

Tāranātha on the Emergence of the Tantric Cycle of Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka: Writing a Tibetan Buddhist Historiography in Seventeenth-Century Tibet¹

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Introduction

The buffalo-headed wrathful tantric deity Vajrabhairava (and its alter ego Yamāntaka) flourished in India in the middle of the 8th century during the ‘mature’ phase of tantric Buddhism. The most important textual source for his practice in India is the *Vajrabhairavatantra* (henceforth VBT), attributed to Lalitavajra (aka Līlavajra), *ācārya* at Nālandā Mahāvihāra, who is said to have retrieved it from the mythical land of Oḍḍiyāna. The transmission of the VBT from India to Tibet took place during the Later Dissemination (*phyi dar*) when it was classified as a scripture belonging to the *yoganiruttara* class. Within several decades of its emergence in the 8th century, Vajrabhairava became one of the most revered deities of Tibetan Buddhism. In spite of Vajrabhairava’s popularity and considerable impact on the formation of religious praxis in the medieval Buddhist world, the cult of Vajrabhairava has still not received sufficient scholarly attention.

This article deals with a hitherto unstudied account on the emergence of the tantric cycle of Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka in India through the eyes of the Tibetan Buddhist historiographer, Tāranātha (1575-1643). Through the textual analysis of Tāranātha’s *Gshin rje chos ’byung*, a text that has not received any scholarly attention to date, this article examines the strategies employed to legitimize the origins of the tradition as well as the literary tropes, modes of emplotment, and ethical concerns adopted by Tāranātha in the broader context of writing the emic historiography of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka

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cycle. Together with the question about the validity of using Tāranātha as a source of historical knowledge, I will attempt to examine whether his perception of the socio-historical reality behind the advent of tantric Buddhism in India aligns (and, if so, to what degree) with various etic models that have been formulated by scholars in recent years.

Tāranātha's interest in writing the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka historiography or the Triple Cycle of Black Bhairava (*nag 'jigs skor gsum*), as it is categorized in Tibet, could have been personal. It is known that Tāranātha belonged to the hereditary lineage of Rwa lotsāwa Rdo rje grags (b. 1016),² the famous Vajrabhairava "sorcerer" who established the Rwa transmission (*lugs*) of the Vajrabhairava (*rdo rje 'jigs byed*) in Tibet. The Rwa lugs—without any doubt the most popular Vajrabhairava lineage among those existing in Tibet—was transmitted through various teachers in the Sa skya, Dge lugs pa, and Jo nang tradition (Tāranātha's own).³ By engaging in the task of writing a Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka historiography, Tāranātha also had a chance to fulfill his personal mission of disseminating the 'Indian-ness' of Tibetan Buddhism—for, as Templeman⁴ has demonstrated, Tāranātha perceived himself as an Indian, born in Gtsang by mistake. Tāranātha was certainly no stranger to the wrathful tantric practices advocated by the VBT and other scriptures, such as the *Guhyasamāja* and the *Hevajra*, and did not shun away from propagating their usage for the protection of the Buddhist state. In his autobiography, Tāranātha refers to the notion of the "ten fields of liberation" (*bsgral ba'i zhing bcu*), enumerating the category of people, the so-called "harmers of the Three Jewels", against whom the employment of wrathful tantric rituals is justifiable.⁵ In so doing, he follows the scriptural definition of the 'enemy' to whom the early Buddhist tantras often refer, while emphasizing at the same time the altruistic context of tantric rituals performed for the "benefit of others".

Besides the specific ideological purpose that may have motivated its author, the significance of Tāranātha's *Gshin rje chos 'byung* can be fully appreciated only when we look at it as a particular case study of Tibetan Buddhist historiography that builds up out of 'native' cate-

² Stearns 2008.

³ For the Vajrabhairava transmission lineages in Tibet and their impact on the Sa skya and Dge lugs traditions, see Wenta 2020. In his *Gshin rje chos 'byung* (pp. 125-126), A mes zhabs reports that Bsod nams grags pa (1280–1352), an important master of the Jo nang tradition belonged to the Western Rwa Tradition of the Black Cycle, which was founded by Rwa Ye shes seng ge, the son of Rwa lotsāwa's nephew, Rwa Chos rab.

⁴ Templeman 2009: 231.

⁵ Dewey 2020.

gories considered significant, real, and appropriate for the Buddhist audience for whom it is intended. In this regard, rather than concentrating on the question of why Tāranātha wrote this account, the present article focuses on the ‘how’ he did it, with the aim of highlighting certain aspects of the emic perception of an important Buddhist tradition, especially in relation to the constituent elements of historiography as narrative. In discussing various ramifications of Tāranātha’s *chos ’byung* project, the following questions are raised: First, in what manner does Tāranātha use factual data in his construction of medieval Indian history? Second, what are the legitimization and authentication strategies through which he validates the origins of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cycle? Finally, what are the characteristic topoi he uses to construct historical narrative and to what extent they derive from Buddhist and Indian culture?

1. *Gshin rje chos ’byung:*
Tibetan Buddhist Historiography as Narrative

The authorship of the *Rgyud rgyal gshin rje gshed skor gyi chos ’byung*, or simply *Gshin rje chos ’byung*, is attributed in the colophon to the Jo nang master Tāranātha, who composed it in the year 1631. Tāranātha, commonly known as the “Venerable” (*rje btsun*), was one of the most prolific historians in 17th century Tibet and the leading exponent of the Jo nang tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in his time. Among his most important works is the celebrated *Rgya gar chos ’byung* (“History of Buddhism in India”⁶), written in 1608, which until now serves as one of the very few premodern textual sources for reconstructing the history of tantric Buddhism in India. It is obviously important to determine what sources Tāranātha himself employed, and over this question there is considerable controversy. It is in principle possible (as Tāranātha himself claims) that he wrote his *Rgya gar chos ’byung* on the basis of three Sanskrit sources, now considered lost.⁷ If the *Rgya gar chos ’byung* is based on Sanskrit chronicles intended to record the most important facts about the ruling dynasty of the Pālas at the time when the *siddhas* and tantric Buddhism took a stronghold at

⁶ Chattopadhyaya 1970.

⁷ The first is a massive, 2000-verse unnamed work by Sa dbang bzang po (Kṣemendrabhadra or Dharaṇābhadrā) that covers the history up to the Pāla king, Rāmapāla (r.1072-1126) (Sanderson 2009: 89). The second, titled the *Bud-dhapurāṇa*, is a work of 1200 verses by Dbang pos sbyin (Indradatta) that also includes the history under the Senas (*ibid.*). The third is an unnamed source penned down by a Brahmin scholar referred to by Tāranātha as Bhaṭṭāghaṭī, a corrupted name, which Sanderson corrected to Vandyaghāṭīya; this work primarily records the succession of Nālandā *ācāryas* (*ibid.*).

Nālandā and Vikramaśīla, the same must be true in the case of the *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, for the biographical material on the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka *siddhas* is similar in both sources. Other scholars⁸ have found it implausible that Tāranātha would have resorted to sources other than the oral histories transmitted to him by various Indian gurus he reportedly met during his lifetime. One of them was Buddhaguptanātha, from whom Tāranātha learnt a lot about the geography and history of South and Southeast Asia.⁹

In spite of his general scholastic orientation that allegedly relied upon Indian sources, whether written or oral, Tāranātha's writings are by no means unaffected by more conventional Tibetan genres. This is certainly visible in the way in which he emulates the general features of traditional Tibetan Buddhist historiography (*chos 'byung*, lit. "Origin of dharma"). Tāranātha's endeavour to write a historiography of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cycle was a reflection of the common tendency represented by the *chos 'byung* genre to place doctrinal cycles in historical perspective in an effort to legitimize them.¹⁰ Among the Tibetan genre classification, *chos 'byung* is classified as one of several types of Tibetan historiographical writing;¹¹ nevertheless, this typology escapes specific formal criteria, for it freely draws upon various Tibetan literary categories, including biographies, geographical accounts, etc.¹² Tāranātha's *Gshin rje chos 'byung* is especially good an example of a multi-genre work, for it records the history of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cycle through biographical accounts of the *siddhas*, more commonly associated with the *rnam thar* genre. Similarly, an aspect of chronology, usually expected from the historiographical writing, is suspended in favour of a focus on the geographic context, which leads to the semanticization of space.

One of the most important features of traditional Tibetan Buddhist historiography, also discernible in Tāranātha's *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, is that the presentation of events takes the form of a narrative governed by the principles of emplotment, shared literary tropes, repetition of motifs, and multi-layering, all bound up with culture-specific models of action, ethics, ideologies, etc. In this regard, Schweiger¹³ has point-

⁸ Templeman 2009.

⁹ Tāranātha did not merely listen to Buddhaguptanātha, but also took notes that functioned as a mnemonic device for his writing: "I wrote notes, I wrote addenda lists to my notes and I ensured that these were not fragmentary or careless. Whatever teachings he [Buddhaguptanātha] gave me I wrote them all down on paper" (Templeman 2009).

¹⁰ van der Kuijp 1996: 46.

¹¹ For an overview of various genres of Tibetan historiography, see van der Kuijp 1996.

¹² Vostrikov 1970: 39.

¹³ Schweiger 2013: 68.

ed out that Tibetan historiography in general draws from a “toolbox of literary forms”, which most of the time reduces the events of history to simple binaries, such as friend-enemy, giver-receiver, Buddhist-non-Buddhist, etc. Schweiger¹⁴ argues further that the modes of emplotment recurrent in Tibetan historiography, such as for example the story of a main protagonist, unfold in repeated patterns “giving a static quality to history as narrative”. These repetitive and static aspects of historiographical narrative enable certain models of conduct to persevere through the centuries in essentially unchanged form, also providing a framework for the basic storyline of biographies.¹⁵ The act of repetition, not only with regard to the adoption of common literary devices and shared tropes found in Tibetan Buddhist literature at large (see below), but also as a practice of textual recycling, is attested in various historiographies written by Tāranātha. The *Gshin rje chos 'byung* contains the same biographical material (albeit with some minor changes) on the *siddhas* associated with the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cycle as the one narrated in the *Rgya gar chos 'byung*. It is quite evident that Tāranātha reuses the same material throughout the corpus of his works, an example of which is attested in yet another of his books, the *Bka' babs bdun ldan* (“Seven Instruction Lineages”), where the account of the Buffalo-headed *siddha* Śrīdhara matches exactly the story narrated in the *Gshin rje chos 'byung*.¹⁶

In terms of its basic structure, ‘narrative’ unfolds in a certain sequence marked by a specific beginning, middle, and end. An ‘end’ is distinguished from other two segments of the sequence by its moralizing import, implicit in the outcome of events.¹⁷ In other words, there is a moral lesson to be learnt at the conclusion of the story, which accounts for its moral teleology. Tāranātha’s *Gshin rje chos 'byung* in many ways ascribes to the moral teleology paradigm and it does so in two different ways. The first is the way in which Tāranātha textually represents and codifies a certain “*siddha* ideal” and depicts them as moral exemplars. The events surrounding the *siddhas* are often evaluated in moral terms and they are framed as simple dichotomies of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. The *siddhas* are often positioned against the evil “other”, which, in the context of proselytizing praxis, entails conversion of evil non-Buddhists into the dharma. The second way in which moral teleology underpins Tāranātha’s historiographical project relates to establishing an ethical framework for the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka’s magical technology specializing in the wrathful rituals of subduing, paralyzing, killing, etc. Tāranātha is especially

¹⁴ Schweiger 2013: 71.

¹⁵ Schweiger 2013: 72.

¹⁶ See *Bka' babs bdun ldan* (Templeman 1983: 66).

¹⁷ White 1987: 23.

concerned with the immoral abuse of wrathful magical technologies by people in power, whom he labels “harm-givers” (*gnod pa can*). In addition, he warns about karmic retribution for those who exploit wrathful magic for selfish needs, and gives the specific conditions in which the “double moral standard” for tantric practitioners using Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka technologies can be applied. This topic will be discussed in more detail below.

One of the reasons for adding a moralizing conclusion to the historiographical narrative may be the important role played by traditional historiographers in society, which Schweiger¹⁸ understands to be the task of “conserving the culture”. In Tibetan context, this mission is implicitly related to the function of traditional historiography, attempting as it does to legitimize the tradition through establishing its link with sacred origins. An ability to depict all events in continuity with the “authority of the past,” thereby authenticating what constitutes a proper memory, has been regarded as the core of traditional historiography.¹⁹ The return to the Ur-event “by means of retelling, replicating, reviving and actualizing origin-myths, the very act of recounting became a crucial ritual act of confirmation and legitimization”.²⁰ Tāranātha’s approach to the notion of origins as the means of establishing the authority of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cycle will be discussed next.

2. The Origins of Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka

Tāranātha’s *Gshin rje chos 'byung* may serve as an example of a historiographical narrative that, in the words of Per Sørensen, “is seeking to account for the [tradition’s] origin and meaning”.²¹ For Tāranātha, this search does not only entail transforming plain titles of the scriptures and lifeless names of the *siddhas* into structured historical narrative characterized by continuity and meaningful moral message, but it also creates a necessity to establish different approaches to the concept of origin²² understood as anchor points that legitimate the tradition. The discussion that follows tries to delineate two different narrative and conceptual frameworks adopted by Tāranātha, in which

¹⁸ Schweiger 2013: 68.

¹⁹ Breisach 1987: 4025.

²⁰ Sørensen 1994: 2.

²¹ Sørensen 1994: 2.

²² In this regard, I am influenced by the distinction of the two types of origin delineated by Gyatso (1993) in the *gter ma* tradition: the one is the “origin account”, which legitimizes the treasure through locating it in the already established timeless authoritative tradition, such as the word of the Buddha; the other is the “revelation account”, which is conveyed through the biography of the treasure-revealer established in the present time.

the notion of origin as a strategy of authenticating the tradition can be discerned. The first approach to origins that can be distinguished in Tāranātha's work can aptly be referred to as "the root-text account", which "is demonstrated by placing the cycle's origin within the parameters of traditions already established as authoritative".²³ In this regard, the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka tradition acquires its legitimacy through the claim that the text existed in the world since time immemorial and was proclaimed by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. The second approach to origins focuses on the "rediscovery narrative" in which the *siddha* Lalitavajra proceeds to the mythical land of Oḍḍiyāna and retrieves the texts guarded by the ḍakinīs, thereby initiating the textual tradition of the Vajrabhairava per se. Since here Tāranātha's approach to the question of origins is structured around the biography of the retriever, it could be named "the rediscovery account".

