Buddhism, Kingship and the Protection of the State: The Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra and Dhāraṇī Literature

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1 Introduction

This article focuses first on the ritual core of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra, which teaches the protection of the state for the mutual benefit of the Buddhist Sangha and the monarch. The essay then explores the ways in which this theme appears in dhāraṇī literature in the first half of the first millennium. It is shown that offering safeguard to rulers and their regions is a long-established practice in South Asian Buddhism, persisting into modern times, and that there have been a variety of incantation scriptures available for accomplishing this task.

2 The Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra: The Sūtra of Golden Light

This scripture of Mahāyāna Buddhism survives in its oldest form in South Asia in two palm-leaf manuscripts from Nepal dated to the 14th and 16th centuries. The remaining witnesses from the subcontinent are paper codices of later centuries, but dozens of Central Asian Sanskrit fragments survive from the second half of the first millennium. The Sanskrit text of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama has been edited a few times, most recently by Skjaervø (2004). This scripture was remarkably influential across the Buddhist lands of Asia, and was translated into Chinese, Tibetan, Khotanese and several additional languages over the course of many centuries. The Chinese translation by Dharmakṣema is the earliest, from circa 417 CE, which marks the terminus ante quem for the emergence of this sūtra. Editions of Tibetan and Chinese recensions were published

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1 For a survey of dhāraṇī literature, see Hidas 2015.
2 Cambridge Add. 2831, 1385 CE; Tōyō Bunko 1979, 1581 CE. It appears that previous publications have left the dated colophon of the former manuscript unnoted (NS 505 [1385 CE], written as pañcādhikāh pañcaśataḥ; see cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-02831/96, lines 3–4).
by Nobel in the 1940s and 1950s, while Skjaervø (2004) provides the most comprehensive treatment of the Khotanese version. Several translations of this scripture are available in Western languages, with Emmerick 1970 being the classical point of reference, based on the Sanskrit. An excellent overview of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama with a detailed account of previous research was published by Gummer (2015).

3 The Ritual Core of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra

The structure of this scripture shows evidence of considerable expansion over the centuries. The most widespread Sanskrit version contains nineteen chapters, but Nobel (1937) suggests that there may only have been fourteen pari-vartas initially. He also proposed that chapter 3, the Deśanāparivarta, is likely to represent the original core of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama, containing verses on the confession of sins, the resolution to attain buddhahood and praise of the buddhas, the recitation or hearing of which brings about great benefit. If we look, however, for chapters that actually have detailed ritual instructions, it appears that the ritual core of this sūtra is contained in sections 6, 7 and 8: the Caturmahārājaparivarta, Sarasvatīparivarta and Śrīparivarta. The latter two include more complex observances and dhāraṇī-spells.

Chapter 6, the Caturmahārājaparivarta or Chapter on the Four Great Kings,5 conveys an explicit message: those kings (manuṣyarāja) who venerate the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama and support the Buddhist Sangha will be protected from hostile armies and other dangers by the Four Great Kings, and their countries will exist in highest state of harmony. Simultaneously, those who ignore this tradition will face decline. This sūtra directly and repeatedly refers to monarchs, and throughout this chapter and the whole scripture it is obvious that kings are envisaged as the principal target audience. At one point the

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3 On the structure of this sūtra, see Skjaervø 2004, lii–liv. The earliest Chinese version contains eighteen chapters, while later Chinese and Tibetan recensions consist of 21, 24, 29 or 31 sections.

