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Chronotopic Narratives of Seven Gurus and Eleven Texts: A Medieval Buddhist Community of Female Tāntrikas in the Swat Valley of Pakistan*

SUMMARY: Modern South Asian women's writing wells up to the stirring surface of contemporary literature in now globally recognizable forms of fiction and memoir, *inter alia*, the novel, the poem, the biography, the autobiography. Yet, beneath these topmost layers of colonial and post-colonial literary tides flow undercurrents of pre-colonial women's writing, often in radically other figurations of lettered expression. Even further down than the familiar temporal strata of the Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite religious poetry written by the dozen authoresses ranging from Muktābāi to Rūpa Bhavānī between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, there exists another place in the deep, like an underwater lake, of a much older women's writing penned by Tantric women *gurus*. The majority of this archaic Buddhist literature streamed out of the Swat valley in Pakistan, a locality for no less than seven known female *gurus*, who lived, taught, or wrote there between the eighth and eleventh centuries. After a short prologue on Swat and its recent history, the essay surveys eleven female-authored medieval Tantric works, which range in genre from ritual treatises, meditation practice-texts, and mystic poems, to literary forms that even seem evocative of contemporary women's gendered voices: spiritual biography and autobiography empowered by a place.

KEYWORDS: place, gender, Swat, Uḍḍiyāna, Pakistan, women's writing, female Sanskrit authors, Tantric Buddhism, Tibetan translation literature, biography, hagiography

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Nestled among the southeastern slopes of the Hindu Kush range in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province¹ of northwestern Pakistan, there lies a valley named Swat. Encircled by high mountains, this narrow canyon, barely a few kilometers wide, extends 112 kilometers from north to south. With its pristine nature and majestic scenery, the valley has often been called the Little Switzerland of Pakistan. It used to be a popular tourist destination with attractions including crystal-clear rivers, mesmerizing mountain lakes, a ski resort, and numerous archaeological sites attesting to the valley's ancient heritage.² The idyllic image has though faded somewhat after fierce fighting erupted in 2007 lasting till 2009 between government forces and local Taliban insurgents. Given that Swat today is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped regions of Pakistan, it is little wonder that the valley's present-day population of about 1.3 million is unsatisfied with their lot. While the revolt may have been hatched in a forbidden dream of a less corruptible future, it also discloses nostalgia for a richer past.

Prior to Swat's incorporation into the modern state of Pakistan in 1969, its inhabitants enjoyed four centuries of complete independence, which neither the Mughal emperors nor the British Crown could wrestle from them.³ Markedly, the members of the land-owning Pakhtun⁴ majority had equal rights. Farm land was periodically redistributed among the eligible tribal families, and until the territory's transformation into a kingdom in 1922 there were no fixed rulers.⁵

¹ The province was formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

² For the tourist sites, see the government web pages such as www.valleyswat.net and www.tourism.gov.pk/swat_nwfp.htm (last accessed: December 21, 2018).

³ For a historical overview of modern Swat, see von der Lühe 1991.

⁴ "Pakhtun" is a regional name, which is part of the broader and well-known tribal designation "Pashtun", an ethnic group whose spread covers Afghanistan and the northeastern part of Pakistan.

⁵ For the making of the kingdom of Swat, see Hay 1934: 236–246. For the social system, see Kalter 1991: 18–20. For the *wesh* system of field

With its lush alpine forests, the valley also had an extraordinary tradition of wood carving craftsmanship, which was unmatched anywhere else in the entire Middle East.⁶

Such is the story of Swat's remarkable Pakhtun past, but in the margins of this narrative there are also scribbles of a different tale of days gone by. The Muslim Pakhtuns are, in fact, outsiders hailing from Afghanistan, who gradually colonized the valley starting with a smaller influx in the early eleventh century and a bigger wave of settlers who arrived in the late fifteenth century (von der Lühe 1991: 164). The arrival of the Pakhtuns ultimately altered the fate of Swat's earlier inhabitants, the Dards. Forced displacement and religious conversion rendered them a dispossessed minority, which today lives on the fringes of the valley's mountainous northern highland and in the adjacent, less fertile ravines of Kohistan, Chitral, and Gilgit-Baltistan (Hay 1934: 240). Hence, their modern descendants are called Kohistanis, simply meaning the "highlanders".

Notwithstanding that the highlanders of Swat in recent centuries have been fully converted to Islam, their oral traditions reveal a folkloristic substratum of beliefs in shamanism, spirits, and witches, which are residues of an older pre-Islamic civilization.⁷ By the same token, also the social structures differ profoundly between the Pakhtuns and the Kohistanis. The Pakhtuns uphold the *Pakhtunwali*, "the way of the Pakhtuns," which is an unwritten honor code that, on the one hand, calls for the Pakhtuns to show profound respect and hospitality to any visitor but that, on the other hand, requires them fiercely to protect the family's honor, particularly the honor of its women against prying looks from other men. For this reason, the Pakhtuns firmly believe in *purdah*, i.e., the strict isolation of women and adolescent

rotation as practiced in the neighboring Indus Kohistan valley, see Jettmar 2000: 109–118.

⁶ See Kalter 1991 with numerous illustrations.

⁷ For the old beliefs of the Kohistanis, see Frembgen 1991: 176.

girls from public life.⁸ In contrast thereto, the Kohistani women are not confined to their homes. Instead, while their men tend to herding cattle in the mountain pastures, the women are responsible for all work in the fields. Hence, *purdah* is not a common practice among the highlanders (Frembgen 1991: 172–173).

