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# The *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā*: A translation and study of the Tibetan version of the six-syllables spell

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**Abstract:** This article examines the Tibetan version of the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā*, an apotropaic text extracted from the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*, and discusses its position in early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature as well as the effects of its *mantra*, which was employed for healing purposes. The diseases, sores, and different kinds of fever against which the *mantra* shall be efficacious are given in a long list, which became a common feature throughout Buddhist protective texts. It is the sound substance of the *mantra*, which brings about the desired effect only when recited correctly. Thus the precise wording of the spell is essential, and this article therefore offers next to a full translation of the Tibetan *sūtra* also an edition of the *mantras*.

**Keywords:** *rakṣā* literature, Tibetan *sūtra*, *mantra*, spell, healing

With the discovery of numerous manuscripts in Indian languages among the finds from Gilgit, Bajaur, Turfan and other places in Central Asia we are now in the position to present more and more texts, which can be ascribed to the genre of the *rakṣā* literature<sup>1</sup> and which, until then, were only preserved in Tibetan or Chinese translations. *Rakṣā* (“protection”) texts function mainly to provide protection, to ward off malignant beings, dangerous animals and all sort of calamities, and to heal illnesses through magical spells, in the beginning in form of moral sayings, which were later supplemented by *mantras*. The Indian original texts finally allow us to shed some light on the beginnings and the evolution of spell practice in early Indian Buddhism. While the protective texts of the Theravādins do not contain any *mantras*, it seems that the redaction of their canon already came to an end when the use of *mantras* gained further

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1 This term was introduced by Peter Skilling (1992) in his extensive investigation on the different classes of the Śrāvakayāna *rakṣā* literature.

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influence by the first two centuries of the Common Era,<sup>2</sup> the spell practice was fully accepted by the Mūlasarvāstivādins and a considerable number of their *rakṣā* texts were translated into Tibetan. Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364) cites in his chronicle of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism *Chos 'byung* “Origin of the Dharma” a royal edict, which says that “(works) other than Mūlasarvāstivāda as well as mantras were not to be translated.”<sup>3</sup>

Skilling gives a first list of seven Mūlasarvāstivādin texts containing protective *mantras*, both in the Sanskrit original language and in Tibetan and Chinese translations,<sup>4</sup> whereas more text can certainly be found. Among that list we find the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* (“The six-syllables spell”) of the *Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna*, which is included as an individual *sūtra* in the Tibetan Kangyur. Before I describe the position of this spell in early Buddhist *rakṣā* literature and its effects, the rather short length of this text allows me to give a brief textual study, comprising a full translation and an edition of the two *mantras*, which the *sūtra* calls *rig sngags kyi rgyal mo* (Skt. *vidyārājñī* “spell-queen”).

## 1 The *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā*

In his Tantra Catalogue Bu ston classes the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* (BU 203<sup>5</sup>) together with other Mūlasarvāstivādin *rakṣā* texts, such as the Mahāsūtras *Mahāsamāja*, and *Āṭānāṭiya*,<sup>6</sup> and the *Bhadrakarātrī-sūtra* under Kriyā Tantra within the section *rigs so so'i rgyud*, and in the family *de bzhin gshegs pa* (Tathāgatha family). Among this family he places it in the subsection *gnas gtsang ma'i lha la sogs pa'i rgyud* (the *tantras* of the Śuddhāvāsa gods, etc.). The *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* is included twice in all the different editions of the Tibetan Kangyur of the *Tshal pa* group (B681, B916, C318, C547, D575, J631, J834, D917, Q313, Q542, U576, U919), and once in the editions of the *Them spangs ma* group (L426, S534, T529, V602, Z547). In the so-called mixed group we can find it twice in *dpe bsdur ma* Kangyur (A693, A1023), but only once in both the Narthang (N573)

<sup>2</sup> The earliest evidence for the use of *mantras* is represented by the Gāndhārī manuscript of the *Manasvi-nāgarāja-sūtra*, which can be dated to the first two centuries of the Common Era. Cf. Strauch 2014: 67, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Vogel 1985: 109–10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Skilling 1992: 156 f.

<sup>5</sup> Eimer 1989: 95.

