

Some Remarks on the Concept of the Yoginī in the *Abhayapaddhati* of Abhayākaragupta*

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Introduction

As is well-known, Indian teachers of the *mantranaya*, the Way of Mantras, or Vajrayāna (tantric Buddhism as modern scholars often call it), as a rule make clear that this form of Buddhism belongs to the Mahāyāna. At the same time, the relationship between the *mantranaya* and the *pāramitānaya*, the Way of the Perfections, or non-tantric Mahāyāna, is a complicated one. In this paper I shall try to shed a little light on one small aspect of this relationship, by considering the role of the female deities called Yoginīs in tantric Buddhism, who are completely absent in non-tantric Mahāyāna. This is itself a vast topic, which I will however limit: first by focusing in particular on the thought of one great author associated with the Vikramaśīla monastery, Abhayākaragupta, and secondly by drawing mainly on one of his works, his commentary *Abhayapaddhati* on the *Buddhakaṭālantra*.

I begin with some remarks about the tantra, and its self-classification.¹ As should by now also be well-known, the most common classification of Buddhist tantric scriptures is a four-fold one, in which the two highest

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¹ The most important publication on the *Buddhakaṭālantra* to date is Luo 2011a, a critical edition with translation and introduction of chapters 9–14. LUO does not however discuss the tantra's self-classification and self-references, simply saying that it 'belongs to the highest category of the four-fold tantra system, i.e., the Yoginītantra' (2011a, xxxi).

classes are successively *yogatantra* and *yoginītantra*.² The question has not yet really been answered, though, why the highest class should be called *yoginītantra*.

Now the *Buddhakaṭāpantra* knows the *yogatantra*/*yoginītantra* classification,³ and it clearly assigns itself to the latter category. It refers to itself, in its first chapter, with the following expressions:

imaṃ tantramahārāja yoginīnām niruttaram
This great king of tantras, the supreme [tantra] of the Yoginīs

...

and

sarvasiddhi yoginīyānaṃ śīghraṃ phalapradāyakam
[This is] the way/vehicle of the Yoginīs, [from which] all accomplish-
ments [arise], which quickly bestows the fruit.

In his commentary on passage 1b, Abhayākara Gupta remarks *yoginīyānam iti yoginītantram* “‘The way/vehicle of the Yoginīs’ [means] the/a *yoginītantra*.’

These passages are of interest, among other reasons, because they suggest that *yoginītantra* is understood as a genitive tatpuruṣa compound; a/the tantra of the Yoginīs. Note that this is presumably a different type of compound from *kriyātantra*, *caryātantra*, and *yogatantra*, the names of the other tantra classes. Those are perhaps best understood as *madhyapadalopi* compounds, shortened forms of *kriyāpradhānatantra* etc., i.e. ‘tantra in which ritual is the main thing’, or ‘tantra which primarily teaches ritual’ or the like. Of course exactly what the function or meaning of the genitive is, if we say that *yoginītantram* = *yoginīnām tantram*, is not immediately obvious. However the use of the expression *yoginīyāna* as, probably, more or less synonymous (as Abhayākara Gupta says that it is), suggests, I think, the possibility that we are to understand that the *yoginītantras* are the teachings of the Yoginīs, or at least teachings which are endorsed by the Yoginīs.⁴ Here it

² See e.g. ENGLISH 2002, 3–4.

³ See e.g. *ṣaṭkoṭim eva khalu yogatantram, ṣoḍaśakoṭi yoginītantra eva ca* (BuKaTa MS A f. 1v3). These are the standard numbers; cf. also e.g. *Samvarodayatantra* 22.2:

yogatantrapramāṇaṃ ca ṣaṭkoṭiḥ khalu eva ca |
yoginītantram ākhyātaṃ ṣoḍaśakoṭisaṃkhyayā ||

(MS National Archives, Kathmandu, [NAK] 1–5233 = Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project [NGMPP] A 136/10 f. 44v).

