A Brief Introduction to the Amṛtasiddhi

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The aim of this talk is to introduce the Amṛtasiddhi, what we now call the earliest hat.hayoga 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 2002. 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 Ms from catalogues and testimonia/incorporations in late hat.hayoga texts. Neither list exhaustive. Presentation of the text’s career in Tibet: specifically Peking cycle of 21 works: [Ōtani cat. nos.] 3131 (!), 5026, 5051 to 5099, 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 dbyer. 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

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

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:

\[
\begin{align*}
ekāśītijute śāke sāhasraikte tu phālgune & | \\
krṣṇāṣṭamīṃ samāpteṣāṃ kṛtvāmṛtasiddhir mayā & ||
\end{align*}
\]

Not samāptō ‘yam

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

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

In his note 49, Schaeffer refers us to Ms f. 38a1-2. But this reads: ye dharmat hetuprabhāvi hetun teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat | teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evamvādī mahāśīramanāḥ ||

8 op. cit. 524 & 525
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 (= kṛtir 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 sirorekha – is mounting quickly.

In fact, the evidence to the contrary is somewhat stronger. The use of prśthamātṛā 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. 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?

Revisiting the Tibetan Colophon

A note on production method:

|| ‘Chi med grub pa zhes bya ba mtha’ dag pa’i gzhung | rgya dpe ji lla ba bzhin lus bsgyur nas | lo tsha ba Bya ban de Pad ma ’od zer gsis ji ltar bsgyur ba bzhin chan btab ste thad kar drangs pa’a || rgya dpe dang mthun mi mthun cung zad mthong lags te | mkhas pas don gsis bsgyur bas bdag ’dra bas bcos par dka’ || bla ma’i thugs dzogs 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
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, i.e. 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.

The Buddhist Millieu of Composition

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

Some suspiciously Buddhist terms: mahāmudrā, vajrapaṇījara, śānaya, abhiṣeka, buddha.

Very strongly Buddhist terms: jñānasambhāra, gotra (cf. Mahāyāna-sūtraśāntikāra), 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/Śārvāra 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.
A Note on Chinnamastā

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

There is independent evidence in Sanskrit for Virūpa’s connection with this goddess. Two leaves, almost complete text, from Virūpa’s Chinnamundāśādhana, for a Tibetan translation of the same, see Tōh. 1555. The Eastern Indian environment is clear, since in the mantoṛaddhāra section he raises bājaṛabaīrocanīye for vajravairo-
canīye.

\[
\text{trayaḥvinśati [BA] punar dayāc} \\
\text{cakāraśya tṛtyāṃ tu [I] saptāvinśaty adhiyutam [RA]} \\
\text{phapṛṣṭhaṃ ca [B] samuddhiṛtaṃ dvāśāśvasvarasamśhitam [A1]} \\
\text{pakārasya saptamaṃ [R] grāhyam trayodasaśivibhīditam [O]} \\
\text{ṣaṭṭhal[CA]dvīdaśaṃ [N] deyaṃ māyābījena [I] sōbhītam} \\
\text{vāyuśabījaṃ [I] tato dayād ekādaśasannārayitum [K]} \\
\]

\[
| \text{yang na nyi shu gsum pa gzung} | \text{| tsa nas brangs pa’i gsum pa la} | \text{| ’og} \\
| \text{tu nyi shu bdun pa sbyar} | \text{| pha rgyab yi ge blang byas la} | \text{| dbyangs yi gcu gnyis pa yis bgyan} | \text{| pa nas brangs pa’i bdun pa la} |
\]

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 |

“The topic of Mallinson’s talk just after this.

Öta. 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, 3.1-6, 4.7-1, 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:

\[
| \text{“Since wind pervades everything, it is wind that bestows all supernatural accomplishments (siddhi), it is due to wind that one becomes immortal. This, I, Virūpa, have explained in the Amṛtasiddhi.”} |
\]

[Alternatively: emend grub par to grub pa, then understand: “I, Virūpa, have taught this, the Amṛtasiddhi [OR: as/for the attainment of immortality.”]
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 Virûpa presenting the three key practices of his teaching. If so, this must be the **Proto-Amr̥tasiddhi**, in fact a new “earliest hathayoga text.”

Example:

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| 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 |\(^{16}\)
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\(^{16}\) Ota. 3133, 158a

Cf. **Amr̥tasiddhi** 13.3

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gun̥arūpa-tatī nāri nisphalā puruṣam vinā |
mahāmudrāmahābandhau vinā bhedena nisphalau ||
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