

# Weaving Dharma into Words: Composition Strategies in Buddhist Tantras<sup>1</sup>

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The authors of Buddhist Tantric scriptures adopted a variety of literary compositional techniques and strategies to ensure the success of their works—intellectual elaborations that are often sophisticated as well as tricky. This article intends to detect and examine some of these techniques, with no pretence of being exhaustive in dealing with such a vast, complex, and as yet largely unexplored topic.

## 1. General Structure and Main Stylistic Characteristics of Buddhist Tantras

Normally, in *tantras*, narrative elements are scarce and limited to the general structure of the text; there are no parables or stories, as sometimes appear in the *nikāyas* or Mahāyāna *sūtras*. The teaching usually conforms to a simple pattern based on alternating questions and answers that follow an opening sentence, which can be either in metrical form or prose.

Several *tantras* adopt the first-person narrator form<sup>2</sup> by starting with a reworking of the famous *nidāna* formula<sup>3</sup>—*evaṃ me sutaṃ*

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Nicola Bajetta and Harunaga Isaacson for their precious suggestions and comments, and Edward Feldman, who has kindly revised the English.

Sandhi and punctuation in the quotations from Sanskrit texts have been silently standardized.

<sup>2</sup> The first-person narrator form is explicit at the beginning of the text and is implicit every time the interlocutor changes and their words are introduced (supposedly by the first-person narrator) by means of short

*ekaṃ samayaṃ / evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye*<sup>4</sup> + *bhagavā / bhagavān* + toponym (locative) + *viharati / viharati sma*—which is often found in both Pāli and Sanskrit works. As has been noted, the function of this opening formula is to ‘seal the authenticity’ of the teaching being introduced:<sup>5</sup> the *saṅgītikāra* is about to recite an authoritative teaching because he witnessed its preaching at a specific place and time, and is able to report it exactly.<sup>6</sup> Although no precise chronological indications are normally given regarding time, which is presented as an unspecified moment in the past, the formula in any case refers to a time attributable to one of the moments in the life of the historical Buddha.

The same function is no doubt present in Tantric scriptures, but the strategy there seems to be rather different, if not the opposite:

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phrases such as *bhagavān uvāca*, *sucandra āha*, *māmakya āha*, etc.

<sup>3</sup> At times, in primary literature (e.g. *Kṛṣṇayamāripañjikā*, p. 1) and secondary literature (e.g. Bang 2019: 140), this formula is referred to with the more generic term *ādivākya*. It is normally labelled *nidāna* in Pāli commentaries, with the sections dedicated to its explanation being usually termed *nidānavañṇanā*. Sometimes the word *nidāna* is used to refer to this formula also in Sanskrit works (e.g. in *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana*, p. 71) and in Mahāyāna commentaries (e.g. in *Abhisamayālaṅkāralokā*, p. 6).

<sup>4</sup> On the punctuation of the first words of this formula, see Brough 1950: 416–421, 423, 425.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Brough 1950: 424–425, and Tola & Dragonetti 1999: 53. On this formula, see also Silk 1989, Galloway 1991, and Tatz 1997. For further references, see also Anālayo 2014: 41 n. 1. On this formula as one of the signs of a work’s authenticity, see also Almogi 2020: 70–73.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., the following passage of the commentary on the words *evaṃ mayā śrutam* by Haribhadra: *tatraivam iti niścayārthābhīdhāyinā svānurūpajñānāvadhāritanikhilasūtrārthasyopadarśanapareṇaivam etad ity aviparīta-toam āha | mayeti ātmavācakena bhagavataḥ sakāśāt sāksācchravaṇam | śrutam iti śrotravijñānānubhavaavacasā ca tathāgatād ṛte ’nyasyaivambhūtasamastadharmādhiḡamasāmarthyavaikalyād adhiḡamābhāvatoam* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāralokā*, p. 5).

the preaching is given *sub specie aeternitatis*, as a reflex of the absolute truth, even if it dwells on the very concrete aspects of the ritual, practice of visualizations, etc. Accordingly, the *saṅgītikāra* also exists in a condition devoid of precise geographical and temporal specifications—the *tantra* is not only de-localized but also de-historicized. And precisely this is the seal of its authenticity. In line with a trend already present in the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, through this formula (which in Tantric commentarial literature is sometimes labelled *nidānavākya*<sup>7</sup> or *vijahārapada*<sup>8</sup>) the teaching is, so to speak, projected into a timeless dimension without geographical coordinates. The Bhagavān is no more, or at least not necessarily, the historical Buddha. According to Kumāracandra, for instance, he is the Dharmakāya.<sup>9</sup> Commentators imbue this formula with various symbolic meanings and, in some cases, discuss it at length at the beginning of their works.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> That is, following Isaacson (2021: 486), “the statement of the circumstances/initial reason.” The compound *nidānavākya* occurs, for instance, in *Yogaratnamālā*, pp. 103, 105; *Gūḍhapadā*, fol. 3r; *Guṇavati*, p. 2; and *Muktāvalī*, introd. (Isaacson 2021: 469).

<sup>8</sup> In most Tantric sources, the third-person perfect *vijahāra* in fact replaces the third-person present *viharati* (or *viharati sma*) at the end of the sentence. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest occurrence of the compound *vijahārapada* occurs in the second chapter of the *Guhyasiddhi* by Padmavajra (probably 8th cent.), entitled *vijahārapadanirvṛttinirdeśa* (see in particular stt. 2.6, 2.7, 2.35, 2.60). It is also found in Candrakīrti’s *Pradīpoddyotana* (10th cent. [?]); see ed. Chakravarti, pp. 10, 17, ed. *Dhīh* 48: 131, 139. See also Kamalanātha’s *Ratnāvalī nāma Hevajrapañjikā* (fol. 1v2). In early Kālacakra works, such as the *Vimalaprabhā* (vol. 1, pp. 31–32) and the *Hevajratantrapiṇḍārthaṭīkā* (colophon of section 2), this formula is also labelled as *vijahārasthāna*.

<sup>9</sup> *bhagavān iti [...] nirābhāsaprakāśamahāsukhasvabhāvajñānaṃ bhagaḥ, tadvān dharmakāyaḥ* (*Kṛṣṇayamāripañjikā*, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Śrībhānu’s *Amṛtadhārā* (Sferra 2020: 388–390), Vajragarbha’s *Hevajratantrapiṇḍārthaṭīkā* (2nd *pariccheda*, pp. 14–15), and Candrakīrti’s

From a formal point of view, the most important difference lies in the replacement of the toponym with a more elaborated and cryptic compound declined in the locative plural (or occasionally singular), usually beginning with the words *sarvatathāgatakāyavākcitta*<sup>o</sup> and ending with a few other words, such as *°hṛdayavajrayoṣidbhageṣu* (which is found in the *Guhyasamājatantra* and the *Hevajratantra*),<sup>11</sup> and which, with slight variants, can be found in numerous other Tantric scriptures.<sup>12</sup> Some works (for instance the *Dākārṇavatāntra*,<sup>13</sup> the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*,<sup>14</sup> and the

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*Pradīpoddyotana* (ed. Chakravarti, pp. 10–17, ed. *Dhīh* 48: 131–139; see also Wayman 1977). Long commentaries on the *nidāna* are also present in Pāli commentarial literature (see, e.g., *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, pp. 5–42) and in mainstream Mahāyāna commentaries (see, e.g., the *\*Vajracchedikāṭīkā* by Kamalaśīla, P fol. 211r1 ff.; cf. the retranslation by Tenzin, pp. 98–100). The *nidāna* formula is quoted and explained on also by Indrabhūti in the middle of chapter 15 of the *Jñānasiddhi* (prose after st. 27, ed. pp. 139–140).

<sup>11</sup> The word *hṛdaya* is omitted in some manuscripts of the *Hevajratantra* and is not explained by some commentators (for instance by Ratnākaraśānti; see Isaacson 2021: 470).

<sup>12</sup> With the sole intention of providing a few further examples, we limit ourselves to listing some of these scriptures (in Sanskrit alphabetical order), with the indication in brackets of the words that complete the compound ending in the locative case and that are specific to each text (a closer examination of the manuscript sources available for each work might lead to slightly different wordings): *Kalparājatantra* (*°vajrayoginībhageṣu*), *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* (*°sarvavajrayoṣidbhageṣu*), *Vajrāmṛtatantra* (*°hṛdayavajrāmṛtaguhyapadmeṣu*), *Samputodbhavatantra* (*°vajrayoṣidbhageṣu*). A simpler version of the *nidānavākya* can be found, for instance, in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (*evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye bhagavān sarvadevottamanandavane viharati sma*, p. 120).

<sup>13</sup> *evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye bhagavān mahāvīreśvara<ḥ> sarvatathāgatavīrakāyavākcittavajrayoginībhageṣu krīḍitavān* (transliteration by Péter-Dániel Szántó).

<sup>14</sup> *evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye bhagavān śuddhāvāsopari gagana-talapraṭiṣṭhite acintyāścaryādbhutaprabhaktabodhisattvasaṃnipātamaṇḍala-*

*Sarvatathāgatataṭṭvasaṅgraha*)<sup>15</sup> show a different and at times more expanded version of the second part of this formula.

Although this opening is quite frequent in Tantric scriptures, it is not the only one. Some *tantras* completely omit the *nidānavākya* and start with some phrases which are delivered, again in the first person, by the *bhagavān* or one of his manifestations, directly beginning the exposition of the text. In such cases, there are two main patterns: (1) starting with the phrase *athātaḥ*, usually put at the beginning of an *anuṣṭubh* (by far the most common metre, though not the only one, used in Buddhist Tantric scriptures) and usually part of a sentence that contains a verb of saying in the first-person singular, such as *vakṣye* or *sampravakṣyāmi*; and (2) starting without utilizing any standardized opening.

Among the *tantras* that adopt an *athātaḥ*-sentence are, for instance, the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, the *Yoginīsañcāratāntra*, and subsequently the *Jñānodayatāntra*. The *Mahāmāyātāntra* represents a variant of this scheme: the exposition of the teaching in the first person begins with an *athātaḥ*-sentence that is, instead, in prose; and, even more notable, is that it is placed after two stanzas in praise of the deity. It is possible, however, that these initial stanzas, which are not commented on by Ratnākaraśānti in his *Guṇavati*, were added at a later time.

An opening utilizing an *athātaḥ*-sentence was evidently considered irregular or at least less traditional, and commentators

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*māle viharati sma* (p. 1).