Although the present-day indigenous culture of Swat might in some regards be considered a distant echo of its forefathers' way of life, the image of the past may stand out a little clearer in the case of another highlander tribe, the Kalash people, who live in the neighboring Chitral valley. The majority of the Kalash still practice their original polytheistic Indo-Iranian religion. They do not believe in gender separation and their women are entirely free to marry whom they want or to elope with someone else.⁹ The narratives of these women—whether Kalash or Swat Kohistani—are these days limited to ethnographic reports, as the native sources hardly acknowledge their existence and do not tell their stories. The literacy rate for women is just below 23% in the area and there are no local female authors speaking in a voice of their own. In fact, the highlanders' gender history is barely known throughout the last millennium.

Yet, astonishingly, prior to the Pakhtun settlement in the 11th century, it was precisely the women who made the valley of Swat legendary in the eyes of Buddhists and Hindus throughout South and East

⁸ Concerning the status and situation of women in modern Swat, the issue seems to be many-sided. Kalter 1991: 44 has emphasized women's status and potential strength within the family-home, whereas Förster-Lühe 1991 has stressed the hardships that women endure living under *purdah*. For a recent autobiographical account by a female Swat teenager and the many difficulties women have faced in getting access to education, see Yousafzai & Lamb 2013. In 2014, its authoress, Malala Yousafzai, received the Nobel Peace Prize for her personal struggle and her involvement in the contemporary political fight for girls' and women's right for education.

⁹ For gender roles and the status of women among the Kalash, see Maggi 2001.

Asia. From the eighth to the eleventh centuries, there appeared several highly revered and influential female *gurus* in Swat, who started new religious trends that left an indelible mark on the face of Asian religious imagination and an unprecedented literary heritage of women's writings in Sanskrit.

During that era, medieval Swat became known as a major locality for religious practices, a so-called *pīṭha*. The Sanskrit word *pīṭha* generally means a "seat", such as a chair, but more typically refers to a special locality of power, such as a throne or office. It also signifies a pedestal supporting a sacred idol, e.g., in Śaivite iconography where the *pīṭha* may denote the female base, the *yoni*, which is the seat for the divine male symbol, the *liṅga*.

As a *pīṭha*, the Swat valley was a sacred seat for Vajrayāna Buddhism as well as for Śaivite Hinduism, both of which propagated advanced forms of Tantrism in this locality. The Tantric traditions produced strings of transmission lineages often held by male and in some cases also by female *tāntrikas*. In this charged atmosphere, it was not only women taking teachings from men, but also men taking teachings from women, and there were cases of interreligious crossovers between the Buddhist and Śaivite traditions.

Given the valley's later turbulent history, most of the Sanskrit writings of that age have disappeared, leaving only remnants of its former glory, nowadays to be found primarily among the Sanskrit treasures of Nepal and in the form of translations contained in the Tibetan Buddhist canon.¹⁰ Among the extant texts in Sanskrit and

¹⁰ For introductory surveys to the relatively well-studied ancient Buddhist Gāndhārī literature dating from the late centuries BCE up till the fourth century CE, belonging to the broader Gandhāra region which includes Swat, see Salomon 1999 and Dietz 2007. The extensive corpus of medieval male-authored Tantric texts from Swat composed between the sixth and the twelfth centuries, however, has to date neither been systematically surveyed nor described. A brief introduction to some of the Śaiva Tantric works associated with Swat can be found in Sanderson

Tibetan from Nepal and Tibet, there is a large number that directly deals with Swat and its women. Further, among those, there is a handful of texts that seem to have been written by women. Especially the names of seven female *gurus* stand out: *Lalitā Devī, *Sahajavajrā, Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī, Lakṣmī, the sisters Mekhalā and Kanakhalā, and *Ḍākiṇī Siddharājñī.¹¹ However, the state of the art of the historical study of these female religious teachers and writers still is in its nascency with crucial aspects of authorship, textual composition, caste, gender, education, and religious status of medieval Buddhist women remaining almost wholly unresearched.¹²

In view thereof, the purpose of the present article is to remedy the lack of philological and hagiographical descriptions for the seven female Tantric teachers from Swat.

The material for this task is derived from two separate textual corpora, one having philological value and the other being hagiographical in nature. The first corpus encompasses eleven texts from the Swat valley and their colophons. The philological data in the form of internal and paratextual evidence therein allows to determine six women *Sahajavajrā, Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī, Lakṣmī, Mekhalā, Kanakhalā, and *Ḍākiṇī Siddharājñī as authoresses of the eleven works.

2007: 265–269. The primary sources of the female-authored Tantric writings from medieval Swat have been surveyed by Kragh 2017.

¹¹ The relative chronology, in which the female *gurus* have here been listed, accords with the series of the first four *gurus* as can be found in the lineage history of Lakṣmī's **Sahajasiddhipaddhati*. For the remaining three women, the order accords with the dating established on the basis of Lakṣmī's **Cittakālpaparīhāradr̥ṣṭi* as well as Tibetan and Bhutanese hagiographical information regarding **Ḍākiṇī Siddharājñī*.

¹² Until now, the existing studies include: a discussion of the religious status of medieval women in Tantric Buddhism with some references to Swat by Shaw 1994, two studies on the Sanskrit writings by the Swat authoress Lakṣmī in Kragh 2010, 2011a, and an exhaustive survey of the eleven Sanskrit texts from Swat ascribed to six female *gurus* by Kragh 2017.

