

TANTRIC BUDDHISM IN INDIA (FROM C. A.D. 800 TO C. A.D. 1200)¹

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I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

It is to be expected that in this series of lectures Tantric Buddhism has already been discussed more than once, for instance when the topic was Buddhism in Tibet. My theme, however, is Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayāna² in India; an extraordinarily difficult and relatively little explored subject, but at the same time one that is both of considerable intrinsic interest and of importance, both for the history of Buddhism (inside and outside of India!) and for the history of Indian religion and culture. It is hardly possible to do justice to so vast a subject in a single brief talk; the more so since after several years of study, I am myself still only at the beginning of my own attempts to come to terms with it. I shall begin by setting out some of my own (methodological) assumptions, and then briefly say something about the texts that form our primary sources, together with a few words on the historical development that can be seen in them. In the main part of this talk, I shall try to go into somewhat greater detail about a single (but important) aspect of this form of Buddhism: of course many themes could be chosen, but since Prof. Sanderson's article, which was distributed in advance, has introduced you to the subject of consecration or empowerment (*abhiṣekaḥ*) in the Vajrayāna, I shall elaborate somewhat on that topic.

It is in my view certainly Indian tantric Buddhist texts that form the most important source of our knowledge of Indian tantric Buddhism. Let me also

¹This is a somewhat revised version of a lecture given in the series 'Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart' at Hamburg University on April 16th, 1997. In a less revised form, this was published in an internal publication of Hamburg University: *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Band II.* Hamburg. pp. 23–49. I have noticed that version being referred to occasionally in published work, and have received a number of requests for copies of it. The present publication should be regarded as completely superseding the earlier one. Although the text retains in many respects the nature of an oral presentation (including a reference to the fact that the original audience had been asked to read Sanderson 1994 in preparation for the lecture), there are a few substantial changes, and at some places references to relevant post-1997 contributions to the field have been added. It cannot yet be said to have been brought really up to date. A more thoroughly revised form is intended to be published in the near future.

²I do not intend to give here a definition of what Tantric Buddhism is or comprehends, nor how precisely it is to be distinguished from non-tantric Mahāyāna Buddhism. Both of these apparently simple and basic questions are in fact of considerable complexity, and have hardly been the object of serious historical scholarship as yet.

make it clear here at the start that I proceed in my study of these texts from the assumption that they, including the scriptures (*tantras*) ascribed to the (or a) Buddha,³ are compositions (or in several cases compositions cum compilations or redactions)⁴ by Buddhists living many centuries after the death of the historical founder of Buddhism. No doubt in many cases the authors or redactors of these scriptures were convinced that their creations were the result of direct inspiration by a Buddha or other enlightened being, or that they were communicating teachings that had been taught by the historical Buddha or another Buddha but not transmitted in writing—processes similar, I suppose, to those involved in the production of many sūtras of the Mahāyāna.

Furthermore, I suggest that it is important to remember that whatever their origin, tantric texts were in the main transmitted in ways similar to non-tantric texts, i.e. usually through being written down and copied.⁵ It follows that obviously these texts too will have suffered from transmissional error, and examination of a substantial part of the surviving manuscript evidence shows that this is indeed the case. In some cases it can be demonstrated that even early commentators on tantric scriptures were faced with corruptions in the manuscripts of the tantras before them, and resorted to often desperate *ad hoc* attempts to make sense of a garbled text.

Finally, let me also remind you that though we may sometimes speak broadly of tantric Buddhism as if we could pin down such an entity and its teachings, it is evident that Indian tantric Buddhists even at any one particular point in history did not agree with each other on all matters, and that in the course of time many changes and developments took place in tantric Buddhist ideas and practice. This is I should say completely natural and unsurprising; I state it explicitly because it is something which

³The most common view was probably that the tantric scriptures were indeed records of teachings by the same historical Buddha who also taught the non-tantric sūtras. According to one account, found primarily but not exclusively in texts pertaining to the Kālacakra system, the Buddha taught the *mantramahāyāna* at Śrīdhānyamahācaitya or Śrīdhānyakaṭaka (thought to be Amarāvātī in Andhra Pradesh); see e.g. SeUdṬī p. 117 l. 5–6; also ViPra vol. 2 p. 8 l. 7–11, AmKa p. 1, PaSaSeUdṬī p. 3 l. 15–16; PaSaUdTaPa f. 2r7–10. There are however several other opinions as to the place where and by whom the tantras (especially the higher tantras of the *yogatantra* and *yoginītantra* classes) were taught; cf. e.g. Snellgrove 1987 p. 119 n. 4.

⁴As has been demonstrated by Sanderson (1991 p. 214 n. 106, 1995), in at least some cases the redactors of these Buddhist scriptures drew extensively on non-Buddhist texts, specifically tantras of the Vidyāpīṭha division of the Śaiva canon.

⁵I do not mean of course to exclude an at least partly oral transmission of some texts and teachings; indeed there is no doubt that we must reckon with that (as we must in several cases with non-tantric texts too).

I am afraid nonetheless seems often to be overlooked or (implicitly or not) denied.

In short, I for one proceed in my work from the assumption that tantric Buddhism, for all that it has of course many unusual characteristics of its own, should not be seen as having an in all respects unique position or requiring for its study methods fundamentally different from those employed in the study of other forms of Indian religion. Like other religious (and non-religious) traditions in India, tantric Buddhism forms a complex of many strands, many traditions, which have interacted with each other, with other forms of Buddhism, and with Śaivism as well.

It will indicate something of the immensity of the task awaiting students of tantric Buddhism if I tell you that though we do not know precisely at present just how many Indian tantric Buddhist texts survive today in the language in which they were written, their number is certainly over one thousand five hundred; I suspect indeed over two thousand.⁶ A large part of this body of texts has also been translated into Tibetan, and a smaller part into Chinese. Aside from these, there are perhaps another two thousand or more works that are known today only from such translations. We can be certain as well that many others are lost to us forever, in whatever form. Of the texts that survive a very small proportion has been published; an almost insignificant percentage has been edited or translated reliably. In such circumstances you will understand that anything that I say can have no more than provisional nature.

Now the texts that are available to us are of widely diverging kinds. We have the scriptures themselves, usually in a mixture of verse and prose, usually also in Sanskrit (though almost always a Sanskrit that transgresses frequently against classical norms of grammar and usage) but sometimes in a mixture of Sanskrit and some form of Middle-Indic. We have commentaries on these scriptures; in the case of some famous tantras several different commentaries survive, though there are also many tantras on which we have no commentary at all. Then there are manuals of ritual (including *sādhanas*), ranging from tiny texts to detailed compendia of in some cases hundreds of folios; hymns to tantric deities; independent works on doctrine and the like. These too are usually in Sanskrit—sometimes intricate, learned and polished and sometimes grammatically and stylistically aberrant—but there are again works partly or wholly written in Middle-Indic. In the case

⁶Some notion of what survives in the original languages may be had from BBK and from Moriguchi 1989. Many more texts are however extant than those enumerated in these two useful books.

of some works one must say that not only is the Sanskrit non-classical, but that one has the impression that the author was only barely able to express himself in the language. On the other hand we have also works by some authors who wrote elegant and difficult Sanskrit, and clearly were well versed in Buddhist (and sometimes also non-Buddhist) philosophy, sciences and literature. Such authors as the celebrated Ratnākaraśānti, of whom several tantric works survive, were evidently very learned and gifted men. It can thus be said that we are dealing with highly varied texts written by authors who evidently differed greatly in their learning and background.

