

*A Brief Introduction to the Amṛtasiddhi*¹

Péter-Dániel Szántó

All Souls College, Oxford

15.ix.2016 London

The aim of this talk is to introduce the *Amṛtasiddhi*, what we now call the earliest *haṭhayoga* text. I shall start with listing some of the preconceptions we had in mind when we began our joint work on this fascinating text; I will then revise some of these ideas such as the presumed date of the manuscript, the manner in which the manuscript was produced, and the environment the text was written in. Lastly, I shall identify a text transmitted only in Tibetan, which may have been a precursor to the *Amṛtasiddhi*.

First study of the text: Schaeffer 2002

Pioneering work and inevitable starting point is Schaeffer 2002² Gained access to a photocopy from microfilm of a Ms from the China Nationalities Library of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, cat. no. 005125 (21), ff. 38. Material unspecified. Through Leonard van der Kuijp (who apparently wished to remain anonymous).

[...] Buddhists and Nāthas participated in shared religious practices in India [...]³ Title: *Amṛtasiddhi*/*Chi med grub pa*. Author: Avadhūtacandra, however, he calls himself Mādhavacandra within the text, so this attestation is stronger. Claims to be a student/follower of Virūpanātha/Virūpākṣa. The Ms is bilingual, Sanskrit and Tibetan, in two scripts, Newārī (consistently thus) and Tibetan. Presents layout and interesting codicological features. Brief study of colophon: Bya ban de Pad ma 'od zer '[...] at once scribe, editor, and translator[...]⁴ 'He also states that because he noticed several small inconsistencies between the translation and the Indic text, he made changes as he saw fit.'⁵ Identified with 'Phrom⁶ lo, junior translator of Gyi jo Zla ba'i 'od zer, late 11th c. Expresses several hesitations about the dating/composition/compilation.

Mention of other Mss from catalogues and testimonia/incorporations in late *haṭhayoga* texts. Neither list exhaustive. Presentation of the text's career in Tibet: specifically Peking cycle of 21 works: [Ōtani cat. nos.] 3133 (!), 5026, 5051 to 5059, 5068 to 5073, 5075 to 5078.⁷ Lists several people who have studied/mentioned it, including Sa paṇ (1182–1251) in his *Sdom gsum rab dbye*. Overview of practices: stress on *jīvanmukti/srog thar*. Appendix: list of section titles.

A somewhat surprising musing on doctrinal validity:

What sort of reception did this strong presence of religious imagery not normally associated with Buddhism have in Tibet? Apparently for

¹ James Mallinson, Kurtis Schaeffer, Leonard van der Kuijp, Kurt Keutzer, Jason Birch, Alexis Sanderson, Diwakar Acharya, Mark Singleton, and many others.

² Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *The Attainment of Immortality: From Nāthas in India to Buddhists in Tibet*. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30: 515–533, 2002.

³ *op. cit.* 515

⁴ *op. cit.* 517

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Also Khrom, old variant; not a clan name originally, but an organisational unit of the Tibetan Empire, cf. F. W. Thomas 1936. Also G. Uray.

⁷ *op. cit.* 520–521

Note, however, that it is unclear whether Sa paṇ refers to it approvingly.

some there was no problem with this at all, for in a sub-colophon, written either by our translator Pad ma 'od zer or some other transmitter of the text, the teachings are unequivocally stated to be the words of the Tathāgata, the Buddha himself.⁴⁹ Perhaps, however, we can read this as a seal of approval attesting more to the practice's perceived liberative efficacy than its doctrinal or sectarian affiliations. [...] The generalization made above that the work of Avadhūtacandra appears to be Buddhist almost by definition alone must not, however, deter more detailed study.⁸

In his note 49, Schaeffer refers us to Ms f. 38a1-2. But this reads: *ye dharmmā hetuprabhavā hetun teṣān tathāgato hy avadat | teṣāñ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādi mahāśramaṇaḥ ||*

⁸ *op. cit.* 524 & 525

Our Joint Work

Jim Mallinson started draft edition some time ago, even before obtaining the aforementioned copy (henceforth Ms C), this was read in Oxford with Alexis Sanderson, Jason Birch, and others. Became part of the present project, continued reading in Oxford, also checking Tibetan where legible. Decided to jointly edit the text. Mallinson published on academia.edu a draft paper highlighting our discovery, namely that the text is much more Buddhist than initially supposed.