<sup>15</sup> <evaṃ mayā śru>tam ekasmin samaye bhagavān sarvatathāgatavajrādhiṣṭhānasamayajñānavividhaviśeṣasamanvāgataḥ, sarvatathāgataratnamukutaṭṭraidhātukadharmarājyābhīṣekaprāptaḥ, sarvatathāgatasarvajñānamahāyogīśvaraḥ, sarvatathāgatasarvamudrāsamatādhigataviśvakāryakaraṇatāśeṣānavaśeṣasattvadhātusarvāśāparipūrakaḥ, mahākṛpo vairocanaḥ śāśvatas tryadhvasamayavyavasthitaḥ sarvakāyavākcittavajras tathāgataḥ, sarvatathāgatādhyuṣitaprasastastavite mahāmaṇiratnapratyupte vicitravarnaghaṅṭāvasaktamārutoddhatapaṭṭasrakāmarahārārdhahārācandropaśobhite akaniṣṭhadevarājasya bhavane vijahāra (p. 3).

usually tried to justify it. For instance, while explaining the first stanza of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* (*athāto rahasyaṃ vakṣye samāsān na tu vistarāt | śrīherukasam̐yogaṃ [sic] sarvakāmārthasādhakam ||*), Jayabhadra, the author of the oldest available commentary in Sanskrit on this work, explains that the phrase *athātaḥ* indicates that the teaching which is about to be imparted is given immediately after the preaching of the *mūlatantra*. Therefore, it is understood that the *laghutantra* which we have access to should be seen as a direct continuation of the deeper and more extensive preaching of the *mūlatantra* (i.e. the *Khasamatantra*)<sup>16</sup> and that the preacher remains the same.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the stanza could be translated as follows:

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<sup>16</sup> *athetyādīnā nipātasamudāyenāsyottaratantratvoṃ niścīnoti | athety ānantarye | khasamatantrād anantaram<sup>A</sup> vakṣyamāṇam idaṃ vakṣye kathayīṣyāmīti sambandhaḥ | ata iti krame hetvarthe ca | tadanantaram iti vispaṣṭam vaktavye,<sup>B</sup> athaśabdopādānaṃ maṅgalārtham | maṅgalādīni śāstrasyādau vācyāni<sup>C</sup> śrotṛṇāṃ nirvighnārtham | adhikārārtham<sup>D</sup> vā | ata evoktam—*

*pūrvaprakṛtāpekṣam<sup>E</sup> maṅgalam athavādhikārikaṃ prāhur |  
athaśabdam athaśabdam kramahetvartham tu śāstrasya || iti |  
(E pp. 105–106, K1 fol. 2r1–3, K2 fols. 2v5–3r4; cf. also Bang 2019:  
140–141 n. 6).*

NOTES (only the most relevant readings are recorded here): <sup>A</sup> °tantrād anantaram K1 (wrongly recorded in E) K2 post correctionem (not recorded in E) ] °tantrānantaram K2 ante correctionem E <sup>B</sup> vaktavye K2 E ] vaktavyeti K1 <sup>C</sup> vācyāni em. Isaacson (Isaacson kindly pointed out to me that a parallel to the sentence beginning *maṅgalādīni*, which gives some support for the emendation *vācyāni*, can be read at the beginning of the *Pañṇavaṇā / Prajñāpanāsūtra* commentary of Haribhadrasūri, ed. p. 1: *prekṣāvātāṃ pravṛttyarthaṃ phalādītritayaṃ sphuṭam | maṅgalam caiva śāstrādau vācyam iṣṭārthasiddhaye ||*) ] vākyāni K1 K2 (the *akṣaras āni* are partly damaged) E <sup>D</sup> °artham em. (Sugiki suggests the same em.) ] °artho K1 K2 E <sup>E</sup> °āpekṣam K1 (not recorded in E) K2 (not recorded in E) ] °āpekṣyam E

<sup>17</sup> A similar, albeit shorter, explanation of the phrase *athātaḥ* is given by Tathāgatarakṣita in his commentary on the *Yoginīsañcāratāntra*: **athāta**

Immediately after [the teaching of the *mūlatantra*], I shall concisely, and not at length[ as in the *Khasama*], teach the secret [Heruka], namely the union [with Vajravārāhī] of the glorious Heruka, [i.e. the Bhagavān] who realizes the aim, i.e. the desire of all [people].<sup>18</sup>

While commenting on the same text, Bhavabhaṭṭa more or less follows the interpretation of his predecessor; the main difference between the two being that, according to Bhavabhaṭṭa, the *Khasamatantra* is, in turn, derived from a larger scripture.<sup>19</sup>

One may note, incidentally, that this explanation of *athātaḥ* reflects the widely attested use of this phrase in non-Buddhist texts, where it sometimes appears at the start of a text (for instance in the case of the *Brahmasūtra* and of the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*), the start of a chapter, or in the middle in order to designate the beginning of a new topic.<sup>20</sup> Being aware of this usage and function

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*ityādi* | **athāta** *ity asmin nīpātasamudāye athaśabda ānantarye, ataḥśabdaś ca krame* | *khasamatantrād anantaram anena vakṣyamāṇakrameṇety arthaḥ* | (p. 2).

<sup>18</sup> This translation of the compound *sarvakāmārthasādhakam* is based on the first of the two interpretations provided by Jayabhadra: [...] *śrīherukam iti viśeṣyaṃ padam, rahasyam iti viśeṣaṇam* | *ata eva sarvakāmārthasādhakam iti bhagavato viśeṣaṇam yuktaṃ* | *sarveṣāṃ kāmō 'bhilāṣaḥ* | *sa evārthaḥ prayojanam* | *tasya sādhaḥ bhagavān* | *atas tam* | *athavā sarve ca te kāmāś ceti viśeṣaṇasamāsaḥ* || (ed. p. 106).

<sup>19</sup> For further details, see Bang 2019, where the beginning of the *viṇṇa* by Bhavabhaṭṭa (introduction and commentary on stt. 1.1–2) is edited again and translated into English.

<sup>20</sup> See, just to quote a few examples, *Kubjikāmatatantra* 23.149, 23.154; *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 1.29, 4.1, etc.; *Netratantra* 12.1, 17.1; *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* 4.40.1, 4.113.1, etc.; *Brahmayāmala* 3.1, etc.; *Matsyendrasaṃhitā* 4.1, 7.1, etc.; *Rudrayāmala* 2.1, 9.1, etc.; *Liṅgapurāṇa* 2.37.1; *Svacchandatantra* 13.8. The same phrase can be observed in medical texts (*Aṣṭāṅgasaṅgraha* 2.1, 25.1, etc.; *Carakaśaṃhitā* 5.1.1, 6.2.1, etc.; *Bhelaśaṃhitā* 1.12.1, 1.14.1, etc.; *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, beginning of each *adhyāya*) and in astronomical works (*Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, introduction to the *sāmvatsarasūtra*).

of the phrase *athātaḥ*, as well as the auspicious value traditionally attributed to the indeclinable *atha* at the beginning of a work,<sup>21</sup> it is very probable that some compilers of Buddhist Tantric scriptures applied this phrase to the opening of their compositions, especially if they were meant to be a continuation or portion of previous teachings. Notwithstanding, such use of this phrase was unusual in Buddhist scriptures.

In his *Guṇavati*, Ratnākaraśānti (11th cent.) explains that the word *atha* highlights the connection of the *Mahāmāyātāntra* with other *tantras* where the *nidānavākya* is already present; that would explain why this formula is not repeated in this *tantra*. In this context, the word *ataḥ* would mean ‘therefore.’ Thus, in light of Ratnākaraśānti’s commentary, the text of the *nidānavākya* in the *Mahāmāyātāntra* could be translated as follows:

Now, [i.e. immediately following the preaching of other *tantras*, such as the *Vajrasāekhara*, and in connection with them,] I will therefore proclaim the *tantra* that is called *Supreme Secret of the Vajradākinīs, the Queens of the Secret*, since it is a quick means of obtaining awakening for those who prefer very brief expositions].<sup>22</sup>

Raviśrījñāna’s (11th cent.) explanation in his *Amṛtakaṇikā* is somewhat more elaborate. He too must explain why the

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance *Amarakośa* 3.3.246ab: *maṅgalānantarārambhaprasāna-kārtsnyeṣv atho atha*. Regarding this, see also above, note 16.

<sup>22</sup> Text: *athāto vajradākinīnām guhyeśvarīṇām paramaguhyaṃ* (em. Rinpoche and Dwivedi ] *paramaguptaṃ* MSS) *nāma tantraṃ pravakṣye* || Commentary: **athetyādi** | *naitat tantraṃ muktakam, kiṃ tarhi tantrāntaraiḥ samprayuktam* | *tasmād ayam athasabdah pūrvatantrāpekṣayānantaryam asya tantrasya dyotayati* | *ata eva nāsyādaḥ nidānavākyaṃ evaṃ mayetyādikaṃ prayuktam, prāg eva prayuktatvāt, tadyathā śrīvajrasāekhara* | **ata** *iti yasmād atisaṃkṣeparucīnām idam eva bodher āśu sādhanam* | **ataḥ pravakṣye** *iti sambandhaḥ* | (cf. ed. p. 2). Regarding this passage, see also the remarks by Tāranātha reported in Almogi 2020: 85–86 (note that section 3.3 in Almogi 2020, Part One is all relevant for this topic).



(*Mañjuśrī*)*nāmasaṅgīti* begins with the word *atha*, which *metri causa* replaces the longer phrase *athātaḥ*.<sup>23</sup> The solution he proposes (probably facilitated by the fact that in the *Nāmasaṅgīti* the word *atha* is not part of a stanza containing a verb of saying)<sup>24</sup> is to interpret the initial *pāda* of the work as a reformulation, evidently more esoteric, of the first words of the *nidānavākya*. Therefore, *atha vajradharaḥ śrīmān* would correspond respectively to the words *evaṃ mayā śrutam*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The use of this phrase in the *Nāmasaṅgīti* is consistent with the use described above, according to which *athātaḥ* would mark the beginning of a section or the continuation of a teaching. In fact, according to a tradition supported by verse 1.13 and by the final colophon of the *Nāmasaṅgīti* itself (see *Amṛtakaṇikā*, p. 109), this work would be part of the *Māyājālamahātāntra*.

<sup>24</sup> The syntactic unit that opens with the indeclinable *atha* actually includes the first six stanzas of the text. The structure of these stanzas can be summarized as follows: “Now, the Glorious Vajradhara[, i.e. Vajrapāṇi], the supreme tamer of those hard to tame [...] (stt. 1–2), together with [his retinue, i.e.] the lords having ripples of furrowed brow [...] (stt. 3–5), after having paid homage to the Lord Bhagavān [...], said the following (st. 6).” See Wayman 1985: 57–58.

<sup>25</sup> *tatra tāvat “atha vajradharaḥ śrīmān” ityādiṣoḍaśaślokaḥ adhyeṣaṇāvyañjana tad eva paramākṣaram āha—atheti | akāreṇātra nairātmyāpratipādatvena<sup>A</sup> sarvākāravaroḥpetā śūnyatoktā<sup>B</sup> | thakāreṇāpy akṣobhyasvabhāvavratipādatvena<sup>C</sup> nirālambakarūṇā | etac ca suviśadasamputahevajraṭīkāyā<sup>D</sup> vyākhyātam | tayor advaidhān mañivarataḥkāntaḥsthitasahañānandaśukram evaṃśabdābhidheyam<sup>E</sup> athety ucyate | [... (quotation of *Vimalaprabhā*, vol. 1, p. 35.11–14)] ata eva śūnyatākarūṇābhinnam mahāsukhajñānavajram tādātmyena dharatīti vajradharaḥ | vajram abhedyajñānam asatsaṅkalpāsthitaskandhakeśamṛtyuvighnamārair<sup>F</sup> abhedyatvāt | [... (quotation of *Paramārthasevā* 178)] tatsūcakaṃ pañcasūcikaḥvajram bahis tadāyattasūcanārtham<sup>G</sup> dharatīti vā vajradharaḥ | mayety arthaḥ<sup>H</sup> | śrīr advaya-jñānam,<sup>I</sup> tadanubhavarūpatvena tādātmyena nityayogāc chrīmān | śrutam ity arthaḥ<sup>J</sup> | (C fols. 1v6–2r4, E p. 2, L fol. 1v5–10, Tib. D fols. 36v5–37r4, Tib. P fols. 45v2–46r3).*

NOTES (only the most relevant readings have been recorded here): <sup>A</sup>

Utilization of the first-person perspective, although limited to the initial sentence of the text, is not the only possible model. Some *tantras* that omit the *athātaḥ* phrase start without any preamble and without any clear definition of the narrator's identity. The *Siddhaikavīramahātantra*, for instance, directly begins, "Mañjuvajra, the *guru* of the world, for the benefit of human beings taught the *tantra* [called] *Siddhaikavīra*, the chief of heroes, the most excellent, the best among preachers," again with a verse in *anuṣṭubh* (*siddhaikavīraṃ vīreśaṃ pravaraṃ vadatāṃ varam | tantraṃ provāca lokārthaṃ mañjuvajro jagadguruḥ ||*).