It is of course a difficult task to assign a date to many of these texts, particularly to the scriptures whose real authors and redactors did not intend to leave signs of their identity or of the true time of their composition or compilation; a comprehensive history of Indian tantric Buddhism is something that may not be possible within our lifetimes. My own studies have concentrated on a later phase of the development of tantric Buddhism in India, but before turning to that I cannot fail to say at least a few words about some important earlier works.⁷ The first more or less dateable moment of importance in the development of tantric Buddhism as a soteriology⁸ which I would like to mention here is that of the composition of a scripture called usually the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, or more fully the *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha*. This text, which was translated into Chinese in A.D. 723, is if not the first certainly one of the earliest and most influential texts in which a tantric way to liberation is taught. As you may be aware, this tantra and the maṇḍalas it teaches became central in the form of tantric Buddhism that developed in Japan from about the ninth century; in India too it remained important, as is shown for instance by the fact that later tantras often mention it⁹ and ritual-texts frequently quote it.

Also of great importance for the further development of Indian tantric Buddhism was the *Guhyasamājatantra*, which was written later, perhaps in the second half of the eighth century A.D.¹⁰ In this text sexual yoga

⁷I must refrain however here from discussing the difficult question of the origins of Buddhist tantra.

⁸This word merits underlining because it is clear that many elements—such as the use of ‘magical formulas’—that are commonly (and not incorrectly) associated with Vajrayāna Buddhism are found in earlier texts, but usually employed for a variety of this-worldly purposes rather than as particularly effective means to enlightenment.

⁹Cf. e.g. HeTa II.v.57ab *yathā tattvasaṃgrāhe maṇḍalavidhis tathā kartavyam*.

¹⁰The most convincing discussion of the much-debated problem of the date of this tantra is, as far as I know, still that found in Matsunaga’s introduction to his edition of the text p. xxiii-xxvi.

is taught as being of great importance and efficacy;¹¹ and we find a clear increase in importance of other elements that transgress ordinary ideas of purity, such as the consumption of such impure (but for that very reason powerful) substances as blood or semen. Mortuary elements such as the use of skulls in ritual are also found in this text, but they do not have the prominence that they take in late scriptures, and are not a part of the iconography of the deities.

Between about the ninth and the twelfth century of the Common Era a vast quantity of scriptures and commentaries and other associated texts was produced. It is clear that the religious milieu in India in this period was very active and volatile, in the sense that many forms of religions were competing actively and consciously with each other. Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Buddhists, and other groups, seem to have been steadily propogating cults of new forms of deities, male and female. Within Buddhism, the Vajrayāna became clearly ever stronger. In a competitive market it held out powerful attractions, claiming to offer Buddha-hood within this very life, with relatively little hardship, and for those who so desired various magical powers as well.

Most of the Buddhist tantras composed during this period belong to the class known as *yoginītantras* or *yoganiruttaratantras*.¹² In these scriptures we find many of the elements that were present in the *Guhyasamājatantra*, but the emphasis lies usually on terrifying forms of the deities and often on female deities or *yoginīs*. Among the most important *yoginītantras* are the *Hevajratantra*, very often cited in commentatorial and other later literature, which teaches a cult of the terrifying Hevajra and his female consort Nairātmyā, who are worshipped in the center of a circle of *yoginīs*, and the *Laghuśaṃvaratantra*, one of the most important of a large group of scriptures concerned with the worship of the deity Cakraśaṃvara and his consort Vajravārāhī. Somewhat later than the two cults propagated in these scriptures is the Kālacakra system, which came to occupy a place of particular importance in Tibet, and certainly was important in India as well.

Bewildering though the diversity of these tantras is, it may be noted that it lies primarily in what may be regarded as details of the methods or techniques employed, the forms of the deities and their arrangements into

¹¹This is not to say of course that this is the first time in Buddhism (whether non-tantric or tantric) that we find references to sexual yoga. See e.g. Snellgrove 1987 p. 127–128.

¹²The various classifications of tantric scripture that were current in India, and the historical development of these classifications, still remain to be seriously studied. Note that the term *anuttarayogatantra*, almost ubiquitous in the secondary literature is not found in any of the texts surviving in Sanskrit that are available to me. See Sanderson 1994, p. 97–98 note 1.

maṇḍalas and so on. It is important to realize that many texts say little or nothing about doctrine; and when they do, many offer little more than some allusions or simple explanations of well-known ideas and teachings of the Mahāyāna. Tantric Buddhism thus in the main sees itself as having its own identity distinct from non-tantric Mahāyāna Buddhism primarily in the sphere of means (*upāya*); means for the tantric practitioner's own liberation and for the purpose of aiding others to the same liberation as well as in the sphere of more worldly aims.

II. OBSERVATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RITUAL OF EMPOWERMENT.

After these all too brief and all too broad sketches, I would like now in the main part of this talk to consider some aspects of at least one matter in some more detail, and as I announced at the start, for this I have chosen the ritual of consecration or initiation (*abhiṣeka*), about which you have read something in Prof. Sanderson's article (Sanderson 1994) which contains a summary of an account of *yoginītantra* consecration, based on important ritual-texts such as Abhayākaragupta's *Vajrāvalī*.

First of all it should be made quite clear that the main purpose of the consecration (or sequence of consecrations) is to entitle the initiate to tantric practice, particularly (*mantra*)-*sādhana*. Herein lies an important difference between Śaiva and Buddhist tantric systems. As you have seen, Sanderson shows that Śaiva tantra has exercised an important influence on tantric Buddhism, particularly in the period of the *yoginītantras*. But it must be noted that the corresponding Śaiva ritual of initiation (*dīkṣā*) is in general thought to be itself, directly, salvific—not in the sense that the initiate is immediately thereby liberated, but rather that in the ritual the bonds that hold the soul in its non-liberated condition are cut, with the exception of a tiny portion that gradually decreases (if the post-initiatory observances are kept correctly) till death, when the soul becomes fully liberated. This was in the main the position even of those Śaivas who held that there was in fact another way (through gnosis) to liberation, and that this other way was superior in that it allowed the possibility of liberation in life (*jīvanmukti*). The tantric Buddhists could not—understandably enough—accept the possibility that the ritual performed by an officiant (*ācārya*) for an initiate could have a directly soteriological effect on that initiate; for them it was in general repeated practice of tantric meditation that brought about liberation. Initiation is none the less essential for them, inasmuch as this ritual alone can qualify one for the directly salvific meditative practice. During the rite of consecration, the initiate is introduced to a particular *maṇḍala* of

deities, and is given mantras that he is later to use in his religious practice. Without consecration, as our texts often repeat, the tantric methods cannot be employed—to attempt to do so is compared with striking the air with one’s fist or trying to drink water from a mirage.¹³

Now here there seems to me to lie an interesting question which is not taken up in Prof. Sanderson’s article, probably because the texts that he refers to there do not explicitly touch upon it. As you have read, the *yoginītantra* ritual of *abhiṣeka*, as presented by Abhayākaragupta and others, involves such extraordinary and apparently non-Buddhist elements as sexual intercourse between the officiant and a female offered to him by the initiate, the consumption by the initiate of the semen produced in this copulation, and the copulation of the initiate himself with either the same or another female. Sanderson has also pointed out that authorities such as Abhayākaragupta teach that even monks should be given these sexual initiations, and that they should ideally be actually performed (rather than merely visualized or imagined). They are to be imagined (that is performed with an imagined partner rather than an actually present female) only if the initiate is not sufficiently convinced of the true, empty, nature of reality, or when in a country where there are evil people (by which he presumably means people who might criticize or even persecute Buddhists who performed apparently sinful rituals). But as far as I can see Abhayākaragupta in his manual of the initiation says nothing about why the sexual elements are important in the ritual in the first place. To explain, as he does, that they are not in fact sinful does not reveal why, in the opinion of this great authority, they are necessary; why this rapid and powerful path of tantric practice cannot be followed except by someone who has been given this set of consecrations.