2-1. The Root-Text Account

In his influential study on the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, Gray²⁴ has delineated two models of establishing textual authenticity adopted by tantric Buddhist scriptures. The first is the so-called "*nidāna* model", in which the opening verse (*nidāna*) of the tantra begins with the characteristic "Thus, I have heard, at one time" (*evaṃ māya śrutam ekasmin samaye*), followed by an indication of the specific place where the revelation took place. In this model, the claim of authenticity lies in the adherence to the oral dimension of the text, which was 'heard', as well as in the physical presence of the revealer located in the same spatiotemporal reality as the revealed text itself. The earliest tantra that follows the "*nidāna* model" is the *Guhyasamāja*.²⁵ The second is the "*athātaḥ* model", in which the tantra begins with a simple "now" (*athātaḥ*). The *athātaḥ* indicates that a specific tantra is considered to be a part of the lost original (the mythical Ur-text) usually referred to as the "root-text" (*mūlatantra*). The root-text, typically of great length (e.g., hundreds of thousands of verses), is said to have contained the full exposition of the intricacies of a particular tantric *sādhana*, of which the part that has come down to us is just a small fragment. The VBT adopts the second model, for it starts with: "Now, I shall describe the means of mastering (*sādhana*) [the deity] Vajrabhairava"

²³ Gyatso 1993: 111.

²⁴ Gray 2007.

²⁵ Among the famous Buddhist tantras belonging to this model is the *Hevajratantra* (1.1): "Thus have I heard: at one time the Lord dwelt in bliss with the Vajrayoginī who is the Body, Speech and Mind of all the Buddhas" (trans. Snellgrove 1959: 46), and the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* (1.1).

(*athātaḥ sampravakṣyāmi vajrabhairavasādhanam*). The alleged existence of a hypothetical inherited root-text is, indeed, mentioned in the final colophon of the VBT, the Sanskrit version of which reads as follows:

Here ends the seventh chapter concerned with the testing [of the disciple] and the accomplishment of visualization procedures in this *yogatantra* of *Mahāvajrabhairavacakra*, called *Mañjuśrī*. The fragment of the *kalpa* which is successful just by being recited (*pañḥitasiddhaḥ*)²⁶ was extracted from that *tantra*, which is characterized as *Mahāvajrabhairavacakra*, and which has come forth from the *yoginīpīṭha* of Oḍḍiyāna.²⁷

The above passage indicates that the VBT, referred to here with the alternative name of *Mahāvajrabhairavacakra*, is just a fragment of the collection of rituals (*kalpa*) extracted from the root-text, called the *Mañjuśrītantra*. The commentaries on the VBT by **Ṣoṇaśrī* and **Vajrasiddha* further clarify that the *tantra* was extracted from the *Eighteen Thousand [Verses] Mañjuśrītantra*.²⁸

A somewhat different colophon is attested in the Tibetan version of the VBT, which gives the following reading:

Completed is the *kalpa* on obtaining *siddhis* of the glorious Buffalo-headed Vajramahābhairava, which is a fragment of the *kalpa*, successful just by being recited, extracted from the *One Hundred Thousand Tantra* of the cycle of the glorious Vajramahābhairava.²⁹

²⁶ The concept of *pañḥitasiddhaḥ* as the way of referring to a particularly powerful mantra is a common feature of the proto-tantric material of the *Mahāyānasūtras*. See, for example, the *Amoghapaśāhṛdaya-dhāraṇī* (Meisenzahl 1962) or the *Hayagrīvaśāhī* found among the Gilgit manuscripts (Kakas 2011). The concept of *pañḥitasiddhaḥ* permeated also the Buddhist tantras. It is found in the early *kriyātantra* *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* (chap. 52, p. 438) in the context of the mantra of Krodharāja Yamāntaka. The placement of the *pañḥitasiddhaḥ* at the end of the *tantra* is found in the *Cakrasaṃvara* (see Gray 2007: 382), in the *Samvarodayatantra* (Tsuda 1970: 36, 312), and in the *Hevajatantra* (2.9.6, Tripathi and Negi's edition, p. 196).

²⁷ *etasmīn mañjuśrīyākyamahāvajrabhairavacakrayogatantra dhyānakarmasiddhiparīkṣākalpaḥ saptanah/ śrīoḍḍiyānayoginīpīṭhāt śrīmahāvajrabhairavalakṣaṇaṃ tantrodḍhṛtaḥ kalpaikadeśaḥ pañḥitasiddhaḥ/ Vajrabhairavatāntra* f.16v

²⁸ Both **Ṣoṇaśrī* (p. 393) and **Vajrasiddha* (p. 412) attest to this fact as follows: 'jam dpal gyi rgyud grangs stong phrag bco brygad pa las 'jigs byed chen po sgrub ba'i thabs kyi rjes las rgyud 'di phyung ba ste/

²⁹ The Tibetan text (Siklós 1996: 113) reads: *dpal rdo rje 'jigs byed chen po'i khor lo rgyud 'bum pa nas btus na phyung ba rtog pa'i phyogs bklags pas 'grub pa*. My translation differs from that of Siklós 1996: 49: "The is the end of ritual procedures, on achieving powers by means of the glorious Buffalo-headed Vajramahābhairava, obtained by reading those sections which appeared after selection from the *One Hundred Thousand Tantra Chapter* of the cycle of the glorious Vajramahābhairava". Siklós mistranslates both *phyung ba rtog pa*, which reflects the Skt. *kalpadeśa*, and

The end of the Vajrabhairava-tantra, the great king of tantras, arisen from the *Mañjuśrī-tantra*, revealed by the glorious Lalitavajra, the master of the *maṇḍala* of the holy masters, from the great and glorious land of Oḍḍiyāna (trans. Siklós 1996: 49).

Here, alongside the reference to the *Mañjuśrītantra*, we also find the name of another root-text, namely, the *One Hundred Thousand Tantra*, conceived of as a mythical root-text from which the condensed version of the VBT in seven chapters has been extracted.³⁰ Gray³¹ has made a considerable headway in understanding the construction of tantric textual authenticity by pointing out that the myth of the *One Hundred Thousand Stanza Root Tantra* conceptualized as a massive root-text that could no longer be accessed became a common trope and a convenient means of justifying the production of “new” tantric scriptures that privileged the notion that “the tantric canon was unrealizable in the present”.³² The consequent displacement of the loci of authority to the unavailable Ur-text dehistoricized the very idea of a tantric canon and at the same time afforded an opportunity to account for the “transhistorical locus of a tradition” understood as an ongoing and timeless revelation continuing, even though only fragmentarily, from the beginningless time to the present.³³ Some tantric exegetical writers, such as Bhavyakīrti, carried out the idea of transhistoricity even further by claiming, for example, that the *Cakrasaṃvatantra* “exists without interruption in inexpressible Buddha lands, and it is experienced through meditative states, and so

phyogs bklags pas 'grub pa, which reflects the Skt. *paṭhisiddhah*; the latter is a technical term (see above, fn. 26). Siklós's translation of *btus* is also inaccurate as it reflects the Skt. *uddhṛtaḥ*, “extracted”, i.e., from the *One Hundred Thousand Chapter Tantra*, that is *Śrīmahāvajrabhairavacakra*.

³⁰ As it is difficult to establish with any certainty the relation between the *Mañjuśrītantra* and the *One Hundred Thousand Tantra* as the root-texts of the VBT, this topic remains a desideratum. The *One Hundred Thousand Tantra* cannot be a synonym of the *Mañjuśrītantra*, because, according to *Śoṇaśrī and *Vajrasiddha, the *Mañjuśrītantra* is much shorter text of 18,000 verses. The reference to the *One Hundred Thousand Tantra* is not found in the Sanskrit colophon and no mention of it is found in the Indian commentaries on the VBT preserved in the Bstan 'gyur, which may indicate that it is a later addition. On the contrary, the *Mañjuśrītantra* as the root-tantra is also mentioned by another commentator of the VBT, Lalitavajra (f. 20), who says: “*di ni 'jam dpal zhes bya ba ni 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi rtsa ba'i rgyud de*”, “As for ‘Mañjuśrī’, it is the root-tantra of Āryamañjuśrī”. *Kumāracandra (p. 288) also mentions the VBT's indebtedness to the *Mañjuśrītantra* in the following gloss: “*di nyid ni 'jam dpal rgyud chen por gsungs pa'o*” “As for this [place] itself, it has been explained in the great *Mañjuśrītantra*.”

³¹ Gray 2009.

³² Gray 2009: 14.

³³ Gray 2009: 6.

forth, by the heroes and heroines..."³⁴

Tāranātha's approach to the issue of the VBT's root-text and its "transhistorical locus" in many ways defies the aforesaid paradigm. Despite the fact that Tāranātha acknowledges the tantra's root-text as a timeless revelation taught by "the newly accomplished heroes, *yoginīs*", and others located in the realm of indefinable space, he also makes an attempt to anchor the text in the historicity of scriptural revelation that goes back to the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. Tāranātha makes an attempt to reinstate the Buddha Śākyamuni's role as the "voice of authority" in tantric context and he does so in defiance of the commonly accepted tendency of tantric authors, who preferred to reformulate a pan-Buddhist strategy of legitimizing the authority of "new" tantras claiming that the text was the "word of the Buddha" (*buddhavacana*) spoken, however, not by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, but by the "new" tantric Buddha, called Vajradhara, etc.³⁵ The adherence to the 'old' framing of textual authenticity provided Tāranātha with an opportunity to shift the attention away from the notion of revelation occurring in the "beginningless time" to the specific historical moment of revelation that placed the VBT's root-text at the centre of the tradition already established as authoritative. Tāranātha reports as follows:

Those newly accomplished heroes, *yoginīs*, buddhas, bodhisattvas taught the extensive root-tantra [of the VBT] in the assembly that fills up the entire space. This extensive [root-]tantra worked for a long time for the immeasurable number of sentient beings. The *siddhis* were achieved by limitless number of people. Then, after some time, having realized that the tantra could no longer benefit people, the tantra was sealed and stayed in the land of Orgyan in the place called the "Treasury of dharma" (*dharmagañja*), it is said. This [tantra] had the power of *siddhi* since the beginningless time. Even though the story of the root-tantra existing before in the past is indeed like that, nevertheless, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni proclaimed it again. Because of that reason, it is clearly evident that [the tantra] was sealed in Orgyan after it was taught [by the Tathāgata Śākyamuni].³⁶

³⁴ Gray 2009: 7.

³⁵ Gray 2009: 8.

³⁶ *gsar du thob pa'i dpa' po rnal 'byor ma dang/ sangs rgyas byang sems nam mkha' gang ba'i bdus su rtsa ba'i rgyud rgyas pa gsungs/ rgyud rgyas ba des dus yin ring mor sems can dpag tu med pa'i don mdzad/ skyes bu mtha' yas pa zhig gis dngos grub thob bo/ de nas bar skabs su mi rnam kyi don du mi 'gyur par mkhyen nas/ orgyan gyi gnas dhar ma gnya dza chos kyi mdzod du rgyas btab nas bzhugs ces 'gyur na/ rgyud 'di gdod nas grub pa'i dbang du byas te/ sngon byung rtsa ba'i gleng gzhi de bzhin yin mod/ ston pa de bzhin gshegs pa sha kya thub pas kyang/ slar bzlos te gsungs pa yin dgos pas/ de rjes*

The above passage is interesting not only to understand Tāranātha's effort to authenticate the VBT's root-text as the "word of the Buddha", but also to recognize how the literary tropes derived from Tibetan traditions shape historiographical narrative. In the above passage, the VBT's root-text's appearance in the world and its subsequent concealment in Orgyan (i.e. Oḍḍiyāna) becomes imagined in many ways in parallel to the Tibetan treasure tradition (*gter ma*),³⁷ where important scriptural revelations and other artifacts are hidden only to be rediscovered in future times. For Tāranātha, the category of a "hidden text" entails the notions of continuity and transhistoricity, as well as the idea of Oḍḍiyāna as sacred land of tantric revelation, all of which came to underpin his conceptualization of origins. More importantly, the "hidden text" trope provides ramifications for the narrative of the *siddha* Lalitavajra who, in the manner of a treasure revealer (*gter ston*), reinstates what has already become a forgotten tradition.

One may say that the trope of the "Treasury of dharma" is employed to perform an archival function. Although the Treasury's existence is imagined as an unchanging repository of tradition, separated from the ravages of history, the act of hiding the text is contingent upon the changing contexts of passing time. The fact that the tantra was sealed because it could no longer benefit people is not purported to exemplify the text's deprivation of power (*siddhi*), but rather to highlight the progressive degeneration of people and their morals. For Tāranātha, the loss of propensity to receive the teachings is symptomatic of a gradual decline of humankind as a whole. It is significant that in order to explain the moral degeneration of people, Tāranātha adopts a concept of time imagined as a series of four cosmic cycles (*bskal pa*) that, propelled by their descending trajectory, pull people in a downward spiral. The distinctive feature of the rhythm of the cosmic cycles, often formulated in terms of loss of perfection, is that it requires different adaptations of dharma teaching that are appropriate for different time-cycles. Tāranātha explains as follows:

The manner in which the [Vajrabhairava] teaching appears in various cosmic cycles such as the Golden Age, the Second Age, etc., may also occur with different purport. Even though there is one tantra text and one time and space, the miraculous manifestation of the Buddha is inconceivable, that's why it [the appearance of tantra in

orgyan du rgyas btab po zhes brjod na legs par mngon no/ Tāranātha's *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 43.