In some cases, however, even the unspecified narrator is omitted. The teaching simply unwinds in an assertive and direct way as an inspired speech of the Bhagavān. This model is adopted, for instance, by the *Vajradākamahātantra* (at least at the beginning of the text) and by the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvaratantra*, which both start with the frequently quoted verse *rahasye parameramyē sarvātmani sadā sthitaḥ*,<sup>26</sup> as well as by the *Sarvarahasyatantra*.

There is also the possibility that different ways of starting a *tantra* are combined together. In the *Abhidhānottaratantra*, for instance, its

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*nairātmyā*° C ] *nairātmya*° L E (equally possible) <sup>B</sup> *sūnyatoktā* C ] *sūnyatā proktā* L E (ep) <sup>C</sup> °*pratipādatvena* L ] °*pratipādanena* C E (ep) <sup>D</sup> *suviśadasamputa*° C (see Tōh. 1184) ] *suviśadaṃ samputaṃ* L E; *suviśadasphuṭaṃ* conj. Lal <sup>E</sup> *evaṃ*° L ] *eva* C E <sup>F</sup> °*saṅkalpāsthita*° C E ] °*saṅkalpodbhūta*° L (ep); °*saṅkalpāsthitaṃ* em. Lal <sup>G</sup> *tadāyatta*° L ] *tadāyattatva*° C E; *tadantas tattva*° conj. Lal; \**tadāyattatva*° Tib. D P (*de dbaṅ du gyur pa ṅid*) <sup>H</sup> *mayety arthaḥ* C L post correctionem ] *maṃyety arthaḥ* L ante correctionem; *matv arthaḥ* E <sup>I</sup> *advayajñānaṃ* C (*advayajñānan*) ] *advayaṃ jñānaṃ* L E <sup>J</sup> *chrīmān | śrutam ity arthaḥ* em. (see Tib. P: *dpal ldan te thos pa zes pa'i don no*) ] *chrīmān | śrutam iti yorthaḥ* C; *iti yo 'rthas* L; *chrīmān | śrutam iti mayārthaḥ* E; cf. Tib. D: *dpal ldan de thos pa zes pa'i don to*

<sup>26</sup> The sentence continues in a different way in the two texts (which in any case show close parallels in the following stanzas): *sarvaḍākinīmayahaḥ sattvo vajradākaḥ paraṃ sukham* (*Vajradāka*, p. 87; note that *pāda c* is here hypermetrical), *sarvabuddhamayaḥ sattvo vajrasattvaḥ paraṃ sukham* (*Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvaratantra*, p. 143).

version of the *vijahārapada*<sup>27</sup> is preceded by three *maṅgalaśloka*s dedicated to Vajraḍāka and the Vajraḍākinīs; and is followed, a few sentences later, by the same stanza found at the beginning of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*.<sup>28</sup>

In all cases, geographical and historical context is usually lacking—with the significant exception of the *Laghukālacakratantra*, which fails to comply with this rule. In this case, we see the first promulgators of the Kālacakra rooting this nascent Tantric cycle geographically and historically as part of a precise founding strategy, although the geographical location and precise temporal indications of when the *tantra* itself was revealed by the Buddha are steeped in symbolic meaning and certainly do not reflect historical reality. The *tantra*, formally recited by Mañjuśrīyaśas, reports the teachings that, according to tradition, the Bhagavān imparted to Sucandra (an incarnation of Vajrapāṇi) and sets the stage for the debate between them. It should be noted, however, that geo-historical information is not given at the very outset of the text, but rather in stanzas 1.26–27; and that the *Laghukālacakratantra* refers to and partly explains the *nidānavākya* in chapter 5, stt. 92, 95. The text, in *sragdharā* metre, starts directly, namely without any introductory formula, with the words of the *saṅgītikāra*. King Sucandra is depicted as paying homage to the Bhagavān (referred to by means of pregnant epithets) and requesting instruction from him.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye bhagavān sarvatathāgata-vajrakrodha<ḍāka>ḍākinīguhyaḥṛdayeṣu vijahāra* (fol. 1v3) (°*hṛdayeṣu* em. ] °*hyadayaiṣu* MS).

<sup>28</sup> *a<thā>to rahasyaṃ vakṣye samāsān na tu vistarāt <|> śrīherukasya saṃyogaṃ sarvvakāmārthasādhakaṃ ||* (fol. 1v6).

<sup>29</sup> According to some stanzas quoted by Nāropā in his *Paramārthasaṅgraha* (p. 66) with attribution to the *mūlatantra* (= *Ādibuddhatantra*), the preaching of the Kālacakra is said to have been originally imparted by the Bhagavān himself in a large assembly of Bodhisattvas present at the great *stūpa* of Dhānyakaṭaka in Andhra. The *Vimalaprabhā*, which presents the oldest traditional account of the early history of the system,

The tendency to de-historicize the teaching and strip it of narrative frames implies that many of the devices used by the redactors of non-Tantric Buddhist scriptures were no longer (or not always) applicable. These strategies are variegated and complex, and have yet to be studied in detail, verified and subsequently evaluated in their full scope and implications.<sup>30</sup> As a first approximation, and trying to reduce a potentially complex theoretical reflection to the essentials, it is enough to note here that these strategies especially concern what is not immediately evident in the letter of the text and what we could define as ‘additional’ or ‘implicit meaning.’<sup>31</sup> These strategies can be divided into intertextual and intratextual.

Intertextual strategies aim to produce further meaning by placing a passage, *sutta/sūtra*, or chapter in a specific context. Accordingly, they relate particularly to the development and tuning of a narrative framework and horizon of meaning, namely the sequence of texts or narrative blocks, as they are arranged within a collection or book. Let us consider, for instance, the famous speech in which the Buddha recounts to the monks his own experience on the night of his awakening. In one version of the Pāli Canon, namely in *Majjhimanikāya* 19 (*Dvedhāvittakassutta*), this description follows some teachings on the correct way to practice awareness, on how to exercise and develop non-judgmental attention accompanied by concentration. Instead, in the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins the episode is preceded by a

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informs us that the teaching was subsequently transmitted for centuries in the majestic region of Sambhala/Śambhala, and eventually revealed in its shorter form (that is, in the *Laghukālacakratāntra*) by Śrīyaśas, an incarnation of Mañjuśrī. Puṇḍarīka, the son of Śrīyaśas and the author of the *Vimalaprabhā*, was said to have been an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara (see *Vimalaprabhā*, vol. 1, p. 22 ff.). For further details, see Newman 1987: 70–113 and Newman 1991.

<sup>30</sup> For a recent study on this topic, see Allon 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Note that the reasoning which is carried out here does not refer to the traditional categories of *nītārtha* and *neyārtha*, *naruta* and *yathāruta*, etc.

description of the acquisition of supernatural powers.<sup>32</sup> This is not a meaningless difference and the implications are clear. The sequence of the *sutta*—and nothing overtly expressed in words—suggests that to achieve awakening, the Theravādin(s) who redacted *Majjhimanikāya* 19 deemed it necessary to cultivate mindfulness and insight, particularly towards the mind and mental states.<sup>33</sup> The redactors of the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, in turn, deemed it necessary to achieve *siddhis* (or ‘perfections’), attainable through *yoga* and representing (also in other Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions) the sign of approaching liberation. It is likely that this reflects the contrast between two different currents coexisting in many Buddhist traditions: one focusing more on the cultivation of mindfulness and discriminative analysis; the other on the cultivation of *yoga* techniques and sometimes even asceticism.

Intratextual strategies, instead, aim to bring out further meaning solely through elements internal to the text, and therefore relate to the form itself of the text, that is to say its inner structure, the typology and sequence of the formulas utilized, the use of key or evocative words and quotations (which can be unattributed or attributed) or paraphrases of passages from other works, etc. In fact, the internal structure of a text can echo similar structures in other works and thus, especially in the case of scriptures, can work as a way to make cross-references. The use of formulas in particular and sometimes also other devices (e.g. the repetition of similar sequences of formulas or similar sets of stanzas) reflects, at least in some cases, even a narrative strategy with precise semiotic intentions—its function cannot be reduced to merely being an aid

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<sup>32</sup> See *Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, pp. 116–119.

<sup>33</sup> We may say, *en passant*, that the situation is, of course, more complex if we consider that the Pāli Canon is in fact the result, not perfectly homogenized, of the fusion of various traditions and trends that existed in early Buddhist circles. A different account of the Buddha’s experience on the night of his awakening can be read in *Majjhimanikāya* 4 (*Bhayabheravasutta*).

for the memorization and transmission of texts, it also plays a significant role in the construction of meaning.<sup>34</sup> The inclusion of keywords in a text can better illuminate the scope of its teaching and in some cases even its original context.<sup>35</sup>

In Buddhist *tantras*, the intertextual strategies are applicable only rarely because they are by nature linked to the narrative framework of the works (which, in turn, are arranged within a canon), which in Tantric texts is less relevant or even completely absent. Instead, the intratextual strategies are applicable *mutatis mutandis* and can be observed more frequently. Particularly important strategies include: (1) the use and reuse of portions of text originally belonging to other works and, in some cases, to other traditions;<sup>36</sup> (2) the use of technical terminology and the application of traditional categories to topics that are purely Tantric; (3) the use of stock phrases, sometimes with different meanings; and (4) the expansion of passages originally belonging to other texts.

In this paper, which is intended to be just the beginning of an investigation, I shall provide only a few examples for the last three above-mentioned categories.

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<sup>34</sup> One example is discussed in Sferra 2011.

<sup>35</sup> For a case study, see Sferra 2007.

<sup>36</sup> On the broad category of 'reuse' in the Indian context (also with occasional, interesting references to other cultural aspects), see Freschi 2012, 2015 (the entire volume to which this is the introduction is also relevant), and Freschi & Maas 2017. This can be seen as a widespread phenomenon when considering that the number of stanzas reused from other sources is, at times, quite large. This is the case, for example, in the *Sarvarahasya*, a short *tantra* of about 200 stanzas. Here, almost a quarter of them come from other texts, in particular from the *Guhyasamāja* (for more than twenty-seven and a half stanzas of the entire text!) and from the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṅgraha* (about 10 stanzas). A synoptic table of the stanzas reused in the *Sarvarahasyatantra* can be seen in Isaacson & Sferra, forthcoming-b, Appendix.

