

THE CASE OF THE *VAJRA*-WIELDING MONK

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In this article I am discussing some polemical passages in Tantric Buddhist works belonging to the 10th–13th centuries concerning the infringement of vows of celibacy when monks took initiation containing sexual elements. The passages follow the standard exegetical format of first presenting argumentation (*yukti*) followed by scriptural citations (*āgama*) purportedly supporting the position of the author. Whereas the argumentation part has been discussed in previous works by others, here I wish to draw attention to the scriptural matter used in justification. In our case nearly always the same quotation is used in a distorted manner. This is a sign that those in favour of justifying transgression of monastic rules were struggling to find appropriate substantiation. From this one could infer that the rites demanding such infringements in the case of a monastic person were most likely developments outside that community, and hence the origins of such innovations should be sought after among lay tantrics.

Key words: late Tantric Buddhism/Vajrayāna, initiation, Mahāpratisarā.

Should the title of this article strike the reader as something akin to the heading of a detective story, it is because the present author often simplistically thinks of philology as a process not dissimilar to detective work. We wait until the facts are in, examine them with the least possible prejudice, and then try to construct a hypothesis which covers all the facts in a satisfactory manner. The “sleuth” interested in the “crimes” of Tantric Buddhism (*Vajrayāna*) is from the very outset in a difficult position. For all the facts – evidence, first and foremost in the form of texts, preferably critically edited – are not in; optimistically speaking not even a quarter of them. However, “cases” sometimes seem to emerge from even a fraction of the facts, and it is one such case that the following essay examines.

I wish to discuss a particular aspect of a debate among mediaeval Indian Tantric Buddhist authors, namely whether the officiant (*ācāryaḥ*, *guruḥ*) that confers initiation (*abhiṣekaḥ*) – an exclusive prerequisite to enter that religion – and the initiand

(*śiṣyah*) should ideally be celibate or not, in other words, whether they should be monks or householders. After presenting and commenting on some pieces of evidence, I would like to advance the hypothesis that in its early days antinomian Tantric Buddhism (roughly from the 9th century onwards) was marked by the authority of non-monastic officiants (or monks who did not observe Vinaya rules strictly), and that this authority was only later (roughly by the end of the 10th century) wrested by the more orthodox and observant monastic community.

The debate I have identified above most likely originated due to a curious development within Tantric Buddhism in the 9th century (or possibly somewhat earlier), namely the inclusion of sexual elements in the initiation ritual. To my knowledge there is no comprehensive explanation why and how this had happened, although Sanderson's groundbreaking research¹ very strongly suggests that such antinomian elements of Vajrayāna ritual were the result of borrowing and/or emulating similar practices in goddess-centered Śaivism otherwise known by the collective term Kaula. This thesis has generated much – in my view not always constructive and impartial – debate, but we need not go into the details here. As a springboard as it were for the present article I would like to point out that indigenous authors were by no means blind to this fact, as the following piece of evidence will show.

The **Vīramānoramā* is an early 10th-century commentary to the *Laghuśamvara* by an abbot of the famed Vikramaśīla monastery, Bhavyakīrti. There is much to say about this very important piece of exegesis, but for our purposes we must limit ourselves to the debate in which an opponent fiercely attacks the prevalent use of antinomian elements (in the Buddhist idiom: the ten 'non-virtues')² in Bhavyakīrti's root-text, concluding that scriptures that advocate such practices are 'the words of the devil' (*bdud kyis bshad, *mārabhāṣitam*).³ The author predictably replies that this would be the case only if one were not to use such practices "skilfully" (*thabs dang bcas, *sopāyena*), i.e. in the spirit of working for the liberation of all beings while understanding that all phenomena ultimately lack any essence whatsoever. The opponent then retorts: "If this is so, then why [do you] not [concede that] heretics such as *Kaulas also obtain liberation?" Bhavyakīrti replies that the reason is the same as the one given above. For *Kaulas do not see the ultimate lack of essence in phenomena

¹ See most recently Sanderson (2009), the culmination of research already presented in Sanderson (1995 and 2001).

² Traditionally these are grouped in three categories: those of the body, those of speech, and those of the mind. The physical non-virtues are killing, stealing, and improper sexual conduct. The verbal non-virtues are lying, slander, harsh words, and idle talk. The mental non-virtues are covetousness, maliciousness, and wrong views.