⁴ It can probably be ruled out that the expression *yoginīyāna* is parallel to *śrāvakayāna*,

may be relevant to note that in the case of the *Buddhakapālatantra*, the largest part of the work is spoken by the Bhagavatī Citrasenā, the Yoginī who is Buddhakapāla's consort, to Vajrapāṇi (see the frame-story in chapter 1, translated in DAVIDSON 2002, pp. 248–250). Now this is by no means normal with *yoginītantras*; but note also that, according to several commentators, in the mythical 100,000 verse *Herukābhidhānatantra*, the 'root-tantra' (*mūlatantra*) of which the famous *Laghuśaṃvaratantra* is supposed to be a condensation, the Bhagavatī, i.e. Vajravārāhī, the Yoginī consort of Śaṃvara Heruka, was the teacher. Cf. e.g., from Bhavabhaṭṭa's commentary on the *Laghuśaṃvara*:

adhyeṣikā devīti ko niyama iti cet—guruparamparāto hi śrūyate mūlantantra saivādhyeṣiketi (MS Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions MBB-I-33 f. 3r4; PANDEY 2002, p. 3) .

If you ask 'What rule is there that the Goddess [must be] the teacher?' [we reply: She must be the teacher] since (*hi*) from the lineage of the gurus it is heard that it is none other than she who is the teacher in the root tantra.

So the idea that *yoginītantras* are actually taught by a female teacher, and in this sense are tantras of a Yoginī/the Yoginīs may after all not be that rare, though this requires further study, and the examination of much more material. I will come back to this later.

Now to briefly say something to introduce the *Abhayapaddhati*, Abhayākara Gupta's commentary on the *Buddhakapālatantra*. This is probably the earlier of his two tantra-commentaries. According to one of the concluding verses, it was completed in the twenty-fifth regnal year of king Rāmapāla, which, depending on which of the chronologies of the Pāla kings is accepted, would correspond to a date somewhere between 1096 and 1108; let us say around the beginning of the twelfth century. The other commentary of Abhayākara Gupta, the encyclopedic, *Āmnāyamañjarī* on the *Sampuṭatantra*, bears a date twelve years later.⁵ It seems that Abhayākara Gupta felt a special affinity for or closeness to the *Buddhakapālatantra*; this is borne out also by the references to the tantra in his other works, which show that he

pratyekabuddhayāna and *bodhisattvayāna*; that would, presumably, entail that all followers of such a form of Buddhism should be or become Yoginīs.

⁵ Although it is already referred to in the *Abhayapaddhati*, which might either mean that at the time he wrote the *Abhayapaddhati* Abhayākara Gupta was already working on, though he had not yet completed, the *Āmnāyamañjarī*, or that after writing the *Āmnāyamañjarī* he went back and added a reference to it.

regarded it as among the most important, or perhaps even as the most important, of the *yoginītantras*.⁶

Four Sanskrit manuscripts survive of this commentary, a relatively large number for a tantric commentary. One of these, which I call A, belongs to a group of manuscripts which have been recently identified as having been most probably copied, towards the end of the twelfth century, in the Vikramaśīla monastery itself.⁷ Perhaps it is no coincidence that this seems to be the best of the four manuscripts. An edition of the text has been published recently by Chog DORJE; it is based on two manuscripts, including the best one, MS A, but unfortunately is not a very careful piece of work. A new, critical, edition of chapters 9–14 has been published recently by LUO Hong (LUO 2011b), and my edition of chapters 1–5 has been submitted as a dissertation to Göttingen University in 2015, and will be published soon. Harunaga ISAACSON'S edition of chapters 6–8 is under preparation but was kindly made available to me by the editor.

1. Selected passages indicating the nature of the Yoginī(s)

I shall now turn to some passages which provide some evidence on how the status and nature of Yoginīs is conceived, both from the tantra itself, and, especially, in the commentary.

1.1 *Buddhakapālatantra*

The *Buddhakapālatantra* shows several interesting features regarding the role of Yoginīs, and their relationship to (male) Buddhas. I have already