The second bulk of material encompasses hagiographical data found in four primary sources. The earliest and most important source is a large Tantric commentary entitled **Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, which primarily deals with explaining a meditation practice on the inborn nature (Skt. *sahaja*). The text is stated to have been written by Princess Lakṣmī from Swat, who possibly lived in the tenth century. During this time, Swat was known under its old name Uḍḍiyāna, also spelled Oḍiyāna, a designation that dates back to the land's early Buddhist history in the first centuries CE.¹³ While the original work was written in Sanskrit, it is now only preserved in a Tibetan translation produced in Nepal some time during the years 1070–1090, which constitutes the *terminus ante quem* for the writing of Lakṣmī's text.¹⁴ A passage in the **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* provides short stories of the early transmission lineage of male and female Tantric teachers from Swat, who passed down the *sahaja* meditation teachings.¹⁵ The stories concern the four earliest of the seven known female *gurus* from Swat, including **Lalitā Devī*, **Sahajavajrā*, *Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī*, and Lakṣmī herself.¹⁶ A second biographical source is the male-authored work **Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti* composed by Abhayadattaśrī in the twelfth century, which provides hagiographies of three of the female *gurus* associated with Swat, namely Lakṣmī, Mekhalā, and Kanakhalā.¹⁷ Finally, details on the life of **Dākinī Siddharājñī*, the last of the female *gurus* from Swat, are only found in two relatively late Tibetan and Bhutanese hagiographical sources as listed below.

It is by combining these two corpora of works that a chronotope of the medieval Swat valley inhabited by female *gurus* begins to emerge.

¹³ For the identification of Uḍḍiyāna with the Swat valley, see Sanderson 2007: 265–269.

¹⁴ For a detailed study of the dating of the Tibetan translation of the **Sahasiddhipaddhati*, see Kragh 2010.

¹⁵ *Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, D2261, folios 6a–14a.

¹⁶ The text's story of Lakṣmī has been translated in Kragh 2011a: 98–99.

¹⁷ The text's biography of Lakṣmī has been translated and discussed in Kragh 2011a: 91–94.

Lalitā Devī

The earliest known female *guru* from Swat was a local princess, who became known as *Lalitā Devī (Tib. *rol pa'i lha mo*). The **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* reports that *Lalitā Devī became a student of the forest recluse *Ṛṣi Jagadāśvasa (Tib. *drang srong 'gro ba dbugs 'byin pa*). Having received a special meditation instruction on what the text calls *sahaja*, meaning “the inborn nature” of the mind, princess *Lalitā Devī took up the life of a wandering ascetic, a so-called *yoginī*. Although she is not known to have composed any written works, she passed the *sahaja* teaching on to a male student named *Vīravajra (Tib. *dpa'bo rdo rje*), who was the king of Uḍḍiyāna, and he in turn taught it to his priest-minister (Skt. **purohita*), a Brahman by the name *Samayavajra (Tib. *dam tshig rdo rje*). *Samayavajra transmitted the teaching to a local farmer called *Padmavajra (Tib. *padma'i rdo rje*) and *Padmavajra's student was a woman named *Sahajavajrā (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i rdo rje*).

Sahajavajrā

According to Lakṣmī's **Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, *Sahajavajrā was a liquor seller (Skt. **śuṇḍinī*, Tib. *chang 'tshong ma*) who grew tired of always drinking and then sought to learn meditation. *Padmavajra knew intuitively that *Sahajavajrā was to become a suitable student. He therefore came to her bar and imparted his teaching to her. Subsequently, she became a well-known female *guru* in Uḍḍiyāna. A single extant Sanskrit work might belong to her authorship and, if so, *Sahajavajrā would be the first known authoress from Uḍḍiyāna.

The Sanskrit text in question is a work entitled *Vyaktabhāvānugatā Tattvasiddhiḥ*, meaning “Accomplishment in the Reality Underlying Manifest Things”. This work achieved such importance that it later was included in a major cycle of some of the most significant Indian Tantric commentaries, which has been variously preserved in Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts as well as in a cycle of Tibetan translations known as “The Eight *Siddhi* Texts”.¹⁸ Her text explains how the mind

¹⁸ *Grub pa sde brygad* (Skt. **Aṣṭasiddhi*). See Kragh 2015: 76, fn. 113.

is deluded and caught in *samsāra*, how it goes through the process of rebirth, and how liberation can be attained through certain yogic practices for generating bliss and realization. The work also provides a catalog of common religious disciplines in Uḍḍiyāna, ranging from the shamanistic to the ascetic to the yogic. The text is extant in several Sanskrit manuscripts and a Tibetan translation produced in the mid-eleventh century.¹⁹

The colophon of the extant Sanskrit version merely states that the text was spoken by a *yoginī* from the self-arisen great *vajra* seat (*pīṭha*) of Uḍḍiyāna:

Hereby ends [the text entitled] *Accomplishment in the Reality Underlying Manifest Things* by the illustrious *Yoginī* born from wisdom, a perfect visionary of meaning, [who stays] in the self-arisen great *vajra* seat of the glorious Uḍḍiyāna. Carrying inexpressible blessing of the truth of reality, [the words] streamed forth [like] a cascade of sweet honey, a nectar-rain of great perfect bliss, from [her] passionately moving lotus-mouth, while [she] was immersed in a meditation [that was like] an [indestructible] *vajra* in the three worlds.²⁰

¹⁹ For the Sanskrit manuscripts, see Kragh 2017. The eleventh-century Tibetan translation (Q3066/D2222) in six folios was made by the Nepalese Paṇḍita Śāntibhadra (Tib. *zhi ba bzang po*, eleventh century) and the Tibetan translator Lotsā ba 'Gos Lhas btsas (ca. 1000–1060). For information on Śāntibhadra, see Lo Bue 1997.

