

མཚན་མོའི་རྒྱུད།

The Mahāmāyā Tantra

Mahāmāyātantra

དཔལ་སྐྱེ་འཕུལ་ཆེན་མོའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ།

dpal sgyu 'phrul chen mo'i rgyud kyi rgyal po

The King of Tantras, the Glorious Mahāmāyā

Śrīmahāmāyātantrarājanāma



Toh 425
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SUMMARY

- s.1 The *Mahāmāyātantra*, named after its principal deity Mahāmāyā, is a tantra of the Yoginītantra class in which Mahāmāyā presides over a maṇḍala populated primarily by yoginīs and ḍākinīs. The practitioner engages the antinomian power of these beings through a threefold system of yoga involving the visualization of the maṇḍala deities, the recitation of their mantras, and the direct experience of absolute reality. As well as practices involving the manipulation of the body's subtle energies, the *Mahāmāyātantra* incorporates the transgressive practices that are the hallmark of the earlier tantric systems such as the *Guhyasamājatantra*, specifically the ingestion of sexual fluids and other polluting substances. The tantra promises the grace of Mahāmāyā in the form of mundane and transcendent spiritual attainments to those who approach it with diligence and devotion.

ac.

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i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The *Mahāmāyātantra*, named after its principal deity Mahāmāyā, belongs to the class of Yoginītantras. According to the post-tenth-century classification scheme of the Tibetan New Schools (*gsar ma*), the *Mahāmāyātantra* is categorized as a Mother tantra (*ma rgyud*) among Unexcelled Yoga tantras (*bla na med pa'i rnal 'byor gyi rgyud, yoganiruttaratantra*). It earns this classification due both to the importance placed on female divinities in the tantra's maṇḍala and to its inclusion of practices focused on the manipulation of the body's subtle energies. In this tantra, Mahāmāyā presides over a maṇḍala populated primarily by yoginīs and ḍākinīs, those semi-divine female figures known throughout South Asian tantric traditions for the power they derive from being propitiated with blood, flesh, and sex. The practitioner engages the antinomian power of these beings through a threefold system of yoga involving the visualization of the maṇḍala deities, the recitation of their mantras, and the direct experience of absolute reality. The *Mahāmāyātantra* also incorporates the transgressive practices that are the hallmark of earlier tantric systems such as the *Guhyasamājatantra*,¹ specifically the ingestion of sexual fluids and other polluting substances. The tantra promises the grace of Mahāmāyā in the form of mundane and transcendent spiritual attainments (*siddhi*) to those who approach it with diligence, courage, and devotion.

i.2

Though it is difficult to pinpoint precisely when the *Mahāmāyātantra* first began to circulate within Buddhist tantric communities, the work rose to prominence toward the end of the first millennium CE as part of an efflorescence of new tantric material associated with yoginīs, ḍākinīs, and other female divinities. The designation "yoginītantra" was conferred on these texts precisely because of their incorporation of a more feminized vision of divinity and power. Yoginītantras vary in style and content, ranging from somewhat disordered and obscure works like the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* to refined and doctrinally coherent texts such as the *Kālacakratāntra*. With its distinct narrative style, focus on the mundane spiritual attainments, and near total absence of clearly articulated Buddhist doctrine, the *Mahāmāyātantra* demonstrates a thematic and rhetorical similarity to the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, one of the earliest yoginītantras.² Additionally, considering instances of intertextuality with the earlier *Guhyasamājatantra*,³ and a seeming lack of awareness of more doctrinally and structurally developed

yoginītantras such as the *Hevajratantra* and *Kālacakratantra*, it is reasonable to assume that the *Mahāmāyātantra* was among the earlier of the yoginītantras, appearing in Buddhist tantric circles in the late ninth or early tenth centuries. It had certainly gained enough popularity by the eleventh century to draw the attention of the prominent monastic scholars of the period.

i.3 In India the *Mahāmāyātantra* probably circulated within both the major monastic institutions and the communities surrounding charismatic tantric masters. Foremost among the monastic scholars who commented on the text was Ratnākaraśānti,⁴ whose *Guṇavatīṭīkā* (*A Commentary Endowed with Qualities*) grounds the often enigmatic verses of the *Mahāmāyātantra* in mainstream Buddhist philosophy, especially that of Yogācāra. Kṛṣṇavajra's commentary,⁵ the *Mahāmāyātantrasya vṛtti smṛti* (*Recollection: A Commentary on the Mahāmāyā Tantra*), frequently cites the oral tradition, pointing to the body of unwritten instructions that present the practical techniques almost completely absent in the *Mahāmāyātantra* itself. Contributions to the *Mahāmāyātantra* corpus came from outside the walls of the monastery as well. Kukkuripa and Kṛṣṇācārya, both of whom would eventually be counted among the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*, composed practice liturgies (*sādhana*) for the tantra, while the siddhas Nāropa and Kaṇha are said to have taught the tantra to Marpa, thus facilitating its transmission to Tibet.⁶

