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„Through the Eyes of the Goddess:
How a Popular Divination Ritual Found its Way into
Unexcelled Yoga Tantra“

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Georgi Krastev, BA BA MA

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Through the Eyes of the Goddess:

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Found its Way into Unexcelled Yoga Tantra

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Email address: gkrustev@yahoo.com



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Abstract:

Among the many arcane allusions in the Kālacakra corpus of texts, the comparison of the visions of “one united with Reality” (*tattvayogī*) to the nature of a prognostic image (*pratisenā*) is one of the most intriguing. However, limited attention has been devoted to it with a single article being exclusively devoted to it (Orofino 1994) and several other prominent researchers either simply mentioning it (i.e. Newman 1987) or exploring it in other contexts (i.e. Vasudeva 2014, McGrath 1993, Strickmann 2002). The ritual of *pratisenā* (or, more commonly, *prasenā*) was not invented by the author of the *Kālacakratāntra*, but has much older, deeper and more complex roots, perhaps partly even in the Greco-Roman world. Some permutation on the practice is attested in Śaiva, Buddhist and even Jain sources. This thesis strives to build upon the previous scholarship on the topic, locate and examine further texts related to *prasenā* and seek a preliminary answer to the question why *prasenā* was of such prominence and how it came to be so.

Keywords: Kālacakra, tantric Buddhism, Śaivism, possession, *yogipratyakṣa*

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Wien/Vienna, 2022



जननीं सर्वबुद्धानां उत्पादक्षयवर्जिताम् ।
चर्यां समन्तभद्रस्य विश्वमातां प्रणम्य ताम् ॥

jananīṃ sarvabuddhānāṃ utpādakṣayavarjitām |
caryāṃ samantabhadrasya viśvamātāṃ praṇamya tām ||

Praise be to Viśvamātā—the progenitrix of all Buddhas,
who is free from all arising and cessation, who is the [the object of the]
conduct of a *samantabhadra*!

ॐ

ॐ

ॐ



Above: Tibet—John & Karina Stewart; 24-armed Kālacakra in sexual union with Viśvamātā; Two accompanying deities: Garuḍa on the lower left , green Jambala on the lower right; ground mineral pigment on cotton; age: 1700—1774; This composition belongs to a Twenty-seven Tantric Deity painting set commissioned by the Chos kyi 'byung gnas in 1750—according to his biography. There was an original set created and then many copies replicating the original, including this one. Overleaf: Viśvamātā as a solitary meditation deity under a tree; detail. ¹

¹ <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/48242> (accessed 30.04.2020).

ॐ

ॐ

ॐ



"All phenomena are like images in a mirror. To see whether or not this is so, look directly at your mind and let go completely. Then you will know."

Lama Shabkar, Tsogdruk Rangdol,
"The Flight of the Garuda"²

² Baker & Laird 2000: 80.

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Preface

I remember a few years back, sitting in a class on the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali with Dr. Dominik Wujastyk, how he explained how problematic the notion of Hinduism is by giving the following example: if you go to a random village in a forested area and ask the people who they worship, they will answer to you “the Mother in the tree.” Apparently something in that example struck me, as I remember it vividly even to this day. Little did I know that I would be reminded of it yet again, after going full circle through the Buddhist *tantras*, only to fall through the looking glass into the wonderland of Indian divination, and to trace it back to the trees from where it all started.

Georgi Kr.

Vienna, May 2022

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I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Klaus-Dieter Mathes for his mentorship, sharing his profound knowledge of the Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy, history and culture, as well as setting me on the path that eventually led to this work.

My sincere appreciation must also go to the Khyentse Foundation for their generous financial support without which the completion of this work would have been severely delayed.

Many thanks to Prof. Francesco Sferra who was so kind to provide me with a provisional draft of his critical edition of Vajragarbha's *Hevajratantrapiṇḍārthaṭīkā* and for sharing his profound knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and hybrid Sanskrit.

Thanks to Dominik A. Haas for his feedback on many different points of this work as many fruitful and insightful discussions.

Many thanks also to Dr. Vitus Angermeier for his invaluable expertise in Āyurveda and for helping me with sources for the substance called *alakṭa*, in particular the 1977 paper by Mira Roy.

Gratitude is also due to Luigi Hari Tehel Singh for pointing out to me the importance of the early iconography of *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* in India and also for many fruitful discussions on this and other topics.

Thanks to Jamie Gordon Creek for pointing out to me that the secret biography of Shabkar was written with the help of *pra* divination.

Thanks to Prof. Dominik Wujastyk for his insightful classes on Yoga and Āyurveda, as well as pointing me to the passages on possession in the *Kumāratantra* of Rāvaṇa.

Thanks to Prof. Harunaga Isaacson for pointing me to important passages on *prasenā* in Śaiva sources and the article by Somadeva Vasudeva.

Conspectus Siglorum

ĀM	<i>Ālokaṃālā</i>	ca. 450-525 CE ³
BK	<i>Bṛhatkāḷottara</i>	ca. late 12 th century CE ⁴
HT	<i>Hevajratantra</i>	ca. 900 CE ⁵
JDM	<i>Jayadrathayāmala</i> (Śiraścheda)	ca. 6 th -10 th century CE ⁶
KV	<i>Kalāvilāsa</i>	ca. 1050-1066 CE ⁷
KNU	<i>Kapphiṇābhyudaya</i>	ca. 9 th century CE ⁸
MM	<i>Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa</i>	ca. 4 th century CE ⁹
MP	<i>Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa</i> (Devīmahātmya)	ca. 250-550 CE ¹⁰
NS	<i>Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti</i>	ca. 7 th century CE ¹¹
P	<i>Padminī</i>	ca. 9 th century CE ¹²
RPBC	<i>Rāvaṇaprokṭabālacikitsā</i>	pre-11 th century CE ¹³
SP	<i>Sāṃkhyapravacana</i>	ca. 7 th century CE ¹⁴
SPT	<i>Subāhuparipṛcchātāntra</i>	ca. 6 th -7 th century CE ¹⁵
STTS	<i>Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha</i>	ca. 7 th -8 th century CE ¹⁶
SU	<i>Sekoddeśa</i>	ca. 9 th -10 th century CE ¹⁷
SUṬ	<i>Sekoddeśaṭikā</i> (Paramārthasaṃgraha)	ca. 956-1040 CE ¹⁸
TĀV	<i>Tantrālokaṃviveka</i>	ca. 10 th -11 th century CE ¹⁹
TS	<i>Tantrasadbhāva</i>	ca. 8 th century CE ²⁰
TVS	<i>Tattvavaiśārādī</i>	ca. 9 th century CE ²¹
VP	<i>Vimalaprabhā</i>	ca. 1025-1040 CE ²²
YS	<i>Yogasūtra</i> (Pātañjalayogaśāstra)	ca. 4 th century CE ²³
YT	<i>Yogatārāvalī</i>	ca. 13 th -14 th century CE ²⁴

³ Scherer 2007: 259.

⁴ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

⁵ Szántó 2015: 334.

⁶ Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 10.

⁷ Vasudeva 2014: 374.

⁸ Vasudeva 2014: 388.

⁹ Wayman 1985: 6.

¹⁰ Collins 1988: 36.

¹¹ Wayman 1985: 6.

¹² Gerloff 2020: 4-5.

¹³ Bagchi 1941: 269.

¹⁴ Garbe 1896: 41.

¹⁵ Strickmann 2002: 211.

¹⁶ Sanderson 2009: 131.

¹⁷ Orofino 1994a: 12-15.

¹⁸ Sferra & Merzagora 2006: 13.

¹⁹ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

²⁰ Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 258.

²¹ Sinha 1938: xvi.

²² Newman 1998: 343.

²³ Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 11.

²⁴ Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 11.

Approximate Chronology of Important Texts

Pāli canon	ca. 200 BCE-200 CE
<i>Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa</i> (<i>Devīmahātmya</i>)	ca. 250-550 CE
<i>Yogasūtra</i> (<i>Pātañjalayogaśāstra</i>)	ca. 4 th century CE
<i>Mañjuśrīyamūla-kalpa</i>	ca. 4 th century CE
<i>Ālokaṃālā</i>	ca. 450-525 CE
<i>Subāhupariṣṭhātantra</i>	ca. 6 th -7 th century CE
<i>Jayadrathayāmala</i>	ca. 6 th -10 th century CE
<i>Svacchandatantra</i>	ca. 6 th -10 th century CE
<i>Sāṃkhyapravacana</i>	ca. 7 th century CE
<i>Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti</i>	ca. 7 th century CE
<i>Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha</i>	ca. 7 th -8 th century CE
<i>Tantrasadbhāva</i>	ca. 8 th century CE
<i>Hevajratantra</i>	ca. 900 CE
<i>Kapphiṇābhyaṅga</i>	ca. 9 th century CE
<i>Tattvavaiśārādī</i>	ca. 9 th century CE
<i>Pāṇini</i>	ca. 9 th century CE
<i>Sekoddeśa</i>	ca. 9 th -10 th century CE
<i>Sekoddeśaṭīkā</i> (<i>Paramārthasaṃgraha</i>)	ca. 956-1040 CE
<i>Rāvaṇaprokṭabālacikitsā</i>	pre-11 th century CE
<i>Tantrāloka</i>	ca. 10 th -11 th century CE
<i>Kalāvīlāsa</i>	ca. 1050–1066 CE
<i>Vimalaprabhā</i>	ca. 1025-1040 CE
<i>Bṛhatkāṭṭhara</i>	ca. late 12 th century CE
<i>Yogatārāvalī</i>	ca. 13 th -14 th century CE

Methodology of Translations & Some Remarks on Formatting

Importantly, the way I proceeded with the material included in this work was very strict so as to avoid superimposing one set of ideas from one text or tradition onto another, let alone across time.

Firstly, each text and the conclusions drawn from it have been primarily based on the texts themselves and their internal context, internal coherence and explanations and only then informed by and/or scrutinised through secondary literature. Then I analysed those conclusions comparatively to see if there are patterns between the texts that draw on common history, motifs, notions and practices. This was done for the sake of avoiding both intertextual and academic presuppositions. Naturally the results of that process I did analyse with an as much as possible impartial academic mindset, while also taking into account the relevance of the materials, colours, plants, geography, historical and socio-economic conditions under which the traditions of the Subcontinent emerged and developed (naturally, in as much scope as the current work permitted), as well as the texts that were produced from their cross-pollination over the millenia.

I used the texts of the *Sekoddeśa* and the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* as they are to be found in Orofino, in the Appendix by Gnoli (1994) and Sferra & Merzagora (2006), respectively. I also consulted the *Sekoddeśaṭippanī* of Sādhuputra Śrīdharānanda as present in Gnoli (1997) and its translation by Lecso (2009). As a support for my translations I have relied on Gnoli & Orofino's translation of the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* into Italian (1994) and the Vienna Buddhist Studies Translation Group's translation of the *Sekoddeśa* from the Tibetan into English (2021).

It has to be noted that Nāropā quotes several sources in his commentary including the *Laghukālacakratantra*, the *Vimalaprabhā* and others and they have been given their respective textual designation. Regardless, they should I have included them as part of the running text of the *Paramārthasaṃgraha*. As the depth and detail of the critical apparati of both Sferra and Merzagora and Upadhyaya and Bahulkar & Dwivedi exceed the need of the current work, critical notes have not been included and the reader is directed to consult the original critical edition. Although where the Sanskrit original is available I have included only a transliteration of that in the current work, the Tibetan has also been consulted throughout, where available. Including it would have, however, required critically editing the texts which would have again far exceeded the scope of this thesis.

For the translation of some passages from the *Chapter on Cosmos* of the *VP* I use Newman's translation (1987) as a guide and for that of the respective passages from the *Chapter on the Individual* and the *Chapter on Practice* the translations by Wallace (2004 and 2010 respectively), but not in an unaltered state with regard to both more updated understanding of the Kālacakra, but primarily because of Newman's translation having overtly Christian overtones in its choice of vocabulary and Wallace's translations not sufficiently taking the context into consideration. Naturally the translations provided herein are nothing but an informed interpretation and do not claim to relay the original intent of the text, although they are aimed at doing so. They are also primarily based on the Sanskrit originals, inasmuch as those can be relied upon, as taken from the editions of Upadhyaya (1986) and Bahulkar & Dwivedi (1994a and 1994b).

After much deliberation, I decided to leave the term *pra(tī)senā* untranslated. It has been seen rendered in many ways, among them "prognostic mirror," "prognostic image" and others, I, however, came to the conclusion that, since the term can refer to the ritual, the deity, the image and so on in equal measure, it is best left in its original form, as any rendition will intrinsically limit the scope of interpretation and thus has a greater chance of being false, much similar to terms like *prajñā* and *upāya*.

The original formatting and the *sigla* of the texts quoted have been preserved, but details such as additional footnotes/endnotes etc. have been omitted unless strictly relevant to the current topic (also see APPENDIX I).

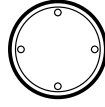
In translations parts of the text that are implied (either by the text, its commentaries or context) are placed within square brackets [].

Bold indicates quotations from the main text being commented on.

Chapter I.

Prasenā

Throughout Time and Traditions



Why *prasenā*?

Among the many arcane allusions in the Kālacakra corpus, the so-called simile²⁵ used for the visions of “one united with Reality” (*tattvayogin*)²⁶ and the nature of a prognostic image (*pratisenā*) is one of the most intriguing and at the same time the most mysterious. Yet, limited scholarly attention has been hitherto devoted to it.

Although the word *pratisenā* itself is very rare in Sanskrit, it possibly derives from an over-Sanskritisation of the word *prasenā* (the term I most commonly use in this work), which in turn comes from MIA *pasiṇa*, itself a corruption of *praśna*—‘question.’ However, “*prasenā*, then, is a back formation, derived from a non-Sanskrit word that has been subsequently Sanskritized.”²⁷ According to both George Hart and P. S. Jaini, it more probably derives from *prasanna* ‘clear’ or ‘bright,’ especially in view of the later Chinese renditions of the term²⁸ as *bo sī nà* (鉢私那),²⁹ and *prasannā* is a term encountered to refer to a *prasenā* deity in many Śaiva sources. The term refers to the oracular possession of a maiden or a young boy by a deity, commonly a goddess, which medium then looks into an object with a burnished surface (very commonly a mirror or a vessel of water) and is asked questions, which the deity answers through him or her.

The ritual of *pratisenā* (or, more commonly, *prasenā*; Tib.: *pra phab*; Ch.: *míng xiǎn* (明顯)) was not invented by the authors of the Kālacakra corpus, but has much older, deeper and more complex roots, perhaps partly even in the Greco-Roman world. Some permutation of the practice can be attested in epic, yoga, Śaiva, Buddhist and even Jain sources, over a period of two millennia and counting. This thesis strives to build upon the previous scholarship on the topic, locate and examine further texts related to *prasenā*, going far beyond the initial confines of the Kālacakra context, and to seek a preliminary answer to the question as to why *prasenā* came to be of such prominence, whereby making a step towards filling what I perceive to be an important gap in the research on the origins of early Indian religious rituals, beliefs and practices, as well as their later incorporation in and influence on yogic and tantric traditions in particular.

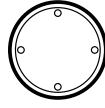
²⁵ Orofino 1994.

²⁶ *SUT* 28; also see *LKCT* 4.232.

²⁷ Smith 2006: 423.

²⁸ Strickmann 2002: 328.

²⁹ From the *Medicine Buddha Contemplation Ritual* (*Yàoshī rúlái guān xíngyí guī fǎ*; 藥師如來觀行儀軌法); T0923_19.0028c12.



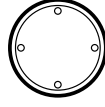
Treatments in Secondary Sources: Short Overview

There have been several important publications on *prasenā* to date, the most relevant among these (but not limited to) being an article by Giacomella Orofino (1994) on *pratisenā* in Tibet and Kālacakra literature in particular, one by Somadeva Vasudeva (2014) dealing with it in the *Niśvāsa* corpus of *Mantramārga* Śaivism, several sections in two books by Strickman (2002), presenting a comprehensive account of the rite in the context of Chinese magical medicine, several chapters from a book by Smith (2006), sections of McGrath's book (2019) devoted to its use in Tibetan medicine and most recently Van Schaik (2020) who relays a *prasenā* ritual found in a Tibetan spellbook from Dunhuang, the latter five not being solely devoted to the topic.

There has not yet been to date, however, an attempt to compile, collate and study what little secondary literature on *prasenā* was and is available, and the current work attempts to try and fill some of that gap. The topic has also not been awarded sufficient attention by historians of tantric Buddhism, as Strickmann also remarks.³⁰ In this Chapter I. we will look at evidence for the topic of *prasenā*'s influence being ever broader and more profound than previously assumed, across both territory and time, by reviewing not only the secondary literature but also by moving towards a more comprehensive survey of primary sources on *prasenā* – something which has been lacking to date.

It is perhaps best to trace *prasenā* through time through the medium of the texts in which it or themes related to it appear and try to extract clues as to its role in the rituals and later even the soteriology of the many religious traditions that employed one or other of its aspects. Traces of *prasenā* can be found in the *Dīghanikāya*, the *Jātakas*, the *Subāhupariṣcchātantra*, and many other texts, including the *Vimalaprabhā*, and in the *Hevajratantra* as well. Chapter II. will concentrate on the latter two in more detail, attempting to unravel the civilizational, historical and religious background of the latter two's *prasenā* heritage .

³⁰ Strickmann 2002: 198.



Tracing the History of *prasenā*— from the Pāli Canon, through Indian Tantra to Modern-day Tibet and Nepal

The currently earliest attestation of a *prasenā*-like divinatory ritual in India is from the Pāli canon, namely that in the *Dīghanikāya* (ii. 63 *Mahāsīlaṃ*, 61-63).³¹ Accounts of possession which, as we will see, are of significance for the history of *prasenā* and its related deities in India can also be found in three of the *Jātakas* (50, 113, 347), as well as the *Bhāyabheravasutta*, and the *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra* which will not be dealt with here for reasons of brevity. Textual evidence points to *prasenā*-like rituals being observably widespread at the time of the composition or the early *Śaiva Mantramārga* texts.³² The earliest Buddhist tantric source to date is the *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra* (not to be confused with the *sūtra* by the same name).³³ Indications of *prasenā*

We must be careful however, not to assume an expressly Indian origin of *prasenā* and similar practices,³⁴ since the texts of the Pāli canon date to the height of the period of Greco-Indian interaction. Parallels with the *Greek Magical Papyri* among many other sources have been pointed out by Orofino³⁵ and Van Schaik³⁶ and we will look at those in some limited detail. Astonishingly, a thumb-gazing divination ritual that fits all the characteristics of *prasenā* was also performed in 12th century France, according to the account of John of Salisbury, bishop of Chartres, who was solicited as a potential medium himself as a young boy,³⁷ the ritual morphology of the practice presumably being in some way the descendent of Greek or perhaps Greco-Egyptian ritual magic. This anecdote was also noted by Prof. Somadeva Vasudeva.³⁸

The Greek influence over the Fergana valley, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Northern India in the centuries following Alexander the Great's conquest, as well as the vibrant trade routes that flourished between India and the Greco-Roman world via the Indian Ocean as evidenced by works such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* surely provided ample opportunity for cultural cross-pollination. Several accounts are listed by Giacomella Orofino about similar kinds of divination from the Greek and Roman world (such as in the *Apology* (§42) of Apuleius and Spartianus' *Vita Didii Juliani* (VII,

³¹ Orofino: 1994: 614; Vasudeva 2014: 371.

³² Vasudeva 2014: 370.

³³ Orofino 1994: 614.

³⁴ Vasudeva 2014: 371.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 1994: 618.

³⁶ Van Schaik 2020: 129.

³⁷ Vasudeva 2014: 373; Ioannis Saresberiensis 1595: 119-123; See *The Curious Case of John of Salisbury*.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 2014: 373.

10)) and even from 18th century Freemasonry.³⁹ That being said, just as any practice would adapt to local circumstances and traditions, even if we accepted that the origin of *prasenā* is at the very least influenced by or shares roots with Greco-Roman and before than even Egyptian ritual magic, so its Indian and later Tibetan and East Asian incarnations acquired the flavour of South Asian folk beliefs and culture. There is, however, also a case to be made, that, at the very least, the particular spirits and deities have roots in ancient Indian folk beliefs and rites of origin different from that of the brahminical culture. I argue for them being indigenous, rather than of Mediterranean origin, even if the particularities of the basic ritual technology, so to say, may very well have been. I also provide some evidence for the argument that at least some key ritual and liturgical elements were also native to the subcontinent when I discuss the substance of *alakṭa* in the *Hevajratāntra* and its relation to tree deities in the first part of Chapter II. It could also be the case that *prasenā* was the product of the confluence of two distinctive currents—the Greco-Egyptian tradition of ritual magic and semi-formalised divine possession on the one hand, and the native Indian deities and their much more recognizably proto-tantric behaviour and characteristics, on the other, but a more conclusive answer remains unclear without a large scale comparative study of sources from across the board.

Although ritual magic and the ancient kinds of divination have given way to other practices and beliefs such as popular astrology and Tarot in many modern industrialised countries, especially the anglophone world, ritual descendents of *prasenā* are still alive today in Nepal and Tibet, and future research may show, perhaps also in India itself as well.

That being said, historical accounts, such as that by John of Salisbury, and encounters in literature, such as the Mirror of Galadriel in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, show us how resilient the themes of light, luminosity, liminality, divination and supra-natural "vision" have been even in the secularised modern world, despite the many millennia that have passed since that deep unfathomable antiquity that gave birth to visions of the divine for the very first time.

The Curious Case of John of Salisbury

A possible Greco-Roman, or even Greco-Egyptian origin of this type of practice is suggested, as we said, by evidence collated by Orofino,⁴⁰ and there are even accounts of such practices being associated with the cult of Anubis in Egypt and still having been performed until quite recently.⁴¹ Delatte points to several additional sources in

³⁹ Orofino 1994: 618-619.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 1994: 618, 619; 624.

⁴¹ Orofino 1994: 624; Delatte 1932: 61; 105.

his 1932 work *La catoptromancie grecque et ses dérivés*.⁴² One of the more curious accounts is, in fact, so strikingly similar to the catoptromantic variant of *prasenā*, that it is worth recounting in full. In his *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury (~1110—1180), the 12th century bishop of Chartres, wrote:⁴³

About the "specularii"⁴⁴ and those evil spirits which sometimes predict the future thanks to their subtle nature, their long temporal experience, and by revelations from higher powers; and that they often deceive, either by the intention of deceiving, or because they deceive themselves and that this kind of soothsayers come to a bad end.

The *specularii* vainly flatter themselves that they offer no sacrifices, that they do no harm to anyone, that they are often useful (for they uncover thefts and purify the world of evil), and that they seek only useful and necessary truth. These wicked men are not like that, they are not. He who does not gather with me," he says, "scatters, and he who is not with me is against me. Practising such arts in defiance of God's prohibition, what else do these wicked men do but lift up their foot against Him who has established this prohibition?

Excessive is the sacrifice offered by him who, despising the Holy Spirit, prostitutes his soul with idolatry; excessive is the sacrifice of him who pleads to the filthy ears of demons with the very voice that is consecrated to the Lord; excessive is the sacrifice made by him who lends the movements of his body to the performance of execrable rites. What has he saved for his Creator who has given his mind, his tongue and his body to the devils? Does he not injure the truth who seeks his perfection in such horrible corruption? Truly, in matters of this importance, no one can plead ignorance, for all know, or ought to know, that this aberration of faith is condemned by the reproach of anathema.

[...]

I give thanks to God because, even from my earliest age, he has put up the shield of his benevolence to defend me from the wiles of the wicked enemy. When I was a child, I was under the guidance of a priest to learn the psalms, and he happened to practise the art of divination by means of the *speculum*. And it so happened that he and I and another slightly older boy were used for his sacrilegious art. After some preliminary magical rites, we would sit at his feet so that what he was looking for would appear [to us] in the nails of our

⁴² For indirect evidence on the likely Indian origin of some elements of the practice, see *Alaktaka and the Metonymic Echo of Tree-deity Worship*.

⁴³ Ioannis Saresberiensis 1595: 119-123; my translation from the original Latin.

⁴⁴ The *specularii* or mirrorers are those who divine by means of burnished surfaces, i.e. glass, basins, nails, mirrors, etc.

thumbs smeared with a certain magical oil or chrism, or in a smooth and polished basin, [thus revealing] itself to him by certain signs that he noticed in us.

And so, after pronouncing certain names, which seemed to me—though I was only a child—to be the names of demons because of the horror they inspired in me, and after swearing some oaths which, thank God, I do not know, my companion affirmed that he saw certain figures, though faintly and obscurely. I, on the other hand, was so blind to all this that nothing appeared to me except the nails, the basin, and the other objects I knew before. Consequently, I was judged useless for such purposes, and, as one who is an obstacle to these sacrilegious practices, I was condemned to be barred from such ceremonies. And whenever they decided to perform their rites, I was kept away as an impediment to divination. That is how merciful the Lord was to me at that tender age.

Looking for *prasenā*

Before moving onto the main topic of discussing *prasenā*'s history and role in India, it is important to first shortly review the veritable zoo of terminology used to refer to it across both texts and time.

Giacomella Orofino⁴⁵ proposes the hypothesis of the close etymological connection between *pratisenā* (>*prasenā*; *pra phab (pa)*) and *pratibhāsa* (*snang ba*, among others), pointing out that even in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* (ca. 9th century CE⁴⁶) *prasenā* is glossed as *gsal snang* (No. 4268). It is worth shortly addressing here the question of the lexical treatment of *prasenā*.

Prasenās (in the sense of the images that appear) are almost universally referred to as *bimbās*. The Tibetan translation of *bimba* is usually *gzugs*, but sometimes also *gzugs brnyan*, which is the common translation of *pratibimba*. While there is a very close association between these terms, a careful reading of the texts reveals that although often synonymous, such a straightforward equation can lead to lots of confusion, even more so in the Tibetan versions of texts, where there is less distinction between these terms specifically. This is even true in Sanskrit, since the term *pratibhāsa* and its derivatives is exceptionally common in Buddhist literature, especially of the tantric type. We must remember that although the *Mahāvīyutpatti* is a colossal testament to the skills of the great translators of the past, like any dictionary it is not to be considered infallible or absolute. This issue I discuss at a greater length in the section titled *Reflection*, after having looked at several different genres of texts. Furthermore,

⁴⁵ Orofino 1994: 615.

⁴⁶ Wayman 1985: 40.

after an extensive digital search of the *bka'* 'gyur and *bstan* 'gyur, it became evident that there are a large number of different terms used to translate *pra(tī)senā* and also that they occur in over thirty-five root texts and their commentaries, adding up to several hundred instances total, ranging from a single mention to entire chapters being devoted to it. I provide below a short list of these Tibetan terms, which is in no way meant to be exhaustive:

pra phab (pa)
pra dbab (pa)
pra sen (na) (dbab pa)
pra (ti) se na
pra ti ta se na
spra / khra
rtsa'i pra sgrub
rdo rje skar 'dma / rtsis

There is an equal number of varied Sanskrit alternatives:

*pratisenā*⁴⁷
prasenā
praśnāvatāra
pratisenāvatāra
*prasīnā*⁴⁸
*prasannā*⁴⁹
*senikā*⁵⁰
*vajrajyotiṣa (praśnāvatāra)*⁵¹

One must also consider, as we will see in the cases of non-Buddhist yogic texts, that the most reliable indicators for the identification of *prasenā* as such are not the specific terms used to refer to it, as they vary greatly among traditions and throughout time, but its ritual morphology and the motifs associated with it, most notably the specific flavour of ritualised possession and its ever-present connection to dreams, luminosity and light.

⁴⁷ In the *Sekoddeśa*, its commentaries, as well as in numerous places in the *Vimalaprabhā*. See *The Kālacakratantra's pratisenā*.

⁴⁸ This is the name found in the *Niśvāsaguhya*. It is unlikely that this is a mere scribal corruption of *prasenā*, but it seems to be rather an early attempt to Sanskritise *paṣiṇa/pasiṇā*. It is the earliest form to be found in any Śaiva scripture. (Vasudeva 2014: 359);

⁴⁹ This form occurs in the *Tantrasadbhāva*. It too does not appear to be a mere scribal corruption of *prasenā*, but rather a conscious variant presumably intended to signal the benign (*pra+sad*) nature of the *svasthāveśa* involved. (Vasudeva 2014: 359);

⁵⁰ *Jayadrathayāmala* 2, *Vidyāvidyeśvarīcakre Tṛtīyapratīhārīsādhanaḥ*, f. 117: *senikāsiddhir atulā...* (Vasudeva 2014: 360);

⁵¹ In the *Hevajratāntra* 1.2.28 and the *Hevajrapañḍārthaṭīkā* commentary.

Accounts of *prasenā* in the Pāli Canon and Other Early Texts

Perhaps the earliest textual evidence of *prasenā* is in the *Brahmajālasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*.⁵² Though in Pāli sources there is no clue as to what the structure of the ritual was or how many participants were necessary, perhaps it is not impossible that these rituals were looked at with a bad eye by the early Buddhists precisely because of the element where the medium loses their consciousness (since in Buddhism personal agency is the sole thing through which one can become liberated) and is being essentially left in the control of the deity by the ritual officiant. What is certain, however, is that because practices such as obtaining answers via a mirror (*adāsapañha*), a maiden (*kumaripañha*) or oracular possession by a deity (*devapañha*)⁵³ are decried by the authors of the Pāli canon as "improper means of livelihood" (*micchājīvena jīvika*), this points to them being already widespread enough by the period of the Pāli canon's composition and well-known enough that they needed to be mentioned as needing to be avoided. This also points out that at this early stage not only were these practices not associated with Buddhism in any way—they were actively decried. Furthermore, it also tells us that there was some element in these practices that the early Buddhists definitely did not look at with a good eye. This dynamic is clearly visible from several anecdotes we find in the *Jātakas* and it was likely the same or a related reason why the later *saidhāntika* Śaivas held a similar negative opinion of *prasenās* and possession in general.

The scepticism towards *prasenā* seems not to have been exclusive to the Pāli canon. A very negative connotation is associated with it in Bhaṭṭotpala's 9th century commentary to the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 2.34, where he warns that one should not let oneself be entangled by the net of Indra (*indrajāla*) being tempted by information about the future, whispered in one's ear by *piśāci* (*karṇapiśācikā*).⁵⁴ He also does not mince his words calling it "trickery and charlatanism"⁵⁵—the source of the respective entry of "jugglery" for *prasena* in the Böhrling dictionary. About a century later, Kashmirian poet and satirist, Kṣemendra, a student of Abhinavagupta, makes the same derogatory remark, also decrying it as "low-level sorcery,"⁵⁶ further adding to the list of Indian literati who regarded the whole possession business with explicit disdain.

Of particular interest are also several Jaina texts, most prominently the the earlier *Āyaraṃgasutta* (*Ācārāṅgasūtra*) and *Ṭhānaṃgasutta* (*Sthānāṅgasūtra*),⁵⁷ as well as the later *Paṇhavāyaraṇa*⁵⁸—the tenth *Āṅga* of the Jain canon whose main topic is

⁵² Orofino 1994: 614.

⁵³ Orofino 1994: 614; Vasudeva 2014: 369-70 .

⁵⁴ Orofino 1994: 614.

⁵⁵ Strickmann 2002: 215.

⁵⁶ Orofino 1994: 614; Vasudeva 2014: 369-70.

⁵⁷ Smith 2006: 423.

⁵⁸ Acharya 2007: 1.

precisely oracular possession and divination⁵⁹—which I tentatively suspect to be at the very least related to the *Pratisenāvatāratāntra* (Tib. *pra dbab pa la'i rgyud*) spoken of by Nāropā in his commentary to the *Sekoddeśa* v. 30. A similar term also appears in the *Śaṭsāhaśrikāhevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā* by Vajragarbha commenting on *Hevajratāntra* 1.2.28 (*praśnāvatāra*).⁶⁰ Kṛṣṇācārya's *Yogaratanmālā*⁶¹ has *anveṣanavidhi* instead of *praśnāvatāra*, but the meaning doesn't differ, on the contrary, it is lexically compellingly close to the Śaiva term *āveśa*, meaning 'possession.'

Traces of Possession in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and Some of its Commentaries

The *Pātañjalatogaśāstra* (ca. 4th century CE⁶²) is not a text that would come to one's mind were one to be asked about topics such as ritualised possession. Upon closer examination, however, we find passages, concepts and, in some cases, quasi-direct evidence in it and its commentaries that Patañjali's *yoga* indeed has vestiges of *prasenā* in its "DNA." The main features of these parallels include (1) divine experiences in dreams, (2) the consideration of conceptual thought as an impediment, (3) allusions to *samādhi* as a possession-like state and (4) the attainment of knowledge of past, present and future (or other powers, as well as liberation) as a result.

(1) The parallel to some aspects of *prasenā* becomes quite explicit, especially in light of Śaiva dream divination (which we will discuss later in this Chapter I.) and the ubiquitous comparison of *prasenā* to having the nature of illusion (*māyā*) or sleep (*yoganidrā* or, in later Buddhist tantric texts—*svapna*), just as we will see done in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* in the next section. Patañjali, Vyāsa (in his *Sāṃkhyapravacana* commentary; ca. 7th century CE⁶³) and Vācaspatimiśra (in his *Tattvavaiśārādī* glosses to the *Sāṃkhyapravacana*; ca. 9th century CE⁶⁴) all tell us that:

{YS} ⁶⁵Or, [steadiness of the mind is achieved] by having the experience of dream and sleep as one's object of cultivation. (YS 1.38)

{SP} By making such a form the object of one's cultivation as one has experienced either in dreams or in sleep, the mind of the *yogin* attains steadiness.

⁵⁹ Vasudeva 2014: 372.

⁶⁰ cf. Francesco Sferra's edition of this commentary; (*forthcoming*; used with permission).

⁶¹ Farrow and Menon 2001: 32-3; Toh. 1183.

⁶² Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 11.

⁶³ Garbe 1896: 41.

⁶⁴ Sinha 1938: xvi.

⁶⁵ *svapnanidrājñānālambanaṃ vā* || YS 1.38 ||

svapnājñānālambanaṃ vā nidrājñānālambanaṃ vā tad ākāraṃ yoginaś cittam sthitipadaṃ labhata ity || SP 1.38 || (Prasāda 1998: 64).

{TVŚ} “When the time comes that this *yogin*, in his dream state, worships Lord Maheśvara’s

form, enrapturing the mind by its beauty, placed in a secluded spot of some lonely forest, appearing as if arising out of the sphere of the light of the moon, the limbs large and small of the shape appearing as soft as the stalks of the lotus, the form seen as if made of shining moon-stones, encircled with garlands of sweet-smelling *mālātī* and *mallikā*; then on awakening he is full of elation, and then remembering the same form which was the object of dream consciousness, his mind determines towards the unity of that one form and attains the position of steadiness.

The sleep to be understood here is the one in which the light of the quality of essentiality appears. (this is the *sāttvic* sleep) It is the same, on awakening from which the remembrance is, 'I have slept pleasurably.' This explains that the mind in that state becomes one-pointed. It is this that the knowers of Brahma define to be of the nature of Brahma (Brahmarūpa).

In the dream state it is not possible to bring mere knowledge without an object, within the range ; therefore, the object also is brought within the range.”⁶⁶

(1) Here we see the presence of fragrant plant-based substances and the olfactory as well as the visual element, which closely parallels what we will later see in Śaiva sources.⁶⁷ The appearance of a deity through dream consciousness is not unique here either—it is again present in Śaiva texts, but can also be found being indirectly discussed in the *Vimalaprabhā* (5.3) and the *Sekoddeśa* (27; 30), again in the context of *prasenā*. The relevance of the figure of Maheśvara appearing from the sphere of the light of the moon (*candrabimba*) for our discussion will be discussed in the section *Reflection* in Chapter II.

(2) Furthermore, in the context of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* we once again encounter the discussion of *vikalpa* and now its removal/absence is a prerequisite for entering such states, which are devoid of it (Vācaspatimiśra’s gloss to Vyāsa’s commentary on YS 1.42):

{TVŚ} Thought-transformation (*samāpatti*) in general has been described. By subsidiary

classification it is four-fold. Thus: indistinct or verbal (*savitarkā*), distinct or wordless (*nirvitarkā*), meditative (*savicārā*) and ultra-meditative (*nirvicārā*). Out of these the description of the Indistinct thought-transformation is given: **There**, etc. Out of these though transformations the indistinct thought

⁶⁶ Prasāda 1998: 65.

⁶⁷ See *Prasenā* in Śaiva texts.

transformation is to be known. How? The notion of word, meaning, and idea consists in this. The faculty of imagination (*vikalpa*) raises distinctions in the same thing and shows sameness in different things. Thus the word, meaning and idea are confused together, though in reality they are different from one another. Therefore is this thought-transformation confused, i. e. mixed up with the notions of word, meaning and idea: **And that as follows. The word ‘cow,’ etc.** The first phrase, 'the word cow' shows the unreal cognition of the word being fancied as confused with meaning and idea.⁶⁸

Vyāsa continues to explain in his commentary to YS 1.43 that:

{SP} The thought-transformation becomes distinctive at the time when the memory

(*smṛti*) of the fictions of verbal convention, verbal and inferential knowledge ceases; when the mind is coloured by the nature of the object; when it, as it were, gives up its own nature of conscious cognition; and when, therefore, it only shows out the nature of the object, and has, as it were, transformed into the shape of the object itself.⁶⁹

(3 & 4) In the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and the two commentaries in question the state of *samādhi* is described as the *yogin* having no awareness of himself, but only of the object of perception and the act of perception—undifferentiated—a phrasing suspiciously akin to descriptions found in later Buddhist *tantra*. Furthermore, *samādhi* is described as achieved by various means, including as the “result of complete surrender as a vessel for the Lord” (*īśvarpraṇidhānāt*) and Vyāsa’s commentary adds that it bestows the power to know “truly all that he wishes with regard to place, body/appearance and time”—a textbook description of the extraordinary abilities afforded by performing *prasenā*:

{YS} ⁷⁰Attaining *samādhi* is the result of/happens after complete surrender as a vessel for the Lord.⁷¹ (YS 2.45)

{SP} By means of the **attainment of *samādhi*** [achieved as a result of his] entire being

having been offered to **the Lord**, [the *yogin*] knows truly all that he wishes with regard to place, body/appearance and time. Thus he comes to acquire the knowledge of that [stuff] just as it [really] is. (SP 2.45)

⁶⁸ Prasāda 1998: 70.

