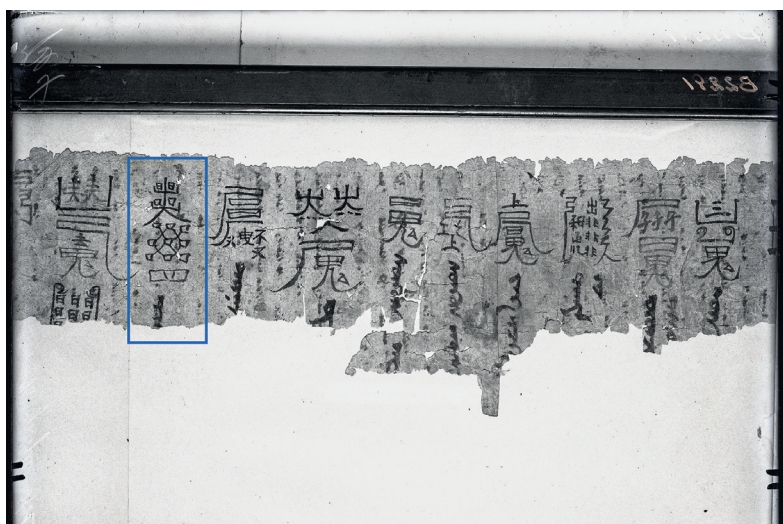


Fig. 4. Fragment B 2291, found in Yarkhoto, date unknown
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of the fragments can be dated to the pre-Mongolian period.¹¹ The block script was often used for copying Buddhist texts, i.e. sacred scriptures, which should be kept in perpetuity, for an extended period of time for generations, and disseminated within the larger community. Thus, the fact that this type of script was used could indicate that those manuscripts were recognised as a kind of sacred scripture intended for the benefit of many people. The writing with the half-block script, in contrast, would indicate some kind of personal use or circulation within a small community. Be that as it may, due to the lack of further information, an exact dating of those fragments is not possible.

Rachmati instead confined his research to a philological investigation and did not discuss the religious affiliations of the fragments in any detail. However, he published them as having non-religious contents. Furthermore, he indicated similarities of some of the talismans with those in the Chinese fragment, P. 3358.¹² This Chinese fragment bears the title *Huzhai Shenli juan* 護宅神曆卷 [*Scroll of the Magical Calendar for Protecting Habitations*]. It consists of a list of various talismans, each with a short explanation. Rachmati himself did not discuss the characteristics of this Chinese fragment either, but Wei Jing, for example, tried to find the Daoist influence in it (Wei 2010). Thus, he, at least, did not seem to identify the talismans in the Old Uyghur texts which he published as specifically Buddhist. In contrast, Zieme re-published these talismans together with some additional fragments containing other talismans in his book on the magical texts of the Uyghur Buddhists.¹³ Thus, he identified

¹¹ For the dating of the manuscripts written in Old Uyghur and the different types of the Uyghur script, see, e.g., Moriyasu 2004b.

¹² TT VII, 96, comment to No. 27. The image of the fragment P. 3358 is available on the Homepage of the International Dunhuang Project, accessed on September 8, 2020, http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=1040621526;recnum=60655;index=4.

¹³ BT XXIII, Chapter I, 179–185, Abb. 181–204. Zieme deals with the fragments which are now preserved as a part of the Berlin Turfan Collection and the St. Petersburg Collection under the following inventory numbers: U 3833a and b, SI 2Kr. 41, MIK III 6622 [T II S 20], U 3834 [T I], U 3854a, b [T I α], U 5985 [T II Y 18]. Among them, only in the last fragment, the talisman itself was lost, and the main text which intensively explains how to make and use talismans, is fragmentarily preserved. The images of all fragments preserved in Berlin are available both in BT XXIII and in the Digitales Turfan-Archiv, accessed on September 8, 2020, http://turfan.bbaw.de/dta/u/dta_u_index.htm. Wilhelm Radloff published the image of the fragment SI 2Kr. 41. See Radloff 1911: 110, Taf. II.

the talismans as Buddhist, although he did not even broach the issue of the reasons for his identification against Rachmati's.

As mentioned in the Introduction of this paper, the Buddhist talismans are obviously closely connected to those common in Daoism, so that they may be seen as essentially containing multi-religious elements. Apart from that, one of the difficulties associated with defining the characteristics of those talismans in the Old Uyghur texts as they appear in the previous studies, is that the extant fragments preserve neither title nor information pertaining to the talismans' production and function. They only provide the list of talismans, together with short notes which mention their name, efficacy or how to use them. Thus, the origin of these talismans, including their religious provenance remains obscure. Furthermore, the Uyghurs' multi-religious society also provide the possibility of misinterpreting the talismans in question. The Uyghurs who originally shared traditional beliefs with other nomadic tribes, were exposed to Manichaeism in Mongolia, and this religion successfully won the support of the Uyghur royal family. After their migration into the Eastern Tianshan area, they retained their Manichaean belief for a period, but gradually became Buddhists due to the influence of the sedentary inhabitants in the Tianshan area.¹⁴ Thus the Manichaean and Buddhist communities experienced a short period of co-existence in the West Uyghur Kingdom. In the second half of the 10th century or at the beginning of the 11th century, Buddhism eventually got the upper hand as the main religion among the Uyghurs.¹⁵ Because of this religious shift, traces of various beliefs can be found in texts and art objects produced or used by the Uyghurs in Central Asia. Evidence of the presence of both Manichaeism and Buddhism is well-documented, although the Buddhist aspect of this material certainly predominates. There

¹⁴ For the introduction of Manichaeism and Buddhism to the Uyghurs, see, e.g., Clark 2000; Moriyasu 2015e; Moriyasu 2015a. The first publication of this article was in 1989. Moriyasu himself enlarged it in 2015. See also Moriyasu 2004a: 174–209; Tremblay 2007: 108–114; Wilkens 2016b: 204–206.