As far as I can tell at present, on the basis of the texts that I have read, this question is never explicitly put or fully answered.¹⁴ One might sug-

¹³Cf. e.g. from the third *paṭala* of the *Laghuśaṃvaratantra* or *Herukābhīdhānatāntra*, the still unpublished basic tantra of the cult of Cakraśaṃvara and his consort Vajravārāhī, *adrṣṭamaṇḍalo yogī yogitvam yaḥ samīhate | hanyate muṣṭinākāśaṃ pibate mṛgaṭṛṣṇikām ||* (MS Baroda 13290 f. 4r7–4v1). Here *adrṣṭamaṇḍalo yogī* means of course a (would-be) yogin who has not received the empowerments (of this *yoginītantra* system). A variant form of this verse is quoted in the *caturthābhiṣekavidhiḥ* section of the *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā*, with the first half reading *nābhiṣikto hi yo yogī yogitvam abhivāñchati* (Sakurai 1996 p. 514 l. 17–18). The *sādhana*-literature also contains numerous references to the fact that their practice is only possible after receiving the corresponding consecrations; cf. e.g. *sādhako bhūtaḍāmaratantre labdhābhiṣeko gurubhir anujñāto...* (SāMĀ 265, p. 515 l. 4).

¹⁴The manuals of the ritual that I have studied do not as a rule go beyond offering merely sets of correspondences. An example to make clear what I mean: both Kuladatta’s *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā* and Kumāracandra’s *pañjikā Ratnāvalī* on the *Kṛṣṇayamāritāntra* tell us

gest that the answer lies simply in the general tantric idea that I mentioned already, that the passions must be conquered by the use of the passions themselves.¹⁵ But the passages which propose this principle are most naturally taken as referring to post-initiatory practice. And since, as I have said, it is this post-initiatory practice that is said to be salvific, it is indeed during it that one might rather expect such transgressive elements. The question why, before embarking on such practice, it should be necessary that sexual intercourse form part of the preparatory ritual of consecration, does not seem to me to be adequately answered herewith.

Now though I said that this question is not explicitly put or fully answered, it seems clear that several authors were more or less acutely aware of it; and in a few texts we find explanations of the function of the *prajñājnānābhīṣeka*—that element of the ritual in which the initiate himself is to have intercourse—which seem to have at least in part the purpose to answer the question or rebut a possible attack on this point. One of the most interesting of such texts that I have seen is one entitled *Abhīṣekanirukti* (AbhiNir) that is attributed in one Tibetan translation (Tōhoku 2476) to the celebrated eleventh-century master Ratnākaraśānti, but more probably was written by a disciple of his called Jinasujayaśrīgupta.¹⁶ This text in fact presents three different views (*pakṣas*) on the function of what is

that the *kalasābhīṣekaḥ* (i.e. the lower consecrations up to the *ācāryābhīṣekaḥ* considered as a unit) purifies the initiate's body, the *guhyaābhīṣekaḥ* his speech and the *prajñājnānābhīṣeka* his mind. While perfectly consonant with the thought of these systems, this does not of course provide a really compelling or satisfying answer to our question, and hardly reveals anything of the logic behind the necessity of the *prajñājnānābhīṣeka*.

¹⁵Among the most famous and frequently cited passages in which (a form of) this idea is stated are HeTa II.ii.51ab (cf. also II.ii.50); CiViPra 35 and 37 (note also verse 20); CaMaTa 13.6 (note that the third pāda of this verse, *viṣeṇāpi viṣaṃ hanyāt* already occurs in (non-tantric) Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* as 4.72a). Cf. also MaSūAl 13.11–13, to which attention is drawn in Snellgrove 1987 p. 126–127.

¹⁶The author is thus named in the colophon of the sole complete manuscript of it that I am aware of at present; if this attribution—which is also made in the colophon of another Tibetan translation (Tōhoku 2477), independent of the abovementioned one—is correct, the author has incorporated his name in the last verse of the work as preserved in this manuscript (*abhidadhatā tattvam idaṃ puṇyaṃ yad avāpi paramasekasya | jinasujayaśrīguptaṃ jagad idaṃ akhilaṃ tato bhavatāt ||* AbhNi f. 45r3–4). On grounds of style and terminology I do not believe that the work was written by Ratnākaraśānti. It is quite clear that the work has been re-redacted deliberately at the same time that it was re-attributed; note for instance that at one point when the text refers to a *Sahajasādhana* 'extracted' from the *Hevajratāntra* by the authors guru (this is probably a reference to the *Hevajrasahasadyoga* of Ratnākaraśānti preserved in Royal Asiatic Society, London, MS Hodgson 35 as the work directly following the *Abhīṣekanirukti*) the Tibetan translation that ascribes the AbhNi to Ratnākaraśānti has *kho bos* (sDe dge *bstan 'gyur, rgyud* vol. zi f. 168v1) where the Sanskrit MS has *asmadgurubhiḥ* (AbhiNir f. 44v9).

supposed to happen during the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* in the Yogatantras (by which is meant here principally the *Guhyasamājatantra*) and, more briefly, three positions on what happens in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* in the Yoginī-tantra systems. Interestingly, the author does not himself decide in favour of any particular *pakṣa*—instead, in one of the verses at the conclusion of the work, he says that the wise should select the appropriate one.¹⁷

In tantric Buddhism, as in the non-tantric Mahāyāna, the practitioner aims not merely at personal freedom from suffering and rebirth but at helping all sentient beings by the acquisition of the bodies of a Buddha, the most important of which (*pradhānam*) is the Dharmakāya. In the *mantranaya*, these bodies are to be achieved through specifically Tantric methods, such as the meditative evocation of a deity who is a transformation from a mantra, the emanation and resorption of maṇḍalas of deities and so on. Now for it to be possible to meditatively cultivate in the *mantranaya* the non-dual, transcendent and supremely blissful goal that is that which is called the Dharmakāya, it is necessary first to have some sort of cognition or experience of it.¹⁸ We might put it that a glimpse of this transcendent target must be had, in order that one can later firmly set one’s meditative sights on it. It is the function of the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* to provide this glimpse.