<sup>6</sup> For an elaborate study of the *mahāsūtras* in relation to the *rakṣā* literature see Skilling 1997: 63–88.

and Lhasa (H602) edition.<sup>7</sup> The differences in the transmission of the different groups of the Kangyur are further reflected by the variations they show in the title and the wording of the *mantras* of the respective *sūtra*. The *Tshal pa* group and the *dpe bsdur ma* Kangyur have as Sanskrit title *ārya-ṣaḍakṣara-bidyā*, and as Tibetan title *‘phags pa yi ge drug pa’i rig sngags*. While the *Them spangs ma* group, and the mixed group give slightly different Sanskrit titles, namely *ārya-ṣaṭākṣara-bidyā*, and *ārya-ṣaṭakṣara-bidyā*, they share the wording of the Tibetan title *‘phags pa yi ge drug pa zhes bya ba’i rig sngags*. The translators’ colophon is only mentioned in Lalou’s inventory of Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang (I § 51.2), which runs: “traduit & corrigé par Jinamitra, Danaśīla et Ye-ṣes-sde, noms qui manquent à Ōtani 313 et à Mdo-man 50”<sup>8</sup>

In the text the Buddha teaches Ānanda the so-called six-syllables spell, through which any kind of disease can be warded off. The structure of the *sūtra* can be summarized as follows:

0. Title and invocation
  - 0.1. Sanskrit title
  - 0.2. Tibetan title
  - 0.3. Invocation
1. Introduction (*nidāna*) at Śrāvastī
2. The Blessed One teaches Ānanda the six-syllables spell and its effects
  - 2.1. The Blessed One teaches the 1<sup>st</sup> *vidyā*
  - 2.2. The effects of the 1<sup>st</sup> *vidyā*: list of diseases
3. The Blessed One utters the 2<sup>nd</sup> *vidyā*
4. Conclusion

## 2 Translation

The six-syllables *vidyā*

[0.1.] In Indian language: *ārya ṣaḍakṣara bidyā*.

[0.2.] In Tibetan language: *‘phags pa yi ge drug pa’i rig sngags*.

[0.3.] Homage to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

[1.] Thus have I heard: At one time the Blessed One was dwelling in Śrāvastī. Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda. “Ānanda, the six-syllables spell was spoken by the six authentic, and complete Enlightened Ones, the four world protectors and the 28 great leaders of the *yakṣas*.

<sup>7</sup> For the transmission of the Tibetan Buddhist Kangyur see especially Eimer 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Lalou 1939: 18.

[2.] Ānanda, keep, hold, return, and master this queen of spells, the six-syllables.

[2.1.] *tadya thā, danti le, kanti le, daṇḍi ma ti, ma dhu ma ti, ma raṇḍi, ko raṇḍe, drā bi ti, ko shā ri, tsha ṭa dze, du du ma ni, ke tu ma ti, tsu dundhe, kau ṭa da na te, ta hu ra re, e na ni ge, hu ta ba hu ni,*

[2.2.] Ānanda, this is the six-syllables spell. Headache, disease of the eyes, disease of the ears, disease of the teeth, disease of the nose, disease of the tongue, disease of the heart, disease of the stomach, disease of the back, pain about the ribs, disease of the urinary organs, disease of the legs, disease of the feet, disease of the limbs, disease of the fingers, dyspepsia, swelling in the bone, resistance in the womb, illness that arises by a combined derangement of air, bile, and phlegm; fever which comes every day, every second day, every third day, every fourth day, momentary fever, fever at day, fever at night; whoever recites this six-syllables spell will be protected, entirely protected. If one holds and maintains it, peace and auspiciousness will occur. Punishment, and weapons will be abandoned, poisons eliminated, and destroyed with water. Having tied it with a thread, Ānanda, I do not see anyone in the world of gods, Māra, and Brahma, of human beings including *śramaṇas*, and *brāhmaṇas*, and of gods, humans, and *asuras*, whose head will not split into seven pieces like the branches of the *arjaka* tree, if one transgresses.<sup>9</sup>

[3.] *tadya thā, aṇḍa re, paṇḍa re, ka re te, ke yū re, bhū taṃ ga me, bhu ta gra he, bhu ta pra kṣi te, bhu ta ya sma ra ya ni, pri yā ba ni te, dza ba ti, ya sho ba ti, gi ri ṇi ni, sha ri ṇi ni.* May I be secure from all fears, and harm. *swā hā,*”

[4.] When the Blessed one had said this the venerable Ānanda, and the world with its gods, humans, *asuras*, and *gandharvas* rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

The noble six-syllables spell is finished.