i.4 The *Mahāmāyātantra* arrived in Tibet in the early eleventh century as part of the second wave of Buddhist teachings to reach the Land of Snows. It appears to have entered Tibet via two distinct lines of transmission, through Marpa Chökyi Lodrö and Gö Lhetsé. The lineage of Gö Lhetsé, a prolific translator and important teacher of the *Guhyasamāja-tantra*,⁷ appears to have died out, though the translation of the *Mahāmāyātantra* and the majority of its associated texts preserved in the Kangyur and Tengyur are his. The converse is true of Marpa; if he ever produced a translation of the *Mahāmāyātantra*, it has been lost, and yet it is his lineage, as passed through his disciple Ngoktön Chöku Dorjé (*rngog ston chos sku rdo rje*, 1036–1102), that continues to be transmitted to this day. The *Mahāmāyātantra* also received a great deal of attention from the Tibetan polymath Tāranātha (1575–1634), who composed two commentaries and a practice manual for it.⁸

The Text

i.5 The *Mahāmāyātantra* describes, in verses both terse and enigmatic, the practices and attainments associated with the deity Mahāmāyā and her retinue of yoginīs. Yoginīs, and their close counterparts the ḍākinīs, are renowned for their ability to grant mastery of temporal and transcendent spiritual attainments to devoted and courageous practitioners who are willing to brave an encounter with these often ferocious beings. In this tantra Mahāmāyā is invoked as the queen of ḍākinīs, the queen of the yoginīs, and the supreme secret of these secret goddesses, making her the paramount source of spiritual attainment. The tantra promises the accomplishment of such powers through the visualization of its deities and their maṇḍalas, the manipulation of the body's subtle

energies and the cultivation of the power of transgression through the ingestion of impure substances. And yet these practices are only hinted at within the tantra itself; the specifics are reserved for initiates and are to be spoken only by a lineage holder. Thus, as is the case with most tantras, this text is meant to be practiced only after receiving initiation and instruction from a qualified master.

i.6 The *Mahāmāyātāntra*'s three chapters and eighty-one verses depart from the traditional narrative structure of Buddhist scripture. Buddhist tantras typically follow the sūtra tradition by beginning with a formulaic introduction meant to establish the time, place, audience, and above all the authority of a given scripture. This formula, which begins "Thus I have heard..." (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*), is absent in the *Mahāmāyātāntra*, which begins instead with a perfunctory "Now..." (*ataḥ*).⁹ This deviation is in part explained by the fact that this is not a discourse of the Buddha, but rather a dialogue between two deities associated with the tantra. However, the lack of a formal introduction leaves it unclear precisely who these deities are. The interlocutor appears to be none other than Mahāmāyā herself; verse 1.25 invokes her by name as the recipient of the tantra's instruction. The speaker, however, is never explicitly identified within the text. Kṛṣṇavajra ventures a guess, suggesting Vajradākinī as the source of the teaching.¹⁰ Ratnākaraśānti takes a different approach and, instead of concerning himself with identifying figures not explicitly named in the text, considers the *Mahāmāyātāntra* to be derived from a much larger mythical compendium of tantras (which he refrains from identifying).¹¹ It is in that collection, he declares, that one may find the traditional introduction that establishes the important details of the *Mahāmāyātāntra*'s setting.

i.7 From this abrupt beginning, the first chapter continues with several verses invoking Mahāmāyā's qualities and describing the powers acquired through her successful propitiation. Tantras centered upon yoginīs and ḍākinīs, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, typically emphasize the attainment of mundane powers over the transcendent; in this the *Mahāmāyātāntra* is no different. The yogī who masters the practices of Mahāmāyā will, the text promises, be able to magically influence and attack others, acquire whatever he desires, fly through the sky, travel through other realms, become invisible, possess the bodies of others, and become immortal. Compared to this comprehensive and repetitive list of mundane attainments, the tantra makes only passing reference to the more altruistic and transcendent attainments. Only once does the text mention that its attainments can be used to benefit others (1.28), and only once does it explicitly announce that its practice can result in buddhahood (3.25).