As for the use and reuse of portions of text originally belonging to other works, I shall limit myself to a general remark, namely that from an emic point of view the composite character of the texts is not perceived of negatively; and in the context of Indian religious literature it is likely an oversimplification to label this phenomenon negatively as plagiarism, also from the etic point of view. Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of a 'composite text' in Indian Tantric Buddhism is the *Nāmasaṅgīti*. In his commentary on the text, among other things, Vilāsavajra (8th cent.) shows that the epithets listed in this eulogy are actually quoted from other works. It is worth noting that by pointing this out, Vilāsavajra is emphasizing the authoritativeness of the text rather than belittling its value (even if it is unclear whether it is the redactors of the *Nāmasaṅgīti* who drew from previous sources or if the opposite may be true, at least in some cases).

## 2. Strategies

### 2.1. Use of Technical Terminology and Traditional Categories

In Tantric texts, the application of traditional Buddhist categories extraneous to their specific context may, at first glance, seem to be dissonant and confusing; lacking any logical coherence and having no real use. However, the use of known sets of names, categories and concepts in connection with new arguments, rather than being a result of a merely ornate style, performs an important function. In particular, by resorting to specific traditional categories and taxonomic schemes, it is possible to: (1) give greater credibility to a text (and its content) and to cover it with an aura of orthodoxy; and, sometimes, (2) establish hierarchical relations between the new text (and the tradition it represents) and other works, as well as between different Buddhist (and in some cases even non-Buddhist) traditions.

Let us first consider aspect (1), mentioned above. Connecting a text with other works through known terminological and conceptual sets suggests that: the novel elements of practice and doctrine present in the 'new' text are, indeed, rooted in tradition;

they are in perfect continuity with what is already explicit in it; and, in the final analysis, one cannot even speak of absolute novelty since the 'new' elements were implicitly present even before.

For example, according to some Tantric texts, during the initiation ritual and *yoga* practice that involves sexual union, the practitioner is supposed to experience four 'blisses' (*ānanda*). Texts and authors differ about the sequence of the last two blisses, but this topic shall not be addressed.<sup>37</sup> What is relevant here is that both scriptures and commentators relate these blisses with other sets of four items. So, naturally enough, *ānanda*, *paramānanda*, *vīramānanda*, and *sahajānanda*<sup>38</sup> are respectively connected with: the four *mudrās* (*karmamudrā*, etc.); the four *kṣaṇas*, or 'moments' (*vicitra*, etc.); the four upper initiations (*kalaśābhiṣeka*, etc.); and the four kinds of 'fruit' (*phala*) that are related to the four stages of the practice. The terms used to refer to the four kinds of fruits (i.e. *niṣyanda*, *vipāka*, *puruṣakāra*, and *vaimalya*) are mostly drawn from Abhidharmic literature; only *vaimalya* is not present in Abhidharma classifications.

One might say there is nothing surprising in this since it is precisely in Buddhist scholasticism that (as far as Buddhism is concerned) a reflection on causality is developed for the first time, aimed at defining the various types of causes (*hetu*), conditions (*pratyaya*), effects (*kārya*), and their relationships. And it is on the basis of the Abhidharmic taxonomies that later Buddhist philosophers will deepen the topic of causality, also in comparison with other traditions. We must acknowledge, however, that the fruits described in Abhidharmic texts fit quite poorly (i.e. only to a limited extent) with those related to the

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed exposition and some discussion on this point, see Isaacson 2010; see also Isaacson & Sferra 2014: 96–101.

<sup>38</sup> This is the sequence of the blisses we read, for instance, in *Hevajratāntra* 1.1.29; the sequence *ānanda*, *paramānanda*, *sahajānanda*, and *vīramānanda* can be read, instead, in *Sekoddeśa* 80–81.



practice of *yoga*; the two contexts are very different. Joining the two categories (the fruits of action and the fruits of *yoga*) into a single whole must, therefore, have a specific function. The inclusion of *niṣyanda*, *vipāka* and *puruṣakāra*, with the addition of *vaimalya* as the fourth (or third, according to some interpreters), within the larger scheme of the four blisses, etc. is not simply a reference to a known set of terms, but also an introduction of an additional hermeneutic level.

Unlike other sets, that of fruits is not thoroughly explained by Tantric commentators.<sup>39</sup> *Hevajratantra* 2.4.56–58, which represents the *locus classicus* for the elucidation of the four fruits in Tantric scriptures, paraphrases the Abhidharmic definitions of the first three fruits.<sup>40</sup> The ‘fruit of equal emanation’ (*niṣyandaphala*) is called such because what is experienced corresponds to what was done and actions produce commensurate results. When a small action produces the ripening of a great result, there is the fruit of ‘maturation’ (*vipāka*). The fruit arising from ‘human effort’ (*puruṣakāra*) stems from the activity of the practitioner. ‘Purity’ (*vaimalya*), the last fruit, derives from the purification attained by means of *yoga*. In some early Kālacakra works, these terms designate the four parts of what is sometimes called *sūkṣmayoga*, that is to say, the phase of the *yoga* practice where the *bodhicitta* (physically speaking, the semen), after having been retained, is supposed to flow upward along the central channel. The four fruits (*niṣyanda*, *vipāka*, etc.) correspond to the four phases of this ascent.<sup>41</sup>

There is no intrinsic need for these correspondences, even more so because one does not find an exact parallel with the five kinds of

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<sup>39</sup> See Isaacson & Sferra 2014: 106–107 n. 34.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, *Abhidharmakośa* 2.57–58 and *Abhidharmasamuccaya-kārikā* 1.16–17.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., *Hevajratantrapiṇḍārthaṭīkā ad* 1.5.8 (ed. and tr. in *First Śaḍaṅga-yoga*, pp. 33–34) and *Vimalaprabhā ad Laghukālacakratantra* 4.111.

fruit listed and described in Abhidharmic works<sup>42</sup>—*ādhipatyaphala* (the Fruit of Sovereignty) and *visamyogaphala* (the Disjunction Fruit) are not mentioned at all; instead, there is *vaimalyaphala*. In theory, it would have been possible to invent four new terms. Most likely, the correspondences were established only to add an Abhidharmic flavour to the Tantric doctrines and practices; and, therefore, also Abhidharmic authority and legitimation.

Regarding the above-mentioned aspect (2), in some cases, by resorting to specific traditional categories and taxonomic schemes, it is also possible to establish hierarchical relations between different Buddhist traditions. For instance, let us consider the description of our world-system (*lokadhātu*). As is well known, this is an essential part of the Buddhist Weltanschauung. Such descriptions can be found in both Pāli and Sanskrit works, particularly in Abhidharmic texts, with some minor and major differences mostly concerning the colors, shapes, and measurement of and distances between the divisions of the terrestrial world. Similar descriptions can be found in Brāhmaṇical and Jaina works, as Willibald Kirfel pointed out already in 1920.<sup>43</sup> The description found in the *Abhidharmakośa* is certainly one of the most influential and important (see 3.53cd–55).<sup>44</sup> Its scheme recurs (with variations on secondary points) also in subsequent texts, including Tantric ones. Anupamavajra's *Ādikarmaṣāḍaṅga*<sup>45</sup> and Āryadeva's *Sūtaka*<sup>46</sup> are representative of

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<sup>42</sup> Apart from the *Abhidharmakośa* and the *Abhidharmasamuccayakārikā* (see above note 40), see, for instance, *Abhidharmadīpavibhāṣaprabhāvṛtti*, pp. 206–213; *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkārahāṣya* ad 17.22–23; *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, p. 71; *Madhyāntavibhāṣabhāṣya* 4.16.

<sup>43</sup> For a more recent contribution, see Huntington 2018.

<sup>44</sup> See below, Appendix 2. Unfortunately, the part related to this topic in the *Abhidharmadīpavibhāṣaprabhāvṛtti* is almost completely lost at this point (see ed. Introduction, p. 13).

<sup>45</sup> [...] *catūratnamayaṃ sumeruṃ dhyāyāt | tanmadhye nānāratnakhacita-siṃhāsanopari vikacāṣṭadalakamalam, kamalaḡarbhe śrīmadgurbhātṭāraḡam vicitrābharaṇabhūṣitaṃ vajrasattvalilayā sthitaṃ drṣṭvā | tataḡ sumeroḡ*

this, with the colors having been changed and the names of the deities added. But the most significant difference is found in the *Laghukālacakratāntra*. Here, cosmology plays a ‘political’ role<sup>47</sup>—added to the above-mentioned description based on colors is a portrayal of the main deities of the traditional pantheon corresponding to a spatial relationship. The central position is represented by Kālacakra, which therefore becomes the essential reference point for the entire cosmic depiction.<sup>48</sup>

A similar function is performed by the symbolic explanation of the parts of the *maṇḍala*, which in some descriptions (for instance in the *Sarvarahasyatantra*, st. 118 and ff.) are associated with the main categories of Buddhist practice and doctrine.<sup>49</sup> In both cases, not just a process of legitimation is at issue, but also an attempt at hierarchization and inclusivism.

However, we can imagine that these dynamics are largely unconscious and that the majority of Tantric practitioners have

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*pūrvato 'rdhacandrākāraṃ śuklaṃ pūrvavideham | dakṣiṇe tryaśraṃ  
suvarṇavarṇaṃ jambudvīpaṃ | paścime parimaṇḍalaṃ raktam aparagodā-  
nīyam | uttare caturaśraṃ śyāmam uttarakuruṃ vibhāvya | sarvaṃ etat  
pratyekaṃ padmarāgendranīlavaidūryamarakatavajramuktāpravālaparipūrṇaṃ  
dhyāyāt | | (Ādikarmapradīpa by Anupamavajra, ed. p. 20).*

<sup>46</sup> *evaṃ punaḥ pṛthivīdhātur bāhye 'pi pañcākāreṇa bhidyate | caturdvīpāḥ  
sumeruś ca | tatra sumerur mahāvairocanasyādhiṣṭhānam, pūrvavideho 'kṣo-  
bhyasyādhiṣṭhānam, jambudvīpo ratnasambhavyādhiṣṭhānam, aparagodānīyo  
'mitābhasyādhiṣṭhānam, uttarakurur amoghasiddher adhiṣṭhānam ity uktaḥ  
pañcadhā pṛthivīdhātuḥ (Sūtaka by Āryadeva, ed. Wedemeyer, p. 355; cf.  
ed. Pandey, p. 11).*

<sup>47</sup> See *Laghukālacakratāntra* 1.10–25 and its commentary (see Newman 1987: 471–531).

<sup>48</sup> See below, Appendix 2.

<sup>49</sup> Symbolic explanations can be observed also in non-Tantric sources, for instance in the *Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana* with regard to the parts of the *stūpa*: *catvāri smṛtyupasthānāni prathamā vedī yāvāt pañcendriyāni caturthī vedī |* (p. 216). See also Roth 2009: 63–64.

not perceived a real difference between the visualization of the *maṇḍala* and, for example, the cultivation of the *smṛtyupasthānas*. In fact, it is believed that what makes the practice of the *maṇḍala* effective is precisely the homology between the Buddhist doctrinal categories and the parts of the *maṇḍala* along with their identification. Subjectively, there is the perception of practicing equivalent methods, both valid, albeit for different types of practitioners. Everything that is in one method is in the other as well; the meaning and content of the Tantric *maṇḍala* is imbued with mainstream Buddhist doctrines and practices.