³⁷ With regard to the traditional division of *gter ma*, a 'hidden text' would belong to the category of "earth treasures" (*sa gter*) concealed in a physical location: see Doctor 2005: 27.

different ages] is not a contradiction.³⁸

The correspondence between the manner in which the VBT's teaching manifests in the world and the various cosmic cycles is formulated by Tāranātha through the concept of purpose or import (*dgongs pa*). However, Tāranātha does not use this term in any of the technical senses³⁹ it had in Buddhist hermeneutics, but rather in conformity with the doctrine of "skillful means", as the Buddha's capacity to adjust the dharma teachings to fit the temper of different time-cycles. In other words, the purport of the dharma appropriate for the Golden Age, symbolic of a highest level of human moral perfection, may not be suitable for the people living in the Second or Third Age, when moral degeneration had already progressed exponentially. Although the above passage merely alludes to the readjustment of the purport of the dharma to suit the moral quality of people living in different eons, in other place Tāranātha shows in more detail how the purpose of the Yamāntaka dharma changes in accordance with a specific zeitgeist, i.e., from the "Golden Age" of the *vidyādhara*s to the "Degenerate Age of the Harm-Givers", etc.⁴⁰ The underlying sense of decline

³⁸ *rdzogs ldan gnyis ldan la sogs pa dus skyabs tha dad du/ bstan pa byung tshul so so la dgongs pa yang srid/ gnas du gcig dang rgyud gzhung gcig yin yang/ sangs rgyas kyi rnam par 'phrul pa bsam gyis mi khyab pas 'ga' ba ni ma yin no/* Tāranātha's *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 43.

³⁹ The concept of *dgongs pa* (Skt. *abhiprāya*) is generally understood as a hermeneutical device in reference to the canonical utterances of the Buddha in which the meaning is intended, rather than explicitly stated: see Ruegg 1985; Brodroid 1984.

⁴⁰ In this regard, Tāranātha (*Gshin rje chos 'byung*, pp. 45-52) introduces the concept of four *kalpas* divided in accordance with the character of practice (*spyod pa*). The first *kalpa*, of unknown inception, lasted for one hundred thousand years and it was the age of the *vidyādhara*s characterized by the accomplishment of all desired *siddhis*. Tāranātha narrates five unrelated stories of the kings situated in the four cardinal directions of the world, i.e., King Vijayasimha in the south; "King of fish" Jwaśaswami in the east of Bharendra (Bengal); King Paraśamarāja in the country of poison (*ha la'i yul*) in the west; King Nagendradeva in the city of barbarians (*kla klo*) in Yavana in the north; and, also in the north, King Harihara of Kashmir. The main narrative plot repeated again and again depicts the king and his retinue consisting of one hundred servants, who after practicing the *vidyāmantra* of Yamāntaka bestowing various *siddhis* attain the status of the *vidyādhara*. This narrative plot was probably based on the story of King Indrabhūti receiving the tantric canon by the *ācārya* Kū[k]kura preserved in Jñānamitra's commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitānayaśatapañcāśatika*, now available only in Tibetan translation (Davidson 2002: 242). In this narrative, which is important for its early date (no later than 800 C.E.), Jñānamitra affirms that after being initiated into the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala, King Indrabhūti along with his retinue consisting of thousand members attained the status of *vidyādhara* (Davidson 2002: 243). This story is one of the earliest accounts of the king and his court depicted as the recipients of the esoteric tantric scriptures that also became "the most widely accepted of the *siddha* transmission stories" (Davidson 2002: 242). The second *kalpa*, which lasted for

and misappropriation of the Yamāntaka dharma, aligned with the cosmic cycles of devolution, triggers the act of hiding the teachings in order to rediscover them at the more appropriate time when they can make a difference.

2-2. *The Rediscovery Account: Lalitavajra and the Retrieval of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka Corpus*

The second approach to the issue of origins that we can distinguish in Tāranātha's *chos 'byung* is an attempt to consolidate the tradition's authenticity in the human world of the Degenerate Age by legitimizing the authority of its revealer, around which the identity of the tradition can crystalize. There are several narratives associated with the rediscovery of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka corpus presented by Tāranātha. All of them revolve around the figure of Lalitavajra and his journey to the mythical land of Oḍḍiyāna. One of these narratives that comes from the oral tradition of Bari lotsāwa narrates the rediscovery account as follows.

The followers of Bari lotsāwa explained [the story of Lalitavajra] in these words: The master called Lalitavajra [*sgeg pa'i rdo rje*] achieved a little bit of power because he meditated on the Black Yamāntaka. In the southern region, he performed ascetic observances (*vrata*). When he competed with a *tīrthika*, even though [the *tīrthika*] could not withstand him, [his] male and female retinue were turned into goats and sheep. Thinking that it was too early for him to practice [the Black Yamāntaka], he prayed to Khasarpāṇi, (an esoteric form of Avalokiteśvara). In a dream, he received a prophecy. He went to the illustrious Oḍḍiyāna and met a *yoginī* in accordance with the prophecy. He acted as her servant for three years, performing austerities. After that, she said: "What do you want?" He said: "I do not want anything. I do services for you because of devotion, Madam". It was the same at the end of six and nine years. At the end of twelve years, she said to him: "What *siddhi* do you wish for?" He made a request: "I wish for a method to instantly annihilate Māras

three hundred years, brings to a forefront a basic structure of Yamāntaka *sādhana*, such as the importance of the *maṇḍala*-initiation, the repetition of the *mantra* in front of the Yamāntaka-*paṭa*, and an emphasis on secrecy. The overall purport of the Yamāntaka praxis extends beyond the goal of the *vidyādhara* of the first *kalpa* to include soteriological and apotropaic goals. The latter becomes conveyed through the story of Ara, who by merely remembering the Yamāntaka-*mantra* is able to escape from the captivity of the bandits who attacked him. The third *kalpa*, which lasted for five hundred years, marks the age of the harm-givers (*gnod pa can kyi dus*), which brings with itself the emergence of those evil people in whose hands the practice is misused (see below, p. 43). The fourth *kalpa* begins with the rediscovery of the cycle by Lalitavajra.

and *tīrthikas* without violating the Buddha's teachings". She conferred to him a tantric initiation of Bhagavān Vajrabhairava and gave him the [Vajrabhairava] tantra in seven chapters. The name of that *yoginī* was "Sukhacakṣuḥ". Thereafter, he wrote down the seven chapters [of the VBT] on a white silk cloth using goat's milk and took it with him. Even though the *ḍakinīs* thought of drawing his heart's blood, they were unable to catch him, since the master had obtained the *siddhi* of swift-footedness and already arrived at his own place. He annihilated all those former *tīrthikas*, so it is said.⁴¹

The aforementioned legend narrating Lalitavajra's rediscovery of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka corpus in Oḍḍiyāna seeks to explain the reasons for the emergence of the cycle specializing in wrathful rituals at that particular point in time. In fact, the rationale behind its reappearance points to the historical context of interreligious struggle between the Buddhists and the *tīrthikas*⁴² (non-Buddhists). The enemy, depicted above as a religious "other", is regarded as a threat to the existing status quo that needs to be eradicated or at least disciplined for the sake of collective welfare. The process of othering and stigmatizing the difference between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists takes on a strategy of demonizing the religious other through the concept of Māra that follows a common way of representing evil in Buddhism in general.⁴³

⁴¹ *ba ri lo tsā ba ' i rjes ' jug rnams ni ' di skad ces ' chad de/ slob dpon sgeg pa ' i rdo rje zhes bya bas/ gshin rje gshed nag po bsgoms pas nus pa cung zad grub nas/ lho phyogs kyi yul du brtul zhugs kyi spyod pa byas/ mu stegs gcig dang ' gran pas khong rang la ma tshugs kyang/ ' khor pho mo rnams ra lug tu gyur pas/ spyod pa sngas so snyam kha sa rpa nir gsol ba btab pas/ rmi lam du lung bstan byung nas/ dpal o rgyan du phyin/ lung bstan dang mthun pa ' i rnal ' byor ma dang mjal nas/ de ' i khol po lo gsun byas te dka ' ba spyad pa las/ khyod ci ' dod gsung/ ' dod pa med de/ bdag khyed la gus pas bkur bsti byed pa lags ces zhuis/ de bzhin du lo drug dang dgu ' i mthar yang de dang ' dra/ lo bcu gnyis kyi mthar/ khyod dangos grub ci ' dod gsung ba la/ sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa dang mi ' gal zhing/ bdud dang mu stegs mod la tshar gcod pa ' i thabs cig zhu byas pas/ bcom ldan ' das rdo rje ' jigs byed kyi dbang bskur zhing rgyud rtog pa bdun pa g nang ngo/ rnal ' byor ma de ' i mtshan ni bde ba ' i spyan ldan zhes zer/ de nas rtog bdun dar dkar po la ra ' i ' o mas bris te bsnams/ mkha ' ' gro ma rnams kyis snying khrag phyung ba snyam byed kyang/ slob dpon rkang mgyogs grub pas rjes ma zin par rang gnas su sleb/ sngar gyi mu stegs de dag thams cad tshar bcad/ ces zer rol Gshin rje chos ' byung, p. 67.*

⁴² The references to *tīrthika*, a word whose semantic range is not well understood, and the problems associated with translating *tīrthika* as a 'heretic', have been investigated by Christopher V. Jones in his recent paper (2021), where he argues that the English term 'heretic' refers to someone within one's own tradition, whereas *tīrthika* is someone outside one's one system. Scherrer-Schaub (1991: 71) and Eltschinger (2013: 12, n. 38) prefer the term "allodox".

⁴³ Boyd 1971.

One of the critical issues that emerges from scholarly deliberations on the origins of tantric Buddhism in general is the extent to which the employment of a “violent dharma” against the religious other reflects Hindu/Śaiva-Buddhist dynamics in the actual social reality. According to some scholars, accounts of the violent subjugation of *tīrthikas* and their gods should be read allegorically and have little to do with actual hostility between Śaivas and Buddhists.⁴⁴ Another opinion is advocated by those who adhere to the ‘agonistic view’, stating that textual and iconographical representations of interreligious violence are a mirror that reflects a hostility between Śaivism and Buddhism in real life.⁴⁵ One of the most vocal proponents of the agonistic view is Giovanni Verardi, whose recent publications (2011; revised 2018) claim that the main reason for the emergence of tantric Buddhism was a desire to subdue the non-Buddhists. Verardi theorizes a long-standing social crisis caused by Brahmanical hatred and persecution of ‘heretical’ (*pāśaṅḍinah*) Buddhists,⁴⁶ which intensified during the Gupta period, and was the main reason for the emergence of tantric Buddhist ritual. According to Verardi, *abhicāra* technologies propounded by Buddhist tantras during the Pāla period were directed against two enemies: Brāhmaṇas/Śaivas (*tīrthikas*) and Muslim invaders, who from the eleventh century onwards began to raid the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁷ Even though it is not impossible that the narratives of growing influence of the *tīrthikas* threatening Buddhist survival may reflect a period of ‘Buddhist hiatus’ caused by the decline of the Pāla empire from approximately 850 C.E. to 977 C.E., which could have had a negative effect on the royal support for the *mahāvihāras* at Nālandā and Vikramaśīla⁴⁸, it is also possible that

⁴⁴ In this regard, Iyanaga (1985), Linrothe (1990), and Seyfort Ruegg (2008) adhere to the allegorical interpretation, and consider the theme of violence not as ‘expression of (sectarian and secular) antagonism between two great religions of India but, rather, a structured opposition between two levels, namely the worldly/mundane (*laukika*) and the supramundane/trans-mundane (*lokottara*)’ (Seyfort Ruegg 2008). Linrothe (1990: 20) perceives Maheśvara to be the symbolic representation of the ‘Indestructible Person’ (*akṣarapuruṣa*), who stands in opposition to the Buddhist notion of the illusory self, and the act of violence inflicted upon Maheśvara by Trailokyavijaya as an allegory for the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness and the absence of self in all dharmas (*sarvadharmānairātmya*).

⁴⁵ Davidson (2001: 215) is another vocal exponent of this agonistic view. Davidson says that the myth of Maheśvara’s subjugation indicates a real tension between Buddhist and Śaiva factions, in particular the Kāpālikas.

⁴⁶ Verardi’s interpretation of *pāśaṅḍa*—with reference to those outside of the Vedic fold, primarily Buddhists and Jains—has been criticized by Sanderson (2015), who demonstrated that in fifth century India *pāśaṅḍa* had a wider application that also included Śaiva sects and Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas.

⁴⁷ For the Pāla patronage of both Śaivism and Buddhism, see below, p.35.

⁴⁸ Sanderson 2009: 96-97; Acri 2016: 19.

these narratives merely emulate common literary tropes found in Buddhist literature at large. If we, therefore, suspend historical frames and examine the narratives only through its value as literature⁴⁹, we will notice that the theme of the fight against adversary forces assuming the garb of the *tīrthikas* and Māras was inspired by a widespread narrative of the conquest of Māra (*māravijaya*) that proliferated into many different versions in Indian and Chinese sources.⁵⁰

The placement of the *tīrthikas* on equal footing with Māra is a common literary trope of Buddhist literature, an early instance of which can be traced back to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* where the arrival of the Mahāyāna is depicted as the Buddha's act of saving countless beings from Māra and his people, the *tīrthikas*.⁵¹ In the same *sūtra*, the Buddha tells Kāśyapa: "700 years after my death, the devil Māra Pāpīyas will gradually destroy my True Dharma"⁵². The appearance of Māra⁵³ in the garb of the non-Buddhist other is often conceptualized within the Buddhist prophesy of a gradual decline of the "True Dharma" (*saddharma*) and the strengthening of the 'counterfeit dharma', i.e. non-Buddhist false paths^{54, 55}. In the *Gaṇḍīsūtra*, the decline of the dharma is coterminous with the appearance of discordant monks who fall ill, while the non-Buddhists and Māras are empowered and come to the fore.⁵⁶ The same trope of the damaging effects of the Kali Yuga bringing to the forefront the false *dharma* of the *tīrthikas* who—as the followers of Śiva—are labeled "the perpetrators of the conduct of Māra" (*māracaryāsamāratāḥ*) is found in the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*⁵⁷, an expanded version of the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*, composed by the Buddhist Newars in the 15th century.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Flores 2008.

⁵⁰ Anderl and Pons, forthcoming.