4 Cf. Suzuki 2012.

5 These eminent yakṣas Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Virūdhaka, Virūpākṣa and Vaśravaṇa are celestial guardians of the cardinal directions, along with their retinues in Jambudvīpa. From the Pali Āṭānāṭiya-sutta (Dīgha-nikāya 32) to various Sanskrit raksā texts, they often take the role of chief protectors. Note that the Four Great Kings guarded the cardinal points at the great stūpa of Bhārhut, circa 100 BCE (Skilling 1992, 163). For a study of the Sanskrit Āṭānāṭiya/Āṭānāṭikasūtra, see Sander 2007.
scripture calls itself a rājaśāstra, a text for kings, and it is notable that chapter 12 is entitled Devendrasamayarājaśāstraparivartaḥ, or Chapter of the Royal Treatise called Conventions for Divine Kings, which expounds the ideal of the Dharma-following monarch. On the basis of the general tone of the Caturmaḥārājaparivarta it is fairly evident that the main intended function of this sūtra was proselytizing, that is, attracting leaders of various regions to Buddhism by offering them mutually beneficial services. The Buddhist community appears to have been in perceptible need of securing support from the highest places; some passages seem to indicate a degree of despair, as reflected in their accentuation of vital threats for those not prepared to follow this tradition. It is also not unlikely that Buddhism was at times persecuted, as certain references indicate. Occasionally the text becomes somewhat guarded or equivocal, for example in its claim that the Four Great Kings and the summoned deities arrive in the king’s palace with invisible bodies, which suggests an effort by the text’s compilers to achieve their goals in the most secure possible ways. As for the ritual instructions in this chapter, it is prescribed that the king should clean the palace, sprinkle the premises with perfumes and scatter flowers. He should prepare an ornamented Dharma-throne and a lower seat for himself. He should listen to this sūtra recited by a dharmaśāstra monk and honour those of the Sangha who present the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama. As a result, the whole universe will be adorned, lit up by golden light. The Four Great Kings and other divine beings will approach the palace to listen to the recitation and will protect the sovereign and his realm.

In chapter 7, the Sarasvatīparivarta, the goddess Sarasvatī grants her support to the Dharma preacher through the gift of eloquence, and presents a bathing ritual with enchanted herbs for him and his audience in order to appease all disturbances. It is promised that, invoked by praise, Sarasvatī herself

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6 Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra 6.2.6 (Skjaervø 2004): yaḥ kaścid bhadanta bhagavan manuṣya-rājo bhavet ya-m-anena Devendra-samayena rāja-śāstreṇa rājatvaṃ kārayet.
7 Cf. also chapter 13 on King Susambhava.
8 Skjaervø 2004, 6.5.14–6.5.32. Chapter 12 also includes a description of grave dangers for kings who fail to follow the Dharma; see Skjaervø 2004, 12.17–12.61.
9 Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra 6.1.35–36 (Skjaervø 2004): manusyarājā ... teṣāṃ sūtrendra-dhārakāṇāṃ bhikṣuṇāṃ sarva-pratyarthikebhya ārakṣāṃ kuryāt.
10 Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra 6.2.17, 6.2.37 (Skjaervø 2004): te vayaṃ bhadanta bhagavamś catvāro mahā-rājāṇah sa-bala-parivāra anekair yaksā-śata-sahasrair adṛśyair kāyāmabhāvaiṣ tenopasarṇamkramasyām. It seems that the redactors wished to avoid the risk that the listener expects these divine beings to come in a perceptible form, and then perhaps be disappointed.
11 Skjaervø 2004, 6.3–6.4.
12 Skjaervø 2004, 7.1–7.67. For a detailed study of this chapter see Ludvik 2007, 145–221.
will appear and remove all diseases and difficulties. The ritual instructions pre-
scribe that one should pound herbs and consecrate the powder with mantras
at the time of the Puṣya constellation. A mandala should be drawn with cow-
dung, flowers should be scattered and gold and silver vessels filled. Four armed
men and four well-adorned maidens should be placed there holding pots in
their hands, thus accomplishing the protective sealing of the boundaries (sīmā-
bandha). One should use incense, music, umbrellas, flags, banners, mirrors,
arrows, spears and dhāraṇī-spells, and in due course bathe behind an image
of the Buddha.13

In chapter 8, the Śrīparivarta,14 the goddess Śrī offers support to the Dharma
preacher and good fortune to his audience. A rite which provides prosperity is
described, through which Śrī herself enters that place. According to the ritual
instructions, one’s home must be purified and one should bathe and wear clean
garments. One should offer worship (pūjā) with perfumes, flowers and incense,
then sprinkle juices (rasa) and utter the names of Śrī, Ratnakusuma Tathāgata15
and the Suvarṇaprabhāsa. One should then recite dhāraṇī-spells, draw a man-
dala of cow-dung and offer perfumes, flowers and incense. Finally, a pure seat
should be provided where Śrī descends and stays.