### 3 Edition of the *mantras*

*Mantras* build the main core of protective texts and are credited with apotropaic powers to overcome calamities, dangers and other evils. Next to other supporting

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<sup>9</sup> It is said that when a branch of this tree falls to the ground, it bursts into seven parts. This metaphor is widely used in *dhāraṇī* scriptures as warning to those who do not act in accordance with the spell's injunction. Davidson (2014: 31) states: “*Dhāraṇī* texts generally asserted the consequence of transgression to be the head bursting into seven parts, like the pod or blossom of the *arjaka* (a species of basil, perhaps *ocimum grassimum* or *ocimum album* closely related to the *tulasi* and well known in medical literature).”

means of efficiency, such as the concept of *saccakiriyā*,<sup>10</sup> *maitrī*,<sup>11</sup> and invocations of protectors and deities,<sup>12</sup> *rakṣā* texts become effective through the mere recitation of their *mantras*. It is the sound substance of the *mantra*, which brings about the desired effect only when pronounced correctly. A very common feature of the *rakṣā* literature then became the so-called list of great poisons, and the list of calamities. By knowing the names of poisons, diseases, dangerous beings, and animals, one gains control and power over them and their negative impact is subdued.

In the wording of the two *mantras*, which the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* calls *vidyā*, we can make out three gently variant readings following the *Tshal pa*, and the *Them spangs ma* lineage, and the mixed group. These differences mostly concern the rendering of the Sanskrit phonemes in the Tibetan script. That is exactly the reason why the main text of the *mantras* is here given in Tibetan script, which enables one to better trace minor orthographical variants.

**Vidyā 1:** A693 p.642.10–643.1, A1023 p.779.9–780.1, D575 at 202a5–6, D917 at 261a7–261b1, H602 at 459a3–4, U575 at 202a5–6, Z547 at 210a1–2

A693, 1023 D575, 917 U575	ཏུ་ཐུ།	དཀྱི་ལེ།	ཀཱི་ལེ།	དཀྱི་མ་ཏི།	མ་རྩུ་མ་ཏི།	མ་རྩེ།
Z547	ཏུ་ཐུ།	དཀྱི་ལེ།	ཀཱི་ལེ།	དཀྱི་མ་ཏི།	མ་རྩུ་མ་ཏི།	མ་རྩུ་མ་ཏི།
H602	ཏུ་ཐུ།	དཀྱི་ལེ།	ཀཱི་ལེ།	དཀྱི་མ་ཏི།	མ་རྩུ་མ་ཏི།	མ་རྩེ།
A693, 1023 D575, 917 U575		ཀོ་རྩེ།	རྩུ་བི་ཏི།	ཀོ་ལུ་རི།	ཚ་ར་ཇ།	ཏུ་ཏུ་མ་ནི <sup>13</sup> ། ཀེ་ཏུ་མ་ཏི།
Z547	ཀཱི་རྩེ་ཏི།	ཀོ་རྩེ་	རྩུ་བི་ཏི།	ཀོ་ལུ་རི།	ཚ་ར་ཇ།	ཏུ་ཏུ་མ་ཏི། ཀེ་ཏུ་མ་ཏི།
H602	ཀཱི་རྩེ་ཏི།	ཀོ་རྩེ་	རྩུ་བི་ཏི།	ཀོ་ལུ་རི།	ཚ་ར་ཇ།	ཏུ་ཏུ་མ་ཏི། ཀེ་ཏུ་མ་ཏི།
A693, 1023 D575, 917 U575	ཙུ་ཏུ་རྩེ།	ཀོ་ར་དཀྱི་ཏེ <sup>14</sup> །	ཏུ་ཏུ་ར་ཇ།	ཨེ་ན་ནི་ག།	ཏུ་ཏུ་བ་ཏུ་ནི།	
Z547	ཙུ་ཏུ་རྩེ།	ཀུ་ར་དཀྱི།	ཏུ་ཏུ་ར་ཇ།	ཨེ་ན་ནི་ག།	ཏུ་ཏུ་བ་ཏུ་ནི།	
H602	ཙུ་ཏུ་རྩེ།	ཀོ་ར་དཀྱི།	ཏུ་ཏུ་ར་ཇ།	ཨེ་ན་ནི་ག།	ཏུ་ཏུ་བ་ཏུ་ནི།	

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Holz 2015: 101–105.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Schmithausen 1997: 45–48.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Skilling 1992: 155.