## 2.2. Use of Stock Phrases

The use of stock phrases is perhaps the feature that most immediately catches the eye of the reader. As is well known, it is not an exclusive practice of Tantric texts or even of Buddhist texts alone—it is a phenomenon that can be defined as pan-Indian. There is reason to believe that through the use of famous expressions and stock phrases redactors and authors of Tantric texts were not attempting to hide references to other works. On the contrary, these references serve to create a link with previous scriptures and works, and give authoritative support to these new compositions, even if the original source is not explicitly cited. Again, there are numerous examples, but we shall limit ourselves to looking at only a few representative ones.

Let us consider, for instance, *Samājottara* 38:

*anādinidhanaṃ śāntaṃ bhāvābhāvākṣayaṃ<sup>50</sup> vibhum |*

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<sup>50</sup> *bhāvābhāvākṣayaṃ* is an emendation supported by the Tibetan translation (*dños dan dños med zad pa'i gtso*, P fol. 159v5) and by the quotations of this stanza in other sources (see, e.g., *Laghutantraṭīkā*, p. 48; *Hevajratantraṭīkā* 10.1 [Sferra 2009: 111]). The same reading occurs in the quotation of this verse in the *Jñānasiddhi*, chapter 15, where it is also followed by a commentary (ed. pp. 134–135). The reading of the printed editions of the *Guhyasamājatantra* by Bagchi (1965) and by Matsunaga (1978) is instead *bhāvābhāvākṣayaṃ*. Other sources have

*śūnyatākaruṇābhinnam bodhicittam iti smṛtam* ||

The initial compound *anādinidhana(m/h)* is strongly evocative, not only intrinsically (the words ‘without beginning and end,’ in fact, refer directly to the ultimate, unconditioned reality) but also because it echoes other stanzas that begin in the same way. This compound occurs often as the first word of an odd *pāda* (but sometimes also in other positions or as the first part of even *pādas*) of a number of *anuṣṭubhs* in Sanskrit literature. Among the works predating the composition of the *Guhyasamāja* that contain this compound, are both Buddhist works (such as the *Sarvatathāgata-tattovasaṅgraha*<sup>51</sup> and the *Nāmasaṅgīti*)<sup>52</sup> and non-Buddhist works (such as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Niśvāsamukhatattovasamhitā*).<sup>53</sup> Among the non-epic and non-scriptural Brāhmaṇic texts that had a strong cultural significance, one of the most remarkable examples is perhaps represented by the beginning of Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya*.<sup>54</sup> Among the many stanzas of the *Mahābhārata* where this compound appears, the following are noteworthy examples: *Āraṇyakaparvan* 186.15cd (*anādinidhanam bhūtam viśvam akṣayam avyayam*); and *Śāntiparvan* 271.19ab (*anādinidhanam śrīmān harir nārāyaṇam prabhuḥ*). It is highly likely that the composer of the *Samājottara* had these stanzas (or similar stanzas) in mind and was intentionally trying to reference them. The words (*a*)*kṣayam* and *vibhum* that appear in the second *pāda* are parallel to the words *akṣayam* (‘undecaying’) and *prabhuḥ* (‘powerful’) in the two above-quoted verses from the *Mahābhārata*. The word *prabhu*, in fact, is essentially a synonym of *vibhu*. The stanza of the *Samājottara* provides the reader with a definition of the *bodhicitta*. So, the

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*bhāvābhāvātmakeṇ* (e.g. *Kriyāsamuccaya*, fol. 180r3, p. 359).

<sup>51</sup> See ed. pp. 5, 494, 533, 559, 561.

<sup>52</sup> St. 100ab: *anādinidhano buddha ādibuddho niranvayaḥ* |.

<sup>53</sup> St. 1.42a: *anādinidhano devo hy ajam akṣaram avyayaḥ* | (p. 158).

<sup>54</sup> *anādinidhanam brahma śabdatattovam yad akṣaram | vivartate ’rthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ* || [...].

intent of the author seems to be to substitute, or at least identify, the absolute of the Brāhmaṇic tradition with the *bodhicitta*. It is no coincidence that this verse will, in turn, be completely (or in part) cited or reused in later texts.<sup>55</sup>

A further step forward is taken by Puṇḍarīka (11th cent.) in two stanzas of the *Vimalaprabhā*. The first stanza makes up part of the Sanmārganiyamoddeśa, the opening section of the work, which represents a sort of manifesto of the new doctrines and practices of the nascent Kālacakra system. The second stanza is presented as a quotation from the *mūlatantra* (i.e. the *Ādibuddha*) and is used in the Deśakādisaṅgrahoddeśa in order to define *vajrayoga*, i.e., as John Newman describes, “[t]he perfect integration of the conventional truth of the mentally fabricated maṇḍala and the ultimate truth of the connate luminosity realizing emptiness [...], the inseparable fusion of wisdom realizing emptiness and compassion.”<sup>56</sup>

*uktaḥ samayasattvo yo bhāvābhāvakṣayo vibhuḥ |*  
*anādinidhanaḥ śānto bodhicittaṃ praṇamya tam ||*  
(*Vimalaprabhā*, vol. 1, p. 2)

*astināstiviyatīkrānto bhāvābhāvakṣayo 'dvayaḥ |*  
*śūnyatākaruṇābhinnō vajrayogo mahāsukhaḥ ||*  
(*Vimalaprabhā*, vol. 1, p. 44)

No doubt, in both cases Puṇḍarīka (who, I assume, himself composed the alleged quotation from the *Ādibuddha*) refers to the stanza of the *Samājottara*, which remains widely recognizable thanks to *pādas* b and c of both verses, but also includes a further reference and identification. The new reference is given in the second stanza by replacing the first *pāda*, and therefore also the famous compound *anādinidhanam*, with another strongly evocative compound: *astināstiviyatīkrāntaḥ*. This corresponds to the

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<sup>55</sup> Cf., e.g., *Cittaviśuddhiprakaraṇa* 1; *Hevajratāntra* 1.10.42cd; *Guhyasiddhi* 9.10b; *Kriyāsaṅgrahapañjikā*, Caturthābhiṣekavidhi st. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Newman 2000: 589.

opening *pāda* of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* by Nāgārjuna and is reused (in the instrumental plural) also in the *Sekoddeśa* (st. 25a). Yet the reference to a previous layer, perhaps even to the *Mahābhārata*, is not completely obscured (at least in the second stanza) if in *pāda* b it is admitted that °*kṣayo 'dvayaḥ* might be an intentional allusion to the words (*a*)*kṣayam avyayam* that appear in many previous works, both Buddhist, such as the *Sarvatathāgatattvaśaṅgraha* (ed. p. 152), and non-Buddhist, like the *Manusmṛti* (8.344a) and the *Mahābhārata* (2.11.28d, 3.160.23b, 3.186.15d, 12.206.2b, etc.). Although from the semantic point of view *advaya* and *avyaya* are different from each other, there remains a certain degree of similarity between them from the point of view of the structure of the word: *a-X-aya*.

To understand Puṇḍarīka's project, we must ask ourselves what he anticipated to be the thought process of the reader. Hence, it can be supposed that, according to him, his reader: (1) recognized the famous definition of *bodhicitta* of *Samājottara* 38, an already well-known work when he composed the *Vimalaprabhā*; and (2) understood that, in the second stanza, the word *vajrayoga*—a fundamental concept in the nascent Kālacakra school, which is thus introduced on the basis of a notable scriptural foundation (here also qualified with the pregnant epithet *mahā-sukha*)—represents the new, 'enriched' definition of the *bodhicitta*, even though the latter is not overtly mentioned. In the second stanza quoted above, there is therefore a deliberate overlap of meanings that educated people would immediately be able to perceive and appreciate in all its fullness. It is clear that for others the appreciation would perhaps come at a later time, possibly after encountering the same words and structure in other works or after some training.

Obviously, it cannot be ruled out that in some cases the use of the same phrases in different texts may simply be the result of coincidence, occasioned by the intent of different authors to express a similar concept while respecting metrical structures, the

linguistic repertoire of Sanskrit, etc. For instance, in the last four verses of the second chapter of the *Guhyasamājantra* (stt. 8-11),<sup>57</sup> as well as in five verses of the third chapter of the *Prajñopāyaviniścayasiddhi* by Anaṅgavajra (stt. 9–13),<sup>58</sup> we find the refrain *namo 'stu te*. Preceded by some vocatives, this refrain occurs hundreds of times in Sanskrit religious literature. We cannot be certain, nor exclude, that the redactors of these two texts had a specific work in mind. In particular, among Buddhist scriptures, the refrain *namo 'stu te* can be found in 16 stanzas of the *Sarvathāgatattvasaṅgraha*<sup>59</sup> and, preceded by the vocative *nirālamba*, in forty stanzas of the *Jñānālokālaṅkārasūtra* (in a section of this Mahāyāna scripture that was known among Tantric Buddhists). This familiarity is evidenced, for instance, by the fact that: (1) Advayavajra (a.k.a. Maitreyaṅgātha, Maitrīpā, etc.) quotes one of its verses<sup>60</sup> in two of his works (namely in the

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<sup>57</sup> *aho buddha aho dharma aho dharmasya (saṅghasya Bagchi) deśanā | śuddhatattoārtha śuddhārtha bodhicitta namo 'stu te || dharmanairātmyasambhūta buddhabodhiprapūrika | nirvikalpa nirālamba bodhicitta namo 'stu te || samantabhadra sarvārtha (sattvārtha Bagchi) bodhicittapravarttaka | bodhicarya mahāvajra bodhicitta namo 'stu te || cittam tathāgataṃ śuddham kāyavākittavajradhṛk | buddhabodhipradātā ca bodhicitta namo 'stu te ||* (ed. Bagchi, pp. 9–10; ed. Matsunaga, p. 11).

<sup>58</sup> *namas te śūnyatāgarbha sarvasaṅkalpavarjita | sarvajña jñānasandoha jñānamūrte namo 'stu te || jagadajñānavicchediśuddhatattoārthadeśaka | dharmanairātmyasambhūta vajrasattva namo 'stu te || sambuddhā bodhisattvāś ca tvattaḥ pāramitāguṇāḥ | sambhavanti sadā nātha bodhicitta namo 'stu te || ratnatrayaṃ mahāyānaṃ tvattaḥ sthāvarajaṅgamam | traidhātukam idaṃ sarvaṃ jagadvīra namo 'stu te || cintāmaṇir ivādbhuta jagadiṣṭhārasiddhaye | sugatājñākara śrīmān buddhaputra namo 'stu te ||* (pp. 74–75). Stanzas 3.9–12 of the *Prajñopāyaviniścayasiddhi* are silently reused in *Samputatantra* 2.1.20–23 (cf. ed. Mical, pp. 260–261 [of the PDF] and ed. Skorupski, p. 230). On the relationship between the *Samputatantra* and the *Prajñopāyaviniścayasiddhi*, see Szántó 2016: 405–411.

<sup>59</sup> See ed. pp. 60–62.

<sup>60</sup> I.e. *Jñānālokālaṅkāra* 4.12: *avikalpitasāṅkalpa apratiṣṭhitamānasa | asmṛty amanasikāra nirālamba namo 'stu te ||* (ed. p. 71 [526]).