Having been instructed by the guru what he must do and on what he must concentrate, the initiand, uniting with the consort, must mark that moment of blissful experience that, checking or counteracting all other sensations offers an at least apparent absence of all duality (*advayābhāsa*). This experience is said to occur in the brief interval between the moment in which the initiand’s *bodhicitta*, that is his semen, is in the center of the *maṇi*, that is the glans of his penis, and the moment of emission. Though not the goal itself, it is so to speak an illustration or example (*dr̥ṣṭāntabhūta*) of what the nature of that goal is.¹⁹

This is roughly the first *pakṣa* set out in the *Abhiṣekanirukti*; it is the simplest and most straightforward one. Without going into the other *pakṣas*, something for which the present occasion hardly allows the time, it should be clear that we see here both awareness of the problem—the need to provide

¹⁷*prajñājñānābhīṣekasya prabhedā lakṣyalakṣaṇāḥ | trayāḥ proktā nirūpyātra yukto grāhyas tu paṇḍitaiḥ ||* AbhNi f. 45r1.

¹⁸See especially ... *pradhānaṃ dharmakāyākhyam phalam sviśuddhadharmadhātu-rūpaṃ yogatantrreṣu bhāvanāsādhyam. na cājñātaṃ bhāvayitum śaktam. na ca samprati tadālabhanajñānam asti, tatprāptaṃ bhāvanāyā vaiyarthya-prasaṅgāt* (AbhNir f. 40v1).

¹⁹See especially *tantruktalakṣaṇamudrāsamyoge gurūpadeśato bodhicittamañimadhyasthītibahīrnīrgamayor antarāle yad upalabhyate sarvānyopalambhapratyanīkabhūtam advayābhāsaṃ mahāsukhākāraṃ jñānaṃ tadr̥ṣṭāntabhūtaṃ draṣṭavyam* (AbhNir f. 40v2–3).

The proponents of this view²¹ further assign to the three consecrations the function of purifying respectively the body, speech and mind of the initiand, and hence, it would seem, see no possible use for any further consecration.

The next two positions that I would like to mention very briefly are found reported in the *Tattvaratnāvaloka* and its *vivarāṇa* alone, and not in the *Abhiṣekanirukti*.²² The first of these, which we find reported in *Tattvaratnāvaloka* 15 and the *Vivarāṇa* thereon, is that the fourth empowerment consists in the initiand, after the copulation with a female partner in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, taking the *bodhicittaṃ*, that is semen, from his partner's sex with his tongue. Here it should be noted that it cannot be the action itself that Vāgīśvarakīrti condemns, for this quite commonly forms part of the ritual, and does so also in Vāgīśvarakīrti's own manual, the *Sāmājika Saṃkṣiptābhiṣekavidhi*, edited by Sakurai in an appendix of his book. It is rather the interpreting of this element as constituting a separate, fourth, empowerment that our author rejects.

The next position, which Vāgīśvarakīrti explains and rejects in the following verse of his work, sees the fourth consecration as being the sexual enjoyment of women by the initiand after the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, i.e., evidently, after the completion of the entire empowerment ritual. It is indeed somewhat surprising that some authorities should thus have regarded what would normally (whether condoned or not) be considered to fall clearly under post-initiatory practice (*caryā*) as a fourth empowerment. This too Vāgīśvarakīrti rejects. I have not found any other text that explicitly mentions either of these two positions, let alone one that actually upholds one of them. I do not rule out that such texts may still exist, but I should think that it is also possible that the strong condemnation of these views voiced by Vāgīśvarakīrti—in which he surely would not have been alone—may have actually resulted in their disappearing without leaving other traces.

²¹As usual, neither the *Tattvaratnāvaloka* nor the *Abhiṣekanirukti* mention the names of any proponents of this view. However, as Sakurai points out, what seem to be the earliest surviving accounts of the Guhyasamāja ritual of empowerment, those of Jñānapāda in his *Dvikramatattvabhāvanānāma Mukhāgama* and his pupil Dīpaṅkarabhadra in his *Guhyasamājamaṇḍalavidhi*, do not speak of or show any signs of knowing a fourth empowerment. It is possible that some later followers of their early tradition might have resisted the introduction (as I shall already call it, anticipating my later remarks) of the *caturthābhiṣeka*.

²²This need not mean that the author of that text did not know of them: we know in fact that he did not set forth all the different views with which he was familiar, but only those which he did not consider to be utterly indefensible. These two positions, both rejected vehemently by Vāgīśvarakīrti, may well have been among those which the author of the *Abhiṣekanirukti* knew but felt not to merit consideration.

We come now to the final *pakṣa* with reference to the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* system's fourth empowerment that I wish to point out to you. It is that which became, I think we may say, the standard orthodoxy, also in the *yoginītantra* systems. At the same time it is a solution which is a little difficult to pin down; or, to put it differently, it could and perhaps should be differentiated into two or possibly more very closely related but slightly divergent variants. This would require a very close and careful examination of a not inconsiderable number of texts, something which I have not yet been in a position to do. I shall therefore gloss over these possible differences here, and can refer you to Sakurai's book for a tentative distinction into two *pakṣas* of what I shall treat for our present purposes as one.

The defining characteristic of this *pakṣa*, then, is that it holds that the fourth empowerment is one which is bestowed verbally, i.e. by the initiating guru giving a verbal instruction to the initiand. Now some texts seem to indeed refer to this consecration as only verbal—our friend Vāgīśvarakīrti in his *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi*, calls it the *vacanamātrābhīṣekaḥ* (cf. Sakurai 1996 p. 419 l. 11 and l. 13), and in this text at least does not indicate that anything more is involved than this speech by the guru. But it is also clear that in fact usually, if not always, the fourth empowerment was seen as having, theoretically at least, another component as well. Indeed, had it been otherwise, that which as the final one one expects to be the culminating or crowning empowerment or consecration could well seem an anti-climax. This no doubt was as clear to these Tantric authors as it is to us. The way that this added element is sometimes expressed in is that the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* and the Fourth Empowerment are said to be related to each other as mark/characteristic and that which is marked, or ultimate goal. In theory, the verbal instruction received from the guru is supposed to cause the bliss experienced, for an instant, without sensation of duality in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* to become strong or steady.

Treating the fourth empowerment as representing or being, in some way, the ultimate goal, means that explanations of its nature may vary according to just how that goal is envisaged. In the—as far as I can tell at present very influential—works of Vāgīśvarakīrti, the transcendental or goal-aspect of the fourth empowerment is explained as being seven-fold or having seven aspects, the so-called seven *anigas* of Mahāmudrā.²³ I don't want to go into an explanation of this rather complicated matter here; let me just conclude

²³Though his *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi*, as I said, does not go into this other component, Vāgīśvarakīrti goes into this in detail in other works of his: both in a text called *Saptāṅga*, a Tibetan translation of which was used by Sakurai, and in the *Tattvaratnāvaloka* and the *vivaraṇa*.

our brief survey of the Guhyasamāja pakṣas by repeating that in the last solution, which I referred to as the orthodox one, we find two elements combined: first the notion that the Fourth Empowerment is given verbally to the initiand by his guru, and secondly that it in some way should also be seen as being or as containing, ideally at least, the goal (*lakṣya* or *phala*).