⁵¹ The *Prajñāpāramitāśāstra* was preached by the Buddha on the Gṛdhra-kūṭa in Magadha where he "destroyed Māra and his people, the *tīrthikas*, and saved innumerable beings" (Lamotte 2001: 43ff).

⁵² Chappell 1980: 139; Nattier 2011: 38.

⁵³ One the plurality of Māras, see Boyd 1971. For the overview of the *māravijaya* as a widespread Buddhist narrative, see Schmidt-Leukel, forthcoming; Nichols 2019.

⁵⁴ Schmidt-Leukel, forthcoming.

⁵⁵ Similarly, the prophesy of the **Āryacandraagarbhapariṣcchāsūtra* warns that "the party of those who obstruct the Dharma—the party of Māra and so on—will arise, and their power and strength will increase. Kings, ministers, and so on will decline in faith they will no longer perceive the distinction between virtue and vice, and they will do harm to the True Dharma" (Nattier 2011: 241).

⁵⁶ *Gaṇḍīsūtra* (Toh. 298; 1.13-1.14), see, trans. by Annie Bien 2020: 10. <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh298.html>.

⁵⁷ *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūhasūtra* 4. 79ab in Sinclair 2015: 467.

⁵⁸ Douglas 1998, online resource: <http://www.aioyama.net/lrc/papers/cbhnmppr-8.htm>; Sinclair 2015.

The literary trope of Māra and *tīrthikas* that threaten the survival of the “True Dharma” is posed as a point of reference indicating that fight against evil is believed by the tradition to be an important part of the Buddha’s or bodhisattva’s struggle in the quest of spiritual perfection. In other words, since the Buddha’s awakening was construed vis-à-vis conflict and victory over Māra, the portrayal of other Buddhist protagonists had to adhere to the same laws of emplotment structured along the basic binary categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, thereby emulating, as it were, the already established *māravijaya* narrative. Lalitavajra’s journey to Oḍḍiyāna to retrieve the tantras capable of destroying Māras and *tīrthikas* replicates the archetype of the Buddhist conquest of evil by constructing its tantric identity *via* and *against* the religious other. As we shall see below, especially in the context of the *siddha*-narratives, the issue of ethics and moral obligation plays crucial role in theorizing about the ‘enemy’. The enemy consolidates the notion of evil, which is not a static idea, but a crudely empirical reality in needs of transformation that prompts a person who took tantric vows to act compassionately by engaging in violent ritual against the evil-doer for the benefit of those whom he harms, and also for his own sake.

3. Lalitavajra at Nālandā and Moltāna: Narratives of Magical Debate

The article has so far examined two different approaches to the question of origins as a validating source of the “new” corpus of tantric revelation. First, the “root-text account” showed how Tāranātha relocates the notion of origins away from the timeless revelation to the historical moment, “spoken by the Buddha Śākyamuni”. Second, the “rediscovery account” concentrated on the biography of the *siddha* Lalitavajra as the *gter ston*, who is guided by prophecies and aided by the *ḍakinīs* to the ‘treasure-site’ of Oḍḍiyāna, at the same time justifying the reasons for the cycle’s rediscovery in the present time. In the following section, I will examine the factors that shape patterns of Buddhist tantric authority in the context of the “narrative of debate as a literary form”⁵⁹.

From Oḍḍiyāna, Lalitavajra proceeds to Nālandā Mahāvihāra, his home-institution, carrying the “new” corpus of Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka teachings. After arriving there, he is challenged to a debate by the *ācāryas* who look with suspicion at his new textual production, questioning its alleged efficacy. The proof or evidence of the new cycle’s credibility lies in the attestation of Lalitavajra’s authority,

⁵⁹ Cabezón 2008: 73.

which rests on his capability to win the challenge / debate and display his acquired *siddhis*. The story goes as follows:

Then, he [Lalitavajra] went to Magadha. When he arrived at Śrīnālandā, the *ācāryas* [at Nālandā] challenged him: “You brought the [Vajrabhairava]tantra and claim to have attained [supernatural] powers, so before the dawn rises tomorrow morning, show us your visible power”. He [Lalitavajra] responded: “Alright, in that case, I am going to summon the retinue of King Pañcasimha⁶⁰ here.” At that time the king and his retinue were in Gaurana (Bengal?). The fastest route from Nālandā to Gaurana in the east would take half a month. Lalitavajra meditated and used his powers. One of the ministers of the king Pañcasimha, was called Mutāripradhāna (Murāripradhāna⁶¹), he was a *tīrthika*. He felt an urge to go to Magadha and having loaded the chariot with many goods, he took on a journey together with the king’s retinue. This journey, which normally takes half a month, he covered in a few hours. On the stroke of midnight, he arrived at the enclosure of Nālandā. Mahāsāṃghika Dāsapada informed that the minister had arrived. As soon as the day broke, he asked the monks for religious instruction and gave them a lot of gifts. Then, the minister came with the retinue and promised to practice Buddhism. They gained faith in the *ācārya* and were amazed.⁶²

⁶⁰ Pañcasimha was the king of Magadha, a son of King Bhaṣara, who served both Brāhmanical and Buddhist clergies (see Sum pa mkhan po 1908). Tāranātha and Sum pa khen po both refer to Sāntideva as the minister to King Pañcasimha. Sāntideva, the author of the manual of Buddhist ethics *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, was a 7th century Nālandā *ācārya*. If he were the minister to King Pañcasimha, it would have meant that Pañcasimha was his contemporary, which would place Mutāripradhāna in the 7th century as well. The account of Candragomin, however, places Pañcasimha a century later, in the 8th century (Tatz 1972: 70). That would mean that both Mutāripradhāna and Lalitavajra lived in the 8th century.

⁶¹ *Pradhāna* means here “one whose chief object is Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu”, probably indicating the adherent of Vaiṣṇavism.

⁶² *de nas ma ga dhar byon te/ dpal na lan dar song pa na/ pa ndit ta rnams na re/ khyed kyis rgyud kyang spyang drangs/ nus pa yang thob ces zer na/ nang bar nam langs pa tshun chod la/ dngos su mthong ba ' i nus pa zhig ston cig zer ba la/ o na rgyal po seng ge lnga pa ' i ' khor zhig ' dir dug gi byas/ de la rgyal po seng ge lnga pa ' khor bcas ni/ yul gau ra na yod de/ na lan da nas shar phyogs su mgyogs par song yang zla phyed tsam ' gro dgos pa la/ slob dpon gyis ting nge ' dzin gyi las sbyor mdzad pas/ rgyal po seng ge lnga pa ' i blon po mu tā ri pra dhā na bya ba mu stegs la dang pa zhig/ yul ma ga dhar ' gro ' dod skyes nas nyi ma phyi phred kyi dus su yo byad mang po dang bcas shing ' khor dang bcas pa lam du zhugs pas zla ba phyed kyi lam chu tshad ' ga ' zhig la bgrod nas/ nam phyed pa na dpal na la nda ' i lcags ri ' i nang du sleb/ dge ' dun gyi zhal ta pa la skad btang ste/ nam langs ma thag dge ' dun rnams la chos ston gsol/ nor mang po phul/ phyin chad sangs rgyas pa byed par khas blangs pas/ slob dpon la thing yid ches shing ngo mtshar skyes so// Gshin rje chos 'byung, pp. 59-60.*

In the next story (narrated also in a shorter version and with slight alternations in Tāranātha's *Rgya gar chos 'byung*), Lalitavajra proceeds to the city of Moltāna in the west where he is ordered by King Naravarman to compete with the *tīrthikas* skilled in the tantra of poison (*viṣatantra*):

Then, in the province of Moltāna in the west, there was a king [known as] Naravarman. In that place, there were many non-Buddhists (*mu stegs pa*) who were experts in the *viṣatantra*. The king ordered Lalitavajra to compete with the non-Buddhists [to prove his magical powers]. The *mu stegs pas* swallowed one poison each at one time. The *ācārya* [Lalitavajra] took twice the measure of the poison that could be carried by ten men. He expelled it and again consumed it, but remained unharmed. *Ghela* is the name of a large clay pot for keeping beer. He drank two such [*ghelas*] of mercury, but remained unharmed. In that way, he was swallowing poison and mercury for seven days. Because of that, his body assumed an immensely lustrous complexion. He shook the palace of the king with one hand. All the people were scared and offered innumerable gifts. They brought whatever the *bhikṣus* and poor people liked.⁶³

Both of the above narratives adhere to the traditional measures of establishing Buddhist authority, endorsing the idea that a proven ability to win a debate establishes the master's authority. The "narratives of great debates" between the Buddhists and their non-Buddhists opponents reflect "a broader literary theme that we might call the *contest*"⁶⁴, that became a popular element of Buddhist self-identity in biographical and historiographical sources.⁶⁵ The theme of contest, whether as a skill of philosophical argumentation, or as a display of supernatural powers in a magical battle, is a common literary motif that purports to dramatize the very function of Buddhist

⁶³ *de nas nub phyogs kyi yul mol tā na zhes pa na/ rgyal po na ra va rma zhes bya ba yod del/ gnas de na mu stegs byed dug gi rgyud la mkhas pa mang po dag yod pa las/ rgyal pos bskul te de dag dang nus pa ' gran pa las/ mu stegs de rnames kyi [recte *kyis] dug bre bo re re dus gcig tu thos [recte *zos]/ slob dpon gyis dug mi khur bcu btags te/ de ' i tshad nyis ' gyur gyi phyos [recte *myos]/ byed la btab ste gsol yang gnod pa med/ ghe la zhes pa chang [lacuna] stol ba ' i snod rāza ma shin tu che ba cig gi ming yin/ de ' dra gnyis dngul chus gang ba gsol yang gnod med/ de ltar dug dang/ dngul chu de zhag bdun gyi ring la gsol bas/ sku bkrag mdangs gzi brjid dpag tu med par gyur tel/ rgyal po ' i pho brang yang phyag gcig gis bsgul bas/ thams cad skrag ste yo byad dpag tu med pa phul/ de thams cad dge slong dang phongs pa rnames kyis ci bder khyer/ Gshin rje chos ' byung, folio 58-59.*

⁶⁴ Cabezón 2008: 73.

⁶⁵ For different narrative of debates in Buddhist tradition, see Cabezón 2008; for the magical and philosophical debates in the Vedānta hagiographies, see Granoff 1985.

dialectics, which aims at eradicating the non-Buddhist wrong views,⁶⁶ both in a “tuitional” sense, as removing the wrong notions that carry undesirable karmic consequences for the opponent, and also in an “apologetic” sense, as a defensive strategy against the attacks from those inside and outside the *saṅgha*.⁶⁷ The popularity of the theme of contest in narratives is not surprising taking into account that debate was instrumental to the formation of Buddhist monastic culture and the educational curriculum and was also a means of gaining social status and receiving patronage.⁶⁸ For Buddhist culture, however, debate was imagined primary a tool of conversion.⁶⁹ It is especially against this proselytizing backdrop that debate became one of the most common literary leitmotifs.

Among all the Buddhist institutions, Nālandā Mahāvihāra is always portrayed as the renowned centre of debate that used philosophical and magical contests as the principal machinery for the suppression of the *tīrthikas*. Not only historiographical writings, but also Chinese travelogues, like that of Yijing—the Chinese missionary who studied at Nālandā in 671-695 C.E.—praise Nālandā masters as those who “oppose the heretics as they would drive beasts in the middle of a plain and explain away disputations as boiling water melts frost”.⁷⁰ The *siddha*-narratives very often contain a story of the master’s successful debate with the *tīrthikas* at Nālandā, making it a mandatory ‘rite of passage’ in the *siddha*’s biography. For example, in the biography of the *mahāsiddha* Tilopa by Mar pa Cho kyi bo bro, we learn

⁶⁶ Jenkins (2016) shows how Buddhist narratives of debate conceive wrong views as a form of slander, which is related to sin that threatens the very survival of Buddhist institutions.

⁶⁷ Eltschinger 2013: 238.

⁶⁸ Jenkins 2016: 138.

⁶⁹ Debate became also a part of the legal system, which entailed serious consequences. The loser in debate was subjected to a wide array of punitive measures, ranging from death penalty to exile from the country. Xuanzang reports in his *Sī Yu Kī* that whoever was defeated in debate had to die as a proof of his inferiority (see Beal 1906:99). The losers were also forced to “renounce their religion—which after all had been proven false—and convert to the other side” (Taber 2005:vii). We do not know whether the conversion was a choice that the loser could take himself or whether it was forced upon him by the judicial body together with more serious types of punishments, such as death. We do know, however, that Brahmins, upon losing the debate, were eligible to convert to Buddhism and still remain Brahmins (see Bronkhorst 2011:172-175), but Buddhists who lost the debate and were not already Brahmins could not convert and become Brahmins since one is a Brahmin by birth, not by conversion. In this view, it appears that Buddhists must have been more interested in obtaining the necessary skills in the art of debate than Brahmins, as that was their only opportunity to de-authorize and destabilize Brāhmaṇical hegemony and change the power structure in favour of the Buddhists.

⁷⁰ Takakusu 1896:181.

that Tilopa subdued a non-Buddhist, later named Nag po Dge ba at Śrīnālandā.⁷¹ Debates often took place in the presence of the king who typically becomes a Buddhist convert and bestows on the *saṅgha* wealth and property.⁷² This principle is emulated in the narrative of Abhayakīrti, who at Nālandā in the presence of the king Digvarman defeated all the *tīrthikas*, thus securing royal patronage.⁷³

Lalitavajra's portrayal as a debater follows the conventional narrative framework of the *siddha*-narratives, thereby emulating a customary practice of debate aiming at the conversion of the non-Buddhists prevalent in Buddhist culture at large. In both stories, Lalitavajra engages in a debate in an apologetic sense, against the challenge posed by those inside and outside the *saṅgha*. At the same time, the stories modify the contest's constitutive elements to fit into the 'tantric' narrative. In the first story, Lalitavajra has to perform magical feasts to convince others about the *siddhis* he had acquired through the mastery of the contents of the tantras. By physically summoning the king's retinue from a long distance he validates the efficacy of the specific magical procedure, i.e., summoning people from a long distance, prescribed in the VBT. In the second story, Lalitavajra is challenged by King Naravarman to take part in the contest with the competing tantric sect in Moltāna.⁷⁴ The *tīrthikas* designated by Tāranātha

⁷¹ Torricelli and Naga 1995: 48-49.