As can be seen, chapters 7 and 8 contain ritual instructions primarily for
securing health and wealth. These seem to be ancillary rites which accompany
the ritual for the protection of the state taught in chapter 6. Interestingly, these
rituals are actually more complex than those in the Caturmahārājaparivarta,
where recitation is the main focus, potentially indicating a somewhat later date
of composition. It is worth noting that chapters 9 and 10, the Drḍhāparivarta
and Samjñāyaparivarta, also offer further support and protection but do not
include detailed ritual instructions.

4 Dhāraṇī Literature Presenting Rites for the Protection of the State

Perhaps contemporaneous with the Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra, there are at
least three pieces of dhāraṇī literature proper which include detailed ritual
instructions for the protection of the state: the Dhvajāgrakeyūradhāraṇī, Nārā-
yaṇaparipṛcchā/Mahāmāyāvijayavāhinidhāraṇī and the Mahāsāhasrapramar-

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13 Skjaervø 2004, lvi notes that the treatise on magical herbs and the dhāraṇīs may be later
additions to this chapter.
14 Skjaervø 2004, 8.1–8.71. On Śrī Lakṣmī see Shaw 2006, 94–109.
15 Note that a Ratnakusumasaṃpuṣpitagātra Tathāgata is listed in the shorter Sukhāva-
tīvyūha.
The former two are centered on this theme, while in the latter the defence of the state is included as one among various rituals. In all three cases the monarch is directly referred to as the beneficiary of the rites.

The *Dhvajāgrakeyūradhāraṇī* was edited by Giunta (2008) based on an undated palm-leaf manuscript, and compared with the Tibetan translation by Jinamitra, Dānaśila and Ye shes sde of circa 800 CE. The Chinese translation by Dānapāla/Shi-hu dates to 982 CE. The setting of this scripture is the celestial Trāyastriṃśat abode where Śakra requests help from the Buddha after the gods have been defeated by the *asura*, led by Vemacitrin. The lord tells Śakra to learn the invincible *Dhvajāgrakeyūradhāraṇī*, which he had come to know from Aparājitadhvaja Tathāgata during a previous existence. Then the Bhagavān reveals the *dhāraṇī* and teaches that its user becomes victorious in battles and conflicts. The spell is to be fixed atop a banner (*dhvajāgra*) or around the neck, and protects kings (*manuṣyarāja*) or heroic people (*śūrapuruṣa*). Manifesting as a divine female, it stands in the frontline, providing fearlessness and protection, driving the enemy away as well as granting blessings and prosperity. Following the main text, the manuscript incorporates the brief *Dhvajāgrakeyūrahṛdaya* “spell-essence.”