i.8 Following this exhaustive account of the attainments, the first chapter closes with a description of a short sequence of visualization. The reader may be puzzled at this point to find that Mahāmāyā, who had, up to this point, been invoked using explicitly feminine epithets, is suddenly referred to using undeniably masculine terms. Though some suggest this is the tantra of a male deity with a feminine name,¹² Mahāmāyā is a female deity, as the verses of invocation make clear—she is the great Queen Mahāmāyā, the mother of the guhyakas, and the queen of yoginīs. She is consistently addressed

using a specifically feminine epithet, *vidyā*, that simultaneously invokes her status as the embodiment of knowledge and as the female deity presiding over a maṇḍala. And yet here, and in the third chapter where her iconography is fully described, she becomes the male Heruka, the Virile One (*vīra*) embracing the consort Buddhaḍākinī.

i.9 This gender ambiguity is clarified when we consider that the tantra describes Mahāmāyā as a feminized form of absolute reality. She is said to pervade everything in the three worlds, to be the source of all the gods, and to create, sustain, and destroy the universe. Most importantly, she is exactly what her name suggests, the “great illusion” that constitutes apparent reality. When she takes embodiment, she can do so in any form necessary, which in the context of this tantra is Heruka, the male deity most frequently found at the center of tantric maṇḍalas. Ratnākaraśānti makes explicit the ontological primacy of the feminine Mahāmāyā; in his commentary he equates her with Vajradhara, the embodiment of absolute reality, who is typically male, and identifies her as “she who has the form of Heruka.”¹³

i.10 The second chapter is the tantra’s shortest and most challenging. Its verses only hint at the techniques and visualizations to which they refer. The communities in which the *Mahāmāyātāntra* circulated would have guarded their teachings and techniques closely, making complete explanations accessible only to an intimate circle of initiates. The tantra’s verses—especially those that appear to refer to specific techniques—are not meant to be edifying, only allusive. It is the role of the tantric master to unpack each verse and convey its practical content to those prepared to receive it. Thus in this chapter we are offered only the barest of introductions to what was likely a complex sequence of techniques.

i.11 The fifth verse of the second chapter introduces the primary structure of the tantra’s practices, one the later Tibetan commentators would identify as a framework for the development stage and completion stage practices unique to the *Mahāmāyātāntra*.¹⁴ Verse 2.5 states:

The threefold practice is said to be essentially mantra, appearance, and reality.
Through three aspects of wisdom he will not be stained by the faults of existence.

Kṛṣṇavajra provides the necessary elaboration:

Mantra refers to those mantras such as *om* and so forth that are fixed in the six places, the eyes and the rest. *Appearance* refers to the [deity’s] manner of appearance as explained below—his color, form, posture and faces. *Reality* refers to the fundamental nature which is completely free from all conceptual fabrication.¹⁵

The visualizations, recitations, and sequences of practice that follow in the text are to be understood and employed in terms of this threefold structure.

i.12 The remainder of the chapter presents a series of practical techniques for attaining mastery over the phenomenal world and generating bodily energies and fluids for use in ritual practice. Each verse from 2.7 to 2.14 alludes to a specific visualization centered

on a single mantric syllable and its associated deity, the practice of which leads to the stated outcome. Yet it is impossible to determine, based on the verses alone, what practices are being described. It is left to the commentators and the oral tradition to fill in the detail. Consider verse 2.7:

Meditate upon the first syllable which is the color of Indra.

Merged fully with one's own awareness it is summoned in an instant.

Ratnākaraśānti comments:

This is explained as follows: once the vulva of Buddhaḍākinī and so forth is rendered red like saffron, imagine the syllable *om* red like saffron in the vessel of the Virile One and fix the Virile One in the subtle sphere. Once the Virile One has been made red by the light of the syllable *om*, two rays of red light emerge from the Virile One. Imagine a noose on the tip of the first and a hook on the second. Binding the neck of the object to be accomplished with the noose and piercing its heart with the hook, imagine that it is quickly summoned.¹⁶

It thus becomes apparent that the words of the tantra itself provide merely an outline, a shorthand version for tantric practitioners already well versed in its practices. Likewise, each of the subsequent verses of this chapter points to complex meditation techniques, a type of knowledge that is, as verse 2.17 indicates, “secret, obscure, and unwritten.”

i.13 The third and final chapter brings the tantra to a close with a description of the rites for preparing and consuming impure substances, followed by a complete presentation of the iconography of Mahāmāyā and her retinue. The cultivation of the power of transgression through deliberate consumption of impure, polluting substances is an important aspect of Buddhist tantra. Notions of purity and pollution have been formative elements of South Asian identity since Vedic times. Such an identity is destabilized through contact with and ingestion of impure substances and bodily fluids. Indian Buddhist tantras, especially those of the later Yoga tantra class such as the *Guhyasamājatantra*,¹⁷ positioned the consumption of sexual fluids at the climax of the ritual process so as to harness the force of the transgressive act into a powerful soteriological moment. The same holds true for the ingestion of illicit meats: their ritual consumption negated a social identity formed through the observation of dietary and behavioral proscriptions. Through the eating of taboo substances, practitioners' bonds with mundane society are fully severed and their acceptance into the community of spiritual adepts is confirmed.