⁶ For example, in the *Āmnāyamañjarī* there is one place where Abhayākara Gupta refers to the *Buddhakapālatantra* together with the *Samvāratantra* as examples of tantras in which the colour of the cause and the fruit (deities) are one (i.e. the same), and not different; and in doing so he names the *Buddhakapālatantra* first, before the *Samvāra*; quite striking, given that the literature related to Cakrasaṃvara is much larger than that related to *Buddhakapāla* (*de ltar yañ dpal sañs rgyas thod pa'i rgyud dan | dpal bde mchog tu yañ gzugs gcig kho nar rab tu gsal bar byas so* 'Nonetheless, in the glorious *Buddhakapālatantra* and the glorious *Samvāra* [the cause and fruit deities] are clearly revealed as having one [and the same] colour' ĀMa D f. 119r1). And at one other place in the *Āmnāyamañjarī* there is a list of deities of major esoteric systems, the *Buddhakapāla*, *Vajrabhairava*, *Yamāntaka*, *Vajrāmṛta*, and *Mahāmāyā*; again it is striking that the *Buddhakapāla* is placed first (*bcom ldan 'das sañs rgyas thod pa dan rdo rje 'jigs byed dan | gśin rje gśed dan rdo rje bdud rtsi dan sgyu 'phrul chen mo la sogs pa rnam kyī dan | ... '...the blessed *Buddhakapāla*, *Vajrabhairava*, *Yamāntaka*, *Vajrāmṛta*, *Mahāmāyā* and others...' (ĀMa D f. 173v5).*

⁷ See DELHEY et al. 2015, 121ff, and especially 124–125.

mentioned that the Yoginī Citrasenā teaches most of the text. Let me here draw the reader's attention to a single passage which may give some further idea of the kind of material we find.

In the context of initiation, the *Buddhakapālatantra* presents a variant on a common mantric formula. Where many other sources, including also *yoginītantra* works such as the *Hevajratāntra*,⁸ have the expression (*om*) *abhiṣiñcantu mām sarvatathāgatāḥ* 'om may all the Tathāgatas consecrate me,' the *Buddhakapālatantra* presents the deliberate variation *abhiṣiñcantu mām sarvayoginyah mukute ṛādhitīṣṭhantu āgacchantu hūṃ svāhā*: 'may all the Yoginīs consecrate me, may they reside empowering in this crown, may they come; hūṃ svāhā'. This substitution of the Yoginīs for the Tathāgatas, which, again, is not found even in most *yoginītantra* texts, is very striking in the *Buddhakapālatantra*.

1.2 *Abhayapaddhati*

I want now to turn to my main focus, the *Abhayapaddhati*. Yoginīs make their appearance already in the opening verse of the commentary. This is an intricate verse which both serves as a *maṅgala*, and, at the same time, announces that the commentary is being written so that those of good conduct can meditate on or cultivate Heruka. In this verse they are called 'mothers of the world'⁹, and Heruka is described as 'glorious because of his play' with them. Perhaps there is not much that can be deduced from this; yet one can at least say that here it seems that the company of the Yoginīs is not only part of the liberated state (from the male perspective) but also is what makes that state glorious.

In the verses after that, Abhayākaragupta tells us that he was commanded in a dream by the Vajra-Goddesses (i.e. Yoginīs) to write the commentary, and that he is doing so under the presiding, empowering, influence both of the same Vajra-Goddesses and of the Primordial Lord (i.e. Heruka or Vajradhara). Here it is worth noting that it is the *adhiṣṭhāna* of the Goddesses that is mentioned first, and that of the Lord second. On the other hand, though, it is significant that the reference to the Lord implies clearly that it is he that is the teacher of the tantra. This is particularly striking because, as I mentioned, in fact the Bhagavatī, Citrasenā, speaks most of the tantra.

⁸ See HeTa I. iv. 2.

⁹ This appellation of the Yoginīs is an unusual one, at least in Buddhist texts. I know of no other usage of it in Abhayākaragupta's works; and only one other occurrence in a published Buddhist tantric work (*Vimalaprabhā* vol. 2 p. 179, a quote from the Kālacakra *mūlatantra*, in which the goddess Locanā calls herself 'mother of the world'). It is very common however in Śaiva tantras.

That Abhayākaragupta regards nonetheless the Bhagavān, Buddhakapāla, as the teacher is clear, however, not only from the expression *taduktayaḥ* in this verse, but also from the explicit statement in the first prose passage of the commentary that Buddhakapāla is both the teacher of the tantra and the matter taught.

Leaving this interesting point, and moving forward in the commentary a little, the first place at which Abhayākaragupta comments on the word Yoginī is still near the beginning of the first chapter. It is not the first occurrence of the word in the tantra; there are two earlier ones, in which Yoginīs, plural, are mentioned as being in the assembly, the *parṣat*. On those occurrences Abhayākaragupta offered no comment. Here, however, it is an individual, Citrasenā (who in the tantra is also called Bhagavatī and Devī) who is being identified as a Yoginī. Abhayākaragupta comments:

yoginīti

prajñopāyasamāpattir yoga ity abhidhīyate. (Guhya-
samājatantra 18.33ab)

so 'tyantam asty asyāḥ.