³ Accusing rival Buddhist fractions of acting as the mouthpiece of Māra is not by any means something unusual or novel. See *Abhidharmapradīpa* (v. 235, but also the *avataraṅikā* to that group of verses on p. 195): *tasmān na bodhimārgo 'nyaḥ sūtrādīpīṭakatrayāt| ato 'nyam iha yo brūyāt sa bhaven mārabhāṣitaḥ|*, or the *Sāratamā* (p. 112): *[...] mārabhāṣitasya hīnamārgasya [...]*.

and they commit antinomian acts with the perverse view of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Due to this such actions will indeed lead them to rebirths in hells.⁴

While this passage and the debate thereafter is a rare glimpse into the mindset of Tantric Buddhist practitioners in its own right, perhaps even more important than what Bhavyakīrti says is what he *does not* say. Without a word of protest he acknowledges that antinomian practices *are* present in the kind of Buddhism defended by him (i.e. the cult of Śamvara, or more widely, the revelations of the *yoginītantras*), and that such practices are, if not copied from, at least paralleled by Kaula observances. While Bhavyakīrti had to defend a host of antinomian practices, here we will focus on one particular aspect, the sexual elements in the rite of initiation.

For much of early Tantric Buddhism bestowing and receiving initiation was not problematic at all. Generally initiations consisted of the following elements: the officiant first constructed the diagram of deities (*maṇḍalam*), and then lead the initiand blindfolded in its presence. After the blindfold was removed the initiand was sprinkled with consecrated water from vases (*kalāśaḥ*), received a garland (*mālā*), pledge-water (*samayodakam*), and ritual implements such as a sceptre (*vajram*) and a bell (*ghaṇṭā*). He then received a new name to signal his sectarian affiliation, and received instructions on how to propitiate the deities of the *maṇḍala* with their appropriate spells (*mantraḥ*), gestures (*mudrā*), and eidetic visualisations (*bhāvanā*). The initiand – at this point, in fact, initiate – paid a fee (*dakṣiṇā*). Thereupon the diagram was dismounted, and the initiate departed empowered to worship the deities for any purpose he saw befitting.

In the more mature – and more antinomian – phase of Tantric Buddhism this sequence was augmented with what was called a “secret” initiation (*guhyābhiṣekam*), still later with the “knowing of wisdom” initiation (*prajñājñānābhiṣekam*), and with yet another one simply called “the fourth” (*caturthābhiṣekam*). Typically the first consisted of the officiant copulating with a so-called “seal” (*mudrā*) or “sophia” (*prajñā*) in view of the initiand (but shielded from bystanders), who after consummation ingested their sexual fluids. In the next stage it was the initiand’s turn to “know wisdom”, who was either the same or a different woman. What the “fourth” consisted of was the subject of a separate debate, but perhaps the most widespread view was that it consisted of imparting secret oral teachings. There were of course several divergences from this rather generalised model – e.g. the *guhyābhiṣekam* at one point was the culmination of the rite, the “fourth” consisted of the initiand copulating with the consort again, etc. – but the structure that exegetes we are going to examine had in mind was by and large the one described above.

Regardless of which variant of these latter initiations we take into consideration, they clearly implied an infringement of monastic rules regarding celibacy. Therefore if one was to give credence to these authors that the “higher” initiations were there to open the door towards a more efficient and powerful form of the religion,

⁴ The debate the beginning of which I am paraphrasing above is on 10r–11v of the **Vīramānoramā*. For the restoration of the title see Sanderson (2009, p. 158, note 3). The Tibetan for what I restore as *Kaulas is *rigs ldan*.

monks, the very foundation of Buddhism, saw themselves somewhat paradoxically barred from practising the most esoteric form of Buddhism.

There is clearly something wrong with this picture, and I propose that it is the expectation that a development within Buddhism need necessarily be triggered in the monastic community. In fact, in this case it is the opposite that seems to have more attestation. One of the most influential works on the qualifications of an officiant and the rules regarding the initiate's conduct towards him is the *Gurupañcāśikā*, a work that is already cited in the first half of the 10th century (Szántó forthcoming). From this text we may infer that the ideal officiant is by no means necessarily a monastic person. The fourth and the twenty-sixth verses state:

“[If the officiant is] a householder (*grhī*) or a novice (*navakaḥ*), he should be worshipped by those who hold the [tantric] vows [but only] mentally (*buddhyā*), after having placed in front a sacred object (*saddharma*⁵) etc., in order to avoid the censure of people (*lokāvadhyānahānaye*).”⁵