i.14 Yoginītantras, including the *Mahāmāyātantra*, carried on the transgressive practices that developed in tantras such as the *Guhyasamājatantra* and the *Guhyagarbhatantra*. In the *Mahāmāyātantra*, the consumption of sexual fluids is presented at the end of the second chapter and the ingestion of illicit meats in the early verses of the third. The final two verses of the second chapter describe, in a typically occluded fashion, the ingestion of sexual fluids that marks the culmination of the meditation sequence. The verses instruct

the yogī to keep his mind free of concepts and take the “wish-granting jewel” between his thumb and ring finger and place it in his mouth. Kṛṣṇavajra explains that this refers to the ingestion of “relative *bodhicitta*” (*kun rdzob kyi byang chub sems*, i.e. semen) after its prolonged retention in the tip of the penis.¹⁸ In the parlance of the later tradition, this marks the completion stage section of the practice. In the words of the tantra itself, the ingestion of sexual fluids triggers “everlasting spiritual attainment.”

i.15 Moving into the third chapter, the tantra introduces a sequence of verses outlining the rites associated with the ingestion of sacramental substances. The yogī is instructed to gather the five illicit meats (elephant, horse, cow, dog, and human), roll them individually into pellets, and store them for seven days. Next they are mixed together and stored in the cavity of a rotting jackal for an additional seven days. Finally they are taken out and consumed, resulting in an experience of “the great fruitions” (*mahāphalāni*, 3.6), which Ratnākaraśānti identifies as “the state of wisdom.”¹⁹ Though the five illicit meats are common enough in tantric literature, the especially polluting addition of a jackal corpse appears to be a unique contribution of the *Mahāmāyātāntra*. We can understand this distinctly unpalatable process as intended to collapse the binaries of pure and impure, precipitating a more complete rejection of dualistic concepts and, as verse 3.1 states, leading to “omniscience.”

i.16 The final section of the tantra concerns the method of practice, the *sādhana*, for the deity, including the details of the visualization of Mahāmāyā and her maṇḍala. The stages by which a tantra is to be practiced are frequently concealed within the text—the order will be scrambled and the details elided.²⁰ The act of organizing these elements is left to tantric teachers and lineage masters, who composed independent ancillary texts to codify the proper sequence of practice. These texts incorporated practices drawn from the oral tradition and embedded the basic outline provided by the tantra within an established *sādhana* framework that normally included common Buddhist elements such as refuge in the Three Jewels, the generation of the aspiration for awakening, the offering of confession, and so forth. Thus while the core material for a *sādhana* is found within the tantra itself, each *sādhana* is unique, reflecting styles and interpretations that are as diverse as their authors. *Sādhana*s composed on the *Mahāmāyātāntra* by the Indian authors Ratnākaraśānti, Kukkuripa, Ratnavajra, and Kumé Dorjé (*sku med rdo rje*), as well as a number composed by Tibetan authors, have been preserved in Sanskrit and Tibetan.

i.17 Within the *Mahāmāyātāntra*, although verse 3.7 announces the commencement of the *sādhana*, the majority of practices have already been introduced in the preceding two chapters. But it is only here, at the end of the tantra, that we are finally given the complete iconographic description required for the self-visualization of the deity that precedes all other practices.²¹ The visualization begins by imagining a red lotus flower with four petals, in the middle of which sits a single subtle sphere. From this sphere, four additional subtle spheres emerge and come to rest on each of the four petals. These four spheres then transform into four yoginīs, each distinct in color and wielding the

specific implements described in the tantra. They sing a song of invocation in the language of the yoginīs ²² to the central subtle sphere, summoning Mahāmāyā and consort from their essential state, first in the form of mantra syllables, then in full iconographic detail. Mahāmāyā takes the dark blue form of Heruka embracing the red Buddhaḍākinī. (S)he has four faces—blue in the east, yellow in the south, red in the west, and blue-green in the north. (S)he has four hands, each holding a different implement: a skull cup, a khaṭvāṅga, a bow, and an arrow.

i.18 Once this five-deity maṇḍala has been fully imagined, the practitioner is prepared to apply any of the diverse practices that have been described throughout the work: the visualization of mantra syllables and additional maṇḍala deities, the manipulation of subtle energies, or the consumption of sexual fluids and illicit meats. Through identification with Mahāmāyā and engagement in these potent practices, the diligent practitioner will be rewarded with mundane powers, reach “highest attainment of suchness” (3.25), and, as we are told in the tantra’s final verse, be forever protected by Mahāmāyā, “the queen of the yoginīs.”