⁷² Jenkins 2016: 139.

⁷³ Guenther 1995: 21-22.

⁷⁴ In his *Rgya gar chos 'byung* (pp. 121-122), Tāranātha identifies Moltāna (Maulasthāna) in the west and its city, Ba ga da (Baghdad) as the place ruled by the Persian-Tartar (*stag gzigs*) King Ha la lu (Hajjaj ibn bin Yusuf Sakafi)—the early eighth-century C.E. administrator of the easternmost provinces of the Umayyad Caliphate—wherefrom the *mleccha* army invaded India for the first time. When analyzed against historical facts, we come to realize that Tāranātha's knowledge of ethnic categories and world-history reveals serious gaps. The Umayyads, including the Governor Hajjaj ibn bin Yusuf Sakafi, were not Persian-Turks, but Sunni Arabs. We also know that Baghdad was built only in 762 C.E by the Abbasids, after the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate (Berzin n.d). Moltāna (Maulasthāna) was known for the Sun Temple of Multān dedicated to a Hindu deity, Sūrya. The cult possibly emerged through the religious contacts with the Persian worship of the solar-deity, Mithra (MacLean 1989:18). The existence of the temple is attested since the medieval period, when it was recorded by the Arab geographer Al-Muqaddasi (Habib 2011:42). When Xuanzang visited the temple in AD 641, he noticed idols of Śiva and Buddha installed in the temple. Even after the takeover of Moltāna by the Umayyads, the sun-temple was protected by the local rulers as a great source of wealth acquired through the "gifts donated by pilgrims who came from all over Sind and Hind to the great idol of the sun-temple at Multān" (Wink 1996:187). Nowhere in Tāranātha's works, however, does Moltāna appear in the context of a sun-temple. We know that Tāranātha's guru, Buddhaguptanātha also visited Mūltān "where most of the people were Mongols of the Tajik race of the *mlecchas* (Persians) living in the area of Upper

as experts in *viṣatantra* ('Treatise on Poison') would normally refer to the Śaivas trained in the twelve canonical *Gāruḍa-tantras* dealing with poisons, snakes, and poisonous insects.⁷⁵ However, the practice of swallowing mercury, which Tāranātha describes as the repertoire of the *viṣatantra* specialists, actually points to another sect, the Nāth Siddhas, also known as Nāth Yogis,⁷⁶ who in the 13th-14th became institutionalized as the Nāth *samprādaya* by Goraknāth/Gorakṣanātha.⁷⁷

The Nāth Siddhas were identified with the practice of swallowing mercury as a method of bodily transmutation into the perfected body of the *siddha* and means of gaining various *siddhis*, found in Hindu alchemy (*rasāyana*)⁷⁸ as well as in haṭhayogic scriptures, such as *Amanaska Yoga*.⁷⁹ This practice was ideologically grounded in the portrayal of mercury as Śiva, Lord Rasa (*rasesvara*),⁸⁰ who leads to victory over disease and death.⁸¹ The practice of swallowing mercury could have been known to Tāranātha through his guru, Buddhaguptanātha, who belonged to the Nāth *samprādaya*.⁸² Tāranātha seems to have confused the adherents of the *viṣatantra* with the Nāth Siddhas and erroneously allocated to them the custom of swallowing mercury. Another evidence in support of the argument that Tāranātha was referring to the Nāth Siddhas' practice is his mention of eating poison (*viṣāhār*), which is indeed included in Gorakṣanātha's *Amarauḡhaśāsana*.⁸³ That Tāranātha understood alchemy as a part of the Śaiva repertoire is also attested in the *Bka' babs bdun ldan*⁸⁴, in the story of the *tīrthika* yogin Asitaghana, who after practicing the *sādhana* of Mahe-

Hor, first they ridiculed and harmed him, but after he started to use fierce mantras, they started paying respect to him." See Tāranātha's *Grub chen Buddha gup-ta'i rnam thar*, p. 543, trans. Templeman 2009. The Persian travelogues, such as *Chachnāma* refer to Moltāna as the place ruled by the governor under the Rāi dynasty. None of these rulers, however, bear the name 'Naravaraman'.

⁷⁵ The *Gāruḍa-tantra* canon is comprehensively discussed in a recent monograph by Slouber (2017).

⁷⁶ The Nāth Siddhas were a conglomerate of different sects, such as the Pāsupatas, Kāpālikas, Śāktas, Māheśvaras and Rasa Siddhas, just like the Buddhist *siddhācāryas* (White 1996: 99).

⁷⁷ White 1996: 90.

⁷⁸ The meaning of *rasāyana* as a Śaiva path to immortality is preserved in Mādha-vācārya's 14th century *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* in the chapter of the "Rasesvara Darśana" (White 1996: 102).

⁷⁹ White 1996: 315-316.

⁸⁰ Treloar 1972.

⁸¹ White 1996: 187-188.

⁸² Huber 2008: 205-206.

⁸³ White 1996: 477. Gorakṣanātha's *Amarauḡhaśāsana* is the post-Haṭhapradīpikā text on the classical yoga, which draws upon the *Netratantra* and *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, but omits the verses of the Haṭha Yoga corpus (Mallinson 2011: 773).

⁸⁴ Templeman 1983: 52.

śvara obtained the *siddhi* of quicksilver. The fact that Lalitavajra is ordered by the king to engage in the alchemico-yogic practices of the rival Śaiva sect gives us some indication of the Śaiva-Buddhist dynamics of that period. This may reflect a tantric Buddhist attempt to gain influence as newcomers within the religious marketplace dominated by the Śaivas as the primary recipients of royal patronage. As Alexis Sanderson⁸⁵ has demonstrated, during the “Śaiva Age” tantric Buddhist traditions competing for patronage went to great lengths to adapt and integrate the practices of the Śaiva orders into a Buddhist ‘package’ that would make them more competitive in the royal environment. King Naravarman (aka Naravarmadeva, r. 1094-1133), the son of Udayāditya and a Śaiva king of the Paramāra dynasty (that ruled the west-central regions of India between the 10th and 14th centuries) could have been particularly interested in the *rasāyana*, since he patronized tantric forms of worship as attested by inscriptions found in Ujjayinī (i.e., Ujjain in present-day Madhya Pradesh). Those inscriptions record the restoration of the tantric temple of Mahākāla Bhairava, the wrathful form of Śiva, by Naravarman.⁸⁶ According to Tāranātha, however, when Buddhaguptanātha visited Ujjayinī, he stayed at the temple of Vajrabhairava consecrated by Dīpaṅkarabhadra⁸⁷ himself; but as Tāranātha reports, nowadays “the local folk practices belief of that country and this temple is celebrated with blood sacrifice”.⁸⁸ Thus, in Tāranātha’s eyes, the temple of Mahākāla Bhairava in Ujjayinī was initially dedicated to Vajrabhairava, and was later reappropriated by the Śaivas. Despite the fact that the characterization of Moltāna as the land of the *viśatantra* specialists and its association with the historical name of the Śaiva King Naravarman is subservient to the consolidation of Lalitavajra’s image as the challenger of the Śaiva-*tīrthikas* within the spatial continuum of the narrative, it gives us some hint at what Tāranātha thought to be the socio-historical reality of that period. The theme of active competition between the tantric forms of Śaivism and Buddhism highlighted in Tāranātha’s narrative reflects a thriving religious environment in which different tantric sects receive royal patronage from the rul-

⁸⁵ Sanderson 2009: 44-45.

⁸⁶ The event of restoration was celebrated by a hymn to the deity written in the serpentine graph (*sarpabandha*) allegorically referred to as the “magical sword of the worshippers of Śiva” (Pollock 2006:177).

⁸⁷ Dīpaṅkarabhadra was one of the twelve tantric teachers of Vikramaśīla (to which Śrīdhara and Līlavajra also belonged) during the reign of the King Devapāla just after Buddhajñānapāda (Chattopadhyaya 1990:18). According to Tāranātha’s *Gshin rje chos ’byung*, he was a direct disciple of Lalitavajra and features in the Indian lineage of the Vajrabhairava Zhang transmission lineage (see Wenta 2020).

⁸⁸ Tāranātha’s *Buddha gupta’i rnam thar*, p. 543.

ers leading to what Alexis Sanderson⁸⁹ has described as the Indian states' propagation of "tolerance in matters of religion", characterized by the "balance of influence" in which one religious tradition was not in a position to diminish the other. At least, in this specific case, Tāranātha's account and the academic theories on the emergence of tantric Buddhism would seem to align.

4. *Lalitavajra at Varendra:
Nāgas, Mlecchas and "Compassionate Violence"*

Lalitavajra's activities at Varendra illustrate a shift in Tāranātha's conceptualization of the notion of the enemy. It is no longer a *tīrthika*, with whom Lalitavajra has to compete or whom he has to convert to Buddhism, but an evil-doer antagonistic towards the Buddhists. In the first story, Lalitavajra performs *abhicārahoma* against the *nāga* called Vikṛta, inhabiting a lake in Bhaṅgala (Bengal):⁹⁰

In the east, there was a place called Bagala, which was a part of Varendra. Regarding this, Bhaṅgla and Bagala must be understood as separate.⁹¹ In that region, there was a lake inhabited by a *nāga* called Vikṛta. He was very violent and harmful, and he would help the 'Outsiders' (*phyi pa*, i.e. non-Buddhists) and *kla klo* (Skt. *mlecchas*). He was very hostile towards the Buddhists. [Lalitavajra] surrounded the lake with a mantric cord and performed *homa* rituals. The *nāga*, along with its retinue, were burnt. The lake dried up in seven days. In the wake of that, Lalitavajra erected a stone stele and placed the image of Mañjuśrī at the top of it.⁹²

Lalitavajra's encounter with the *nāga* is representative of a wider trend seen in many Buddhist accounts, which points to Buddhist en-

⁸⁹ Sanderson 2015: 159.

⁹⁰ This story is also recounted in *Rgya gar chos 'byung* where Tāranātha mentions *tīrthikas*, *pārasikas* (*stag gzigs*) and wicked sub-human beings performing *abhicāra* against sentient beings, who are obliterated by Lalitavajra, see Chattopadhyaya 1990: 244.

⁹¹ Tāranātha appears to be confused with regard to the proper spelling of Bhagala. According to his *Rgya gar chos 'byung* (Chattopadhyaya 1990:121), Bhagala and Bhaṅgala are synonyms.

⁹² *de nas shar phyogs ba re ndra'i bye brag/ [lacuna]ba ga la zhes bya ba cig yod/ de yang bhañ ga la dang ba ga la so so yin par go dgos/ yul de na mtsho gcig la klu vi kri ta zhes bya ba/ gdug rtsub che zhing/ phyi pa dang kla klo'i grogs byed/ nang pa la shin tu gnod pa zhig yod do/ mtsho'i mtha' rnam su sngags kyi srad bus bskor nas/ der sbyin sreg mdzaā pas klu 'khor dang bcas pa tshig/ mtsho yang zhag bdun bskams/ de'i shul du rdo ring chen po bcugs/ rdo ring gi rtse mo la 'jam dpal gyi sku gzugs cig byas so/ Gshin rje chos 'byung, p. 60.*

agement with the local *nāga* cults.⁹³ As such, a *nāga* is a metaphorical index pointing to a much larger cluster of meanings, which includes the “insider-outsider” distinction, the Buddhist re-appropriation of the local *nāga* sites and the destruction of the water-bodies through *homa* ritual. The reappropriation of the *nāga* sites for Buddhist purposes is widely attested in the textual corpus. The conversion of a *nāga*, a dangerous spirit difficult to control and possessing the powers of nature such as rainmaking, was a common trope employed in the narratives about the establishment of Buddhist monasteries.⁹⁴ In these stories, the monastery is built at the exact same location as the *nāga*-site and it is purported to pacify and control a troublesome *nāga*.⁹⁵ The subordination of the *nāga* sites under Buddhist institutions has been “viewed as a crucial element of the *saṅgha*’s ‘localization’ in new areas”.⁹⁶ Interpreted from the perspective of “cultic integration”, the *nāga* cult, as a representative of local/folk traditions, was incorporated into a wider Buddhist religious framework.

In Lalitavajra’s narrative, the principle of religious conversion of sacred sites is evident in the way in which the *nāga*-lake as a contested place of evil ‘other’ becomes reappropriated and reconsecrated as a Buddhist site dedicated to Mañjuśrī, of whom Vajrabhairava is a wrathful manifestation. This reappropriation, however, goes hand in hand with the total obliteration of the *nāga*-deity through the tantric ritual of *homa* and not with its integration into the Buddhist fold. Although Lalitavajra follows the footsteps of Padmasambhava in that he controls physical landscape through the act of taming wild aspects of nature⁹⁷ he neither creates springs or streams as a part of irrigation technology⁹⁸, nor is he interested in securing water-harvesting and agrarian production for the *saṅgha*.⁹⁹ On the contrary, Lalitavajra dries up the lake, thereby destroying the access to the water-bodies in that area. In order to explain the reasons for this crucial difference, we should first look at another “*nāga*-narrative” given in Tāranātha’s *Gshin rje chos ’byung*, this time, concerning the famous tantric sorcerer Rwa lotsāwa’s meeting with the *nāga*-demon (*klu bdud*) of Thog bar

⁹³ Normally, *nāgas* are local folk deities associated with the powers of nature, such as rainmaking, which are paramount to the agricultural cycle. Already in the 6th C.E., Chinese travellers to India report that due to their water symbolism, especially in Northern India, *nāga* sculptures were often found near water-tanks or pools and depicted them “with right hand raised as if ready to strike, and left hand holding a cup or a jar”, a symbol of wealth (Bloss 1978: 38).

⁹⁴ DeCaroli 2004: 61.

⁹⁵ DeCaroli 2004: 61.

⁹⁶ Cohen 1998: 377-378, quoted in Shaw 2004: 50.

⁹⁷ Dalton 2004:764

⁹⁸ Wangdu & Diemberger 2000: 14.