Revisiting the Sanskrit Colophon

The/a date is given by the following problematic verse:

ekāśītijute śāke sāhasraike tu phālgune |
kṛṣṇāṣṭamyaṃ samāpteyaṃ kṛtvāmṛtasiddhir mayā ||

Not samāpto 'yaṃ

Śaka year 1081 etc. converted to March 2nd, 1160 CE. We took this to be the date of the Ms itself.

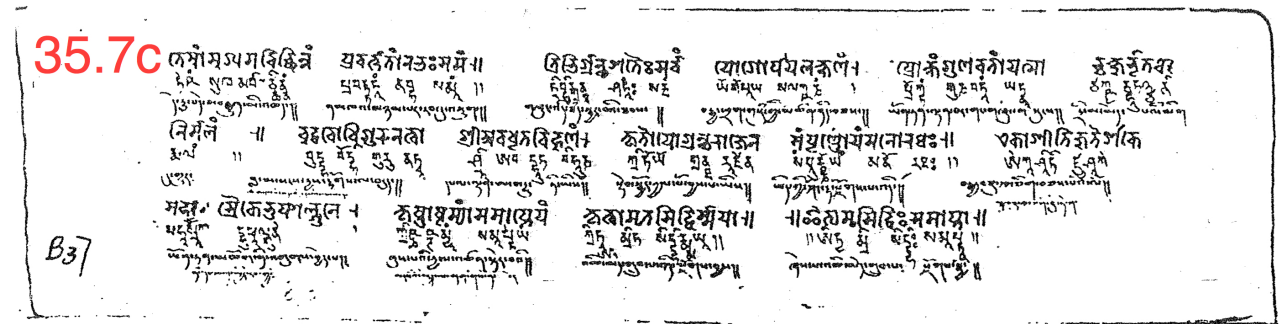


Figure 1: Penultimate folio with the verse encoding the date 1160.

However, although not entirely certain, the Ms is written on paper. This would make it perhaps the earliest paper Ms on the Subcontinent.

However, there is no reason to assume this: perhaps the solution is that the producer of Ms C simply had an Indian manuscript, which he copied over into this document very faithfully. A telltale sign is

that the scribe seems to have difficulty distinguishing vowel-quantity. Although of course not unheard of with Indian scribes, the sheer amount of occurrences very strongly suggests a Tibetan.

Therefore the date 1160 CE still holds, but if I am right, it is ‘virtual’ evidence. Also note that because of the ambivalent phrasing and because what follows reads *ity amṛtasiddhiḥ samāptā*, it is not at all clear whose writing this is: the author (= *ḥṛtir me*)? the scribe (ergative construction)?

Revisiting the Script

As for ‘Newārī script’, we accepted this as a given.

However, there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to do so. This type of script is seen elsewhere in Eastern India. Do not let the occasional hook-tops fool you; I believe Bendall was incorrect in positing this theory, as the evidence for similar features being employed outside Nepal – even *śīrorekḥā* – is mounting quickly.

In fact, the evidence to the contrary is somewhat stronger. The use of *prṣṭhamātrā* is rather overwhelming – which is not to say that the Nepalese do not use it. The style of dating, Śaka year, is also suspicious – again, which is not to say that the Nepalese are ignorant of it. However, also note that Pālas do not seem to use it either – perhaps some exceptions, but in fact none come to mind –, using regnal years instead or rarely Vikrama.⁹ Moreover, note that the date is more or less the same as the fall of the Pālas and the starting point of Sena dominance in Eastern India. Could this have implications concerning patronage?

⁹ Earliest on Sarnāth inscription 1083 = 1026 CE, cf. GLM, IA 14, Huntington no. 33

Revisiting the Tibetan Colophon

A note on production method:

|| ‘Chi med grub pa zhes bya ba mtha’ dag pa’i gzhung | rgya dpe ji lta ba
bzhiñ lus bsgyur nas | lo tsha ba Bya ban de Pad ma ’od zer gyis ji ltar bsgyur
ba bzhiñ chan btab ste thad kar drangs pa’o || rgya dpe dang mthun mi mthun
cung zad mthong lags te | mkhas pas don gyis bsgyur bas bdag ’dra bas bcos
par dka’ | | bla ma’i thugs dgongs rdzogs par gyur cig || ||

Unfortunately the interlinear notes (?) are not legible on this copy. They may add something useful.