About the Translation

i.19 This translation is based upon a comparative edition, made by the translators, of the Tibetan recensions of the *Mahāmāyātāntra* drawn from the Degé (*sde dge*), Lhasa, Narthang (*snar thang*), Peking, and Stok Palace (*stog pho brang*) editions of the Tibetan Kangyur. Though the tantra itself no longer exists in Sanskrit, Ratnākaraśānti’s important commentary, the *Guṇavatīṭīkā*, is preserved in two Sanskrit manuscripts held in Nepal’s Royal Archive, which have been edited by the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. Because the *Guṇavatīṭīkā* attests to the majority of the Sanskrit terms, it allows access to much of the *Mahāmāyātāntra* in its original language. We have therefore given careful consideration to both the Sanskrit edition of this commentary and the manuscripts upon which it is based. Where the Sanskrit term is available, we have privileged the semantic range of the Sanskrit over that of the Tibetan, allowing us to recapture something of the flavor of the original Sanskrit. The commentaries of Ratnākaraśānti and Kṛṣṇavajra were consulted throughout the translation process and greatly influenced our reading of the root text.

i.20 The *Mahāmāyātāntra* is a challenging text. It is thematically inconsistent and disjunctive in places, and at times the referent of a given verse is unclear. Though this is certainly due in part to attempts by its authors to conceal the meaning or proper sequence of the tantra, it is clear that a grammatically flawed work is hiding behind the Tibetan translation. This is common among Buddhist tantras, as their authors did not always possess a solid command of the Sanskrit language. Where possible we have clarified the text to make it more readable, but there remain passages that are enigmatic and difficult to follow.

Note

- i.21 In the translation, the numbers within square brackets preceded by F. indicate the folio numbers of the Degé edition of the Tibetan; the numbers without letters indicate the page numbers of the *dpe bsdur ma* (comparative) edition of the Tibetan (see bibliography).

tr.

THE TRANSLATION

The King of Tantras, the Glorious Mahāmāyā

1.

Chapter 1

The First Instruction

1.1 [F.167a] Homage to the Glorious Vajraḍākinī!

I pay homage to the protector of beings, Glorious Vajraḍākinī,
Universal sovereign of the ḍākinīs, the very essence of the five wisdoms and three
bodies.

1.2 I pay homage to all the vajraḍākinīs

Who cut the bonds of conceptual thought and descend to act in the world.

1.3 Now, following that, I will explain the tantra called *The Supreme Secret of the Secret
Goddesses, the Vajraḍākinīs*. [F.167.b]

1.4 She pervades the entire Egg of Brahmā, the animate and inanimate.
She is the source of all goddesses and rules over Brahmā and the rest.

1.5 She is their great secret, the great Queen Mahāmāyā.
She is the great illusion, intensely fierce, who destroys all that exists.²³ [507]

1.6 She pervades all of this: the animate and inanimate, the three worlds.
Time after time she gathers in and again emanates the triple world.

1.7 This mother of the guhyakas is celebrated as the essence of illusion.
She is the knowledge that perfects the three worlds and fulfills all desires.

1.8 Through the mere thought of the queen of the accomplished, knowledge itself,
The devas, dānavas, gandharvas, yakṣas, āsuras, and humans,

1.9 The vidyādhara, the kinnaras, and mahodaras,
The rākṣasas and piśācas—all are mastered for practitioners.
All creatures are subdued: those born in the water and on land.