¹⁵ The co-existence of Manichaean and Buddhist communities is indicated by the fact that the Uyghur rulers gave their financial support to both parties. Thus at least the rulers tried to keep a balance between the different religious communities under their rule, although the Buddhist community received more support than the Manichaean, reflecting its increasing influence. This topic was discussed in detail by Yukiyo Kasai, who cites relevant previous studies. See Kasai 2020: 73–76. For the Uyghurs' religious shift from Manichaeism to Buddhism, see, e.g., Moriyasu 2015d.

is even a divination text called *Irk Bitig* [*The Book of Omens*], part of which may have been based on traditional Uyghur or even Turkish folk beliefs (e.g. Tekin 1993). This indicates that Uyghur religious culture and practices were influenced by contact with other religious traditions, including Turkish folk tradition.

At least a small hint indicating the religious affiliation of those talismans is to be found in B 2289. In the middle of this fragment, a short note including a *mantra* was written by a person named Konımdu (= *guanyin nu* 觀音奴) in both Chinese characters and in Old Uyghur, as Zieme read it:

唵吽吽叭叭娑婆呵也 [*an hong hong ba ba suo po he ye = om hūṃ hūṃ
phaṭ phaṭ svāhā*] 觀音奴 [*guan yin nu*]
konımdu bit(i)yü tägındim kenki-lär-kä astıg bolzun tep

I, Konımdu, have sincerely written it, so that it may be (of) use for the succeeding generations.¹⁶

Zieme pointed out the possibility that this short note was added later (BT XXIII, 183). Even so, at least it indicates that a Buddhist used the talismans in question.¹⁷ Besides, some talismans contain Chinese characters among their components, suggesting a strong connection with the Chinese tradition. When we consider the possible Buddhist origin of those talismans, the unique position of Dunhuang as the neighbouring state to Turfan is crucial. As mentioned in the Introduction of this paper, this oasis state was in close contact with the West Uyghur Kingdom in the Turfan area. In the course of the various cultural exchanges that took place between them, Buddhist culture in Dunhuang played a major role in the Uyghurs' religious shift, i.e. it made a vital contribution to the establishment of their Buddhist textual culture in particular.¹⁸ The Chinese Buddhist texts

¹⁶ The corresponding lines are boxed off with the red color in fig. 2. The reading and the translation of those sentences follow those made by Zieme. See BT XXIII, 183–184. Furthermore, he also comments on the last Chinese character *ye* 也 which should stand as the final particle.

¹⁷ Rachmati also read this note, but he did not identify the Chinese origin of this name. See TT VII, 73, comment to 27.

¹⁸ For the impact of Chinese Buddhism in Dunhuang on the Uyghurs, see, e.g., Kudara 1983: 201; Röhrborn 1997: 551; Wilkens 2016b: 219–225. The strong influence of Chinese Buddhism is generally reflected in the fact that the majority of the Old Uyghur Buddhist texts were translations from the Chinese. For an overview of extant Old Uyghur Buddhist texts, see, e.g., Elverskog 1997.

from Dunhuang should therefore come into consideration as the primary source when we compare the talismans in Old Uyghur texts with Chinese ones in our attempt to establish their origin.

3. Talismans in Chinese Buddhist Texts from Dunhuang

The sensational discoveries from Mogao Cave 17 at the beginning of the 20th century dramatically extended our knowledge of Chinese Buddhist texts. Not only did this cave contain famous texts from the Buddhist canon as preserved elsewhere, but also different versions and even previously unknown texts. The Taishō *tripiṭaka* from 1924 comprises some of those texts under the category *Koitsu* (古逸) [*Old Lost (Texts)*] in volume 85.¹⁹ These texts are of considerable importance as they were neither transmitted, nor kept in any Buddhist *tripiṭaka* up to that time, nor documented in the official Buddhist bibliographies composed in Central China. Thus they complement the transmission of Buddhist texts, which can otherwise only be reconstructed in a fragmented manner, as representations of a local Buddhist culture which was unique to Central Asia.

According to Robson, at least fifty texts from Dunhuang included in the Taishō *tripiṭaka* volume 85 contain talismans or describe their production. However, in many cases, the images have not been preserved (Robson 2008: 155). After the edition of the Taishō *tripiṭaka*, many further Buddhist texts came to be identified through the ongoing investigation of the Dunhuang manuscripts, among which are some which include Buddhist talismans. Gao Guofan, for example, discussed the belief in witchcraft and in talismans, seals, and spells in his book dealing with the cultural materials discovered in Dunhuang.²⁰ He lists more than thirty texts associated with these beliefs and customs, although his list contains not only Buddhist

¹⁹ Henrik H. Sørensen gives an overview of those esoteric texts which are preserved outside volumes 18 to 21, some of which were found in Dunhuang and contain talismans, see Sørensen 2011. Robson also lists some texts from Dunhuang in which talismans appear, while Strickmann dedicated one section of his book to this topic. See Robson 2011: 228–229; Strickmann 2002: 161–170. Some of the texts which are relevant for this paper will be discussed in detail below.