⁶⁹ Prasāda 1998: 71.

⁷⁰ *samādhi-siddhir īśvarpraṇidhānāt* || YS 2.45 ||

īśvarārpitasarvabhāvasya samādhisiddhiryayā sarvam īpsitam avitatham jānāti deśāntare dehāntare kālāntare ca || tato 'sya prajñā yathābhūtam prajānātīti || *Sāṃkhyapravacana* 2.45 || (Prasāda 1998: 169).

⁷¹ Taking *ni-dhāna* as “placing, containing anything (gen.) in itself” (pw 548/3.) I read *īśvarasya pra-ṇi-dhāna* as “to completely (*pra-*) surrender [oneself] as a vessel (*ṇi-dhāna*) for the Lord (*īśvarasya*).”

{YS} ⁷²The knowing of past and future is the result of/happens after the *saṃyama* [which is the] three maturations.

{SP} **The knowing of past and future** for *yogins* occurs **as the result of *saṃyama*** after the **maturations** of the exhaustion of the characteristics of *dharma*s [have occurred]. The three: *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* are called ***saṃyama*** here. By means of this, i.e. the maturation of the three evidently being done, **the knowing of past and future** is attained in them.

I propose that such traces of dream consciousness or the consciousness of possession (and the substratum⁷³ that produced *prasenā* in particular) employed for soteriological purposes (such as providing an object for cultivation, rather than being finally liberatory) can be excavated in yogic texts, not least in the famous *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and some of its commentaries. While this is naturally but one possible interpretation—it is solidly based on the evidence—both linguistic and (con)textual—in the text itself and its commentaries. Looked at in the context of the ritual and situational evidence related to possession, it would take serious evidence to disprove what appears to be a straightforward connection to the *prasenā*-related ritual currents.

Arriving at this conclusion “backwards” as it were—i.e. trying to trace the origins of the *pratisenā* mentioned in the Kālacakra corpus to its roots—it was later independently confirmed when I read the study by Smith in his 2009 book *The Self Possessed* about possession as an inseparable element of non-*saiddhāntika* Śaiva initiation:

With respect to practice, *samāveśa* is identified by Abhinavagupta, in his *Vimarśinī* on Utpaladeva’s nondualist *Īśvarapratyabhijñānākārikā*, as *abhyāsa*, yogic and spiritual practice. Through such discipline, says Abhinavagupta, the practitioner may realize his or her identity with the Supreme Lord, even if this identity is qualified or limited by the human body, which has the capacity to realize the divine powers of the Lord only partially. *Samāveśa* is not only practice, however; it is also the goal. As Louise Finn says unambiguously, citing a commentary on the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra*, “in Kashmir Śaivism liberation is

⁷² *pariṇāma-traya-saṃyamād atītānāgata-jñānam* || YS 3.16 ||
dharmalakṣaṇāvasthā-pariṇāmeṣu saṃyamād yogināṃ bhavaty
atītānāgata-jñānam | *dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhi-trayaṃ* ekaṭra *saṃyama* uktas tena *pariṇāma-trayaṃ*
sākṣāt kriya-māṇam atītānāgata-jñānam teṣu sampādayati || *Sāṃkhyapravacana* 3.16 || (Prasāda 1998: 207).

⁷³ Following the suggestion by Giacomella Orofino (*Ibid.* 1994: 618).

achieved not through *samādhi* but through *samāveśa*.”^[74] This is consistent with the general tenor of non-*saiddhāntika* Śaiva thought, in which *mokṣa* is viewed as a state of possession or *samāveśa* in that it is determined by levels of initiation, which are in turn verified by symptoms of *śaktipāta*, recognized as a variety of *āveśa*. This *śaktipāta* is divine energy transmitted either by one’s *guru* or by a *siddha* who, apparently, may not necessarily be one’s *guru*. Abhinavagupta presents a fourfold classification of *siddhas*: celibates (*ūrdhvaretas*), heroes (*vīra*) who are on the path of Kula (*kulavartman*), noncelibates, and “non-physical *siddhas* who are non-physical *gurus*” (*Tantrāloka* [TĀ] 29.41–43). Jayaratha says that these disembodied *gurus* can enter (*praveśa*) the bodies of practitioners during the Kaula rite. *Śaktipāta* causes the initiate to become possessed (*āveśa*); symptoms are convulsions (*ghūrāi*, *kampa*) and loss of consciousness (*nidrā*), the degree of possession revealed by their intensity (*tīvra*). Thence the objective was “immersion [*samāveśa*] into the body of consciousness; to make possession, or the eradication of individuality, permanent” (TĀ 29.207–208).⁷⁵

These observations will gain even firmer ground, when we look at Śaiva and other non-Buddhist texts closely associated with the later Śaiva-Śākta traditions, such as the *Jayadrathayāmala* and the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and their treatments of the nature of visionary experiences, possession and how those are related to the notion of sleep consciousness. The distinction between *āveśa*, *prasenā* and *nidrā* appears to be blurry at best, or rather, we see once again an indication that the exact terminology used did not really affect the nature of the ritual morphology, nor does it seem to have in any way discouraged the incorporation of sleep perception and divine possession in the framework of either Śaiva and Buddhist tantric cults.

Traces of Ritualised Possession from the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* to the *Yogatārāvalī*

⁷⁶A [*pratisenā* is] an object which is empty of material substance, akin to an illusion, a dream, a magical apparition. (*SU* 30*bc*)

In the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*,⁷⁷ (ca. 250-550 CE⁷⁸) we find the famous episode where Viṣṇu is sleeping the *yoganidrā*, all the while Brahmā resides in the lotus sprouting

⁷⁴ Interestingly enough, this quote hints that the view of *samādhi* being spoken of here is different from what we find in Patañjali about it as an element of *saṃyama*, producing knowledge of past, present and future, which, as we will see, is one of the characteristic motifs associated with *prasenā*. Here, *samādhi* is juxtaposed to *samāveśa*. A detailed examination of this relationship is, unfortunately, far beyond the scope of this thesis and I hope to expand on the topic in the future.

⁷⁵ Smith 2009: 370.

⁷⁶ *vastuno 'bhāvato 'py arthaḥ māyāsvapnendrajālavat || SU* 30 ||

⁷⁷ (*Ibid.* 81.41-53), roughly corresponding to *Devīmahātmya* (*Durgāsaptasatī*; 1.53-68).

⁷⁸ Collins 1988: 36.

out of his navel. Two *asuras* emerge from his earwax and aim to murder Brahmā. To prevent that, he appeals not to the sleeping unconscious Viṣṇu, but to the *yoganidrā* of Viṣṇu in the “form” of a sentient goddess:

⁷⁹There is nothing to wonder! The Yoganidrā of the Lord of the World
[who is also] the Mahāmāyā of Hari (Viṣṇu)—[she] bewilders the world!
(81.41)

She, the blessed Lady, the goddess Mahāmāyā, draws by [her] power
The minds of even the wise into bewilderment! (81.42)

Through Her all [questions about] the moving world (*saṃsāra*) are answered
-
this Shining One is the fulfiller of humanity's desire for liberation! (81.43)

She is the supreme Vidyā (spell-holder; knowledge)—herself the eternal cause
of liberation—and the cause of bondage in *saṃsāra*, verily she is the ruler all
rulers! (81.44) [...]

⁸⁰As Illustrious Lord Viṣṇu engaged in *yoga-nidrā*, the Worlds having
submerged into the [cosmic] Ocean at the end of a *yuga*, spreading [himself]
over the [snake] Śeṣa (81.49), two terrifying *asuras* called Madhu and Kaiṭabha
arose from Viṣṇu's earwax with the aim of killing Brahmā! (81.50) [...]

⁸¹Brahmā – the Lord of Progenation – abiding in the navel-lotus of Viṣṇu,

⁷⁹ *tan nātra vismayaḥ kāryo yoganidrā jagatpateḥ |*
mahāmāyā hareś caitat tathā saṃmohyate jagat || 81.41 ||
jñāninām api cetāmsi devī bhagavatī hi sā |
balādākṛṣya mohāya mahāmāyā prayacchati || 81.42 ||
tayā viśṛjyate viśvaṃ jagad etac carācaram |
saiśa prasannā varadā nṛṇām bhavati muktaye ||81.43||
sā vidyā paramā mukter hetubhūtā sanātani |
saṃsārabandhahetuś ca saiva sarveśvareśvarī ||81.44|| (The Sanskrit Project. 2020).

⁸⁰ *yoganidrām yadā viṣṇur jagaty ekārṇavīkṛte |*
āstūrya śeṣam abhajat kalpānte bhagavān prabhuḥ ||81.49||
tadā dvāvasurau ghorau vikhyātau madhukaiṭabhau |
viṣṇukarṇamalodbhūtau hantum brahmāṇam udyatau ||81.50|| (The Sanskrit Project. 2020).

⁸¹ *sa nābhikamale viṣṇoḥ sthito brahmā prajāpatiḥ |*
dṛṣṭvā tāvasurau cograu prasuptam ca janārdanam ||81.66||
tuṣṭāva yoganidrām tām ekāgrahṛdayasthitaḥ |
vibodhanārthāya harer harinetraḥ kṛtālayām ||81.67||
viśveśvarīm jagaddhātrīm sthiti-saṃhārakāriṇīm |
nidrām bhagavatīm viṣṇor atulām tejasah prabhuḥ ||81.68|| (The Sanskrit Project. 2020).

having seen these two horrifying *asuras* and the sleeping Agitator of Men (Viṣṇu) (81.66), with [his] heart one-pointedly concentrated on the goal of awakening Hari, praised that Yoganidrā, who had made the eyes of Hari into her abode (81.67):

Oh Lady of the Universe, Mother of the World, You who maintain and destroy the sleep, Oh Illustrious Goddess of boundless splendour, of Viṣṇu – the Lord! (81.68)

To recap, what Brahmā does is appeal to Yoganidrā herself, who in this case is equated with Mahāmāyā as a goddess (*devī*) and dwells in the eyes of Viṣṇu. The situation can be read in the following way:

Viṣṇu (Hari) is unconscious, but Mahāmāyā, (or Yoganidrā), is conscious. She is a female deity who has taken up residence in his eyes (i.e. possessed him). As we will see in several later sources, one of the shiny/reflective/burnished objects which can be used for *prasenā*, are indeed the eyes. Furthermore, in the *Vimalaprabhā* (1.34bc) we encounter the *Mahāmudrā* being called “She, who ever dwells in the eyes [of all beings]” (*nimikā*).⁸² In the *Sekoddeśa* (34ab) it is stated that a maiden “doesn’t see with her own eyes nor with the other eye,”⁸³ whereby Nāropā explains in his commentary that this means neither her normal physical eyes, nor the “eye of the forehead.”⁸⁴ In Vṛddhakāyastha’s *Suviśuddhasamputaṭīkā* commentary to the *Hevajratanta* 1.2.28, in the context of a *prasenā* ritual, it is explained that the maiden is the goddess Nairātmyā, i.e. possessed by her.⁸⁵

In many tribal cultures around the world, whenever a shaman or an officiant or even a lay person is possessed by a deity or spirit—they have neither awareness of themselves at the time of possession nor memory as to what transpired while they were in that state. What happens when one is possessed in the classical sense is that one has no awareness of self or one’s surroundings, but, naturally, the deity that possesses oneself does. The essence of this scenario sounds eerily reminiscent of what we read in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*—we encounter a female deity (Yoganidrā) who dwells in (possesses) a “medium” (Viṣṇu), robbing him of his consciousness, and an “officiant” (Brahmā), who appeals to that deity for favour. Only, this scenario is in a mythological solution, to put it in tolkinian terms. One is almost dared to ask the rhetorical question, what better ritual officiant than Brahmā himself?

I propose that these *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* passages provides a compelling indication that it is not only in tantric sources, but also in more conventional brahminical

⁸² See *The Kālacakratantra*’s *pratisenā*.

⁸³ *na paśyaty anyacakṣurbhyāṃ svacakṣurbhyāṃ na paśyati.*

⁸⁴ *yadītiādi | anyacakṣurbhyāṃ lalāṭādibhavābhyāṃ na paśyati nāpi svacakṣurbhyāṃ anyadā darśanāt | anena pratisenādṛṣṭāntena yogipratyakṣaṃ sarvathā svabhāvābhāvād ajātam | svapne kumārikāputropalam bhavat siddham sarvajñajñānam |*; See also *The Kālacakratantra*’s *pratisenā*.

⁸⁵ See *The Hevajratanta*’s *vajrajyotiṣa*.

material that traces of that archaic possession-related ritual substratum of pre-classical India from which *prasenā* and its ritual relatives emerged can be found.

Such curious allusions are not unique to the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* either. A thousand years later, in *Yogatārāvalī* (ca. 13th-14th century CE⁸⁶) we encounter the following description of *yoganidrā*:

⁸⁷The old human conflicts having been defeated by means of considerable inner examination—[then,] an [intellectually] inert sleep (*jāḍyanidrā*) which is completely devoid of conceptual thought shines forth. (24)

The *yoginī* who appears [to those *yogins* who are] extraordinarily skillful in completely uprooting the web of actions by severing the root of volition and of imagination as a result of uninterrupted practice, is *Yoganidrā*. (25)

Abiding in the nature of the Fourth [condition], devoid of all [other conditions] and so forth, unhindered by the triad [of the other conditions], Oh, fellow—that delight of the non-conceptual sleep of all times which is obtained [then] is of the [very] nature of perception! (26)

Comparing this passage to the much more mythological setting of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, we see how—where in the older text there was a ritual officiant, a medium and a female deity—here the process is internalised, whereby the medium for *nidrā* is the intellect, rather than active consciousness. Vācaspatimiśra in his gloss to Vyasa's commentary on YS 1.1 and 1.10 respectively explains that the *cittavṛtti* that is deep dreamless sleep (*nidrā*) is the result of the intellect (*buddhi*) being overwhelmed by the quality of inertness (*tamas*).⁸⁸ Naturally, this specific *nidrā* condition is spoken of in negative terms here.⁸⁹ As we saw in the case of *īśvarpraṇidhāna*, however, some particular instances of sleep consciousness are treated differently, and perhaps a certain parallel can be drawn between it and the state referred to as *yoganidrā*. This is a striking parallel to the *Kālacakra* corpus, where even the word, used to describe the quality of the experience that arises after the successful completion of *pratyāhāra*, so often mentioned in parts of the *Vimalaprabhā* in connection with *pratisenā*, is related (for example *ajaḍa* (VP) and *jāḍya* (YT)) as

⁸⁶ Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 11.

⁸⁷ *pratyagvimarśātīśayena puṃsām prācīnasamgeṣu palāyiteṣu |*
prādurbhavet kācid jāḍyanidrā prapañca-cintām parivarjayantī || YT 24 ||
vicchinnaśaṃkalpavikalpamūle niḥśeṣnirmūlitakarmajāle ||
nirantarābhyāsanitāntantabhadṛā sā jṛmbhatyoginī yoganidrā || YT 25 ||
viśrāntimāsādyā turīyatattve viśvādyavasthātritatayoparisthe |
saṃvinmayīm kām api sarvakālaṃ nidrām sakhe nirviśa nirvikalpām || YT 26 || (Bhattacharya 1987: 27-29).

⁸⁸ Prasāda 1998: 3; 24.

⁸⁹ The three types of sleep dominated respectively by *rajas*, *tamas*, and *sattva* are explained in both the *TVŚ* and the *SK* commenting on the relevant to the topic sections of the *YS* and can also be found in *vaiśṇava* tantric texts.

well as used by Nāropā in the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* when explaining the nature of a *pratisenā* (na [...] *jaḍadharmatām paśyet* (PS on SU 29)). In the *Vimalaprabhā* (5.3) it is explicitly stated that “in the states of dreaming (*svapna*) a direct apparition (*ajaḍapratiḥhāsa*) can be seen without employing intermediating phenomena (*jaḍadharmair vinā*).” As we saw in the previous section, a very similar notion of the immaculateness of the knowledge obtained *via* a certain type of dreams and its particular suitability as the object of cultivation, also standing in a context which sounds suspiciously *prasenā*-related, is even elaborated in the *Pātañjalatogaśāstra* (2.45) and some of its adjacent commentaries.

Furthermore, considering the span in time between the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and the *Yogatārāvalī* as well as the *Tattvavaiśārādī*, on the one hand, and older Buddhist and Śaiva texts drawing on *prasenā* and its ritual relatives and the Kālacakra corpus, on the other—the encounter of the internalisation of an external ritual also makes sense in terms what seems to have been a general developmental trend in the diachronic transmission of ritual traditions.

Finally, a curious reference to *yoganidrā* can be found in Saroruhavajra’s *Padminī* commentary to the *Hevajratāntra* (2.3.37):

⁹⁰An expert practitioner need not recite mantras,
Or rely for support on contemplation.
He does not need to renounce sleep,
Or restrain his senses.⁹¹ (*HT* 2.3.37)

To which the *Padminī* says:

⁹²“Sleep,” i.e. the *yoga*-sleep (*rnal 'byor gyi gnyid*; *yoganidrā*), need not be renounced. It (i.e. the *yoganidrā*) and the *Lords (*Īśvara*; *dbang po rnam*; i.e. the experience of the deities) attained through the absolute purity of [the nature of] its perception (i.e. seen in a dream), should not be rejected as a negative phenomenon (*pratisedha*; *dgag pa*) since they are an object suitable for one[’s cultivation].

which, if my interpretation is correct, is a very similar scenario to what is found in the *Jayadrathayāmala* (i.e. a Śaiva adept sleeping in the temple of the deity and gaining a

⁹⁰ *mantram naiva japed dhīmān dhyānam naivāvalambayet |
nidrātyāgaṃ na kurvīta nendriyāṇāṃ nivāraṇam || HT 2.3.37 ||*

⁹¹ Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

⁹² */gnyid ni rnal 'byor gyi gnyid de de spang bar mi bya ba'o//de dang de'i dbang po'i rnam par dag pa grub pa'i dbang po rnam rang gi rjes su mthun par yul la myong bar byed pas dgag par mi byed do/ Dége/Toh. 1181 ff. 162b.*

visionary experience in a dream), as we will see below, and the *Tattvavaiśārādī*, which was also roughly contemporaneous with the *Padminī*.

***Prasenā* in Śaiva Texts**

Prasenā and/or its related practices were apparently widespread and considered esoterically prestigious enough for the systematisers of both the early Śaiva *Mantramārga* and the Buddhist *Mantranaya* to incorporate it into their systems.⁹³ It was, however, seemingly looked at with a bad eye, or at the very least somewhat sidelined by most Śaivas with the exception of the Kāpālikas of the Atimārga (for whom possession, or *āveśa*, was actually soteriologically significant), as, by virtue of the nature of *prasenā* being a ritual that induces benign possession by means of *mantras* (in the broad sense), it would have perhaps made it apparent that they were not exclusively privy to that esoteric ‘technology,’ and not only that, but they could have borrowed it from somewhere else. This is, of course, also connected with the question of the mechanics of liberation in the respective traditions. The loss of consciousness or, alternatively, the inactivity of the intellect may have also played a role in the shunning of notions of a soteriological technology based on or derived from notions of possession, especially since the *saiddhāntika* Śaivas put such an emphasis on constructing the world through cultivation (*bhāvanā*), while the Kāpālikas held possession to be central to success on their path to liberation. The notion that sleep or dream consciousness was connected to the ideas of initiation, cultivation and possession is also no mere conjecture. For example, in Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrasāra* (5), we find the exact same term *yoganidrā* used to refer to the second last of the five mystical states which are taken as outward signs of the possession of the *yogin* by Rudra’s power.⁹⁴ Thus we see the traces of a continuity in terms of both vocabulary and ideas related to the nature of visionary experiences connected with or deriving from practices of induced possession. Smith⁹⁵ calls possession a “symptom of tantric initiation”—but perhaps “desired result” is much better suited in light of the current discussion.

One of the earliest Śaiva texts that feature instructions for a *prasenā* is the *Niśvāsaguhya* (10.116–117b).⁹⁶ Others include the *Jayadrathayāmala*⁹⁷ (parts of which are datable to different periods between 6th-10th century CE⁹⁸) and the *Tantrasadbhāva* (ca. 8th century CE⁹⁹), although there are others that can offer much in terms of information on *prasenā*, such as the *Picumata* (also called *Brahmayāmala*;

⁹³ Vasudeva 2014: 370.

⁹⁴ Rastelli 2013: 300.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 2009: 421.

⁹⁶ *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* f. 82v1–2; Sanderson 2009: 138.

⁹⁷ Vasudeva 2014: 371.

⁹⁸ Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 10.

⁹⁹ Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 258.

6th - 7th century CE¹⁰⁰) and the *Vīṇāśikha*,¹⁰¹ which can be shown to be related to the early Buddhist *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* (ca. 4th century CE¹⁰²). A text that deals almost exclusively with the induction and control of possession is the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*.¹⁰³ A short review of the diachronic intertextuality among the different Śaiva traditions is necessary as a background against which to examine the later evidence from the Buddhist unexcelled yoga tantras.

Early mainstream Śaivism, later referred to as the Atimārga, was, expectedly, primarily focused on the figure of Śiva. From the Lākula Atimārga around the 5th century CE emerged the mainstream Mantramārga, referred to as the Śaivasiddhānta. The transitional corpus of texts that was produced during this period is the *Niśvāsa* (to which texts such as the *Bṛhatkālotṭara* (ca. late 12th century CE¹⁰⁴) belong, concerning themselves primarily with ritual and the installation of images—a specialty of the Saiddhāntikas). Coming into contact with related systems of liturgy, a prominent feature of the Siddhānta became the worship of the regarded as higher form of Śiva—Bhairava. The scriptures related to this cult became known as the *Mantrapīṭha* (Mantra Corpus), the most prominent being the *Svacchandatantra* (ca. 6th-10th century CE¹⁰⁵) dedicated to Svacchandabhairava and his consort Aghoreśvarī. To these belongs also the *Vidyāpīṭha* (Vidyā Corpus), or texts concerned with the “worship of the Goddess as Śiva’s divine power.” Among these there are several prominent texts. One such work is the above-mentioned *Jayadrathayāmala*, “which teaches the cult of Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī or Kālī,” among many other goddesses as her “esoteric embodiments.” This corpus is closely related to Kālikula texts, which became the foundation of the Kālī tradition that came to be known as the Krama (also known as the Mahānaya). Another work is the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, related to the *Māliṇīvijayottara*, which became the basis of the Trika variant of Śākta-Śaivism expounded in Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*. Others include the *Picumata* (*Brahmayāmala*)—concerned with the goddess Caṇḍā Kāpālīnī, and the *Vīṇāśikha*, which teaches “the cult of the four goddesses Jayā, Vijayā, Jayantī/Ajitā, and Aparājītā, the sisters of the god Tumburu,¹⁰⁶ venerated as an aspect of Śiva.” The *Tantrasabhāva* is also a scripture, closely related to the Trika.¹⁰⁷ “The centrality of possession in the [later] Śākta-Śaiva domain may [have] derive[d] from its Kāpālīka antecedents, since the Saiddhāntika Śaivas report that the Kāpālīkas [of the Atimārga] defined liberation as arising from a state of possession (*āveśaḥ*) by the qualities of the deity, analogous to the state of one who is possessed by a Bhūta

¹⁰⁰ Sanderson 2009: 51.

¹⁰¹ Sanderson 2009: 137-9.

¹⁰² Wayman 1985: 6.

¹⁰³ Törzsök 2013: 191.

¹⁰⁴ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

¹⁰⁵ Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 10.

¹⁰⁶ For the relevance of Tumburu for the topic of *prasenā*’s relation to tree deities and *yakṣas*, as well as a close parallel to this section of the *Vīṇāśikha* in the Buddhist *Ārya-maṇjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*, see *The Case of Tumburu*.

¹⁰⁷ This paragraph has been adapted from Sanderson (2009: 137-9).

(*bhūtāviṣṭapuruṣavat*).¹⁰⁸ This is also an idea we later see reflected in Buddhist Unexcelled Yoga *tantras*, such as the *Hevajra* and *Kālacakra*.

As we will see in further detail in the following sections, a major use of a *prasenā* was for answering inquiries—be that for the purpose of answering questions, finding lost or stolen things or people or diagnosing the cause of a disease. An interesting parallel is drawn by Somadeva Vasudeva between the darkness of the night when one cannot see and the state of having lost something or having had something stolen, which is then “recovered” as the sun rises, illuminating the world and making things visible (i.e. existing) once again.¹⁰⁹ “The *Kapphiṇābhyudaya* (15.35) of the ninth century Kashmirian court poet Śivasvāmin uses the apparition of a *prasenā* in a mirror as a metaphor for the appearance of the sun in the sky:

¹¹⁰May this *prasenā*, embodied as the sun,
appearing in yonder polished mirror of the sky,
witnessed by the foremost among the *mantra*-chanters,
their muttered spells empowered with visualisations of Sandhyā,
recovering, all at once, the elements of the world that were completely lost,
grant the heart satisfaction.”¹¹¹ (*KNU* 15.35)

The connection between light and darkness and the existence and non-existence of things and even the world is not a new idea.¹¹² It does, however, seem to be an association characteristic of cultures who have not gone past a certain level of technological advancement. Data from colour vocabulary studies¹¹³ show that hunter-gatherer cultures or even settled societies who do not, however, possess a high level of technological advancement have in their vocabulary many words for describing degrees of illumination and brightness, but very few (and in some cases even none, such as the Paliyan of South India) for describing hues (what in general parlance would be called “colours”). It is worth quoting data for the South Indian Dravidian language Paliyan as a striking example of this:

¹⁰⁸ Sanderson 2009: 133.

¹⁰⁹ Vasudeva 2014: 374.

¹¹⁰ *saṃdhyādhyānapraguṇitajapair mantravādipradhānair dṛṣṭā mṛṣṭe gaganamukure 'mutra kṛtvāvatāram | naṣṭān naṣṭān jhagiti jagato lambhayanī padārthān eṣā toṣaṃ diśati manasaḥ pūṣamūrtiprasenā ||* (Vasudeva 2014: 373).

¹¹¹ Vasudeva 2014: 373.

¹¹² See Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka’s book *Semantics: Primes and Universals* (1996) for a detailed discussion on this topic. According to Wierzbicka, “colour” is subject to semantic, interpersonal and contextual relativity, whereby it is not a universal or a self-contained semantic domain. “In all cultures, people are interested in “seeing” and in describing what they see, but they don’t necessarily isolate “colour” as a separate aspect of their visual experience. All languages have a word for SEE, but not all languages have a word for “colour.” *Ibid.* 1996: 287.

¹¹³ Most notably Berlin and Kay (1991) and Rosch and Olivier (1972); There has been much criticism of the study by Berlin & Kay; their data, however, is still a valuable source of information for the study of colour vocabulary. See also two other studies by Rosch (1975; 1978) and a follow-up by Kay and McDaniel (1978).

“Language: Paliyan (Stage I)
 Linguistic class: Dravidian, Tamil-Malayam
 Area: South India
 Source: Gardner (1966a)
 Basic color terms:
velle ‘illuminated’ (sometimes ‘bright’)
manja ‘bright’
nīlam ‘of medium brightness’
sihappu ‘dark’
karuppu ‘dark’ or ‘in shadow’

This interesting variant of Stage I is employed by a technologically marginal group in Southern India. Our data come from an unpublished manuscript by Peter M. Gardner (1966a), who recently returned from field work among these people. The Paliyans speak a dialect of Tamil, a major Dravidian language with about 30, 000, 000 speakers. An adjacent Tamil-speaking people, Plains Tamil, have a standard Stage V colour terminology, given by Gardner as *vellai* ‘white’, *karuppu* ‘black’, *sivappu* ‘red’, *paccai* ‘green’, *manja* ‘yellow’, and *nīlam* ‘blue’.

In Paliyan Tamil, cognates of five of these six terms are retained but with radically altered meanings. Discrimination is encoded exclusively in terms of brightness. Gardner’s terminology is a bit unorthodox. He makes an analytical distinction between brightness due to intensity of light source (which he calls “illumination”) and brightness due to properties of the reflective surface (which he calls “brightness”). He notes that the Paliyans classify these together on the dimension *nīram*, ‘brightness and illumination [sic]’. Paliyan colour terms with their glosses in and standard Plains Tamil Sources are given below.

Paliyan	meaning	Plains Tamil
<i>velle</i>	‘illuminated’ (sometimes ‘bright’)	<i>vellai</i> ‘white’
<i>manja</i>	‘bright’	<i>manja</i> ‘yellow’
<i>nīlam</i>	‘of medium brightness’	<i>nīlam</i> ‘blue’
<i>sihappu</i>	‘dark’	<i>sivappu</i> ‘red’

<i>karuppu</i>	‘dark’ or ‘in shadow’	<i>karuppu</i> ‘black’
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Gardner indicates that there is a considerable overlap in usage between each term in the Paliyan series and its neighbours. The effect of the usage of the terms of the extent to which brightness comes from light source as opposed to surface properties is not entirely clear from Gardner’s preliminary manuscript. The most extreme terms *vel!le* and *karuppu*, are not reserved exclusively for the extremes of brightness. Gardner says “The usual leaf on a tree is *vel!le* on its upper surface and *karuppu* on its lower surface” (1966a). He also notes, however, that the same leaf may well be *nīlam* or *sihappu* (presumably on both sides) if seen in different light.

[...] For example: “*sihappu* was elicited for dark shades of red, yellow, green, purple and black” (1966a).

Of particular interest for the evolutionary hypothesis is Gardner’s conviction that these people have a minimum of shared culture. He speaks of “imprecision and lack of elaboration in the most basic aspects of Paliyan subsistence related classifications ... highly idiosyncratic taxonomy ... de-emphasis on both verbal communication and formality of expression [*sic*]” (1966a: [...]).¹¹⁴

Whether this has a direct correlation with the metaphorical thought complex associated with *prasenā* (i.e. luminous visions/*prasenā* ≈ true reality) is hard to say, it is, however, a compelling notion worthy of further inquiry and which will require a comparative study of the vocabulary used around *prasenā* and related contexts in a broad range of texts.

“Approximately two hundred years [after Śivasvāmin], another Kashmirian poet and satirist, Kṣemendra, who states to have studied literature (*sāhitya*) with the tantric authority Abhinavagupta (fl. ca. 975–1025 AD), [however,] mocks *prasenā* magic as worthless, labelling it derogatorily as *indrajāla*, as illusion or low-level sorcery:

¹¹⁵The virgin sees a bewildering tumult of people,
in a sword, in a thumb, in water,
but the thief is not caught,
this is the delusion of sorcery.”¹¹⁶ (*KV* 9.17)

¹¹⁴ Berlin & Kay 1991: 49-50.

¹¹⁵ *khaḍge ’ṅguṣṭhe salile paśyati vividhaṃ janabhramaṃ kanyā |
na prāpyate tu cauro moho ’sāv indrajālasya || Kalāvilāsa 9.17 ||* (Vasudeva 2014: 375).

¹¹⁶ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

While Kṣemendra seriously questions *prasenā*'s usefulness, he does not deny that the medium does see something—an attitude he might have inherited from his mentor who does not so much as even mention it in his *Tantrāloka*, though it has to be noted that he does deal with the topic of possession as relevant for initiation, which most likely is connected to the same ritual substratum that produced *prasenā* and its ritual relatives. Vasudeva is puzzled at why Abhinavagupta fails to mention (or probably intentionally omits) *prasenā* in the third chapter of the same work, where he gives a detailed exposé of the doctrine of reflection (*pratibimbavāda*).¹¹⁷ I discuss a likely solution to this question in the sections *The Medium of the Own Mind* and *Reflection*. The answer is, however hinted at by the commentator Jayaratha, who does mention *prasenā* in his *Tantrālokaviveka* 3.64:

118O Lord! Through your power
You have revealed the universe in [your] pure [mirror-like] self
without an “original” [source being present],
just like a *prasenā* [who is not visible as a source, nevertheless appears]
in a mirror.¹¹⁹ (*TĀV* 3.64)

However, Vasudeva notes that “in none of the above similes and metaphors is a *prasenā* valued in itself as a significant ritual actor fulfilling a soteriological function.”¹²⁰ This indicates a rough contrast between two views or attitudes towards *prasenā*: (i) that it does function somehow, that the medium does see something, but it is of no actual use practically or soteriologically or (ii) that it is both functionally useful *and* soteriologically relevant, though the nature of that relevance varies between traditions and some refer to it explicitly, while other obscure it behind codewords and non-transparent terminology.

Beside the visual descriptions, there is also a consistent connection to olfactory perception as well. This theme was also present in the *TVŚ*. Vasudeva recounts further, that:

“when more detailed descriptions of oracular apparitions appear in literary works, they fulfill a quite different function in the imagination of the poets and their audiences: the legitimisation of royal succession. A common trope is the visionary apparition of a *prasenā*-like goddess dressed in white who is identified as a visionary manifestation of Rājyalakṣmī, Rājyaśrī (the patron goddess of the kingdom), or a local protective deity. She acknowledges the king, rewards his meritorious deeds, predicts the future greatness of his

¹¹⁷ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

¹¹⁸ *nātha tvayā vinā bimbaṃ svacche svātmani darśitam | prasenā darpaṇenaiva prabhāvādbhāvamaṇḍalam || Tantrālokaviveka* 3.64 || (Vasudeva 2014: 375).

¹¹⁹ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

¹²⁰ Vasudeva 2014: 375.

dynasty, and thereby endorses his right to rule. Sometimes this appears to imply that the succession was irregular, in doubt, or even contested. For example, in the *Harṣacarita* of Bāṇa, Rājyalakṣmī emerges from a divine sword called Aṭṭahāsa that Puṣyabhūti/Puṣpabhūti had won by assisting his Śaiva teacher Bhairavācārya in a Vetāla summoning. Since a sword is one of the reflective substrates in which a *prasenā* may appear, it seems likely that Bāṇa is deliberately implying a connection between this goddess and a *prasenā*. The initial manifestation of the goddess is described as follows:

¹²¹Thereafter he saw, all of a sudden, a flood of moonlight, and he smelled the fragrance of a night lily pad blossoming in autumn. Suddenly he heard the tinkling of anklets, and he trained his eyes to [the source of] the sound.”¹²²

Yet another parallel with the higher Buddhist tantras is the description of the lotus maiden (*padmiṇī*) in *HT* as having sweat whose fragrance is that of a lotus:

¹²³[Her fragrant sweat
Smells the same as musk, she has the navel of a doe,
[Her] lotus [has the scent of] the blossom of a blue lotus,
And instantly spreads like [the scent of] a lotus. (*HT* 2.8.3)

¹²⁴Her hands and limbs are also soft—
A beautiful lotus girl of tender speech,
Possessing a fair moon-face and
Sweat with the fragrance of a lotus!

She abides like a lotus petal,
She has the neck and belly of doe,
She is not hairy, she is fleshy (well-formed)
Her *bhaga* is like the back of a tortoise!

Another parallel in chapter two of the *HT* are the spells for magical destruction, bearing some similarity to one of the powers gained as a result of *prasenā* in the

¹²¹ *anantaram ca sahasaivātibahalām jyotsnām* (p. 53) *dadarśa, śaradi vikasatām kamalavanānām iva ca ghrāṇāvalepinam āmodam ajighrat* | (2) *jhaṭiti ca nūpuraśabdam aśṛṇot. vyāpārayām āsa ca śabdānusāreṇa dṛṣṭim* | (Vasudeva 2014: 375-376).

¹²² Vasudeva 2014: 375-376.

¹²³ *prasvedaṃ ca sugandhi syān mṛganābhisamaprabhaṃ* |
padmaṃ cendīvaraṃ gandhaṃ kṣaṇāt padmaṃ ivācaret || *HT* 2.8.3 ||

¹²⁴ *Hevajratantṛapañjikāpadminīnāma* Dége 1181, ff. 171b.; */lag pa rkang pa 'jam pa dang/'jam smra pad+ma can mdzes pa//ljang gu zla ba'i gdong ldan rdul//pad+ma'i dri ltar zhim pa dang//pad+ma'i 'dab ma lta bur gnas//ri dwags mgrin pa ri dwags gsus//ba sp(b)u med cing sha che sbom//b+ha ga rus sba l rgyab lta bu/* Translation courtesy of the Vienna Buddhist Studies Translation Group under the auspices of “84,000—Translating the Words of the Buddha,” (*forthcoming*; used with permission).

Tridaśaḍāmarāpratyāṅgirā.¹²⁵ An even more striking parallel is to be found between those sections of the *Hevajratāntra* and the *Tantrasadbhāva* and the *Jayadrathayāmala*:

In [the *Tantrasadbhāva*] 9.376b and in 9.380d the *prasenā* is said to enable or accomplish ten or seven *karmas* respectively. This presumably intends a list comparable to that found in a similar *prasenā* teaching in the *Jayadrathayāmala*:¹²⁶

Jayadrathayāmala's *Indīvarīkālīvidhi*, 2.17:

Bewitching, attraction, causing hate, killing, driving away etc., paralysing, stupefaction, bestowing courage, warding off of poison and thunderbolts, subduing serpents (or elephants), destruction of enemies, stopping the motion of ships, wagons or machines, or of celestial bodies.¹²⁷ [The [adept] will undoubtedly succeed [in these], Oh Goddess, as a consequence of the undefiled path of *yoga*!]

In the *Hevajratāntra*'s second chapter we encounter an, albeit longer, very similar list of abilities achieved through mantric powers: **bewitching** (*vaśya*), **driving away** (*uccāṭana*), **paralysing** (*stambhana*), **causing hate** (*dveṣa*), assaulting (*abhicāruka*), **attraction** (*ākarṣaṇa*), **killing** (*māraṇa*), rain-making (*varṣāyana*),¹²⁸ breaking up of clouds (*meghasphāṭana*), breaking up of gods (*devasphāṭana*), igniting fever (*tāpajvalana*), causing someone to vomit alcohol (*madyodgiraṇa*), controlling lustful women (*pramadāvaśīkaraṇa*), controlling the moon and sun (*candrasūryavaśīkaraṇa*) and the chasing away of various animals (*palāyana*).