1.10 Phenomena are naturally luminous; they are primordially pure and without stain.

- The methods of those possessing the self-arisen five wisdoms are to be praised;²⁴
- 1.11 These are the yoginīs, the mother of yoga, and the entirety of the three worlds.²⁵
The entire play of illusion is accomplished without exclusion or remainder.²⁶
- 1.12 Abducted from the buddhas, the maidens of the highest gods are enjoyed.
The yogī has knowledge, masters yoga and weaves Indra’s Web.²⁷
- 1.13 He beguiles and paralyzes, slays, dissuades, and more.
He tames, magnetizes, and so forth; he flies through the sky.
He enters the citadel of another, is invisible, and so on.
- 1.14 He causes hostility, renders mute and moves under the earth;
Becomes the universal sovereign of vidyādhara, does not age, and is deathless.
- 1.15 One with knowledge of yogic illusion is likewise free from disease—
Yogīs revel in the form of the mantra’s syllables. [F.168.a]
- 1.16 Through recitation and contemplation, meditation and absorption, [508]
The vidyā created through recitation brings about the accomplishment of knowledge.²⁸
- 1.17 Without discipline or austerities, without hardship, fasting, or vows,
Bliss and Joy bring accomplishment through constancy in knowledge and method.²⁹
- 1.18 The Virile One stands in the center of the navel, in the hidden space of the blossom;
He is mind, the absence of mind, and mental form—the nature of knowledge and what
can be known.
- 1.19 I will now describe him—this is the profound instruction of the Buddha:
A chain equal to that of the āli kālī is coiled there.
- 1.20 The upper chain ignites and is made to flow downward,
A drop of nectar flowing in the form of semen.
- 1.21 Whatever comes on the path of the senses is naturally just that.
Through the practice of supreme benefit all becomes the nature of the Buddha.³⁰
- 1.22 The spiritual attainment of the great commitment is the perfection of the great pill.³¹
In the embrace of Mahāmāyā you should practice yogic union.³²
- 1.23 Endowed with the five offerings together with the five objects of desire,
The power of accomplishment will be known and spiritual attainment made permanent.
- 1.24 I will explain this spiritual attainment of wisdom,
By which the state of a god is swiftly attained—Goddess, I speak truthfully!
- 1.25 To you, Mahāmāyā, I will explain the accomplishment of the three worlds,

- The garland of syllables of the most excellent among the great yoginīs.³³
- 1.26 The great yogī who masters the animate and inanimate with thought alone
Is constantly offered desirable things and served according to his pleasure.
- 1.27 He is always at play and accomplishes the vajra yoginīs. [509]
In a variety of forms the essential practice is revealed. [F.168.b]
- 1.28 The great attainment, the splendor of the tathāgatas, is granted;³⁴
Through extracting various essences the yogī constantly benefits beings.³⁵
- 1.29 With the collected semen, liquor, and extracted large pill,
He mixes in the great flesh and unites with the yoginī.
- 1.30 He gains long life, great virility,³⁶ great splendor, and becomes exceedingly powerful;
He possesses divine sight, magical ability, and drinks the moon day after day;
- 1.31 He becomes long-lived so that he lives for a great age;
He manifests an alluring form and conjures miracles;
- 1.32 With merely a thought his appearance is transformed—
The queen of vidyās, the great enchantress, is unfailingly accomplished through
recitation.
- 1.33 Vidyā! In the three worlds there is nothing equal to my knowledge.³⁷
This transmission of all tantras has been explained to you, Magnificent One!

This completes the first instruction on the signs of spiritual attainment of The Great Vidyā, Queen of the Yoginīs.

2.

Chapter 2

The Second Instruction

- 2.1 Now, following that, I will explain the sublime secret syllable that bestows the result of the spiritual attainment for the practice of the great queens of yoga.
- 2.2 Merely visualizing her, the yoginī grants the best of things.
Apply the first syllable and sustain the upward breath.³⁸
- 2.3 Taking that which comes at the end of the eight together with *ū* and the bindu,
The yogī moves the downward breath, abandoning the real and unreal. [510]
- 2.4 The observances are not explained: the activities of the garland mantra,
Of retention, and of fire offerings are all omitted.³⁹
- 2.5 The threefold practice is said to be essentially mantra, appearance, and reality.
Through three aspects of wisdom he will not be stained by the faults of existence.
- 2.6 The yogī who constantly meditates on this without interruption
Is equal to Vajrasattva and gains accomplishment in a single month. [F.169.a]
- 2.7 Meditate upon the first syllable which is the color of Indra.
Merged fully with one's own awareness it is summoned in an instant.
- 2.8 The one possessing the second syllable is imagined and cultivated.
One gains power over everything within the whole of the three worlds.
- 2.9 Brahmā, and lord Viṣṇu, so too Indra and the Lord of Desire;
Invoked with the wisdom syllable, they are summoned along with their wives.⁴⁰
- 2.10 Endowed with the syllable *ā*, settled in awakened body, speech, and mind,⁴¹
Perform the threefold union—this is the supreme extraction of the pill.
- 2.11 Possessing the syllable *khe* is the four-faced one with a red body.⁴²
Skull cup in hand he is passion itself—this is the supreme extraction of semen.