The *Nārāyaṇaparipṛcchā/Mahāmāyāvijayavāhinidhāraṇī* was edited, along with the Tibetan translation by Bstan pa‘i nyin byed, by Banerjee (1941) on the basis of a palm-leaf manuscript dated to 1361 CE. No Chinese translation seems to be available. The setting of this scripture is Mount Svar-
ṇaśṛṅga, the mansion of Vaiśravaṇa, where Nārāyaṇa requests help from the Buddha upon defeat by the asuras, much like the Dhvajāgrakeyūradhāraṇī. The lord tells him that earlier, during the reign of King Ratnaśrī of Magadha, there lived Sarveśvara Tathāgata, from whom the Bhagavān learned the Mahāmāyāvijayavāhini spell. For hundreds of thousands of years that king ruled righteously by the power of this dhāraṇī. In his next existence he was born as Māndhātā, a bodhisattva and cakravartin king, who practiced charity for sixty-four thousand kalpas and became a buddha. Then the lord tells Nārāyaṇa that this spell should be learnt, recited and taught to others. The dhāraṇī should be fixed upon five models of chariots and placed across the battlefield. Then the personified Queen of Spells (i.e. Mahāmāyāvijayavāhini) should be visualized there as devouring the enemy. At midday the king should write down this incantation with saffron, after which he is to conquer the hostile army. By reciting this dhāraṇī three times daily one is freed from even the five sins of immediate retribution, gains heaps of merit and shall be able to remember former existences. Laypeople, monastics, kings (rāja), princes (rājaputra), Brahmins and Dharma preachers are all promised to benefit from this spell.

The Mahāsāhasrapramardanasūtra was edited in Iwamoto 1937 based primarily on a paper manuscript from 1553 (CE), while its rituals are studied in Hidas 2013. The Tibetan translation by Śīlendrabodhi, Jñānasiddhi, Śākyaprabha and Ye shes sde dates to circa 800 CE, and the Chinese one was completed by Dānapāla/Shi-hu in 983 CE. The setting of this long and complex

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24 The Suvarṇaśṛṅga is listed as a King of Mountains (parvatarājā) in the Mahāmāyūrivid-yārajñā (Takubo 1972, 49).

25 For an overview of the classical Buddhist ideal of cakravartin kingship see Harvey 2007.

26 For references to consuming the enemy cf. the Dhvajāgrakeyūrahṛdaya: oṃ bhagavati dhvajāgrakeyāre parasainyavidhvansanakari | svasainyaparipālanakari | ulkāmukhi | kha kha | khāhi khāhi | parasainyam anantamukhenānantabhujena prahara prahara | hiṃ hiṃ phat phat svāhā.

27 Nārāyaṇaparipṛcchā (Banerjee 1941, 4): nārāyaṇa atha tasmin samparāye senayor ubhayor madhye pañcasu sthānesu etad dhāraṇākram mahāsurāṇāṃ rathapratikṛttau yuñjyāt | nārāyaṇa ubhayor madhye paripālāya tasmin rathamadhye mahāmāyāvijayavāhiniṃ nāma vidyārājñāṃ anekaśatasahasrasrāpam anekaśatasahasrabhujāṃ trineṇām lohitakṛṣṇavānāṃ dīptaś ca tattvād prasenāṃ bhaksayantam iva cintayet | svayam eva cakravartyarākāram kṛtvā madhyāhne dhāraṇāṃ kunkumena likhitvā rājā parasya ca senāṃ svabhāvena māyāsa-dṛśena cchādayan vividhena sāreṇa viñayi bhavisyatī.

28 Iwamoto (1937) consulted two undated paper manuscripts as well. All three codices are Pañcarakṣā collections kept in Japan. Many thanks to Dr. Kenichi Kuranishi for his help with the Japanese introduction to the edition.
scripture is Rājagṛha, where the Buddha and the Four Great Kings offer protection from calamities following an earthquake in Vaiśālī. Towards the end, this sūtra provides detailed instructions for several rituals, including one for the protection of the state. This prescribes that the royal residence (rājadhānī) should be cleaned and purified with flowers, incense and other offerings. Four maidens should be placed in the four directions with swords in their hands. The dhāraṇī should be recited and written on strips of cloth, mounted on the top of caityas, trees and banners. Recitation should continue for a fortnight, thus saving the state.