While not corresponding completely 1:1, the parallels down to the vocabulary used are undeniable. If we consider this a syncretic list, then taking the stopping of the sun and moon as “stopping of the motion of celestial bodies” that will make seven *karmas*—exactly the same number of one of the sets referred to in the *Tantrasadbhāva*. What is more, the chapter of the *HT* ends with a ritual that is essentially a *prasenā* in all but name (which I discuss in the respective section on the *tantra*) and the *HT* further states, that the ritual is done “for the sake of achieving what one wants” (*arthasādhanaṛthaṃ*). While the common function of finding a thief and/or one's lost things is listed in the text immediately after, the comparison with Śaiva texts such as the *Tantrasadbhāva* and the *Jayadrathayāmala* shows that the

¹²⁵ See Vasudeva 2014: 380; Text under Muktabodha NGMCP B 173/22, NAK 3-30.

¹²⁶ Also known as the *Śiraścheda*. See Sanderson 2009: 45.

¹²⁷ *vaśyākarṣaṇavidveṣa māraṇoccāṭanādikam | stambhaṃ stobhaṃ tathotsāhaṃ viṣāśaninivāraṇam | nāganigrahaṃ atyugraṃ ripucakravighātanam | nāvāśakaṭayantrāṇāṃ stambhanam divyasamtateḥ | siddhyanty akleśato devi yogamārgān na saṃśayaḥ* | (Vasudeva 2014: 381).

¹²⁸ I am taking “stopping of the motion of celestial bodies” to be somewhat elaborated in the *Hevajratāntra*, with the stopping of the moon, sun, dispersing of clouds etc.

prasenā being at the end of the chapter is very likely not a coincidence, but indeed actually implies that the powers enumerated in that same chapter are attainments one achieves as a result of it. This is also explained by the last verse of the chapter, again, closely paralleling in meaning the line in *Jayadrathayāmala* above:

¹²⁹Thanks to the powers¹³⁰ of Vajrā, Gaurī, Vārī, Vajraḍākinī, Nairātmikā,¹³¹ Bhūcarī and Khecarī the adept performs [the rituals] of paralysing and so forth.

Not only does the comparison with Śaiva texts provide new insights into the *Hevajratāntra*, but also shows compelling evidence of extensive borrowing between the Buddhist *Mantranaya* and the Śaiva *Mantramārga*, and especially in the context of *prasenā* and the complex of motifs related to it. This phenomenon is also to be found in the much earlier *Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa* (2.68) where one of the *yakṣiṇīs* has the power to paralyse one's enemies.¹³²

“This particular combination of seeing, hearing, and smelling was an important factor in the emergence of a *prasenā* too, for these sensory aspects of the vision are affirmed even in the invocatory mantra of the *Tantrasadbhāva* (before 9.375) given below:

¹³³“I see your body, I hear [you] clearly, I myself can smell [you].”

These literary sources highlight the brightness of the *prasenā*, who appears as a radiant female dressed in white, while Śaiva sources invoke *prasenās* with Vidyās of the ferocious Goddess Caṇḍikā, who in the *Tantrasadbhāva* is given the epithets “red one” (*rāktā*, *piṅgalī*).¹³⁴

Accounts of *prasenās*, occasionally even detailed cycles of worship, such as the *Prasenācakreśvarīvidhāna* of the *Jayadrathayāmala*, recur in later Śaiva and Śākta works, and evidently not all of these can be directly derived from the *Niśvāsa* corpus.¹³⁵

It is further possible that other, now no longer traceable, early *Mantramārga* sources may have existed. This possibility is made more likely by the existence of a substantial body of Buddhist *Mantranaya* materials concerning *pratisenās*,

¹²⁹ *vajrā gaurī ca vārī ca vajraḍākinī nairātmikā |
bhūcarī khecarī yogāt stambhanādīn kared vratī || HT 1.2.34 ||.*

¹³⁰ Or, alternatively, “thanks to the union with.”

¹³¹ The *Muktāvalī* indicates an instrumental here: *bdag med ma zhes ba ni bdag med mas bya'o*.

¹³² See *The Case of Tumburu*.

¹³³ *asvakāyaṃ paśyāmi bādham śṛṇomi svayaṃ jighrāmi |*

¹³⁴ Vasudeva 2014: 375-377.

¹³⁵ Vasudeva 2014: 378.

first surveyed in Orofino (Orofino 1994), some of which have identifiable parallels with the Śaiva materials.¹³⁶

A preliminary, composite account is found in Smith (Smith 2006: 421ff.) who bases himself on unpublished materials provided by Sanderson. As Smith notes, in the most common case Śaiva mantras are used to induce a benign trance (*svasthāveśa*) in a young girl or boy who then acts as a medium. To demonstrate how brief the instructions can be we can look at a late (12th cent.?) *Saiddhāntika* scripture, the *Br̥hatkāḷottara*, that teaches a paradigmatic procedure:

¹³⁷[The mantra is:] O Red-lipped one! O Mātāṅgī! O mother of the ghosts! Descend! Descend! Come! Show, show! Bring the thief! Seize him! With this mantra flowers should be offered to the head of two virgins on the day of summoning. Purified after bathing at noon on the second day, facing north, one should rub one's own left thumb with amla [oil while reciting] one's own mantra. Thereafter one should smear it with thick lac and abundantly offer flowers to the head of the two virgins and show them the thumb. [One of them] tells of the theft.¹³⁸

Trying to use *prasenā* rituals/deities for either the dating or the derivation of textual passages should probably be undertaken with significant caution. While the rituals and themes do possess distinct differences in their details, the general framework of the *prasenā* spiritual technology does not really change all that much, regardless of tradition or era. This is further evidence of both the ubiquity and the remarkable resilience of the practice (or, at the very least, the notion) of *prasenā*. The details of the different rituals could, however, be some indication of the truthfulness of the practice's transmission.

Here we see that *prasenā*-derived ritual and notions of visionary experiences (and *prasenā* itself in varied guises) can also be found in *saiddhāntika* material,¹³⁹ naturally without the soteriological connotation found in texts such as the *Jayadrathayāmala*. In a letter from 2015, Sanderson gives a short commentary on a passage from the

¹³⁶ Vasudeva 2014: 378-9.

¹³⁷ *raktoṣṭhi mātaṅgi bhūtamātṛ avatara ehi ādars[ā]dars[ā]vahi cauraṃ grhṇāpaya enam. anena mantr[na] kumārīdvaya[sya] mūrdhni puṣpāṇy āmantraṇadine deyāni. dvitīye 'hni madhyāhnasamaye snātvā śucinottara mukhenāmladravyeṇa svamāntreṇa svavāmāṅguṣṭhaṃ vimardya tad anu ghanālaktakenopalipya bhūyaḥ sa kumārīdvayasyānena mantr[na] śirasi puṣpāṇi dattvāṅguṣṭhaṃ darśayet. cauraṃ kathayati.* (*Br̥hatkāḷottara* N1 = NAK 1-273, fol. 321v:32; Vasudeva 2014: 379-10).

¹³⁸ Vasudeva 2014: 379-10.

¹³⁹ Vasudeva 2014: 379-10.

*Jayadrathayāmala*¹⁴⁰ which details the attainment of powers through the *vidyā* of Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī:

As the fruit of a Sādhana of certain Vidyās in a Rudrasthāna or a temple of the Mothers (*mātr̥gr̥ham*) the deity of the Vidyā appears before the Sādhaka as a *prasenā* on the surface of water, a metal pot, a sword-blade, in the flame of a lamp, in a mirror, the eye of a girl, the sun, the moon, his own thumb smeared with oil, or within his body in the point of light between his brows, and there reveals the answer he seeks. The answer may take the form of apparitional writing or a disembodied voice, or it may be uttered by a young boy or girl placed in a trance for this purpose (cf. *svasthāveśaḥ*) or it may appear to such a medium in one of the aforesaid substrates, or it may arise in the Sādhaka's mind when he awakes after a night spent in a temple of the deity

In this passage we can see very clearly the appropriation of the *prasenā* within Śaiva yogic practice. Here, there is a curious hybridisation between the possession of the *yogin* and the maiden. The *prasenā* is clearly explained to be the image of the goddess Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī. The ritual is to take place at a temple of Rudra (Śiva) or a temple of the Mothers (*mātr̥gr̥ham*). Besides the usual reflective objects, here we encounter the eyes of the maiden (a detail not specified elsewhere) where it can appear, yet she must nonetheless be placed in a trance, referred to by the same term used for the state of possession of a Kāpalika initiate (*svasthāveśa*). Crucially, the *prasenā* “may arise in the Sādhaka's mind when he awakes after a night spent in a temple of the deity”¹⁴¹—a direct connection with the notion of sleeping as a segway into divine visionary experiences and a very close parallel to what we read in the *Tattvavaiśārādī*. It has to be noted, however, that although the form of Maheśvara is seen in a dream in the *bimba* of the moon, it is then used for cultivation after, which sounds much more *saiddhāntika*, lacking any direct soteriological significance of the state of possession, but nonetheless regarding the dream experience of Maheśvara as revelatory and a proper subject for cultivation (*bhāvanā*). When this fails, however, the *Mantramārga* texts prescribe precisely the performance of *prasenā* for the sake of seeking a solution:

The *Niśvāsaguhya* 3.24–2743

¹⁴²But, if the *sādhaka* does not see any auspicious or inauspicious sign in his dream, he should invoke a *Prasīnā* by reciting at least ten thousand times: *om*

¹⁴⁰ “*Vidyāvidyeśvarīcakre* (ff. 106v4-126v6) of SaTka 2, *Netrasāadhanādhikāraḥ*, ff. 124r4-125r9. The propitiation of the Vidyā of Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī known as Vidyāvidyeśvarī enables *nāgasāadhanam*. F. 125r5-9” (Sanderson 2015: 5).

¹⁴¹ Sanderson 2015: 5.

¹⁴² *śubhāśubham na dṛṣṭam tu svapne vai sādhakena tu |*
prasīnān kārayet tatra japtvā ayutam uttamam || 3:24||
om caṇḍike krama krama tathā | caṇḍimantro 'yam|

caṇḍike krama krama svāhā. This is the mantra of Caṇḍī [that must be used]. After reciting the mantra of Caṇḍī he should mix oil and lac and [then] smear his thumb while mantrically empowering the oil. After washing the faces of a boy and a girl he should make them look [at the thumb]. Eating sesame and rice they see what the problem is. After [they have seen [it, the *sādhaka*,] hearing [it from them], should master the best of mantras.

The *Tantrasadbhāva* 9.375–379

The ninth chapter of the *Tantrasadbhāva*, which teaches the initiatory rite (*saṃyadīkṣā*) for samayin neophytes, the lowest rank in a hierarchy of four initiates, calls these oracular apparitions *prasannā*. They appear again in a secondary, prognosticatory function, to be summoned only if the usual dream prognostication has failed.”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁴Now I will reveal another [method of prognostication], the supreme Prasannā procedure. [The mantra to be used is:]

¹⁴⁵[Basic ritual:]

Oṃ Homage to Caṇḍikā! O bringer of yoga! Come forth! Come forth! Greatly beguile! Beguile! O face/mouth of yoga! O mistress of yoga! O supporter of great Māyā! possess! Possess! O beloved of the ghosts/lover of ghosts! I see [your] own body. I clearly hear! I myself can smell. I see all the worlds. Hurry! Hurry! Be successful! Be successful! svāhā!

After becoming pure in a Śaiva temple one should recite the mantra ten thousand times. The spell is mastered and enables ten actions. He should make a girl or a boy look at the moon, the sun, [the blade of] a sword, a mirror, a

caṇḍimantram tu yo japtvā tailālakṭakasamṃyutam || 3:25||
aṅguṣṭham mraṅśayed vāmaṃ tailaṃ caivābhimantrayet |
dārikāṇ ca kumāraṇ ca mukhaṃ prakṣālya vīkṣayet || 3:26||
tilataṇḍulabhakṣantau paśyantau yat tu cintitam |
tato dṛṣṭvā ca śrutvā ca sādhyen mantrasattamam || 3:27||

¹⁴³ Vasudeva 2014: 380-81.

¹⁴⁴ *athānyat saṃpravakṣyāmi prasannāvidhim uttamam |* [fol. N1 52r, N2 96v] (Vasudeva 2014: 382).

¹⁴⁵ [prakṛtiḥ:] *oṃ namaś caṇḍikāyai yogavāhini pravartta pravartta mahāmohaya mohaya yogamukhi*
yogeśvari mahāmāyādhārīṇi hiri 2 bhūtapriye svakāyaṃ paśyāmi bādhaṃ śṛṇomi svayaṃ jighrāmi
sarvalokāni paśyāmi turu 2 sādhyā 2 svāhā ||
rudrasthāne śucir bhūtvā sahasrā daśa yojayet ||375||
siddhā bhavati sā vidyā daśa karmāṇi kārayet |
candre sūrye 'thavā khadge darpaṇe vātha dīpake ||376||
aṅguṣṭhe vā ghaṭe vāpi dārikāṃ66 vātha dārakam |
paśyāpayaty asaṃdehāt tilād vā taṇḍulād ataḥ ||377||
bhūtaṃ bhavyaṃ bhaviṣyaṃ ca pr cchataḥ kathayanti hi |
atha vidyāṃ samāvartya rajanyāṃ svapayec chuciḥ ||378||
svayaṃ eva prapaśyeta svapnānte yac chubhāśubham | (Vasudeva 2014: 382).

lamp, a thumb, or a pot [of water]. Immediately, or after [feeding them] sesame and rice, they reveal the past, present and future to the questioner. Then he should dismiss the mantra[-deity] and sleep after purifying himself. At the end of his sleep/dreams he will see the positive and negative prognosis himself.

¹⁴⁶[Inflection 1:]

Om! O red one! O red-thumb[ed one]! O crackling one! Descend! Descend! O flesh-eater! Tell! Tell! Make [her/him] tell! Make [her/him] tell! svāhā! In a sword[-blade], in a mirror, or in a thumb, O fairfaced one, the virgin sees all the positive and negative prognosis, the good outcome and the bad.

¹⁴⁷[Inflection 2:]

Om O tawny one! O consort of Paśupati! O exalted spell! svāhā! This spell, O great goddess, accomplishes seven actions.

¹⁴⁸[Inflection 3:]

Om O red one! O Passionless one! Descend! Descend! O Mātāṅgī! svāhā! This spell performs action that is ninefold. After empowering it with seven [repetitions] one should place one's hand on one's own chest, and, by the power of this mantra, one will know [what is sought] oneself.

¹⁴⁹[Inflection 4:]

Om Homage to Caṇḍikā! Descend! Descend! Hurry! Hurry! svāhā! After cleansing himself and abstaining [from food etc.] he should recite [the mantra] one hundred and eight times. Descending at night in a dream [the goddess] will reveal positive and negative prognoses.

¹⁵⁰[Conclusion:]

¹⁴⁶ [vikṛtiḥ 1:]

om rakte raktāṅguṣṭhe ucchuṣṭe avatara avatara piśācini kathaya kathaya kathāpaya kathāpaya svāhā |
khaḍgamādarśake vātha aṅguṣṭhe vā varānane |
paśyati kanyakā sarvaṃ śubhāśubhaṃ phalāphalam ||379|| [N2 57r] (Vasudeva 2014: 383).

¹⁴⁷ [vikṛtiḥ 2:]

om piṅgali pāśupati mahāvidye svāhā |
eṣā vidyā mahādevi karma kurvati saptadhā ||380|| (Vasudeva 2014: 383).

¹⁴⁸ [vikṛtiḥ 3:]

om namaś caṇḍikāyai avatara 2 turu 2 svāhā |
sopavāsaḥ śucir bhūtvā aṣṭotkṣ ṣṭaśataṃ japet |
rātrau svapne tv avatīrya kathayed yac chubhāśubham ||383|| (Vasudeva 2014: 383).

¹⁴⁹ [vikṛtiḥ 3:] om namaś caṇḍikāyai avatara 2 turu 2 svāhā |

sopavāsaḥ śucir bhūtvā aṣṭotkṣ ṣṭaśataṃ japet |
rātrau svapne tv avatīrya kathayed yac chubhāśubham ||383|| (Vasudeva 2014: 383).

¹⁵⁰ [sāmānyavidhiḥ:]

sarvāsāṃ caiva vidyānāṃ caṇḍikāgr ham āśritaḥ |
daśasāhasriko jāpyas tataḥ karmāṇi kārayet ||384|| [N1 52v] (Vasudeva 2014: 383).

For all of these spells one should go to a temple of Caṇḍikā, and recite ten thousand times. Afterwards one should have the rites performed.

Prasenā in Early Buddhist Tantric Texts

The Subāhuparipṛcchātantra

One of the oldest Buddhist tantric sources on *prasenā* available to date are the *Subāhuparipṛcchātantra* (*The Questions of Subāhu*; Toh. 805) which dates to the 7th century CE and was translated into Chinese (T 895) in 726 CE¹⁵¹ and then again at the end of the 11th century CE (T 896)¹⁵² as well as its anonymous commentary (Toh. 2671), where a similar ritual is described. There we find the following preparation instructions (described in Orofino 1994):

One must propitiate the “fierce female spirits that eat human flesh” (*sha za’i gnod sbyin mo*), by burning as an offering to them the blood and flesh in a cemetery while shouting aloud, as well as being in sexual union while maintaining non-emission of the semen, lest one should anger the *piśāci*. If presided over by *nāgas*, the offerings are more peaceful (sugar, milk, etc.) The vessel for the deity (boy or girl) should be prepared by being washed, dressed in white clothes. They should be young, with no deformities, with clear skin and eyes, pointed canine teeth and a face like the moon. Then, sitting on a *kuśa* grass mat facing east, mantras should be recited. Afterwards, cleaning the mirror, one should concentrate on the medium a set number of times, reciting mantras mentally. At this point the medium, facing westward, will be able to see future and past and things far away with “the eyes of the divinity” (*lha’i mig / divyalocana*).¹⁵³

The *Subāhuparipṛcchātantra* lists different methods for the calling down of a deity in various objects, among them effigies. Certain signs would appear if the ritual was a success, such as the effigy moving its facial features, flowers raining from the sky, a fragrance being perceived or celestial music heard. Sometimes the deity may manifest out of thin air, in which case it should be propitiated and subsequently dispatched in the prescribed manner after the officiant has presented their request:¹⁵⁴

[The deity] may be invited to abide in a finger, a bronze mirror, clear water, a sword-blade, the flame of a lamp, or a jewel; or in a hollow statue, a child, a pearl, or a piece of flint. Into such a lodging [*prasenā*] will come if one invokes him, and he will at once explain things in the heavens or among men, as well as matters of past, present, and future; all things good and evil throughout all

¹⁵¹ Van Schaik 2020: 128.

¹⁵² Strickmann 2002: 211.

¹⁵³ Orofino 1994: 614.

¹⁵⁴ Strickmann 2002: 211.

the three ages he will explain in detail. But if there is some error in the ritual, if there are too few or too many syllables in the mantra or if it is not recited correctly; if you do not have total, wholehearted faith, if you do not make the necessary offerings, or if the place is not pure or the weather not fair; or again, if the child's bodily signs are either deficient or in excess—should any of these conditions obtain, the [*senā*] will not descend.¹⁵⁵

Choose the eighth or the fourteenth or the fifteenth day of the white fortnight [i.e., when the moon is waxing, not waning]. Fast on that day, and prepare with cow dung a ritual area the size of a stretched-out ox's hide. Bathe the child, dress him in a pure white garment, and seat him in the middle. Make offerings to him with flowers and incense, then you yourself should enter the area and sit on rush-grass, facing east. If you wish the figures to show themselves in a mirror, first rub the mirror clean with ashes from a Homa fire performed by a chaste brahman, rubbing the mirror seven, eight, or up to ten times. Suspend the mirror above the *maṇḍala* [that is, the ritual area], have the child gaze up at it, and he will see things beyond the world of mortals. To do the same with a sword-blade, proceed as in the case of a mirror. If you want the child to see things good or evil on the surface of his fingers, first rub his fingers clean with purple ore water, then apply fragrant oil, and good or evil things will immediately manifest themselves. If you wish it to descend into a jewel or a pearl and be seen there, first sprinkle the jewel or pearl with pure water, concentrate fully, recite the mantra, and all forms will instantly be manifested therein. Item: If you wish a divine image to be the vehicle, make offerings with flowers and it shall manifest itself at once. The same is true of a lamp-flame. And the spirit will even come to you in your dreams to explain various things.¹⁵⁶

The *mantra* given later by the *Subāhupariṣṭchātāntra* for the final call to the deity leaves little doubt as to the connection between spirits of possession related to diseases, one's own experience of the deity and their implementation in tantric ritual: *gr̥ha āveśa kṣipra* ("Take possession quickly!").¹⁵⁷ The text further specifies that the recitation of the mantra thousands of times is done in case the *prasenā* deity does not descend or one makes a mistake during preparing for the ritual—a structure similar to the prescription given in Śaiva texts if one's dream divination fails.

The *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*

Written and expanded between the 7th and the 8th centuries CE, considered to be the foundational *tantra* of the Yoga class—the second in the ascending hierarchy of the

¹⁵⁵ Strickmann 2002: 211-212.

¹⁵⁶ Strickmann 2002: 211-212.

¹⁵⁷ Strickmann 2002: 213.

Mantranaya—the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* is a text crucial for demonstrating the syncretism between Buddhist ideas and *prasenā*-related Kaula practices. In it

we find the beginning of a process of assimilation of Śākta-Śaiva language, practices, iconography, and concepts that would become ever more comprehensive throughout the rest of the Mantranaya's creativity. Here we find for the first time the requirement that candidates enter a state of possession (*āveśaḥ*) at the time of their initiation. This feature, which is altogether alien to antecedent Buddhism, is the hallmark of initiation in the Śaiva Kaula systems, setting them apart from all others.¹⁵⁸

The Vajrācārya puts the candidate into a state of possession, has him cast a flower on to the *maṇḍala* to determine from the section on which it falls the Mantra-deity from which he will obtain Siddhi, and then, while he is still in this state, removes his blindfold to reveal the *maṇḍala*. He then consecrates him with scented water from a *mantra*-empowered vase, places a *vajra* in his hand, and gives him his initiation-name (*vajranāma*). The immediate effects of the possession are described as follows:¹⁵⁹

¹⁶⁰As soon as he becomes possessed supernatural knowledge arises [in him]. Through this knowledge he understands the thoughts of others; he knows all matters past, future and present; his heart becomes firm in the teachings of the Tathāgatas; all his sufferings cease; he is free from all dangers; no being can kill him; all the Tathāgatas enter-and-empower him; all Siddhis approach him; unprecedented joys arise [in him], causing spontaneous delight, pleasure, and happiness. In some these joys give rise to meditation-states, in some to [the mastery of] Dhāraṇīs, in some to the fulfilment of every hope, and in some to the state of identity with all the Tathāgatas.

and, after the blindfold has been removed:

As soon as he sees the Great Maṇḍala he is entered-and-empowered by all the Tathāgatas and Vajrasattva dwells in his heart. He sees various visions of orbs of light and miraculous transformations. Because he has been entered and empowered by all the Tathāgatas sometimes the Lord Vajradhara or the

¹⁵⁸ Sanderson 2009: 133.

¹⁵⁹ Sanderson 2009: 134.

¹⁶⁰ *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, section 226: *āviṣṭamātrasya divyaṃ jñānam utpadyate | tena jñānena paracittāny avabudhyati sarvakāryāṇi cātītānāgatavartamānāni jñāti hṛdayaṃ cāsyā dṛḍhībhavati sarvatathāgataśāsane sarvaduḥkhāṇi cāsyā praṇaśyanti sarvabhayavigataś ca bhavaty avadhyāḥ sarvasattveṣu sarvatathāgatāś cādhiṭṭhanti sarvasiddhayaś cāsyābhimukhībhavantiapūrvāṇi cāsyākāraṇahars.aratiprīṭikarāṇi sukhāny utpadyante | taiḥ sukhaiḥ keṣāṃcit samādhayo nīspadyante keṣāṃcid dhāraṇyaḥ keṣāṃcit sarvāśāparipūrayo yāvāt keṣāṃcit sarvatathāgatatvam api nīspadyata iti |* (Sanderson 2009: 134).

Buddha appears to him in his true form. From that time forth he attains all his goals, every desire of his mind, all Siddhis, up to the state of Vajradhara or the Tathāgatas.

We may note that the name Hevajra, that of the second major deity of the Yoginītantras, appears to have a similar origin, having been conjured up from the Mantra HE VAJRA PAŚYA 'O Vajra[-being], behold!' that is uttered when the blindfold is removed from the candidate's eyes in the presence of the Maṇḍala (*Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, section 230).¹⁶¹

Further, Ānandagarbha in his *Sarvavajrodaya* tells of how the novice is put into a state of possession by the deity at initiation and how, just in the Kaula variant, this happening is a must. Should possession not occur, he prescribes fire ritual for expiation to be done by the *vajrācārya* and should then possession still not take hold, the novice should not be given initiation at all.¹⁶²

In the *Padminī* commentary to HT 1.9.16 there is a similar formulation:

¹⁶³Whatever the world is bound with,
The bondage will be released by that very thing.
People are deluded and do not know true reality.
Bereft of true reality, they will not attain accomplishment. (HT 1.9.16)¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁵"Whatever" [means] *skandhas*, desire, and so forth. Through them worldly beings are bound, and that includes suffering through karma, defilements, and so on. "By that very thing" [means] that through the purification of the *skandhas*, desire, and so forth, there is freedom from bondage. "People are deluded and do not know true reality" because they have become deluded.¹⁶⁶ If one wonders because of what, therefore he said "bereft of true reality,"¹⁶⁷ because one does not know that entities are like illusions and pure in terms of

¹⁶¹ Sanderson 2009: 135.

¹⁶² Sanderson 2009: 135.

¹⁶³ *yena tu yena tu badhyati lokas tena tu tena tu bandhanam muñcet ||
loko muhyati vetti na tattvam tattvavivarjita siddhim na lapsyet || HT 1.9.16 ||*

¹⁶⁴ Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

¹⁶⁵ Dége 1181 [ff. 146.b] /**gang dang gang gis** zhes pa ni gang dang gang gis ni phung po dang 'dod chags la sogs pas 'jig rten pa bcings te/las dang nyon mongs pa la sogs pas sdug bsngal dang nye bar ldan pa'o//**de dang de nyid kyis** zhes pa ni phung po dang 'dod chags la sogs pa dag pas bcings pa las grol ba'o// **de'i phyir 'jig rten rmongs pas** zhes pa ni rmongs par 'gyur ba yis so//gang las snyam pa la//gang gi phyir **de nyid rig pa med** ces pa ni dngos po rnam sgyu ma lta bu dang de bzhin nyid kyi bdag nyid du rnam par dag pa mi shes pas so//**mi shes pas de kho na nyid spangs te nam yang dngos grub thob pa ma yin no**//de'i phyir, de kho na nyid yongs su shes pa yang dri la sogs pa'i dngos po yod pa ma yin no/

¹⁶⁶ The quotation of the *Padminī* interprets *loko muhyati* as being the cause of *vetti na tattvam*, saying **de'i phyir 'jig rten rmongs pas**. The present indicative third person singular has been explained here as a past participle of √*muh*.

¹⁶⁷ The *Padminī* reads: "he does not know true reality" (*de nyid rig pa med*).

their suchness. Not knowing it, they are bereft of true reality and will never attain accomplishment. (P)¹⁶⁸

What is particularly relevant here is that earlier in the same chapter it says:

¹⁶⁹Bhūcarī is explained to be related to tangible objects;
And Khecarī to the *dharmadhātu*.
Those united with Reality will always succeed,
Through the purity of these [goddesses]. (HT 1.9.11)

Furthermore, the *Padminī* (F. 147a) says at the end of the 9th chapter “Meditating on true reality in such a way will be without reward when not empowered” which further parallels the special kind of perception of reality after an empowerment, which is, as we saw in some prominent cases, regarded as possession by the deity.

There is a description in the *HT*:

¹⁷⁰You should take, O great being, a goddess
Who grants pleasure and accomplishment,
One who can take any form pleasing to the mind.
Having found her, make offerings to her. (HT 2.12.3)

The wisdom [thus obtained] is very subtle—
It is the sky-like essence of the vajras,
Stainless, liberating, and peaceful.
It is your father that is you yourself. (HT 2.12.4)¹⁷¹

Here a parallel is noticeable between the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* and the use of *prasenā* in Śaiva *Mantramārga* texts.

In the *Niśvāsaguhya* and the *Tantrasabhāva*, on the other hand, the original idea of finding thieves is missing. Instead, *prasenās* have been co-opted to support the prognostications required when an initiation (*dīkṣā*) has failed to yield the desired results. The instructions are added as an appendix to the

¹⁶⁸ Translation courtesy of the Vienna Buddhist Studies Translation group under the auspices of “84,000—Translating the Words of the Buddha;” (forthcoming; used with permission).

¹⁶⁹ *sparśe ca bhūcarī khyātā khecarī dharmadhātutaḥ |*
sadā hy āsām viśuddhyā tu siddhyanti tattvayogināḥ || HT 1.9.11||

¹⁷⁰ *ratidāṃ siddhidāṃ devīm viśvarūpāṃ manoramām |*
grhṇa grhṇa mahāsattva grhītvā pūjanam kuru || HT 2.12.3 ||
idam jñānam mahāsūkṣmam vajramaṇḍam nabhopamam ||
virajam mokṣadam śāntam pitā te tvam asi svayam || HT 2.12.4 ||

¹⁷¹ Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

ritual of initiation as a secondary method to be attempted is the usual dream divination has not yielded any results.¹⁷²

Nor is possession restricted in the *Sarvatathāgatasamgraha* to the context of initiation. The term *āveśaḥ* is used repeatedly in the text to denote the state that the practitioner must induce in himself in order to accomplish both his Siddhis and his enlightenment, typically in the compound *vajrāveśaḥ*. ‘possession by Vajra’. For example:

For by means of possession by [Vajra]sattva enlightenment will quickly be attained.

[. . .]

When he has given rise to *āveśaḥ* in this way whatever form he meditates on as

his own will automatically become Buddha in form.

[. . .]

When vajr *āveśaḥ* has arisen he should visualize the water as an embodiment of

the Vajra. Quickly achieving success he will be able to walk on [that] water.

[. . .]

Once he has generated *vajrāveśaḥ*, if with concentrated mind he makes a slight

clap with his palms in the Vajrāñjali [gesture] he can subject to his control even a

mountain.

[. . .]

Likewise, by virtue of the practice of *āveśaḥ*, if he stretches out [his hands in] the

Vajra gesture and strikes together the tips of his fingers he can kill a hundred families.¹⁷³

In the *Hevajra* as well as the earlier Buddhist tantras, elements of *prasenā*, and most prominently the embodying of a deity’s qualities by the aspirant, are common. Even in the texts where vajra possession (*vajrāveśa*) is crucial for initiation which is, in fact, impossible without it manifesting in the disciple, such as the *Sarvatathāgatattvasamgraha*, it is soteriologically relevant in the sense that it is a step on the path.

The blindfolding of the disciples before they are given initiation is also present in the *Hevajratantra* (2.5.52):

¹⁷² Vasudeva 2014: 380-81.

¹⁷³ Sanderson 2009: 139.

¹⁷⁴Blindfolded [first],
They (the novitiates) are then shown the *maṇḍala*.
Empowerment is bestowed upon them
At midnight, in an empty temple. (2.5.62)¹⁷⁵

The practice of *prasenā* itself is, however, relegated to the very end of the second chapter of the first book, where it is explained with but a few sparse sentences and only referred to by essentially a Saiva term for it (*jyotiṣa*) with *vajra* stuck to the front of it to "buddhify" it—quite a common practice of incorporation into Buddhism. The commentaries by Ṭaṃkadāsa (*Hevajratāntrarājaṭīkā Suviśuddhasamputa*¹⁷⁶) and Vṛddhakāyastha (*Suviśuddhasamputaṭīkā*¹⁷⁷) which are almost identical in their contents, however make the crucial assertion that the maiden is possessed by none other than Hevajra's consort Nairātmyā.¹⁷⁸

Even though Sanderson does not make the connection between *prasenā* and (*svasth*)*āveśa* in his monumental *The Śaiva Age*, the similarity or even sameness of the two has been noticed by Somadeva Vasudeva in his 2014 article on the topic of *prasenā* in Śaiva sources. Only through a re-examination of the valuable material Sanderson presents, this time with *prasenā* and its characteristics in mind, does it become stunningly clear how embedded some *prasenā*-derived elements of "liturgical morphology," as Sanderson puts it, must have been in the Kāpālīka Atimārga, whose adherents "defined liberation as arising from a state of possession (*āveśaḥ*) by the qualities of the deity, analogous to the state of one who is possessed by a Bhūta."¹⁷⁹

Not only does this definition bear striking resemblance to the practises found in the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras, where the aspirant cultivates his perception of himself as the principal deity, but also harkens back to the possession of devotees or even of unsuspecting passers-by by the spirits who reside in trees, such as we will see described in the *Jātakas*. In the commentaries to the *Hevajratāntra* we will encounter a precedent for the consort of the main deity of a *tantra* being indeed capable to be made to possess a maiden and answer the questions of the ritual officiant. In a Kālacakra context, the comparison of the *yogin*'s state after the successful completion of *prātyāhāra* with that of the maiden possessed by a *pratisenā* in the *Vimalaprabhā* and the *Sekoddeśa* is essentially the same as in the Kāpālīka Atimārga system. This is because it is indeed the *yogin*'s own mind having been consecrated (by means of the same ritual technology) as Viśvamātā (i.e. the Mahāmudrā) who bestows coemergent

¹⁷⁴ *akṣiṃ pracchādya vastreṇa paścān maṇḍaladarśanam |
abhiṣekaṃ dīyate tatra niśīthe vijane grhe || HT 2.5.62 ||*

¹⁷⁵ Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

¹⁷⁶ Toh. 1184; ff. 89b-90b.

¹⁷⁷ Toh. 1190 ff. 30b-31b.

¹⁷⁸ See *The Hevajratāntra's vajrajyotiṣa*.

¹⁷⁹ Sanderson 2009: 133.

bliss, hence her epithet as “Progenitrix of all the Buddhas” (*jananīm sarvabuddhānām*).¹⁸⁰ There are also parallels between the figure of Māyādevī, who is the biological mother of Gautama Buddha, and tree deities, which I deal with in some detail in the relevant section (*Alakta and the Metonymic Echo of Tree Deity Worship*). Thus the designation *jananī* is probably also no coincidence.¹⁸¹

In both the *Niśvāsaguhya* and the *Tantrasabhāva* a *prasenā* is used as a secondary means to dream prognostication in order to diagnose the reason for failed initiation (*dīkṣā*).¹⁸² However, at present no direct textual link can be established between the two. The “chronologically and doctrinally more removed” *Bṛhatkālottara* and *Jayadrathayāmala*, however, foreground “*prasenās* as the central deities of their own cycles of worship.”¹⁸³ The *prasenā* incorporated in the *Hevajratantra*, appears to be related much more directly to the tradition of the Krama (to which the *Jayadrathayāmala* belongs) and the Śaivasiddhānta (to which the *Bṛhatkālottara* belongs and which features a *prasenā* with an oiled thumb, as we saw above), which integrated *prasenā* in a central doctrinal role, rather than to that of the Trika (to which the *Tantrasabhāvatāntra* belongs), where it was looked at more as an occasionally useful heterodox practice.¹⁸⁴

Another compelling parallel is to be found in the *Yoginīsaṃcāra* section of the *Jayadrathayāmala*. Sanderson¹⁸⁵ explains that this section was probably either autonomous or part of a larger text added at a later date and possibly related to the lost *Yoginījālasaṃvara*, as it refers to itself by that name at the end of the *Yoginīsaṃcāra*. The text explains the various female deities representing the parts of the body, much like the *ṇāḍīs* are deities in the *Hevajratantra*, which, curiously enough refers to itself in a compellingly similar way at its very end as: “The Tantra of Śrī Hevajra, the concealed essence of the net of the *ḍākinīs*” (*śrīhevajraḍākinījālasaṃvaramahātāntra*). Even though the most *prasenā*-relevant section of the *HT* (Book 1, Chapter 2) appears more closely related to another section of the *Jayadrathayāmala* (the *Indīvarīkālīvidhi* 2.17), in light of this evidence one cannot help but wonder whether this is more than a mere coincidence—a question future research will hopefully help answer. Accounts of *prasenā* are also to be found in earlier influential tantric works such as the *Sarvabuddhasamayoga-ḍākinījālasaṃvara* and figure prominently in the *Lokeśvarakalpa*, the *Śrīparamādyā*, the *Guhyagarbha* and most of their commentaries, which fact shows the importance and need for more comprehensive, continued and in-depth study of the subject.

¹⁸⁰ VP 1.16.

¹⁸¹ To those who may question the possibility of a tantric relationship with one’s own mother—it is spoken of as possible in *Hevajratantra* 1.1.5 and 2.4.61.

¹⁸² Vasudeva 2014: 380.

¹⁸³ Vasudeva 2014: 86.

¹⁸⁴ Vasudeva 2014: 378; 386.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 2009: 187.

The Importance of *prasenā* in Tibet and its Use until the Present Day

Firstly, it has to be noted, that a comprehensive survey of *prasenā* (most commonly *pha phab* or *pra mo* in Classical Tibetan) in Tibet is a gargantuan task I could not possibly undertake here, and it could only ever be done justice in a treatise specially dedicated to it. For the sake of providing much needed historical context, however, it is important to attempt to at least draft a tentative overview.

In Tibet *prasenā* had many incarnations, both more closely resembling its Indian predecessors and less so, incorporating native Tibetan elements and/or innovations. The text of the *Lha 'dre bka'thang* recounts that *pra mo* (*prasenā*) was among the means used to divine the reason for the disasters that had befallen Tibet at the time of Khri srong lde bltsan before the coming of Padmasaṃbhava.¹⁸⁶ In the relatively late corpus of writings by Mipham rgya mtsho (1846-1912) we find *prasenā* mentioned numerous times: in the collections of *sGyu ma'i be bum* and the *sNgag kyi be bum* there are the *prasenā* rites of, among others, the goddesses Khros ma nag mo, dPal ldan lha mo and Tshe ring ma.¹⁸⁷ *Prasenā* was even used to divine the birthplace of the 14th Dalai lama in 1935 by means of the surface of the Lha-mo'i bla mtsho lake.¹⁸⁸ Strickmann recounts how Lama Chime Radha (head of the Tibetan section at the British Library) independently referred to the same use of *pra*. He also said that the mirror could be made of stone or metal and that one should lock oneself in a dark room with a single butter lamp remaining the only source of light in order to perform the divination. After three unsuccessful attempts, however, an alternative must be used.¹⁸⁹ Strickmann expresses a very strong opinion that “it very likely that the *Questions of Subāhu* was a primary scriptural source for this form of divination, in Tibet as well as in China and Japan.”¹⁹⁰

The prasena method of mirror divination became one of the most popular methods in Tibet, though it was also considered the most esoteric. Its uses ranged from everyday divination to the discovery of the rebirth of the Dalai Lamas. It was also used in the Tibetan medical tradition as a means of medical diagnosis.¹⁹¹

There is a marked difference between the “original” form of *prasenā* that was widely used in India and the type of practices that came to be popular in Tibet. One of the main crucial differences is the medium for the deity. In India, the medium was a person and the shiny object used in the divination was but a tool, serving as a medium

¹⁸⁶ Orofino 1994: 616.