²⁰ Gao 1994: 260–262, 304–305. Other than this, there are also some general studies on Buddhist talismans, as listed by Robson. See Robson 2008: 142, n. 41. See also Arami 2020.

but also Daoist ones. As far as we can tell, the following Buddhists texts from Dunhuang have been identified as including images of talismans in the previous studies, up to now, but are not recorded in the section Mikkyō (密教) [Esoteric] of the Taishō *tripitaka*, volumes 18–21. After their titles, the inventory numbers of the corresponding Dunhuang manuscripts are listed. Those fragments are now preserved in London and Paris:²¹

- *Foshuo qiqian fo shenfu jing* 佛說七千佛神符經 [Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas, Preached by the Buddha, T. 2904.85]/*Foshuo qiqian fo shenfu yisuan jing yijuan* 佛說七千佛神符益算經一卷 [Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas to Increase the Account, Preached by the Buddha]: Or. 8210/S. 2708, Or. 8210/S. 4524, P. 2153, P. 2558, P. 2723, P. 3022 recto, P. tib. 2207
- *Sanwanfo tonggen shenmizhiyin bing falong zhongshang zunwang fofa* 三萬佛同根神祕之印竝法龍種上尊王佛法 [Dharma of the Divine Seals from the Same Root of the Thirty Thousand Buddhas and the Nāgarāja Buddha, T. 2906.85]: S. 2438
- *Guanshiyin ji shizun fuyin shiertong ji shenzhou* 觀世音及世尊符印十二通及神咒 [Twelve Talismanic-Seals and Divine Spells of Avalokiteśvara and Bhagavat]: P. 3874
- *Guanshiyin pusa ruyilun tuoluoni zhangju zhouyue bing biexingfa* 觀世音菩薩如意輪陀羅尼章句咒曰 並別行法 [Dhāraṇī-Phase Incantations of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Wheel, with Alternative Rites]: P. 2153
- *Guanshiyin pusa fuyin yijuan* 觀世音菩薩符印一卷 [Talisman-Seals of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, one Scroll]: P. 2602 verso

²¹ To compile this list, the following research publications were taken into consideration: Gao 1994: 260–262, 304–305; Strickmann 2002: 163–170; Robson 2008: 154–166; Mollier 2008: 100–133; Copp 2011. Robson also refers to Buddhist talismans painted on paper, but fails to provide a list of these, or any detailed description of their function. See Robson 2008: 155–158. Those talismans are not included in the present list. The titles of the first two texts are recorded in the Taishō *tripitaka* (the first one in various forms). The titles of the latter four quoted here generally follow those given by Paul Copp, who documents them as they were written in the original texts. For the fragment P. 3874, Copp did not give a title because it is lost. It is therefore listed here under the provisional title given in Gao 1994.

- *Guanshiyin ruyilunwang monibatuobixingfa* 觀世音如意輪王摩尼跋陀別行法 [*Alternative Rites of Mañibhadra, Avalokiteśvara King of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Wheel*]: P. 3835

According to Paul Copp's research, the latter four texts of this list can be traced back to a single manual on the manufacture and use of talismans and seals, *Guanshiyin ruyilun wang monibatuobie xingfa* 觀世音如意輪王摩尼跋陀別行法 [*Alternative Rites of Mañibhadra, Avalokiteśvara King of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Wheel*]. Its title, contents and extant talismans and seals, however, vary considerably with each manuscript. Copp also pointed out that two other fragments in the collection of the National Library of China in Beijing, BD 8738 and BD 7468, also belong to that manual (Copp 2011: 196–203). Although this text does not appear in any canonical catalogue, according to Japanese records it was widespread beyond Dunhuang during the Tang period (Copp 2011: 197). As the title indicates, the manual is closely connected with a particular form of Avalokiteśvara, Cakravartintāmaṇi, which had its peak of popularity in Dunhuang from the late 9th century to the 10th century. Copp suggests that the manual in question was probably copied out and used during that period.²²

3.1. *Foshuo qiqian fo shenfu yisuan jing*

Unlike the *Separate Rites of Mañibhadra and Avalokiteśvara King of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Wheel*, the manuscripts of the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account], Preached by the Buddha* maintain a certain uniformity in terms of title, sequence, structure, and the images of the talismans.

Although the composer of this text and its exact date of composition remain obscure, Christine Mollier pointed out that this text was not mentioned before the end of the 7th century. Furthermore, she points to the fact that in the Buddhist catalogue composed in 695, *Dazhou kanding zhongjing mulu* 大周刊定眾經目錄 [*Catalogue of Scriptures Authorised by the*

²² Copp 2011: 204. Copp also discusses individual talismans and their different versions in detail. See Copp 2011: 212–225.

Great Zhou], three different versions of that text are recorded. She concludes that most probably two versions of its Daoist counterpart, *Taishang Laojun shuo changsheng yisuan miaojing* 太上老君說長生益算妙經 [*Marvelous Scripture for Prolonging Life and for Increasing the Account, Revealed by the Most High Lord Lao*] and *Taishang Laojun shuo yisuan shenfu miaojing* 太上老君說益算神符妙經 [*Marvelous Scripture of the Divine Talismans to Increase the Account, Revealed by the Most High Lord Lao*] provided the model for the composition of this Buddhist *sūtra* (Mollier 2008: 107–113).