At any rate, a re-examination of the Tibetan colophon revises several of Schaeffer’s interpretations.

First of all, the actual scribe falls into the oblivion of anonymity, because Pad ma ’od zer is **not** ‘at once scribe, editor, and translator’. He is a translator at most. What this text says is that the Tibetan translation is not of the present Sanskrit text. This is made very evident when the two registers are compared: it is quite clear that the

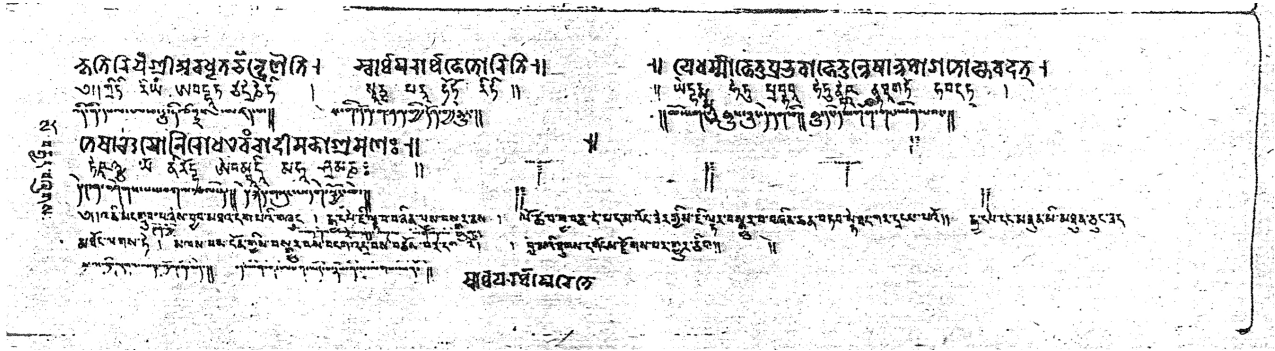


Figure 2: Last folio with the Tibetan colophon.

Tibetan translation is based on a **different recension**. In other words, a translation was already available and it was this which was introduced in an interlinear fashion.

He also says that he copied over the Sanskrit faithfully. This gives us evidence for the actual Ms dated 1160. Note the terms: *bsgyur* here does not mean translation but has to be read as *lus bsgyur*, ie transcription (of both Skt. and Tib.?).

He also says that he saw inconsistencies between the two versions – not at all surprising in light of the above – but he **did not** correct them, in fact, the very opposite: he claims he could not improve on the text.

Sometimes witnessed by other transmissions.

The Buddhist Millieu of Composition

Now see Mallinson: forthcoming.¹⁰ It was fairly clear that there was some kind of syncretism going on, but now we have evidence that the primary audience consisted of – for the most part – esoteric Buddhists.

Some suspiciously Buddhist terms: *mahāmudrā*, *vajrapañjara*, *śūnya*, *abhiṣeka*, *buddha*.

Very strongly Buddhist terms: *jñānasambhāra*, *gotra* (cf. *Mahāyāna-sūtrāṅkāra*), *kūṭāgāra*, *trivajra*, *trikāya*. Also the list of blisses from the *Hevajratantra*.

Buddhist style: *chandoha* for *sandoha*.

But what really made me sit up was *svādhiṣṭhānayoga*. Described in 8.9 as a **useless practice** for perfecting the mind: ‘chewing stone’, ‘drinking air’. Instead of *svādhiṣṭhānayoga*, one should use the following practice, after having obtained from a *guru*. Proceeds to describe the central tenets of the text. In other words he is singling out what is essentially deity-yoga (using a *Guhyasamāja* / *Śamvara* term. Why voice this so strongly if the intended audience is not tantric Buddhist?

Also to note that although not consistently, other transmissions seek to erase/replace these Buddhist terms.

¹⁰ Festschrift for Alexis Sanderson, Toronto.

A Note on Chinnamastā

Incipit of Ms C eulogises the goddess Chinnamastā. Her Buddhist origin is clear.¹¹ Other transmissions either erase this verse or transmit it garbled.