<sup>13</sup> A 1023: *ti*.

<sup>14</sup> A 1023, D 917: *dānte* for *da na te*.

**Vidyā 2:** A693 p. 643.19–644.2, A1023 p. 780.19–781.2, D575 at 202b3–4, D917 at 261b7–262a1, H602 at 459b4–5, U575 at 202b3–4, Z547 at 210b3–4

A693, 1023 D575, 917 U575	ཏུ་ཐུ།	ཨུ་རེ།	པུ་རེ།	ཀ་རེ <sup>15</sup> ཏེ།	ཀེ་ཡུ་རེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་མེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།
Z547	ཏུ་ཐུ།	ཨུ་རེ།	པུ་རེ།	ཀ་ར་ཏ།	ཀེ་ཡུ་རེ།		ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།
H602	ཏུ་ཐུ།	ཨུ་རེ།	པུ་རེ།	ཀ་ར་ཏེ།	ཀེ་ཡུ་རེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་མེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།
A693, 1023 D575, 917 U575	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།
Z547	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།
H602	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།	ཟུ་རྟི་ག་ཏེ།
A 693, 1023 D 575, 917 U 575	གི་རི <sup>17</sup> ཏེ།	གི་རི <sup>18</sup> ཏེ།	གི་རི <sup>18</sup> ཏེ།	གི་རི <sup>18</sup> ཏེ།	གི་རི <sup>18</sup> ཏེ།	གི་རི <sup>18</sup> ཏེ།	གི་རི <sup>18</sup> ཏེ།
Z 547	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།
H 602	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།	གི་རིཏེ།
A693, 1023 D575, 917 U575	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།
Z547	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།
H602	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།	གཞོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་བྱུང་ཅིག་སྒྲུ།

## 4 Position in early *raṅṣā* literature

The narrative frame and one of the two *mantras* found in the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā*, is extracted from the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*. Remarkable is the fact that the wording of the spell entitled *ṣaḍakṣarī-vidyā* differs entirely in both versions. The

<sup>15</sup> A 1023, D 917: *ra*.

<sup>16</sup> A 1023, D 917: *ti/te* for *ni te/*.

<sup>17</sup> A 1023, D 917: *rī*.

<sup>18</sup> A 1023, D 917: *rī*.

<sup>19</sup> A 1023, D 917 omit: */*.



beginning of the Sanskrit *mantra*, however, appears then in the second *vidyā* of the Tibetan text. The introductory narrative of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*, story 33 in the *Divyāvadāna* collection, was translated into Chinese in 230 CE under the name *Mātaṅgī-sūtra*.<sup>20</sup>

This part, which begins with the following narration, is completely missing in the Tibetan text:

Overpowered by a magical spell cast of a *caṇḍāla* woman whose daughter Prakṛti had fallen in love with him, Ānanda enters their house. In awareness of the danger that awaits him, he invokes the Buddha who is able to rescue him by a magical counterspell. Buddha's spells are more powerful than the spells of other sorcerers and annihilate them. In this way Ānanda gets away from the two women. The *mantra* recited by the Buddha to release Ānanda from the witch's spell consists entirely of natural language. The text of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* runs as follows:

*atha bhagavān āyusmantam ānandaṃ samanvāharati sma samanvāhṛtya sambuddha-  
mantraiś caṇḍālamāntrān pratihanti sma | tatreyam vidyā |*

*sthitir acyutiḥ sunītiḥ | svasti sarvapraṇibhyaḥ |*

*saraḥ prasannaṃ nirdoṣaṃ praśāntaṃ sarvato 'bhayaṃ |*

*ītaḥ yatra śāmyanti bhayāni calitāni ca |*

*tad vai devā namasyanti sarvasiddhāś ca yoginaḥ |*

*etena satyavākyena svasty ānandāya bhikṣave ||*

(Mukhopadhyaya 1954: 3–4)

The Blessed One then focused his attention on the venerable Ānanda, having turned his attention [on him] he stroke back the *mantras* of the Caṇḍāla women with the *mantras* of the Buddha. This is the spell then:

Standing firm, imperishable, free from distress, well-being for all sentient beings.  
Water, clear, faultless, calm, and entirely fearless,  
Where plagues, fears, and disordered senses are extinguished.  
To that indeed, all gods, *siddhas*, and *yogins* pay homage.  
By this asseveration of truth, [may there be] well-being for Ānanda, o monks.