²⁰ *Vyaktabhāvānugatā Tattvasiddhiḥ* (Samdhong & Dwivedi 1987: 179₉₋₁₂): *śrī-odiyāna-mahā-vajrapīṭha-svayambhū-jñānasambhūta-śrīmad-yoginī-sārtha-saṃnyak-kutūhalôcchalita-dharma-tattvatathya-sākathyā-dhiṣṭhāna-tribhuvana-vajrasamādhi-samadhiṣṭhitasamaya-sarabhasavikasita-vadanakamala-vigalita-madhu-mahāsukhasampad-amṛtavarṣabhūridhārā-śravanī vyaktabhāvānugatā tattvasiddhiḥ samāptam*. Tibetan translation (Samdhong & Dwivedi 1987: 270₆₋₁₂): *dpal u rgyan gyi rdo rje chen po mchog gi gnas su rang byung gi ye shes phun sum tshogs pa'i dpal rnal 'byor ma rnams 'dus nas yang dag pa'i don la zgigs mo las byung ba'i ma nor ba'i chos kyi de kho na nyid kyi mod la byin gyis rlob par byed pa/ sa gsum rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin la*

The eleventh-century Tibetan translation has an additional shorter colophon, which specifies the authoress' name as being *Sahajayoginī Citī (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i rnal 'byor ma tsi ti*).²¹ If the first part of the name, *Sahajayoginī, mentioned in the colophon of the Tibetan translation of the text is taken as referring to the female master *Sahajavajrā, whose story is narrated in Lakṣmī's **Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, then the authoress of the text can be identified with a female *guru* whose life story is known from Lakṣmī's work. If, however, it were not accepted that

snyoms par zhugs pa'i dus su/ nem nur mi mnga' ba'i zhal gyi padmo rab tu rgyas pa las bde ba phun sum tshogs pa'i sbrang rtsi'i rgyun 'bab par gyur pa dngos po gsal ba'i rjes su 'gro ba de kho na nyid grub pa rdzogs so//.

²¹ D2222.68b, N1066.71a₆₋₇, and Samdhong & Dwivedi 1987: 271: *dngos po gsal ba'i rjes su grub pa de kho na nyid grub pa zhes bya ba/ lhan cig skyes pa'i rnal 'byor ma tsi tos mdzad pa rdzogs so//.* The eighteenth-century Tibetan *bstan 'gyur* editions of the text thus give the name as *lhan cig skyes pa'i rnal 'byor ma tsi to*, which may be reconstructed into Sanskrit as Sahajayoginī *Cittā or *Cintā. However, Bu ston's *bstan 'gyur* catalog composed in 1334, which is an older witness, gives the authoress' name as *lhan cig skyes pa'i rnal 'byor ma tsi ti*. See *Bstan 'gyur gyi dkar chag yid bzhin nor bu dbang gi rgyal po'i phreng ba*, found in *Bu ston rin chen grub kyi gsung 'bum*, the Lha sa zhol edition, vol. La (26), TBRC W1934-0759, folio 47a₂, p. 497. The reading *tsi ti* seems preferable and may be reconstructed into Sanskrit as *Citi or *Citī. It should be added that the two earlier *bstan 'gyur* catalogs by Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339) do not include the text, though they do include a similarly titled work attributed to Līlāvajra (Kragh 2015: 76, fn. 113). For these catalogs, see *Thugs dam bstan 'gyur gyi dkar chag* (TBRC W30541-6481, p. 526₁) and *Bstan bcos 'gyur ro 'tshal gyi dkar chag* (TBRC W30541-6481, p. 672₂). Bu ston suggests that Līlāvajra was a student of the female master Lakṣmīmkarā (TBRC W1934-0759, folio 47a_{1,2}). Lakṣmīmkarā is a name variant for Lakṣmī. The short form Lakṣmī seems to be more common in the extant Sanskrit manuscripts, while Tibetan texts tend to use the Sanskrit transliterated form Lakṣmīmkarā.

the names *Sahajayoginī and *Sahajavajrā denote the same individual, then there would be two separate female *gurus* explicitly associated with the Swat valley (i.e., Uḍḍiyāna) under somewhat reminiscent names: one *Sahajayoginī who authored the *Vyaktabhāvānugatā Tattvasiddhiḥ* and another *Sahajavajrā whose story is told in Lakṣmī's *sahaja* lineage history.

Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī

According to Lakṣmī, *Sahajavajrā transmitted her teachings to a male weaver named *Nandivajra (Tib. *dga ba'i rdo rje*),²² who in turn had a female student called Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī (Tib. *bram ze mo rdo rje ldan ma*). As indicated by her title Brāhmaṇī, Vajravatī was from the Brahmin caste. Lakṣmī tells that *Nandivajra became Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī's teacher after he debated with her about the futility of performing religious ablutions in holy rivers. Since ablution is a common practice only in the Hindu tradition and not in Buddhism, it can be supposed that she hailed from a Hindu background.

Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī composed a *sādhana*, i.e., a practice-text, for a goddess called Pīṭheśvarī (Tib. *gnas chen gyi dbang phyug ma*). The name of the goddess means the "Matriarch of the Seat", which again underlines Uḍḍiyāna's importance as a 'seat' in the sense of a religious locality (Skt. *pīṭha*, Tib. *gnas chen* or *gdan*). Pīṭheśvarī is a red, wrathful form of the goddess Tārā.²³ According to the later, male Kashmirian author Saṅghaśrībhadra, the transmission lineage of the Pīṭheśvarī practice began with Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī and was transmitted by her to male Tantric masters living in Kashmir. This suggests that Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī must have been the innovator of this particular form of Tārā.²⁴ Her work is only

²² Alternatively, the Tibetan name might also be reconstructed as *Ānandavajra.

²³ For Pīṭheśvarī Tārā, see Shaw 1994: 104–107 and Shaw 2006: 340. This form of Tārā is also included in two other *sādhana*s by unnamed authors in the *Sāadhanamālā*, works no. 310 and 311; see Bhattacharyya 1925–1928.