¹⁸⁷ Orofino 1994: 616.

¹⁸⁸ Orofino 1994: 616.

¹⁸⁹ Strickmann 2002: 217.

¹⁹⁰ Strickmann 2002: 217.

¹⁹¹ Van Schaik 2020: 127.

for the deities to appear in, but not much else. In Tibet, however, the usual practice in many rituals is that the deity is invited into the object itself, even if there is a human medium present, such as in the spellbook of Dunhuang.¹⁹² This is a fact that brings further confusion to the topic of “reflection” and its relation to the topic of *prasenā* and to the terms *bimba* and *pra(tī)bhāsa*, with which it is closely connected. Or, it is perhaps one of the possible reasons for the apparent contemporary confusion on the issue (the other being the ambiguous translations into the Tibetan), especially since there has not been far-reaching diachronic research on the topic until now and the use of mainly niche Buddhist (be they Indian, Tibetan or Chinese) or Śaiva sources could provide some clarity on the topic only with great difficulty.

De Nebesky-Wojkowitz in his *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* lists several methods of divination that are either outright called *prasenā*-divination (*pra mo*) or prominently feature related elements, including in one instance even the mythical king Ge sar himself as the presiding deity. Among these is *tshe sgrub mda' dar*—a divination where a special arrow painted in red is stuck upside-down in a bowl of grain and from which a mirror is hung. De Nebesky-Wojkowitz further notes that the same kind of arrow is used in divination rituals involving Amitāyus, Padmasambhava or the goddess lHa mo gas dkar mo, and in the *tshe ring mched lnga'i pra mo* and for the *rdo rje g.yu sgron ma'i pra mo* divination rites.¹⁹³

Regarding the *Ge sar rgyal po'i pra mo*, he writes:

The way of its execution is said to be known among members of all the sects of Tibetan Buddhism. In order to perform this ceremony first [...] a painted-scroll bearing a picture of king Ge sar is hung up on a wall, and a table is placed below it. [...] Should no such painted-scroll be available, then either an image of *Ge sar*, his particular *gtor ma*, or a *phye mar* should be placed on the table. In front of one of these objects three cups are set filled with Tibetan beer, milk, and tea, and on the right side of the table a vessel is placed full of barley or wheat, into which a "divination arrow" has been stuck with its point downward. On the left side of the table comes another vessel filled with wheat or barley and bearing a well-polished mirror [made] of silver or bell-metal on top. The mirror is then covered with five pieces of silk, a red, white, yellow, green, and blue one. Should these five kinds of silk not be available, then one piece of silk may be used, which should be either red, yellow, or white. On no account black-coloured silk must be taken [...]. Finally one, three, or five butter-lamps are placed in front of the three cups previously mentioned.

¹⁹² Van Schaik 2020: 144.

¹⁹³ De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 365.

The priest who directs this ceremony should be a man who has gained great spiritual powers by practising *yoga*. He has to take his seat in front of the table, and after burning incense and offering a *gser skyems* he reads a litany in honour of king *Ge sar*, whose help he requests in order to bring the *mo* to a successful end. Then a boy is brought into the room where the ceremony is being performed and led to the table bearing the offerings. He should be about eight years old, and should come from a better-class family; on no account the services of the son of a butcher or a blacksmith must be engaged. The boy takes his seat on a white cushion in front of the mirror. The officiating priest now removes the five covers of silk, and the boy is asked to gaze for a while into the mirror. If the divination works well, the boy will soon claim that he sees various apparitions in the mirror. He has to describe these to the priest, who derives from the account of his helpmate the answer to the questions which the *Ge sar rgyal po pra mo* should clarify. Should the boy, however, claim that he sees only the reflection of his own face, then the priest will once more implore king *Ge sar* to grant an answer. If even the third attempt does not lead to a success, then recourse must be taken to other kinds of divination. In case that it is difficult to find a suitable young helpmate to participate in this ceremony, the officiating priest himself will try to recognize some apparition in the mirror. The same kind of divination can be performed with the help of a sword, in which case the various apparitions are supposed to become visible in the polished blade of the weapon.¹⁹⁴

Without digressing into unnecessary detail, we can clearly identify classic *prasenā*-related motifs such as the use of a young boy as a medium, the employment of a magically empowered mirror and even the fact that in place of a mirror a sword can also be used. We also see an explicit mentioning of the fact that if a young person is unavailable, the ritual officiant himself may attempt to fulfil that role. The Vajra Jade Protectress *prasenā* (*rdo rje g.yu sgron ma'i pra mo*) is conducted in a similar way, with some interesting details given about the ritual mirror having to be “adorned with five engraved dots arranged symmetrically in the form of a cross. In front of this vessel one should place a piece of crystal or, preferably, a small *stūpa* made of this material.”¹⁹⁵ We see a similar mirror on one of the murals in the kLu khang in Lhasa, as well as a similar depiction of a *bimba*. These passages are also noted by Strickmann.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 462-463.

¹⁹⁵ De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 464.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 2002: 216.



A *bimba*; north wall of the kLu khang temple, Lhasa, murals of the revealed treasures of Pema Lingpa. HAR.¹⁹⁷

Some revealed texts are even said to have been written with the help of *pra*, such as the *Secret Biography of Shabkar*. In Tendzin's *The Writings of Shabkar: A descriptive catalogue*, we find the following entry:

SH 3: *gsang ba'i rnam thar*. Vol. 2 (*kha*): 691-762. The esoteric biography. *rje btsun zhabs dkar rdo rje 'chang chen po'i gsang ba'i rtogs brjod mandarava'i phreng ba de kho na nyid snang ba 'phag ma'i zhal lung*. QH, 2002, Vol. 2: 645-700. (Original manuscript in *dbu med*, 21 folios, preserved at TK). The origin of this esoteric biography is rather unusual. Four years after Shabkar's death in 1855, his close disciple Kunzang Nyendrak (*kun bzang snyan grags*), who possessed the *siddhi* of clairvoyance, visited Yama Tashikhyil. He was there request by Sangye Rinchen to write the secret biography of Shabkar by means of *pra*, a method of divination using a mirror. Kunzang Nyendrak gladly complied with this request and, in 1856, committed to writing all that he had seen. The result is a unique secret biography describing the visions and meditative experiences enjoyed by Shabkar throughout his life.¹⁹⁸

There are also accounts in western literature about *pra* being commonly known by Tibetans at the beginning of the 20th century. Alexandra David-Neel in her book *My Journey to Lhasa* recounts a belief among the nomadic herders of Tibet that foreigners and certain lamas have the power of looking into a bowl of water and seeing, for

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/81786> (accessed 10.05.2022).

¹⁹⁸ Tendzin 2003: 7.

example, who has stolen something—essentially a textbook description of a *prasenā*. She recounts the following episode about being confronted with a band of thieves who wanted to test and see whether those stories were true:

"Do you know," asked Tsering of the three Tibetans, "who is the noble, reverend lady who travels with such a beautiful tent and wears a *toga* (kind of vest worn by lamas) of golden brocade?"

"Would she be the *philing* Jetsunma who lived in Jakyendo? We have heard about her."

"Yes, she is. And you understand that she does not fear robbers any more than wild beasts or any other thing. One who stole the least of her belongings would immediately be discovered and caught. In that case, she has only to look in a bowl full of water, and at once she sees in it the likeness of the thief, together with the stolen articles and the place where both are to be found."

"So it is really true," said the men. "All the *dokpas* say white foreigners have this power."

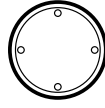
"Nothing is more certain," confirmed my head servant. Tsering was well acquainted with the story which was repeated among the cowmen, and he had cleverly taken advantage of it to frighten the robbers and to dissuade them from going to bring their friends to rob us a few days later.¹⁹⁹

The herdsmen, however, wanted to test whether this was true and falsely claimed that their horses had been stolen, requesting that the lama look into a bowl of water and tell them where the thieves and the stolen horses were. Her adopted son, who was also a lama, however had cleverly told the herders that the rite would take a long time and they were in a hurry, however that the lady lama would send the wrathful deity with whose help the rite was to be performed after the perpetrators. If, however, it found that there was no such thing, it would go after the false questioners. Later, the servant Tsering had stolen three rupees and David-Neel pretended to do the water bowl divination, knowing where he had hidden them, revealing his theft and curing him of his scepticism toward the rite.²⁰⁰

Naturally, David-Neel presents this anecdote as a purely empty ritual action with no effect whatsoever, which was however held to be true by many ordinary Tibetans. Even if the story never occurred, her telling it means that she was familiar with it. It is curious, however, that she states how it was believed all foreigners had the power, since the *pra* divination is something that has been regarded as esoterically prestigious in Tibet since the time of Padmasambhava. It is also possible she was familiar with the Buddhist texts (such as the *Sekoddeśa* and its commentaries) which recount such rites.

¹⁹⁹ David-Neel 1927: 229.

²⁰⁰ David-Neel 1927: 229-232.



The Mechanics of Divine Vision (*divyacakṣus*)

In early texts that feature some of the ideas later encountered in the Kālacakra corpus, Vajrapāṇi and Vajragarbha, in their respective commentaries to the allegedly abridged *Hevajratantra*—the *Laghutantraṭīkā* and the *Hevajratantrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*—relate that, among other means of supernatural perception (*abhijñā*), they possess divine vision (*divyacakṣus*) and divine hearing (*divyaśrotra*). This classification of *abhijñā* in relation to the five eyes (*pañcacakṣus*) is also addressed in the *Vimalaprabhā* (4.232).²⁰¹

Unlike cases of ritualised possession in Korea, Japan and China, which often include also possession by the spirits of both dead people and living sorcerers,²⁰² in India, possession, voluntary or forced, seems to have originally been the exclusive purview of nature spirits or deities. In Japan, the procedure for the externally induced possession with the purpose of diverting a malevolent spirit away from, usually, a woman in labour, involved a young girl or boy, though being afflicted with possession was not exclusive to such a 'patient.'²⁰³ The 'patient' was, however, neither a child, nor displayed any violent or radical signs of possession,²⁰⁴ like we see in some Indian examples of diseases caused by beings of the sort of the aforementioned deities.²⁰⁵

Of course, there have always been those who have spoken about the more esoteric flavours of Buddhism from the high moral pulpit of those with a preference for 'pure' established doctrine. This sentiment is not exogenous to Buddhism itself at all—in the *Dīghanikāya*, *prasenā* is called 'an improper way of making a livelihood' and later Kashmirian poet Kṣemendra would decry it as 'low-level sorcery', but the truth was that, even though some of the more intellectually-minded scholars and philosophers of the past looked down on such practices, the rites were both popular and widely practised, so much so that they survived for as long as historical Buddhism itself has, if not longer, very possibly having greatly predated it.

Strickmann, in his *Chinese Magical Medicine*,²⁰⁶ remarks the following on the sentiment of Ivan Morris dismissing such rites as incongruent with Buddhist doctrine and hence necessarily labelled as being unconnected to it:

²⁰¹ Sferra 2015: 342.

²⁰² Strickmann 2002: 194-195.

²⁰³ Strickmann 2002: 195-196.

²⁰⁴ Strickmann 2002: 196.

²⁰⁵ Bagchi 1941: 270-275.

²⁰⁶ Strickmann 2002.

These statements clearly illustrate the power of received ideas and the distorting effect of Western "logic." We are all supposed to know what Buddhist doctrine is: Was not Buddhism presented to the rationalistic nineteenth century as an enlightened, atheistic religion? Thus when we encounter any of the complex realities of Buddhist practice, we are forced to classify them as "anomalies." The problem here lies not with the eleventh-century Japanese and their supposed inability to make "rational distinctions," but with our own continuing ignorance about the actual substance of Buddhism in eleventh century Japan and throughout medieval and modern Asia.²⁰⁷

A full-fledged tantric system appeared in Chinese translations for the first time in the 8th century, succeeding a "proto-Tantric" literature consisting in

"Buddhist books of spells, or *dhāraṇī* scriptures, which are placed in an apocalyptic setting and which contain incantations suited to such demonridden times. [...] [I]t is important to note that there is no clear break in continuity between the proto-Tantric materials and the eighth-century synthesis. As early as the beginning of the sixth century, we find many of the elements that were to comprise the mature system floating, as if in suspension, in Chinese texts. There is an essential continuity and homogeneity running through all this material: It forms a distinct tradition."²⁰⁸

The "single, though complex, genetic stock," as Strickmann calls it, which gave birth to these esoteric Buddhist practices was, as we will see, not exclusive to Buddhism, but found its way into Śaivism and Jainism as well.

"Tantric Buddhism provided a flexible framework within which the most variegated local gods, cults, and practices could be assimilated within a Buddhist context."²⁰⁹

"This is the common trait of all forms of Tantric practice: The practitioner propitiates a deity, with whom he then proceeds to identify himself or otherwise unite. [...] This is the basic premise that underlay the entire Tantric revolution and that distinguished it from the Vedic and post-Vedic phases of Indian ritual on which it freely drew."²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Strickmann 2002: 197.

²⁰⁸ Strickmann 2002: 198-199.

²⁰⁹ Strickmann 2002: 201.

²¹⁰ Strickmann 2002: 201.

Within tantric Buddhist ritual the officiant

“follows the rules of Indian hospitality and enters into a host-guest relationship with his god. Having prepared and purified himself and the ritual area, he sends a carriage for the deity and then receives him as an honored guest. Water is given him to wash his feet, then more water to rinse his mouth. A seat is prepared and a meal offered, followed by music to delight the visitor. Perhaps the most common way of effecting this comprehensive entertainment is through Homa, a fire ritual ultimately based on the archaic Vedic sacrificial oblation.”²¹¹

This kind of possession is, however, to be distinguished from *prasenā* with which, as we will see, it is very likely cognate, but from which it is also somewhat distinct. The main difference being that the possession principle was taken up by the tantric systems as union (*yoga*) when concerning the practitioner—this being it in solution as it were in the respective tradition’s soteriological framework—while simultaneously, and perhaps separately, surviving as a ritual current with an archaic core, where the practitioner is the officiant of the ritual and the medium for the deity is somebody else. The latter is also conceptually closer to Vedic than to Tantric ritual. Traces of the former are even visible in nominally non-tantric texts such as the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* which speaks of “surrender to the Lord” *īśvarapraṇidhāna*.²¹² In Tibet we observe the use of the latter principle being even relegated to the shiny objects themselves, with the deities being trapped in mirrors or bowls of water, instead of living mediums. The two streams seemingly come together in the *Kālacakratāntra*, where the very mind of the practitioner becomes the medium for the divine consort of oneself as the deity.

The word *prasenā* and its various derivations appear to have been used for three things: for the question-deity itself, for the images that the possessed sees and for the ritual. When referring to the images that appear or to the figure of the deity itself, it is synonymous with *bimba* or *pratibhāsa*, which words may refer to either of the two, depending on context. Hence this can bring about some confusion, as in many texts it is not entirely clear which of the two is being spoken about. Sometimes the deity appears separately (as in the *Tantrasadbhāva*) or it may inhibit the shining object itself, as we often see done in Tibet.²¹³ A point which is repeatedly emphasised throughout all sources that deal with explaining the mechanics of *prasenā* (such as the *Tantrāloka*,²¹⁴ *Sekoddeśa*,²¹⁵ *Sekoddeśaṭīkā*, *Vimalaprabhā*,²¹⁶ etc.) is that it is *like* a reflection inasmuch as its appearance is contingent upon some reflective (or

²¹¹ Strickmann 2002: 201-202.

²¹² See *Traces of Possession in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra and Some of its Commentaries*.

²¹³ Van Schaik 2020: 144.

²¹⁴ *TĀV* 3.64.

²¹⁵ *SU* 30 & the adjacent commentary in the *SUT*.

²¹⁶ *VP* 5.2; 5.3.

perhaps better—shiny, burnished or luminescent) object, *but*, crucially, there is no original object that produces a reflection. Said differently, a *prasenā* (in the sense of the apparition), a *pratibhāsa*, or a *bimba* are *like* a reflection in appearance, but *unlike* one in the sense that they are not reflections, but manifestations of something which does not belong to the world of discrete entities (i.e. those consisting of atoms (*aṇu*)). We also have to remember that before the invention of modern silver-lined glass mirrors, mirrors in the past were made of polished stone (onyx) or metal (silver, copper or bronze) and the polishing technology itself was inferior to what is possible today. This is relevant because these mirrors do not produce a clear reflection, but instead a shifty, blurry one, which much resembles what we see in a dream. Thanks to that shifty, shiny surface, it is possible to “see” many things in it, much like the everchanging flames of a fire have been used for divination, both throughout history and in literature.

As we saw in the *Jātakas*, the formalised ritual for the induction of benign possession seems to have been a later development, since in those scenarios a person is possessed by the will of the deity and not as a part of a ritual under the control of an officiant.

The “raw” archaic version has a human medium who fulfils certain requirements of ritual purity (age, virginity, cleanliness), an officiant (the ritual specialist), a deity who is called upon (usually the sex of the medium and deity match, though not always)²¹⁷ and a questioner²¹⁸ who has commissioned the whole operation. In this sense, a *prasenā* of this type (such as we see in the *Hevajratantra*) is much like a vedic ritual, perhaps an example of the phenomenon proposed by Smith, namely the gradual inclusion of folk practices into the brahminical ritual framework.²¹⁹ A ritual setting is established (in the later sources this is explicitly the particular *maṇḍala* of the deity in question), everything, including the location, the medium and the shiny object, is consecrated with *mantras*, prayers and ritual offerings.²²⁰ Sometimes the medium is blindfolded. Then the question is asked and the deity, who has now descended (*avatāra*), seeing the answers in the shiny object of choice, answers through the medium. Such are the cases of the *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra*, the *Hevajratantra* and several Śaiva sources, as well as presumably, the divination rituals referred to in the Pāli canon. The situation we encountered in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* is also very similar. Naturally, we should be cautious of equating things with a light hand, but perhaps speaking of a common “flavour” is not incorrect.

²¹⁷ This is not the case for some folk mediums (*lha po* / *lha mo*) in Tibet.

²¹⁸ Technically there does not seem to be an issue with the ritual officiant also being the questioner, as can be seen in some later texts.

²¹⁹ Smith 2006: 426; Perhaps much akin to the process of the inclusion of pagan holidays and rites in the Christian calendar and liturgy as it occurred in Europe. An “assimilate it if you cannot eradicate it” approach of sorts.

²²⁰ There are also cases, such as in the *Hevajratantra*, that the substance used to consecrate the objects is itself consecrated beforehand.

The hybrid version, internalisation—here there is no external medium, but it is not always the case that the officiant himself gets possessed. This variant usually uses sleep and the officiant's own dreams provide the substratum for the deity to manifest. Such examples are alluded to in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and some Śaiva sources. The situation is something like the medium for the deity becomes the practitioner's own mind—i.e. the ritual is internalised. This is also what we find in Kālacakra sources, there however, the practitioner is not asleep, there is complete control over the process and the image of the deity is provided by the *guru*, rather than, such as in the case of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, having been itself first seen in a dream. This is commented upon by Nāropā:

²²¹[A *pratisenā*'s] existence may not be material,
because what appears is void (*śūnya*) of physical substance (*vastu*);
[it is an] object, verily, without any physical reality,
similar to an illusion, a dream [or] a magical apparition. (*SU* 30)

Reading Nāropā's commentary to this verse of the *Sekoddeśa*, we learn that beginner *yogins* are given physical pictures (*citra*), which are either drawn or sprinkled, to cultivate upon, which they presumably strive to internalise to such a degree, that an accomplished *yogin* does not require the external support of physical pictures of the deities, or having willfully visualised them—these images being classified as inferred (*anumāna*) meditational forms (*ālambana*), but instead utilises directly-perceived ones (*pratyakṣa*) which arise on their own out of the *yogin*'s own mind.²²²

They are specifically *not* visualisations, since a visualisation is the product of both conscious effort and conceptual thought (*vikalpa*). That is why it is also called unimagined (*acintita*). We can see a clear parallel to the loss of consciousness in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* and the lack of control over the dream visions in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. This characteristic of *prasenā* is universal and shared among all instances where the motif of this specific divine possession is to be found and is one of the key factors for identifying its traces in different texts, as in the case of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. The conscious consideration for how the mechanics of divine possession are supposed to function naturally arose later than its arhaic origins. The negative handling of *vikalpa* as an impediment can be found as early as the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali:

²²³A contradiction [is] reverse knowledge founded upon a form/appearance opposite to the actual one. (*YS* 1.8)

²²¹ *asyā bhāvo na bhāvaḥ syāt vastuśūnyārthadarśanāt |
vastuno 'bhāvato 'py arthaḥ māyāsvapnendrajālavat || SU 30 ||*

²²² *LKCT* 4. 232; *SUṬ* 28; *VP* 4.5

²²³ *viparyayo mithyājñānam atadrūpapraṭiṣṭham || YS 1.8 ||*

Vācaspatimiśra's gloss to Vyāsa's commentary to Patañjali's *Yogasūtras* 1.8 states that when this pertains to something in the real world—the mistake can be pointed out easily on the basis of people's common knowledge and experience (for example mistaking a rope for a snake or *vice versa*). In imagination, however, he says, this can only be recognised by “those who show the capacities of a learned man.” He further goes on to explain that if it were correct perception, subsequent encounters with the truth would correct it by substitution. However, with *viparyaya* it is usually the case that the old impression predetermines how the next iteration of something will be seen, much like a filter, i.e. it displaces any new information with the already existing impression—bias of sorts.²²⁴

Something akin to the intermediate or hybrid version we also find in chapter 43 of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, combining the more archaic ritual elements with what would become a *leitmotif* of tantra—deity identification practice:

Having repeated the mantra over a sword, water, one's thumb, a lamp, or a mirror, one will cause the descent of the divinatory image (*prasenā*) by means of the yoga of oneself [as the deity].²²⁵

Bhavabhaṭṭa comments:

Having repeated [the mantra] one hundred and eight [times] over a sword, and so forth, one will cause the descent of the luminous [*prasenā*]²²⁶ ((Pandey 2002, 556): *khadgādaṁ cāṣṭottaraśataṁ japtvā prasenam jyotiṣam avatārayet*).²²⁷

Vīravajra describes the rite as follows:

Repeating the mantra, one applies the magical diagram of the seven syllable [mantra] (*saptākṣarayantra*) to the sword, to water, one's thumb, a lamp or a mirror, and the [*prasenā*]²²⁸ should clearly descend. If one arranges the seven syllable magical diagram over the eyes of a virgin girl and repeats the mantra seven times, the auspicious and inauspicious will be revealed. (*PD* 438a)²²⁹

In this case there is both the ‘possession’ of the officiant by a deity (even though it is referred to as *yoga*) and its descent. From the text itself one cannot say whether the deity is supposed to descend into a medium or into the object. Perhaps it being

²²⁴ Prasāda 1998: 19.

²²⁵ Gray 2007: 345.

²²⁶ Original has ‘divinatory image’ which I replaced with the Sanskrit term to restore its original polysemy.

²²⁷ Gray 2007: 345.

²²⁸ Original has ‘divinatory image’ which I replaced with the Sanskrit term to restore its original polysemy.

²²⁹ Gray 2007: 346.

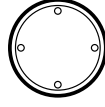
described as ‘luminous’ (*jyotiṣam*) points to the former, rather than to the latter. In Vīravajra’s description, however, we seem to encounter the more archaic, three- or two-person ‘team’ version.

The externalised version—What occurred in Tibet was that the deity went the opposite way—instead of the practitioner’s mind becoming the medium, the shiny object itself was converted into a vessel for the deity—an identifiable, but certainly not prevalent notion in earlier instances of *prasenā*. Perhaps this stems from the blurred lines (both lexically and conceptually) between the deity and the images that appear, as discussed above. Naturally, the practitioner needed to apply the correct ritual actions for the descent of the deity into the object to function properly and perhaps needed to have some predisposition towards receiving visionary experiences throughout that process. We encounter both cases where there is no medium and the one who looks into the shiny object is the officiant as well as more “traditional” settings, where there are both a medium and an officiant, such as in the case of the spellbook from Dunhuang.

However, how does this ‘divine vision’ function and what were the principles thought to be behind it? There seems to have been a notion of a five-level stratification of what one can perceive according to one’s level of accomplishment. Called the “Five Visions,” the “Five Eyesights” or the “Five Eyes” (*pañcacakṣus*; Ch.: *wǔyǎn*; Jp.: *gogen*; (五眼)) it can also be found as early as the Pāli canon (in the *Dīghanikāya* in the *Suttāntapiṭaka*, *Samyuttanikāya* in the *Suttapiṭaka*, and the *Khuddakānikāya* in the *Vinayapiṭaka*) and features prominently in the *Vimalaprabhā* also (such as in VP 4.5.232). In the Pāli canon they are: the Vision of the Flesh or *māṃsacakṣus* (*māṃsacakkhu*), the Luminous or Divine Vision or *divyacakṣus* (*dibbacakkhu*), the Wisdom Vision or *prajñācakṣus* (*paññācakkhu*), the Dharma Vision or *dharmacakṣus* (*dhammacakkhu*), and the Buddha Vision or *buddhacakṣus* (*buddhacakkhu*). The theme of the five eyesights has been quite prominent in Prajñāpāramitā literature, such as in texts like the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, in the *Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* and the *Kṣitigarbhabodhisattvapūrvapraṇidhānasūtra* among others. The names and sequence of these five, however, vary wildly between texts and throughout time and that makes it hard to draw a more nuanced conclusion without further detailed intertextual comparison and research. A thorough discussion of this topic is, however, too great a deviation from the discussion of *prasenā* and I hope to explore this further in future work.

Relating directly back to the topic of vision or “eyesight”, the *Sekoddeśa* tells us that a maiden sees “neither with her own eyes, nor with the eyes of others.” Nāropā explains that this means she sees neither with the Eye of the Flesh nor with the third eye, i.e. through supernatural cognition (*abhijñā*). The third “Eye” in the sequence according to the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* is the *divyacakṣus*—the Divine Eye(sight). Since in the mantra given in the *Hevajratantra*’s commentaries the maiden is called divine-eyed

(*divyalocanā*) we could suppose that the third level is what is referred to here, though this is impossible to say with any degree of certainty without a careful comparative study of all sources on the Five Eyes.



Tracing the Identity of a *prasenā*— Who the Question-Deities are Supposed to Be

There is a

“sweeping panorama of the feminine divine in the Buddhist imaginal world. Nature divinities abound: mother earth, the grove goddess of Shakyamuni's birthplace, lotus goddesses, mother nature figures, star and planet goddesses, goddesses of the dawn and night sky, grain goddesses, mountain goddesses, tree goddesses, and snake goddesses. We find Buddhist goddesses presiding over human fertility, the health of infants and children, wealth, agricultural abundance, healing, longevity, artistic inspiration, learning, music, love magic, and occult practices.”²³⁰

Naturally, conducting a comprehensive survey of divinities and their development through Śaiva, Buddhist and other sources is a task worthy of several lifetimes and certainly beyond the scope of this work. That being said, demonstrating several compelling connections, especially between early tree deity worship, practices involving fierce female divinities such as *grahas*, *yoginīs*, *yakṣiṇīs* and *ḍākiṇīs* and the later emergence of very similar fierce goddesses in Śaiva and Buddhist tantra will certainly lay weight on the argument that such parallels are indeed far from coincidence.

Traces of Tree Deities in Three *Jātakas* (50, 113, 347)

The question of *prasenā* is inextricably linked to two major factors—the ritual continuity & the framework associated with it and the nature and identity of the deities involved in such rituals. One of the earliest places in non-brahminical sources that provides evidence of the worship of deities associated with particular offerings, with trees, with possession and with the granting of particular powers is in three *Jātakas*: *Sigāla*, (50) *Dummedha* (113) and *Ayakūṭa* (347). A close comparison with the attributes of such deities and those invoked in *prasenās* in texts from later centuries reveals their uncanny similarity in many, although not always overlapping, aspects. The identity of the deities as connected with trees is not always preserved, or sometimes present only symbolically or metonymically, but traces of it can reliably be found nonetheless.

²³⁰ Shaw 2006: 12.

An interesting lexical observation from the three *Jātakas*, but the *Dummedha* in particular is that there seems to be a difference being emphasised between gods (*deva*) and deities (*devatā*) whereas the deities seem to be implied by the context to be tree-deities (**rukṣadevatā*) by default. For example, here Śakra is called “king of the *devas*” and nowhere is the word *deva* used for *yakṣas*, *piśācas*, *raṁsasas* and other similar orders of beings, whereas the word *devatā* is demonstrably used interchangeably with those terms. This theme is also present in later Śaiva sources, where “there is no distinction between Gandharvas and other classes of semidivine beings.”²³¹

Judging from the beginning of the *Ayakūṭa-jātaka* there seems to have been, generally speaking, more malignancy towards the presumably indigenous tree-deity worship, animal sacrifice etc, than to the brahminical tradition. The gods of the brahminical tradition are regarded as superior in power to the *yakṣas*, *raṁsasas*, *piśācas* and *devatās* in these Buddhist narratives, and they, again, seem to be regarded as more or less the same sort of being.

The *Dummedha-jātaka* provides early non-brahminical evidence for the granting of powers by indigenous tree-deities as a result of sacrificial offerings of not only meats, but perfume and flowers, especially by sprinkling (*abhiśeka*) as well as circumambulation—all ubiquitous motifs in later tantric practice, and *prasenās* in particular. I encourage the reader to maintain an awareness of these motifs as they will become increasingly prominent through the texts that we will examine. From these *Jātakas* we can safely conclude that the motif that the tree-deities can grant such wishes or answer questions should proper sacrifices be performed to them was regarded by the early Buddhists as undesirable—a sentiment later shared by the saidhāntika Śaivas, as we will see in the next section.

However, the fact that in some Śaiva context the practitioner has to purify himself both before and *after* performing a *prasenā*²³² is an interesting detail paralleling what we read in the *Sigāla Jātaka* about the brahmin having to wash himself and his clothes after interacting with the Buddha in his previous life as a tree deity in a cemetery.²³³ Wynne²³⁴ suggests that the brahmin’s impurity stems from his meeting with the tree deity, however we must consider that it is the tree deity itself that tells the brahmin to go wash, after he had been digging with his bare hands and after the jackal had shat on his robe. Now, the fact that the tree is situated in a cremation grove outside the city does allude to some significance related to ritual purity. In the all three *Jātakas*, however, the offerings to the tree deities are not made exclusively outside the city

²³¹ Goudriaan 1973: 73.

²³² Vasudeva 2014: 385.

²³³ Chalmers 1895: 255.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 2021 .

limits, quite the contrary.²³⁵ Notwithstanding that, there are many motifs in *Śaiva Mantramārga* works that can demonstrably be shown to be directly related to the folk ritual substratum that gave so much to the loose group of ritual practices and notions of possession that later came to be referred to as *prasenā*. What is more, Sanderson also notes that these currents found in non-*saiddhāntika* Śaiva material could be as old, if not older, than *saiddhāntika* texts.

Interestingly enough, the jackal's excrements form the same pattern on the brahmin's robe that we find on mirrors used for *prasenā* in Tibet as described by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (see *Prasenā in Tibet*).

Possession, Child Disease and its Treatment

The *Rāvaṇaprokṭabālacikitsā* (*Luō fù ná shuō jiù liáo xiǎo'ér jíbìng jīng*; 囉縛拏說救療小兒疾病經²³⁶) or “The Treatise on the Treatment of Children Proclaimed by Rāvaṇa,” translated into Chinese by Fǎ Tiān (Dharmadeva; ?~1001 CE), explains how children aged one through twelve can suffer different afflictions, because of being possessed by female deities called *grāhamātṛkās*. These are to be considered as different from both the nine celestial bodies (*navagraha*) and the consorts of the different *devas* (*śaktis*).²³⁷

“At the time when Ravana looked on the earth he found that all children from the first to the twelfth year, when they are still senseless babies²³⁸ and when their spiritual strength is still undeveloped, are possessed by *grāha-mātṛkās*. There are twelve *grāha-mātṛkā* that roam on the earth. At a convenient moment in the day and in the night, when the baby is either sleeping, walking or sitting alone, they assume different shapes, frighten the baby and upset his normal condition. They completely take away his energy and so the baby falls sick and dies.”²³⁹

There are twelve *grāhamātṛkās* named in this text: Mātṛnandā, Sunandā, Revatī,²⁴⁰ Mukhamaṇḍikā, Viḍālī, Śakunī Pūtanā, Śuṣkā, Āryakā, Jambukā, Pilipicchikā and

²³⁵ In fact, an anecdotal account from my grandfather Blagoy Roushkov who was the Bulgarian trade attache for India in the 1960s recalls that they once went hunting with a friend and shot some peacocks that had perched on a tree in the centre of a village. Suffice to say they did not endear themselves to the villagers after it turned out the tree was considered sacred.

²³⁶ [Hob. 1330, Nanijo 882, *Cannon Buddhique* II, p. 589, (n 41). Tok. XXVII, 12, pp. 14a-16a].

²³⁷ Bagchi 1941: 270.

²³⁸ ‘Baby’ means ‘child’ here.

²³⁹ Bagchi 1941: 277.

²⁴⁰ According to Orofino (1994: 617) there are some traditions in Tibet that perform *pra* centred on the goddess Rematī (such as the *Pan chen na bza'pa*). I would argue that Rematī and Revatī are the same. It is both the case that *ma* and *ba/wa* can be easily mistaken in Tibetan and that if the practice was transmitted *via* Chinese texts, that the characters used for transliteration remained the same while Chinese

Skanda. M. Filliozat in his 1935 study surveyed text related to this one and there the names of the *mātrkās* are: Nandā, Sunandā, Pūtanā, Mukhamāṇḍitikā, Kaṭapūtanā, Śakunikā, Śuṣkarevatī, Āryakā, Sūtikā, Nirṛtā, Pilipicchikā, Kāmukā. They are said to “haunt children till they get the offering.”²⁴¹ The symptoms of the affliction caused by these female deities may often include fever, motionlessness, different types of confusion, loss of consciousness, stomach pain, breathing difficulty, seizures, weight loss, absence of or excessive passage of urine and stool, visions or delusions, refusal to eat and drink, pox-like eruptions on the skin, temporary blindness, general weakness, foaming at the mouth, pain in the teeth, eyes and finger joints and partial paralysis of the extremities. As we will see, several of these conditions can be induced by rituals centred on female deities variously called by different names, but often also referred to as *mātrkās* in several prominent Buddhist and non-*saiddhāntika* Śaiva tantras.²⁴² The high likelihood of a connection is confirmed by such textual places as the section of the *Tantrāloka* (29.207–208) which attributes the same symptoms to those who’ve successfully undergone initiation and have thus become possessed (*āveśa*)²⁴³ as those described as indicating a child having been possessed by the *grāhamātrkās* in the *Rāvaṇaproktabālacikitsā*. Similar descriptions can be found in the *Jayadrathayāmala* (3.14.72a) and the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*.²⁴⁴ It is perhaps poignant to point out here, that an approach which tries to discreetly differentiate between fields such as “medicine” or “ritual,” just like trying to divorce “philosophy” from either of those or any other field, for that matter, can produce detailed, but in end effect limited and thus unsatisfactory treatments of subjects such as the roles of possession, transcendental perception and visionary experience in tantra, and is thus perhaps best avoided wherever possible. In East Asia such practices were known as early as the 7th century CE through the instructions found in the *Amoghapāśasūtra* (T. 1097) for the curing of diseases caused by malevolent spirit entities as well as the description of a *prasenā* with a child medium.²⁴⁵

Returning to the *Rāvaṇaproktabālacikitsā*, the procedure for curing the illness is similar for all twelve *grāhamātrkās*. The approach is to propitiate and pacify rather than rebuke or dominate the female deities. The ritual is very similar to those described in the second chapter of the first book of the *Hevajratantra*. The methods are called *vidyās* by the *Rāvaṇaproktabālacikitsā*, and the ritual officiant—a *vidyādhārapuruṣa*. There is a square *maṇḍala* within which either an effigy of the child or that of a goat’s head is placed facing west. The effigy may be made of the earth taken

pronunciation changed, leading to them being pronounced otherwise than originally intended, such as *na* being pronounced as *da* and so on. This phenomenon is observable in Japan as well.

²⁴¹ Bagchi 1941: 278.

²⁴² “Use of the term *mātr* in the sense of ‘*yoginī*’ is attested, for instance, in the Siyān inscription of Nayapāla, in Bengal.” (Hatley 2013: 27).

²⁴³ See the relevant sections on the *Patañjalayogaśāstra* and *prasenā* in Śaiva sources; Also see Smith (2009: 370).

²⁴⁴ Törzsök 2013: 191.

²⁴⁵ Strickmann 2002: 204–205.

from the two banks of a river, powdered rice, flour, a special grass, powdered beans or wheat, depending on the particular *grāha-māṭṛkā*. The offerings that accompany the ritual are incense, flowers, food, grains, fruit, raw and/or cooked meat, raw and/or cooked fish and drink, which are neutral, black, red or white in colour, depending on the particular *grāha-māṭṛkā*. The officiant also sets up flags and lamps or jars in various numbers, usually corresponding to the number of the month. Usually offerings are made within the *maṇḍala*. Then a special incense is made with cow butter mixed with some combination of the following: (always) white mustard seeds, *guggulu*, the excrements of a wild cat and a snake skin, (and sometimes also added variously) the excrements of a wild fox, the excrements and feathers of a pigeon, the leaves and/or sap/gum of different trees, sesame seeds, garlic, tiger's claws, cow or goat's horns, the hair of dead body. The child is fumigated with this mixture. Then the child is washed with a decoction of several plants—the castor oil plant, sweet hemp, *pippala* tree leaves and *bhadraka* leaves—after which offerings are made in the *maṇḍala* once again, all the while reciting the respective mantric formula. Afterwards the officiant goes outside the city at midday (facing east or west) or in the afternoon (facing west, north or south) and makes offerings of all the leftover ritual articles to the respective *grāha-māṭṛkā*.