“[The] composed [initiate] should constantly view the belongings (*dravyam*) of the guru as if they were [worth as much as his own] life; his woman (*°aṅganām*) [as if she were] equal to the guru; and his people like [one's own] family.”⁶

I found it significant to juxtapose these two verses, for v. 4 in itself is open to interpretation.⁷ It may suggest that although the ideal officiant is a monk, should he happen to be a householder or a novice, he should receive worship nevertheless. However, the second verse cited here makes it quite clear that the *guru* has a consort, people around him (most likely his own family), and administers wealth. It is important to note that v. 4 is unambiguous in recording that worship of such, non-monastic, officiants normally attracted the censure of society.

Let us now look at an example in which the topic of monks taking these controversial initiations are discussed. One of the most elaborate such discussions comes from a late 10th–early 11th century author, Vāgīśvarakīrti. His *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi* concisely describes the initiation rites, and then launches into the following discussion with an opponent:

[Objection:] “Well now, if the consecration consisting merely of words [i.e. the “fourth”] is forbidden,⁸ then how should one favour monks

⁵ *saddharmādīn puraskṛtya grhī vā navako 'pi vā vandyo vratadharair buddhyā lokāvadhyānahānaye* | Variants: *navako* N Dh, *vanako* L; *lokāvadhyānahānaye* em., *lokāvadhyānahānayet* N, *lokāvadyāvahānaye* L. Quoted in the *Vimalaprabhā* (p. 6, ll. 3–4) in this form.

⁶ *jīvam iva guror dravyam guruvac ca tadanāṅgam | bandhuvat tasya lokam ca paśyen nityam samāhitam* | Variants: *jīvam iva* N, *jīvam eva* L, *svātmavac ca* Dh; *bandhuvat* N, *candravat* L, *svajānān* Dh; *tasya lokam ca* L N, *iva tallokān* Dh.

⁷ In fact it is reinterpreted in the *Vimalaprabhā* (p. 6).

⁸ Tib. adds: “for he, who has not taken the *Prajñājñāna* initiation in the flesh” ([...] *shes rab ye shes kyi dbang bskur dngos su ma thob pa la* [...]).

[with initiation]?” [Answer:] “Monks should not be favoured, for they lack the qualification (*adhikārah*, *dbang*) for it. In this respect it has been said: «Those who delight in their monkhood, those men who delight in logical debate, and those who are old – to these he should not teach the Truth [i.e. all consecrations].»⁹

[Objection:] “But then why is it said in the *Mahāpratisarā* and elsewhere that «He should make a monk into a vajra-holder (*bhikṣuṃ vajradharam kuryāt*), intent upon chastising the wicked.»?” [Answer:] “[True,] this is [indeed] stated [in that scripture].¹⁰ However, while there is no qualification in respect of spells, gestures, and so forth [i.e. “lower” Tantric practice] for an ascetic/poor/wretched/miserable (*tapasvī*, *dka’ thub can*)¹¹ monk who is [...] and holds to his *śrāvakayāna* views, there is qualification for spells, gestures and so forth for he who, [although] maintaining *śrāvakayāna* vows, has [nevertheless] generated the intention of enlightenment in the *Mahāyāna*; but [still] not for the secret consecration (*guhyābhīṣekaḥ*) and the others. As for he who holds on to his *śrāvakayāna* vows [but] has generated the intention of enlightenment in the *Mantranaya* [i.e. Tantric Buddhism], such a person does have the qualification for every consecration and the rest. It is such a person that should be made into a «vajra-holder intent upon chastising the wicked.»¹³

[Objection:] “All right, but even then, will there not be a transgression of monastic vows?” [Answer:] “No. To explain: [when one takes the vow] «I take each vow, the outer, [Tib./sense add: the inner,] and the secret, relating to the three vehicles» it is not against the monastic vow that one takes it, nor is it taken in conflict with any other vow, it is merely an additional one. So how could there be transgression of vows?”¹⁴

⁹ *nanu yadi vacanamātrābhīṣekasya niṣedhaḥ, katham tarhi bhikṣūṇām anugrahaḥ kartavyaḥ? *bhikṣūṇām anugraho na kartavyaḥ* (conj., omitted in MS due to eyeskip) *teṣām atrādhikārābhāvāt| tathā coktaḥ[-] «bhikṣubhāve ratā ye ca ye ca tarkarātā *narāḥ* (em., *naḥ* MS, °*naraḥ* Ed.)| *vrddhabhāve sthitā ye ca teṣāṃ tattvaṃ na deśaye[d] i|ti*||

¹⁰ Note that Tib. misunderstands where the objection finishes.