⁹⁹ Shaw 2004: 51.

and evil female *nāgas* called “Five Sisters Causing Leprosy”. In Rwa lotsāwa’s story, the *nāga*-demons insist that all the travellers passing through the valley must pay respect and make offerings to them. Anybody who does not comply with this order will become a victim of mischievous tricks resulting in that person’s disappearance. As the years pass, many travellers vanish without a trace. At one time during his journey through that region, Rwa lo stops close to the *nāga* site for refreshments. Since he does not bow down to the *nāgas*, they kill one of his animals. In retaliation, Rwa lo performs *homa*-ritual that causes a thick fog of black darkness to descend from all directions. As a result, all the *nāga*-demons together with their retinue are burned down. Soon after, the water-bodies in that area are dried up. Tāranātha concludes the story saying that this is just one example of a taming narrative aiming at the subjugation of non-humans harmful towards the Buddhist dharma.¹⁰⁰

Both of the “*nāga* narratives” follow the patterns of emplotment that concentrate on three focal points: 1) employment of the magical technology of *abhicārahoma* (*sbyin sreg*); 2) burning down (*tshig*) the *nāgas*; and 3) drying up (*bskams*) the lake. The move away from securing the water-bodies paramount to the agricultural subsistence linked to the water-magic of Padmasambhava, and even their total destruction by Lalitavajra and Rwa lotsāwa, is predicated upon the reconfiguration of the *nāga*-figure along the lines of the tantric enemy *par excellence*. In Tāranātha’s narratives, a *nāga* is no longer linked to the powers of fertility and agricultural growth¹⁰¹, but he is first and foremost the evil-doer hostile towards the Buddhists. As such, he meets scriptural requirements of the type of target against whom the use of wrathful *abhicārahoma* is justifiable. By consolidating the image of the *nāga* as the evil-doer, Tāranātha seems to emulate injunctions prescribed in the VBT and other early Buddhist tantras such as the *Susiddhikara* and the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*, which authorize the use of *abhicāra* against those who harm the three jewels, i.e., who are antagonistic towards Buddhist teachings and institutions.¹⁰² This principle is also mimicked in the next story. This time, however, it is not a *nāga*, but the *mlecchas* (*kla klos*) that conform to this characteristic:

At the time of the kingdom of Varendra, there was a township of the *kla klos*, called Hetsali. [Regardless of the fact] that there were no other *kla klos* there, Lalitavajra saw (in his vision) that they were going to grow powerful and harm the whole kingdom. [To prevent

¹⁰⁰ *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁰¹ Bloss 1978: 37-38.

¹⁰² On the conceptualization of the tantric ‘enemy’ in early Buddhist tantras, see Wentz, forthcoming.

this from happening,] he performed *homa* rituals close to that town. One day, having used a *yantra*, he created a zombie (*ro langs*) called “Fiery” and brought the sun near to the earth. Then, the whole town of Hetsali burnt down instantly. The *kla klo-gurus* called Kātī and Sayita, all of them died. Starting from that time, for five hundred years, no *kla klos* had ever appeared in the Varendra kingdom, it is said.¹⁰³

This story is interesting because it concerns future events that have not yet taken place. The threat, more imagined than real, are the *kla klos* (Skt. *mlecchas*), which *The Rangjung Yeshe Tibetan English Dictionary of Buddhist Culture*¹⁰⁴ defines as “barbarian, savage, primitive, tribesmen, uncivilized, foreigner, hunter, Moslem”¹⁰⁵ etc. Despite the fact that the *mlecchas*¹⁰⁶ described in the above narrative are not explicitly said to be hostile towards Buddhism, it is plausible to assume that such specific characterization was indeed intended here. In the *Rgya gar chos 'byung*¹⁰⁷, Tāranātha is very clear about the fact that the arrival of the *mlecchas* was coterminous with the start of the decline of dharma that had begun during Nāgārjuna’s life. He is also precise in identifying the first *mleccha* invasion as the arrival of the Bagdad-

¹⁰³ *skabs der yul va ren dra he tsa li zhes pa kla klo'i grong zhig yod/ gzhan kla klo med dol de rnams stobs dang ldan par 'gro ba dang rgyal khams thams cad phung bar byed pa'i ltas gzigs nas/ de dang nye bar sbyin sreg kyang cher mdzad/ nyi ma gcig 'khrul 'khor bskor nas/ ro langs me ldan zhes bya ba/ nyi ma khos pa la btad pas [recte *khos sa la btad pas] de ma thag he tsa li'i kla klo'i grong thams cad tshig ste/ kla klo'i bla ma kā tci dang/ sa yi ta thams cad shil/ de nas brtsams [recte *mtshams] lo lnga brgya'i bar du va re ndra kla klo ye ma byung skad/ Gshin rje chos 'byung, pp. 60-61.*

¹⁰⁴ *The Rangjung Yeshe Tibetan English Dictionary of Buddhist Culture* vol.3, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ *The Rangjung Yeshe Tibetan English Dictionary of Buddhist Culture* (vol.3, p. 59) defines the word *kla klo* as “Islam, those who live in the thirty-two border countries such as loknatha, and all those who consider harming others an act of faith or whose savage beliefs see taking life as good.” In Tibetan literature, these are often either Muslims or people from the southern borderlands of Tibet (i.e. ‘tribal’ people).

¹⁰⁶ The identification of the *mlecchas* with the Muslims invading the northwestern part of India was a common trend established in tantric literature since the compilation of the *Kālacakratāntra*, a text written as a response to the Islamic presence in India. The tantra was completed between 1025-1040, at the exact time when Maḥmud of Ghaznī began his invasions of northwestern India (Newman 1998). The *Kālacakra* literature extended the meaning of the *mleccha* to refer not only to such foreigners as Yavanas, Śakas, Kūṣāṇas and Hūnas, which were known as foreign invaders of northern India before 7th century, but also to Muslims. Since the time of the *Kālacakra* onwards, the usage of the word *mleccha* to designate specifically Muslims permeated virtually all genres of Tibetan literature; therefore, it is plausible to argue that Tāranātha too had this ethnic and religious group in mind, especially since the Jo nang tradition holds the *Kālacakra* as its main teaching.

¹⁰⁷ Chattopadhyaya 1990: 121-122.

based Persian-Tartar king, Ha la lu.¹⁰⁸ At the time of Lalitavajra, *mlecchas* are just a minority group, but in the future, they are going to grow powerful and bring destruction to the whole kingdom. The *homa* and *yantra* rituals employed as Lalitavajra's tantric repertoire are envisioned as preventive rather than defensive methods, which have only limited effect on the shape of the future that would last "for five hundred years". Ultimately, they cannot stop the onslaught of the future *mleccha* invasion. Lalitavajra's vision of the upcoming havoc brought by the *mlecchas* positions him at the centre of eschatological concerns where tantric rituals offer a chance to take temporary control of inevitable destruction, a chance to control the uncontrollable. The reference to the "five hundred years" as a fixed period of time during which the tantric rituals will have an effect on Varendra is concomitant with the specific timetable for the duration of *dharma* attested in the earliest Buddhist traditions. In this regard, the *Nikāyas* agree that the Buddhist *dharma* will endure only for five hundred years after the Buddha's demise, and this shorten lifespan is due to the presence of women in the *saṅgha*, whose effect on the Buddhist community is compared to that of "mildew on a field of rice, or rust on a sugarcane plant".¹⁰⁹

Tāranātha's depiction of Varendra as a land inhabited by *nāga* and *mlecchas* plays an important role in the ethical framework of the *sid-dha*-narratives. We have already seen that by having Lalitavajra requesting the *yoginī* in Oḍḍiyāna teachings that could defend the Buddhist *dharma* without violating the Buddha's teachings,¹¹⁰ Tāranātha makes it clear that these new dharma teachings have to fit into an overall ethical framework of Buddhism. After all, the first of the five ethical rules (*pañcaśīla*) of Buddhism is abstinence from harming living being. Tantric Buddhist ethics have resolved this conundrum by postulating a double moral standard for the tantric practitioners exemplified by the principle of "compassionate violence".¹¹¹ Lalitavajra kills the evil ones through the use of the *abhicārahoma* and, thus, does them a service by preventing them from accumulating bad karma. Interpreted from a tantric (as well as Mahāyānist) point of view, he does not act motivated by anger, but merely actualizes the exercise of compassion to liberate those beings from the torments of hell that surely await them for their evil deeds. By liberating evil ones from the retribution of bad karma and by securing a violence-free zone for the future inhabitants of Varendra, Lalitavajra makes sure

¹⁰⁸ Chattopadhyaya 1990: 122. The term *stag gzigs* seems to be a conflation of *hor* (Turks from Central Asia) and *sog* (Mongols).

¹⁰⁹ Nattier 1991: 28-29.

¹¹⁰ See p.17.

¹¹¹ Gray 2007.

that the compassionate *bodhisattva* ideal, one of the distinguishing features of the Mahāyāna, secures its place as the ultimate tantric goal. The consolidation of the image of Varendra as the place of cultural conflict that becomes the stage for Lalitavajra's exercise in "compassionate violence" is also a strategy to ensure that scriptural injunctions, delineating the categories of beings against whom the use of *abhicāra* is justifiable, is brought to life in a story by giving them a narrative context. By making Varendra a place inhabited by violent *nāgas* and *mlecchas* who are hostile towards the Buddhists, Tāranātha does not only construct an accursed site and an appropriate setting for internecine violence, but, more importantly, he makes it possible for Lalitavajra to act for the welfare of sentient beings and Buddhist *saṅgha*, and make the double standard of tantric Buddhist ethics manifest in 'real' life.

5. Tāranātha as a Historian?
Vikramaśīla and the Siddhas of the Raktayamāritantra

The article so far has examined Tāranātha's *Gshin rje chos 'byung* from the perspective of its value as a historiographical narrative that employs shared literary tropes, established motifs, and modes of emplotment of the *siddha*-stories. In this section, the discussion will turn to the question of using Tāranātha as the source of historical knowledge, or what Robinson¹¹² calls a "horizontal dimension" of the *siddha*-narratives. The "horizontal dimension" focuses on establishing the *siddha*'s historicity insofar that it is usually connected to a particular historical timeframe that allows the reader to navigate the events anchored in a specific time-space continuum. As such, the "horizontal dimension" is based on factual information that anchors the great religious master in the historical continuity and, at the same time, links him to the 'history-bound humanity'.¹¹³ In this regard, the question arises how authentic and reliable is Tāranātha's presentation of historical facts¹¹⁴. In order to determine the factual accuracy of Tāranātha's 'history', we turn to the historical facts behind the life-stories of *Śrīdhara (*dpal 'dzin*) and Kamalarakṣita at Vikramaśīla, the *siddhas* associated with the *Raktayamāritantra*.

¹¹² Robinson 1996: 67.

¹¹³ Robinson 1996: 67.

¹¹⁴ In this regard, Templeman (1981) noted that the historical data provided by Tāranātha is full of inconsistencies, and that his comprehension of India is thin and shallow: "it comprises at best, a surface familiarity with some dynastic events and names, and a basic, but often unrealistic geography."

5-1. *Śrīdhara and the Pāla kings

The propagation of the *Raktayamāritantra* is associated with the *siddha* *Śrīdhara. *Śrīdhara was a Brahmin, born in Magadha around the end of the life of King Dharmapāla (r. 775–810/812).¹¹⁵ According to Tāranātha, he was trained in grammar, logic and epistemology, and became ordained in the Oḍantapuri Mahāvihāra. *Śrīdhara was trained in the Tripiṭaka and received transmissions from a certain *Dīpaṅkarabhadra (*mar me mdzad bzang po*). He sought and relied on the teaching of Dpal sde (Śrīvarga?), who was a disciple of the *ācārya* *Jñānapāda (Buddhajñānapāda), from whom he mastered the *Guhyasamāja*- and *Yamāntaka-tantras*.¹¹⁶ According to Tāranātha, *Śrīdhara was invited by the Pāla King Mahīpāla I (r. 977-1027) to become an abbot at the tantric Vikramaśīla Mahāvihāra established by the earlier king of the Pāla dynasty, Dharmapāla. This invitation was due to the impressive obliteration of the *tīrthikas* that *Śrīdhara had accomplished in South India, known in Tibetan sources as 'Bedarwa' [Skt. Vidarbha] or 'The Land of the Palm Trees'. Tāranātha reports as follows:

Also another King Narapaticala (Nārāyaṇapāla, r. 865-917), after hearing amazing accounts [about Śrīdhara] came and bowed down to him. Later, as his fame spread, he was invited by the king of Magadha. He became a tantric master of Vikramaśīla. At that time, the king [of Magadha] was Mahīpāla, it appears. There [i.e. in Vikramaśīla], he wrote many treatises.¹¹⁷

It appears that in the later part of his life—which coincides with holding a position at Vikramaśīla—*Śrīdhara was mainly engaged in scholarly work, as well as the subjugation of minor spirits and display of *ṣudrasiddhis*, such as transformation of alcohol into milk and poison into *amṛta*. However, the event that led to his appointment by the king Mahīpāla I is directly connected with his proselytizing activities. Tāranātha says that due to *Śrīdhara's magical feats "there was not a single *tīrthika* left in South India" (*phyogs der re shig mu stegs rmeḡ med par song*; p.71).

Tāranātha's attempt to establish *Śrīdhara's historicity is enacted by means of his association with the Pāla kings that ruled Magadha

¹¹⁵ *de la slob dpon dpal 'dzin ni rgyal po dhar ma pa la'i sku tshe'i 'jug gi cha tsum la/ yul ma ga dha bram ze'i rigs su 'khrungs/ Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 70.

¹¹⁶ *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 70.