Bagchi also discusses a relatively new medical treatise called the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā* (or *Vṛddhajīvakiyatantra*), edited by Jādevī Trikamji Ācārya and Somnāth Śarmā of Nepal.²⁴⁶ Although it does not name the twelve *māṭṛkā*s, the text does mention diseases in children as being caused by such beings as *grahas*, *piśācas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *bhūtas*, *skandas* and *apasmāras*,²⁴⁷ yet again demonstrating the fuzziness of these categories of beings. The same is valid for female divinities across different branches of Buddhist and non-Buddhist tantra:

Modern scholars have been somewhat confused on this subject by wholesale use of the term *śakti* ("power") in reference to Buddhist goddesses. This term, general in Hindu Tantras, seldom occurs in the Buddhist Tantras, which actually employ the following generic words for the goddesses or females: *prajñā* ("insight"), *yoginī* ("female *yogin*"), *vidyā* ("occult science" or "know-how" - "wisdom" in its historic meaning including all academic learning), *devī* ("goddess" or "queen"), *māṭṛ* ("mother"), *māṭṛkā* ("mother" or "letters"), *dākiṇī* ("fairy"), *dutī* ("female messenger"), *surī* ("heroine"), and *mudrā* ("seal" or "gesture").²⁴⁸

The *Revatīkalpa* chapter of the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā* names sixteen female supernatural beings that cause children's diseases as: Piśācī, Yakṣī, Āsurī, Kālī, Vāruṇī, Śaṣṭhī,

²⁴⁶ Published by Nirṇayasagar Press, Bombay.

²⁴⁷ Bagchi 1941: 271-272. Apasmara is a *yakṣa*, son of Skanda in the *Mahābhārata*.

²⁴⁸ Wayman 1962: 74-75.

Bhirukā, Yamyā, Mātaṅgī, Bhadrakālī, Raudrī, Vardhikā, Caṇḍikā and Pilipicchikā.²⁴⁹ The names of six of these *mātrkās* are mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* (*Āraṇyakaparvan*, *Adh.* 217-219).²⁵⁰ According to the *Kāśyapasaṃhitā*, Svāhā—the mother of Skanda—assumed the form of six *mātrkās* who were granted by him the honour of motherhood, including the faculty of taking away the lives of children up to the age of sixteen. Skanda himself is said to have produced a number of both male and female offspring, who were given the power to exercise evil influence upon children: Pūtanā, Śītapūtanā, Revatī and Mukhamaṇḍikā. Skanda and the female deities are said to be worshipped with cooked rice, to be fond of meat and wine.²⁵¹ The children are said to need to be washed and fumigated as a remedy against such ailments as are caused by these deities.²⁵²

Considering the late nature of this text and the ritual continuity we demonstrated between the many esoteric traditions of India, it can be argued that in the names of such deities as Kālī, Bhadrakālī, Mātaṅgī and Caṇḍikā we can see a clear cross-influence between the ritual-medical tradition and Śaiva sources. Or rather, perhaps it is better to say, that the same underlying theme found different incarnations in the different societal and cultural milieus across the millenia.

“Rational medicinal practices were probably developed in line with the spread of urbanisation—a world more susceptible to disease.”²⁵³ This is supported by the section in the *Vimānasthāna* of the *Carakasamhitā* that deals with the topic of epidemics and how urban areas should be avoided. Cakrapāṇidatta—one of the main commentators on the *Carakasamhitā* was the son of one Nārāyaṇa—the overseer of the kitchens of king Nayapala of Bengal and himself the king’s physician. Both the *Carakasamhitā* (100 BCE – 200 CE) and the *Suśrutasamhitā* (ca. 2nd century CE) roughly overlap with the dating of the Pāli canon, especially considering that the *Carakasamhitā* itself states to be the inheritor of an already established medical

²⁴⁹ Bagchi 1941: 271-272.

²⁵⁰ *skanda uvāca*

yāvat śoḍaśa varṣāṇi bhavanti taruṇāḥ prajāḥ |
prabādhata manuṣyāṇāṃ tāvad rūpaiḥ pṛthagvidhaiḥ || 219.22 ||
 [...] *pūtanāṃ rākṣasīm prāhus taṃ vidyāt pūtanāgraham || 219.26c ||*
kaṣṭhā dārunarūpeṇa ghorarūpā niśācarī |
piśācī dāruṇākārā kathyate śītapūtanā |
garbhān sā mānuṣīṇāṃ tu harate ghoradarśanā || 219.27 ||
aditiṃ revatīm prāhur grahas tasyās tu raivataḥ |
so 'pi bālāṇ śīśūn ghorā bādhate vai mahāgrahaḥ || 219.28 ||
daityānāṃ yā ditir mātā tām āhur mukhamaṇḍikāṃ |
atyartham śīśumāmsena saṃprahr̥ṣṭā durāsadā || 219.29 ||

²⁵¹ Bagchi 1941: 273.

²⁵² *teṣāṃ praśamanaṃ kāryaṃ snānaṃ dhūpam athāñjanam |*
balikarmopahāraś ca skandasyejyā viśeṣataḥ || 219.43 ||
evam ete 'rcitāḥ sarve prayacchanti śubham ṇṇām |
āyur vīryaṃ ca rājendra samyak pūjānamaskṛtāḥ || 219.44 ||
ūrdhvaṃ tu śoḍaśād varṣād ye bhavanti grahā ṇṇām || 219.45a ||

²⁵³ Wynne 2021: 07:30.

tradition. Forms of *prasenā* in the early Śaiva text the *Bṛhatkāḷottara* is called *svasthāveśa*, which Vasudeva translates as “benign trance.”²⁵⁴ The word *svastha* (lit. ‘healthy’) may be the result of simple convergence, but must not be ignored in light of the apparent medicinal associations of certain types of *prasenā* or of rituals for curing child illness caused by the children being possessed by female deities across India, Tibet and China. In his book *The Self Possessed: Deity and Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*, Frederick Smith lays out a detailed argument for how *svasthāveśa* and *prasenā* are not only related in terms of ritual logic and morphology, but, for all intents and purposes, in some situations even refer to the same thing.²⁵⁵ In both the *Niśvāsaguhya* and the *Tantrasabhāva* a *prasenā* is used as a secondary means to dream prognostication in order to diagnose the reason for failed initiation (*dīkṣā*).²⁵⁶

In Tibet, the practice of “channel *prasenā*” (*rta’i pra sgrub*) was prolifically used. One such text is the *Evocation Ritual of the Yellow Sage Kapila and His Two Sons* (*drang srong ser skya spun gsum gyi sgrub thabs*),²⁵⁷ Kapila, of course having close connections with both the area that is today Bengal, and medicine—sometimes described as a sage, sometimes as a deity.²⁵⁸ The *Yellow Sage* is ascribed to Nāgārjuna,²⁵⁹ one of whose historical personalities is as a physician and alchemist.²⁶⁰

The Case of Tumburu

As we saw in the three *Jātakas*, the worship of tree deities is a practice with its roots deep into India’s past. Among the many such deities associated with trees, one of the more rare male examples is Tumburu, who appears in both Śaiva and Buddhist tantric texts. Compellingly, he is depicted with his three sisters and in texts such as the *Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa* is explicitly associated with traits demonstrably linkable with *prasenā*-related passages in Śaiva sources, as well as the *vajrajyotiṣa* described in *Hevajratantra* 1.2.28.²⁶¹ There, in the *mantra* of Mañjuśrī-Kārttikeya we encounter the connection to red fragrances and unguents of tree origin and worship conducted with red flowers. According to Sanderson, Tumburu and his sisters were worshipped in Śaiva circles as early as the 6th century CE.²⁶² His sisters are also referred to as *yakṣiṇīs* in the *Mañjuśrī-yamūla-kalpa* (2.67-72),²⁶³ making the connection to more archaic forms of female deities associated with the trees explicit.

²⁵⁴ Vasudeva 2014: 379.

²⁵⁵ Smith 2006: 427.

²⁵⁶ Vasudeva 2014: 380.

²⁵⁷ McGrath 1992: 261.

²⁵⁸ Wynne 2021: 06:00—07:00.

²⁵⁹ McGrath 1992: 261.

²⁶⁰ Personal correspondence with Prof. Akira Saito.

²⁶¹ See *The Significance of the Colour ‘Red’ and Alaktaka and the Metonymic Echo of Tree-deity Worship* in Chapter II.

²⁶² Griffiths 2007: 250.

²⁶³ *Ārya-mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa* Degé Kangyur, vol. 88; 84,000 translating the words of the Buddha (v 1.21.11).

What species Tumburu is supposed to be is not quite clear, the most compelling candidate presented by Arlo Griffiths being *Zanthoxylum acanthopodium*—a thorny, dioecious tree, around six metres tall with a dense crown, prickly trunk and branches, found in the mountain valleys of the Himalayas between Kumaun and Sikkim at altitudes between 600 and 1,800 m. The tree has a strong odour and its fruit have a taste similar to coriander.²⁶⁴ In places where *Z. acanthopodium* did not grow, there seems to have been a semantic shift of the word *tumburu* to also denote a species of *Diospyros* genus under the name *tinduka*. This is the reason why in some dictionaries *tumburu* is listed as referring to a species of *Diospyros* tree. The use of *tumburu* in ritual does appear to have demonstrable roots in the Atharvavedic tradition.²⁶⁵

Garuḍa

One of the more recent discoveries of a *prasenā*-related text is a Tibetan Buddhist book of spells written in the 10th century and found in Dunhuang and described by Sam Van Schaik in his 2020 book *Buddhist Magic*. Among the many spells it explores such as weather control, curing illness, manipulating others and so on (powers, as we saw, very characteristically obtained through some permutation of *prasenā*), is a mirror divination called *prasena*, along with other methods of prognostication.²⁶⁶ The description of some of these sounding suspiciously *Śaiva*, as the reader will undoubtedly be able to spot at this point. This ritual is described as follows:

Wash yourself and gaze toward the eastern entrance [of the *maṇḍala*]; make offerings of the five types to the mirror. Then fumigate with *gugul*. Reciting the eleven-syllable *mantra*, wash the pure child, and bless him with the six-syllable *mantra*. Direct him toward the eastern opening and place the mirror there. Answers to the questions you have thought about or asked aloud will appear [to the child] with great clarity within the mirror.

The text relates a by now quite familiar framework for a *prasenā*. It names the different shiny surfaces which could be employed beside a mirror—the officiant’s thumbnail coated with lac,²⁶⁷ a skull cup filled with moist barley flour²⁶⁸ and a sword. Once again, the possessed medium has the ability to see anything throughout the three times—past, present or future. Van Schaik traces this particular *prasenā* ritual to the *Subāhuparipṛcchā*, though he

²⁶⁴ Adapted from Griffiths 2007: 257. Refer to the same source for a more in-depth discussion on the identification of *tumburu* with this particular species.

²⁶⁵ Griffiths 2007: 258-260.

²⁶⁶ Van Schaik 2020: ix.

²⁶⁷ Van Schaik has ‘laquer;’ for a discussion on the topic of this substance see *The Significance of the Colour Red*.

²⁶⁸ This seems to be a particular Tibetan development, as this option does not appear in earlier or contemporary texts.

mistakenly refers to the *sūtra* of the same name (Toh. 70; T. 310(26)), which has nothing to do with *prasenā*, rather than to the *tantra* (Toh. 805; T. 895/896).²⁶⁹ Perhaps the confusion arises from the fact, that both words are rendered as 經 (*jīng*) in Chinese, meaning ‘a classic.’ The particular feature of this *prasenā* is that the deity invoked is Garuḍa, rather than *yakṣas* or *nāgas*, as is done in the *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra*.

The ritual follows a more or less generic sequence of actions, though Van Schaik notes that it is a composite of many sources. One sets up a *maṇḍala* with a mirror inside it in the usual way, with offerings and chants. The officiant is facing East. Thus Garuḍa is invited into the mirror., which is characteristic of Tibetan consecration ceremonies. Garuḍa, along with Jambhala and solitary Viśvamātā are also the most commonly encountered iconographic companions of Kālacakra in Himalayan art.

The *prasena* ritual in the book of spells seems to have been compiled from more than one source; this is evident from the instruction to set up a mandala, which appears three times. Still, the nature of the ritual is fairly clear: First the setting is established, with²⁷⁰ the mandala and the mirror being set up, and the usual offerings and prayers carried out. During these preliminaries, Garuda is invited into the mirror. This is similar to the way mirrors are used in Tibetan consecration ceremonies, in which the “wisdom being” of the deity is invited into the mirror.

The practice of scrying itself requires the child to be placed in a position facing east and being instructed to gaze at the mirror. Other reflective objects are mentioned in addition to the mirror: a sword, a skull cup filled with moist barley flour, a thumbnail rubbed with lacquer, or a plank of pale wood. After the child has gazed at the object, he or she is questioned. This marks the end of the ritual, apart from a protective practice in which the ritual specialist visualizes mantra syllables on his or her own body and that of the child.²⁷¹

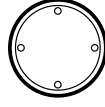
²⁶⁹ Van Schaik 2020: 127.

²⁷⁰ Van Schaik 2020: 143.

²⁷¹ Van Schaik 2020: 144.

Chapter II.

The Legacy of *Prasenā* among
Unexcelled Yoga Tantras:
the Two Cases of
the *Hevajratantra*'s *vajrajyotiṣa*
and the *Kālacakratantra*'s *pratisenā*



The *Hevajratāntra*'s *vajrajyotiṣa*

Among the many mantra rituals taught in the second chapter of the *Hevajratāntra*, the one named *vajrajyotiṣa* (Tib.: *rdo rje skar mda'/ma/rtsis*; Ch.: 金剛喻沙多)—a ritual for the retrieval of stolen or lost things with the help of a deity possessing a maiden medium—is of particular interest to our current discussion. One may wonder, what are the grounds for such attention, since the *Hevajratāntra* teaches many other spells and rituals alongside it and the world of Buddhist magic is broad and variegated in its practices, timespan and geography? The simple answer is that *vajrajyotiṣa* is, in fact, an example of *prasenā*.

Initially, the main obstacle to proving this was the fact that the ritual is referred to as *vajrajyotiṣa* without using the word *prasenā* or any of its many variants in either the Sanskrit or Tibetan versions of the *Hevajratāntra* or most of its commentaries. Luckily, some did succeed in providing definitive evidence that this is indeed the case as we will see below. Paralelly, examining the details of the ritual morphology itself and comparing it with other practices described in texts such as the *Subāhuparipṛcchātāntra* as well as Śaiva sources also demonstrated compelling parallels and arguably even textual borrowing, which cannot possibly be dismissed as mere coincidence. Demonstrating that the *vajrajyotiṣa* is a form of *prasenā* would significantly mean that some form of the practice has influenced more than one of the unexcelled yoga tantras (the other being the *Kālacakratāntra*, which we will look at in more detail in the next section)—a fact that undoubtedly deserves more future attention, especially in light of its previously unknown ubiquity across the history and the many traditions of the Subcontinent and beyond. But before commenting I will let the texts have the first say.

The text of the *Hevajratāntra* is taken from Snellgrove's edition,²⁷² with certain elements being modified according to Harunaga Isaacson's unofficial critical edition of the Sanskrit text.

²⁷² Snellgrove 1959.

The Root Text

The *Hevajratantra* 1.2.28 states:

²⁷³Having empowered the eyes of a maiden by [reciting] the mantra *oṃ nagrā nagrā* 108 times during twilight for the sake of accomplishing a purpose (for example finding lost property), [one] invites/invokes [Nairātmyā] making the five offerings such as flowers, incense and so forth. At dawn, on a 14th or an 8th [day of a lunar month] place the vase and so on with sesame oil and lac (*alaktakā*) and empower it through the *mantra* [recited] 108 times. Afterwards the *mantrin* bathes his thumb with the empowered lac. Washing it with sesame oil he shows it to the maiden. [The questioner] asks: “Speak: By whom has my stuff been taken away?” Accordingly she tells: “By such-and-such person!” This is [the rite of] the vajra-luminary.

[...]

²⁷⁴Thanks to the powers of Vajrā, Gaurī, Vārī, Vajraḍākinī, Nairātmikā, Bhūcarī and Khecarī [respectively] the adept performs [the rituals] of paralysing and so forth.

The Commentaries

Ṭaṃkadāsa’s *Suviśuddhasamputa*²⁷⁵

Empowering the eyes of the maiden by [reciting] the *mantra* “*oṃ [na]g[r]ā nagrā*”²⁷⁶ 108 times at twilight for the sake of accomplishing a purpose, one should appeal [to Nairātmyā] after having made the five offerings such as flowers, incense and so forth.

²⁷⁷

[Sequence of the ritual:]

²⁷³ *oṃ nagrā nagrā ity anena mantreṇa vikāḥlāyāṃ kumāryā arthasāadhanārthaṃ cakṣuṣy aṣṭottaraśatenābhimantrya | puṣpadhūpadinā pañcopacāreṇa saṃpūjya nimantrayet | caturdaśyām aṣṭamyām vā prabhātakāle kalaśādikaṃ saṃsthāpya tailam alaktakarasaṃ cānenaiva mantreṇāṣṭottaraśatvārān abhimantrayet | paścād abhimantritālaktakaraseṇa mantriṇo vṛddhāṅguṣṭhaṃ mraṅkṣayitvā tailenāpi snāpya [5a] kumāryān darśayet | vada kena mama dravyam apahṛtam iti | tatra sā kathayati | amukeneti | vajrajyotiṣaḥ |*

²⁷⁴ *vajrā gaurī ca vārī ca vajraḍākinī nairātmikā | bhūcarī khecarī yogāt stambhanādīn kared vratī || HT 1.2.34 ||*

(The *Muktāvalī* indicates an instrumental: *bdag med ma zhes ba ni bdag med mas bya'o*).

²⁷⁵ (Toh. 1184; ff. 89b -90a-90b).

²⁷⁶ Since all sources give the mantra consistently as *nagrā nagrā* it has also been emended here accordingly.

²⁷⁷ Lit. ‘eight beyond one hundred.’

²⁷⁸In the early morning on a 14th or an 8th day, place the *kalaśas* and so on,²⁷⁹ empowering the liquids (*khu ba*) of the grain oil and the *alakta*[*ka*]. One should consecrate these through [reciting] the mantra 108 times. Then, smear the empowered thumb with the empowered *alakta*[*ka*] liquid and [also] wash [it] with the grain oil and show it to the maiden. Ask [her], “By whom [has] my stuff been taken?” She answers the following: “Such-and-such [person]!” This is [the rite of] the vajra-luminary.

²⁸⁰This [is also] called “the prognostication of Mantravajra” (*sngags rdo rje'i mo*). [This is] nothing but a **prasannā* (*don gsal ba*).²⁸¹ Moreover, *Om* [stands for] the three indivisible *vajras*. Furthermore, the syllables *na grā na grā* signify the four moments²⁸² and also the four joys; **through this mantra** [means] through this Wisdom;²⁸³ [Regarding] **at twilight: twilight** is the time beyond the three times—they are the time of bliss, the time of suffering and the inconceivable time.

²⁸⁴**Twilight** is free from any of these three. At such a moment. As for **eight in by 108 times**, this refers to the [number] of *yoginīs*. Among these [words] **beyond** (**-uttara-*) refers to Vajradhara who is inseparable from Nairātmyā. According to the division into hundred families there is hundredfold-ness and therefore the *mantra* [is recited] **one hundred** [times]. As a consequence, the eyes of the maiden, Nairātmyā, which stand for the two truths, are empowered. They (the maiden and Nairātmyā) are taken in terms of mutually being pervaded and pervader.

²⁷⁸ /bcu bzhi pa'am brgyad pa la snga dro'i dus na bum pa la sogs pa gzhas ste/'bru mar dang/a la k+ta'i khu ba la sngags 'di nyid kyi lan brgya rtsa brgyad mngon par bsngags te/ de nas mngon par bsngags pa'i a lak+ta'i khu bas bsngags pa'i mthe bong rgan po la bsku zhing/ 'bru mar gyis kyang bkrus nas gzhon nu ma la bstan te/nga'i rdzas sus khyer smros/der de smra bar 'gyur te/che ge mos zhes pa rdo rje skar rtsis so/

²⁷⁹ There seem to be two *kalaśas*—one with lac and one with grain oil. This is also consistent with the phrasing ‘Vajradhara inseparable from Nairātmyā’ to which this ritual assembly is compared in the commentary. Furthermore, the verb *saṁsthāpyate* may have a connotation of two vessels being put together here, one in the other or with their mouths facing each other as in the case of *saṃpuṭa*, meaning two *puṭas* put together to form a crucible.

²⁸⁰ /'di ni sngags rdo rje'i mo zhes pa ste/don gsal ba kho na'o//yang na'oM rdo rje gsum dbyer med pa'o//de yang/na grA na grA zhes pa yi ge bzhi rnams kyi skad cig bzhi dang/gzhan dga' ba bzhi rnams so / zhes pa'i sngags 'di dang ye shes 'dis **dus ma yin pa'i dus na** zhes pa dus gsum dang bral ba'i dus ni **dus ma yin pa** ste/bde ba'i dus dang sdug bsngal dus//bsam gyis mi khyab dus nyid do/

²⁸¹ Meaning ‘clear’ or ‘clear light’. See below. For the etymology of *prasannā* see *Prasenā in Śaiva Texts* as well as the article by Vasudeva (2014).

²⁸² *vicitra*, *vipāka*, *vimarda*, *vilakṣaṇa*.

²⁸³ Reading 'dis instead of 'di according to the Sanskrit *anena mantreṇa*. This is also supported by the other *Suvisuddhasaṃpuṭaṭīkā*: /de yang nA grA nA grA zhes pa ni yi ge bzhis skad cig ma bzhi dang/gzhan dga' ba bzhi yin pas bzhi'o zhes bya ba'i sngags 'dis zhes pa ni ye shes 'dis so/

²⁸⁴ /gsum po 'di gang la bral ba de dus ma yin pa ste/'di lta bu'i skad cig la'o//brgyad lhag pa'i brgya yis zhes pa/brgyad ni rnal 'byor ma rnams so/'di rnams la **lhag pa** ni gzhan bdag med ma dang dbyer med pa'i rdo rje 'chang ste/de yang rigs brgya'i rab tu dbye ba tha dad pa nyid kyi rnam pa brgya yin pa'i phyir **sngags brgya'o**//rgyu de yis gzhon nu ma bdag med ma'i mig bden pa gnyis la mngon par bsngags te phan tshun khyab par bya ba dang khyab par byed pa'i ngo bor byas nas/

²⁸⁵**The fourteenth** [day refers to] the fourteen *yoginīs* of the *maṇḍala* of Nairātmyā. **The eighth** [day refers to] the eight *yoginīs* of the *maṇḍala* of Vajradhara. And the *maṇḍala* [for the rite] has the nature of both.²⁸⁶ [At] **the time of first light** [refers to time of] clear light,

²⁸⁷[Regarding] **the *kalaśas* and so on**, the vase [with grain oil] is Vajradhara, [the syllable] *a* is Nairātmyā. The two—undifferentiated and primordial. Furthermore, *kaṃ* [is] the aspect of wisdom. Those (vases and so on) having been placed and shown, one should **offer perfume, flowers and incense** to the maiden as Nairātmyā—[this refers to] to establishing body, speech and mind as indivisible. [Regarding] **Having consecrated the grain oil by [reciting] the mantra 108 [times]**, [grain oil refers to] sesame oil, that is, *bodhicitta*. Furthermore, **108** [refers to] Vajradhara.

²⁸⁸By means of [that the *mantrin*] completely realises the essence of wisdom. Then, [regarding] *a-lakta*, [*a-*] (i.e. the negation) is Nairātmyā, and *-lakta*—attachment—is Amitābha. *Kaṃ* has the nature of both, [that is,] coemergent wisdom. These having been empowered—the eyes of the maiden who is Nairātmyā, [are empowered] by [reciting] the *mantra* hundred-and-eight times. **The *mantrin*'s thumb** [refers to] the thumb of the *mantrin* as Vajradhara, [that is,] the most prominent among the five fingers, [in other words] the first among equals. By means of that, i.e. undifferentiated wisdom, [refers to] the *a-lakta* [being] Vajradhara and Nairātmyā. For that very reason, after having washed [the thumb with *alakta*, it is washed] with the grain oil, i.e. it is empowered by *bodhicitta*. It must be shown to the maiden who is Nairātmyā. It is the action which reveals that which is characterised by clarity.

²⁸⁵ *bcu bzhi pa zhes pa rnal 'byor ma bcu bzhi bdag med ma'i dkyil 'khor ro//brgyad pa zhes pa rnal 'byor ma brgyad rdo rje 'chang gi dkyil 'khor ro//gnyis ka'i bdag nyid kyi dkyil 'khor la/ snga dro zhes pa 'od gsal ba nyid la'o/*

²⁸⁶ The junction of day and night is yet another iteration of the leitmotif of liminality. Here this is recast as the union of the male and female tantric deities, themselves projected over the canvas of celestial phenomena—thus completing a full circle from the probably shamanic origins of *prasenā* rite to its most complicated Buddhist incarnations.

²⁸⁷ */de bum pa la sogs pa ni bum pa rdo rje 'chang dang/ a bdag med ma ste gnyis ka dbyer med pa dang po thog ma'o//de yang kaM ye shes kyi rnam pa ste/de gzhas cing bstan par byas nas gzhon nu ma bdag med ma de la/dri dang me tog dang bdug pa rnams kyang phul te zhes pa sku dang gsung dang thugs dbye ba med pa rnam par gnas [ff. 90.b] par bya zhing/'bru mar la brgyad lhag pa'i brgya yis mngon par bsngags te zhes ba til mar byang chub kyi sems te/de yang brgyad lhag pa'i brgya rdo rje 'chang ngo/*

²⁸⁸ */de yis kun nas ye shes kyi rang bzhin rtogs te/de nas a lak+ta yang/bdag med ma/lak+ta chags pa 'od dpag med/kaM gnyis ka'i bdag nyid lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes so//di yang mngon par bsngags te, gzhon nu ma bdag med ma de'i mig la slar brgya rtsa brgyad kyi mngon par bsngags nas/sngags pa'i mthe bong rgan po zhes pa sngags pa rdo rje 'chang gi mthe bong rgan po zhes pa sor mo lnga'i thu bo nyid las de nyid thun mong ba'i bdag po'o//de yis a lak+ta'i ro rdo rje 'chang dang bdag med ma dbyer med pa'i ye shes kyi so//de nyid kyi phyir 'bru mar gyis kyang bkrus nas byang chub kyi sems kyi dbang bskur te/gzhon nu ma bdag med ma de la bstan par bya zhing/rab tu gsal ba'i mtshan nyid mngon sum du gyur ba'i bya'o/*

²⁸⁹In the [passage], “By whom has [my] stuff been taken away?” **By whom** (*kena*) has my, i.e. my wisdom’s, stuff—the thing which by nature is myself, [been taken away]. **Speak** (*vada*) [refers to] the third [*akṣara*] from the fifth [*varga*]*—*the syllable *ba*—Amitābha, and the third [*akṣara*] from the fourth [*varga*]*—*the syllable *da*—Ratneṣvara.²⁹⁰ Having been **taken away** (*apa-hṛta*) [refers to] those two indivisible, in short.²⁹¹ The essenceless manifestation whose nature is without characteristics, which has the nature of ultimate truth is addressed. Using conventions, relative truth (i.e. the answer) is made clearly manifest.

²⁹²“**Such-and-such a person**” [refers to those] whose designation is formed with the *a*-word (*amuka*). **Vajra** in **vajra-luminary** [refers to] the three vajras [of body, speech and mind] indivisible. **Luminary** (*jyotiṣaḥ*) [refers to] “the clear light” (i.e. the *prasannā* deity) sealed/marked by²⁹³ the syllable *a*.²⁹⁴

Vṛddhakāyastha’s *Suvisuddhasamputa*²⁹⁵

²⁹⁶Moreover, ***nā grā nā grā*** consists of four [syllables], because of the four moments and also the four joys. **Through this** [means] by this wisdom. **At twilight** [refers to] at such a time [when] the three times [are] timeless. These are the time of bliss, the time of suffering and the inconceivable time. Then the separation between these three moments does not exist.

²⁹⁷**Through 108** (*aṣṭottaraśatena*) refers to, [to begin with] to the **eight** *yoginīs*. [Regarding] the most supreme or excellent among these, or Vajradhara, [he is] indivisible from Nairātmyā. Furthermore, there is the [number] component **one-hundred**, because there is hundredfold-ness according to the division into hundred families. As a consequence, **the maiden** is Nairātmyā.

²⁸⁹ /de'i rdzas sus khyer smros zhes pa/sus ye shes kyi nga'i rdzas nga nyid kyi rang bzhin kyi dngos po ste//khyer zhes par phrogs pa'o//smros zhes pa lnga pa'i gsum pa ba yig 'od dpag med dang bzhi pa'i gsum pad yig rin chen dbang po dang/gnyis ka dbyer med pas 'phrog par byed cing bsdus zhes pa'o//mtshan ma med pa'i rang bzhin bdag med mngon dam pa'i bden pa'i ngo bo de smra bar 'gyur te/ta snyad byed cing kun rdzob kyi bden pa mngon par gsal bar byed do/

²⁹⁰ I.e. Ratnasambhava; Ratheshavara is mentioned in the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasamgraha* in a similar context.

²⁹¹ This is possibly a play on the fact that *apa-hṛta* contains syllables from the same two groups as *bada* (i.e. *vada*)*—*the fifth and the fourth *varga*.

²⁹² /che ge mos khyer ro zhes pa a'i ming can gyis bsdus zhes ba'o//rdo rje skar ma zhes pa badzra ni rdo rje gsum dbyer med pa'o//dz+yo ya tiH zhes pa de 'od gsal ba AH yig gi rgyas btab pa'o/

²⁹³ Reading *gis* instead of *gi*.

²⁹⁴ em. *a*] *aḥ*

²⁹⁵ (Toh. 1190 ff. 30.b-31.b).

²⁹⁶ /de yang nA grA nA grA zhes pa ni yi ge bzhis skad cig ma bzhi dang/gzhan dga' ba bzhi yin pas bzhi'o zhes bya ba'i sngags 'dis zhes pa ni ye shes 'dis so//dus ma yin pa'i dus su ni dus dang bral ba'i dus gsum mo//bde ba'i dus dang sdug bsngal gyi dus dang bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i dus so//di gsum dang bral bas gang de dus ma yin pa ste//di lta bu'i dus su'o//

²⁹⁷ brgya rtsa brgyad ni rnal 'byor ma brgyad de//di rnam las bla ma 'am mchog ni bdag med ma dang tha mi dad pa'i rdo rje 'dzin no//de yang rigs brgya'i dbye bas tha dad pa nyid kyis rnam pa brgya yin pas brgya'i bdag nyid do//rgyu des na gzhon ma ni bdag med ma'o/

²⁹⁸**The two eyes** [refers to] the two truths. **Consecrated** [means] the pervaded and the pervader are taken in terms of mutually being pervaded and pervader. **The fourteenth [day]** refers to] the *maṇḍala* of Nairātmyā with fourteen *yoginīs*. **The eighth [day]** refers to] the *maṇḍala* of Vajradhara with eight *yoginīs*. The *maṇḍala* [for the rite] has the nature of both. **[In] the morning** [refers to] clear light. Then, [regarding] the **vases** and so on: the vases [stand in for] Vajradhara and Nairātmyā inseparable. **[And] so on** [means they are] first.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, *kaṃ* [is] the aspect of wisdom. **Placed** [refers to the *kalaśas*] being arranged. Then, **the maiden** [is] Nairātmyā. **Flowers** and so on [refer to] body, speech and mind being arranged as undifferentiated.

³⁰⁰[Regarding] **having consecrated the grain oil through [reciting] the mantra 108 [times]**: the **grain oil** [refers to] *bodhicitta*. Furthermore, **108** [refers to] Vajradhara. **Consecrated** by these [108 times] [refers to] all aspects of wisdom. [Regarding] **alakta**: wiping out [own nature], **a** is Nairātmyā; **lakta** is attachment. These two are verily coemergent wisdom. Even though [the thumb] has been empowered by these two, one's maiden must be Nairātmyā. The two eyes are empowered by 108 *mantras*.

³⁰¹[Regarding] **the thumb of the mantrin: the mantrin** is Vajradhara; **the thumb** [refers to] the common locus [of the gazing] because of it being the eldest (biggest) of the five fingers [on the hand]. By that having been done, [concerning] the *alakta* liquid: it is the wisdom [of] Vajradhara and Nairātmyā inseparable. **Washing with grain oil** [refers to] the consecration by means of *bodhicitta*.

³⁰²[Regarding] **asks the maiden, [the maiden]** refers to] the manifestation characterized the clearly luminous [one]. [Regarding] **“By whom has my stuff been**

²⁹⁸ /*mig dag* ni bden pa gnyis so//*mngon par bsngags* ni phan tshun du khyab par bya ba dang khyab par byed pa'i tshul du byas pa'o//bcu bzhi ni/rnal 'byor ma bcu bzhi rnam la bdag med ma'i dkyil 'khor ro//brgyad pa ni rnal 'byor ma brgyad la rdo rje 'dzin pa'i dkyil 'khor ro//gnyi ga'i bdag nyid kyi dkyil 'khor ro//*snga ba* ni 'od gsal nyid do//de la *bum pa* la sogs pa ni bum pa rdo rje 'dzin pa dang/bdag med gnyis tha mi dad pa'o//*sogs* ni dang po'o//de yang *kaM* ni ye shes kyi rnam pa'o//de *gzhaq pa* ni brtag par bya ba'o//de *gzhon nu ma* ni bdag med ma'o//*me tog* la sogs pa zhes pa ni sku gsung thugs dbyer med par *gzhaq* par bya ba'o/

²⁹⁹ The Tibetan *la sogs pa* is the translation of a Sanskrit compound of the type *x+ādi*, which is used as a *bahuvrīhi*.

³⁰⁰ /*'bru mar la lan brgya rtsa brgyad mngon par bsngags* so zhes pa ni '*bru mar* byang chub kyi sems so//de yang *brgya rtsa brgyad* ni rdo rje 'dzin pa'o//des *mngon par* ni ye shes kyi rnam par rtog pa'o//*a lak+ta* ni/phyi nas *a* bdag med ma'o//*lak+ta* ni chags pa'o//di gnyis ka yang lhan [ff. 31.b] cig skyes pa'i ye shes so//di gnyis kyi mngon par bsngags pa yang de'i *gzhon nu ma* bdag med ma la'o//brgya rtsa brgyad kyi mig dag la mngon par bsngags so/

³⁰¹ /*sngags pa'i mthe bo rgan po* zhes pa ni sngags pa rdo rje 'dzin pa'o//*mthe bo rgan po* ni sor mo lnga'i po yin pa'i phyir *gzhi mthun pa'o*//des na a *lak+ta*'i khu ba ni/rdo rje 'dzin pa dang bdag med ma tha mi dad pa'i ye shes kyi so//de nyid '*bru mar gyis blugs* la zhes pa ni/byang chub kyi sems kyi dbang bskur bar bya'o/

³⁰² /*gzhon nu ma la bstan te* zhes pa ni rab tu gsal ba'i mtshan nyid mngon du bya ba'o//*nga'i rdzas sus khyer smros* zhes pa la *sus* ni ye shes kyi so//*nga'i rdzas* ni bdag nyid kyi dngos po'o//*khyer* zhes pa ni yang

taken away?”: By whom [refers to] by wisdom. **My stuff** [refers to] one’s own material substance. **Away** [refers to being] pure [in the sense of being] completely devoid [of impurities]. **Take** [refers to] the third [akṣara] of the fifth [varga] (ba), [that is] Amitābha, [and] the third [akṣara] of the fourth [varga] (da)[, that is,] Ratnasambhāva. The two are undivided. **Taken** [refers to their] complete summation. [Regarding] that, Nairātmyā, who is endowed with a form without defining characteristics is questioned according to the manner of ultimate truth (i.e. about how things really are). The relative truth (i.e. the answer) which has been made visible is precisely what manifests.

“It has been taken by such-and-such person!” [refers to] what has been taken by the nameless (i.e. the unknown).³⁰³ [Regarding] **vajra-luminary: vajra-** [refers to] indestructible diamond; **luminary** [refers to] the luminous one (**prasannā*) marked (**mudrita*) by the letter *a* (i.e. Nairātmyā). Having questioned the luminous one, one utters five *mantras* for the sake of the elimination of the five defilements.