*Amanasikārādhāra*<sup>61</sup> and in the *Pañcatathāgatamudrāvivarāṇa*),<sup>62</sup> probably since it provides a scriptural basis for the central doctrine of the *amanasikāra*; (2) this verse is also reused in the *Samvarodayatantra*;<sup>63</sup> and (3) we find, eventually, the Tantric Nāgārjuna embedding one stanza of this *sūtra* in the *Caturmudrānvaya*,<sup>64</sup> three stanzas in the *Svādhiṣṭhānakrama* and four stanzas in the *Abhisambodhikrama*.<sup>65</sup> It is therefore possible that the redactors of the *Guhyasamājatantra* and *Anaṅgavajra*, who were active sometime before *Advayavajra*, and (in the case of *Anaṅgavajra* probably) also before the Tantric Nāgārjuna,<sup>66</sup> actually had this portion of text from the *Jñānālokālaṅkārasūtra* in mind, but one cannot be sure. It is also possible that they were influenced by the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṅgraha*, which was, in turn, probably influenced by the *Jñānālokālaṅkārasūtra*, or perhaps even by another Buddhist or non-Buddhist work. *Anaṅgavajra* might have had in mind the *Guhyasamājatantra* itself. Regardless of how they were formed, the fact remains that, once produced and put into circulation, the aforementioned passages from the *Guhyasamāja* and the *Prajñopāyavinīscayasiddhi*, not unlike passages from other texts, became part of a dynamic network of relationships, which had already been partly established and were

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<sup>61</sup> See ed. p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> See ed. p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> *Samvarodayatantra* 8.36 (ed. p. 101) corresponds to *Jñānālokālaṅkāra* 4.12 (see above note 60).

<sup>64</sup> See ed. p. 35.

<sup>65</sup> *Svādhiṣṭhānakrama* 4–6 (= *Pañcakrama* 3.4–6) correspond to *Jñānālokālaṅkāra* 4.16, 5, 34, and *Abhisambodhikrama* 8–11 (= *Pañcakrama* 4.8–11) correspond to *Jñānālokālaṅkāra* 4.4, 17, 12–13.

Verses from the *Jñānālokālaṅkāra* can also be found in other Tantric works; for instance, in Vibhūticandra's *Amṛtakaṇikoddyota*, p. 190.

<sup>66</sup> Both *Anaṅgavajra* and the Tantric Nāgārjuna have probably flourished before the end of the 10th century. On the chronology of the early Ārya school, see Tomabechi 1994.

also continuing to evolve. For the user, that is to say the exponent of the tradition, the refrain *namo 'stu te* creates a formal and virtually significant link with previous and subsequent works, regardless of whether this link arose by chance, consciously or only somewhat consciously.

Similar reasoning can be used regarding the employment of keywords. Let us consider for example the use of the famous compound *prakṛtiprabhāsvara*, which is found in the third chapter of the *Sarvatathāgatattvaśaṅgraha*<sup>67</sup> and which appears again in the *Guhyasamājatantra*.<sup>68</sup> In these two texts (and also in the *Piṇḍīkramasādhana*, where the same compound occurs),<sup>69</sup> *prakṛtiprabhāsvara* is a qualification of the *dharmas*, in line with the theoretical framework typical of the later Mahāyāna mainstream. However, there is no doubt that in an earlier phase, this compound was primarily a qualifier of the mind or mental continua (*citta*); as we read, for example, in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (*prakṛtiprabhāsvarāṇi subhūte tāni cittāni*)<sup>70</sup> and in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* 13.19ab (*matam ca cittam prakṛtiprabhāsvaram sadā tad āgantukadoṣadūṣitam*). Surely, the average educated user of the aforementioned Tantric texts was (and is still today) able to grasp the connection with these (or similar) passages; as well as the reference to an even more ancient scriptural passage which is found, in its Pāli version, in *Āṅguttaranikāya* 1.5 and 1.6, where the mind is said to be luminous and defiled by accidental blemishes.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *prakṛtiprabhāsvarāḥ sarve hy ādiśuddhā nabhaḥsamāḥ* | (ed. p. 124), *prakṛtiprabhāsvarā dharmā hy ādiśuddhāḥ svabhāvataḥ* | (ed. p. 138).

<sup>68</sup> *prakṛtiprabhāsvarā dharmāḥ suviśuddhā nabhaḥsamāḥ* | (2.7ab), *prakṛtiprabhāsvarāḥ sarve anutpannā nirāśravāḥ* | (7.34ab). St. 2.7 is quoted also in *Jñānasiddhi* 15, with the reading *bodhinā'bhisamayair* instead of *na bodhir nābhisamayam* in *pāda c* (see ed. p. 136).

<sup>69</sup> See also *Piṇḍīkramasādhana* 208cd: *prakṛtiprabhāsvarān dharmān deśa vajra namo 'stu te* | |.

<sup>70</sup> See ed. p. 127.

<sup>71</sup> *pabhassaram idaṃ, bhikkhave, cittam | tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi*

### 2.3. Expansions

The reuse of a passage belonging to a previous text can lead to a more complex scenario. Sometimes it does not involve a modification of the source text by substituting only a few words, but rather entails its extension. We shall limit ourselves to briefly discussing two examples taken from two prominent works.

The first concerns one of the most famous stanzas of the *Hevajratantra*:

*caṇḍālī jvalitā nābhau dahati pañca tathāgatān |  
dahati ca locanādīr dagdhe haṃ sravate śaśī || (1.1.32)*

While at first glance the passage may seem relatively simple, it actually lends itself to various interpretations. In fact, in his *Yogaratnamālā*, Kṛṣṇa (a.k.a. Kāṇha) proposes five different explanations.<sup>72</sup> A sixth interpretation is given by Ratnākaraśānti

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*upakkiliṭṭhan ti | (ed. vol. 1, p. 10).*

<sup>72</sup> The first interpretation is from the point of view of the 'generation process' (*utpattikrama*), the second from the point of view of the meaning of the syllables (*akṣarārtha*), and the last three according to tradition (*sampradāya*). In all these interpretations, the word Caṇḍālī is understood as being composed of two aspects: *caṇḍā* and *ālī*, which are, in turn, gradually identified with a series of more specific items. The former is identified with Wisdom (*prajñā*), the syllable *aṃ*, the Dharmodayā, and the left channel (*vāmanāḍī*); while the latter with Vajrasattva, the syllable *hūṃ*, the syllable *a* (*ādyakṣara*), the Means (*upāya*), the right channel (*dakṣiṇanāḍī*), and the mind filled with great compassion (*mahā-kāruṇāmāyacitta*). In the fourth interpretation, the navel, where these two aspects merge, is identified with the central channel (*avadhūtī*); and in the fifth interpretation, with the *mahāmudrā*. The five Tathāgatas are the five aggregates, whereas Locanā, etc., are identified with the elements starting with the earth (interpretations 1, 2, 4); alternatively, the Tathāgatas are the sense faculties, and Locanā, etc. are the elements (interpretation 3); or both are the deities present in the *maṇḍala*, starting with Akṣobhya (interpretation 5). The Moon is the *bodhicitta* or also Vajrasattva/Vajradhara. See ed. Snellgrove, part II, p. 110.

in the *Muktāvalī* (pp. 27–28); in light of the latter, the stanza can be translated as follows:

Caṇḍālī[, i.e. Nairātmyā,] blazes up in the navel. She burns the five Tathāgatas[, namely, Vairocana, etc.]. And she burns Locanā, etc. Once it is burnt, *haṃ*, i.e. the Moon, flows[, i.e. melts].

This stanza was certainly known to the author of the *Samvarodayatantra*, who implicitly refers to it in chapter 31,<sup>73</sup> and was also known to the early Kālacakra masters. The first among them who refers to this verse is Vajrapāṇi (fl. 10th–11th cent.) in his *Laghutantraṭīkā*. He does this implicitly while explaining the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*. In approaching this topic, he takes the teaching of the *Samājottara* (stt. 141–154) as a starting point from which he diverges by adding numerous details and by introducing specific practices.<sup>74</sup> The result, let us say in passing, is the first and perhaps most influential description of the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* practice among the early Kālacakra masters.<sup>75</sup> According to the classification of Vajrapāṇi, the *yoga* limbs are divided further into the four phases that are listed and described in the *Guhya-samāyatantra* (12.60–76) and in the *Samājottara* (135 ff.): *sevā*, *upasevā*, *sādhana*, and *mahāsādhana*. In Vajrapāṇi's work, *Hevajra-tantra* 1.1.32 is clearly rephrased into prose during the explanation of the last two phases, *sādhana* and *mahāsādhana*; and particularly in connection with the description of the last two limbs: *anusmṛti*,

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<sup>73</sup> *caṇḍālī jvalitā prakāśavisaratsaṃvittir evāmalā | dagdhaskandhavikalpīte sravati cānāmbasaṃvedanam | vyomavyāpi samastavastusamatāsampādakaṃ cāmṛtam ||* (31.32). The *Samvarodayatantra* is probably a Nepalese composition produced after the *Laghukālacakratantra* (see Szántó 2019: 279 and also Isaacson & Sferra 2015: 315).

<sup>74</sup> See Sferra 2000: 22–37.

<sup>75</sup> Vajrapāṇi's interpretation is followed by Anupamarakṣita (11th cent.) and Nāropā (11th cent.), who both quote his words verbatim or with minor changes. See *First Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, pp. 122–135, and *Sekoddeśaṭīkā*, pp. 123–130.

with which the practice of the *caṇḍālī* (*caṇḍālīyoga*) is eventually identified; and *samādhi*, which corresponds here to the fusion into unity of the aggregates, the elements, etc., as well as to the melting of the *bodhicitta*.<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that the four phases are also listed in some manuscripts of the *Hevajratāntra*, appearing between the list of the four *kṣaṇas* and the list of the four *āryasatyas* (see 1.1.24–26); however, it seems that they do not assume much importance, and it is not ruled out that they may have been added at a later time in the transmission of the text (concerning this, it is relevant that neither Kṛṣṇa nor Ratnākara-śānti comment on them). Instead, in Vajrapāṇi’s interpretation, these phases assume a prominent role insofar as they represent, for him, a general framework of *yoga* practice as a whole. He tries to show that the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, the *Guhyasamāja*, the *Samājottara*, and the *Hevajratāntra* all converge on the transmission of essential elements of the *yoga* practice. From the discussion in the *Laghutantraṭīkā*, it emerges that the *Cakrasaṃvara* would present the most essential and cryptic formulation of the *yoga* (according to Vajrapāṇi, in stanzas 1.9cd–10ab of this *tantra*, the six limbs of *yoga* are mentioned in an extremely succinct way, with the puzzling indication of only three of them); the *Guhyasamāja* and the *Samājottara* would offer the most detailed and comprehensive presentation; while the *Hevajratāntra*, by describing the *caṇḍālīyoga*, the burning of the Tathāgatas, etc., would explain the final and most important part of the *yoga*

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<sup>76</sup> *tataḥ “sādhane devatābimbam” [Samājottara 173a] iti | iha dhāraṇābalena nābhisthāṃ caṇḍālīm jvalitāṃ paśyati yogī sarvāvāraṇarahitāṃ pratisenopamāṃ mahāmudrām anantabuddharaśmimēghān sphārayantīm prabhāmaṇḍalavīrajitā<m | sā>nusmṛti<ḥ> sādhanam ucyate | dhāraṇānte caṇḍālīyogaṃ bhāvayed iti niyamaḥ | tatas tasyā jñānārciṣā skandhadhātvaīyatanādīni dagdhāny ekalolībhavanti | vāmadakṣiṇanāḍīgatāni vijñānādīpṛthivyādīni maṇḍalasvabhāvāni lalāṭe candramaṇḍale praviṣṭāni | tataś caṇḍālyā jñānārciṣā candre drute sati tad bodhicittaṃ bindurūpeṇādhogataṃ kaṇṭhe hṛdi nābhau guhyakamale ānandaparamavīramasvabhāvena | tato vajramaṇiṃ yāvāt sahañānandasvabhāveneti | athavā vicitravīpākavimardavīlakṣaṇasvabhāveneti | (cf. *Laghutantraṭīkā*, pp. 142–143).*

practice. The fact that there is no reference to the *caṇḍālīyoga* in the *Guhyasamāja* nor the *Samājottara*, and no (significant) reference to the limbs of *yoga* and their subdivisions in the *Hevajratantra*, implies that, according to Vajrapāṇi's interpretation, these scriptures are, so to say, complementary.