¹¹ The irony in the word *tapasvī* is untranslatable both in Tibetan and English.

¹² I am unable to translate *ekāntakaṭaṅkaṭas*.

¹³ *katham tarhy* (corr. Ed., *tarhi* MS) *uktam Mahāpratisarādau[-] «bhikṣuṃ vajradharam kuryād duṣṭatarjanatparam» iti? uktam eva| kiṃ tu yo bhikṣur *ekāntakaṭaṅkaṭas* (*ekāntakaṭaṅkaṭas* Ed.) *tapasvī śrāvakayānadṛṣṭis tasya *nāsty (nāsty* Ed.) *eva mantramudrādiṣv *adhikārah* (em. Ed., *avikārah* MS)| *yas tu śrāvakasamvaro mahāyānacittotpādayuktas *tasyāsti (tasyāstu* Ed.) *mantramudrādiṣv adhikārah| na punar guhyābhīṣekādau| yas tu śrāvakasamvaro mantranayacittotpādayuktas tasyāsti sarvatrābhīṣekādāv adhikārah| sa eva vajradharo duṣṭatarjanatparaḥ kartavyaḥ*||

¹⁴ **nanv* (silent em. Ed., *na tv* MS) *evam api katham bhikṣusamvarakṣatir na syāt? na syāt[|] tathā hi bhikṣusamvarāpratiyogena «samvaram pratigrhṇāmi bāhyaṃ guhyaṃ triyānikam» ityādinā *samvarāntaram aviruddham* (em., *samvarāntaraviruddham* MS, Ed.) *adhikam ca prati-grhṇāti| tadā katham samvarakṣatiḥ?*

[Objection:] “All right, let us accept this adoption of an additional vow without transgressing [a previous one]. But for one who holds monastic vows and [yet] performs the union of the two [sexual] organs how is there no transgression [of vows]?” **[Answer:]** “Even so there is no transgression of vows. For in the Vinaya and elsewhere it is taught that there is transgression when one commits forbidden acts, [but there is no transgression] if one commits acts that are not forbidden. Women (*tāh*) are forbidden for he who relishes (*āsvādayatām*) passion characterised by tainted intense attachment with respect to beauties of the three worlds, human, godly, etc., but women who are in the form of the consorts of Mañjuvajra and so forth, whose form is transcending the three worlds, and who are merely consciousness, are not. Otherwise,¹⁵ there would be transgression of vows even in the case of [women] perceived in a dream, whose form is merely imaginary.”¹⁶

To paraphrase Vāgīśvarakīrti’s solution: monks who are able to perceive the consort offered for consummation in the initiation ritual as merely an apparition of consciousness (just like everything else) do not commit any transgression of celibacy.¹⁷

Slightly later, but roughly contemporary with Vāgīśvarakīrti was an author writing under the *nom de plume* “the *bodhisattva* Vajrapāṇi”. He was one of the three so-called “*bodhisattva*-commentators”, exegetes that tried to create a corpus of texts that would reinterpret major tantras of the day from the viewpoint of the emerging cult of Kālacakra. Reading the passage below¹⁸ one cannot help but notice that by this time there was something one might call an all-out doctrinal war against non-monastic officiants, and that monks were trying to bring back under their authority the religion that has now become almost mainstream. The passage is written as a prophecy, but it clearly refers to contemporary issues.

“Driven by greed for the wealth and women of others, [as if] eager to go to the hells, people of wicked character/practices will teach short/minor/fake tantras without commentaries. [...] By having diligently collected Buddha-hood, and Vajrasattva-hood through initiations, some men

¹⁵ Note that the Vinaya does not consider wet dreams transgressive.