Saroruhavajra’s Padminī

³⁰⁴[The ritual of] **the vajra-luminary** is taught as follows: having initially recited [the mantra] *oṃ nagrā nagrā* a hundred thousand times and making a burnt offering of red lotuses, the mantra [recitation] will be complete. Offer 108 praises with the mantra *oṃ nagrā nagrā kumārīke divyalocane svāhā* at dawn after the night of the 13th or 7th [day of the lunar month] to the body and the eyes of the maiden. Having made offerings a request will be fulfilled.

dag pa spangs pa'o//smros zhes pa ni/Inga pa'i gsum pa'i yi ge ba ste/'od dpag tu med pa'o//bzhi pa'i gsum pa ni/rin chen 'byung ldan ste gnyi ga dbyer med pa'o//khyer ba ni yang dag par bsdu pa ste/de ni bdag med ma mtshan ma med pa'i tshul can don dam pa'i bden pa'i tshul smras pa ste/gsal bar byed pa'i kun rdzob kyi bden pa mngon par gsal ba nyid do/

³⁰³*/che ge mos khyer zhes pa ni/ ming med par bsdu pa yin no//rdo rje'i dpyad do zhes pa ni/rdo rje ni rdo rje mi phyed pa'o//de'i dpyad ni 'od gsal yi ge as rgyas btab pa'o/'od gsal bstan nas sgrib pa lnga spang bar bya ba'i phyir sngags lnga gsungs pa/*

³⁰⁴*/rdo rje skar ma gsungs pa/oM na gra zhes pa sngon du 'bum bzlas te pad+ma dmar po'i sbyin sreg byas nas sngags bsgrub par bya'o//oM na gra na gra ku ma rI ke Di bya lo tsa ni swA hA zhes bya ba 'dis tshes bcu gsum mam bdun gyi mtshan mo'i thun mtshams su bu mo'i lus dang mig gnyis la brgya rtsa brgyad mngon pa bsngags te mchod nas snyan gsan dbab par bya'o/ (forthcoming; courtesy of the Vienna Buddhist Studies Translation Group under the auspices of “84,000—Translating the Words of the Buddha;” translation used with permission).*

Other Commentaries

Not all commentaries on the *Hevajratantra* go into detail when dealing with this divination ritual. The two most extensive sections we already looked at are in Ṭaṃkadāsa's *Suviśuddhasamputa* and Vṛddhakāyastha's *Suviśuddhasamputa*, followed in length by Kāṇha's *Yogaratnamālā*, Vajragarbha's *Śaṭṣāhaśrikāhevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*, Ratnakaraśānti's *Muktāvalī* and Saroruhavajra's *Padminī*, which provide brief comments on some ritual details. *Padmaṃkuravajra's *Hevajratantarājasya ṭīkā*, Kṛṣṇapā's *Smṛtipada*, Durjayacandra's *Kaumudīnāma*, Dharmakīrti's *Netravibhaṅga*, Kāmadhenapā's *Śrīhevajravajrapadoddharaṇa*, the anonymous *Śrīhevajranāmatantrārthasaṃgrāha* and Bhavabhadra's *Śrīhevajravākyāvivarāṇa* do not comment on it at all, or just frustratingly designate the latter part of the chapter on *mantra* "easy to understand" (*gzhan ni go sla'o*). Kelikuliśa's *Trivajjaratnāvalīmālikā* and Kamalanātha's *Ratnāvalī* (both not translated into Tibetan) were, unfortunately, inaccessible to me.³⁰⁵ Yaśobhadra(Nāropā)'s *Vajrapadasārasaṃgraha* doesn't seem to comment on it, though he does mention term *pra phab* (*pratisenā*) three times, however only in quotations from the *Sekoddeśa* or the *VP* and in connection to other passages of the *tantra*. Nāropā seems to have either taken it as self-evident that this is a form of *prasenā* or he did not recognize it as such. This is unlikely, however, since in the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* he himself lists *prasenā* with an oiled thumb as one of the eight main types.

Identifying vajrajyotiṣa as a prasenā

Among these, the most relevant for the purpose of identifying *vajrajyotiṣa* as *prasenā* are the commentaries by Ṭaṃkadāsa and Vṛddhakāyastha which provide the most detailed explanations of the ritual and Vajragarbha's *Śaṭṣāhaśrikāhevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*, which, in my estimation, also seems to be commenting on a very particular recension of the *Hevajra* which provides the entire *mantra*. It is interesting to note that Saroruhavajra also finds it necessary to give the complete version of the *mantra*, as if one were to use the version of the *Hevajratantra* he seems to have been commenting on, one would remain with the impression that the *mantra* is **only** *oṃ nagrā nagrā*, but as we will also see in Vajragarbha's commentary, it is in fact *oṃ nagrā nagrā kumārike divyalocane svāhā*—the exact same *mantra* given by Saroruhavajra. Then again, according to Saroruha one first repeats only *oṃ nagrā nagrā* 100 000 times and then the full mantra 108 times, a detail only recounted in one other commentary—the *Śaṭṣāhaśrikāhevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*, which, however, does not break up the mantra in the aforementioned way:

³⁰⁵ A palm leaf Sanskrit manuscript of the *Ratnāvalī* commentary of the *Hevajratantra* by Kamalanātha (Mañjuśrī) can be found in the National Library of Kathmandu (C 26/4).

³⁰⁶Here follows the procedure [of the rite] for the descent of the question-deity,³⁰⁷ [i.e.] the vajra-luminary:³⁰⁸ [One] first completes the *mantra*, reciting it one million times [and making] 100,000 fire offerings of red lotuses. The *mantra* being: **om nagrā nagrā kumārike divyalocane svāhā. At twilight, [one is] to empower the eyes of a maiden by reciting this mantra 108 times; she should be offered fivefold worship with flowers, incense and so on. Place down the vase on the 14th or 8th day in the morning; having placed on top of the vase leaves of the kṣīravṛkṣa tree,³⁰⁹ [one is to] put the sesame oil in a brass vessel [and] the lac liquid in another pot, empowering it with [the same] mantra as before [recited] 108 times.** Empower the left-hand thumb, having bathed it with lac and then with sesame oil. The *mantrin*['s thumb] is looked at by the maiden. The mantra is muttered [by him]. The other [person]³¹⁰ asks: Speak! By whom has my stuff been taken away?" [Alternatively,] the other [person] asks: "What do you see will be done in the future?" Then, having seen [the answer] appear on the thumb [the maiden] tells: "The things have been stolen by such and such person." or "Such a thing will come to pass." [This is] the rite for the descent (*avatāra*) of the question-deity, [i.e.] the vajra-luminary.

The most parsimonious way to prove the hypothesis that vajrajyotiṣa is a form of prasenā is to compare the ritual to known descriptions of prasenā and to look for similarities, as well as looking at the commentaries to the Hevajratāntra itself. Nāropā in his *Paramārthasaṃgraha* commenting on the Sekoddeśa 29 elaborates that the prasenā (there referred to by the uniquely Kālacakra term pratisenā) is a non-physical image that is conjured in eight reflective objects for the sake of answering a question.

While the term *praśnāvatāra* here does not seem to relate to the name of a text³¹¹ like it explicitly does in Nāropā's *Paramārthasaṃgraha*, its mention could hardly be

³⁰⁶ *idānīm vajrajyotiṣapraśnāvatāraṇam* (em. *vajrajyotiṣa*) *vajrajyotiṣe* ucyate | *pūrvavan mantram sādhayitvā daśalakṣaṃ jāpel lakṣahomena raktapadmānām* | *tatra mantraḥ — om nagrā nagrā kumārike divyalocane svāhā* | *ity anena mantreṇa vikāṭavelāyām kumāryāś cakṣuṣī aṣṭottaraśatam abhimantrya* | *puṣpadhūpādī<nā> pañcopacāreṇa pūjayitvā nimantrayet* | *caturdaśyām aṣṭamyām vā prabhātakāle kalaśaṃ saṃsthāpya tadupari kṣīravṛkṣapallavaṃ datvā tailaṃ tāmraabhājane saṃsthāpya* | *alaktakarasaṃ aparapātre* | *pūrvamantreṇāṣṭottaraśatam abhimantrya* | *vāmakaravṛddhāṅguṣṭham alaktakena snāpayitvā tilatailena snāpayet* | *tataḥ kumāryā<ṇ> darśayen mantrī* | *mantram jāpet* | *aparaṃ pṛcchati — "vada mama dravyaṃ kenāpahṛtam"* | *aparam — "kāryaṃ vā kīdṛśaṃ paśyaṣīti"* | *tatra sāṅguṣṭhe dṛṣṭaṃ kathayati — "amukena dravyaṃ apahṛtam," "amukaṃ kāryaṃ bhaviṣyati"* | *iti vajrajyotiṣapraśnāvatāraavidhiḥ* || From Francesco Sferra's critical edition (forthcoming; used with permission). A previously published version of the commentary can be found in Shengde 2004: 57-58.

³⁰⁷ Vasudeva has 'question-aparition' for *praśna* in a similar context (2014: 370).

³⁰⁸ Following the meanings in the *Harṣacarita* (p. 56; *jyotsnām*), *PS* to *SU* 28 (*jyotiḥ*) and Bhavabhaṭṭa's commentary to the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* Chapter 43 (*jyotiṣam*)—all in an explicitly *prasenā*-related context.

³⁰⁹ Possibly *Pinus longifolia* (pw Vol. 2, S. 126); Could also refer to the leaves of any tree that produces sap, especially those with a milky appearance, such as that of some species of the *Ficus* genus.

³¹⁰ I.e., the supplicant; after Farrow and Menon 2001: 33.

³¹¹ Personal correspondence with Prof. Francesco Sferra.

dismissed as a coincidence. Both Orofino and Vasudeva point out that the word *pratisenā* very likely derives from an over-Sanskritisation of the word *prasenā*, itself a corruption of *praśna*—‘question’³¹² and therefore it is safe to assume that *praśnāvatāra* and *prtisenāvatāra* essentially refer to the same thing, regardless of whether it is a procedure or the text that deals with it, that is being referred to here. In this regard, Vasudeva further remarks that “many apparently related systems of oracular prognostication (even if the designation *prasenā* is not used) are still practised in South Asia, at least in Tibet, Kerala, and Nepal.”³¹³ Kṛṣṇācārya’s *Yogaratanmālā*³¹⁴ has *anveṣanavidhi* instead of *praśnāvatāra*, but the meaning doesn’t differ, one could also easily argue that *anveṣana* is an even more explicitly Śākta-Śaiva term. The name of the *Pañhāvāyaraṇa* (i.e., *Praśnvyakāraṇa*)- the tenth Aṅga of the Jaina canon whose main topic is precisely oracular possession and divination³¹⁵ also carries an uncanny resemblance to the term *praśnāvatāra*, but further research is necessary to determine the likelihood of a possible connection.

There is more information given in the *Śaṭsāhasrikāhevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā* version of the text than in the critical edition version of the *Hevajratantra*. The *alaktaka* (lac) and the sesame oil are kept in *separate receptacles covered by *kṣīravṛkṣa* leaves and also individually empowered with the same *mantra*. Also, in this version a third person—a questioner—seems to be explicitly involved besides the *mantrin* and the maiden, this fact being more than simply alluded to by the phrase *mantrī mantram japet*.

Within the *Kālacakra* corpus, the most common reference is to the mirror prognostication (*ādarśapratisenā*). However, in Nāropā’s commentary it is evident that pretty much any form of a reflective object would do, and in particular—a mirror, a sword, a lamp, the moon, the sun, a basin full of water, the eyes of the medium or, crucially, one’s own thumb. The second common motif is the description of the *pratisenā* as a rite that involves a maiden as a medium,³¹⁶ and the third is that the goal of the ritual is to reveal a thief. As we will see, all three appear to be leitmotifs as pertains to most forms of *prasenā*.

As we mentioned, an older text that provides a more extensive description of *prasenā* is the *Subāhuparipṛcchātāntra*,³¹⁷ together with its later commentary—the anonymous *Subāhuparipṛcchāṭīppañī* (*SPT*). Considering that according to the seventh chapter of the *SPT* the ritual requires rather gruesome preparations when

³¹² Orofino 1992: 614; Vasudeva 2014: 369-70 .

³¹³ Vasudeva 2014: 372.

³¹⁴ Farrow and Menon 2001: 32-3; Toh. 1183.

³¹⁵ Cf. Vasudeva 2014: 372.

³¹⁶ Vṛddhakāyastha’s *Suviśuddhasamputaṭīkā* (Derge ff. 30B-31B) gives further detail that the maiden should preferably be from the family of an *ācārya*, and it also mentions the eight *yoginīs*: *brgya rtsa brgyad ni rnal 'byor ma brgyad de//di rnam las bla ma 'am mchog ni bdag med ma dang tha mi dad pa'i rdo rje 'dzin no//de yang rigs brgya'i dbye bas tha dad pa nyid kyis rnam pa brgya yin pas brgya'i bdag nyid do//rgyu des na gzhon ma ni bdag med ma'o/*.

³¹⁷ This *tantra*, which is only available in Tibetan and Chinese, but was originally written in Sanskrit and translated into Chinese by Śubhakarasiṃha (CBETA: 大正新脩大正藏經 Vol. 18, No. 896).

presided over by wrathful deities, and benign substances when presided over by peaceful deities or *nāgas*, the ritual we encounter in the *Hevajratantra* probably belongs to the latter category:

In this Tantra the means by which the divination can be performed are more numerous than those mentioned by Nāropā: they are a thumb that has been dipped into lacquer and spread with butter, a mirror, a sword, a vessel of clean water, a crystal, a lamp, some earth, an iron plate, the space, a begging platter made of strained clay, precious stones put into the water and a burning fire. According to the text, after the propitiation of the spirits and the invocation to receive the power of divination, one can proceed with the mantra recitation, fasting, the wearing of white clothes, the covering of the ground with cow dung, the offering of scented ointments, flowers, incense, food, and butter lamps.³¹⁸

On Some Commentarial Treatments of *Hevajratantra* 1.2.28

As with the mirror *prasenā* in the Kālacakra corpus, the thumb-gazing variant too has its parallels in early Śaiva texts. An exceptionally similar case is described in the *Bṛhatkālottara* where the goddess Mātāṅgī is called upon to descend, to seek out a thief by means of lac-smeared thumb and seize him:

³¹⁹[The mantra is:] O Red-lipped one! O Mātāṅgī! O mother of the ghosts! Descend! Descend! Come! Show, show! Bring the thief! Seize him! With this mantra flowers should be offered to the head of two virgins on the day of summoning. Purified after bathing at noon on the second day, facing north, one should rub one's own left thumb with amla [oil while reciting] one's own mantra. Thereafter one should smear it with thick lac and abundantly offer flowers to the head of the two virgins and show them the thumb. [One of them] tells of the theft.

The ritual has here evolved into a two day affair and the main aim remains the detection of a theft. The mantra, if it is not corrupt, seems to imply a female thief. In the *phalaśruti* in the *Tridaśaḍāmarāpratyāṅgirā* too, we also find the *prasenā* closely associated with the power of *satyakathana*, "truth-saying": *lakṣajāpena vidhinā pātālaṃ tu rasātalam | prasenā satyakathana[m] tathā vidhvamsamāraṇam*, "After one hundred thousand repetitions [of the mantra

³¹⁸ Orofino 1994: 28.

³¹⁹ *raktoṣṭhi mātāṅgi bhūtamātr avatara ehi ādarś[ā]darś[ā]vahi cauraṃ grhṇāpaya enam | anena mantre[ṇa] kumārīdvaya[sya] mūrdhni puṣpāṇy āmantraṇadine deyāni | dvitīye 'hni madhyāhnasamaye snātvā śucinottaramukhenāmladravyeṇa svamāntreṇa svavāmāṅguṣṭhaṃ vimardya tad anu ghanālaktakenopalipya bhūyaḥ sa kumārīdvayasyānena mantreṇa śīrasi puṣpāṇi dattvāṅguṣṭhaṃ darśayet | cauraṃ kathayati | Bṛhatkālottara N1 = NAK 1-273, fol. 321v:32; (Vasudeva 2014: 379).*

one masters] subterranean realms, the *prasenā*, truth-saying, [magical] destruction and murder.”³²⁰

The number of *mantra* repetitions, the gazing at an oiled thumb, the reference to the colour red and the use of lac (*alaktaka*) are elements completely identical to those mentioned in the *Hevajratāntra* and the two commentaries: the and the. Much like Yoganidrā robs of Viṣṇu of his consciousness in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*—wisdom (*ye shes; jñāna*) is what “takes one’s stuff away” here—the stuff (*rdzas/dravya*) according to the commentary being one’s own stuff of selfhood (*bdag nyid kyi ngos po; *ātmavastu*).³²¹ In other words there are clear traces in the *Hevajratāntra* of the continuity of ideas relating to the states of sleep and possession as being examples of higher states of consciousness and having explicit soteriological relevance as a result. In the next section we will examine one aspect of the ritual side of this particular flavour of *prasenā*, namely—the significance of the colour red.

The Significance of the Colour ‘Red’

A vital means for mapping the connection between many *prasenā* deities (and goddesses in particular) is their connection to the colour red. The deities (most often female) are either themselves red, have parts of their bodies in red (lips, feet) and/or are worshipped with red articles, most prominently incense and flowers.

In the *Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa*, in the mantra of Mañjuśrī-Kārttikeya mentioned within the context of deities with demonstrable connections to both *yakṣas* and *yakṣinīs* and tree worship, we encounter red as a prominent colour, as well as the olfactory element already encountered in a *prasenā* context in the *Harṣacarita* of Bāṇa: “Your color is red and you are fond of red fragrances and unguents. [...] Your images are worshiped with red flowers.”

In the Śaiva *Bṛhatkālottara*³²² the *prasenā* goddess is described as “red-lipped” (*raktoṣṭhi*) the thumb of the officiant is smeared with red lac (*alaktaka*) and the mediums are worshipped with flowers (*puṣpāṇi*). Although their colour is not specified, we will see that in the context of *prasenā* they are very often indeed red.

In the Buddhist magical medicine text the *Rāvaṇaproktabālacikitsā* (the *Kumāratāntra* of *Rāvaṇa*) many of the disease-causing *graha-māṭṛkas* are pacified by means of offerings of red flowers.

The most prominent example of a Buddhist use of *prasenā* where red substances are utilised is the one found in *Hevajratāntra* 1.2.28 and the relevant commentarial

³²⁰ Vasudeva 2014: 379.

³²¹ Vṛddhakāyastha’s *Suvisuddhasamputa* (ff. 31.b).

³²² N1 = NAK 1-273, fol. 321v:32. See Vasudeva 2014: 379-10.

explanations. In Saroruhavajra's *Padminī*,³²³ Vajragarbha's *Hevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*³²⁴ and Kṛṣṇācārya's *Yogaratanmālā*³²⁵ the maiden who is to be the medium for Nairātmyā in the *vajrajyotiṣa-prasenā* is worshipped by means of a fire offering of red lotuses 108 times.

In the preceding section of the tantra (*HT* 1.2.26) there is a ritual for controlling lustful women with the help of the deity Kurukullā:

³²⁶Those who wish to make lustful women theirs, go to an aśoka tree on the eighth day of [the month of] Aśoka. Wear red cloth and eat a *madana* fruit. Mark your forehead with *kākamācikā* (*Solanum indicum*) juice and recite the following mantra:

Oṃ, hrīḥ! May such-and-such become enthralled with me! *svāhā!*³²⁷

While not directly connected with *prasenā*, as was explained in the section on Śaiva texts, *HT* 1.2 as a chapter displays the characteristics of a book of spells and lists powers which can be convincingly linked to the performance of a *prasenā* of one sort or another or its associated deities. The *Śaṭsāhasrikāhevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā* commenting on *HT* 1.2.28 explicitly names which powers can be obtained through the help of which *yoginī*. The colour red being usually connected to Kurukullā, the connection between it and *prasenā* here would be arguably dismissable if it was not for the already explained context of a large part of the chapter's connection with *prasenā*. The facts that the ritual is performed under a specific tree, that a tree sap is used as a ritual ointment and that the officiant dons a red garb further connect this ritual with the milieu of tree-deity-related practices.

To the sceptical reader I offer the following passage about Māyādevī encouraging Gautama along his path even after her death in Kṣemendra's *Avadāna Kalpalatā*:

“Mayadevi continued to watch over her son from the heavens. When Siddhartha was perilously close to death as a result of his extreme ascetical disciplines, Mayadevi went with her angelic retinue to the Nairanjana River, where the Bodhisattva was meditating. When she saw his weak and emaciated condition, she wept in the sky above him, lamenting that he was going to die

³²³ Derge ff.131a: *bdun gyi mtshan mo'i thun mtshams*

³²⁴ cf. Francesco Sferra's forthcoming edition of this commentary; *jāpel lakṣahomena raktapadmānām*. (used with permission)

³²⁵ Farrow and Menon 2001: 32-3; *puṣpadhūpadipānām pañcopacareṇa sampūjya*.

³²⁶ *pramadām vaśīkartukāmenāśokāṣṭamyām aśokatalaṃ gatvā raktavastraṃ paridhāya madanaphalaṃ bhakṣayet |*

kāmācīkārasena tilakaṃ vandayitvā mantraṃ jayet | oṃ kurukulle hrīḥ amukī me vaśībhavatu svāhā | cf. Francesco Sferra's critical edition; (forthcoming; used with permission)

³²⁷ Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

before he had fulfilled his destiny to attain deliverance. Her tears stirred him, and the Bodhisattva consoled her "I will return to you your fruitful labor.... The time is not far distant, when you will see the enlightenment of a Buddha." Consoled, Mayadevi blanketed her son with coral-red blossoms from a heavenly tree and then returned to her divine abode."³²⁸

We must note, however, that red is the main colour of interest only in a certain amount of cases, though that amount is substantial. The other colour that appears very prominent is white. Even though the detailed tracing of the ritual and symbolic significance of the colour white in relation to *prasenā* is a vast undertaking in itself, I will, for the purpose of the current preliminary exploration, limit myself to relaying the observation that these seem to be two main "streams" in the *prasenā*-like traditions that were passed down through time in India and beyond: one seems to be the more wrathful type of *prasenā*, where red seems to be a more prominent colour, which retained more archaic traits and evidence of which can be found in Śaiva-Śakta tantric texts and the Buddhist *tantras* that drew inspiration from those, such as the *Hevajratantra*, and which is still practised in some form in Nepal today;³²⁹ the other, more associated with the colour white, luminosity, water, mirrors and the sky, we find reflected (pun intended) more recognisably in the Kālacakra tantric corpus and also the type of *prasenā* that became more prominent in Tibet since around the time of Padmasaṃbhava, who is also recounted to have performed it. A connection between this more 'peaceful' or 'white' version of *prasenā*, its Śaiva antecedents and Buddhist tantric practice can be found in the ritual instructions by Vajrabodhi (662-732 CE) the *Yogin's Book of All the Yogas of the Diamond-Pinnacle Pavilion* (T. 867) which uses the very explicitly Śaiva term *āveśa* to refer to the state of the medium possessed by the deity.³³⁰

***Alaktaka* and the Metonymic Echo of Tree-deity Worship**

Concerning the identity of the substance referred to as *alakta* or *alaktaka*—this has been variously interpreted as either the sap or gum of a particular genus of trees or the lac produced from the processing of a species of mealybugs, used as a dye in India. Various texts seem to interpret it alternatively as one or the other and that may be partially due to geographic and climactic impact on what the term was used to refer to, but, as we will see below, several themes, most notably the connection to trees and the red colour, persisted. Since there has hitherto been a lack of clarity with regard to the identity of *alakta*, this has led to free renditions such as 'lacquer' in the translations of ritual texts.³³¹ Even though there are species of lacquer tree (gen. *Toxicodendron*) also native to the Indian Subcontinent, they were only cultivated in

³²⁸ Shaw 2006: 46.

³²⁹ Acharya 2007: 5; Vasudeva 2014: 372.

³³⁰ Stickmann 2002: 206-207.

³³¹ Van Schaik 2020: 127.

East and Southeast Asia and the use of actual refined lacquer in India was very limited. Although sometimes associated with a more coppery colour, *alakta* seems to explicitly be closer to blood-red, rather than a coppery or pinkish colour. *Carakasamhitā* (1.24.22) uses the word *alakta* in the description of blood.³³² The *Suśrutasamhitā* (01.06.25-28) mentions *alaktaka* in its description of spring:

³³³ In the Malaya Mountains,

- which [now] is marked by the lac from the feet of the wives of the *siddhas* and *vidyādhara*s,
- which is perfumed by the embrace of the shoots of the sandal tree,
- blows the south wind in spring,
- which brings delight among the longing people,
- inflames the god of love and
- breaks the pride of [every] couple.

The heavenly regions in spring are

- clear and
- adorned with forests in which palasa trees, lotuses, bakul, mango and aśoka trees, etc., have blossomed,
- sung to by swarms of cuckoos and insects that it boggles the mind,
- [completely] taken in by the south wind and
- lovely glittering with [their fresh] sprouts.³³⁴

It would be a speculation to suggest so, but as we will see further below, one species of insect actually produces a crust of red residue on the bark of certain trees and it would not be impossible that that sounds eerily similar to the red lac footprints of the “wives of the *siddhas* and *vidyādhara*s,” which would then bear a new significance in light of the association between *alakta*, the colour red and tree deities.

The red gum, sap or lac is not always referred to as *alakta*. The 20th *kāṇḍa* of the *Paippalādasamhitā* of the *Atharvaveda* (61.8d) mentions the *śigru* tree and its healing

³³² Personal correspondence with Dr. Vitus Angermeier.

³³³ *siddhavidyādhara* *adhūcaraṇālaktakāṇkite* |
malaye candanalatāpariṣvaṅgādhivāsīte || 25 ||
vāti kāmijanānandajanano 'naṅgadīpanaḥ |
dampatyor mānabhiduro vasante dakṣiṇo 'nilaḥ || 26 ||
dīśo vasante vimalāḥ kānanair upaśobhitāḥ |
kiṃśukāmbhojabakulacūtāśokādīpuṣpitaiḥ || 27 ||
kokilāṣaṭpadagaṇair upagītā manoharāḥ |
dakṣiṇānilasaṃvītāḥ sumukhāḥ pallavojjvalāḥ || 28 || (Jāḍavji & Rām 1938).

³³⁴ I thank Dr. Vitus Angermeier for his help in translating these passages.

properties. Griffiths³³⁵ writes that it is also referred to as *lohitavrkṣa* ('copper tree'), and that there is a red variety called *raktaśigru* or *madhuśigru*. It is, however, unlikely that this refers to either of the two species *Moringa oleifera* or *Moringa concanensis*, with which it is commonly identified, despite the pale reddish gum of the latter.³³⁶

In the Atharvavedic *Kauśikasūtra* (29.23) the word *śigru* is used in the sense of the 'fruits of *śigru*' where it is used for anointing when mixed with butter (*śigrubhir navanītamiśraiḥ pradegdhī*)³³⁷—a procedure that bears striking similarity to the ritual of the thumb-gazing *prasenā* where sesame oil (*tila*) and lac (*alakta*) are used. Furthermore, *fruit* must not necessarily denote the actual fruit of the tree and may well refer to something it produces, such as the lac made by the insects living on it. The fact that the dye is made from the encrusted secretions of the female insects on the bark of the tree may well explain why it is sometimes considered the sap or gum of the tree and why identification of the tree species has proven so challenging. By the same method of metonymic transfer, it can be hypothesised that in later ritual the red lac was used because of its connection to the dwelling places of the goddesses, even though it might have later simply been preserved as a ritual anecdote, with its ancestral metonymic magical connection largely forgotten, but still underpinning the material paraphernalia used for the practice.

The use of a red pigment in India derived from insects dates back to the late Vedic Period. Mira Roy in her 1977³³⁸ article provides us with invaluable information on the subject:

Lākṣā (lac, *Coccus lacca*—**Coccidae** family)

Lākṣā or *rākṣā* (from *rāga*, dye) the two names of the insect meaning 'bright dye' was obtained from the resinous excretion deposited on the twigs of trees from the female lac insects. It was an excellent dye-stuff (*rāgamata*) in India throughout the centuries starting from the late Vedic period. The word *lac* in English comes from the Persian word *lak* and Hindu word *lakh* both of which mean 'hundred thousand' indicating the vast numbers of minute insects required to produce lac. The red colouring principle of lac is chemically known as laccaic acid which is related to carminic acid in cochineal dye.

The insect was the native of India and of different parts of the South-East Asia. In the Hellenistic age the *lakkos*, i.e. Greek word for *lākṣā* was an export article in the part of Adulis from the important port of Barygaza in India. This particular lac is stated to have been originated in Ariaka, e.g. Maharashtra.

³³⁵ Griffiths 2007: 254.

³³⁶ Griffiths 2007: 254.

³³⁷ Griffiths 2007: 255.

³³⁸ Roy 1977 90-91.

Laccha the dye substance of Achaia, mentioned by Democritos, probably refers to crude gum lac and shellac which was imported there from the ports of Axum and India during the first century A. D.

The particular dye-producing insect (*raṅgamātā*) of India has been described by Ktesias during the fourth century B.C. as "the size of beetle, of a red colour, resembling that of minium, having long legs and soft to the touch. They are produced on trees that bear electrum, and they feed on the fruit of those." In Indian literature *lākṣā* has been described as an insect "breeding on trees, like, *mañjiṣṭhā* (*Rubla munjistha*), *palāśa* (*Butea frondosa*), *khadira* (*Acacia arabica*), *parpaṭa* or *parpaṭi* (species of *Oldenlandia*), three species of *Mangifera indica* (*vanāmra*, *kṣūdrāmra* and *raktāmra*)⁷⁸ etc., "sucking the fluid of the tree" (*palāṅkaṣā*) and "full of fluid essence" (*dravarasa*) accumulated from the nourishment obtained from the essence of trees. It produced 'resinous substance' (*jatu*) by being "attached to the trees" (*yāva*, *yāvaka*) which was produced in female insect after its "impregnation" (*krimija*). The resinous substance is stated to be the "disease of tree" (*drumāmaya*).

The resinous substance which is the source of dye has been described as both 'dark' (*kṛṣṇa*, *nīla*) and 'red' (*rakta*). This depended on the product of the trees on which the insect was fed on.

The colouring material was obtained in two ways ; (i) by squeezing the *lākṣā* and (ii) by bruising.

The dye was believed to produce permanent tints to fabric if it was boiled and made cool before being applied to the desired article.

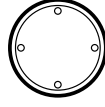
Apart from dyeing of fabric the red colouring properties of *lākṣā* was utilized widely as cosmetic for reddening of certain parts of the body."

Now, there are two other red dyes derived from insects in India—*kṛmirāga* (dye produced from crushed *Kermoccus vermilia* weevils) and the same from the *indragopa* (a species of the *Coccidae* family),³³⁹ but neither of the two bear quite the same resemblance in the manner of their extraction as *lākṣā*. There is also a possibility (and not entirely uncommonly so) for lexical variation caused by the interchangeability of the liquids /l/ and /r/ such as in the cases of *lākṣā* and *rākṣā*. One is even compelled to wonder if some distant relationship to *rākṣasa* should not be investigated. Considering the context as a further argument, reading *alakta* as something along the lines of *arakta* (which would be a derivative of *rāga* meaning 'undyed' (such as in the

³³⁹ Roy 1977: 91-92.

Manusmṛti)), especially considering that vowel length across Indic languages also varies and that the Classical Sanskrit word *ārakta* means ‘red’ (as used by Suśruta) or ‘red sandalwood’ (as used by Hemacandra), but in the context it would be unreasonable to claim that *alakta* and *lākṣā* are lexicologically and etymologically unrelated, which cannot be said with such certainty about *kṛmi* and *indragopa*.

The issue remains, that the definitive equation of *lākṣā*, *alakta* and *śigru* is impossible given the information summarised here. Examining their cases, however, does provide evidence for ritual continuity and the explicit association of a red tree-derived substance with ritual activity involving healing and, more relevantly, ritual anointing in particular. It also locates practices, elements of which can be identified as predecessors to the liturgical morphology of *prasenā* firmly in India during the Vedic period. The export of red dye from India to the Mediterranean, the use of related substances in Vedic ritual, as well as the non-Vedic indigenous worship of tree deities, as well as their demonstrable connection to lac and the colour red both materially and textually all speak in support of there being indeed a demonstrable ritual continuity.



The *Kālacakratantra*'s *pratisenā*

When one hears the title '*Kālacakratantra*,' divination, let alone notions of possession, are likely the last to come to mind. There are, however demonstrable parallels to and even borrowings from earlier tantric sources, especially Śaiva material, and particularly concerning how notions of union with the supreme consort and visionary experiences are handled, both being said to be 'like a *pratisenā*' (*pratisenāvat*) where perhaps the suffix *-vat* is better rendered as *as* instead. Although Orofino and others consistently call *pratisenā* a simile or a metaphor for the visionary experience of a *yogin*, the *Vimalaprabhā* itself states otherwise:

³⁴⁰Now, the relative has the likeness of Emptiness [and] Emptiness has the likeness of the relative, because of being beyond worldly similes.

Naturally, the authors of Kālacakra texts could not avoid the constraints of linguistic expression and thus phrases such as "like a *pratisenā*" (*pratisenopamā*) are used in several places (such as *VP* 2.2), though it is likely due to the challenge of trying to express a comparison, and yet avoid sounding metaphorical, which is something inherently dual and non-ultimate.

We will look at a number of passages from the *Laghukālacakratantra*, the *Vimalaprabhā*, the *Sekoddeśa* and its commentary the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* which explain at length how, in the same way as a maiden sees a *pratisenā*, the *yogin* experiences something beyond ordinary temporal and physical perception as well as analyse their context and the vocabulary used to speak about *pratisenā* together with similar passages from earlier sources.

The sequence of the earliest text that display Kālacakra ideas has been identified as follows: "(1) the *Laghutantraṭīkā*, (2) the *Hevajratantrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*, and (3) the *Vimalaprabhā*. The *Laghukālacakratantra*, which might be contemporaneous with or slightly earlier than the *Vimalaprabhā*, was still a work in progress at the time of the composition of the first two texts."³⁴¹

Although the ritual of performing a *pratisenā* divination is not described in much detail in the main Kālacakra texts, the term is surprisingly prominent in both the *Sekoddeśa* and the *Vimalaprabhā*, but also in their commentaries, although it does not

³⁴⁰ *ataḥ saṃvṛtiḥ śūnyatārūpiṇī śūnyatā saṃvṛtirūpiṇī lokopamāṃ atikrāntatvād asti tac cittam yac cittam acittam śāśvatocchedadharmalakṣaṇāpagataṃ śūnyatākaruṇābhinnam iti* |

³⁴¹ Sferra 2005: 260–261.

figure directly mentioned in the main text of the *Laghutantra* itself. It is also mentioned in some detail in Vajrapaṇi's commentary, in the anonymous *Sekoddeśapañjikā* and in Sādhuputra's *Sekoddeśaṭippanī*, as well as in the *Guṇabharāṇi* by Raviśrījñāna.³⁴² We have to point out that although Orofino examines some aspects of the treatment of *pratisenā* in the *Sekoddeśa* and the *Paramārthasaṃgraha*, more attention can be given to Puṇḍarīka's *Vimalaprabhā*, and specifically to its fifth chapter where *pratisenā* figures most prominently.

In his commentary preceding *Sekoddeśa* 24, Nāropā writes that “being initiated lets Reality³⁴³ (*tattva*) shine forth.” He states that this also means “it is necessary to have the mundane (*laukika*) initiation[s] as the proper basis for the [practice of] the sixfold *yoga*.”³⁴⁴ There is a recognisable similarity to the Kāpālika notion of successful initiation (*dīkṣa*) being an absolute necessity for further practice (indicated by a state of possession by the deity (*āveśa*) such as in the *Tantrāloka*³⁴⁵). A similar discussion is also found in the Buddhist *Sarvatathāgatasaṃgraha*.³⁴⁶ Further parallels are found in other Śaiva works, which describe the appearance of the deity as a result of *sādhana*, such as the *Jayadrathayāmala* which details the attainment of powers through the *vidyā* of Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī:

As the fruit of a Sādhana of certain Vidyās in a Rudrasthāna or a temple of the Mothers (*mātṛgrhaṃ*) the deity of the Vidyā appears before the Sādhaka as a *prasenā* on the surface of water, a metal pot, a sword-blade, in the flame of a lamp, in a mirror, the eye of a girl, the sun, the moon, his own thumb smeared with oil, or within his body in the point of light between his brows, and there reveals the answer he seeks. The answer may take the form of apparitional writing or a disembodied voice, or it may be uttered by a young boy or girl placed in a trance for this purpose (cf. *svasthāveśaḥ*) or it may appear to such a medium in one of the aforesaid substrates, or it may arise in the Sādhaka's mind when he awakes after a night spent in a temple of the deity.³⁴⁷

The different readings of the term *tattva* can shine a very different light on the meaning of the text. If interpreted as ‘Reality’ (which is naturally also implied)—then

³⁴² Orofino 1992: 613.

³⁴³ “Note, for instance, *Tantrasadbhāva* 16.47cd–48: ‘The *Yoginīs* should be known as taking the form of ontic levels (*tattva*) [of the cosmos], O fair woman. Carrying out the volition of Śiva, as thought and mighty, they all traverse the worlds of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Indra’ (*tattvarūpās tu yoginyo jñātavyās ca varānane* ||47| | *śivecchānuvidhāyinyo manovegā mahābalāḥ* | *vicaranti samastās ca brahmaviṣṇvindrabhūmiṣu* ||48||). (Text as quoted by Kṣemarāja commenting on *Netratantra* 19.71, but numbered as per Dyczkowski's collation of the manuscripts.) Cf. *Brahmayāmala* 32.87cd: *tattvarūpā[h] sthitā devyo yogaiśvaryā hy aninditā[h]*, ‘the goddesses take the form of the ontic levels, possessing yogic mastery, and irreproachable.’” (Hatley 2013: 27).

³⁴⁴ “*siktvā tattvaṃ prakāśayet*” *iti laukikasekapūrvako 'pi śaḍaṅgayogahetuka eva*

³⁴⁵ See the relevant sections on the *Traces of Possession in the Patañjalayogaśāstra and Some of its Commentaries* and *Prasenā in Śaiva Texts*; Also see Smith (2009: 370).

³⁴⁶ Sanderson 2009: 137.

³⁴⁷ Sanderson 2015: 5.

the meaning is very abstract. If read in the sense of *mātr*, *yoginī*, *ḍākiṇī* and so on,³⁴⁸ then it would point to *tattvayogin* referring to the *yogin* experiencing at the very least a vision of the female deity. We already discussed the contextual relation of the term *yoga* to sleep and possession in contexts such as those encountered in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* to the *Yogatārāvalī*. Hints of this are also to be found in expressions such as that “*prajñā*-wisdom is tenfold” (*LKCT* 5.114), explained in a *prasenā*-related context by the *Vimalaprabhā* (5.2) to be the *yogin*’s own mind assuming the shapes of the deities as a result of it being empowered by the *vidyā*-mantra.

Pratisenā* in the *Sekoddeśa* and the *Paramārthasaṃgraha

In the *Sekoddeśa* we encounter all the above-mentioned themes, but in a much more compressed form and thus harder to unpack. The *Sekoddeśa* states:

[The *yogin*] should engage (*kuryāt*) in his (Kālacakra’s) practice (*asyaiva sādhanam*) using³⁴⁹ such (*taiḥ*) unimagined (*acintitaiḥ*) apparitions (*pratibhāsair*), [as] those characterised by “smoke” and so on (*dhūmādibhir nimittaiḥ*), [which are] images of *prajñās*³⁵⁰ (*prajñābimbair*) unperturbed like the sky (*nabhaḥsamaiḥ*), (*SU* 24)

the consciousness objects (*pratyayārthaiḥ*) of [the *yogin* ’s] own mind (*svacetasaḥ*), which are outside (*vyatikrāntaiḥ*) [concepts such as] “is” [and] “is not” (*astināsti*), [and are] completely free free (*parivarjitaiḥ*) all [notions of] the aggregations of [even the smallest] atomic particles³⁵¹ (*paramāṇurajaḥsaṃdohaiḥ*); (*SU* 25)

[These being:] smoke (*dhūma*), a mirage (*marīci*), celestial light³⁵² (*khadyota*), a lamp[’s flame] (*dīpa*), a blaze (*jvālā*), the moon (*indu*), the sun³⁵³ (*bhāskara*),

³⁴⁸ Following Hatley (2013: 27) and Wayman (1962: 74-75) who, taken together, convincingly argue for the interchangeability of any number of terms, including *tattva*, used throughout Buddhist and Śaiva tantric texts for female spirits or deities.