Direct partial or complete quotations of *Hevajratantra* 1.1.32 can be found in other early Kālacakra works.<sup>77</sup> However, the reuses of and implicit references to this verse are more germane to our topic. For example, stanzas 19–24 of the fifth section of the *Hevajratantrapañḍārthaṭīkā*, where Vajragarbha claims to be quoting from the *Pañcalakṣahevajra* (namely, the supposed *mūlatantra* of the *Hevajratantra*) and which he uses precisely to comment on *Hevajratantra* 1.1.32.<sup>78</sup> As for the reuses, it is particularly

<sup>77</sup> See, for instance, Vibhūticandra's *Amṛtakaṇikoddyotanibandha*, pp. 138, 158.

<sup>78</sup> *kāmonmādo yadā puṃso lalanā rasanāpy atha | tayoh sampuṭayogena caṇḍālī jvalati dhruvam || [19] jvalitā<sup>A</sup> nābhicakre sā dombīmārgena niḥṣṛtā | rāhukaṃ<sup>B</sup> śāsinam bhittvā haṃkāraṃ taṃ ca sā sprṣet || [20] tayā sprṣṭaḥ sa haṃkāro dravate cāmṛtaṃ tataḥ<sup>C</sup> | skandhadhātṛvādike dagdhe pañcamaṇḍalavāhike || [21] viṣayendriyaruddhe ca ānandādye<sup>D</sup> samutthite | sravati bindukān indor<sup>E</sup> haṃkāro mūrdhni samsthitaḥ || [22] lalāṭacandrataḥ<sup>F</sup> sūrye kaṅṭhād rāhau tato gataḥ | nābhau caṇḍālīkāviṣṭo<sup>G</sup> guhyacakre tato gataḥ<sup>H</sup> || [23] sampāte<sup>I</sup> guhyacakre 'smin kathito 'yaṃ mahāpaśuḥ | trīśūlādhas trināḍīnām yatra randhraṃ pradarsitam || [24] (D fol. 17r7–17v3, E p. 29, K<sup>K</sup> fols. 21r5–21v2, K<sup>N</sup> fol. 20v2–7, Ñ fols. 13r6–13v1); stt. 21cd–35ab are also quoted in the *Amṛtakaṇikā* (ad st. 9.10, ed. pp. 82–83) and commented on in the *Amṛtakaṇikoddyota* (ed. p. 190); H. Isaacson pointed out to me that stt. 20–24 are also quoted by Kelikuliśa in his commentary on the *Hevajratantra* (*Trivajraratnāvalīpañjikā*, fol. 27v3–5) with the following variants: *nābhimadhye* (20a), *sā nirgatā* (20b), *rāhvakaṃ* (20c), *ca mayā sprṣet* (20d), *sitam* (21b), *pañcamaṇḍalavāhake* (21d), *viṣayendriye niruddhe* (22a), *bindukam ānando* (22c), *guhyacakre nipātitaḥ* (23d), *pāto 'sya* (24a), *kathitaṃ tasya* (24b).*

NOTES (only the most relevant readings are recorded here): <sup>A</sup> *jvalitā* Ñ E ] *jvalati* K<sup>N</sup> (contra metrum); K<sup>K</sup> broken <sup>B</sup> *rāhukaṃ* Ñ E ] *rāhvarkaṃ* K<sup>K</sup>; *rāhukaṃ* K<sup>N</sup> <sup>C</sup> *dravate cāmṛtaṃ tataḥ* K<sup>K</sup> K<sup>N</sup> post correctionem (the ante

significant that in the commentary on *Laghukālacakratantra* 4.110 (which we will look at below), Puṇḍarīka cites *Hevajratantra* 1.1.32 within a group of 14 verses that he attributes to the *mūlatantra* (*Vimalaprabhā*, vol. 2, pp. 204–205). In both cases, either because the original context of *Hevajratantra* 1.1.32 is provided (Puṇḍarīka) or because its ‘original formulation’ is provided (Vajragarbha), the author claims to draw on a layer of the transmission of the teachings that is conceptually more authoritative than the one to which both the *Hevajratantra* itself and the *Laghukālacakratantra* belong. The implications of this operation are very important on a hermeneutic level and deserve independent reflections on the self-promotion strategies of the first masters of the Kālacakra (which are not explored here).<sup>79</sup>

The most significant reuse of *Hevajratantra* 1.1.32 is perhaps the one appearing in *Laghukālacakratantra* 4.110. Here *Hevajratantra* 1.1.32 is literally expanded and adapted to the context of the new scripture:

**caṇḍālī nābhicakre navahatabhujage carcikādyādihidaive**  
*hokārajñānagarbhe taḍidanalanibhā jñānatejaḥprabuddhā |*  
**nābhau vairocanaḍīn dahati narapate locanācaksurādīn**  
*sarvān dagdhvā sucandrāt sravati śirasi yo bindurūpaṃ sa*  
*[vajrī ||*

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correctionem reading is unclear, perhaps *drāvate cāmṛtaṃ tataḥ*) ] *dravate cāmṛtaṃ sitam* Ṇ (see D de nas bdud rtsi dkar por 'ju) *Trivajraratnāvalīpañjikā* (ep); *dravate amṛtaṃ sitam* E <sup>D</sup> °ruddhe ca ānandādye K<sup>K</sup> ] °ruddhe cānandādye K<sup>N</sup> (contra metrum); °niruddhe cānandādye Ṇ *Amṛtakaṇikā* (contra metrum); °niruddhe cānandādyai E (contra metrum) <sup>E</sup> *sravati bindukān indor* K<sup>K</sup> (contra metrum) ] *śravati bindukān ando* K<sup>N</sup> (contra metrum); *śravanti bindunīndo* Ṇ; *sravanti bindunīndo* E; *srāvati (yati) bindukān indor Amṛtakaṇikā* (contra metrum) <sup>F</sup> *lalāṭa*° K<sup>K</sup> Ṇ *Trivajraratnāvalīpañjikā* ] *lalāṭe* K<sup>N</sup> *Amṛtakaṇikā* E <sup>G</sup> °āviṣṭo *Trivajraratnāvalīpañjikā* ] °āviṣṭaṃ K<sup>N</sup> E *Amṛtakaṇikā*; K<sup>K</sup> broken; °āviṣṭā Ṇ <sup>H</sup> *gataḥ* em. ] *gatam* K<sup>K</sup> K<sup>N</sup> E *Amṛtakaṇikā*; *gatā* Ṇ <sup>I</sup> *sampāte* K<sup>K</sup> (*sampāte*) post correctionem Ṇ E ] *sampāto* K<sup>K</sup> ante correctionem K<sup>N</sup> *Amṛtakaṇikā*

<sup>79</sup> For some thoughts on this topic, see Sferra 2005.

Caṇḍālī, similar to a flash of lightning, is awakened by the fire of knowledge in the wheel of the navel, which has seventy-two [channels], the presiding deities of which are Carcikā, etc.; in the embryo of knowledge that is the syllable *ho*. O king, in the navel she burns [the five Tathāgatas, i.e.] Vairocana and so on, [as well as] Locanā[, etc.], who correspond to the eye and so forth. After she has burnt all of them, the one who flows from the beautiful moon towards the head is the Vajra-holder, namely [the semen] with the form of a *bindu*.<sup>80</sup>

The *Laghukālacakrantra* does not present a teaching that is radically different from what appears in *Hevajatantra* 1.1.32. It is mainly the context in which the rephrasing of the stanza takes place that is indicative of a different way of understanding it. According to the Kālacakra doctrine, the passage describes the *binduyoga*, which will then be followed by the *sūkṣmayoga*, and therefore the subsequent acquisition of a 'pure body' or of a 'body of knowledge,' the source of the other bodies (*dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*). The conceptual redefinition of the context in which the expansion of *Hevajatantra* 1.1.32 takes place is not without meaning. The 'new' scriptural context orients the reader in their interpretation of the same verse even in its 'original' context. From this point of view, the new reformulation acts in some way as a comment, which, in this case, claims to be the true and most authentic interpretation of the practices described in the *Hevajatantra* as well.

The second example is taken from the well-known verse 2.3 of the *Guhyasamāja*,<sup>81</sup> a rather cryptic passage that was the subject of conflicting interpretations. Although this example concerns a text that predates the above-examined *Hevajatantra*, it is mentioned here secondly as it presents a further strategy. In its original context, the text of the verse that is the subject of the expansion

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. also Wallace 2010: 137 ff.

<sup>81</sup> The same stanza occurs in *Piṇḍikrama* 16.



presents, in fact, an apparent sudden change of topic and style which, in my opinion, is an attempt to surprise and therefore catch the attention of the reader—it forces them to focus and therefore fix the concepts in their own mind.<sup>82</sup>

Verse 2.3 is the start of the Bhagavān's teaching, who was asked by all the Tathāgatas to explain the unsurpassed *bodhicitta*, namely the essence of the body, speech, and mind, i.e. the secret of all the Tathāgatas. The answer is intentionally enigmatic:

*abhāve bhāvanābhāvo bhāvanā naiva bhāvanā |*  
*iti bhāvo na bhāvaḥ syād bhāvanā nopalabhyate ||*

As one might expect, the passage can be explained in various ways; and the Tantric Candrakīrti, the first interpreter of the work, offers four explanations. The text, translated according to the first of them, may be rendered in the following way:

Given the absence [of all things, both stationary and moving (which are the object of creative meditation)], there is the absence of creative meditation. Creative meditation [of something already existing] is indeed not a creative meditation[, since such a thing exists also without creative meditation]. In the same way, a thing [that is both existing and non-existing] is not a thing. [Therefore,] creative meditation is not perceived.

Without going into the details of the different possible interpretations of this verse (for these, refer to the recent studies by Yael Bentor [2010] and Alexander Yiannopoulos [2017]), we shall limit ourselves here to observing that the first three-quarters of this verse are reused and expanded on in another scriptural passage, namely *Sekoddeśa* 28–30ab:<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> A similar function is performed, for example, by stanza 97 of the *Dhammapada*. For some reflection on the subject, see Sferra 2011: 78–79.