¹¹⁷ *rgyal po na ra ba ti tsa la zhes pa cig gis kyang gdam de thos nas zhabs la btud do/ phyi nas de lta bu'i snyan pa'i grags pas khyab pas/ yul dbus kyi rgyal pos spyang drangs te/ bi kram ma sila'i sngags pa slob dpon mdzad/ de skabs kyi rgyal po ni ma he'i pa la yin pa 'dra'ol/ der bstan bcos kyang mang du mdzad/ Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 71.

from the 8th century onwards. Needless to say, there are serious chronological discrepancies with regard to *Śrīdhara's lifespan. If he was indeed born at the end of Dharmapāla's life (d. 812), as Tāranātha reports, then at the time of his appointment by Mahīpāla I (r. 977-1027), he would have been at least 155 years old, which is impossible. As far as the Pālas' support of Buddhism is concerned, Tāranātha's account is confirmed by historical evidence. Nevertheless, the story of Mahīpāla's appreciation of *Śrīdhara's proselytizing magic feasts seems far-fetched. Inscriptional evidence and manuscript colophons demonstrate a strong Pāla patronage of Śaivism, despite the fact that these rulers are identified as *paramasaugataḥ* 'a devotee of the Sugata (i.e. the Buddha)'. For example, the Bhāgalpur copper-plate of Nārāyaṇapāla (r. 860-917) refers to him as a *paramasaugataḥ* but also records him founding numerous temples to Śiva and granting a village to the Pāsupatācāryas, one of the sects of the Śaiva Atimārga.¹¹⁸ The title *paramasaugataḥ* was also borne by Mahīpāla I, who despite his uniquely Buddhist title, built temples to Śiva, his consort and other Śaiva deities.¹¹⁹ On the basis of this evidence, Sanderson¹²⁰ has concluded that Śaiva-Buddhist interactions during the Pālas were characterized by symbiosis, and that through their acts of generous endowments and royal support of Buddhist institutions the Pālas made sure that Buddhism "was in no position to oust or diminish Śaivism".¹²¹ In this view, Tāranātha's version of 'history' in which Mahīpāla I extends his invitation to *Śrīdhara as an award for his successful eradication of the non-Buddhists from South India seems to be merely an example of a Buddhist agenda highlighting the proselytizing activities of the *siddhas* rather than historical fact.

5-2. Kamalarakṣita and the Invasion of Karṇa of the West

Another story that unfolds in Tāranātha's 'history' of the *Raktayamāri* cycle in India is connected to yet another Vikramaśīla *ācārya*, Kamalarakṣita. The biographical summary places him one generation after *Śrīdhara. He was born in Magadha, in the family of a businessman, but was himself a monk. Although he was mainly known for attaining the *siddhi* of the *Kṛṣṇayamāri* cycle, he was also skilled in logic, *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Guhyasamāja*, and *Yamāntaka*. His *siddhi* over the Yamāntaka cycle came after a twelve years long retreat in Andagiri

¹¹⁸ Sanderson 2010:3.

¹¹⁹ Sanderson 2010:3.

¹²⁰ Sanderson 2009:116.

¹²¹ Sanderson 2009:116.

located in the South.¹²² Initially, Kamalarakṣita encountered many hardships and obstacles, but through the gradual meditation on *śūnyatā* and various deities, the difficulties subsided and he had a vision of Yamāntaka.¹²³ According to Tāranātha, Kamalarakṣita served as the tantric master at Vikramaśīla at the time of King Śambupāla, whose name does not feature in the historical list of the Pāla kings.¹²⁴ Perhaps, Tāranātha's Śambupāla [Śambhupāla?] is a misspelling of Śūrapāla II (r. 1071-1072). Tāranātha recounts a competition in debate that took place between Kamalarakṣita and eight heretic Brahmins from which Kamalarakṣita came out victorious "having suppressed their voices", through the power of *vāc-stambhana* or 'speech paralysis'.¹²⁵ He was also successful against sixteen adepts skilled in black magic whom he annihilated (*bsgral ba*)¹²⁶ using mantras and *homa*. The most interesting part of the account is, however, the story in which Kamalarakṣita attended the *gaṇacakrapūjā* in a cremation ground at the outskirts of Magadha at the time when the army of the *mleccha* king allegedly attacked the region looting temples and villages. The story goes as follows:

Once he [Kamalarakṣita] wished to do the *gaṇacakrapūjā* at the cemetery on the borders of the region of Magadha. At that time, in the country of Karna of the West, there was a king of the barbarians (*kla klo*). One of his commanders, with his cavalry and five hundred military elephants, came to attack and loot Magadha. When, after robbing a few areas and temples, the commander was returning back, he encountered the master [Kamalarakṣita] and a few of his disciples coming back from the *gaṇacakrapūjā* carrying various ritual paraphernalia. The soldiers beat their hot brass [drums] and shot many weapons [at the monks]. When they were ready to overcome them, the master smashed his pot on the ground, and instantly, a huge dark storm arose. All the soldiers, horses and elephants were knocked down. [To the enemy] it seemed as if there were dark warriors carrying swords coming to get them. The commander instantly died vomiting blood. Other soldiers too were struck with epidemics, and except for one, none of them reached their homeland, it is

¹²² *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 73.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Sircar 1975: 209-210.

¹²⁵ *gzhan yang chos 'khor bi kra ma la rtsod pa byed pa'i mu stegs pa'i pa ndi ta brgyad kyi ngag mnan/ byad ma byed pa bcu drug tsam sngags dang sbyin sreg gis bsgral ba sogs/ Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p. 73.

¹²⁶ For *bsgral ba/sgrol ba* as the rite of "liberative killing" that reenacts the killing of Rudra by Vajrapāni and constitutes the archetype for all wrathful tantric rituals in Tibetan Buddhism, see Dalton 2013.

said.¹²⁷

In the *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, the *mleccha* king Karṇa of the West is identified as a Turuṣka king, who invades Magadha along with an army of five hundred Turuṣkas.¹²⁸ Verardi¹²⁹ takes Tāranātha's account at face value and repeats the same story to justify his argument about the tantric Buddhists during the Pāla reign "fighting on two fronts", against the Brahmins and the Muslim invaders. However, the historical basis for this story is not the Turuṣka invasion, but the 11th century raid of Magadha by an Indian ruler, the (Śaiva?) Lakṣmīkarṇa (r. 1041-1073), known also as Karṇa of the Kālacuri dynasty of Tripuri in central India. From the evidence of the Siyān stone slab inscription from the reign of Nayapāla (r. 1038-1053), which states that Lakṣmīkarṇa was defeated,¹³⁰ and other inscriptions found in the Birbhum district, historians concluded that Lakṣmīkarṇa did invade the Pāla-ruled Magadha. The invasion of Magadha by Lakṣmīkarṇa was well known in Tibet due to Atiśa's (a.k.a. Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, 982-1054) alleged role in ensuring the peace-treaty between Lakṣmīkarṇa and Nayapāla.¹³¹ Atiśa's biography, available in several Tibetan versions, reports this story as follows:

During Atiśa's residence at Vajrāsana a dispute had arisen between the two, Nayapāla, king of Magadha and the *tīrthika* king of Kārṇya of the west; the latter made war upon Magadha. Failing to capture the city his troops sacked some of the sacred Buddhist institutions and killed altogether five hundred (men), out of whom four were ordained monks and one *upāsaka*. When a good deal of church furniture was carried away as booty (from the possession of the clergy), Atiśa did not show any kind of concern or anger at it, but remained quiet, meditating on the *bodhicitta*, love for humanity and compassion. Afterwards when victory turned towards Nayapāla and the troops of Kārṇya were being slaughtered by the armies of Magadha, he took the king of Kārṇya and his men under his protection and

¹²⁷ *lan cig ma ga dha'i yul mtha' dur khrod cig tu tshogs 'khor rgya chen po mdzad par bzhed/ de'i dus na nub phyogs ka rna'i yul na kla klo'i rgyal po zhig yod/ de'i dmag dpon gcig 'khor rta pa dang/ glang po pa lnga brgya tsam dang bcas dmag zag la 'ongs/ yul dang lha Khang 'ga' zhig bcom ste log 'ongs pa dang/ slob dpon 'khor bcas tshogs 'khor gyi yo byad du ma dang bcas te byon pa phrad/ de dag gis rol [recte *rag] me brdungs/ mtshon mang 'phangs/ 'joms pa brtsams pa la/ slob dpon kyis bum pa sa la brdabs pas skad cig la rlung nag byung mi rta glang po rnams bsgyel/ mi nag po ral gri thogs pas brdog pa'i snang ba shar/ dmag dpon ni de nyid du khrag skyugs te shi/ gzhan rnams la yang rims nad kyis btab stel/ gcig ma gtogs yul du ma sleb skad/ Gshin rje chos 'byung, p. 73.*

¹²⁸ The same story is repeated by Sanderson 2009: 107, ff. 224.

¹²⁹ Verardi 2011:366.

¹³⁰ Sircar 1972/73:78-80 quoted in Huntington 1984:75.

¹³¹ See also Eimer 1982, 2; Mochizuki 2016:75.

sent them away. The king of Kārṇya revered Atiśa and became devoted to him. He invited him to his country, which was in Western India and did his honour. Atiśa also caused a treaty to be concluded between the two kings.¹³²

It seems quite obvious that Tāranātha must have known the story of Kārṇa's invasion of Magadha and he simply adopted it as the historical framework for Kamalarakṣita's tantric feasts. This adoption exposes the general pattern of making 'history' by Tāranātha, which can be called 'patchwork'. Tāranātha's way of gathering historical data follows the 'patchwork' technique in which he utilizes the names of famous historical figures and events and making ad-hoc associations between them, he arranges a 'history'. In both life-stories of the *siddhas* *Śrīdhara and Kamalarakṣita, Tāranātha interweaves disparate fragments of historical facts and figures and makes them fit into the narrative in order to convey the image of the *siddhas* "causing terror in the hearts of barbarians and 'non-Buddhists'."¹³³

6. Buddhist Tantrics at the Royal Courts: Towards the Moral Teleology of Tibetan Buddhist Historiography

As the previous pages have demonstrated, the engagement of the *siddhas*— the very progenitors of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka cults—in their tenacious journeys throughout the Indian subcontinent set the terms for regular social interactions, not only with the proponents of the *tīrthika* systems, but also with royals. In this context a question arises: in what capacity did the *siddhas* participate in the wider network of politics and power?

According to Sanderson¹³⁴, one of the defining features of the "tantric repertoire" was the institutionalization of the officiating priests, called *rājagurus*, who provided a personal assistance to the ruling monarch with regard to spiritual and worldly matters. While the spiritual matters revolved around providing the king with an initiation (*dīkṣā*) and special consecrations (*abhiṣeka*), the worldly aspect of the *rājagurus* focused on personally assisting kings in the matters of the state. With regard to their worldly function, *rājagurus* subsumed the role of Atharvavedic *rājapurohitas*, who as Brāhmaṇical sorcerers employed a whole array of apotropaic rituals specifically designed to kill the enemies, protect the kingdom, and ensure victory in battles. Historical sources provide evidence of Śaiva *gurus* acting as the royal

¹³² Chattopadhyaya 1996:97.

¹³³ *kla klo dang mu stegs can thams cad shin du skrag par mdza!* *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, p.73.

¹³⁴ Sanderson 2004.

preceptors (*rājagurus*) to the Pāla kings; for instance, the *Bāṅgarh praśasti* of Mūrtiśiva records that Nayapāla had as his royal preceptor the Saiddhāntika Guru Sarvaśiva.¹³⁵ There is also strong evidence in support of Rāmapāla having as his royal preceptor a Saiddhāntika priest, called Dharmasambhu (Dharmaśiva).¹³⁶ The strong position of Śaiva sects at the royal court must have appealed to the Buddhists, who from the early 7th century onwards began to remodel the Mahāyāna along Śākta-Śaiva lines in order to make it more attractive to the royals. The emergence of the early tantric scriptures containing rituals meant to defeat military opponents and secure protection for the kings would make this point valid. For example, two important tantric scriptures written by the *vajrācāryas* of Vikramaśīla during the early Pālas, the *Sarvavajrodaya* of Ānandagarbha and the *Guhyasamājamaṇḍalavidhi* of Dīpaṅkarabhadra, contain protective rituals for warding off the dangers for the king.¹³⁷ We also know that Buddhajñānapāda, the *vajrācārya* of Vikramaśīla and the founder of the Jñānapāda school of the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* exegesis, regularly performed *homa* rituals to protect the reign of the Pālas at a cost of 902,000 *tolas* of silver.¹³⁸ Similarly, the 51st “Yamāntaka chapter” of the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* (51.36-40) is explicit in its enemy-conquering purpose, where the enemy is stated to be a king and his army, thus pointing to the sphere of royal politics and statecraft. The VBT gives two *vāśīkaraṇa* recipes meant specifically for the subjugation of the king and his minister under the tantrika’s own will. In this view it seems plausible to assume that tantric magic was being used for military purposes and that magical rituals against the enemies would reflect the need of those in power for such recipes. This argument is substantiated by Tāranātha, who besides being aware of the alliance between Brāhmaṇical sorcerers and kings also gives instances for the use of tantric magic not merely for defensive and protective reasons, but for the sheer greed for power and political conquest.

In narrating the history of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka tantric cycle in India in the period before Lailtavajra’s rediscovery of the VBT in Oḍḍiyāna, Tāranātha refers to the story of the Brahmin *Susiddhā (*bram ze legs grub*) initiated into Yamāntaka. After proving his *siddhis* and converting many *tīrthikas* to Buddhism, *Susiddhā becomes a guru (*bla ma*) of the local king and makes him powerful. The king is able to conquer Saurāṣṭra (Gujarat), which was inhabited by Śaivas. The *tīrthika*-master Somācārya (which is a popular name among Śaivas) becomes jealous and envious seeing that Buddhism is

¹³⁵ Sircar 1972-74: 34-56, quoted in Sanderson 2004:4.

¹³⁶ Sanderson 2004: 4.

¹³⁷ Sanderson 2009:106.

¹³⁸ Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos ’byung* (see Chattopadhyaya 1970: 274, 278).

spreading in Saurāṣṭra and plans a plot to assassinate *Susiddhā. He offers 100,000 gold coins to anyone who succeeds in killing the Brahmin.¹³⁹ The story is an interesting example in support of Sander-son's argument that the tantric Buddhists follow the Śaiva model in assuming the role of *rāja*gurus to the monarchs.