The *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account]*, *Preached by the Buddha* is a short scripture. It explains in the first part how the buddhas protect human beings, and which particular kind of misfortune is under the control of each of the seven stars of the Northern Dipper.²³ The second part describes various talismans and, at last, those talismans are listed with their titles. The number of talismans slightly varies from one manuscript to another. While some copies list fifteen talismans, others contain sixteen. All manuscripts are, however, evidently written following the same categorisation of talismans into two series according to function. Talismans in the first series are prophylactic, and number five in all extant copies. According to the version recorded in the Taishō *tripitaka*, the following titles are given after the ordinal number:²⁴

1. to open the heart
2. to increase the life-account
3. to protect body and life
4. to regulate the Five Phases
5. to govern human life [against] the murderous Aji demons and decrepitude²⁵

²³ The contents of this explanatory section in the Daoist version overlaps at many points with the Buddhist version. Mollier deals with these points and also explains the changes in the Buddhist version. See Mollier 2008: 111–123.

²⁴ The following English translation is quoted from Mollier 2008: 123.

²⁵ The original Chinese names in the Taishō *tripitaka* are: 1. 心開符, 2. 益算符, 3. 救護身命符, 4. 金木水火土不相剋符, 5. 注生人阿姬死鬼耗虛神符. In other manuscripts, some variations appear: 1. 開心符 in manuscripts P. 2153, P. 2558, and P. tib. 2207, 2. 益符 in the manuscript P. 2723, 3. 救歛護身命符 in the manuscript P. tib. 2207, 4. 金木水火土不相剋符 in the manuscript S. 2708 and 金水火不相剋符 in the manuscript P. 2153, 5. 注人阿姬死鬼耗虛神符 in the manuscript P. 2153 and 注阿姬死鬼耗虛神符 in the manuscript P. tib. 2207.

The remaining ten or eleven talismans in the second series are for the suppression of demons, and each one is designed to function against one particular species of demon. For those talismans, an ordinal number is not given but each talisman is equipped with an explanation which begins with the phrase “talisman [for] the suppression [of]...” (Chin. *fuyan* 符厭). The order of these talismans in the second series slightly differs from one manuscript to another. According to manuscript P. 2558, which seems to provide the standard order in comparison with other copies, the talismans in this series are for the suppression of:²⁶

- Demons of the past or recent dead and demons who apply demolition and diseases to men and women
- Demons of mountains and forests and lands and grains
- Demons that travel in the sky
- Demons induced by evil spells
- Demons of the neighbouring five regions
- Demons of the evil spirits and the chthonic breaths
- Demons of putrid cadavers
- Demons of deceased foreigners
- Demons of those dead in the battlefield and prison
- Demons with male and female signs
- Demons of innocent [victims]²⁷

The titles of talismans in copies of the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account]*, Preached by the Buddha from Dunhuang are sometimes written with mistakes, and there is also manuscript P. 2153, which contains only the list of talismans without the main text. Those facts could indicate that this text was not copied professionally and used by clergy in the monastery. Instead, this text has a folksy characteristic, and as such may have been in use among

²⁶ The following English translation, again, is based on Mollier’s with slight changes. See Mollier 2008: 126–127.

²⁷ The Chinese original names are: 死衰新舊注雌雄破殃伏連之鬼, 山林社稷之鬼, 遊天之神鬼, 赤舌之鬼, 比舍五土之鬼, 日遊土氣之鬼, 星死之鬼, 客死之鬼, 兵死獄死之鬼, 男祥女祥之鬼, 無孤之鬼. In the manuscript Or. 8210/S. 2708, the talisman, 山林社稷之鬼, is lacking. In P. 2153, some minor variations are recorded: 死衰新舊注雌雄破殃伏連之病, 遊天行之鬼, 去兵死之鬼.

ordinary people for their protection in everyday life. In any case, the copies from Dunhuang are evidence of some sort of practice with those talismans.

4. Identification of Talismans in Old Uyghur Texts

Because the short note in the Old Uyghur text contains the name Konimdu, namely “Slave of Avalokiteśvara,” as presented above in Section 2, it is likely that the talismans are in fact closely connected with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. As discussed in Section 3, among the Dunhuang manuscripts, there is a manual for the talismans connected with a form of Avalokiteśvara called Cakravartīcintāmaṇi. A comparison with this manual, however, does not reveal any correspondences with the talismans in the Old Uyghur manuscript. It is instead the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account], Preached by the Buddha* which provides us with a number of successful matches in several of the talismans.²⁸ Although not all the talismans in our manuscript can be identified with any of those in the Chinese text, some of them are clearly identical. The first identification can be made with the second talisman in B 2291 (Fig. 5). It matches the third talisman, “to protect body and life,” in this scripture.²⁹

As the Chinese manuscripts show, an exact correspondence should not be expected in every detail. On the whole, the example in the fragmented text of P. 2153 (Fig. 6) offers the closest match to the Old Uyghur. The element in the lowest part of the figure, however, exhibits a greater similarity with that in the fragment P. tib. 2207 (Fig. 10). All the components of this talisman match at least one of the examples found in the Chinese manuscripts.