5 Dhāraṇī Literature Making General Reference to the Protection of the State

Various examples of dhāraṇī literature, in the wider sense, include references to the defense of the state, while not being centered on this theme and lacking detailed ritual prescriptions. Schopen (1978: 363–367) lists the Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra, Prajñāpāramitā, Ratnaketuparivarta, Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhānavyūha and Śrīmahādevīvyākaraṇa as relevant texts surviving among the Gilgit manuscripts (6th–7th centuries). The Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra claims that all disturbances to an anointed kṣatriya king, including hostile armed forces, shall cease by performing worship (pūjā). The Prajñāpāramitā teaches that those who study this text shall be protected in the battlefield. The Ratnaketuparivarta declares that those kings who commit this spell-text to writing shall not face any danger from an enemy’s army. If they raise the Ratnaketudhāraṇī on a banner they shall be victorious in battle. Paying reverence to the Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhānavyūha will cause victory for kings and queens in war and riots. Those monarchs who preserve the Śrīmahādevīstotra will face no calamities in their realm, and Śrī herself will reside in their homes. In addition to these scriptures, the Amoghapāśahṛdaya states that to protect one’s land from the enemy or calamities the ritually pure officiant should fill a vessel with various substances, perform great pūjā and recitation; peace shall follow thus. The Amoghapāśakalparāja teaches a couple of methods for success in warfare.

29 Cf. the Sarvasvatiparivarta of the Suvarnaprabhāsottamasūtra.
30 For a detailed translation see Hidas 2013, 236–237. See also Gentry 2016.
31 Cf. the Śrīparivarta of the Suvarnaprabhāsottamasūtra.
32 Amoghapāśahṛdaya (Meisezahl 1962, 325–326): paraviṣayarājyarāṣṭropadravarakṣasu pūrṇakalasaṃ sthāpayitvā śucinā śucivastraprāvṛtena mahātiṃ pūjam kṛtvā vācyaitava- vyam | mahāśāntir bhavati. Cf. also Amoghapāśakalparāja 3b.
By the use of a magical noose the army of the enemy and its weapons shall be bound. By encircling a sword the weapons of the enemy shall be broken and disabled. The Mahāpratisarāmahāvidyārājñī promises the destruction of hostile armies and victory in battle with the help of its dhāraṇī. This scripture includes a testimonial narrative in which King Brahmadatta overpowers the army of the enemy by fixing the spell upon his body before entering the battlefield. In another story it is Śakra who defeats the asuras with the help of this incantation.

6 The Characteristics of Buddhist Rituals for the Protection of the State in the First Half of the First Millennium

As the passages above show, the protection of the state and acquiring safety in battle were recurring topics in Buddhist ritual literature from the early centuries of the common era onwards. The target audience was primarily monarchs. Besides defence, the texts occasionally promise additional rewards as well, most commonly health and wealth. While these incantation scriptures principally aim at worldly goals, it is worth noting that in a few cases they promise a better future existence, such as rebirth as a bodhisattva. Even bud-

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33 Amoghapāśakalparāja 18b (Mikkyō Seiten Kenkyūkai. 1998–2011): sainyamadhyotkipet sainyā pāsabandhā bhavanti | samgrāmamadhye kṣipet sarvasastraapraharāṇadhamu- śaṇasaakti‘asimusalamusundicakrakunța‘ayudhavarmakavacā sarve pāsabandhā bhavanti ||, 21b: saṃgrāmamadhye kṣipeta yasya nāmā kṣipyate sa ca pāsabaddhā agratam upatīṣṭhati ||, 30a: saṃgrāmē yuddhyamāne krodharājaṃ japatā pāśam saṃgrāmamadhye kṣeptayam | mahātāṃ aśvīṣam prādurdbhavatī | vikaṭākṣaṃ lalajihvaṃ aṅgāradipti- nayanam saha darsanamātrāṇi caturāṅgām balākāya diśividiśāni prapatādayante ||, 34 Amoghapāśakalparāja 29a (Mikkyō Seiten Kenkyūkai. 1998–2011): ato vidyādhareṇa krod- dhena khaḍga bhrāmaṇam sarvavighnavināyakānāṃ duṣṭāṣṭākṣarākṣasānāṃ sarvavabhū- tānām cinnā bhavisyati | sakrtaṃsaṃgrāmamadhye bhrāmaṇey sarvayodhīnānāṃ aśvīṣaṇā cinnā bhavisyantī | stambhitāni bhavisyantī | sarve daśavidviśāni prapatā- yanti ||.