³⁴⁹ I freely translate the instrumental in a more active way.

³⁵⁰ It has to be noted that the so-called ten omens bear striking similarities with ten goddesses described in the VP’s *Chapter on Practice* and there is a very compelling case to be made here that this is indeed the case, rather than just abstract visual phenomena, which I attempt to do at length in a forthcoming publication.

³⁵¹ The *Lalitavistarasūtra* (Vaidya 1958: 103) refers to the Buddha’s conversation with the mathematician Ārjuna, where *paramāṇurajaḥ* is referred to as a measurement equal to 10⁻²⁴ of a metre (if we accept 1 *yojana* to be approx. 9km) or ~1,1 yoctometers, which, curiously enough, is approx. the diameter of a neutrino. Lamotte (1980: 2202) translates *paramāṇu* as *atoms subtil* or “subtle atoms.”

³⁵² Usually translated as “firefly,” the Tibetan gives us *mkha’ snang*, which is equally ambiguous, alternatively translatable as either “celestial light” or “firefly”, but this is not the usual word for “firefly” in Tibetan, therefore I take the meaning derivable from the etymological analysis of the word. What is clear, however, is that the term refers to some kind of optical phenomenon seen in space or the sky.

³⁵³ The commentary of Nāropā suggests ten signs, therefore I read *indubhāskara* as two lemmas: *indu* and *bhāskara*.

Rāhu (*tamaḥ*), lightning (*kalā*) and the Great Drop (*mahābinduḥ*)—the clear image of Viśva[mātā] (*viśvabimbaṃ prabhāsvaram*). (SU 26)

The *Paramārthasaṃgraha* comments:

³⁵⁴[They are] **apparitions** (*pratibhāsa*), because of the suddenness of their appearance in the empty [sky]. [They are] **unimagined** (*acintita*), because of the arrestation of all cognitive activities. [They are] **omens** (*nimitta*) because they are the first forms of the fruit of Reality (*tattvaphala*).

[...]

³⁵⁵Moreover, these six omens [comprise] the *yoga* of open space, [i.e.] “the *yoga* of the day”, because of their appearance as beings of celestial light in the cloudless sky.

If the reader had any doubt what is being spoken about here, Nāropā gives one of precious few explicit references to *bimba* here referring to the images of actual deities, rather than mere abstract visual phenomena:

³⁵⁶So, this apparition of a Buddha-image whose nature is that of an emanation body, akin to the momentary vision [which can be seen in the] water in the [palm of the] hand of all clear forms of [those characterised by] the pot, fabric etc. with which the *yogin* unites, [is] **the clear image of Viśva[mātā]**. (PS)

³⁵⁷The dream-like true form not followed by eyes which are half-closed—half-open, which can be seen in the empty [sky/atmosphere], [is] what [the *yogin*] should always strive to cultivate. (SU 27)

³⁵⁸“With eyes half closed and half open”: with eyes half-closed, turned towards space [emptiness] (*antarāla*), “that image which appears in the empty” i.e. in the ether (*ākāśa*) is devoid of perceiver and perceptible, “like a dream, non-discursive; this image” is universal, directly perceived (*pratyakṣam*); “the *yogin* will have to meditate on it”, i.e. consolidate it with that branch of *yoga* called contemplation (*dhyāna*). (PS)

³⁵⁴ *akasmāc chūnye pratibhāsanāt pratibhāsaiḥ | sarvavikalpoparamād acintitaiḥ | tattvaphalasya pūrvarūpatvān nimittaiḥ |*

³⁵⁵ *etāni śaṇṇimittāni nirabhṛagaganālokabhāvāt divāyogo'bhyavakāśayogaś ca |*

³⁵⁶ *tatas tan madhyagāmisambhogakāyātmakabuddhabimbadarśanasahitam ekakṣaṇe karasthānīropamasvacchasarvākāraghaṭapaṭādidarśanam viśvabimbaṃ prabhāsvaram |*

³⁵⁷ *pihitāpihitānetrābhyāṃ śūnye yan nānukalpitaṃ || dṛśyate svapnavad bimbaṃ tad bimbaṃ bhāvayet sadā || SU 27 ||*

³⁵⁸ *pihitāpihitānetrābhyāṃ iti | antarālāvalambitayā 'rdhonmīlitalocanābhyāṃ śūnya ākāśe grāhyagrāhakarāhite yan nānukalpitaṃ svapnavad bimbaṃ yogipratyakṣam tad bimbaṃ viśvabimbaṃ bhāvayed dhyānāṅgena 'sthīrikuryāt |*

Similarly, the *Hevajratantra* says:

³⁵⁹[When it first appears it is like a cloud,
But when fully attained, it is like an illusory display.
Then it powerfully manifests like a dream,
[And then] without distinction whether dreaming or awake.
When the characteristic [of the coemergent] is obtained through the lack of
[this] difference,
The *mudrāyogin* is accomplished. (HT 1.10.19)³⁶⁰

In this particular example we also see how the terms *tattvayogin* in the Kālacakra context and *mudrāyogin* in the Hevajra context, much like the designation *yoginī* and its synonyms as noted by Keul³⁶¹ and Wayman,³⁶² directly correspond to each other, or are, at the very least, strongly synonymous, especially considering the similarity of the context within which they appear—an argument which can be used as a reliable litmus test for one’s understanding of a text’s contents. Once again, we encounter the phenomenon of different individual authors, texts or traditions essentially drawing upon similar sources, ideas and practices, while referring to them by different means, be it a matter of preference, the felt necessity for the concealment of the source or relation or simply lexical variation.

To compare the nature of the *yogin*’s visionary experience to the very special and extra-ordinary perception characteristic of the medium for the deity in the divinatory rite of *pratisenā*, where an officiant calls upon a deity to possess a maiden or a young boy and, having gazed at a shiny, burnished or reflective object, to answer a question, the *Sekoddeśa* continues:

³⁶³Cultivating with a non-existent image
is not the *yogins*’ cultivation.

³⁵⁹ *prathamam meghavad bhāti siddhe tu māyāvad bhavet |*
sahasā svapnavad bhāti svapijāgradabhedavat |
abhedalakṣaṇāsiddhau mudrāyogī prasidhyati || HT 1.10.19 ||

³⁶⁰ The *Muktāvalī* says: *abhedah svapnajāgarābhyām aviśeṣaḥ, tena lakṣaṇā sahajabhāvanā, tayā siddhiḥ sahasāśāṅkṣātkriyā, tasyām avasthito yogī siddhyati*; “Lack of difference” means the lack of difference between [the way the coemergent manifests in] sleep and during the waking state. That which is “characterized” by the [no-difference] is the cultivation of the coemergent. Through this [cultivation, the no-difference] is “obtained,” which means that the coemergent is experienced directly and the yogin is established in this [experience]; Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

³⁶¹ “In the goddess category, ‘yoginī’ could be associated, for example, with *mātrī/mātrkā*, *mahāvidyā*, *śākinī*, and *ḍākinī*, especially if we consider the tantric Buddhist traditions (Herrmann-Pfandt 1992). In the demigoddess or intermediary being category, the list of potential semantic neighbours would include the *apsaras*, *vidyādhārī*, *yakṣī/yakṣiṇī* and also Śiva’s *gaṇas*.” (Keul 2013: 13)

³⁶² Wayman 1962: 74-75.

³⁶³ *abhāve bimbe bhāvanā sā yoginām na bhāvanā | bhāvo ’bhāvo na cittasya bimbe ’kalpitadarśanāt || SU 28 ||*

What “exists” or “does not exist” are not of the mind, because what [one] sees in an image is something unimagined. (SU 28)

³⁶⁴In the same way (*iva*) that a maiden can see a *pratisenā* appearing in a mirror without a physical [object being reflected therein], so, verily, a *yogin*, can see past and future³⁶⁵ *dharmas*³⁶⁶ in the sky. (SU 29)³⁶⁷

Nāropā comments:

[On] a *pratisenā* and so on: The expression “*pratisenā*” should be understood (*abhidhīyate*) [to refer to] the object (*arthah*), not [deliberately] imagined by the adept (*sādhakācintitaḥ*), appearing in a mirror etc., [in the same way as a maiden] can see such a [*pratisenā*] appearing without a physical [object being reflected therein], [i.e.] without the intermediating phenomena of a thief and so on, in a mirror, [i.e.] in a *speculum*;

In the *tantra* on the summoning of prognostic images (*pratisenāvatāratantre*) it is said that a *pratisenā* can be summoned up in eight [reflective objects]: a *speculum*, a sword, the thumb, a lamp, the moon, the sun, a basin full of water [or] the eyes. The *yogin* by whom the non-conceptual path has been obtained [can see] a phenomenon beyond past and future as an image of all forms in the empty, i.e. in the sky.

The above passages clearly demonstrate the continuity of the ideas that associated the special kind of experience that is the product of conceptual thinking (*vikalpa*) being arrested. In the same way that there is no abstract reflection of reality in mental concepts, the image (*bimba*) of a *pratisenā* shines forth in a mirror without an original object which could be the original were it an ordinary reflection, yet it nonetheless appears. This we already encountered explicitly mentioned in the *Kapphiṇābhyudaya*

³⁶⁴ *pratisenām ivādarśe paśyet kumāry avastujām | tathātūtānāgataṃ dharmam yogy ambare 'pi paśyati || SU 29 ||*

³⁶⁵ The exact same wording can be seen in the YS of Patañjali. See *Traces of Possession in the Pātañjalatogaśāstra and Some of its Commentaries*.

³⁶⁶ The term *dharma* here can be understood more broadly as ‘phenomenon,’ however I would suggest that this actually refers to the visionary experiences referred to as *nimittas* in SU 24-26, and even refers to deities, as can be surmised from LKCT 4.3.54 and 55, as well as LKCT 4.3.94.–95 and VP 4.115.

³⁶⁷ Orofino (1992: 612) translates this verse as:

“As a young girl who sees in the divinatory mirror an image not born from any material thing, the *yogin* sees in the ether the past or future reality.”

I propose an updated understanding on this verse in my translation for various reasons, including the use of various different objects for the performance of a *pratisenā*, and not just mirrors. See Nāropā’s commentary below.

(15.35), and in his commentary to *SU* Nāropā extensively quotes Saraha and Āryadeva to the same effect. The *Sekoddesa* continues:

³⁶⁸Its (the *pratisenā*'s) existence is empty,
because what appears is void (*śūnya*) of physical substance (*vastu*).
An object which is empty of material substance is akin to an illusion, a dream,
a magical apparition. (*SU* 30)

Slightly later, the *Sekoddesa* (34) also tells us:

³⁶⁹[A *yogin*] sees neither with his own eyes, nor with the other eyes
in the same way as an unborn son
is seen as born by a maiden [like in a dream]. (*SU* 34)

Nāropā comments, quoting the *Sāadhanā*-Chapter *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Laghukālacaratantra*, explaining that:

At the beginning [of his Path], the beginner yogin sees all images/apparitions with the “Eye of the Flesh”, without [the involvement of] any supernatural perception (*abhijñā*). Then [he] sees with the “Divine Eye” up within the range of supernatural perception. Having reached a condition without attachment, he sees with the “Eye of an Awakened One.” Within the [perceptual] range of a bodhisattva, he sees with the “Eye of Wisdom”; and then again after that: with the “Eye of Knowledge” within the range of [perception] of a Perfectly Awakened One (*samyaksaṃbuddha*) – having attained final release from all limitations. Thus, “Eye of the Flesh” and the others are called the Five Eyes of a Tathāgata, with regard to the vision of Emptiness. Other beings are born blind with [regard to] the vision of Emptiness. Such is the principle [that applies to] cultivation with Reality.

The *Vimalaprabhā*, however, specifies that it is indeed the faculty of divine vision that enables this perception—a theme also reflected in the *prasenā-mantra* from the *Hevajratantra*, where the maiden is called “divine-eyed” (*divyalocanā*).

³⁶⁸ *asyā bhāvo na bhāvaḥ syāt vastuśūnyārthadarśanāt |*
vastuno 'bhāvato 'py arthaḥ māyāsvapnendrajālavat || SU 30 ||

³⁶⁹ *na paśyaty anyacakṣurbhyāṃ svacakṣurbhyāṃ na paśyati ||*
dr̥śyamānam ajātaṃ tu kumāryā jātakaṃ yathā || SU 34 ||

Pratisenā in the Vimalaprabhā

The first mention of *pratisenā* in the *Vimalaprabhā*³⁷⁰ occurs at a very central place in the text—at the very beginning of the first chapter, in the verses in praise of Kālacakra and Viśvamātā. In these first verses both Kālacakra and Viśvamātā (*Mahāmudrā*) are described as having the appearance or own likeness of a *pratisenā* (in the sense of the extraordinary image that appears in a shiny surface). As in the *Sekoddeśa*, their union (*e-vaṃ*) is said to be beyond conceptual cultivation (*vikalpabhāvanātīta*)—a clear trait paralleled in non-*saiddhāntika* Śaiva sources, among others. There is also a complete dissolution of “perceived, perceiver, shape, thought and expression.” *E-vaṃ* is said to have the form of the city of the *gandharvas*. Then, the *Mahāmudrā* is described as being “beyond the reality of the smallest atoms”—the same descriptor as in the *Sekoddeśa* and the *Paramārthasaṃgraha* to verse 28.

In *VP* 1.1.34 Viśvamātā is described as “She who moves swiftly³⁷¹ like the flying wind”—a description much like that of the *ḍākiṇīs/yoginīs* as sky-goers (*khecarīs*). If my interpretation of the term *nimikā* is correct, then this descriptor also evokes echoes of the mythological scenario found in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* among other places, where the goddess Yoganidrā dwells in the eyes of Viṣṇu. On the other hand, this also corresponds to *pratisenā* being again and again said to be also conjurable in the eyes (both one’s own or the maiden’s). Viśvamātā is also said to be “like the eight types of *prasenā*.”

VP 1.1.35 explains how a true *yogin* practices with her and neither with a physical consort of flesh and bone (*karmamudrā*), nor with a visualised/imagined consort (*jñānamudrā*). If he were to do that, it would lead to emission of the semen—something definitively undesirable in the Kālacakra context—but also something we encountered in the *Subāhupariṣṭcchātānta* as what causes the fierce female divinities to get angry at the *sādhaka*—an exceptionally curious detail and perhaps one that adds to the list of motifs connected with the history of *prasenā* and like practices, also noted by Orofino.³⁷² Instead, he should practice with the *Mahāmudrā*—of the own likeness of a *pratisenā*, endowed with the most supreme of all aspects (*sarvākāraavaropeta*).

At the very beginning of *VP* 1.2. It is mentioned that “what bestows the fruit of Buddhahood” (i.e. Viśvamātā) is glossed as that which bestows the ten powers. The theme of special abilities being obtained through *prasenā* and like practices we saw

³⁷⁰ Text of the verses from Upadhyaya 1986: 2.

³⁷¹ Although no direct etymological connection can be made between *śīghra* (swift, the wind) and *śigru* it is curious that the word is being used in the description of a *prasenā*-related deity, since the *śigru* tree, also referred to as *lohitaṣṭkṣa* (‘copper tree;’ See Griffiths 2007: 254) and trees associated with the colour red in general, have a strong connection to both the male and female tree deities that are possibly the predecessors of the deities invoked in *prasenās*.

³⁷² *Ibid.* 1994.

clearly reflected in the *Hevajratantra* and its related Śaiva texts. Regarding the *yogin* who abides in Great Bliss—Great Bliss is glossed as the *dharmadhātu* and the *dharmodaya*. Respectively, *e* and *vaṃ* are explained to be the vajra lion throne, characterised by space, and its occupant.

Furthermore, *VP* 1.3 elaborates:

³⁷³What is mundane³⁷⁴ is characterised by colour, hands, signs and shape.³⁷⁵
What is ultimate is devoid of colour, hands, signs and shape.

From among these two, the one which has been taught to be mundane is what produces as its fruit worldly *siddhi*—a phenomenon imagined by one's own mind for the practice of attaining [such] worldly *siddhi* inside or outside oneself.

What is ultimate is devoid of phenomena imagined³⁷⁶ by one's own mind, is directly perceived—the luminous apparition³⁷⁷ of the own mind of the *yogin*, which shiningly appears in the sky—the same as a *pratisenā* [seen] by a maiden in a mirror and so forth.

The successful adept is described in *VP* 1.3 as:

³⁷⁸Devoid of perceived and perceived, beyond the factors of existence of cognition, being grounded in neither cyclical existence nor *nirvāṇa*, [one is] the sum of the Buddhas and the chosen of the goddesses.

The text continues to compare *vajrayoga* to a *pratisenā* appearing in a mirror and explains that to be the practice aimed at the *yogin* achieving ultimate impartiality. Next, the topic of existence and non-existence is examined, it being argued to be connected to the notions of temporariness and permanence, by means of the example of the sky flower and the pot. If the sky flower would exist, then the pot would not—the reverse would also be true. On the mundane level, the two are mutually exclusive.

³⁷³ *yo lokasaṃvṛtyā sa varṇa-bhuja-cihna-saṃsthāna-lakṣaṇaḥ, yaḥ paramārthataḥ sa varṇabhujacihnasaṃsthānarahitaḥ | anayor yo lokasaṃvṛtyā deśitaḥ, sa bāhye 'dhyātmani laukikasiddhisādhanaṃ svacittaparikalpanādharmo laukikasiddhiphaladāyaka iti | yaḥ paramārthasatyena deśitaḥ, sa lokottarasarvākāravaroṣaṇaḥ svacittaparikalpanādharmarahitaḥ pratyakṣaḥ svacittapratibhāso yogināṃ gagane pratibhāsate kumārikāyā ādarśādau pratisenāvad iti |*

³⁷⁴ The object of this and the following sentences is most likely the *mudrā*.

³⁷⁵ I.e. it is material, has a body, etc.; Newman has 'symbols' for *cihna*.

³⁷⁶ For *kalpanā*; Newman has 'imagine.'

³⁷⁷ For *pratibhāsa*; Newman has 'clear light.'

³⁷⁸ *grāhyagrāhakavajito vijñānadharmatātīto bhavanirvāṇāpratiṣṭhito buddhānāṃ samājo devināṃ saṃvaraś ca |*

³⁷⁹Hence, the example [consists in how] these two [are] mutually exclusive. Thus, if there were existence, because there is no temporariness, everything would exist; If there were no temporariness, because there is no existence, then nothing³⁸⁰ would exist.

Crucially here, the perception which goes beyond such distinction is said to be the same as the nature of a *pratisenā* (here referring to the image that appears in the burnished surface)—not subject to this paradox by virtue of being beyond the two opposing categories, and beyond conceptual thought altogether:

³⁸¹Here, again, the image of the completely pure mind, whose nature is emptiness and compassion, which is the same as the *pratisenā* [seen] by a maiden, is not characterised by having a [physical] form because of the absence of a child opposite [oneself];³⁸² It is not[, however,] characterised by not having a form [either], because of its being visible in the empty [space].

Further, *VP* 1.6 explains how on the relative level, the *mandala* is composed of coloured cords and powders drawn and sprinkled on the ground, as is also referred to by Nāropa, but on the ultimate level it is devoid of them and thus the same as a *pratisenā*, paralleling how the *Karmamudrā* is identified by physical characteristics (i.e. a living consort of flesh and blood, much like the archaic version of the ritual where an external medium is used), the *Jñānamudrā* is willfully cultivated (such as in the *saiddhāntikas' bhāvanā*), but the *Mahmudrā* is beyond characterisation of any kind (or all of them simultaneously and without differentiation, hence called *sarvākāraropeta*; i.e. like a *pratisenā*):

³⁸³[Regarding] **Explain all these very [things], Oh guru of gods and men, and also about the *maṇḍala* [and] the empowerment[s]!** Here, according to worldly truth, [the *maṇḍala* is] a *maṇḍala* [made] of [coloured] powders; **explain** [refers to explaining how it should be constructed] by laying down the powders [and] threads.³⁸⁴ According to ultimate truth, [the *maṇḍala* is] free

³⁷⁹ *ity anayoḥ parasparavaidharmyād dṛṣṭānto bhavati | evam ucchedavaidharmyād bhavo 'sti sarvabhāvataḥ, bhavavaidharmyād ucchedo nāsti sarvabhāvataḥ |*

³⁸⁰ *Ca: sarvātmani.*

³⁸¹ *iha punaś chūnyatākaruṇātmakasya bimbasya viśuddhacittasya kumārikāpratisenopamasya na rūpalakṣaṇaṃ paramāṇor abhāvān nārūpalakṣaṇaṃ śūnye vidyamānatvāt |*

³⁸² Reading a Genitive singular of *para-mānu-*; Such an interpretation makes sense in light of the fact that for the performance of a *prasenā* a young person is usually needed to act as a medium.

³⁸³ *etad vyākhyā hi samyak tridaśanaraguro maṇḍalaṃ cābhiṣekam iti | iha laukikasatyena rajomaṇḍalam ākhyā hi rajahsūtrapāteneti [32 b] | paramārthasatyena punaḥ sūtrapātaraḥitaṃ rajahpātaraḥitaṃ varṇabhujasaṃsthānarūpadevatāvikalpabhāvanācittaraḥitaṃ sarvākāram ākāśadhātāv ādarsapratisenopamam iti |*

³⁸⁴ This could either refer to using a thread covered in powder which is held under tension in such a way, that when pulled and released, it strikes against a surface and leaves a perfectly straight line. This is how grids for murals and grids for sand *maṇḍalas* are still made in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition today. Alternatively, as in the Hevajra tradition, beside the coloured powders that form the *maṇḍala*, there are also figures of deities drawn by laying down threads. Newman's translation of *rajasūtrapāta* as 'striking

from the laying down of threads, free from the laying down of powders, free from the mind of conceptually cultivating the deity with colour, arms, shape and likeness— [it is instead] of all shapes, as a mirror *prasenā* in the realm of space.

The second chapter of the *VP* mentions *pratisenā* only twice, firstly in 2.2 and later in the commentary to *LKCT* 2.161, glossing “unobstructed emptiness” as ³⁸⁵“endowed with the most supreme of all aspects, like a *pratisenā*.” Later *The Vimalaprabhā* 2.7 explains:

³⁸⁶**There is existence, and there is nonexistence. There is a state without intrinsic nature and free from momentariness.** Here, the state of Buddhas, whose makeup is composed of the oneness of existence and non-existence, is without own nature, free from substances and conceptualizations, equal to a *pratisenā*, devoid of momentariness, free from arising and loss.³⁸⁷

In the third chapter of the *VP* *pratisenā* is mentioned only once—the apparitions that manifest at the *lalāṭa* during the generation stage are described to be “as a *pratisenā* that appears in a mirror” (*ādarśagatam iva pratisenāsamam*).

In the fourth³⁸⁸ and fifth chapters, however, it is afforded much more attention.

The Medium of the Own Mind

The fifth chapter of the *Vimalaprabhā* is the only one where *pratisenā* is not only mentioned, but a virtual debate is held with an opponent who inquires about how is it exactly that the experience of a *yogin* can be temporally and physically transcendental, to which the author explains that the reason is it functions as a *pratisenā*—a much lengthier and more detailed version of the argument laid out in the *Sekoddeśa*.

³⁸⁹And the *prajñā* wisdom is mind. Its manifestation is tenfold. Empowerment, which is the immersion in this, is like the image (*bimba*) of the stainless

the chalk line’ is unsupported by the next sentence, which mentions the two separately, similar to the scenario encountered in the *Hevajratantra*.

³⁸⁵ *tathaivājāḍā sūnyatā sarvākāraavaropetā pratisenopameti*; Later I translate *ajāḍā* as non-intermediated in the same context.

³⁸⁶ *bhāvo 'bhāvo 'pi cāsti kṣaṇikavirahito niḥsvabhāvo bhavo 'stīti | iha bhāvābhāvaikalolībhūto niḥsvabhāvo dravyavikalparahitaḥ pratisenātulyaḥ kṣaṇikavirahita utpādayayarahito bhāvo buddhānām dharmacakrapravartanāyāstīti |*

³⁸⁷ Adapted from Wallace (2004: 241).

³⁸⁸ See Appendix II.

³⁸⁹ *prajñā jñānaṃ ca cittaṃ bhavati daśavidhas tasya cābhāsa eva seko 'smin majjanaṃ yad vimalaśaśinibhādarśabimbopamaṃ vai | tasmān nirvāṇasaukhyācyutam api sahajaṃ cākṣaraṃ vai caturthaṃ yasyaitad buddhavaktraṃ hṛdayamukhagataṃ vartate śrīguruḥ saḥ || LKCT 5.114 ||* (Dwivedi & Bahulkar 1994b: 53).

appearance of the moon in a mirror. From it there is also the imperishable bliss of *nirvāṇa*, the co-emergent, the fourth. In whose heart that Buddha-face has entered—he is the venerable *guru*! (LKCT 5.114)

The *Vimalaprabhā* comments:

³⁹⁰To expand upon ***prajñā* wisdom** and so forth: ***prajñā*** as well as wisdom in this verse are, in respective order (*yathāsaṃkhyam*), [both] the **mind** of the perceiver and this perceiving mind's tenfold [signs] starting with smoke (*dhūma*)³⁹¹ i.e., what is being perceived (*grāhya*), akin to a *pratisenā* appearing in a mirror. That appearance is the **wisdom**. It is the mind [inasmuch as it is the object] to be perceived. Such is the meaning. just as the reflection of one's own eyes in a mirror is an object being perceived by one's own eyes. **In this sense it is *prajñā*** and wisdom. (VP 5.2 to LKCT 5.133)³⁹²

The larger exegetical passage comes in VP 5.3. The commentary is to LKCT verse 5.3.127:

³⁹³The unity of the vowels and consonants—of the moon and the sun—the throne of the vajra-holder, which has been marked, verily, by the syllable *hūṃ*, i.e. transformed [out of it], is a colour[ful] own likeness [which is], again, undesirable [compared to] to the imperishably arisen drop of all forms which has reached the end of perishing, the [one perceived by the] divine sense organ of the supreme lord of all Jinās, who has a grasp of universal illusion! (LKCT 5.3.127)

Here we find once again the theme mentioned in the VP 1.1.35 and 1.2. that neither the *karmamudrā* nor the *jñānamudrā* are ultimately desirable for a *yogin*, as well as a rare explicit mention that the term *dharma* in this context should be understood as 'deity' (*devatā*), also supporting this reading in other related texts such as the *Sekoddeśa* v. 29:

³⁹⁴Hence, **that which been transformed out of the syllable *hūṃ*** [refers to] **that which has been marked** by a *vajra*. That which has been transformed

³⁹⁰ *prajñā jñānam* ityādi vitanyate [184b] | iha *prajñā* ca *jñānam* ca yathāsaṃkhyam grāhakacittam, tasya ca grāhakacittasya yo *daśavidho* dhūmadiko grāhya ādarśābhāsaḥ pratisenāvat, sa eva jñānam grāhyacittam ity arthaḥ | evam ādarśa svacaṣṭhpratibimbam iva svacaṣṭhgrāhyam iti *prajñā* ca *jñānam* ca |

³⁹¹ I.e. the ten goddesses described in the *Chapter on Practice*. See, among others, LKCT 4.3.54; 55; 94; 103.

³⁹² My gratitude to Klaus-Dieter Mathes for his invaluable input on the translation of this verse and the section of the commentary.

³⁹³ *ekatvaṃ hy ādikādyoḥ śaśidīnakarayor āsanam vajriṇo na hūmkāreṇaiva cihnam pariṇatam aparaṃ neṣyate varṇarūpam | utpannasyākṣareṇa kṣaranidhanagatasyāśya divyendriyasya sarvākārasya bindoḥ paramajinapater viśvamāyādharaṣya || LKCT 5.3.127 ||*

³⁹⁴ *tathā hūmkārapariṇatam vajracihnam, vajracihnāpariṇato devatākāyo varṇabhujasaṃsthānaparikalpanādharmā ādheyalakṣaṇo neṣyate | kasmāt | abhiniveśalakṣaṇāt kṣarasvabhāvāt |*

into the marked by a *vajra*, i.e. the body of the deity—a conceptual phenomenon which has colour, arms and shape, [and is] characterised as the supported—is undesirable. How come? Because [it is] characterised by affection and is [therefore] perishable.

The *Vimalaprabhā* continues slightly later on:

³⁹⁵These two, [i.e. the vowels and consonants together, or the sun and the moon are] outside the scope of dependently arisen [objects of the] sense faculties, [but] within the scope of the divine sense faculty,³⁹⁶ the two parents³⁹⁷ of Vajrasattva and [all] the buddhas, which have the own nature of imperishable bliss, have transcended the reality of even the smallest atomic particles, are like a mirror-*pratisenā* or a dream, [and] have the [same] own likeness as imperishable bliss.³⁹⁸

Thus once again we see the stress on the non-application of conceptual cultivation, further underpinning the argument for a doctrinal connection between the Śākta-Śaiva Kāpālikas and the Kālacakara corpus of texts. More specifically, there seems to be a systematic incorporation of both *saiddhāntika* and non-*saiddhāntika* Śaiva soteriological logic, one being utilised on the mundane (*laukika*) and the other on the supramundane (*lokottara*) level respectively. Sanderson,³⁹⁹ as we briefly reviewed in *Prasenā in Śaiva Texts*, elaborates on the possible doctrinal background of the incorporation of possession ‘technology’ into later Buddhist tantra:

The centrality of possession in the [later] Śākta-Śaiva domain may [have] derive[d] from its Kāpālika antecedents, since the Saiddhāntika Śaivas report that the Kāpālikas [of the Atimārga] defined liberation as arising from a state of possession (*āveśaḥ*) by the qualities of the deity, analogous to the state of one who is possessed by a Bhūta (*bhūtāviṣṭapurūṣavat*). [...] They are distinguished in this context from the two other Atimārgic traditions, those of the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas, who defined liberation as the transference of the state of equality with Śiva in the manner in which one lamp is lit from another (*sāmyasaṃkrāntivādaḥ*), and the Lākulas, who defined it as the arising of this state (*sāmyotpattivādaḥ*); see SANDERSON 2006, pp. 179–181. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that possession by the deity as the goal of practice is a marked feature of the *Picumata* and *Yoginīsaṃcāra* of the

³⁹⁵ *tau pratītyasamutpannānām indriyāṇām agocarau divyendriyagocarau vajrasattvabuddhamātarau paramākṣarasukhasvabhāvau paramāñudharmatātītau ādarśapratisenāsvapnatulyau paramākṣarasvarūpāv iti* |

³⁹⁶ Thank to A. Calahan Morse for his input on translating *divyendriya*.

³⁹⁷ Alternatively ‘mothers;’ The word *mātr* in dual can refer to the two parents. (cf. Karl F. Geldner, 1907: *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, vol. II: 234).

³⁹⁸ The Tibetan ignores the dual in this passage.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 2009: .

Vidyāpīṭha, texts in which the perpetuation within the *Mantramārga* of the Kāpālīka tradition of the Atimārga is particularly clear. Both describe the goal of their Kāpālīka-style asceticism as the entry of the deity propitiated into the person of the propitiator.

The *Vimalaprabhā* later attests that states of dreaming (*svapnāvasthāyām*) a direct apparition (*ajāḍapratibhāsa*) can be seen without employing intermediating phenomena (*jaḍadharmair vinā*). In the waking state, however, this is not possible without a receptacle for the mind, similar to the reflection in a mirror (*cittavāsanāvaśena jāgradavasthāyām punar jaḍadharmair vinā 'jaḍapratibhāso na dṛśyate darpaṇe pratibimbavat*). The *Vimalaprabhā* here explicitly distinguished between two kinds of cultivation apparition (*bhāvanāpratibhāsa*)—one which is like a reflection (the example being given is like the moon reflected in water) is actually undesirable because it is indirect, and one where the *yogin* sees in space direct phenomena similar to a dream, which are unimagined and unarisen without employing intermediating phenomena. The opponent, however is puzzled:

⁴⁰⁰[*Objection:*] If a direct apparition cannot be seen by he who has attained *samādhi* with there being no intermediating phenomena, what would the difference between these [types of perception] be?

[*Answer:*] In that regard, it is said: Here, verily, it is to be mentioned, that during states of wakefulness [one sees] by the applications of the intermediating receptacle for the mind.

[*Objection:*] A direct apparition[, however,] cannot be seen without [the help of] intermediating phenomena. How could this not be so?

[*Answer:*] Because a direct apparition is visible in a *pratisenā*-mirror, which is not an intermediating phenomenon. Thus a maiden who, as the deity by means of the power of consecration with a mantra,⁴⁰¹ sees [both] past and future phenomena reproduced as a direct apparition in a *pratisenā*-mirror. These are, furthermore, no past, present or future intermediating phenomena that are directly in front of that mirror, (i.e. reflected in it) nor are these phenomena thought up/imagined by the maiden (i.e. products of conception). In this way,

⁴⁰⁰ *na jaḍadharmair vinā 'jaḍapratibhāsaḥ samādhinā dṛśyate, iha keṣāñcid abhiprāyo bhaviṣyati | tasmād ucyate— iha hi yad vaktavyam jaḍacittavāsanābhiratair jāgradavasthāyām jaḍadharmair vinā 'jaḍapratibhāso na dṛśyate, tan na, kasmāt? pratisenādarśe jaḍadharme vinā 'jaḍapratibhāsadarśanāt | yathā kumārī pratisenādarśe mantradevatā 'dhiṣṭhānabalenātītānāgatapratyutpannadharmāṇām ajaḍapratibhāsaṃ paśyati, na ca te 'tītavartamānānāgatajaḍadharmā ādarśābhīmukhāḥ santi, na ca te dharmāḥ kumārikayā cīntitāḥ | evaṃ yogī svacittādhiṣṭhānabalenākāśadhātau jaḍatraidhātukaṃ vinā 'jaḍapratibhāsaṃ paśyatīti |*

⁴⁰¹ Orofino (1992: 613) has ‘the empowering of the mantras and of the divinities’ (Tib.: *sngags dang lha'i byin gyis brlabs pa*), however this interpretation is based on the Tibetan translation. I opt to take into consideration the general structure of a *prasenā* ritual, where a medium is empowered as the deity with a *mantra*, as is obvious in the example of the *Hevajratantra*. Furthermore, it has to be noted that it is unclear whether the ritual the author had in mind here uses one (as in the *Hevajratantra*), or many *mantras* (as in the ritual described by Van Schaik 2020: 144). Since the earlier source materials err on the side of one, rather than many, I have used the singular.

the *yogin* [also], by means of having consecrated his own mind, can see a direct apparition in the realm of space without [the help of] intermediating [phenomena] belonging to the three realms.

The *Vimalaprabhā* continues to emphasise that this is actually not due to the power of the *guru*, nor is it bestowed by him, but due to the power of the *mantra* (*vidyā*), nigh identical to the description we saw earlier in the *Jayadrathayāmala*. We also encountered this scenario in the commentaries to the *Hevajratāntra*, where the maiden participating as the medium for the *vajrajyotiṣa* was said to be Nairātmyā herself by the power of the consecration with *mantra*. It is further explained that the maiden is only capable of seeing in this way thanks to the consecration by *mantra* and thanks to the ritual sexual union without ejaculation (*cyutisukhopalabdhir nāsti*)—something we encountered as far back as the *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra*. The author says, that in conventional terms this is referred to as “the maiden’s delight” (*kumārīsurataṃ yathā*).⁴⁰² The most crucial passage for the understanding of the importance of *pratisenā* in the soteriological mechanic of the Kālacakratāntra follows:

⁴⁰³[Regarding] a young man having been consecrated as a boy deity: as the young woman who has been consecrated as the deity sees, so too can the young man. Thus, the *yogins*, having internalised the state of a maiden stripped of the bliss of external dripping, see past, future and present within the range of supreme imperishable bliss by the power of their own mind having been consecrated and not thanks to the grace of the master’s commandment.

Reflection?

Giacomella Orofino⁴⁰⁴ proposes the hypothesis of the close etymological connection between *pratisenā* (>*prasenā*) and *pratibhāsa* and indicates that even in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* *prasenā* is glossed in Tibetan as *gsal snang* (No. 4268). While there is a very close association between the two, a careful reading of the texts reveals that although often synonymous, such a straightforward equation can lead to a lot of confusion, since the term *pratibhāsa* and its derivatives is exceptionally common in Buddhist literature, especially of the tantric type. Orofino writes:

⁴⁰² A passage in the *Hevajratāntra* also refers to this term:

paścād utpadyate jñānaṃ kumārīsurataṃ yathā | kim apy utpadyate tatra mūkasya svapnaṃ yathā | paramāntaraṃ madhyaviraṃaṃ śūnyāśūnyaṃ tu herukaṃ || HT 2.5.68 ||

[Subsequent to this, wisdom will arise that is like the sexual bliss for a virgin. Even though it arises there, it is like a dream of a mute person. [It comes] at the end of the supreme, in the middle of no-joy—it is both empty and not empty, and is, in fact, the Heruka. (HT 2.5.68); Translation by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

⁴⁰³ *kumārādevatādhiṣṭhāne yuvā devatādhiṣṭhānaṃ yuvatī yuvāpi paśyatīti | evaṃ yogino 'pi paramākṣarasukhābhyāsavaśād bāhyacyutisukhaparitāgāt kumārīkāvasthāntaragatā atītānāgatavartamānaṃ paśyanti,[#] svacittādhiṣṭhānabalena , na guror ājñāprasādeneti |*

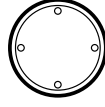
⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 1992: 615.

From the given metaphors let us consider the terms: *pratiśrukta* (T. *brag cha*) an echo, *pratibhāsa*, (T. *mig yor*) a reflection, *pratibimba*, (T. *gzugs brnyan*), the reflection in a mirror in which the prefix *prati* indicates the meaning of a reflection (*projectio*) both in terms of an optical and auditory phenomenon.