Yoginī: [this means that] she has, to the highest degree (*atyantam*), that [yoga, defined in the Guhyasamājatantra thus]: the equal union of wisdom and means is called yoga.

This explanation should, I suggest, be taken as implying that the Yoginī, Citrasenā, is fully awakened.¹⁰

In another explanation of the word Yoginī, in a later passage of the first chapter of the tantra, Abhayākaragupta says that it denotes the possession of excellence in the three-fold yoga. What is meant here is almost certainly a classification which Abhayākaragupta explained a little earlier. In this the three yogas are the union of the vajra and the Lotus, the union of bodhicitta and rakta, and the union of emptiness and compassion (*śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*). It should, again, be understood that one who has excellence of the last of these is fully awakened; while the fact that Abhayākaragupta is interpreting the Yoginī as one having excellency of the former two as well suggests that

¹⁰Note such statements as *upāyasahitā prajñā prajñāśahita upāyo mokṣatvena varṇitaḥ* (Kamalaśīla *Bhāvanākrama* I) and, among tantric authors, Advayaśaṅkara's *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*, purportedly quoting the *Āryavimalakīrtinirdeśa*: *prajñārahita upāyo bandhaḥ, upāyarahitā prajñā bandhaḥ, prajñāśahita upāyo mokṣaḥ, upāyasahitā prajñā mokṣaḥ*.

the means to that awakening was the tantric one of sexual union.

These two passages set the tone for the treatment of Yoginīs in Abhayākara Gupta's commentary. For him the word Yoginī may denote (though it does not always denote) a female being who is fully awakened, in that she possesses the perfection of both wisdom and compassion, and thus is the equivalent of a Buddha, though in a female instead of a male embodiment.

This equality in status between Buddhas and Yoginīs (also called Devīs or Vidyādevīs) is implied at a number of places in the commentary. For example, both in the more exoteric and in the esoteric type of consecration (the former taught in chapter four of the commentary, and the latter the main subject of chapter six), the consecration is to be visualized as being carried out by the Tathāgatas and the Vidyādevīs together.¹¹

However, in spite of the equality that is thus suggested between the Yoginīs and the Buddhas, the goal at which the practitioner aims is not put in terms of becoming a Yoginī, but either in terms of Buddhahood or in apparently 'gender-neutral' terms as the 'Accomplishment of the Great Seal' (*mahāmudrāsiddhi*)¹². For instance, Abhayākara Gupta defines the *prayojanaprayojana*, the 'goal of the goal', i.e. the final or highest aim of the tantra, at the beginning of the commentary as *mahāmudrāsiddhi*; while elsewhere, throughout the commentary, the goal of the tantric practitioner is regularly referred to as *buddhatva*, Buddhahood. But perhaps this does not mean that Buddhahood is a higher state than being a Yoginī. Instead, it may be simply a consequence of the fact that the practitioner is envisaged as being, normally at least, male rather than female. It might therefore be possible (though I don't know of any explicit statement to this effect) that male practitioners, who are in the majority, are expected to be striving to become male Buddhas, while female practitioners, forming a minority, are expected to be striving to become awakened Yoginīs, different in gender from but equal in realization to the Buddhas.

Now let us look at a very remarkable passage, from the sixth chapter of the *Abhayapaddhati*, which perhaps is not really evidence of Abhayā-

¹¹In the initiation of the *adhimātraśiṣya*, the student with the highest level of spiritual faculties, in ch. 6, the water is formed of the melted Buddhas and Vidyādevīs. Male and female enlightened beings together form the liquid of awakening with which the initiate is sprinkled/consecrated. In the less esoteric consecration, taught in the fourth chapter of the *Abhayapaddhati*, the Vidyādevīs and Tathāgatas together consecrate.