¹⁶ *atha bhavatv (rucatvā* Ed.) *adhikāvīruddhasamvaragrahaṇam* | *bhikṣusamvarasya tu dvayendriyasamāpattim kurvataḥ kathaṃ na kṣatiḥ? evam api na kṣatiḥ* | *niśiddhācaraṇe hi vinayādau kṣatiḥ* | *pratiṣiddhā* | *na punar aniśiddhācaraṇe* [‘]pi [‘] *traidhātukavartināmarādi*sundarīsu* (corr., *sundarīsu* MS, *sundharīsu* Ed.) *sāsvāvābhīṣvaṅgāsvādalakṣaṇarāgam* **āsvādayatām* (*āsvādayatā* Ed.) *tāh* **pratiśiddhā* (corr., *pratisiddhā* MS, Ed.) *vinayādau na punas traidhātukākṛānta*mūrtayo* (°*mūrttyā* Ed.) *vijñaptimātrarūpā Mañjuvajrādisvābhārūpāḥ* | *anyathā* **svapnopalabdhasu* (corr. Ed., *svaṣṇopalabdhasu* MS) *kalpanāviśayasvarūpāsv api samvaraḥkṣatiḥ syāt* |

¹⁷ This problem is dealt with more extensively in Onians (2002). The passage from the *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi* is also discussed and slightly differently translated there (pp. 281ff.), with emendations mostly proposed by Harunaga Isaacson. These have been very influential in my edition.

¹⁸ The source for this passage is the first chapter of the *Hevajrapañḍārthaṭīkā* as edited by Sferra (2009).

will tell other men: «We are Vajrasattvas!», «No monk who holds to the discipline and vows is to be honoured, we, the white-robed ones [i.e. householders] are to be honoured, we are the Vajradharas on this earth!» Servants, merchants, *śūdras*, people making a living out of ploughing, idiots who sell the [Buddha's] teaching and who thoroughly enjoy what is forbidden – these will become *gurus*, [alas,] very embodiments of the devil for initiands, after having disguised their own deeds/works under the cloak of *Yogācāra* [...] A Vajradhara/vajra-holder should be a monk who is endowed with the virtues stated above, not a householder, and not a novice; ten of these two don't make up for a single monk.¹⁹

Regardless of how influential the exegesis of the *Kālacakra* might have been, the mainstream opinion seems to have continued along the lines we have seen in Vāgīśvarakīrti's work. Thus, Abhayākara Gupta (cca. 1085–1125), the abbot of Vikramaśīla during the reign of the last great Pāla emperor, writes:²⁰

“In other places it is said: «For he whose mind is pure and is compassionate out of his love [for sentient beings] there is no downfall.» And: «For he who is compassionate and acts for good reason even forbidden things are allowed.» As for the one who – through his gathered merits and vast learning – strongly realises that all phenomena are like an illusion, a dream, and of one-taste with emptiness, how can there be even a hint of contradiction between the vows of a monk and those of Vajradhara [i.e. Tantric vows]? It is for these reasons that the Lord had said: «He should make a monk into a Vajradhara/a vajra-holder.» And this should necessarily be accepted. [...] However, should the country be under the scrutiny of wicked people [i.e. non-Buddhists], [the officiant] should bestow the secret (*guhya*) and the knowledge of wisdom (*prajñājñāna*) initiations by means of a visualised consort (*jñānamudrayā*) on him [i.e. a monk] as well. But when there are no wicked people, with an actual consort (*karmamudrayā*). However, for a monk, no matter how faithful, whose realisation of the truth is feeble, taking the consecrations with an external [i.e. flesh and blood] consort is forbidden. Otherwise there will be a great setback because of breaking his previous [i.e. monastic] vow. However, if the powers of eidetic visualisation are strong in a guru, then the knowledge of wisdom consecration is given and

¹⁹ *tīkām vinālpatantrāṇi deśayīṣyanti durnayāḥ| parastrīdravyalobhena narake gamanodyatāḥ || 8 || [...] buddhatvaṃ vajrasattvatvaṃ sekaiḥ saṃgrhya yatnataḥ| vayaṃ vajradharāḥ kecid vadiṣyanti narā nṛṇām || 10 || avandya bhikṣavaḥ sarve śīlasaṃvaradhāriṇaḥ| sitavastrā vayaṃ vandyāḥ svayaṃ vajradharāḥ bhūvi || 11 || sevakā vaṇijaḥ śūdrāḥ kṣikarmaratās ca ye| sad-dharmavikrayā mūrkhā abhogaparibhoginaḥ || 12 || guravas te bhaviṣyanti śiṣyāṇāṃ mārakāyikāḥ| yogācāracchalenaiḥ gopayitvā svayaṃkṛtān || 13 || [...] ebhir uktaguṇair yukto bhikṣur vajradharo bhavet| na cellako grhī tan na daśa bhikṣusamās tayoh || 31 ||*

²⁰ In his *Vajrāvalī*, an encyclopedic and extremely influential initiation manual.

taken with a visualised consort, and [thus] there is no question about transgressing celibacy, for there is no corporeal action involved. [...]”²¹

The argument raged on much along the same lines for several centuries in lands where Tantric Buddhism took hold; but that should form the object of a separate inquiry.