²⁸ The fragment Or. 8210/S. 2708 was used as the basis of the Taishō *tripitaka* edition. Thus, all talismans in that fragment are presented in that edition. The digital image of fragment Or. 8210/S. 4524 is not available on the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) home page, yet. Accessed on September 18, 2020, http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=9697999229;recnum=9478;index=1. For comparison, the other four fragments from the Pelliot Collection in Paris are used. Their images are all available on the IDP home page.

²⁹ The talismans dealt with in this section are marked with a blue coloured border in Figs. 2–4, above.



Fig. 5. B 2291
detail part 1
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Asiatische Kunst

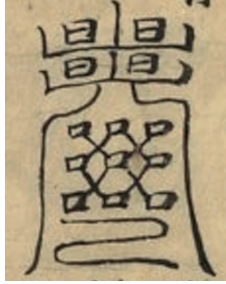


Fig. 6. P. 2153 detail part 1
from the *Sūtra of the Divine
Talismans of the Seven
Thousand Buddhas*
[to Increase the Account],
Preached by the Buddha,
found in Dunhuang, date
unknown © Bibliothèque
Nationale de France

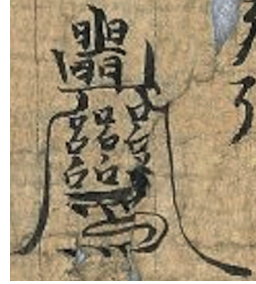


Fig. 7. P. 2558 detail part 1
from the *Sūtra of the Divine
Talismans of the Seven
Thousand Buddhas*
[to Increase the Account],
Preached by the Buddha,
found in Dunhuang, date
unknown © Bibliothèque
Nationale de France



Fig. 8. P. 2723 detail part 1
from the *Sūtra of the Divine
Talismans of the Seven
Thousand Buddhas* [to
Increase the Account],
Preached by the Buddha,
found in Dunhuang, date
unknown © Bibliothèque
Nationale de France

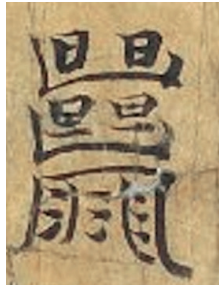


Fig. 9. P. 3022 detail
part 1 from the *Sūtra of
the Divine Talismans of
the Seven Thousand
Buddhas* [to Increase the
Account], *Preached by the
Buddha*, found in
Dunhuang, date unknown
© Bibliothèque Nationale
de France



Fig. 10. P. tib. 2207
detail part 1 of the
*Sūtra of the Divine
Talimans of the Seven
Thousand Buddhas*
[to Increase the
Account], *Preached by
the Buddha*, found in
Dunhuang, date
unknown
© Bibliothèque
Nationale de France

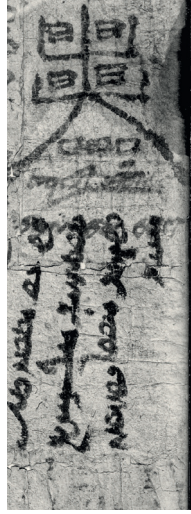


Fig. 11. B 2289 detail 1 © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Museum für Asiatische Kunst

Careful comparison also leads us to the identification of the talisman published by Rachmati (TT VII Taf. 5 links). The upper part in the right side of this talisman is now lost.³⁰ According to the photograph, however, this talisman features all the components which appear in the talisman in question. According to the Chinese text, the explanation accompanying this talisman begins with the ordinal number for three and its function is “to protect body and life.” Neither the example in B 2291, nor that published by Rachmati contain this number. However, the explanation for the latter is: *bo ätöz küzädgü vu ol* “This is the talisman protecting the body” (BT XXIII, 182, II; (TT VII 27/2)) which corresponds to the function of this talisman as mentioned above. Furthermore, the remaining part of the first word in B 2291, *ätöz* “body,” also indicates the possibility that this example was originally accompanied by the explanation concerning the protection of the body.

One other talisman shows some similarities with that third talisman, too: The last one on fragment B 2289 (Fig. 11).

³⁰ The photograph is re-published by Zieme. See BT XXIII, Abb. 187 TT VII Taf. 5 links.

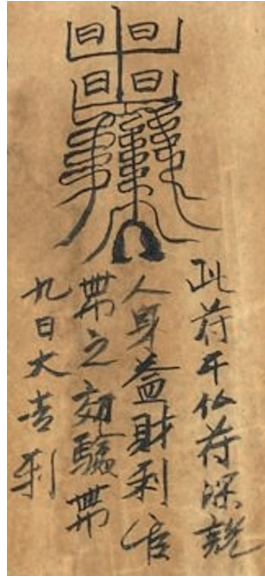


Fig. 12. P. 2602 detail part 1 from the *Alternative Rites of Mañibhadra and Avalokiteśvara King of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Wheel*, found in Dunhuang, date unknown © Bibliothèque Nationale de France