Let us now turn our attention to the *yoginītantra* or *yoganiruttaratantra* systems. Here the quantity of literature is far greater than that dealing with the Guhyasamāja system, and to survey it all is a task that will require many years of study. Still, following the lead of the *Abhiṣekanirukti*, I shall at least touch on the question of the existence and nature of the fourth empowerment in the *yoginītantras* too. The *Tattvaratnāvaloka* and its *vivarāṇa* provide us with no information, for Vāgīśvarakīrti does not there refer to, nor show any awareness of, these systems. But the *Abhiṣekanirukti*, after its account of the different *pakṣas* in the Guhyasamāja system, goes on to tell us that there are some who hold that in the *yoginītantras* such as the *Hevajratantra*, too, there is no fourth empowerment.²⁴

Now, at first sight at least, it may well be found surprising that, as we are told, some teachers held there to be only three kinds of consecration even in the ‘*yoginītantras* such as the *Hevajratantra*’. For in the HeTa itself there is clear reference to the empowerments being four in number.²⁵ And indeed in the commentatorial and other material directly related to the HeTa that I have been able to study till now, I know of no passage that denies existence of a fourth empowerment.

But if we take other *yoginītantra* cycles into consideration, there are, I think clear signs to be found that indeed a fourth empowerment was not an element that was invariably present. Here, however, much of my evidence must necessarily be negative. But I believe that the absence of any mention of a *caturthābhiṣeka* in an otherwise detailed account of the ritual of empowerment must be taken as a significant and probably reliable indication that no fourth empowerment was envisaged. This is the case with the *Caṇḍamahāroṣāntantra*, a work famous rather for its frankness and lack of reticence. In its third chapter, called the *abhiṣekapaṭala*, this scripture teaches how the *abhiṣekas* are to be performed, and does so with no mention of the fourth empowerment. Rather, at the end of the account of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, we are told simply that the ritual concludes with

²⁴*yoginītantre tu hevajrādau kecid ācāryās trividham abhiṣekaṃ manyante* AbhiNir f. 44r10.

²⁵Cf. *ācāryaguhyaṣraṇḍā ca caturthaṃ tat punas tathā | ānandāḥ kramaśo jñeyāś catur-*
secanasamkhyayā || HeTa II.iii.10

a tantric feast (*bhakṣaṇacakra*, corresponding to what is usually called a *gaṇacakra*).²⁶ The sole commentary that seems to exist on this tantra, the *Padmāvātī* by Mahāsukhavajrapāda, gives us much useful additional material on the empowerment rituals, but it too simply does not mention any further empowerment after the *prajñājñānābhīṣekāḥ*.²⁷ Nor is, I think, the CaMaTa likely to be the only *yoginītantra* that has no fourth empowerment.²⁸

²⁶See CaMaTa (ed. George) 3.92.

²⁷I must admit that I have not yet read more recent sources for the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* ritual of empowerment, which continues to be practised in Nepal; it would not surprise me to learn that in later times the fourth consecration was imported into the cult of Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa from, for instance, the Hevajra or Cakraṣaṃvara systems. But it seems certain to me that it did not originally form a part of the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa consecrations.

²⁸As an excursus here, I would like to briefly consider the case of the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra*, an important Yamāri-tantra which has survived and even been published in Sanskrit. This work, though ‘traditionally’ not classified as a *yoginītantra* shares several some features with texts of that class, and the commentary on it that has been published in Sanskrit, Kumāracandra’s *Ratnāvalī*, with its numerous quotations from texts such as the *Hevajratantra* and *Ḍākinīvajrapañjaratantra*, seems to be attempting to bring it even more into harmony with the *yoginītantra* tradition. In it we find four consecrations mentioned (*prathamam maulisekena dvitīyam khadgamodanāt | tṛtīyam vajraghaṇṭām ca caturtham candrabhakṣaṇam || catvāry ete mahāsekāḥ kṛṣṇasya mukhanirgatāḥ | etatsekaprabhāvena bodhisattvā jīnaurasāḥ ||* (em., *jīnorasāḥ* ed.) KṛYaTa 6.5–6), but they clearly do not correspond to the lists of four that we have seen. Rather the first three seem to correspond (at least in type) to the lower consecrations, and the last should be understood as referring to the *guhyaḥbhīṣeka*; the ‘eating of the moon’ (*candrabhakṣaṇam* in KṛYaTa 6.5d) is most naturally taken as meaning the consumption of semen that is the defining act in the *guhyaḥbhīṣeka*. It is true that this also often has a part in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* (cf. p. 11 above), but it cannot be said to be the defining or essential element of that consecration. Indeed there are accounts of the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* that do not refer to it at all. However Kumāracandra seems determined to make the KṛYaTa conform in its empowerment ritual with the ‘standard’ systems. Interpreting the verses in question, he apparently takes the fourth mentioned consecration as referring to or including the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*: *caturtham candrabhakṣaṇam iti nāmābhīṣekatrikulasamayavajrācāryavajravratāśvāsavyākaraṇānujñānantaram prajñopāyābhīṣekam gṛhṇīyāt* (KṛYaTaPa p. 44). Here *prajñopāyābhīṣeka*, though not a term that is normally used, probably refers—I would suggest—to the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*. That is also frequently called simply *prajñābhīṣeka*, and note CaMaTa 3.51 *āsām* (i.e. *strīṇām*) *tu prajñābhīṣekasthāne upāyābhīṣeko deya iti*. And at a later point, when commenting on a section in the tantra’s fourteenth chapter where the drawing of the maṇḍala is described, Kumāracandra digresses lengthily to give a virtual manual of the empowerment ritual, complete with a verbal *caturthābhīṣeka* following the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* (KṛYaTaPa p. 91–103). The account Kumāracandra gives there is a fairly typical, eclectic, *yoginītantra* one; close in many respects to Vāgīśvarakīrti’s *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi* and to Kuladatta’s *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā*, though also with some borrowings from the *Hevajratantra* system, such as the mantras used for the consecration of the sexual organs of the initiand and his consort before the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*.

But in what I may perhaps call the *yoginītantra* mainstream, the cults of Heruka forms such as Hevajra and Cakraśamvara and Vajravārāhī, it is pretty clear that it was the overwhelmingly widely held view that a fourth empowerment followed the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, and that this empowerment was verbal in nature. This mainstream view is virtually identical with the final *pakṣa* we saw in the Guhyasamāja system, which as I said seems to have become established as the standard orthodoxy. In the *yoginītantras* too (even more so perhaps than in the literature relating to the Guhyasamāja), it would be possible and useful to distinguish between slightly different variants of this *pakṣa*, but again I shall not here try to do so.²⁹

Another important idea which I should mention here, however, is one which is expressed by, among others, Kamalanātha in his commentary on the *Hevajratantra*. This is the notion that the fourth empowerment, understood as the state (or the realization of the state) which is the goal, is experienced directly by some few (fortunate, or rather advanced) disciples during the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*. For others, however, it must be revealed with words thereafter.³⁰ This is an interesting proposal;³¹ it divides the two components I spoke of above, which indeed are a little difficult to integrate in a

²⁹I may however point out some points of particular interest in the *Abhiṣekanirukti*'s second and main *pakṣa* with regard to the *yoginītantras*. One of the features here which is as far as I can see not common, is that the fourth empowerment is said to be or involve an expansion of the bliss that was initially experienced during the the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* to fill first the initiand's entire body and than all things, moving and unmoving, which the initiand is to cause to become of the nature of, or one might say suffused with this bliss. This is therefore said to be, like the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, a consecration or empowerment of the initiand's mind. So the *caturthābhiṣeka* here, and as I say this seems to me uncommon, seems to represent both the fruit and a part of the cause, the purification or transformation of the initiand's mind. Cf. *tatra prajñāṅgasāṅge sahajamahāsukhasya yat sthīrīkṛtya lakṣaṇaṃ tat prajñāṅgāśrayatvāc cetasaḥ prajñājñānābhiṣeka ity ucyate. yat punaḥ sthīrīkṛtasya sahajamahāsukhasya yathāśakti samāhitena manasā sarvāṅgapratyaṅgavyāpanaṃ viśvavyāpanaṃ ca viśvasya ca tanmayīkaraṇaṃ tat prajñājñānavad advayam akalpaṃ mahāsukhamātrapratibhāsam, ataḥ so 'pi cetasa evābhiṣekaś caturthaṃ tat punaḥ tathety anena nirdiṣṭo veditavya iti manyante* (AbhiNir f. 44v7–9).