²⁴ For Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī as the first *guru* of the Pīṭheśvarī lineage, see the transmission stated at the end of the Tibetan translation

extant in a Tibetan translation from the eleventh century, while the original Sanskrit text has not survived.²⁵ It bears the title **Oḍḍiyānakrama-tārādevī-sādhana* (Tib. *lha mo sgröl ma u rgyan gyi rim pa'i sgrub thabs*), meaning “The Uḍḍiyāna-Style Practice-Text on the Goddess Tārā”. The text’s colophon states that it came from Uḍḍiyāna in the north, where it was spoken by **Dākinī Vajravatī* (*mkha' 'gro ma rdo rje ldan ma*).²⁶

A significant aspect of this ritual is the visualization of a *maṇḍala* of 24 female *yoginī* goddesses in 24 points inside the practitioner’s own body, which represents an internalization of the 24 external sites of Tantric pilgrimage, including the seat (Skt. *pīṭha*) of Uḍḍiyāna.²⁷

of the Kashmirian scholar Saṅghaśrībhadrā’s **Āryapīṭheśvarī-sādhana* (D1706.67a₇-b₁): Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī→[the Kashmirian] Paṇḍita Parahita (eleventh century)→the thrice-initiated Siddha Vinītabhadra→his student Paṇḍita Saṅghaśrībhadrā→the Tibetan translator ’Jam dpal sgeg pa’i rdo rje. For Paṇḍita Parahita, see Naudou 1968: 182–183.

²⁵ The Tibetan translation (Q2582/D1711) was made by the Kashmirian Paṇḍita Parahita and the Tibetan translator Nag tsho Shes rab rgyal mtshan (eleventh century).

²⁶ D1711.74b₇-75a₁: ... *byang phyogs kyi/ u rgyan nas 'ong ... bcom ldan 'das ma lha mo sgröl ma u rgyan gyi rim pa'i sgrub thabs rdzogs so// //mkha' 'gro ma rdo rje ldan mas gsungs pa'o/*. English Translation: “... Hereby ends the *Uḍḍiyānakrama-bhagavatī-tārādevī-sādhana* coming from Uḍḍiyāna in the north ... It was spoken by **Dākinī Vajravatī*”.

²⁷ Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī’s text does not enumerate the 24 sites. However, these are specified in the later text **Śrīmad-oḍḍiyāna-tārākrama-abhisamaya* (D1707) handed down by the Kashmirian Paṇḍita Saṅghaśrībhadrā, whose transmission of the practice goes back to Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī, as mentioned above. In the list of sites stated in his work, Uḍḍiyāna features as one of the most important localities, namely as one among the four major seats (Skt. *pīṭha*). See D1707.68b₁₋₃: the four seats (Skt. *pīṭha*) consisting of (1) Pullīramalaya, (2) Jālandhara, (3) Oḍḍiyāna (i.e., Uḍḍiyāna), and (4) Arbuda; the four subsidiary seats (Skt. *upapīṭha*) consisting of (5) Godāvarī, (6) Rāmeśvarī, (7) Devīkoṭa, and (8) Mālava; the two fields (Skt. *kṣetra*) (9) Kāmarūpa and (10) Oḍra; the two

The notion of peregrination sites and their bodily internalization is also a prominent feature of Hindu Bhairava and Kaula Tantras,²⁸ with which the present text might share some material.

Lakṣmī

In the ensuing narratives of the **Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, Lakṣmī tells that Vajravatī's teachings were passed down through a lineage of three male masters named *Siddhavajra (Tib. *grub pa 'i rdo rje*), *Sarvajagannātha (Tib. *kun 'gro 'i mgon po*), and *Cittavajra (Tib. *thugs kyi rdo rje*). The latter became the teacher of Lakṣmī, the authoress of the **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* containing the life stories of the *gurus* of Lakṣmī's religious lineage, on the basis of which the present details about female *gurus* from Swat have been extracted.

Lakṣmī is in some sources also known as Lakṣmīm̐karā. She became the most famous female *guru* ever to have lived in Uḍḍiyāna. She flourished around the tenth century and, like *Lalitā Devī, is said to have

subsidiary fields (Skt. *upakṣetra*) (11) Triśakuni and (12) Kosala; the two gathering [places] (Skt. *chandoha*) (13) Kaliṅga and (14) Lampāka; the two subsidiary gathering [places] (Skt. *upachandoha*) (15) Kāñcī and (16) Himālaya; the two meeting places (Skt. *melāpaka*) (17) Pretapuri and (18) Gṛhadevatā; the two subsidiary meeting places (Skt. *upamelāpaka*) (19) Saurāṣṭra and (20) Suvarṇadvīpa; the two charnel grounds (Skt. *śmaśāna*) (21) Nāgara and (22) Sindhu; and the two subsidiary charnel grounds (Skt. *upaśmaśāna*) (23) Maruḍīśas and (24) Kulūtā. The list agrees with the peregrination system of the Buddhist *Cakrasamvaratantra*; see Gray 2007: 58–60 and 329–332, who provides further geographical and ritual details. Notably, the list does not conform to the peregrination system of the Buddhist *Hevajratantra* (chapter I.vii.12–18); see Snellgrove 1959: vol. 1 p. 70 and vol. 2 pp. 22–25.

²⁸ Concerning the internalization of Tantric peregrination sites in Hindu sources, see Dyczkowski 2001. It may be added that Tārā is a major goddess for Buddhists as well as Hindus. For an example of a Tārā practice that originated in the Buddhist tradition and later was adopted by Hindus, see Bühnemann 1996.

been a princess at the royal court in Uḍḍiyāna, as stated in her autobiography.²⁹ Her first encounter with her teacher *Cittavajra took place after she had heard of his renown as a meditation master. She went to seek his instructions and having been his student for several years, she received his teaching on *sahaja* (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa*), the inborn nature, after which she withdrew into a meditation retreat on Mount *Śrī Parvata (Tib. *dpal gyi ri*).³⁰ There she perfected her meditation and later became the *guru* of her brother, King *Indrabuddhi of Uḍḍiyāna.³¹