<sup>83</sup> Stanzas 28ab, 29–30ab are a back translation from Tibetan and on the basis of the commentaries available in the original Sanskrit (*Paramārthasaṅgraha*, *Sekoddeśapañjikā*, and *Sekoddeśaṭippanī*); they are quoted in the

[**abhāve bhāvanā bimbe yogināṃ sā na bhāvanā** | ]  
*bhāvo 'bhāvo na cittasya bimbe 'kalpitadarśanāt* | |  
[*pratisenāṃ yathādarśe kumārī paśyed avastujām* |  
*atītānāgataṃ dharmam tattvayogy ambare tathā* | |  
*asyā bhāvo na bhāvaḥ syād vastuśūnyārthadarśanāt* | ]

Again, the expansion of the verse behaves as a short, but authoritative comment (the *Sekoddeśa* is itself *buddhavacana*). In fact, the ambiguity of its interpretation is eliminated and, in this case, a more straightforward and binding interpretation is offered. The initial *abhāve* is (as Nāropā explains) the 'cloudless sky.' The meditation of the *yogins* is not a conceptual meditation. The reality that they experience in the emptiness is neither being nor non-being and is likened to the image seen by a young virgin during the *pratisenā* rite,<sup>84</sup> namely a divination liturgy known both in Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources.<sup>85</sup>

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First *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* by Anupamarakṣita and also commented on in the *Guṇabharaṇī* (ed. pp. 117–118). St. 28cd is quoted in the *Sekoddeśaṭippanī*, p. 122.

<sup>84</sup> *tasmād abhāve nirabhre gagane svapnamāyādisadrśe bimbe pratyāhāreṇa drṣṭe yā bhāvanā dhyānāṅgena traikālikatraidhātukapratibhāsātmakasya pratyātmedyayogisvacetasah prabandhena pravartanaṃ sā yogināṃ bhāvanā kalpanā na bhavati, astināstibhāvābhāvādisakalavikalpajālaviṣayavijñānā-diprāṇāpānavāyūnām uparamād eva sphuṭataratryadhvatraidhātukapratibhāsa-syodayāt* | [...] *traikālikaviśvarūpasyāpi cetaso na bhāvo 'titādivasturūpa-tvaṃ teṣāṃ abhāvāt paramāṇudharmatātītatoac ca | atītāder evābhāve 'pi naivābhāvaḥ sarvopākhyāviraḥalakṣaṇas cīttasya | kuta ity āha—bimbe 'kalpitadarśanād iti | yato bimbe viśvabimbākāre cetasy akalpitaṃ sakalikalpanāpagataṃ darśanaṃ pratyakṣasamvedanam asakyāpahnavaṃ anubhūyata eva* | (*Sekoddeśaṭikā ad st. 28, pp. 142–144*).

<sup>85</sup> On the *pratisenā* rite, see Orofino 1994 and Vasudeva 2014.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present inquiry is based on three theoretical assumptions that represent the conceptual basis of my study. Aiming at focusing on the most essential aspects of an elusive and complex argument that is the subject of investigation of various disciplines, starting with hermeneutics, these assumptions are formulated here with concise propositions, followed by a brief explanation. A more extensive discussion of this topic is being prepared in collaboration with Federico Squarcini, with whom I have discussed these lines of inquiry, and who I sincerely thank.

*1. Every written composition is the result of an intellectual project in which the purpose, that is to say the transmission of specific contents, is the result of a double-sided operation: the choice of the topics to be communicated and the choice of how to communicate them.*

In this definition, ‘the contents’ and ‘the topics to be communicated’ are not the same thing. The latter (choice 1) become the content of communication when they assume a form (choice 2). The content of communication, that is to say what is transmitted by the author to an attentive and interested listener/reader, is the result of both choices, not only of the first, which concerns only abstract concepts. What we want to communicate and the formal and structural aspects of how we communicate it are never independent. This is why, in ordinary communication, we usually do not notice the difference between these two aspects and do not identify them with two independent choices.

*2. The formal aspects are decisive in the semiotic enrichment of the topics being communicated.*

The formal aspects do not fulfill a merely auxiliary function to the correct or effective transmission of what one wants to communicate—in all literary compositions the formal aspects contribute, in varying degrees, also to the formation of the content, corroborating and completing what one intends to communicate. The meaning of each statement, both in the

moment in which it is produced as well as the one in which it is received, cannot be determined in isolation, since it depends on the connections it has with the rest of the language. The formal aspects are the subject of special attention by the authors and editors because, through them, the 'specific horizon of meaning' is established. In fact, while, *lato sensu*, the significance of each word and sentence belongs to a language as a whole, the intended meaning becomes clear only in a specific horizon of meaning. In addition to the arrangement of the topics being communicated and the formulation of appropriate sentences, their semiotic enrichment takes place through the construction of a specific context, which is the selection of a particular horizon of meaning among the many possible ones permitted by language. This implies, among other things, the use of quotations and implicit references to previous works as well as ideas present in previous works. The 'semiotic enrichment' is nothing but the effect produced by the context on the letter of the text.

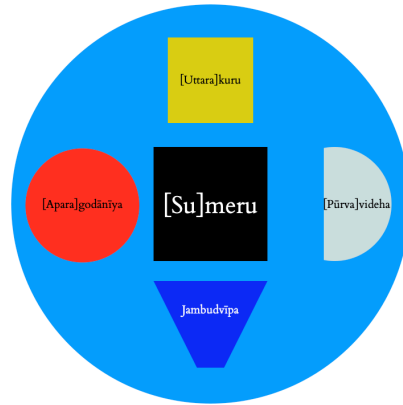
*3. All representation, in literature as well as in art, is communication and is never devoid of intentionality.*

The interpreter's goal is to understand an author's intention as faithfully as possible. The sincere attempt to reach this goal is the most important thing, the basis of the whole process. In theory, it cannot be ruled out that a full understanding may also happen, but in practice there is no guarantee that this happens, and also no proof. The interpreter will never have certainty whether he or she has fully grasped the intentions of the communicator. In this regard, four main factors play a decisive role. The first two have to do with the unavoidable differences that exist between the author and the interpreter. (1) The 'contextual gap': namely that of the social, cultural, geographical, and historical context in which the author and interpreter have carried out their activity. (2) The 'individual gap': that is, that of the idiosyncratic differences between individuals (in this case, the author and interpreter) and the inevitable weight of their expectations; this is never entirely absent even in the mind of the most attentive interpreter. The other two factors have to do with the sources and

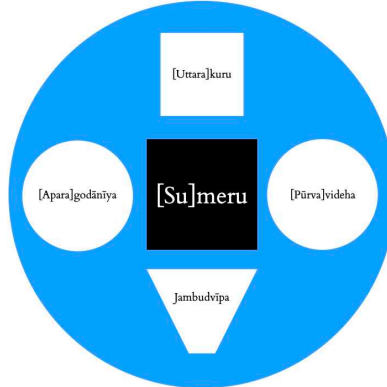
the very nature of knowledge. (3) The sources available to the interpreter are almost always limited; new evidence brings about change in previous evaluations; this is incredibly evident in philology, for instance, where editing a text can never produce more than the best hypothesis. (4) Regarding the interpreter's attempt to understand a text, this understanding has in itself an element of dynamism; it is an ongoing process. At the core of understanding is desire.

## Appendix 2 Cosmological Schemes<sup>86</sup>

### 1) *Abhidharmakośa* 3.53cd–55



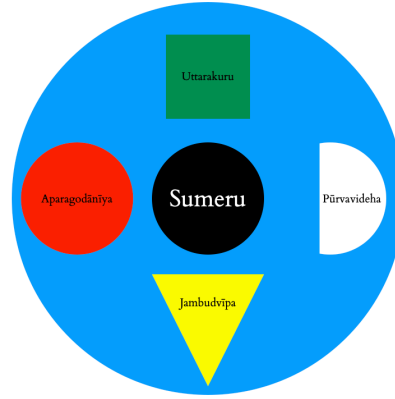
### 2) Saṃmitīya view according to the *\*Lokaprajñāptyabhidharmaśāstra* (cit. in Okano 1998: 173, 175)



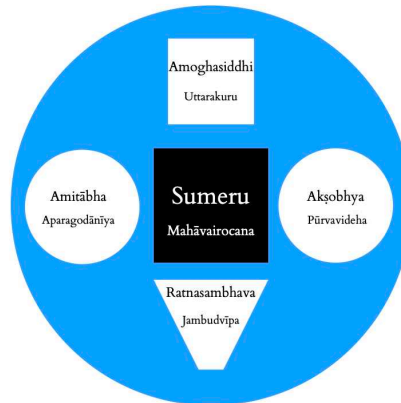
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<sup>86</sup> The colors of the geometrical figures that are blank in schemes 2 and 4 are not indicated in the original texts.

3) *Ādikarmapradīpa*, p. 20

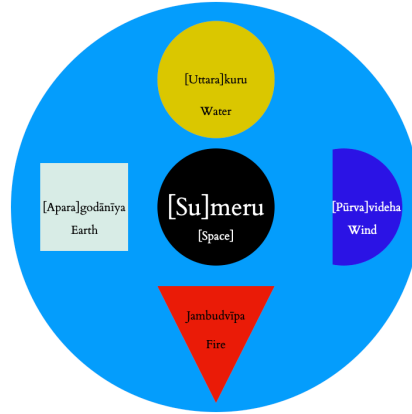


4) *Sūtaka*, p. 355

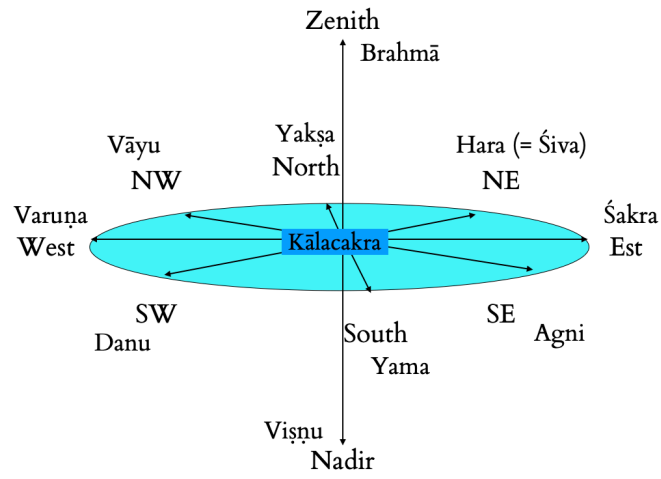


Evolution of Scriptures, Formation of Canons

5) *Laghukālacakratāntra* 1.17



6) *Laghukālacakratāntra* 1.21





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Published by the Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Asien-  
Afrika- Institut, Universität Hamburg, Alsterterrasse 1,  
D-20354 Hamburg, Germany  
Email: indologie@uni-hamburg.de

© Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2022

ISBN: 978-3-945151-12-9

Almogi, Orna: Evolution of Scriptures, Formation of Canons: The  
Buddhist Case

First published 2022

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Printing and distribution:

Aditya Prakashan, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi, 110 002, India.

Email: [contact@bibliaimpex.com](mailto:contact@bibliaimpex.com)

Website: [www.bibliaimpex.com](http://www.bibliaimpex.com)

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

This publication has been supported by the Khyentse Center for Tibetan  
Buddhist Textual Scholarship (KC-TBTS), Universität Hamburg.