35 Hidas 2012, 205, 241, 243, 249.
36 Hidas 2012, 216–217. Note the setting similar to the Dhvajāgrakeyūradhāraṇī.
37 Hidas 2012, 227.
38 Note that monarchs were also addressed in a highly elevated literary style by prominent Buddhist personalities such as Mātṛceta and Nāgārjuna in the first centuries CE (cf. e.g. Zimmermann 2006, 228–229, Sanderson 2009, 103–104, Bronkhorst 2011, 103–107). While works such as the Ratnāvalī lack the ritual instructions, as might be expected, their counsel of righteous governance, however idealized, sometimes resonates with certain parts of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra.
dhahood is promised.39 These texts of both mainstream and Mahāyāna Buddhism employ various ritual means, such as the use of mantra, dhāraṇī, man-ḍala and simābandha. It is difficult to suggest a precise chronology for the emergence of these scriptures and, for example, to estimate whether the grand Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra appeared first, with independent dhāraṇī texts following afterwards, or the reverse. What can be stated more or less with certainty is that all the aforementioned scriptures originate from the first half of the first millennium, but emerged over an uncertain interval of time.

As far as actual users or evidence for the protection of the state in South Asia is concerned, only indirect information is available. Various Chinese sources refer to the successful use of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra in some Indian kingdoms as early as the first century CE, although these may only be legendary accounts for the promotion of Buddhism in China.40 A more telling piece of evidence, however, from the middle of the first millennium, is the Gilgit collection of manuscripts, where royal patronage and apotropaic literature are closely linked, albeit without surviving exemplars of the Sūtra of Golden Light.41 In the southern island of Sri Lanka, where monastics and worldly rulers were deeply interdependent for most of the centuries, we have no proof that the Sangha provided protection for the state or that the king used the above mentioned texts. There are however accounts from at least the fourth century CE onwards reporting the performance of parītta-recitals with the Ratnasūtra in times of national calamities.42 Simultaneously, in East Asia we find plenty of direct evi-

39 See the Nārāyaṇaparipṛcchā.
40 Ludvik 2007, 150–151.
41 See von Hinüber 2014 and 2018. It is notable that in Bāna's Harṣacarita (early-7th-century), the Mahāmāyūrī (surviving in Gilgit in numerous manuscript copies) is mentioned as being recited for healing at the royal palace: “So amid the salutations of the chamberlains he slowly entered the palace. There he found people bestowing all their goods in presents, worshipping the family gods, engaged in cooking the ambrosial posset, performing the Six Oblation sacrifice, offering tremulous Durvā leaves besmeared with clotted butter, chanting the Mahā-Māyūrī hymn, purifying the household, completing the rites for keeping out the spirits by offerings. Earnest Brahmans were occupied in muttering Vedic texts; Śiva's temple resounded with the murmur of the Hendecad to Rudra; Śaivas of great holiness were bathing Virūpākṣa's image with thousands of vessels of milk.” (Cowell and Thomas 1897, 137).
42 Gunawardana 1979, 226–227; Norman 1983, 174. On parītta texts, the Ratnasūtra/Ratnasūtra tradition and its remodelling as the Mahāsāhasrapramardanasūtra see Skilling 1992. Cf. also Hidas 2013. On modern Thai amulet cultures incorporating the Ratnasūtra see McDaniel 2014, 143–144. On Southeast Asian aspects and the recitation of the Mahādibbaramanta before going to battle see Skilling 2007, 195, and for a detailed study of this text Jaini 1965. Note that Pali canonical sources acknowledge the efficacy of spells, but do not have a high opinion of them: in the Kevaṭṭasūtra (Dīgha-nikāya 11) the Buddha teaches...
dence for protective practices employing dhāraṇī texts. De Visser (1935), May (1967), Sango (2015) and Gummer (2015) provide a detailed picture how the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra* was actually used for the defense of the emperor and the state. From these studies it becomes clear that Japanese ritual procedures follow what is prescribed in the original Sanskrit remarkably closely; it thus appears that the ‘periphery’ preserves well what may have once been the norm in the native center of this tradition.