While the components in the upper part are similar to those of the third talisman above, those in the lower part do not correspond with any precision. Furthermore, the explanation of the talisman's function differs completely from both the Old Uyghur and Chinese: *bo vu ätöztä tutsar ad mañal bulur kop küsüş kanar* "Whoever wears this talisman on his body gains fame and happiness, all wishes come true" (BT XXIII, 184, XXXVIII (= TT VII 27 Nr. 30)). If it really was this same third talisman, we would have expected the Old Uyghur scroll to have recorded its different functions. The variations of this talisman in other Chinese manuscripts indicate that the image was not necessarily copied carefully and accurately. The explanation of the talismans' function, however, was essentially kept and transmitted correctly. Thus, the possibility that this talisman's image was changed through repeated copying and became confused with those for other functions, on the one hand, does not appear entirely improbable. We should also note that the components in the upper part are characteristic not only for

this third talisman but are also to be found in other talismans with different combinations of components. One such example is the talisman in fragment P. 2602 (Fig. 12), which belongs to the *Alternative Rites of Mañibhadra and Avalokiteśvara King of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Wheel*.³¹

The Chinese explanation to the effect that, “This talisman is the talisman of the thousand buddhas. [It] deeply explains that [it] does the human beings’ body good and augments their wealth. The efficacy of merely wearing it effectuates excellent luck after wearing [it] for nine days.”³² This corresponds to the explanation in Old Uyghur much better but, again, the elements in the bottom part show considerable differences. Therefore, any conclusive identification of this talisman must await further research.

The next talisman which can be identified is the first on fragment B 2290 (Fig. 13). This is the fifth talisman in the Taishō *tripiṭaka* prophylactic list, intended “to govern human life [against] the murderous Aji demons and decrepitude.”

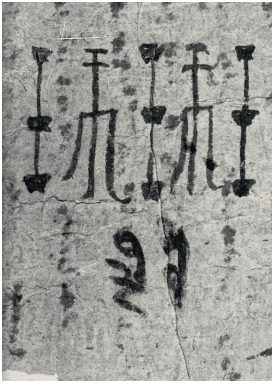


Fig. 13. B 2290 detail 1
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Museum für Asiatische Kunst

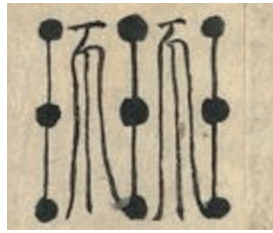


Fig. 14. P. 2153 detail part 2
© Bibliothèque Nationale
de France

³¹ This text was discussed in Section 3.

³² The Chinese original text can be read: 此符千仏深説人身益財利唯帶之効驗帶九日大吉利. Dr. Hou Haoran (Beijing) kindly gave me some suggestions which improved my reading of this text.

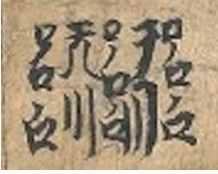


Fig. 15. P. 2558 detail part 2 © Bibliothèque Nationale de France

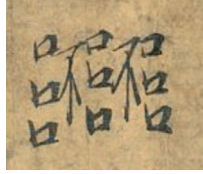


Fig. 16. P. 2723 detail part 2 © Bibliothèque Nationale de France



Fig. 17. P. tib. 2207 detail part 2 © Bibliothèque Nationale de France

In this case, there is no Chinese example which perfectly corresponds to the Old Uyghur text but, once again, the image in fragment P. 2153 (Fig. 14) displays remarkable similarities. Furthermore, the number five is written in the explanation in Old Uyghur.³³ Considering the absence of a number in the Old Uyghur text for the third talisman, “to protect life,” we cannot be certain that the Old Uyghur number *beš* “five” corresponds to the number of this talisman in the Chinese text, or that the Old Uyghur explanation follows the Chinese. After number five, it seems that no other sentences are written in Old Uyghur.³⁴ Thus, even if this number corresponds to the Chinese text, the explanation of this talisman’s function in Old Uyghur would seem to differ from the original.

It seems that one other talisman can also be identified: The third one on fragment B 2289 (Fig. 18) is found not in the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account], Preached by the Buddha*, but in the *Foshuo Changjuli dunü tuoluoni zhoujing* 佛說常瞿利毒女陀羅尼咒經 [*The Dhāraṇī Incantation Scripture of Jāṅgulī, the Poisonous Woman*, T. 1265.21].

Whereas in the examples recorded in the *Taishō tripitaka*, a sign can be discerned in the centre of the coil, the other examples from the Pelliot Collection in which this talisman is included as one of the elements do not contain this sign.³⁵ There seem to have been, therefore, some variation in the way talismans were written and transmitted, and that one of those

³³ The number is given on the left side under the talisman.

³⁴ On the right side, only one word *vu* “talisman” is written.

³⁵ This sign was identified and discussed with further examples in Dunhuang manuscripts by Copp. See Copp 2011: 218–219.