¹²Though both the nouns *siddhi*, 'Accomplishment', and *mahāmudrā*, 'Great Seal', are feminine in their grammatical gender, I call *mahāmudrāsiddhi* a gender-neutral term in as much as, as far as I can see, it expresses nothing about the gender of the person striving for it, nor about whether on achievement of it the person becomes a male Buddha or a female awakened Yoginī/goddess.

karagupta's own position but is nonetheless suggestive and relevant to our topic. In the initiation of a student of the highest level, for which AG gives in this chapter detailed instructions which are not found in the tantra, after the lower consecrations and before the higher ones (the *guhyaḅhiṣeka*, *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* and *caturthābhiṣeka*), the guru predicts the future Buddhahood of the initiand (this is known as *vyākaraṇa*).

eṣo 'haṃ tvāṃ tricakreśaḥ sarvabuddhamayaḥ
svayam |
śrīherukīti nāmnā vai vyākaroṃi tathāgatīm ||

śrīherukīti nāma tathāgatī siddhiḥ.

samayas tvāṃ bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ

īti paṭhet.

Note that there is no *iti* after the verse; it seems therefore that *śrīherukīti nāma tathāgatī siddhiḥ* is also spoken by the guru. Now the interpretation of this passage is far from clear; but surely the second half of the verse suggests the meaning, surprising though that may be, 'I predict you as a [future] female Tathāgata, by the name of Śrī-Herukī'. This would be absolutely remarkable, but might nonetheless be conceivable in a religious environment in which the possibility of awakened beings who are female is accepted, and in which there may even be some tendency to see these female awakened beings as somehow even higher than male ones. However the prose immediately after this, also not completely clear to me, may possibly be intended as a kind of commentary on the second half of the verse. It may be saying that what is intended in the verse is only that the accomplishment of a Tathāgata (i.e. Buddhahood) is being predicted. If this is indeed also part of the ritual dialogue, I think that it is likely that Abhayākaragupta is preserving here in his commentary earlier materials¹³ from the Buddhakapāla-tradition which hint at, at least, a tension between an emphasis on female awakened beings which went so far that in the *vyākaraṇa* the initiand was predicted to become such a female Tathāgata (i.e. Yoginī), and

¹³Though it is not impossible that some of the elements of the procedure that Abhayākaragupta teaches in this chapter have been invented or altered by him, it seems to me certain that it draws on older traditions, whether they were (partly) written down or purely oral. This is also implied by the fact that at the conclusion of the whole passage teaching how to perform this special initiation, Abhayākaragupta says that he has explained the oral teachings to prevent the (oral) traditions from being lost.

(expressed in the prose, commentarial addition) a wish to back down from this, and interpret the prediction as the more ordinary one of (male) Buddhahood. I am assuming here that while both the verse and the prose are pre-Abhayākara Gupta, the verse may predate the prose (or at least this sentence; the *samayasa tvaṃ bhūr bhuvah svaḥ* might well belong to the same historical stratum as the verse).

It is necessary, now, to look briefly at a final passage which might be seen as inconsistent with the equality which I am trying to show that Abhayākara Gupta accords to Yoginīs and Buddhas. It is found near the beginning of the commentary on the first chapter, when the commentator explains what is meant by the extraordinary statement that the Bhagavān entered final nirvāṇa (*parinirvṛtaḥ*) in the *yoṣidbhageṣu*, through the union of vajra and lotus. The passage is too long to look at in its entirety; the following is the part most relevant to our topic today:

bhagavāṃs tatra **mahāmudrāvajrapadena**

prajñayā na bhava sthānaṃ kṛpayā na śame sthitiḥ¹⁴ |

ity apratiṣṭhitanirvāṇena **parinirvṛtaḥ**. tadātmako bhūtvaikalolīsvabhāvena samastabhedāparāmarśād āsaṃsāram aparimitatathāgatabodhisattvayoginīvītarāgamudrāmaṇḍalamantrakotībhiḥ sārddham avikalpako 'pi san pūrvāvedhavaśāt sarvasattveṣu kiṃkaravāṇinyāyenāvasthita ity arthaḥ.

The Blessed One entered final nirvāṇa there (i.e. in emptiness) with the adamant state of the great seal, [i.e.] with non-fixed nirvāṇa,¹⁵ as [defined in the line *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 10ab]:

Because of wisdom, [the Buddha has] no abiding in existence; because of compassion [he has] no abiding in quiescence.

What this means is that, having become one in nature with that [emptiness], since because of this homogeneous nature (*ekalolīsvabhāvena*) all duality is not experienced, as long as saṃsāra lasts, together with count-

¹⁴prajñayā...sthitiḥ] *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 10ab. In the edition of the *Abhayapaddhati* by DORJE this is not recognized as a line of verse.