Special attention should be paid to the term *pratibhāsa*: different translations of this term can be found in Tibetan literature. In the Glossary of the Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese version of the Dasabhumikasutra, Rahder lists three different Tibetan equivalents to the term *pratibhāsa*: *mig yor*, *gzugs brnyan*, and *snang ba* as they recur in the various versions of the text. The first is the most frequently used Tibetan translation of the term, the second is more frequent as a translation of the Sanskrit term *pratibimba* and the last covers a wide range of nuances of meaning, all in the field of vision and having a notable spectrum of equivalents in Sanskrit. In the *Mahāvīyūtpatti*, *pratibhāsa* is rendered as *mig yor*, (No. 854, 2821) *snang ba* (No. 3435) and *snang ba gsal ba* (No. 556). In the Tibetan versions of the Kalacakra literature, however, we find this term translated very often with *rab tu gsal ba*, *rab tu snan ba*, or *snang ba*. We should also note that in the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* itself the translation for *prasenā* is *gsal snang* (No. 4268), a term unequivocally close to *snang ba gsal ba* or (*snang gsal*) as we saw above and thus, given the semantic link, I would therefore suggest the hypothesis that *pratisenā*, (> *prasenā*) is the result of an association with the metaphors which give the idea of a reflection, as we have considered above, and in a particular way to *pratibhāsa*.⁴⁰⁵

The word “reflect” comes from a combination of the Latin prefix *re-* meaning “against,” or “back” and *flectere* “to bend,” meaning what is projecting is not the original source, much like a mirror reflecting an image or a cliff face—a voice. On the other hand, although somewhat similar, “project” (Lat.: *projectare*, *proiectus*) is a combination between the Proto-Indo-European root prefix **per-* having the meaning of “forward,” “against,” “toward” and the PIE root **yē-*, meaning “to impel,” or “to throw,” thus signifying something coming out of source. Neither are appropriate, in my humble opinion, for *bimba* or *pratibhāsa*, at least in *prasenā*-related context, and something along the lines of “image” or “apparition” coming much closer to the intended meaning.

⁴⁰⁵ Orofino 1994: 615.



Conclusion

While the observation by Giacomella Orofino⁴⁰⁶ that there is a close contextual connection throughout both Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist texts between *pratisenā* and *pratibhāsa* (*mig yor*, *gzugs brnyan*, and *snang ba (gsal ba)*) holds definitively true, approaching the issue from the Tibetan and using the different equivalents to inform our opinion as to their appropriateness for the respective terms in Sanskrit could very well be misleading to the modern scholar, since it has led to the translation of *pratibhāsa/bimba* and *pratibimba* being translated as ‘reflection’ where, at the very least in a Kālacakra context, the texts themselves tell us otherwise. Tibetan translators were certainly not foreign to technically translating terms from the Sanskrit and one can easily see how this may lead to the different semantic nuances of the *uapasarga prati-* most being rendered similarly in Tibetan and thus the possibility of interpreting it more in the sense of the prefix *re-* rather than in the senses of **per-* or *pro-* automatically arises. This is further solidified by having the same translation for *bimba* **and** *pratibimba* (also discussed by Vesna Wallace) even though, as we saw, the texts themselves tell us they are very far from the same thing in the minds of their authors. It is a matter of linguistic first principles that if a language has two different words—they designate two different things, however similar those may be. This confusion also leads to asking questions such as that posed by Vasudeva, when he wonders why Abhinavagupta does not discuss *prasenā* in his *Tantrāloka* chapter on *pratibimbavāda* (“doctrine of reflection”), when there is a simple answer offered by the texts themselves, namely, that *prasenās* or *bimbās* (in the sense of the images that appear) are not reflections, even though they do appear in the medium of a shiny or a reflective surface and are similar in appearance. This is so, since they do not reflect anything in the “real world,” but are manifestations of something in the medium of the shiny or reflective surface, which would otherwise be inaccessible *via* conceptual cognition in the waking state, as we see mentioned in the *Sekoddeśa*, explained by Nāropā in the *Paramārthasaṃgraha*, and also saw explicitly discussed in the *Vimalaprabhā*. That a mirror only reflects is itself is a reflection of our modern understanding.

Naturally, the physical images in the external world are far inferior to even an imagined one—which, albeit the product of willful visualisation and thus not actually real—is in a way similar to the moon reflected in the pool of water as it is ‘projected’

⁴⁰⁶ Orofino 1994: 615.

in a way. In a dream we commonly see the afterimages of our waking experience. Just like the realm of the mirror or pool of water, however, it is considered that within a dream true reality can show itself in a pure form, which is not the secondary product of some reflective phenomenon (both in the sense of a reflection of an image and reflection in terms of mental pondering), but the primary entity, a manifestation, hence referred to as a *bimba* or a *pratibhāsa*. Hence, an image of the deity that has manifested in an auspicious dream is a much better signpost for the *yogin* as to what he should cultivate than any physical picture or detailed description—it is directly experienced (*pratyakṣa*), from the source, as it were. **Historically, this can be described as what was initially the loss of consciousness in deep sleep became the inactivity of the active intellect and the reduction of the overall filtering of information, rather allowing for the direct conscious perception of visionary experiences.** In the Kālacakra context this goes from an external representation (picture; *citra*) through internal representation (visualised form) to the self-manifestation of the own mind in the space of non-conceptual conscious perception beyond the three times which is its own nature, inseparable from True Reality,

A broader look at the different appearances of *pra(tī)senā* in multiple places throughout Indian textual history allows for ritual references, be they straightforward instructions, similes or simply a stray lexical reference here and there, which were previously seen as self-contained and anecdotal instances to be seen as what they are—interconnected and related instantiations of a ritual current with a long complex history and broad influence, from a deep Indian past which continues all the way to the present day.

ANNEX I.

A Short Remark on the Critical Apparatus used for the *Vimalaprabhā* and the *Laghukālacakratāntra*

I am rendering those elements of the critical apparatus collated by Upadhyaya and Dwivedi & Bahulkar that may be of some relevance for the meaning of the passages presented herein, while leaving minor differences out, as this work does not aim to recreate their critical edition. Where the authors have provided an alternative in brackets in the running text, I left the most suitable alternative in the running text and provided the other in footnotes under the designation of the name of the author(s). Whenever necessary, I also consulted with the edition of the root text of the *LKCT* by Banerjee.

Ka MS: Nepalese paper manuscript of 332 folios in Devanāgarī. Contains the entire *VP* safe for the 5th chapter, which contains only the root verses. In the possession of Pandit Dīvyā Vajra Vajracarya, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Kha MS: Nepalese paper manuscript of 325 folios in Newari-compounded Devanāgarī. Contains the entire *VP* safe for the 5th chapter. Also microfilmed by the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (1978: Reel No. E. 618/5, Running No. E. 13746). In the possession of Pandit Asha Kaji Vajracharya, Patha, Nepal.

Ga MS: Palm leaf manuscript at the National Archives in Kathmandu, Nepal in Newari, 262 folios. Incomplete, only containing pages 58-364 with many folios in between missing. Also microfilmed by the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (Reel No. A. 48/1). Contains parts of the commentary missing in other mss.

Gha MS: Palm leaf manuscript at the National Archives in Kathmandu, Nepal in Newari, 157 folios. Fragmentary, containing only the commentary up to *VP* 1.135. Also microfilmed by the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (1970: Reel No. B. 31/16).

Na MS: Palm leaf manuscript at the National Archives in Kathmandu, Nepal in Devanāgarī, 153 folios. Fragmentary.

Ca MS: Palm leaf manuscript preserved at the library of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta (No. 10766) in Archaic Bengali script. This ms is special as it contains the texts of the commentary on the 5th chapter.

Bho: This refers to the Dége Tibetan edition of the *VP*, published by Dharma Publications USA in 1981, Vol. 40/1347 and its Sanskrit equivalents.

ANNEX II.

Selected Translations of Passages Referred to in the Main Text

Vimalaprabhā

Lokadhātupaṭala (Chapter on the Cosmos)

⁴⁰⁷[Co-emergent Kālacakra] who is beyond conceptual cultivation,
[who has attained] the immovable bliss of the *Mahāmudrā*,
is without perceived, perceiver, shape, thought and expression. (VP 1.13)

⁴⁰⁸Praise be to *e-vaṃ* which has the appearance of the city of the
Gandharvas,⁴⁰⁹ the own likeness of a *pratisenā*—the union whose nature is
Insight and Means [together]! (VP 1.14)

⁴¹⁰Praise be to the *Mahāmudrā* who, possessing the own likeness of a
pratisenā,
is beyond the reality of the smallest atoms⁴¹¹—endowed with the most
supreme of
all aspects! (VP 1.15)

⁴¹²Praise be to Viśvamātā—the progenitrix of all Buddhas,
who is free from all arising and cessation, who is the [the object of the]
conduct⁴¹³ of a *samantabhadra*!⁴¹⁴ (VP 1.16)

⁴⁰⁷ *vikalpabhāvanātītaṃ mahāmudrākṣaram sukham |*
grāhyagrāhakaśamsthānakalpajalpavivarjitam || VP 1.13 ||

⁴⁰⁸ *gandharvanagarākāraṃ pratisenāsvārūpakam |*
prajñopāyātmakam yogam [1b] evaṃkāraṃ praṇamya tam || VP 1.14 ||

⁴⁰⁹ I.e. it is round, shining and floating in the sky.

⁴¹⁰ *paramāṇudharmatātītaṃ pratisenāsvārūpiṇīm |*
sarvākāravaroṇetāṃ mahāmudrāṃ praṇamya tām || VP 1.15 ||

⁴¹¹ It is an interesting question to consider whether it is only the main goddess that is ‘beyond the reality of the smallest atomic particles’ or the subsidiary goddesses also, in view of a statement to be found in the *Hevajatantra* II.4.64-65: *atha sarvā devyo nairātmyayoginīpramukhāḥ / tadyathā / locanā māmakī ca pāṇḍurā ca tārā ca bhṛkūṭī ca cundā ca parṇaśavarī ca ahoṣukhā ca // evaṃpramukhāḥ sumeruparamāṇu[ra]jjahsamā yoginyah paramavismayam āpannā //* ([Hearing this,] all the goddesses, headed by the yoginī Nairātmyā and including Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍurā, Tārā, Bhṛkūṭī, Cundā, Parṇaśavarī, and Ahoṣukhā—the yoginīs beginning with such [an enumeration], equal in number with the atoms of Mount Sumeru, were struck with great wonder.)

⁴¹² *jananīm sarvabuddhānām utpādaḥ śayavarjitām |*
caryām samantabhadrasya viśvamātām praṇamya tām || VP 1.16 ||

⁴¹³ Both *dharma* and *carya* can be interpreted in this way; *Gha*: *dharmām*.

⁴¹⁴ I take *samantabhadra* (lit. “all-good”) to refer to the practitioner here.

[...]

⁴¹⁵She is the Great Lady who leads [he] who [aims to] swiftly traverse [saṃsāra] by means of the true pleasures along the Path; for those desirous of the ultimate truth of *nirvāṇa*, She is Wisdom, She who moves swiftly⁴¹⁶ like the flying wind;

For the one who holds the clever that destroys the set of obstacles and afflictions, for the one who possesses the wish-fulfilling jewel of perception, She, who ever dwells in the eyes [of all beings] (*nimikā*⁴¹⁷), bestowing the nature of the supreme Lord of the Three Realms, can be simultaneously perceived everywhere!⁴¹⁸ (VP 1.34)

⁴¹⁹She is the consort of a *vajra*-holder, verily She,⁴²⁰ the Great One, who bestows the joy of an Omniscient One, She is the object [of cultivation] of one who has shed the shell of the [five] *skandhas* and so on, She who is like the eight⁴²¹ [types of] *prasenā*.⁴²²

He who has abandoned Her and attends instead to [a woman] whose heart is twisted by wealth and longing, or to [a consort] imagined by thought for the sake of attaining Buddhahood, he can only be led to ejaculation! (VP 1.35)

VP 1.3:

⁴¹⁵ *satsaukhyair drutalaṅghanāya mahatām mārgēṇa sā nāyikā prajñā vātapateṇa śīghragaminī nirvāṇapārārthinām | mārakleśasamūhanāśanapaṭoḥ saṃjñānacintāmaṇes trailokyādhipatitvadātṛnimikā sarvatra saṃdarśikā || VP 1.34 ||* (Upadhyaya 1986: 4).

⁴¹⁶ Although no direct etymological connection can be made between *śīghra* (swift, the wind) and *śigru* it is curious that the word is being used in the description of a *prasenā*-related deity, since the *śigru* tree, also referred to as *lohitavṛkṣa* ('copper tree'; See Griffiths 2007: 254) and trees associated with the colour red in general, have a strong connection to both the male and female tree deities that are possibly the predecessors of the deities invoked in *prasenās*.

⁴¹⁷ *Kha*: -*nvadāntu*-.; *Dha*: -*nvadānnimike*; em. -*rimikā*; The name *nimi* belongs to a son of Ikṣvāku, *Pur*. (having lost his body through the curse of Vasiṣṭha he occupied the eyes of all living beings, hence the opening and shutting of men's eyelids; cf. नि-मिष and See, VP. 4.5); pw pp. 551a; (Perhaps influenced by my eyes, biased by *prasenā*, I suggest that, considering the proximity and the visual allusions invoked in connection with the goddess possessing a person and dwelling in their eyes, open or closed, this interpretation is worth taking into account.)

⁴¹⁸ em. *saṃdarśikā*] *sandarśikā*.

⁴¹⁹ *mudrā vajradharasya saiva mahatī sarvajñasaukhyapradā skandhādyāvaraṇaprahīṇaviṣayā yā aṣṭaprasenopamā | tyaktvā tām dhana-lubdha-vakra-hṛdayām yaḥ kalpitām sevayet buddhatvāya tayā vikalpitādhiyā vā nīyate sa cyutim || VP 1.35 ||*

⁴²⁰ em. *saika*; *Bho*: *de nyid gcig pu*.

⁴²¹ Upadhyaya: *yāpta*; *Bho*: *brgyad*.

⁴²² My translation here follows Nāropā who, in his commentary to verse 29 of the *Sekoddeśa* names eighth types of liminal objects used for *prasenā*, the eighth being the eyes: "In the "Tantra on the summoning of prognostic images" (*pratisenāvatāratantre*) it is said that a prognostic image can be conjured up in eight [reflective objects]: a mirror, a sword, the thumb, a lamp, the moon, the sun, a basin full of water [or] the eyes." (*pratisenāvatāratantre kila darpaṇakhaḍgāṅguṣṭhapradīpacandrasūryodakakuṇḍanetreṣv aṣṭaṣu pratisenāvatāra uktāḥ*) Sferra & Merzagora : .

⁴²³What [makes] a *Karma*-, *Jñāna*- and *Mahāmudrā* complete, are: for the *Karmamudrā*—having breasts and long hair (i.e. being of flesh and blood.), for the *Jñānamudrā*—being imagined by one’s own mind; [for the] the *Mahāmudrā*—being of the own likeness of a *pratisenā*—without the involvement of any conception.

⁴²⁴Theirs [is] the threefold accomplishment: the one of the *Karmamudrā* is the domain of Pleasure (*kāma*). The one of the *Jñānamudrā* is the domain of Form (*rūpa*), characterised by existence and non-existence, and the accomplishment of the *Mahāmudrā* is removed from existence and non-existence (*bhāvābhāvarahitā*), endowed with the most supreme of all aspects.

⁴²³ *karmajñānamahā*[12a]*mudrāsiddhir* iti | *karmamudrā stanakeśavatī* | *jñānamudrā svacittaparikalpitā* | *mahāmudrā vikalparahitā pratisenāsvarūpiṇīti* |

⁴²⁴ *āsām trividhā siddhiḥ kāmāvacarā karmamudrāsiddhiḥ, rūpāvacarā rūpabhavābhāvalakṣaṇā jñānamudrāsiddhiḥ, bhāvābhāvarahitā sarvākāravaropetā mahāmudrāsiddhir iti* |

Adhyātmapaṭala (Chapter on the Individual)

VP 2.2:

⁴²⁵“Therefore, in the secret lotus, in the lotus of the *uṣṇīṣa*, and in the lotus of the navel, the presiding deity is the Viśuddhakāya, which is devoid of an inherent nature (*svabhāvā*), whose nature is non-ideation (*akalpanā*), and which is similar to a [*pratisenā*]. The Dharmakāya is in the heart. The Saṃbhogakāya is the presiding deity in the lotus of the throat, in accordance with the classification into bodies. The Nirmāṇakāya is the presiding deity in the drop, in the lotus of the head, the pure *cakra*.”⁴²⁶

The VP ommentary to LKCT 2.161:

⁴²⁷[Selflessness],^[428] the maturation of *karma*, the three realms, the six [realms of rebirth],^[429] the origination due to the twelve-limbed dependence, the [wise⁴³⁰] truths, the [twice nine] qualities (*āveṇika-dharma*) of the Buddha, the five aggregates, the three bodies and the Sahaja[-kāya] and [unobstructed⁴³¹] emptiness: that [system] according to which they teach these [tenets] is the clear and definite instruction of a *vajrī*.”⁴³²

⁴²⁵ *ato guhyakamale uṣṇīṣakamale nābhīkamale viśuddhakāyo 'dhidevatā niḥsvabhāvā, akalpanāsvabhāvā, pratisenopamā | hṛdaye dharmakāyaḥ, kaṇṭhābje sambhogakāyo 'dhidevatā kāyabheda | bindāv iti śirasas 'bje śuddhacakre nirmāṇakāyo 'dhidevatā |*

⁴²⁶ Translation by Vesna Wallace (2004: 33).

⁴²⁷ *nairātmyaṃ karmapākaś tribhavarṇatugatir dvādaśāṅgapratīteḥ sambhūtir vedasatyam dviguṇitanavakā 'veṇikā buddhadharmāḥ | pañca[152 b]skandhās trikāyāḥ sahaja iti tathāivājaḍā śūnyatā ca yasminn etad vadanti prakaṭitanīyatā deśanā vajrīṇaḥ sā || LKCT 2.161 ||*

⁴²⁸ Wallace has ‘identityless.’

⁴²⁹ Wallace has ‘the six destinations.’

⁴³⁰ Wallace adds ‘four’ instead of translating *veda*.

⁴³¹ Wallace has ‘conscious’ for *ajaḍa*.

⁴³² Wallace 2004: 219.

Sādhanaṭaḥ (Chapter on Practice)

VP 4.4:⁴³³

⁴³⁴Thus, what **abides in a**⁴³⁵ **wisdom [consort's] source of phenomena**, i.e. *bodhicitta*, yet **again** as it has come so it goes, [this is the meaning of it having] dispersed [through it].⁴³⁶

“Just as it (the *bodhicitta*) has arrived from the forehead [*cakra*] in accordance with the classification [of joys] into joy (*ānanda*) and so on—or, just as it is completely full with fifteen digits of [a fortnight of the] moon in accordance⁴³⁷ with the classification into *vicitra* and the other lunar units⁴³⁸—so, by having gone [back] upwards to the forehead in accordance with the classification into nonvibration (*niḥspanda*) and so on, the [*bodhicitta*] is **pure and dispersed**.”⁴³⁹ **It is because of** that pure [*bodhicitta*] **drop that the self-arisen circle of gnosis is as if present in a mirror and endowed with various ornaments**, the same as a *pratisenā* belonging to the three times.⁴⁴⁰ After the *bindu-yoga* comes the subtle *yoga*.

The VP commentary on LKCT 4.133:

⁴⁴¹“He (Kālacakra) has innumerable faces—one and so on. He has many arms and legs and is of various colors. He consists of wisdom and method. At the end of [the] darkness, he brings forth immutable bliss due to the obstruction of the moon and the sun in the channels. Similar to a stainless jewel, he completely [pierces⁴⁴²] earth and the other elements. He is empty and unique. Kālacakra

⁴³³ Adapted from Wallace (2004: 143).

⁴³⁴ *evaṃ prajñādharmodayasthaṃ bodhicittaṃ punar apīti yathāgataṃ tathāgataṃ sphāritam ity ucyate | yathā lalāṭād ānandādibhedenāgataṃ vicitrādibhedena vā pañcadaśa[284b] candrakalāparipūrṇam, tathā niḥspandā#dibhedenordhvaṃ lalāṭe gataṃ vaimalyaṃ sphāritam bhavati | tena bindunā vaimalyena nānālaṅkārayuktam ādarśagataṃ iva pratisenāsamaṃ tryadhvagaṃ jñānacakraṃ svayambhūti ity binduyogāt sūkṣmayogo 'bhūti |*

⁴³⁵ Wallace has ‘the.’ *et passim*.

⁴³⁶ Wallace has ‘or which has left in the same way so it arrived is described as dispersed.’

⁴³⁷ Wallace has ‘concordance.’

⁴³⁸ Wallace has ‘mansions,’ which would be *nakṣatra*—a term not used for the phases of the moon.

⁴³⁹ Wallace 2010: 143.

⁴⁴⁰ Wallace has ‘who is present in the three times and similar to an image in a prognostic mirror.’

⁴⁴¹ *ekādyanantavaktro bahukaracaraṇo 'nekavarṇas tamo 'nte prajñopāyātmako vai dadati samasukhaṃ nādikendvarkarodhāt | bhūmyādīnāṃ samantād amalamaṇinibho vedhakaḥ śūnya eko nādyo nānto na madhyas tv aviṣayaṣayaḥ sādhitāḥ kālacakraḥ || LKCT 4.133 ||*

⁴⁴² *em. vedakaḥ] bhedakaḥ*; Tib.: ‘bigs par byed; Wallace translates *bhedaka-* (‘shatters’), taking the root text at face value which is inconsistent with the commentary which has *vedhaka-* (‘pierces’) and *bhedaka-* is negated. I hypothesised that the root verse should have *vedhaka-* instead, which would make more sense in context and which suspicion was later confirmed by the Tibetan translation. That being said, in a *haṭhayoga* context *bhedā* is indeed a term that means ‘to pierce.’

is meditated upon as being without beginning, end, and middle, and as the sense object that is without sense objects.”⁴⁴³ (LKCT 4.133)

⁴⁴⁴“Now, beginning with "one" and so forth, he described a meditation on the [viśvabimba].⁴⁴⁵ Here. [Kālacakra] has innumerable faces. He has one face, and due to the word "and [so on]" it is implied that he also has three,⁴⁴⁶ four, or five faces. "He has many arms and legs" means "he has various arms and legs and holds different weapons." He is of variegated⁴⁴⁷ colors and many shapes.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁹“Having a grasp of all illusions—he is king; having a grasp of all the mantras of the buddhas—he is great!”⁴⁵⁰ (Nāmasaṃgīti 8.35ab)

⁴⁵¹“He is the Divine Lord, who holds emptiness and imperishable [bliss], and who consists of wisdom and method.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵³**At the end of [the] darkness** [refers to] one who sees the yoga of the perfection of wisdom at nighttime by means of the yoga of the night and at daytime by means of the yoga of the day—he sees in space at night and in the open air during the day.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁵“One should meditate in this way until an image [appears]. Then, **due to obstruction of the moon and the sun in the channels** [means] because of the obstruction of [prāṇa in] the left and right channels. **One brings forth immutable bliss**, i.e.] imperishable bliss. [...] **earth and so on** [refers to] the elements of earth and so on.”⁴⁵⁶⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁴³ Wallace 2010: 180.

⁴⁴⁴ [292a] *eketyādi | ihaikavaktro vā ādiśabdāt trimukho vā catuḥpañcādyanantamukho vā bahukaracaraṇo 'nekakaracaraṇo 'nekāstradharaḥ | anekavarṇo 'nekasaṃsthānaḥ*

⁴⁴⁵ Wallace has ‘universal form.’

⁴⁴⁶ *Bho: dvi-*.

⁴⁴⁷ Wallace has ‘diverse.’

⁴⁴⁸ Wallace 2010: 180.

⁴⁴⁹ *viśvamāyādharo rājā buddhavidyādharo mahān |*

⁴⁵⁰ Wallace has ‘He is the king bearing all illusions, he is the great bearer of the mantras of the buddhas;’ Davidson (1981: 57) has ‘Bearing every sort of illusion, he is king, and as the holder of incantations of the buddhas, he is exalted.’

⁴⁵¹ *śūnyatākṣaradharo bhagavān prajñopāyātmakaḥ |*

⁴⁵² Wallace 2010: 180.

⁴⁵³ *tamo 'nte niśākāle niśāyogena divākāle divāyogena yaḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ yogam paśyati, sa ākāśe paśyati niśāyāṃ abhyavakāśe paśyati divyāyāṃ |*

⁴⁵⁴ em. *divyāyāṃ | divyāyāṃ*.

⁴⁵⁵ *evaṃ vibhāvito bimbaparyantam | tato nāḍikendvarkarodhād iti vāmadakṣiṇaprāṇarodhāt, dadati samasukham iti paramāḍakṣarasukham dadāti | bhūmyādīnām iti pṛthivyādīnām dhātūnām |*

⁴⁵⁶ Wallace has ‘the earth element and the like.’

⁴⁵⁷ Wallace 2010: 180.

⁴⁵⁸[Regarding] **similar to a stainless jewel, he pierces,**⁴⁵⁹ **stainless jewel** [here refers to the following]: as one makes a material like a raw minerals etc. into a gem by means of friction, piercing without cutting,⁴⁶⁰ so the **empty single** stainless one completely pierces through earth and the other elements of the body.

⁴⁶¹“Having the form of emptiness, he is without beginning, end, and middle; he is the sense object that is without the sense objects. Similar to an illusion, a dream, or a *pratisenā*,⁴⁶² he has an appearance of the sense object that is without sense objects. When meditated upon, Kālacakra brings forth immutable bliss. This is the principle. He described in this way the *sādhana* of the glorious Ādibuddha in terms of the stage of completion. Its detailed description is to be discussed in the Chapter on Gnosis.”⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ *amalaṃaṇibho vedhaka* iti | *ihāmalaṃaṇir yathā sparśamātreṇa pāṣāṇādikaṃ dhātukaṃ ratnaṃ karoti na bhedako* vedhaka iti | *tathā sūnya eko* vimalo *bhūmyādīnāṃ śarīradhātūnāṃ samantād vedhaka* iti |

⁴⁵⁹ em. vedhaka] bhedaka.

⁴⁶⁰ Dége ff. 243a: 'bigs byed dri med nor bu dang mtshungs zhes pa ni ji ltar dri med nor bu chen po reg pa tsam gyis rdol sogs pa'i khams rin po cher byed de 'bigs par byed ces pa 'joms par byed pa ni ma yin no / /de bzhin du stong pa gcig pu dri ma dang bral ba ni sa la sogs pa'i lus kyi khams rnams kun nas 'bigs par byed do/

⁴⁶¹ *sa śūnyatārūpī nādyo nānto na madhyo 'viṣayaviśaya* iti | *viṣayair vinā viṣayapratibhāso māyāsvapnapratisenopamaḥ* | *sādhitaḥ kālacakraḥ samasukhaṃ dadāti* niyama iti *śrīmadādibuddhasādhanam utpannakrameṇoktam, asya vistaro jñānapaṭale vaktavya* iti ||

⁴⁶² Wallace has 'prognostic mirror.'

⁴⁶³ Wallace 2010: 181.

Jñānapaṭala (Chapter on Gnosis)

VP 5.3:

⁴⁶⁴Just as the merging of support and supported is desirable [only] for the sake of [attaining] mundane *siddhi*, so for the *yogin*, who is:

- satisfied by the practice of supreme imperishable bliss received in the form of instruction from the true *guru*,
- completely removed from the confluence of corruptions,
- actuated by the first among those cultivated as the ten marked by smoke and so on,⁴⁶⁵
- purified of [beginning,] middle[, and end],
- with a mind, like that of all beings,
- seeking supreme affection like a single son,
- non-dependent on mundane and supramundane truth,
- without regard for the own bodies of [his] son wife and so on,
- existing outside of the enjoyment of the substance of the *guru* in a remote monastery,
- non-dependent on the Path of the buddhas and *bodhisattvas*,
- one who enjoys the four Brahmic states of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity,
- one who has conquered the appetite for practices such as peaceful activities for the sake of mundane *siddhi*,
- one who wishes to climb to the state of an Omniscient One, completely removed from the conceptual cultivation of the *maṇḍala* and *cakras*, illuminated by non-arisen phenomena similar to a mirror *pratisenā* of Emptiness in all its forms, with a mind whose object is akin to the shining forth of the diffusion of [his] own mind as a dream, empty of the application of phenomena who have the accumulation of the tiniest atomic particles as their essence, an Emptiness far removed from cessation,

⁴⁶⁴ yathā laukikasiddhisādhanaṁ ādhārādheyasambandha iṣyate, tathā
paramākṣarasukhasādhanaṁ yoginā, sadgurūpadeśalabdheṇa, duṣṭasaṅgaparivajitena,
dhūmādinimittabhāvitena, madhyamāviśodhitena, sakalasattvaikaputravat
paramasnehanubaddhacittena, laukikalokottarasatyāśrītena, putra kalatrādisvaśīranirapekṣakeṇa,
maṭhavihāragurudravopabhogabāhyabhūtena,
buddhabodhisattvamārgāśrītena, maitrīkaruṇāmuditopekṣācaturbrahmavihāravihāriṇā,
śāntikarmādilaikikasiddhisādhanaṁ bhilāṣajitena, sarvajñāpadavīm āroḍhukāmena ,
maṇḍalacakrādivikalpabhāvanāparityaktena, ākāśagatau sarvākāraśūnyatāādarśapratisenāvad
anutpannadharmāvalokitenā, svacittaspharaṇapratibhāsavapnasadṛśārthacittena,
paramāṇusandohātmakadharmavicāraśūnyena ucchedaśūnyatādūrīkṛtena,
adhyātmasukhasvasaṁvedyadharmānuraktena, bāhyendriyasvasaṁvedyasukhadharmaparityaktena,
prajñopāyātmakena , bodhicittasthīrākaraṇakadākṣeṇa ,
paramākṣaramahāsukhaprajñājnānamārgopadeśalabdheṇa ādhārādheyacihna-varṇa-bhuja-
saṁsthāna-maṇḍala-devatāneṣyata iti ||

⁴⁶⁵ The ten goddesses.

- pleased by the phenomena of the awareness of the bliss of oneself, completely removed from the phenomena of the bliss [caused by] the awareness [produced by] external senses,
- [one whose] essence is insight and means,
- the hero who arrests *bodhicitta*,

[for the *yogin* who is all this] thanks to having obtained the instruction on the Path of the knowledge of the *prajñā*, [who brings about] supreme imperishable great bliss, [for him] the conceptually fashioned phenomena of support, supported, marks, colours, arms, shape, *maṇḍala* and deity are undesirable!

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Detsche Zusammenfassung (German Abstract):

Durch die Augen der Göttin: Wie ein populäres Wahrsagerritual seinen Weg in das höchste Yoga-Tantra fand

Unter den vielen geheimnisvollen Anspielungen im Kālacakra-Textkorpus ist der Vergleich der Visionen des "mit der Wirklichkeit Vereinten" (*tattvayogī*) mit der Natur eines prognostischen Bildes (*pratisenā*) eine der faszinierendsten. Allerdings hat sich die Wissenschaft bisher nur wenig damit befasst. Das Ritual der *pratisenā* (oder, öfter, *prasenā*), eine Methode der orakelhaften Vorhersage, wurde nicht vom Autor des Kālacakratantra erfunden, sondern hat viel ältere, tiefere und komplexere Wurzeln, vielleicht sogar teilweise in der griechisch-römischen Welt. Einige Abwandlungen der Praxis sind in Śaiva-, buddhistischen und sogar jainistischen Quellen bezeugt. Die vorliegende Arbeit versucht, auf der bisherigen Forschung zu diesem Thema aufzubauen, weitere Texte zu finden und zu untersuchen, die sich auf *prasenā* beziehen, und eine vorläufige Antwort auf die Frage zu finden, warum *prasenā* eine so große Bedeutung hatte und wie es dazu kam, sowie dadurch eine wichtige Lücke in der Forschung über die Ursprünge der frühen indischen religiösen Rituale und Praxis zu schließen.

Bis heute gibt es wenige Publikationen über *prasenā*, die wichtigsten davon sind zwei Arbeiten von Orofino (1992) über *pratisenā* in der Kālacakra-Literatur und Vasudeva (2014), der sich mit ihr im Nīśvāsa-Korpus des *Mantramārga* Śaivismus beschäftigt, sowie mehrere Abschnitte in zwei Büchern von Strickman (2002), welche eine umfassende Darstellung des Ritus im Kontext der chinesischen magischen Medizin präsentieren, und Van Schaik (2020), der ein *prasenā*-Ritual wiedergibt, das in einem tibetischen Zauberbuch aus Dunhuang gefunden wurde, wobei die beiden letztgenannten Bücher nicht ausschließlich diesem Thema gewidmet sind. Bislang wurde jedoch noch nicht versucht, die beschränkte Literatur über *prasenā* zusammenzustellen und zu untersuchen, und die vorliegende Arbeit versucht, diese Lücke in der Wissenschaft zu schließen. Ich zeige auf, dass das Thema *prasenā* mehr wissenschaftliche Aufmerksamkeit verdient, als ihm bisher zuteil wurde, und untersuche die Belege dafür, dass sein Einfluss sowohl räumlich als auch zeitlich breiter und tiefgreifender als bisher angenommen war, indem ich nicht nur die relevante Sekundärliteratur überprüfe, sondern auch eine umfassende Liste von Primärquellen zu *prasenā* vorlege - etwas, das bisher mangelhaft war.

Es ist vielleicht am besten, die *prasenā* durch die Zeit hindurch anhand der Texte zu verfolgen, in denen sie erwähnt wird, und zu versuchen, Hinweise auf ihre Rolle in den Ritualen und später in der Soteriologie der vielen religiösen Traditionen zu finden, die den einen oder anderen Aspekt der *prasenā* verwendeten. Obwohl das Wort *pratisenā* selbst im Sanskrit sehr selten vorkommt, leitet es sich sehr wahrscheinlich von einer Übersanskritisierung des Wortes *prasenā* ab, das wiederum eine Verballhornung von *praśna* - "Frage" - ist. Der Begriff *prasenā* bezieht sich auf die orakelhafte Besessenheit eines Mädchens oder eines Jungen durch eine Gottheit, meist eine Göttin, wobei das

Medium dann in ein reflektierendes Objekt (meist einen Spiegel) blickt und gezwungen wird, Fragen zu beantworten. Spuren davon finden sich im *Dīghanikāya*, den *Jātakas*, dem *Subāhupariṣṛchātāntra* und vielen anderen Texten, einschließlich der *Vimalaprabhā* und dem *Hevajratāntra*. Die vorliegende Arbeit wird sich auf die beiden letztgenannten Texte konzentrieren und sie in einen zivilisatorischen, historischen und religiösen Kontext stellen.

In den Kālacakra-Texten ist der Begriff *pratisenā* besonders relevant, da er zur Beschreibung der Bilder verwendet wird, die dem Adepten nach der erfolgreichen Vollendung des *pratyāhāra* (Loslösung der Sinne von den Sinnesobjekten) erscheinen und die unvorstellbar (*acintita*) und von derselben Art wie die prognostischen Bilder (*pratisenāsvarūpaka*) sind. Dann entsteht jedoch die Notwendigkeit zu erklären, wie es möglich ist, eine sichtbare Manifestation der Leerheit zu haben, ohne die Beteiligung von begrifflicher Anstrengung (*kalpanā*). So kommt der Metapher der *pratisenā* eine Schlüsselrolle zu.

Unter den vielen Mantra-Ritualen, die im zweiten Kapitel des Hevajratāntra gelehrt werden, ist dasjenige mit dem Namen "Vajra-Divination" (*vajrajyotiṣa*; 金剛喻沙多) - ein Ritual zur Wiedererlangung gestohlener oder verlorener Dinge mit Hilfe eines jungfräulichen Mediums - von besonderem Interesse. Man kann sich fragen, was der Grund für diese Aufmerksamkeit ist, da das Hevajratāntra viele andere Rituale lehrt und die Welt der buddhistischen Magie in ihren Praktiken, ihrer Zeitspanne und ihrer Geographie breit und vielfältig ist. In dieser Arbeit möchte Ich Beweise dafür liefern, dass dieses Ritual tatsächlich eine Form von *prasenā* ist und dass es nachweislich mit *Śaiva Mantramārga*-Texten in Verbindung steht.

Das Haupthindernis für die Identifizierung des Rituals als *prasenā* ist die Tatsache, dass sowohl im Tantra selbst als auch in allen verfügbaren Original-Sanskrit-Kommentaren (einschließlich derjenigen, die jetzt nur noch in tibetischer Sprache verfügbar sind) das Wort *prasenā* oder eine seiner vielen Varianten sowohl in Sanskrit als auch in Tibetisch nicht verwendet wird, sondern das Ritual stattdessen als "Vajra-Divination" (*vajrajyotiṣa*, *rdo rje skar mda' / ma / rtsis*) bezeichnet wird. Die einzige Möglichkeit, die bleibt, um es definitiv zu identifizieren, ist, die Details des Rituals selbst zu untersuchen und es mit anderen derartigen Praktiken zu vergleichen, die in anderen Texten beschrieben werden.

Hilfreich ist, dass Nāropā in seinem *Paramārthasaṃgraha* einige Details über die Praxis von *prasenā* gibt. Weitere Informationen finden sich in dem viel früheren *Subāhupariṣṛchātāntra*. Ein Vergleich der drei ergibt zu viele Übereinstimmungen, als dass die Ähnlichkeiten ein Zufall sein könnten. Der Nachweis, dass das *vajrajyotiṣa* eine Form von *prasenā* ist, würde bedeuten, dass irgendeine Form der Praxis mehr als eines der höchsten Yogatantras (das andere ist das *Kālacakratāntra*) beeinflusst hat, was ihren Status in den eines bedeutenderen pan-tantrischen Phänomens verwandelt und anhand der anderen zahlreichen Beispiele zeigt, wie die Praxis von *prasenā* offenbar sowohl weiter verbreitet war als auch einen viel größeren Einfluss auf die indischen religiösen Traditionen hatte, als

bisher angenommen wurde, und infolgedessen auch viele Aspekte der Religiosität Nepals, Tibets und darüber hinaus beeinflusste.