7 The Continuity of Buddhist Rituals for the Protection of the State into Later Times

From the second half of the first millennium CE, new types of Buddhist ritual texts incorporated the theme of state protection in South Asia within the tantric traditions. Sanderson (2009, 105–106) refers to passages in the *Sarvavajrodaya* of Ānandagarbha and the *Guhyasamājamanḍalavidhi* of Dīpaṅkarabhadra (9th c.) being used for the protection of the monarch, in connection to rites of initiation. Sanderson (2009, 125) also observes that the *Maṇḍūṣryamūlakalpa* and *Sarvdurgatipariśodhanatantra* both offer protection to the ruler through royal consecration. In the latter text protection is accomplished by Vajradhara and the Four Great Kings, reflecting continuity with earlier sources. As for chronicled accounts of the protection of royal dynasties, Sanderson (2004, 238; 2009, 93–94) refers to Tāranātha’s history of Indian Buddhism, which reports that upon seeing omens of the future ruin of the Pāla dynasty, the eminent master Buddhajñānapāda of Vikramaśīla persuaded Dharmapāla (r. circa 775–812) to institute a regular fire-sacrifice at the monastery in order to protect his dynasty. The rituals lasted for many years at immense cost. In another reference to Tāranātha, Sanderson (2009, 107) notes that tantric rituals were often performed to avert the enemy, especially Turuṣkas. Based on passages from the *Maṇḍūṣryamūlakalpa* and a grant by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Govinda III, dated to 805 CE, Sanderson (2003–2004, 433–434 fn. 308) writes that “[t]he practice of going into battle with an image of one’s personal deity and the belief that this will protect one’s troops and confound those of the
enemy, is well attested in Indian Buddhist sources and in Far-Eastern sources derived from them.” A few texts of this period also pick up on the theme of protection in warfare. The Siddhaikavīratantra introduces mantric amulets worn on the body which, with help from enchanted swords, ensure victory in battle. The Laghusaṃvaratantra claims that one who enters the battlefield after reciting a certain mantra one thousand times towards the enemy cannot be hurt by weapons and obtains an indestructible vajra-body. Finally, one of the latest and most complex tantric scriptures in South Asia, the Kālacakratantra, mentions a number of war-machines (yantra), presumably integrated into this religious text because of the imminent threat from Western ‘barbarian’ invaders in North India around the 11th century.

8 The Protection of the State in Modern Nepal

As for recent practices in the Kathmandu Valley, there is evidence for the performance of a royal ritual for protection involving Pañcarakṣā recitation in the era of Mahinda Vira Vikram Shah (r. 1955–1972). As the officiant, Ratnarāj Vajrācārya of Patan, kindly provided information, in 1962 he performed a ceremony in the royal palace for the protection of the monarch and his realm using this influential apotropaic collection. In this part of South Asia, few early manuscripts of the Suvarṇaprabhāsottama survive, though this sūtra became part of the renowned Navadharma collection of nine texts in medieval times.
Various other scriptures of dhāraṇī literature, however, such as the Pañcaraksā, are available in several old palm-leaf witnesses, and we have colophons from the wider region which indicate their use at the court.49

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49 For the use of the Pañcaraksā by a Pāla queen in the 11th century see Pal 1992 (cf. also Hidas 2012, 84–85). For modern talismanic cults related to warfare in Japan see Bond 2014, and for the protective Jinapaṇḍaragāthā used in Thailand see McDaniel 2011, 77–120.
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