¹⁵For the technical term *apratīṣṭhitanirvāṇa*, expressing the Mahāyāna concept of the Buddha's nirvāṇa, entirely different from that of an Arhat, see e.g. EDGERTON BHSD s.v.

less tens of millions of Tathāgatas, bodhisattvas, Yoginīs, passionless [Arhats], mudrās, maṇḍalas, and mantras, even while remaining free of discursive thought he remained in the manner of a servant to all beings [i.e. fulfilling their aims]¹⁶ because of the continuing force (*āvedha*)¹⁷ of his former [resolve].¹⁸

Although here it is the Bhagavān, Buddhakapāla, who is spoken of, the latter part of this difficult passage is probably intended to be understood at the same time as a vision of what the state of an awakened tantric Yogin might be like. It involves remaining, as long as saṃsāra lasts, and serving sentient beings, helping them to attain awakening themselves. And in this one is said to be accompanied by countless Tathāgatas, bodhisattvas, Yoginīs and Arhats. Now it might be objected that the sequence, with the bodhisattvas placed before the Yoginīs, is not consistent with the view that Yoginīs are female awakened beings, equivalent in their awakening to the Buddhas. I think that there may indeed be a discrepancy here. But in considering this passage, it is important to note that it is not entirely Abhayākaragupta's own. A very close parallel to the wording here is found in a text which predates Abhayākaragupta, the **Tattvāvatāra* of *Jñānakīrti; although this is available only in a Tibetan translation at present, the parallelism is beyond doubt. And there is a further close parallel in a text which does survive in Sanskrit, the anonymous *Subhāṣitasamgraha*, edited by Bendall—a work which, incidentally, seems to have drawn quite a lot from *Jñānakīrti's **Tattvāvatāra*. However in both of these parallels, it should be noted, Yoginīs are not mentioned at all, and the bodhisattvas precede the Tathāgatas. See following parallel from the *Subhāṣitasamgraha*:

sa hi tattvayogī sakalasaṃsāropavyāvṛttirūpatvāt tattadāropavyāvṛtṭyā
pañcākārābhisambodhisvabhāvaḥ sakalamāṇḍaleyadevatātmaka itī
tadātmako bhūtvāikalolībhāvena samastabhedāparāmarśād āsaṃsāram
anabhilāpyānabhilāpyair bodhisattvatathāgatamantramudrākoṭībhīr avi-

¹⁶I am not aware of any other occurrence of the odd 'syntactic compound' *kiṃkara-vāṇinyāya*.

¹⁷For this sense of *āvedha* see EDGERTON BHSD s.v., meaning 2.

¹⁸There is a striking parallel to parts of this sentence in the anonymous *Subhāṣitasamgraha* (ed. BENDALL p. 43): *tasmād evaṃ krameṇa sa hi tattvayogī sakalasaṃsāropavyāvṛttirūpatvāt tattadāropavyāvṛtṭyā pañcākārābhisambodhisvabhāvaḥ sakalamāṇḍaleyadevatātmaka itī tadātmako bhūtvāikalolībhāvena samastabhedāparāmarśād āsaṃsāram anabhilāpyānabhilāpyair bodhisattvatathāgatamantramudrākoṭībhīr avikalpo 'pi san dharmadeśanādidivāreṇa sarvasattvānāṃ sarvāśāṃ paripūrayati.*

kalpo 'pi san dharmadeśanādidvāreṇa sarvasattvānāṃ sarvāśāṃ paripūrayati (SuSam p. 67).

In comparison with these passages, we can observe, then, that Abhayākaragupta has consciously added the Yoginīs (as well as the *vītarāgas*). Note also that in the *Subhāṣitasamgraha*, as well as the **Tattvāvatāra*, the Bodhisattvas precede the Tathāgatas, so that the order does not seem to express any hierarchy. Since Abhayākaragupta has put the Tathāgatas first, however, it remains surprising (given the portrayal elsewhere in the *Abhayapaddhati* of the Yoginī as effectively a female equivalent of a Buddha) that the Yoginīs have been added not in second but in third place. Probably one should understand the Bodhisattvas as meant here to be only ones of the highest rank—such Bodhisattvas as Avalokiteśvara etc. It is also relevant that in the opening sentence of the *Buddhakapālatantra* the assembly is said to have contained ‘Bodhisattvas beginning with Āryāvalokiteśvara’; though again it is somewhat striking that in the tantra the sequence in which the various groups which make up the assembly are mentioned is Tathāgatas, Yoginīs, *vītarāgas* such as Ānanda, and Bodhisattvas such as Āryāvalokiteśvara. If Abhayākaragupta is altering his source (**Jñānakīrti's *Tattvāvatāra?*) in order to make the groups listed identical with those mentioned in the tantra as making up the assembly, the question remains why he changed the sequence of the tantra, in which the Yoginīs are paired with the Tathāgatas, as one would expect if these are the male and female embodiments of awakening.