Lakṣmī was a prolific authoress who composed at least four texts, which are still extant. Her first and most famous work is a short treatise on the basic principles of Tantric practice entitled *Advayasiddhi*, “The Accomplishment of Non-Duality”. The text is preserved in several Sanskrit manuscripts and an anonymous Tibetan translation.³² Like the aforementioned work by *Sahajavajrā, Lakṣmī’s *Advayasiddhi* was also included in the Nepalese Tantric corpus and Tibetan text-cycle known as “The Eight *Siddhi* Texts”. Her treatise succinctly explains the innermost details of Tantric practice, while it denies the use of performing austerities, fasting, rituals, and ablutions. The text is also partly aniconic, since it rejects the worship of statues and *stūpas* made of wood, stone, or clay and instead recommends worshipping the deity residing within the body. Its most unique feature is perhaps its theology of gender and sexuality in the form of religious precepts for worshipping the female, which seem to reveal certain social customs of the Uḍḍiyāna Tantric community of that time. The work ends with a declaration that the Buddha Vajrasattva is present in the *yoga* seat

²⁹ For a translation of Lakṣmī’s autobiography, see Kragh 2011a: 98–99.

³⁰ Concerning this site, see Kragh 2011a: 98, fn. 44.

³¹ The Tibetan translation of the **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* consistently gives the king’s name as *dbang po’i blo*, which corresponds to Sanskrit *Indrabuddhi. It is unclear whether *Indrabuddhi is to be taken as being identical with one of the famous teachers of Uḍḍiyāna known in other sources as Indrabhūti or Indrabodhi.

³² For details, see Kragh 2017.

(Skt. *yogapīṭhaka*), thereby again indicating Uḍḍiyāna as being considered a place holding a special blessing. The Sanskrit text's colophon announces that it was taught by the illustrious Lakṣmī in Uḍḍiyāna, the great *yoga* seat:

[Here] ends the practice text entitled *The Accomplishment of Non-Duality* on the steps for self-blessing, containing the entire *Yogatantra*'s inner *sanctum* of reality, which sprang from the lotus-mouth of the illustrious Lakṣmī, promulgated in the glorious Uḍḍiyāna, and transmitted in [this] great *yoga* seat.³³

Lakṣmī's second work is a ritual on a special form of a Tantric goddess called *Chinnamuṇḍā Vajravārāhī*, meaning "the severed-headed Vajravārāhī". This short work is partly lost in its original Sanskrit version but is fully preserved in two Tibetan translations.³⁴ The practitioner is instructed to visualize the yellow goddess Vajravārāhī in the navel *cakra*, flanked by two attendant goddesses. The central goddess cuts off her own head with a knife which she holds in her right hand and then grasps the severed head in her left hand. Three streams of blood spray out from the open neck of the torso, running into the mouths of the two flanking goddesses and into the mouth of the central goddess' own severed head. In this terrifying manner, the visualization symbolically expresses how the practitioner opens up the central energy channel and the two side-channels at the level of the navel *cakra*. The practice includes a short offering ritual and *mantra* recitation. It ends by

³³ Sanskrit edition by Samdhong & Dwivedi (1987: 164₁₃₋₁₅): *śrīmadodiyānavinirgatā mahāyogapīṭhāgatā akhilayogatantratavagarbhā śrīlakṣmīmukhakamalād viniḥṣṛtā svādhiṣṭhāna-kramodayā/ advayasiddhir nāma sādhanopāyikā samāpteti//*.

³⁴ The Tibetan translations include the anonymous **Vajrayoginī-sādhana* (Q2255/D1547) and the **Chinnamuṇḍa-vajravārāhī-sādhana* (Q2262/D1554). The latter translation was made by the Nepalese Ācārya Varendraruci and the Tibetan translator Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) during Rngog's visit to Nepal in the 1090s (Kragh 2010: 212–213, fn. 47). An anonymous parallel Sanskrit version of the *sādhana* is found in the *Sādhanamālā*; see text no. 232 (Bhattacharyya, 1925–1928: 452–453).

informing the practitioner that the meditation should be performed in a desolate place, e.g., at a river confluence, a god or goddess temple, or in the wilderness. It is also said that the practitioner should be “sky-clad,” i.e., naked, let the hair be long and disheveled, and maintain complete silence while remaining free from all concepts. The colophon of one of the Tibetan translations further states that the text was composed by Princess Lakṣmīṃkarā (Tib. *lha lcam lakṣmī kara*), while the colophon in the other translation gives the authoress’ name as *Lakṣmīmati Devī (*lha mo dpal gyi blo gros ma*). Elisabeth A. Benard (1994) has argued that Lakṣmī’s work on this deity became the fore-runner for the Hindu goddess Chinnamastā, who is a form of Durgā.

The third extant work ascribed to Lakṣmī is the longer text entitled **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* (Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa grub pa’i gzhung ’grel*), meaning “Guide to the Accomplishment of the Inborn”. The treatise, which is only preserved in an eleventh-century Tibetan translation,³⁵ is a **paddhati* commentary (Tib. *gzhung ’grel*) on a short root-text in 57 verses ascribed to Lakṣmī’s brother and student, King *Indrabuddhi of Uḍḍiyāna. The root-text and its commentary describe the practice needed for realizing *sahaja*, the inborn nature, denoting an inherent *buddha* nature that is found within each sentient being. It propagates an aniconic strand of mysticism instructing the *sahaja yogī* to avoid all forms of ritual, image worship, as well as *yoga* practices of visualization and breathing techniques. Instead, the practitioner is to rest in a non-conceptual form of meditation referred to as “the treasure of the space repository” (Skt. **gaganagañjasya nidhānam*, Tib. *nam mkha’ mdzod kyi gter*).

The opening verses of the root-text pay homage to a lineage of twelve previous *gurus*, whose stories are narrated in the commentary, including the here-mentioned four female masters *Lalitā Devī, *Sahajavajrā, Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī, and Lakṣmī herself.