- 2.12 Possessing the syllable *ci* is one yellow in color who shines brightly,
With the form of a horse's face—engaging him is the supreme extraction of the liquor.
- 2.13 The one possessing the syllable *ra* is red in color and exceedingly bright,
Has four arms and four faces, and appears in the form of a jackal.
- 2.14 Cultivating this wrathful mind is the supreme extraction of blood.
Endowed with the six syllables, they are fixed in the six places.
- 2.15 The practice, the host of ḍākinīs, and the vajra yoginīs are accomplished, [511]
The two eyes, the ears, and so too the nose and the mind.
- 2.16 Yogīs take the posture of a sporting lion;⁴³
While meditating with the movement of breath controlled, it blazes in an instant
Throughout Akaniṣṭha, the summit of existence, and in the seven worlds of the animate
and inanimate.
- 2.17 All meditate upon it, but they don't realize it.
If everyone realized it, the manifestations of beings would utterly collapse.
Therefore this wisdom is secret, obscure, and unwritten.
- 2.18 Because the awakened ones know, they who are immersed in yogic sleep,⁴⁴
They concentrate upon the pill and meditate on the singular nature of forms. [F.169.b]
- 2.19 They meditate on the essence of the substances arisen from the nine doors,⁴⁵
And consume them with a mind free of concepts and devoid of intrinsic nature.
- 2.20 With the thumb and ring finger, place the wish-granting jewel in the mouth,
And attain the everlasting spiritual attainment arisen from the nature of the nectar.

This completes the second instruction on the practice of The Great Vidyā, Queen of the Yoginīs.

3.

Chapter 3

The Third Instruction

- 3.1 Now comes a thorough explanation of the supreme accomplishment of the samaya:
The ingestion of the other gathered substances that bestow the result of omniscience.
- 3.2 By their mere consumption the mothers of the spirits are accomplished.⁴⁶
Elephant and horse, and so too cow and dog.
- 3.3 Mixed with the great one and also the five wisdom nectars,
From the fourteenth to the eighth they are combined and mingled together.⁴⁷
- 3.4 Left inside a jackal for seven days, remove them. [512]
Roll the five into pellets the size of mustard seeds.
- 3.5 Indeed this tantra teaches that from the eighth to the fourteenth
Cultivate them individually for seven days, mix them, and place them in a jackal.⁴⁸
- 3.6 Take them out—from the five make pellets the size of the fruit of spiritual attainment.
Because the great fruition is perfectly realized, it is taught in this tantra but fully
concealed
The buddhas have concealed the great fruition in every instance.
- 3.7 Next follows the method of practice: visualize a mind lotus
Glowing red in color and endowed with the four goddesses.
It is adorned with the figure of the Buddha.
- 3.8 In the east he shines like a blue lotus, to the south he is yellow,
To the west whitish red, and in the north he glows emerald.⁴⁹
Shrouded in a garland of flames, he is beautiful with three eyes, four faces, and four
arms.

- 3.9 Imagine that the goddess in the east has three eyes and holds a khaṭvāṅga and bell in her left hands and a vajra and skull cup in her right hands. The goddess in the south wields a trident, a jewel, a banner, and a jackal. The goddess in the west holds a bow, an arrow, a multi-colored lotus, and a skull cup. [F.170.a] The goddess in the north wields a sword, a noose, a hand drum, and a skull cup.
- 3.10 In its center visualize the vajra body, speech, and mind
Bearing a skull cup and khaṭvāṅga, and so too a bow and arrow.
- 3.11 Meditating on that which possesses the first mantra, it blazes for an instant.
Practicing like this, the yogī is granted the spiritual attainment of the substance. [513]
- 3.12 Through the accomplishment of the yoginī, confidence swiftly develops.⁵⁰
One can become entirely invisible and manifest a thousandfold at once.⁵¹
- 3.13 Plunder from the buddhas and enjoy sublime celestial girls.⁵²
With vajra eyes one will see, like an āmalaka fruit in the palm of one's hand.
Buddhas equal to grains of sand in the Ganga residing in their vajra realms,⁵³
- 3.14 Pure realms numerous as sand in the Ganga, the features of awakened body, speech,
and mind,⁵⁴
The intrinsic condition of all objects—know them to arise from the mind's dance.⁵⁵
- 3.15 Apply the syllables in reverse and meditate on the mantra.
Ingest each one of the pills infused with the vajra drink.
- 3.16 Take the last of the eight syllables together with the *ū* and bindu;
Fix it firmly at the end and clearly pronounce the mantra: *guhya bhakṣa abhakṣe hūm*.⁵⁶
- 3.17 In perfect union with the yoginī take possession of the first syllable.
If desiring accomplishment through the vajra holder, a yogī consumes the manifest
mantra seven times.
- 3.18 The last of the three syllables sits clearly at the end of the eight.
Endowed with the *ū* and bindu it remains as the supreme syllable.
- 3.19 The one linked to the first syllable is united with *hrīḥ*. [F.170.b]
Apply the last of the syllables and fix in place the five seeds.
- 3.20 Meditate upon the syllable and cause the lotus to fully bloom.
For those who seek the accomplishment of a vajra holder, this union should be fully
known.
- 3.21 Then, the sublime vajra song which is the realization of the vajra yoginīs welcomes the
one who thoroughly accomplishes existence.⁵⁷