³⁰From the commentary on *Hevajratantra* II.iii.10b: *tad eva prajñājñānam. punar iti paścāt. yadi paścād api tad eva kiṃ caturthenety āha—tatheti. tad eva prajñājñānaṃ rūpaviśeṣeṇa jalam iva taraṅgarūpeṇotpannaṃ caturtham ity arthaḥ. sa punar ayaṃ mahāsukhamayo vajradharaḥ. sa cāyaṃ keśāṃcit tadaiva prajñājñānābhiṣekakāla eva cakāsti. tadapareṣāṃ vacasā prakāśyate* (Ra.ĀvHePa f. 17r6).

³¹It is incidentally followed, it seems, by Abhayākaragupta in his famous commentary *Āmnāyamañjarī* on the *Samputodbhavantra*; cf. *de yan bsod nams dañ ye śes kyi bag chags bsags pa rnams la śes rab ye śes kyi dbañ gi dus kho nar gsal zin. de las gzan rnams la tshig gis gsal bar bya'o* (quoted in Sakurai 1996 p. 251 n. 76). There is some evidence that Kamalanātha precedes Abhayākaragupta; I plan to discuss this in my forthcoming edition of the *Hevajratantra* together with this commentator's *Ratnāvalī*.

natural fashion. The verbal instruction is only needed for those who do not have this intense experience of enlightened bliss in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*. Presumably, however, this would in Kamalanātha's view have applied to most cases, and the advanced who did not need the oral instruction would have been indeed few.

A final selection from the vast *yoginītantra* literature that I wish to mention here is one to which Snellgrove has already drawn attention in his book *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, though it seems that Snellgrove was not fully aware of the unusual character of his source, nor of the underlying problems.³² This is a manual of the ritual of empowerment or initiation into the maṇḍala of Hevajra, written by an Indian author of whom I at least know at present nothing beyond his name, Prajñāśrī. This is Snellgrove's translation of the description of the *caturthābhīṣeka* in this work:

Then on the western side of the main maṇḍala one should prepare the maṇḍala for the Fourth Consecration one fathom across, sprinkling it with sandalwood scent and so on and with *bodhicitta*. On it one places a white blanket and so on and then the Wisdom-maiden, who is consecrated, adorned and honored just as before. Then the pupil makes his request in this manner:

Salutation to you, the inward self of the sensible world,
Salutation to you, inwardly gentle to sensible things
and inwardly released from the sensible world.
inward bestower of sensible things, salutation to
you!
O excellent lord, grant to me, the excellent Fourth
Consecration.

Then the master speaks thus:

You must slay living beings. You must speak lying
words.
You must take what is not given. You must frequent
others' wives.
If you do these things, no evil is done, great merit is
yours.

³²I may perhaps be permitted to remark here that Snellgrove's account of Higher Yogatantra initiation in this book, though treating some interesting material, is very inadequate as far as his grasp of the historical development is concerned, and in several respects seems to me both confused and confusing.

If these things you can do, I will give the Fourth Consecration.

The pupil replies:

Great protector, by your gracious favor, I can.

Then he unites in the embrace, performs coition, and as the great bliss descends to the palace of knowledge, he reverses it upward to the level of non-cognition, holding it there. This experiencing of noncognitive knowledge is the Fourth in terms of its (psychophysical) support. The Fourth in terms of no support is to be known from one's master's mouth. (Snellgrove 1987, 259–260).

As Snellgrove remarks, a 'distinctive feature of this account is the deliberate separation of the Fourth Consecration from the preceding one[s], each taking place at one of the four sides of the main maṇḍala' (Snellgrove 1987, 260). Also noteworthy is that in Prajñāśrī's account of the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* (translated in Snellgrove 1987, 258–259), the initiand is said to retain rather than emit his semen; in the Fourth Consecration, in which as we see the copulation is repeated, he not only retains it but is said to reverse it upwards. In itself this is a not uncommon yogic sexual technique, but it must be said that in the context of what should be an initiatory rite, the entrance of a pupil into the religion, it is highly unnatural that that pupil should be expected to perform so advanced a feat. And in forbidding emission of semen in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, while making it perhaps a little easier for the initiand to repeat his performance in the *caturthābhīṣeka*, Prajñāśrī appears to go against the *Hevajratāntra* itself, which should have presumably been his main scriptural source.³³ Altogether, Prajñāśrī's anomalous account is for many reasons clearly 'secondary'. I shall return below to what may underlie what one cannot but suspect were innovations intended for the use of at most a tiny group of virtuosi.

I have presented just enough material here to show that in *yoginītantra* as in the *Guhyasamāja* system we do not find a single unanimous view either on the existence or the nature of the fourth empowerment. There is, I am

³³That the *Hevajratāntra* itself did prescribe ejaculation during the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, followed by the intiand's consumption of the semen, is seen most clearly in *Hevajratāntra* II.iv.39: *na kareṇa tato grhyet śuktikayā na śaṅkhakaiḥ | amṛtaṃ jihvayā grāhyam edhanāya balasya vai ||* .

sure, much that I am leaving unreported here, but I believe that we are not overlooking anything that would very substantially affect the discussion with which I wish now to conclude.³⁴

Having to this point given you a descriptive survey of some of the varied views on the existence and nature of the fourth empowerment to be found in the literature, I am now going to try to look at all this with two questions in my mind which are, not surprisingly, not considered explicitly (as far as I know) in the Buddhist tantric tradition itself. The questions are, firstly: what is the historical (using the word both to refer to actual chronology of texts and even more importantly to conceptual development) relationship between the diverse views that we have seen? and, secondly, intimately related of course to the first: what factor or factors drove or motivated such historical developments?

I do not claim to be able to answer these questions in detail and with a very high degree of certainty. But answers, however provisional, can I think be attempted; and that they can is partly due to the fortunate circumstance that it emerges quite clearly from our primary sources that the debate on the existence and nature of the fourth empowerment has its origin in a single cryptic line (one might say a single cryptic pāda) of the GuSaTa, or rather the *Samājottara*, and the problem of its interpretation. This line, the *locus classicus*, is quoted in virtually every more or less detailed discussion of the *caturthābhīṣeka*. When it is explicitly attributed to a source, that source is (I believe) always said to be either the *Guhyasamājantra* (or *Samājottara*) or the *Hevajratantra*; since there can in my view be no doubt that the *Hevajratantra* is later than and, in this respect, draws on, the *Samājottara*, we can reasonably assume (though not be absolutely certain) that the *Samājottara* is indeed the first text in which the line occurred.