<sup>20</sup> In the appendix of their edition of the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil briefly describe the four Chinese translations of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* (Taishō 551, 552, 1300, 1301), among them the *Mātaṅgī-sūtra*, which belongs to the earliest Buddhist scriptures containing *mantras*. Cf. Cowell/Neil 1970: 657.



This passage is followed by the injunction to Ānanda to take up, hold, speak, and master the so-called six-syllables spell. This is the first parallel to the Tibetan *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* [1., 2.]. The Sanskrit text reads:

*udgr̥hna tvam ānanda imāṃ ṣaḍakṣarīvidyāṃ dhāraya vācaya paryavāpnuhi | ātmano  
hitāya sukhāya bhikṣhūṇaṃ bhikṣhuṇīnām upāsakānām upāsikānām hitāya sukhāya | iyaṃ  
ānanda ṣaḍakṣarīvidyā ṣaḍbhiḥ samyaksaṃbuddhair bhāṣitā caturbhiḥ ca mahārājaiḥ  
śakreṇa devānām indreṇa brahmaṇā ca sahāpatinā | mayā caitarhi śākyamuninā samyak-  
saṃbuddhena bhāṣitā | tvam apy etarhy ānanda tām dhāraya vācaya paryavāpnuhi |*

(Mukhopadhyaya 1954: 4)

Take up, Ānanda, this six-syllables spell, hold it, speak it, master it for your benefit and welfare and for the benefit and welfare of monks, nuns, lay men, and lay women. Ānanda, this six-syllables spell was spoken by the six completely Enlightened Ones, and by the Four Great Kings, and by Śakra, the king of the gods, and by Brahma, the Lord of the World. And now it is spoken by me, Śākyamuni, the completely Enlightened One. Now you, Ānanda, also hold it, speak it, and master it.

The six-syllables spell strings together a variety of isolated, alinguistic phonemes and words whose sources cannot easily be traced. Both the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* and the Tibetan *sūtra* call their spell *ṣaḍakṣarī-vidyā*, although they do not share the wording of this *mantra* (Tibetan *vidyā* 1). The Tibetan text takes up the first four words of the Sanskrit spell in its second *mantra* (*vidyā* 2). The *mantra* of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* is expressed with the words:

*yad uta tadyathā | aṇḍare paṇḍare karaṇḍe keyūre ‘rcihaste kharagrīve bandhumati vīra-  
mati dhara vidha cilimile viloḍaya viṣāṇi loke | viṣā cala cala | golamati gaṇḍavile cilimile  
sātinimne yathāsaṃvibhakta golamati gaṇḍavilāyai svāhā |*

(Mukhopadhyaya 1954: 4–5)

Some of the terms, however, seem to be names of poisons or poisonous substances, which belong to a group called *mahāviṣa* (“great poisons”). Those poisons can be eliminated by the mere recitation of their names, which is already expressed in the hitherto earliest known *rakṣā mantra* of the Gāndhārī \**Manasvi-nagara-sūtra*, which contains an almost identical enumeration of poisons and which is concluded by the words:

Thus is (the spell) of Manasvin, thus is (the spell) of Manasvin, thus is (the spell) of Manasvin. (Who) would know the names of these great poisons has not to be afraid of human beings ...<sup>21</sup>

Strauch has further shown the connection between this list of poisons and healing illnesses, which are caused by these poisons, in the *Mahāsāhasrapramardinī* of the *Pañcarakṣā* (“Five Protections”) collection. This text gives *mantra* words, which make poison effectless, namely *aṇḍare paṇḍare kaṭake keyūre*, and refers to diseases, such as white leprosy, *visarpa* disease, itch, cases of tartar, bloody abscesses, and scab, which will be destroyed alike.<sup>22</sup>