2. Conclusion: Abhayākaragupta's concept of the Yoginī

I hope to have given an impression of the treatment of Yoginīs in the *Buddhakapālatantra* and, especially, in Abhayākaragupta's commentary thereon. To sum up: we have seen that there is a tendency to place the figure of the Yoginī as equivalent to that of the Buddha. This figure is completely absent in the teachings of the *pāramitānaya*. Going even further, there are at least occasional hints in the tantra and in other *Buddhakapāla*-related, pre-Abhayākaragupta materials which are drawn on in the *Abhayapaddhati*, of an even higher status for the Yoginī; a preference for the female embodiment of the union of wisdom and compassion over the male embodiment of the same. Such a tendency to place the female above the male can also be found in some other Buddhist *yoginītantra* literature (though that has had to remain beyond the scope of this paper), just as they can quite clearly be seen within the history of the development of Śaivism.¹⁹ But we have also seen that Abhayākaragupta in his commentary seems occasionally to be

toning such tendencies down; and also that this ‘toning down’ may already be there in materials which Abhayākaragupta is probably quoting or borrowing. While displaying his own personal devotion to the ‘Vajra-Goddesses’, with his keen awareness of theoretical/philosophical implications, he seems to be trying to ensure that the female and the male, *prajñā* and *upāya*, are given basically equal status. At the same time, in one respect at least, he appears to emphasize the supremacy of the male to the female, in that he regards the Buddha, rather than the *Yoginī*, as the teacher of the tantra. In thus maintaining the status of the male Buddha as the teacher par excellence he may be going against the tendency of at least some earlier tantric teachers at *Vikramaśīla*, such as *Bhavabhaṭṭa*, as well as against the tantra itself. This tension between a tendency to make a female deity the teacher of tantric scriptures (something which, again, is also found in *Śaiva* tantras, which may well have had some influence in this respect on Buddhist ones) and the wish to maintain the status of the Buddha as the unsurpassed teacher, and to continue to present these tantras as *Buddhavacana*, word/teaching of the Buddhas rather than *Yoginīvacana*, word/teaching of the *Yoginīs*, is a tension which I believe deserves further investigation.

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- AA *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* attributed to Maitreya. Th. STCHERBATSKY and E. OBERMILLER (eds.): *Abhisamayālaṅkāra-Prajñāparāmitā-Upadeśa-Śāstra*: [sic] *The Work of Bodhisattva Maitreya. Edited, Explained and Translated*. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970. [Reprint of 1929 edition.]
- ĀMa *Āmnāyamañjarī* by Abhayākaragupta. Tibetan translation, Tōhoku 1198, sDe dge bstan ’gyur, rgyud vol. cha, f. 1r1–31r7.

¹⁹Cf. e.g. SANDERSON 1988, 669: ‘As we ascend through these levels, from the Mantrapīṭha to the Yāmala-tantras and thence to the Trika and the Kālī cult, we find that the feminine rises stage by stage from subordination to complete autonomy’.

- KuDrNi *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* by Advayavajra. In: Mikkyō Seiten Kenkyūkai (eds.): Advayavajra chosakushū: bonbun tekisuto wayaku' = 'Advayavajrasaṃgraha—New Critical Edition with Japanese translation' in: *Taishō Daigaku Sōgō Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Nenpō* 10 (1988), pp. 231 [1] -178 [57].
- TaA **Tattvāvatāra* by *Jñānakīrti (Ye śes grags pa). Tibetan translation, Tōhoku 3709, sDe dge bstan 'gyur, rgyud vol. tsu f. 39r2–76r4.
- BuKaTa *Buddhakapālatantra*. See LUO 2011a under Secondary literature below. MS A = Manuscript of which photographic copies are preserved in the library of CTRC in Beijing, on sheets 2–8 of box 144. Complete in 15 large palm-leaf folios, with seven lines on each side; undated.
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