The complete verse may be constituted as follows:³⁵

([*abhiṣekaṃ tridhā bhinnam asmiṃs tantre prakalpitaṃ |*]
kalaśābhīṣekaṃ prathamam dvitīyam guhyābhīṣekataḥ |)
prajñājñānam tṛtīyam tu caturtham tat punas tathā || GST
 18.113³⁶

³⁴My most important omission here (Sakurai too, no doubt for reasons similar to mine, leaves it out of consideration) is the Kālacakra system, in which of course much interesting, and in several respects untypical or innovative material is to be found.

³⁵There are a large number of testimonia to the text of this verse (i.e. quotations of it in other works), and I have allowed these to influence the constitution of the text, especially in view of the fact that Matsunaga's edition of the GuSaTa is only based on a few quite late paper MSS.

³⁶Cf. HeTa II.iii.10 (quoted in footnote 25 on p. 13 above) and cf. also *tac cābhīṣekaṃ*

a. *bhinnam*] em. (with testimonia), *bhedam* Matsunaga. b. *prakalpi-*
tam] Matsunaga, vv.ll. (testimonia) *prakāśitam*, *prakīrtitam*

The first thing to note, perhaps, is that the first two pādas, are those which we have seen before, quoted in the *Abhiṣekanirukti* as part of the evidence put forward by those who held there to be no fourth empowerment. Now many, perhaps most, of the texts which quote the *locus classicus* omit to quote these two pādas and do not refer to them. Note also that in the *Samputodbhavatantra*'s version or borrowing of the verse the troublesome pādas have been replaced by an (unmetrical) statement that the empowerments are four in number.³⁷ The crucial pāda, however, is the final one, which since its interpretation is so disputed really defies translation. Taken one by one its words mean 'fourth' 'that' 'again' 'thus/in the same way'. For centuries, it seems, much effort was spent in attempting to provide a satisfactory interpretation of these words. Here I can not go into the details of the exegetical discussion;³⁸ I propose, however, that this line may origi-

caturvidham | prathamam kalasābhiṣekam dvitīyam guhyābhiṣekataḥ | prajñājñānam
ṭṭīyam tu caturtham tat punas tathā || SaTa 2.1.46 and also *ācāryābhiṣekasampūrṇam*
dvitīyam guhyam uttamam | prajñājñānam (em., *prajñājñāna*^o Tsuda) *ṭṭīyam tu*
caturtham tat punas tathā || SaUdTa 18.28 All of these parallels are from almost certainly later *yoginītantra* literature.

³⁷Obviously, just as those who understand there to be three consecrations in the GS system need to provide some interpretation of 18.113f, so those who hold there to be four should, properly speaking, offer some explanation of the fact that the first two pādas quite clearly say that there are three. But this is often simply not done. The (history of the) interpretation of the verse, and especially its cryptic last pāda deserves careful study.

³⁸I shall do no more than give a few samples of how proponents of both views (that there is and that there is no fourth empowerment) suggest that we should understand the final pāda. Not taken as referring to a separate fourth empowerment: *upadeśasaṃrakṣārtham sattvayāmohanāya ca ṭṭīyam eva caturthaśabdenoktam bhagavata. anyathā tat punar iti noktam syāt. tad atyantasaṃgatam. . .* TaRaAvVi p. 141 l. 5–6; *nānenābhiṣekādya bhāṅyate. kiṃ tarhi? tantrābhīsyandanaṃ kriyate. tathā hy uktam tantrē—sevāsādhanam prathamam dvitīyam upasādhanam | sādhanam tu ṭṭīyam vai mahāsādhanam caturthakam ||* (GuSaTa 18.136) *iti. tatrāyam arthaḥ—yad etat prajñājñānam tad eva caturtham, mahāsādhanam iti arthaḥ. tenaiva mahāvajradharapada-prāpteḥ. idānīm tatpadasya lakṣaṇatvāt tad eva prajñājñānam caturtham caturthaśabdavācyam mahāsādhanam ity arthaḥ* AbhiNir f. 44r3–5; *caturtham tat punas tatheti ṭṭīyād yad anyat tattvasaṃgrahādyabhīhitam mālodakādīkam abhiṣekāntaram tasya saṃgrahaṃ* (conj, *saṃgrhītam* MS) *varṇayanti* AbhiNir f. 44r8–44v1. Taken as referring to a separate fourth empowerment: *caturtham iti prajñājñānam ṭṭīyam apeksya caturtham ity ucyate. tad iti tacchabdena tad eva prajñājñānam tadrūpaṃ parāmṛṣyate. punar iti punaḥśabdena tasmād viśeṣaḥ. viśeṣaś cātra nirāsravanirantarātyantasphītāvicchinnaprabandhapravāhīvalakṣaṇaḥ. tatheti tathāśabdena tādrśatvam abhidhīyate. tādrśatvam ca yādrśyā prajñādiyuktyā sāmagryā yādrśam prajñājñānam utpannam paścād api tādrśasyaiva sāmagryā tathaiva cotpadyate nānyatheti tathāśabdārthaḥ* TaRaAvVi p. 140 l. 15–20.

nally not have been intended to teach a separate fourth empowerment, but that it was the cause of/the justification for the introduction of one.

To present an outline sketch of a hypothetical reconstruction of this development I must start by briefly jumping back in time to discuss a period before that of which I have been speaking till now.³⁹ I believe that in the history of *yoga*- and *yoginītantra* consecration ritual we have the familiar pattern of continuous upward expansion of an original set; in this case, I suggest, a set of five separate Yogatantra empowerments, corresponding to five Buddha families and five Buddha-knowledges, and culminating in the *nāmābhīṣeka*, in which the initiand was given the name corresponding to his new tantric identity. This set of five empowerments survives, with the correspondences that show that it was once intended to be complete in itself, as part of the set of Higher Yogatantra empowerments as taught for instance by Kuladatta in his *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā*. In the Guhyasamāja system the *guhyaḥbhīṣeka* was added, first, probably, as a separate ritual,⁴⁰ later as a culmination to follow the yogatantra initiations. I have not yet found any evidence in the *Guhyasamājatantra* itself, excluding the *Samājottara*, that a *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* was envisaged; rather the *guhyaḥbhīṣeka* seems to me to be clearly regarded as the highest of empowerments.

It is in the *Samājottara* that it seems that the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* first emerges. We have seen that the *Samājottara* in its listing of the empowerments also uses the term *caturthaṃ*, but that a separate fourth empowerment was actually intended herewith seems to me, as to Sakurai, on the whole unlikely; in view of the facts that the same verse explicitly refers to the empowerments as three and that the early Jñānapāda tradition (as well as, to the best of my knowledge, the early Ārya tradition) of Guhyasamāja exegesis and practice not only does not teach a fourth empowerment but seems ignorant of any suggestion that there might be such a thing.

With the formulation of empowerment in the Higher Yogatantra as three-fold, it was a natural, and, I assume, a swiftly following step to assign to the three the functions of purification or transformation of the initiand's body, speech, and mind. The set of empowerments now looks complete; and the increase in intensity as the initiand passes through them culminates in a natural climax with his experience, guided by the prior instruction of his guru, of the blissful moment of consciousness without duality in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*.

³⁹I regret that lack of time prevents me from offering adequate documentation for the brief hypothetical outline presented in the following sentences.

⁴⁰See especially the eighth *paṭala* of the GuSaTa.