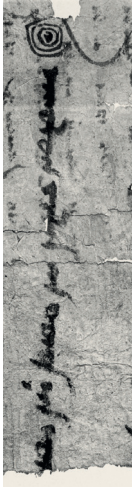


Fig. 18. B 2289 detail part 2
© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Museum für Asiatische Kunst

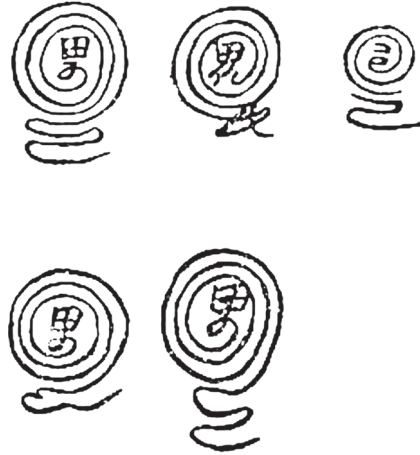


Fig. 19. T. 1265, 0295a23–24 from
the Taishō *tripiṭaka*

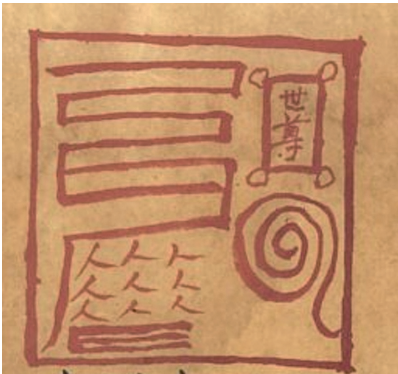


Fig. 20. P. 2602 detail part 2
© Bibliothèque Nationale de France

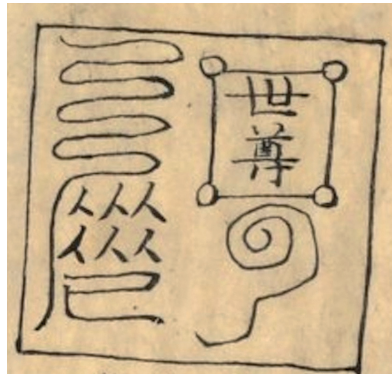


Fig. 21. P. 2153 detail part 3
© Bibliothèque Nationale de France

variants appears in the Old Uyghur scroll. In the present case, we note that the Old Uyghur explanation of the talisman's function corresponds very well to that given in the *sūtra*, which reads: *aguluk yilan-ka kurt kon[guz-ka]* “[If one steps on] poisonous snakes, worms and be[etles]” (BT XXIII, 183, XXXIII (= TT VII 27/Anm. 27 No. 25)).

Besides these talismans which can be identified as a whole, some of the individual elements used as a part of talismans in Old Uyghur show similarities with those in Chinese texts. For example, the talisman published by Rahmati consists of two parts. While the left side corresponds to the talisman against poisonous snakes discussed above, the right portion is similar to that listed as the talisman against demons of those who have died on the battlefield or in prison in the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account], Preached by the Buddha* (Fig. 22, 23):³⁶



Fig. 22. P. 2153 detail
part 4 © Bibliothèque
Nationale de France

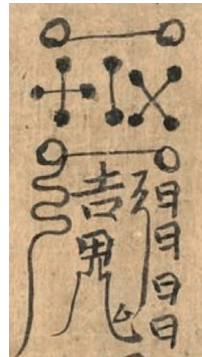


Fig. 23. P. tib. 2207
detail 3 © Bibliothèque
Nationale de France

The ninth talisman in B 2290 (Fig. 24) against childbed fever is similar to the lower part of the talisman shown in fragment P. 3358 (Fig. 25), which should be drunk if one does not have any children:

³⁶ See BT XXIII, Abb. 189 TT VII Taf. 5 rechts. According to the explanation in Old Uyghur, this talisman should be licked so as not to get lost. See BT XXIII, 182, IV (= TT VII 27/4).

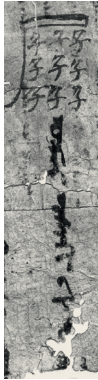


Fig. 24. B 2290 detail part 2
© Staatliche Museen zu
Berlin, Museum für
Asiatische Kunst

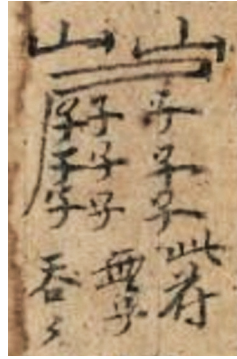


Fig. 25. P. 3358 detail part
from the unidentified text with
talismans, found in Dunhuang,
date unknown © Bibliothèque
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As research on this topic advances, the meaning of individual components may become clearer and, along with those clarifications, we hope that the function of more talismans will be revealed.

5. Closing Remarks

As discussed here, the number of talismanic images that can be identified in the Old Uyghur material is relatively small. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that two among them can be identified as stemming from the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account], Preached by the Buddha*. Up to now, an Old Uyghur version of this text has not been found among the published texts. Some copies of this apocryphal text in Chinese, however, were discovered in Turfan, which shows that it was transmitted to this place.³⁷ Even so, it remains unclear whether the Uyghurs translated the entire text or only parts of it. The fact that some talismans from that text appear in Old Uyghur materials, however, indicates that the Uyghurs evidently knew the scripture

³⁷ Those Chinese fragments from Turfan are: Ch 989, Ch 2190, Ch 2860. See e.g., Rong 2007: 81, 180, 232; Mollier 2008: 106.

fairly well. Most importantly, it documents that the Sinitic practice of using talismans was adopted by at least some of the Uyghur Buddhists.

Much remains unclear concerning the Old Uyghur scroll and its time of production. Because this scroll only contains the collected images of several talismans, together with corresponding short explanations for their function and how to use them, it was probably produced for practical use in daily life. It must have enabled laypeople to choose suitable talismans for practical problems without requiring a detailed knowledge of particular Buddhist texts or theories. In that respect, the text was probably produced for Buddhists, including laypeople, who would have possessed it for their own personal use. At the same time, the text would have been considered sacred because those talismans were believed to have the power to solve urgent and severe problems in everyday life. The sacred and secular characters of the texts containing the talismans correspond well with the impression given by the type of script used: Block or half-block script. Furthermore, from among those Chinese manuscripts found in Dunhuang, manuscript P. 2153 contains only a list of talismanic images with no corresponding text, from which we conclude that this type of usage was probably to be found in common practice within Buddhist societies, both in Dunhuang and Turfan.