The reader will have noticed that both exegetes cited here, Vāgīśvarakīrti and Abhayākara Gupta, quote the same passage *bhikṣuṃ vajradharaṃ kuryāt* in order to substantiate their viewpoint that monks can and should become “vajra-holders”, i.e. tantric initiates. They were not alone with this. I am aware of at least two more authors, not cited here, who use the same scriptural citation.²² Above I have translated this quarter-verse according to how the citation is presented by these authors: “he [the officiant] should make a monk into a vajra-holder”. However, as an examination of the original context (*Mahāpratisarā* 42.24–26) will show, this is – in my view – an intentional misrepresentation. The original context is a passage on drawing and customising an amulet of the Pratisarā:

“One should **draw a monk wielding a vajra**, intent upon chastising the wicked, and the four great kings on the four sides. For *brāhmaṇas* he should draw Īśvara, for *kṣatriyas* Maheśvara, for *śūdras* he should always draw the benign Lord of the Discus [i.e. Viṣṇu]. For *vaiśyas* he should draw (*kuryād*) Vaiśravaṇa and Indra, lord of the gods. For children he should always [draw] Prajāpati, who is of great wisdom.”²³

²¹ *anyatra ca «nāpattiḥ śubhacittasya snehāc caiva dayāvata» iti | «niśiddham apy anujñātaṃ kṛpālor arthadarśina» iti ca | yaḥ punar upacitapuṇyabāhuśrutyādi[bhi]ḥ sarvadharmaṃ māyāsvapnasamān śūnyataikarasān sudṛḍham adhimuñcati tasya bhikṣuvajradharasamvarayoḥ kva virodha-gandho [‘]pi? ata evoktaṃ bhagavatā | «bhikṣuṃ vajradharaṃ kuryād» iti | avāśyaṃ caitad abhyupeyam | [...] yadi punar durjanagocaraḥ pradeśaḥ syāt tadā tasyāpi jñānamudrayā guhya-prajñājñānābhiṣekau dātavyau | durjanāsambhave tu karmamudrayaiva | adṛghatattvādhimokṣasya tu bhikṣoḥ śrāddhasyāpi bāhyaprajñābhiṣekasya grahaṇam niśiddham | anyathā pūrvasamvarabhraṃsān mahān anarthaḥ syāt | yadi punar guruḥ sthira bhāvāno bhavati tadā tenārpitāyāṃ jñānamudrāyāṃ tasyāpi prajñābhiṣeko deyo grhṇataś ca nābrahmacaryaśankāpi kāyakarmābhāvāt |*

²² They are: (1) Ratnarakṣita (floruit cca. 1200 CE), in his *Padminī*, a commentary to the *Samvarodayatantra*. The commentary is not fully edited, the better manuscript of the two known is at the Buddhist Library (Nagoya), Takaoka CA 15 (I thank Prof. Alexis Sanderson for allowing me to use his copy). An inferior, but nevertheless useful apograph of the above is Baroda Oriental Institute no. 1916 (I thank Dr. Ryugen Tanemura for presenting me with a copy of this manuscript). Tib. – Tōh. 1420. (2) Jagaddarṣaṇa (floruit before 1305) in his *Kriyāsamuccaya*. The relevant passage has been edited by Moriguchi (1998). A full edition is currently under preparation by Iain Sinclair.