And here, it seems, we have a bifurcation of the tradition. The set of three consecrations did indeed remain unaugmented for some time in at least some circles. It was even, it seems, carried over into the *Caṇḍamahā-roṣaṇatantra*; somewhat surprising since on other points that text has been influenced by traditions such as that of the *Hevajatantra*. (Similarly, it may be noted, the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* appears to follow the early *Guhyasamājatantra* in having the *guhyaḅhiṣeka* as its culminating consecration). But the more widespread development was that, inspired by or making use of the handle offered by the far from clear wording of *Guhyasamājatantra* 18.113, a fourth consecration was held to follow the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*.

In the different *pakṣas* we saw as to the nature of this fourth consecration we can now easily discern different strategies. The first of the two *pakṣas* rejected by Vāgīśvarakīrti can be seen as an attempt to accommodate a fourth empowerment without actually adding anything to the ritual performance; the taking with the tongue of the semen from the consort’s sex, usually a part of the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, is labelled the Fourth Empowerment. The idiosyncratic solution chosen by Prajñāśrī is an interpretation in ritual of the cryptic *caturthaṃ tat punas tathā*; if the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* consisted in the initiand’s uniting with a consort, to say that the ‘fourth is that again, in the same way’ must mean that in the Fourth Empowerment the act of copulation is repeated. Of course there are other factors involved in the development represented by Prajñāśrī’s solution, but I am convinced that indeed the formulation *caturthaṃ tat punas tathā* is to be seen as underlying it.

As for the solution that came to be the preferred one, I see it as having, aside from the *caturthaṃ tat punas tathā*, two main factors that shaped its two components. First of all, the idea that the Fourth Empowerment consisted in an oral instruction of the initiand by the guru was another attempt to accommodate a further empowerment without significantly changing the way in which the ritual was performed. For it seems to be an early tradition that after the *guhyaḅhiṣeka* and the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* the guru proceeded to impart instruction on the nature of reality (or on the true meaning of the initiations received). This instruction is found in the important and early *Guhyasamājamaṇḍalavidhi* by Jñānapāda’s pupil Dīpaṃkarabhadra, but with no hint that it is understood as forming a separate empowerment.⁴¹ This manual can be shown to have retained its importance for centuries; an extensive commentary on it exists (Tōhoku 1871 by Ratnākaraśānti)—a very

⁴¹*maṇḍalaṃ devatātattvaṃ ācāryaparikarma ca | saṃkathya guhyaprajñābhīṣeṣā siktva tattvaṃ samuddiśet ||* GuMaVi f. 15v3–4.

unusual distinction for a mere manual of the ritual—and it is quoted and referred to explicitly in several later texts, including works that themselves belong rather to the *yoginītantra* systems.⁴² It is thus conceivable that it is indeed this ritual manual by Dīpaṃkarabhadra that, while not knowing a fourth empowerment itself, provided the element that was re-interpreted as being the Fourth.⁴³

The second factor that I suggest was involved is one which is even harder to pin down, and which I must confess I extrapolate from some accounts of the fourth empowerment rather than being able to attest its prior existence. Let me put it that it was the not always clearly formulated idea that while the empowerment ritual, and particularly the set of three consecrations, was a cause, though an indirect rather than a direct one, of the initiand’s future Buddhahood, the ritual should contain also an element that corresponded to his enlightenment itself; that even the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, though a religious act, was nonetheless in a sense *laukika* or conventional, *saṃvṛtisat*. The fourth empowerment was then to serve ideally as the goal, ultimately real (*paramārthasat*), utterly transcendent (*lokottara*). Such a role had probably been previously played, at least to a certain extent, by the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, but this had meant that that element of the ritual had had the double function of being both a purifier (of the initiand’s mind) and a foretaste or representative of the pure goal.⁴⁴

Once the orthodox solution had become the most widely accepted,⁴⁵ its spread may have been furthered by the composition of manuals giving a general account of Higher Yogatantra consecrations, meant to serve as a template no matter which particular cult was being followed or into which

⁴²Cf. e.g. VaĀv MS A f. 59v7–60r1, MS B f. 55r1–2; YaTaMaUp f. 26r4.

⁴³It cannot be ruled out however that Dīpaṃkarabhadra himself was following an earlier, possibly scriptural, source. This may perhaps be suggested by the quotations I have noticed of what seems to be a single pāda of a metrical text, of which it is not made quite clear however whether or not it is scriptural, which speaks of an instruction following the *abhīṣekas*: *siktvā tattvaṃ prakāśayet* (AbhPa f. 14r5; ViPra ad *Kālacakratāntra* 5.112, vol. 3 p. 53 l. 1). But note that both the authors who quote this pāda, Abhayākaragupta and the self-styled bodhisattva who authored the *Vimalaprabhā*, postdate Dīpaṃkarabhadra by several centuries; till the source of the pāda has been found we have no reason to assume that Jñānapāda’s disciple indeed knew it.

⁴⁴The same double role is played by the *caturthābhīṣeka*, it is interesting to note, in the second *yoginītantra-pakṣa* in the *Abhīṣekanirukti*; cf. footnote 29 on p. 15 above.

⁴⁵Its wide acceptance among the Tibetans is indicated by the fact that in indigenous Tibetan works the *caturthābhīṣeka* is not infrequently called *tshig dban*, a term for which I have seen no exact equivalent in an Indian work, though it may be noted that Vāgīśvara-kīrti in his *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi* twice uses the expression *vacanamātrābhīṣeka* (cf. p. 12 above).

maṇḍala a pupil was being initiated. In the manuals of this type that I have looked at, which are those which seem to have been the most influential, the *Vajrāvalī*, the *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā* and the *Kriyāsamuccaya*, the consecration always includes some form of the orthodox type of *caturthābhiṣeka*. It may have been under the influence of such texts that Kumāracandra felt motivated to give an account of Kṛṣṇayamāri empowerment ritual that conformed to the ‘*yoginītantra*-norm’ rather than accepting at face value what looks like an older (or at least archaic) form of the ritual envisaged by the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* itself.

While the topic that I have discussed here touches, I believe, on matters that are central and important for Vajrayāna Buddhism, and which I for one find very thought-provoking, let me conclude with a general remark on hermeneutics rather than one directly on the substance of what we have seen. From one point of view at least, what is most important about what I believe I have been able to show, is that we find clear signs that at least some developments in Vajrayāna practice and theory were motivated by controversies or difficulties of exegesis. In the different views on the existence and nature of the elusive fourth empowerment we see these Buddhists struggling to interpret the revelations that they saw as containing the highest teachings of the Buddha. In this students of the history of Buddhism, or indeed, I would suppose, of any classical Indian tradition, will recognize something familiar. For this importance of exegesis and the tensions created by the need for reinterpretation of scripture after further developments (that may sometimes have been partly inspired by exegesis of the very same scriptures) can be seen to run like a red thread throughout Indian intellectual traditions; and for all that it contains mystical and even what might be called anti-intellectual elements as well, it is of importance that we should recognize Indian tantric Buddhism as a part of Indian intellectual tradition.

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⁴⁶I am indebted to a large number of individuals and institutions for providing access to or photocopies or microfilms of Sanskrit manuscripts used in this study: Isabelle Onians, Somdev Vāsudeva, Prof. Dr. Albrecht Wezler; the Oriental Institute, Baroda; Cambridge University Library; the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen; the Royal Asiatic Society, London; the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

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