There is independent evidence in Sanskrit for Virūpa's connection with this goddess.¹² Two leaves, almost complete text, from Virūpa's *Chinnamuṇḍāsādhana*, for a Tibetan translation of the same, see Tōh. 1555. The Eastern Indian environment is clear, since in the *mantroddhāra* section he raises BAJRABAIROCANĪYE for VAJRAVAIROCANĪYE.

trayaviṃśati [BA] *punar dadyāc*
cakārasya tṛtīyaṃ tu [J] *saptāviṃśaty adhoyutam* [RA] |
phapṛṣṭhaṃ ca [B] *samuddhṛtya dvādaśasvarasamsthitam* [AI] |
pakārasya saptamaṃ [R] *grāhyaṃ trayodaśavibheditam* [O] |
ṣaṣṭha [CA] *dvādaśamaṃ* [N] *deyaṃ māyābījēna* [I] *śobhitam* |
vāyubijam [Y] *tato dadyād ekādaśasamanvitam* [E] |¹³

| yang na nyi shu gsum pa gzung | | tsa nas bgrangs pa'i gsum pa la | | 'og
 tu nyi shu bdun pa sbyar | | pha rgyab yi ge blang byas la | | dbyangs yig bcu
 gnyis pa yis brgyan | | pa nas bgrangs pa'i bdun pa la | | bcu gsum pa yis
 brgyan par bya | | drug pa bcu phrag gnyis pa sbyin | | sgyu ma'i sa bon gyis
 brgyan bya | | de rjes rlung gi sa bon sbyin | | bcu gcig pa dang ldan par bya
 |¹⁴

¹¹ Bühnemann 2000, Sanderson 2009

¹² Kaiser Library 139 = NGMPP C 14/16, "Vajrayoginīśādhanamālā vajrayoginīstotra" 35 ff. on palm leaf; in fact, various fragments.

¹³ leaf marked 11(r)

¹⁴ Tōh. 1555, 207a

Ōta. 3133: the Proto-Amṛtasiddhi?

Transmitted separately from the cycle. Attributed to Virūpa in the colophon. Starts with obeisance to Chinnamastā, but not parallel to the verse mentioned above. Essentially describes the three basic practices of the doctrine: *mahāmudrā*, *mahābandha*, *mahāvedha*.

Starts *in medias res*, closely matching – sometimes verbatim, sometimes only echoing – Mādhavacandra's text as follows: 11.1-7, 13.1-6, **authorship-statement**, 13.7cd-14, 11.8, 11.10cd-11, 12.1, 12.8, 14.19, etc. The translation is of mediocre quality, not unlike 'our' Tibetan text in Ms C; imagine something like Google-translate for more obscure languages.

Authorship statement:

| *rlung gis yongs la khyab pa yis* | | *rlung gis dngos grub thams cad sbyin* | |
rlung gis 'chi ba med par 'gyur | | *de ni bdud rtsi grub par ni* | | *birba nga yis*
yang dag bshad |¹⁵

"Since wind pervades everything, it is wind that bestows all supernatural accomplishments (*siddhi*), it is due to wind that one becomes immortal. This, I, Virūpa, have explained in the *Amṛtasiddhi*."

[Alternatively: emend *grub par* to *grub pa*, then understand: "I, Virūpa, have taught this, the *Amṛtasiddhi* [OR:] as/for the attainment of immortality."]

The topic of Mallinson's talk just after this.

¹⁵ Ōta. 3133, 158a

Inclined to go for the second and weaker interpretation, although all are possible. It is also not impossible that this is a final verse and that the rest was added. At any rate, it is significant that the author refers to himself. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that this is indeed the famous Virūpa presenting the three key practices of his teaching. If so, this must be the **Proto-Amṛtasiddhi**, in fact a new “earliest *hathayoga* text.”

Example:

| *rtsa (!?) ni bud med gzugs can te* |
 | *skes pa (=skyes po) med na 'bras bu med* |
 | *phyag rgya che dar (=dang) bsdams pa che* |
 | *dbye ba med na 'bras bu med* |¹⁶

¹⁶ Ōta. 3133, 158a

Cf. *Amṛtasiddhi* 13.3

guṇarūpavatī nārī niṣphalā puruṣaṃ vinā |
mahāmudrāmahābandhau vinā bhedenā niṣphalau | |