## 5 The effects of the *mantra*

The effects of the six-syllables spell of the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* are described in a long list of diseases against which the *mantra* shall prove to be effective. The healing of diseases through the help of *mantras* has its origin in non-Buddhist sources. Early Vedic medicine was characterized by demon-caused diseases and magical rites involving the recitation of potent charms and the application of efficacious amulets to exorcise demons and to ward off their further attacks. The principal source for medicine in early Vedic times is the *Atharvaveda*, as it contains a significant number of hymns and *mantras* devoted to healing of illnesses. During special healing rites these charms and *mantras*, which were considered to be more efficacious than the actual use of herbs and medicine (AV II 9.3; VI 45.2), were recited. This tradition further continues in āyurvedic treatises. The *Kauśika-sūtra* of the *Atharvaveda* lists numerous diseases, which will be cured through the utterance of *mantras*. Halдар summarizes them as follows:

They are securing curatives for various otherwise incurable diseases produced by the sins of past life, viz. Fever, Cholera and Diabetes ; stopping the flow of blood from wounds caused by injuries from weapons, preventing epileptic fits and possession by different types of evil spirits, such as the *bhūta*, *piśāca*, *brahma-rakṣas*, etc. ; curing *vāta*, *pitta* and *śleṣman*, heart diseases, Jaundice, white leprosy, different kinds of fever, Phthisis, Dropsy ; during worms in cows and horses, providing antidotes against all kinds of poisons, supplying curatives for the diseases of the head, eyes, nose, ears, tongue, neck and inflammation of the neck warding off the evil effects of a Brāhmaṇa’s curse ; arranging women’s rites for securing sons, securing easy delivery and the welfare of the foetus.<sup>23</sup>

Buddhist protective texts and their *mantras* were also widely employed as means to cure diseases and similar lists can be found throughout the *rakṣā*

<sup>21</sup> Strauch 2014: 75.

<sup>22</sup> For an investigation of the use of this spell in protective texts and its parallels in Buddhist and Āyurvedic literature cf. Strauch 2014: 75–78.

<sup>23</sup> Halдар 1977: 14.

literature in Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese context.<sup>24</sup> At the Japanese imperial court there existed a number of “healer-meditation masters, priests well versed in dhāraṇīs for protecting the health of the ruler”<sup>25</sup> in the eighth century. An important example of this tradition is the well-known *Mahāmāyūrī-vidyārājñī* (henceforth: *Mahāmāyūrī*), another text of the *Pañcarakṣā* collection. The *Mahāmāyūrī* with its *mantras* was popular in its application as remedy in China and Japan in the eleventh/twelfth century.<sup>26</sup> This protective text comprises an enumeration of illnesses, and demons and other evils causing fever, corresponding to the list in the *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā*. The text of the *Mahāmāyūrī* runs as follows:

*śīrorttim apanayantu. arddhāvabhedakam arocakam akṣirogaṃ nāsārogaṃ mukharogaṃ kaṇṭharogaṃ hṛdrogaṃ galagrahaṃ karṇasūlaṃ dantaśūlaṃ hṛdayaśūlaṃ pārsvaśūlaṃ pṛṣṭhaśūlaṃ udaraśūlaṃ gaṇḍaśūlaṃ vaṣṭiśūlaṃ guḍaśūlaṃ yoniśūlaṃ prajanaśūlaṃ ūruśūlaṃ jaṃghāśūlaṃ hastaśūlaṃ pādaśūlaṃ aṅgapratyaṅgaśūlaṃ jvaram apanayantu. ekāhikaṃ dvāhikaṃ traitīyakaṃ cāturthakaṃ saptaḥikaṃ ardhamāsikaṃ māsikaṃ dvaimāsikaṃ mauhūrtikaṃ nityajvaraṃ viṣamajvaraṃ bhūtajvaraṃ pretajvaraṃ mānuṣajvaraṃ amānuṣajvaraṃ vātikaṃ paittikaṃ śleṣmikaṃ sānnipātikaṃ sarvajvaraṃ sarvavyādhiṃ sarvagrahaṃ sarvaviṣaṃ sarvapāpaṃ sarvabhayaṃ ca nāśayantu*

(Takubo 1972: 28, 29)

Headache shall be removed. Hemiplegia, indigestion, disease of the eyes, nose, mouth, throat, heart, compression of the throat, pain of the ears, teeth, heart, ribs, back, stomach, cheeks, bladder, piles, womb, menorrhagia, thighs, shanks, hands, feet, limbs, minor limbs, and fever shall be removed. Every day, every second day, every third day, every fourth day, every seventh day, every half a month, every month, every second month, momentary, uninterrupted, and irregular fever, fever caused by beings, *pretas*, human, and non-human beings, illness that arises from a combined derangement of air, bile, and phlegm, every kind of fever, all plagues, all evil demons, all poisons, all evil, and all fears shall be extinguished.