Although several differences between the manuscripts from Dunhuang and the Old Uyghur talisman scroll must be taken into consideration, all Chinese manuscripts of the *Sūtra of the Divine Talismans of the Seven Thousand Buddhas [to Increase the Account], Preached by the Buddha* feature the talismans as a unity and do not mix them with talismans from other texts in an arbitrary manner. In the Old Uyghur scroll, however, talismans seem to have been gathered from different sources, including the text mentioned above, and put together according to special needs. Whether the Old Uyghur scroll was strictly translated from a possible Chinese version or compiled by a Uyghur Buddhist in response to a special situation remains obscure due to lack of information. As shown by the examples of the talismans identified in Section 4, the short explanations given for the talisman's function in Old Uyghur are not word-for-word correspondences with those in Chinese. Therefore, the practice of using talismans and the transmission of the relevant texts would not necessarily have been the same in the two oasis centres of Turfan and Dunhuang, even though there was a sharing of similar practices.

Nevertheless, the close relationship between those two oasis states remains a relevant factor when considering the transmission of talismanic practice. This relationship, in fact, grew closer from the 10th century onwards, which leads us to the assumption that the use of talismans had most likely already occurred in the pre-Mongolian period. As discussed in Section 2, the type of script which is used in the Old Uyghur scroll indicates that copying took place during that early period. The close connection between the spread of talismans and the spread of Esoteric Buddhism, too, would seem to support the transmission of talismanic practice in that period. When discussing Esoteric or, rather, Tantric Buddhism among the Uyghurs, it is widely acknowledged that in the Mongolian period, the Uyghurs first began to have intensive contact with the Tibetans, and several Tantric Buddhist texts were translated from Tibetan during that time.³⁸ The introduction of Esoteric Buddhism and its influence among the Uyghurs are still open to debate, one of the difficulties being that not many traces related to Esoteric Buddhism and the Uyghurs have been found.³⁹ Those Esoteric Buddhist texts which were influential during the spread of the esoteric schools, such as the works of Amoghavajra (705–744, Chin. Bukong 不空), have rarely been identified in the material in Old Uyghur.

Nevertheless, in the Turfan area, a number of Buddhist banners depicting esoteric forms of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, including Sahasrabhujasahasranetra, the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara, have been found, and this number visibly increases from the 10th century onwards.⁴⁰ Those art materials, however, could have been produced not only by the Uyghurs but also by local non-Uyghurs, such as the Chinese. This being the case, it only shows that the practice of talismans was accepted by the Uyghurs as one of the relevant features of Buddhist practice closely connected with Esoteric Buddhism. Furthermore, the very existence of this scroll suggests that such practices associated with Esoteric

³⁸ Elverskog also devotes one section of his book to tantric texts in Old Uyghur, although not all the texts listed were translated from Tibetan. See Elverskog 1997: 105–125.

³⁹ For an overview of the Uyghurs and Buddhism, see, e.g. Wilkens 2016a: 477–480; Wilkens 2016b: 215–235. For the Uyghurs' possible absorption of Esoteric Buddhism, see also, Kasai forthcoming.

⁴⁰ The Avalokiteśvara cult in Turfan and its comparison with that in Dunhuang is mainly discussed in Kasai forthcoming.

Buddhism were likely to have been a feature of everyday life. Because, in use, talismans were worn or sometimes even ingested by people according to need,⁴¹ not many of them would be preserved after fulfilling their purpose and, thus, it is no great surprise that not many traces of these practices have come down to us.

In this context, also, amulets are worthy of a mention. Alongside talismans, the use of amulets is also a feature connected with Esoteric Buddhism. These amulets were also worn by people in order to fulfil particular needs, and amulets have even been found among the burial accessories unearthed from tombs.⁴² Because of the way in which they were used, however, this kind of material is difficult to come by in comparison with sacred Buddhist scriptures, and more than a single artefact are almost never found together in one place. Any new future discovery of, for example, burial goods from the Uyghur tombs could provide further traces of Esoteric Buddhist practices being spread among the Uyghurs and advance active discussions on this topic.

Abbreviations

- BT XXIII – Zieme, Peter. *Magische Texte des uigurischen Buddhismus*. Berliner Turfantexte XXIII. Turnhout: Brepols, 2005.
- TT VII – Rachmati, Gabdul Rašid (mit sinologischen Anmerkungen von Wolfram Eberhard). “Türkische Turfan-Texte VII.” *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse* 12 (1936): 3–124.
- U II – Müller, Friedrich Wilhelm Karl. “Uigurica II.” *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse* 3 (1910): 3–110.
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⁴¹ The similar practice of talismans is also known among the Tibetan Buddhists. See, e.g., Garrett 2010. Dr. Dylan Esler (Bochum) kindly pointed out this article.

⁴² For research on the amulets from Dunhuang, see, e.g., Copp 2008; Copp 2014: 59–140; Sørensen 2019.

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