³⁵ Q3108/D2261 made by a Nepalese *paṇḍita* from the Mānavihāra in Patan and the Tibetan translator ’Bro Lotsā ba Shes rab grags (ca. 1030–1100) in the 1070s or 1080s. For details of the translation history, see Kragh 2010.

The hagiographies are typical Indian didactic stories, yet their reference to what seems to be real persons, whose writings have been preserved, is unusual for medieval Indian literature. As such, the text is an early example of a new genre of historical biography, which began in Jainism and Buddhism in the tenth and eleventh centuries.³⁶ It is notable that Lakṣmī's text is at least one or two centuries earlier than the hitherto main hagiographical source for the lives of Indian Buddhist Tantric teachers, namely the Bengalese Abhayadattaśrī's twelfth-century work "The Lives of the 84 Mahāsiddhas" (Skt. **Caturaśīti-siddha-pravṛtti*, Tib. *grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i lo rgyus*). Lakṣmī's **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* therefore constitutes a unique source for the Tantric tradition of northern Pakistan.

The fourth and last text ascribed to Lakṣmī is a short mystical poem in eleven verses, only extant in Tibetan translation. Its title is **Cittakalpaparihāradṛṣṭi* (Tib. *sems nyid kyi rtog pa 'joms pa 'i lta ba*), meaning "The Vision that Eliminates the Idea of the Mind".³⁷ The poem is addressed to a woman named Mekhalā, who is one of the two sisters Mekhalā and Kanakhalā, two famous Tantric masters in their own right.

Mekhalā and Kanakhalā

The biographies of Tantric masters from Uḍḍiyāna provided by Lakṣmī in the **Sahajasiddhipaddhati* do not include the story of the sisters Mekhalā and Kanakhalā. Perhaps this is because the sisters may have been Lakṣmī's students and therefore probably postdate the writing of Lakṣmī's text. A male-authored hagiography of the sisters can though be found in the aforementioned twelfth-century work by the Bengali writer Abhayadattaśrī, "The Lives of the 84 Mahāsiddhas".³⁸ According to him, the sisters were born

³⁶ For the emergence of historical biography in Jain literature, see Kragh 2011b. For another, slightly later example of Buddhist historical biography, see Tatz 1987.

³⁷ Q3211/D2433.

³⁸ Abhayadattaśrī's work is only extant in Tibetan translation. See *Grub thob brgyad bcu rtsa bzhi'i rnam thar*, Snar thang bstan 'gyur vol. *Sngags Lu*,

in Devīkoṭa, which is one of the four subsidiary Tantric seats (Skt. *upapīṭha*) possibly located in northeastern India.³⁹ They received teachings on the severed-headed Vajravārāhī practice from the male master Kṛṣṇācārya, which they perfected after twelve years of meditation. Abhayadattaśrī does not mention that the sisters had any association with Uḍḍiyāna or Lakṣmī. Yet, if the **Cittakalpaparīhārādṛṣṭi* poem is an authentic work actually spoken by Lakṣmī, the fact that Lakṣmī addresses Mekhalā in the poem would suggest that the sisters must have met Lakṣmī in Uḍḍiyāna or some other place. It is also notable that the sisters were adepts of the Chinnamuṇḍa Vajravārāhī practice, which was initiated by Lakṣmī. However, there is definitely less evidence to tie the Mekhalā and Kanakhalā sisters to the Swat valley, than is the case with the other female *gurus* from Swat.

Mekhalā and Kanakhalā are the authors of another practice-text on the severed-headed Vajravārāhī, which is only available in an anonymous Tibetan translation.⁴⁰ The text is entitled **Nandy-āvarta-trayamukhāgama* (Tib. *g.yung drung 'khyil pa gsum gyi zhal gdams*), meaning “Oral Transmission on the Three Whirls of Bliss”. It explains the inner aspect of the goddess-meditation with particular emphasis on the visualization of energy channels and mantra seed-syllables.

Ḍākiṇī Siddharājñī

The last of the known authoresses from Swat is a female master of the eleventh century known as **Ḍākiṇī Siddharājñī* (Tib. *mkha' gro ma grub pa'i rgyal mo*). While her own writings make no reference to Uḍḍiyāna, the later tradition—especially her eighteenth-century Bhutanese hagiographer⁴¹—reports that she came from the valley.

folios 52b–53a₅ (pp. 104–105). For an English translation, see Dowman 1985: 317–321.

³⁹ See Gray 2007: 332, fn. 19. However, the maps given by Dyczkowski 2001 place Devīkoṭa in northwestern India.

⁴⁰ Q3257/D2415.

⁴¹ See the hagiography by Śākya Rin chen 1710–1759, *Ma gcig grub pa'i rgyal mo'i lo rgyus cung zad brjod pa ngo mtshar yid ches*,

Four works are ascribed to *Dākinī Siddharājñī, all of which are preserved only in Tibetan translations made in the late eleventh century. There is some internal evidence indicating that several of the texts are slightly later writings based on oral transmissions going back to *Dākinī Siddharājñī and probably not all written by her own hand. *Dākinī Siddharājñī, too, became known as the initiator of new rituals and traditions. She introduced a novel kind of Avalokiteśvara practice and became renowned as a virtuoso of Amitāyus practices, whose blessing of longevity was considered highly effective at home and abroad.⁴²

Her first work is a practice-text detailing the outer, inner, and secret aspects of a meditation on a red form of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara known as Jinasāgara (Tib. *rgyal ba rgya mtsho*), meaning “The Ocean of the Victorious Ones”.⁴³ The ocean relates to a visualization, wherein Lokeśvara features in the middle, his *guru* in the form of Buddha Amithābha floats above Lokeśvara, the male deity Hayagrīva stands on the right and the female deity Guhyajñāna dances on the left of the central figure, while a host of *ḍākas*, *ḍākinīs*, and *Dharma*-protectors hover below the whole gathering.