Parts of the *Mahāmāyūrī* were found among the Bower Manuscript from Central Asia, a collection of medical treatises, that can be dated to the first half of the sixth century. It contains a similar list in a slightly different order (VI, 2):

*jvarād ekāhikadvaitīyakatraitīyakāc cāturthakāt saptaḥikād ardhamāsikād māsikād daivasikān mauhūrtikān nityajvarād viṣamajvarād bhūtajvarān mānuṣajvarād amānuṣajvarād vātikapaittikaśleṣmikasānnipātikāt sarvajvarāt śīro'rttim pari-m-apanaya ardhāvabhedakam arocakam akṣirogaṃ nāsārogaṃ mukharogaṃ kaṇṭharogaṃ*

<sup>24</sup> References to healing of illnesses in Buddhist *rakṣā* literature by the means of *mantras* can be found in Hidas 2012: 34, note 41.

<sup>25</sup> Abé 1999: 162.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. De Visser 1919–1920: 387.

*hṛdayarogaṃ karṇaśūlaṃ dantaśūlaṃ hṛdayaśūlaṃ pārśvaśūlaṃ prṣṭhaśūlaṃ  
udaraśūlaṃ gaṇḍaśūlaṃ vastiśūlaṃ ūruśūlaṃ jaṅghāśūlaṃ hastaśūlaṃ pādaśūlaṃ  
aṅgapratyaṅgaśūlaṃ cāpanaya*

(Hoernle 1897: 223)

from fever, such as comes on every day or every second day or every third day or every fourth day or every seventh day, or every half-month, or every month, or even only once for a moment, from continued fever, from remittent fever, from fever such as spirits or such as men or such as non-humans beings are subject to, from fever such as arises from derangement of the air or of the bile or of the phlegm or of all three combined, in short, from every kind of fever *and* headache. Remove *from him* also hemicrania, loss of appetite, fly-like disease of the skin, disease of the nose, disease of the mouth, disease of the throat, disease of the heart, pains in the ear, pains in the teeth, pains in the heart, pains in the side, pains in the back, pains in the belly, pains in the cheek, pains in the bladder, pains in the thigh, pains in the legs, pains in the hands, pains in the feet, pains in any limb, whether large or small.

(Hoernle 1897: 227–228)

The *Āryatathāgatoṣṇīṣasitātapatra-pratyāṅgirā-mahāvidyārājñī* contains an almost identical list. This text is preserved in various Sanskrit manuscripts from Central Asia and Nepal, and in Chinese and Tibetan translations.<sup>27</sup> Both Abé and Waddell, who partially translated the Tibetan version, refer to this *sūtra* as means for protection and as a remedy against all forms of illness<sup>28</sup>:

*jvarā ekāhikāḥ, dvaitīyakāḥ, traitīyakāḥ, cāturthikāḥ, saptaḥikāḥ, arddhamāsikāḥ,  
māsikāḥ, dvaimāsikāḥ, mauhūrttikāḥ, nityajvarāḥ, viṣamajvarāḥ, pretajvarāḥ, piśāca-  
varāḥ, mānuṣajvarāḥ, amānuṣajvarāḥ, vātikāḥ, paittikāḥ, ślaiṣmikāḥ, sānnipātikāḥ, sar-  
vajvarāḥ śirovartimapanayantu mama sarvasattvānāṃ ca arddhāvabhedakam, arocakam  
akṣirogaṃ nāsarogaṃ mukharogaṃ kaṇṭharogaṃ hṛdrogaṃ galagrahaṃ karṇaśūlaṃ  
dantaśūlaṃ uraśūlaṃ hṛdayaśūlaṃ marmaśūlaṃ prṣṭhaśūlaṃ udaraśūlaṃ vastiśūlaṃ  
gudaśūlaṃ yoniśūlaṃ pradaraśūlaṃ ūruśūlaṃ jaṅghāśūlaṃ hastaśūlaṃ pādaśūlaṃ  
aṅgapratyaṅgaśūlaṃ mama cāpanayantu/*

(Ngawang/Pandey 2002: 152–153)