²³ Hidas (2009, p. 155, tr. p. 224, slightly different from mine): [...] *bhikṣuṃ vajradharaṃ kuryād duṣṭatarjanatatparam | caturaś ca mahārājñāś catuḥpārśveṣu saṃlikhet || 24 || brāhmaṇeṣv īśvaro lekhyah kṣatriyeṣu maheśvaraḥ | śūdreṣu ca sadā saumyaṃ cakrasvāminam ālikhet || 25 || vaiśyeṣu vaiśravaṇam kuryād indraṃ caiva sureśvaram | dārakebhyaḥ sadā lekhyah prajāpatir mahāmātiḥ || 26 || [...] The Gilgit ms. is fragmentary at this point, but the beginning reads *bhikṣuś ca vajradharaṃ kuryā[t]* (ibid., p. 65) for the equivalent of 24a.*

The verb *kuryāt* in this passage does not mean “to make A into B”, but simply “to draw”, as is the case in 26a. It is interesting to note that the Tibetan translation took *bhikṣum* as a genitive (*commodi*) plural (*dge slong phyir ni*),²⁴ perhaps reading *bhikṣūṃ*, and understanding it as an *aiśa* genitive plural for -u stems on the model of similar formations in -a stems: *devāṃ* for *devānām*, etc. I have not seen this shortening of plural genitive -u stems elsewhere, but if it is acceptable, then the passage originally meant: “he should draw a *vajra* for monks”.

Whether the rather abstracted reasoning part in the twofold method for exegesis, namely by reasoning (*yuktiḥ*) and by scripture (*āgamaḥ*), was convincing enough we may only guess. However, the scriptural side is decidedly feeble: the same passage quoted over and over, and even then brought out of context. It is as if our exegetes had to look long and hard to find a passage acceptable to both sides as the word of Buddha which would in any way suggest monks as eligible for the higher initiations. I would go one step further and suggest that this means that the religion in this, antinomian, form was originally the business of householders. It is highly unlikely that the monastic establishment would have innovated their religion along lines that proved so problematic for them. Nevertheless, and for this we do have direct evidence, they did join the “new” religion, and looked for compromises to do so.

What could have been the attractions of latter Tantric Buddhism for the monastic establishment? I would argue that the reasons were the same as they were in the 6th to the 8th centuries. Firstly, for the virtuoso practitioner it offered a yet speedier and more effective way to liberation as well as rites to unlock supernatural powers. Second, it was a source of not inconsiderable prestige: tantric officiants commanded communities which in some cases included royalty and wealthy merchants, and where initiates owed unequivocal allegiance to their master.²⁵ Third, for the more materially inclined, it was a source of generous patronage. The *Kālacakra* and its commentary, the *Vimalaprabhā*, commanded that the initiate surrender one sixth of his movable income to the officiant for the worship of the *yoginīs*,²⁶ and Atīśa reported²⁷ to his Tibetan sponsors that the emperor Devapāla offered himself, his wife, his empire, and his weight in gold to the preceptor of the *Guhyasamāja*, Buddhajñānapāda.

²⁴ This is also the case for the Chinese and the Mongolian translation as reported by Hidas (2009, p. 224, note 361).

²⁵ This is perhaps most poignantly conveyed by a formula in the initiation process (see *Vajrāvalī*, and *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi*, but the formula is much older). The officiant utters the following to the initiate: *adya prabhṛti tavāhaṃ vajrapāṇir yad ahaṃ brūyāṃ imaṃ kuru tat tvayā kartavyam| na cāhaṃ avamantavyo mā te viśamāparihāreṇa kālakriyāṃ kṛtvā narakapataṇaṃ syāt|* “From today onwards I am your Vajrapāṇi! Whatever I say, you shall do. You should never disrespect me, lest you should die without avoiding misfortune and fall into hells.”

²⁶ *Vimalaprabhā* (p. 144): *iha yadā vajrācāryeṇābhīṣikto grhasṭhaś cellako bhikṣuko vā, teneyaṃ pratijñā kartavyā «mayā sarvakālaṃ ṣaḍaṃśaṃ sarvavastūnāṃ dānaṃ dātavyam» iti*. In addition to this tax, the initiate was to offer his wife or any other female relative no less than five times a month for purposes that the expression “*kāmadānena*” in the text makes unambiguous.

²⁷ **Bodhipathapradīpapañjikā*, 288v–289r. Note however that Atīśa seemingly was of the opinion that monks should not partake of the Vinaya-infringing sexual consecration. Whether this was tactfulness towards his Tibetan patrons, who after all called him to Western Tibet precisely to do away with such heterodox practices, is the object of yet another inquiry.

References

Abbreviations

NAK – National Archives Kathmandu.

NGMPP – Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project.

Tōh. – Tōhoku catalogue of the Derge Printing of the Buddhist Canon (Kangyur and Tengyur).
References are to catalogue numbers. See Ui *et al.* (1934).

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