In another example, Tāranātha gives a tantric spin on the famous legend of the Brahmin-minister to the Maurya King Bindusāra, named Canaka (or rather Cāṇakya) who uses *abhicāra* for territorial conquest of neighboring kingdoms. The story goes as follows:

In the country of Gauḍa of the king Bindusāra, there was a Brahmin-minister, called Canaka Devaputra. Canaka had a vision of Yamāntaka and, using *abhicāra*, he killed around three thousand people. He caused much harm: about ten thousand of them he rendered mad; he created discord among them, expelled them, paralyzed them, and weakened their senses, etc. He annihilated sixteen kings in all directions. On the account of his negative karma, he was reborn in hell. This is foretold in the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*: "In the future he will become Yamarāja". Even though I have not heard the details of this story, I shall give a sample: In the country of Dili, there was a king of the barbarian race, called Hatshrāla. Below the city of Mathura, there was the territory of King Bindusāra. While these two kings had a battle and were fighting each other, the Brahmin (Canaka) sent a pigeon into the sky on which he had cast a spell (*mantra*). When that pigeon was merely touching the heads of the Dili soldiers, they were lifted up, and the wind of their wings sounded like thunder. All the soldiers looked up to the sky, but the pigeon had gone beyond their sight. The ordinary soldiers remained in their normal state; however, the king and five hundred knights looked up to the sky and fell unconscious or became mad. While they were left paralyzed, the army of the king Bindusāra took over the Dili kingdom.

Moreover, while King Haharāja of the Sirota country and King Bindusāra had a dispute, there was a festival in that country. The Brahmin Canaka disguised himself as a beggar and went to the city to attend the festival. On his way, he met an old lady and recognized she was a *mantradhāriṇī*. He said to her: "Please be my partner in accomplishing ritual activities". She agreed and they went together. When they reached the festival place, they saw the heaps of *kakoti* fruits. People were eating them, so the Brahmin put a spell on them and also the *ḍākinī* cast a gaze to make them magically potent. During the festival, the fruit was brought in a chariot to the king, ministers and leaders. Each one of them ate. They thought about eating all [the food] to the last [that was brought] by the stewards; when the fruit was cut with a small knife, the king and three hun-

¹³⁹ *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, pp. 51-53.

dred members of his retinue had their heads cut off and the heads fell to the ground. The kingdom was taken over by King Bindusāra.¹⁴⁰

The story of Cāṇakya/Kauṭilya,¹⁴¹ although probably not based on historical facts¹⁴², forms the well-known narrative of the Brahmin-minister who played a prominent role in the establishment of the Maurya Empire in ancient India serving as the royal advisor to King Candragupta Maurya (r. 321-287 BCE) and his son Bindusāra (r. 297-273 BCE). The legend emphasizes Cāṇakya's exceptional skills in the matters of *realpolitik* that resulted in founding the largest empire that had ever existed in the Indian Subcontinent. The principles of *realpolitik* that led to this military success were allegedly penned down by Cāṇakya/Kauṭilya himself in the Sanskrit manual on statecraft, economics and military strategy, the *Arthaśāstra*.

The *Arthaśāstra* gives us a hint of at least three different categories of “magic specialists” employed by the king for various purposes. In this regard, the text speaks about “*siddha-ascetics*” (*siddhatāpasi*), “*magicians*” (*māyayogavid*), and “*experts in the Atharvaveda*” (*atharvavedavid*). The difference between these three distinct groups of

¹⁴⁰ *yul gauda'i rgyal po snying po thig le'i blon po bram ze ca na ka lha bu yin/ des gshin rje gshed kyi zhal mthong/ mngon spyod kyi las kyis mi sum stong tsam ni bsad/ stong phrag bcu tsam smya bar byas/ dbye ba/ bskrad pa/ rengs pa/ dbang po nyams pa sogs kyi gnod pa 'ang ches mang/ phyogs kyi rgyal po'i srid bcu drug tsam stongs par byas/ de'i sdig pas dmyal bar skyes so/ 'di 'jam dpal rtsa rgyud las lung bstan/ ma 'ongs pa na gshin rje chos kyi rgyal por 'gyur bar bshad do/ 'di'i gtam rgyud mtha' dag mi thos kyang/ dper mtshan pa la/ yul dilir kla klo'i rigs kyi rgyal po/ ha tshra la zhes bya ba yod do/ grong khyer bcom rlag man chad rgyal po snying po thig le'i yul yin/ rgyal po de gnyis 'thabs tag yul bshams pa'i skabs su/ bram ze des sngags kyis btob pa'i bya thi ba zhis nam kha' la spyar te btang pas/ di li'i dmag mi rnams kyi mgo la reg pa tsam du phar zhing/ gshog pa'i rlung gi sgra 'brug sgra tsam byung/ dmag mi thams cad kyis nam mkha' la bltas so/ bya de thag ring por mi snang bar song pa na/ dmag mi phal pa rnams rnal mar 'dug kyang/ rgyal po dang dpa' bo'i rigs lnga brgya tsam mig nam kha' la blta tshul gyis dran med du brgyal zhing myos/ de ka la lus pas snying po thig le'i dmag gis di li'i yul mtha' dag blang so/ yang yul si ro ta'i rgyal po ha ha ra ja dang snying po thig le [lacuna] rtsod par gyur ba'i skabs shig yul der dus ston chen po zhis byung/ bram ze ca na ka slong mo bar brdzus te blta bar song ngol lam du bud med rgan mi zhis dang phrad pa/ de yang sngags 'chang ma yin par shes nas/ bdaq cag las tshogs sgrub pa'i grogs gyis shig byas nas/ de dang sde bas te song song ba las/ mthar dus ston byed sa na/ shing ka rkota'i 'bras bu phung po shin tu che bar 'dug nas/ mi rnams kyis mchod par/ de la bram zes sngags kyis btob ste bzhag mkha' 'gro mas kyang lta stangs kyis mnan nol de nas dga' ston gyi skabs/ shing thog rgyal po dang blon po dang gtso bo thams cad la drangs/ rang rang so sos de nas thos (recte *zos) so/ thams cad kyi tha ma phyag tshang ba des za bar bsams tel chu gris shing thog phyed mar btu ba pas/ rgyal po 'khor bcas sum rgya tsam gyi mgrin pa dus gcig tu chad de mgo sa la lhung ngol de nas yul de yang snying po thig les blang so/ zhes grag go/ Gshin rje chos 'byung, pp. 50-51.*

¹⁴¹ For the identification of Cāṇakya with Kauṭilya, see Burrow 1968.

¹⁴² Bronkhorst 2011:67.

magic specialists is difficult to determine. In one verse (4.3.37) the “experts in the *Atharvaveda*” are specifically said to perform the *abhiçāra* rites and the “*siddha*-ascetics” are twice referred to as those engaged in the pacification rites (*śāntika*, 4.3.13, 4.3.25) and expiatory rites (*prāyaścitta*, 4.3.12). Besides this noticeable difference in the intent of magic activity, the *siddha*-ascetics are the only group of magical specialists used as decoys by official royal spies (*sattrins*). It was a common feature for the *sattrins* to disguise as *siddha*-ascetics for the purpose of espionage. Due to their expertise in the magical lore that was meant to ward off various calamities, “magic specialists” were supposed to reside within the borders of the kingdom and be respected by the king himself.¹⁴³ This seems to be a significant detail, which indicates that they held a fairly high social status and performed magic on the king’s behalf. In the arena of internal affairs, magic specialists seem to have had two fields of function, i.e. averting dangers and prosecution of criminal offences.¹⁴⁴ Insofar as foreign affairs are concerned, they were responsible for “blitzkrieg” attacks designed to create disorientation among the enemy forces by releasing large groups of birds with poisoned tails to the enemy-fort, setting fire to the enemy-fortress with the “human fire” or a fire produced with human bones¹⁴⁵, and implementing various kinds of magical recipes to cause enemy’s blindness, coma, madness, disease, fever and paralysis, to poison water, or to make people and animals invisible for the purpose of effortless infiltration into the enemy’s territory.¹⁴⁶ These magical recipes, which resemble the recipes included in Buddhist and Saiva tantras,¹⁴⁷ are included in the last book of the *Arthaśāstra*, called ‘Secret’ (*aupaniṣadika*).

In relating a tantric version of Cāṇakya’s legend, Tāranātha makes an interesting reuse of the *Arthaśāstra* and tantric material. Cāṇakya emerges as the tantric minister who empowered by the vision of Yamāntaka uses *abhiçāra* and more precisely *unmatta-karaṇa* (‘rendering mad’), *uccāṭana* (‘expulsion’), *vidveṣaṇa* (‘separation’) and *stambhana* (‘paralysis’) against thousands of people, killing sixteen kings of neighboring kingdoms. He also uses ‘bird-magic’, which seems to be lifted directly from the *Arthaśāstra*, and impersonates a beggar, which echoes the conduct of *Arthaśāstra* *sattrins* who disguise themselves as *siddha*-ascetics for the purpose of espionage and

¹⁴³ *māyāyogavidas tasmād viṣaye siddhatāpasāḥ / vaseyuh pūjitā rājñā daivāpat pratikāriṇaḥ*
// *Arthaśāstra* 4.2.44ab-44cd

¹⁴⁴ *Arthaśāstra* 5.80.

¹⁴⁵ *Arthaśāstra* 14.2.38.

¹⁴⁶ *Arthaśāstra*, book 14.

¹⁴⁷ See Goodall and Isaacson (2016) on the shared ritual syntax attested in early Śaiva and Buddhist tantras.

infiltration into enemy territory. By combining materials from two seemingly unrelated sources, namely the *Arthaśāstra* tradition and tantric *abhicāra* practices, Tāranātha inadvertently points towards continuity with regard to the political role of those specialists in magic whose practical skills, at least from the time of *Arthaśāstra*, were seen as indispensable in political matters. But Tāranātha seems to be more interested in this legend's propaedeutic function insofar that Cāṇakya's use of *abhicāra* is intended to teach a lesson about the dangers of wrathful rites, if these are performed merely with the intention of harming others. Tāranātha seems to condemn the use of *abhicāra* employed for the purposes motivated by the ambition of territorial conquest as unethical and likely to rebound on a person engaging in it. Cāṇakya's legend is used to highlight the issue of misappropriation of the Vajrabhairava practices that took place during the time-period of harm-givers, which Tāranātha defines as follows:

The meaning of 'harm-giver': various mantras were not just [used] for the taming through deeds that brought merit, but they could also spread to those who had strong propensity of receiving the *vidyā* (i.e., mantra). The power could [be misused to] harm people. If the *abhicāra* rites were performed in a wrong place and time, the practitioner himself could also suffer. It is said, many such accidents happened in this period, but at the same time, there were also many others who attained *siddhis*. It is not true they did nothing for the sentient beings; they also did countless good deeds [for others].¹⁴⁸

The harm-givers are those in whose hands the practice of mantra gets out of control. The misuse of mantras can be potentially fatal and the *abhicāra* performed with intention of harming others rebounds on the doer. Among the most common consequences of this misuse is rebirth as hell-beings,¹⁴⁹ which, as Tāranātha reports, happened to Cāṇakya. The moral lesson intended here is that the retributive punishment for the employment of *abhicāra* against those who do not come under the category of the "harmer of the Buddhists and sen-

¹⁴⁸ *gnod pa can gyi don ni/ skal ldan ched du bya ba'i gdul bya rang yang ma yin mod sngags ci rigs pa 'grub nus pa'i las shugs chen po yod pa rnam la 'ang dar bas nus pa'i sgo nas sems can la gnod pa dang/ yul dang dus ma yin par mngon spyod byas pas/ sgrub po rang la'ang sdig pa 'byung ba'i don yin/ dus kyi stobs kyis de 'dra 'ang mang du byung ces pa tsam yin gyi/ skabs der yang skal ldan dngos grub thob pa 'ang mang du byung zhing/ sems can gyi don rgya cher ma byas pa yin ma yin no/ de dag kyang mtha' yas pa zhig yod mod/ Gshin rje chos 'byung, p. 48.*

¹⁴⁹ In this regard, *Jñānākara, the 11th century (probably Kashmiri) tāntrika warns about unauthorized performance of *abhicāra* as follows: "Likewise, those who perform unauthorized destructive magic rites (*mngon spyod*) motivated by past anger, and those who delight in killing etc. will be reborn as hell-beings, or as bloodthirsty demon, or as a *yakṣa*, etc." See Wenta 2018.

tient beings" is severe and entails dire consequences. Thus, the ethical core of the dharma against the enemy as envisioned by Tāranātha cannot bow down to the political elites who want to misuse its power for worldly purposes rather than for self-defense.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present Tāranātha's account on the emergence of the Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka tantras in India by focusing on the literary tropes, modes of emplotment, and constellation of meanings, which have come to characterize the *siddha* narratives in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhist emic historiography. From the legitimizing strategies of the tradition's origins as "root-text" and "rediscovery narrative", through the attestation of religious authority in the context of interreligious debates with the *tīrthikas*, to the conceptualization of the enemy as a *tīrthika*, *māra*, *mleccha*, and *nāga*, we have seen the manner in which Tāranātha draws from the "toolbox of literary forms" found in Tibetan Buddhist literature at large. At the same time, Tāranātha's *chos 'byung* sanctions a particular interpretation of historical narrative where the recounted stories of the *siddhas* identify paradigmatic models of tantric conduct in the pursuit of "compassionate violence" for the benefit of sentient beings and Buddhist *saṅgha*, unjustly tormented by the evil-doers and, perhaps, also for the benefit of the evil-doers themselves, who would otherwise keep accumulating bad karma. In so doing, Tāranātha follows the scriptural definition of the enemy against whom the use of wrathful tantras is justifiable, attested in earliest Buddhist tantras. Similarly, having normative value of his *chos 'byung* in mind, Tāranātha acknowledges the use of tantric magic as a means of political aggression and perhaps inadvertently points out towards the continuity of the practice to employ magical specialists at the royal courts; by condemning such practices as immoral and dangerous, he brings to the forefront the aspect of moral teleology of Tibetan Buddhist historiography.

Despite the fact that Tāranātha's 'patchwork history' should not be taken at face value and adhered to uncritically, his account of the socio-historical reality in medieval India does sometimes align with contemporary academic theories on the emergence of esoteric Buddhism in India. This raises the question as to what extent the etic theories produced by the historians of religion do actually rely on the emic accounts put forward by traditional historiographers. At least in this particular case study, the emic and etic perspectives in writing 'history' would seem to coalesce at times.

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