Fever which comes every day, every second day, every third day, every fourth day, every seventh day, every half a month, every month, every second month, momentary, uninterrupted, and irregular fever, fever caused by *pretas*, *piśācas*, humans, and non-humans, illness that arises from a combined derangement of air, bile, and phlegm, every kind of fever, and headache of me and all beings shall be removed. Hemiplegia, indigestion, disease of the eyes, nose, mouth, throat, heart, compression of the throat, pain of the ears,

<sup>27</sup> For a Sanskrit manuscript from Turkestan see: Hoernle 1916: 52, no. 150, for a Sanskrit manuscript from Nepal see: Mitra 1981: 227 no. B, 46; for the Chinese text see: Taishō 19: 943A, 944B, 945, 976, 977; for the Tibetan text see: A709, A1092, D591, H542, N515, Q203, Z567.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Waddell 1914: 49, 54; Abé 1999: 161.

teeth, chest, heart, articulations, ribs, back, stomach, bladder, piles, womb, menorrhagia, thighs, shanks, hands, feet, limbs, and minor limbs shall be removed from me.

The theme of curing any kind of disease through the recitation of *mantras* further continues in the *Amoghapāśahṛdaya-dhāraṇī*, which survives in a fragmentary Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscript from Nepal and in Tibetan and Chinese translations. The Sanskrit text gives the following list of illnesses:

*ekāhikena jvareṇa | dvyaḥhikena vā | tryāhikena vā | cāturthikena vā | evaṃ saptaḥhikena vā jvareṇa | akṣiśūlena vā nāsāśūlena vā | karṇṇaśūlena vā | dantaśūlena vā | oṣṭhaśūlena vā | jihvāśūlena vā | tāluśūlena vā | hṛdayaśūlena vā | udaraśūlena vā | pāśvaśūlena vā | kaṭiśūlena vā | aṅgapratyaṅgaśūlena vā | arśograhaṇiśūlena vā | atisāreṇa vā | hastapādavedanayā vā | śīrorujayā vā | valāhakaśvitṛakuṣṭhavicarccikākīṭimalohaliṅ-gagalagrahabhagandaravisphoṭakāpasmārakākhordair anyair vā | kṛtyāpakṛtyair vā | vadhābandhanatāḍanatārjjanā*

(Meisezahl 1962: 314)

Fever which comes every day, every second day, every third day, every fourth day, every seventh day, pain of the eyes, nose, ears, teeth, lips, tongue, palate, heart, stomach, ribs, hips, limbs and minor limbs, piles, dysentery, hands and feet, headache, cutaneous disease (?), white leprosy, black leprosy, itch, leprosy, abscesses, compression of the throat, fistulas, boils, epilepsy, evil spirits or other demons, killing, imprisoning, beating or threatening.

## 6 Conclusion

The narrative context of the Tibetan *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* is extracted from the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*. Both texts call their protective *mantra ṣaḍakṣarī-vidyā*, “the six-syllables spell”, although the reading of the Tibetan *mantra* is completely different from the Sanskrit version. The beginning of the Sanskrit *mantra*, however, can be found in the second *vidyā* of the Tibetan *sūtra*. These words correspond to names of poisonous substances and appear already in lists of poisons in early post-canonical protective texts. By knowing the names of these poisonous substances, their negative impact is subdued. It is through mere recitation of the *mantra*, that the desired effect of the protective text can be achieved. Especially remarkable is the relation of the Tibetan *sūtra* to the *Gāndhārī Manasvi-nagara-śūtra*, and some texts of the *Pañcarakṣā* collection, which shows that they follow a common tradition.

The effect of the six-syllables spell in the Tibetan *Ṣaḍakṣara-vidyā* is described in a long list of illnesses, which will not occur by the means of its *mantra*. Almost identical enumerations of diseases can be found throughout the genre of *rakṣā* texts in Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese context. This tradition,

however, is rooted outside of Buddhist sources in the *Atharvaveda* and in medical treatises, like the Bower Manuscript, which further supports Strauch's suggestion, that the major source of *raḁṣā* texts possibly lies in a scientific tradition.

## Sigla

- A dpe bsdur ma Kangyur
- B Berlin Kangyur
- C Cone Kangyur
- D Derge Kangyur
- H Lhasa Kangyur
- L London Kangyur
- N Narthang Kangyur
- Q Peking Kangyur
- S Stog Kangyur
- T Tokyo Kangyur
- U Urga Kangyur
- V Ulannbaatar Kangyur
- Z Shey Kangyur

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