Her second work is a short text entitled **Hayagrīvasādhana* (Tib. *rta mgrin gyi sgrub thabs*), simply meaning “Hayagrīva Practice-Text”.⁴⁴ Hayagrīva is said to be a wrathful speech-manifestation of Avalokiteśvara and the text includes a visualization, *mantra* recitation, and *bali* (Tib. *gtor ma*) offering practice. It ends by stating

in *Thub dbang gnyis pa rgyal ba śākya rin chen gyi gsung 'bum*, vol. Ka, pp. 179–188 (TBRC W8684-4365).

⁴² See the narratives of the Tibetan *yogī* Ras chung pa’s supposed encounter with *Dākinī Siddharājñī in Roberts 2007: 165–166, 168–170, and 176.

⁴³ D2140, omitted in Q.

⁴⁴ Q4889/D2142. The Tibetan translation was made by the north-Indian *paṇḍita* Varacandra (Tib. *zla ba bzang po*, late eleventh century) from Mithila and the Tibetan translator Glan chung Darma Tshul khrim. For Varacandra, see Roberts 2007: 105–106.

that it was composed by *Dākinī Siddharājñī, who was prophesied by [Buddha] Amitābha.

Her third work is a practice-text on the longevity deity Amitāyus entitled **Aparimita-āyur-jñāna-sādhana* (Tib. *tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa'i sgrub thabs*), meaning “Practice-Text on Limitless Longevity and Knowledge”.⁴⁵ Here the meditator visualizes the deity Hayagrīva in the heart *cakra* and within Hayagrīva’s heart *cakra* sits the *buddha* of long life, Amitāyus, in union with his female partner, surrounded by a *maṇḍala* of deities representing the physical elements. The text outlines the main visualization, the *mantra* recitation, and a visualization of goddesses who gather life-force from the physical elements. The colophon gives the authoress’ name as *Jñānadākinī Siddharājñī.

Her fourth work is a slightly longer text on the same practice of Amitāyus entitled **Bhagavat-āparimitāyurjñāna-maṇḍala-vidhi* (Tib. *bcom ldan 'das tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*), meaning “Ritual of the *Maṇḍala* of the Sublime Limitless Longevity and Knowledge”.⁴⁶ It describes an empowerment ritual, outlining how to arrange the *maṇḍala*, the liturgy to be recited, the *mantras*, and the various associated visualizations. It is notable that one passage in the text instructs the meditator to visualize *Dākinī Siddharājñī herself as part of the *maṇḍala*. She appears in the form of a dancing *dākinī* holding a small drum (Skt. *ḍamaru*) and a skull-cup (Skt. *kapāla*) surrounded by the whole transmission lineage of *gurus* subsequent to her.⁴⁷ The colophon states that it was composed by *Jñānadākinī Siddharājñī.

A Chronotope of Myth and History

The textual corpora of female-authored texts and hagiographical narratives in the Swat literature reveal an intimate space, Uḍḍiyāna,

⁴⁵ Q2990/Q4886/D2145. Anonymous Tibetan translation.

⁴⁶ Q2991/Q4888/D2146. Anonymous Tibetan translation.

⁴⁷ D2146.225b₆₋₇. The mention of a lineage beyond her lifetime suggests the lateness of the present version of the text.

as a sacred locality. Repeated references to the valley as being a religious “seat” (Skt. *pīṭha*) for an action must be imbued with a new meaning of *pīṭha* as a “site” that engenders and nurtures a particular activity. Comparably, in Indian dramaturgy, a dramatic stage is called a *raṅgapīṭha*, the performative space (*pīṭha*) for dance and acting (*raṅga*), to be erected according to specific rules and measures and be empowered by rituals. Likewise, the word *pīṭha* appears in contemporary India as a label for numerous institutions of learning that are named sites for knowledge (Hindi *vidyāpīṭh*).

Thus, the trope of *pīṭha* in the female writings from Swat serves to denote Uḍḍiyāna not as a passive environment arrested in time and space but as a dynamic site for *yoga* (Skt. *yogapīṭhaka*), meaning a stage for spiritual practice (Skt. *yoga*). The designation, however, is not a simple metaphor (Skt. *rūpaka*) of adorning the external place with a particular meaning and function. Rather, the outer metaphor of the locality Swat alludes to the inner experiential locality of the human body as a site for *yoga* and non-dualistic knowledge in view of Vajravatī Brāhmaṇī’s interiorization of the twenty-four pilgrimage destinations for Tantric practice. Hence, the embedded trope of place operates simultaneously on outer and inner levels, merging the literal (Skt. *svabhāvokti*) with the figurative (Skt. *vakrokti*).

The texts’ own tropological notion of place as a literal exterior and figurative interior evokes a chronotopic substratum of the historical authorizing the mythic as a pair of allusive metaphors. The mutual relationship between female-authored work and hagiographical narrative renders the mythic hagiography into historical biography, resulting in the historicity of a site of memory—*un lieu de mémoire*—for staging the historical narratives of the seven female *gurus*.

Abbreviations

- * Reconstructed Sanskrit word or name on the basis of the Tibetan text.
- D Derge edition of the Tibetan canon. The number references for texts are to the catalog entries by Ui (Ui 1934).
- N The Narthang edition of the Tibetan canon. The number references for texts are to the catalog entries by Mibu (Mibu 1967).
- Q The Peking edition of the Tibetan canon. The number references for texts are to the catalog entries by Suzuki (Suzuki 1955–1961). See <http://web1.otani.ac.jp/crj/twrpe/peking/>.
- Skt. Sanskrit.
- TBRC Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, also known as Buddhist Digital Resource Center; see www.tbrc.org.
- Tib. Tibetan.

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