“Hey, friend! The vajra makes the lotus swell and bloom.
A la la la la ho! You have been aroused by the dance of great bliss.
The rays of the sun fully open the face of the lotus. [514]
You have become aroused by the dance of great bliss.”⁵⁸

- 3.22 Then, simply through this song sung to the great vajra holder
The vajraḍākinīs dance and call out to Vajrasattva.
- 3.23 In this way one with consistent devotion gains the spiritual attainment of union.
Through perfect union in the four times, accomplishment is gained—this is the
supreme meditation.
- 3.24 Adorned with all perfect ornaments and wreathed with flowers and perfume,
So the spiritual attainment that bestows the sublime three bodies is certainly attained,
Causing its perfect illumination within a hundred miles.
- 3.25 From the perfect application of the two powers arise the substances of the nine doors.
One will accomplish the unsurpassable essence, the peace of abiding in the awakening
of buddhahood.
- 3.26 Now, in verse form:

The forms, the seals, and the attributes,
The substances, absorptions, and meditations—
These various ritual methods have been set forth,
Taught according to the desires of the goddess’s mind.
- 3.27 Whoever keeps this tantra at home, keeps it with him always, and chants and meditates
upon it will no longer experience illness, aging, obstacles, or death. He will be forever
protected from obstacles by the queens among yoginīs.

*This completes the third instruction on the method of practice and ancillary activities, the supreme
secret of secrets, that are the intent of the great vajraḍākinīs. [F.171.a]*

c.

COLOPHON

c.1 This completes the *Mahāmāyātantra*.

It was translated and edited by the Indian paṇḍita Jinavara and the great Tibetan
translator Gö [515] Lhetsé.

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

- G Guṇavatiṭkā
S Mahāmāyātantrasya vṛtti smṛti
SM Mahāmāyāsādhanaṃ (in Sādhanaṃālā)

n.

NOTES

- 1 The *Mahāmāyātāntra* clearly postdates the *Guhyasamājātāntra* because of the instances of intertextuality indicated below in notes 3 and 51–55. The *Guhyasamājātāntra*, and similar works like the *Guhyagarbhatāntra* demonstrate significant iconographic and ritual innovations over those works typically identified as Yoga tantras, such as the *Sarvathāgatattvaśaṅgraha*. Beginning in approximately the eighth century CE, the pacific and regal Vairocana was replaced at the center of tantric maṇḍalas by deities associated with the vajra family, frequently in the wrathful form of Akṣobhya known as Heruka. This shift is related to the introduction of transgressive practices and a wrathful, mortuary aesthetic into the established structure of the Yoga tantras, leading some Indian Buddhist commentators to begin to refer to Mahāyoga, or “Great yoga,” tantras. In the later Tibetan doxographical schemes of the New Schools these tantras would be identified as Father tantras (*pha rgyud*), joining the yoginītantras in the class of Unexcelled Yoga tantra (*yoganiruttaratantra*). The yoginītantras would build upon the framework of these tantras as they introduced their own unique iconographies and practices.
- 2 On the dating of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, see Gray (2007) pp 11–14, and Sanderson (2009) pp 158–69.
- 3 Verses 3.12–14 of the *Mahāmāyātāntra* contain a number of close correspondences with verses 12.52, 53, and 55 of the *Guhyasamājātāntra*.
- 4 Regarding Ratnākaraśānti’s dating, see Isaacson (2001) p 458, n 4.
- 5 For the dating of Kṛṣṇavajra, see Isaacson (2001) p 457, n 2.
- 6 Tāranātha, F.3a.7–3b.6. Although there is no definitive evidence, some assert that Kaṇha and Kṛṣṇācārya are identical.
- 7 *’gos lo tsa wa* (1988) pp 208–9.
- 8 See bibliography.
- 9 The *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* shares this abrupt beginning. For an in-depth discussion of the implications of this style of introduction, see Gray (2007) pp 28–35.

- 10 S, F.108b, lines 6–7. His attribution is somewhat problematic as he contradicts the tantra by stating that the recipient of the discourse is Buddhaḍākinī, not Mahāmāyā.
- 11 G, pp 2–4.
- 12 English (2002) p 47.
- 13 G, p 6: *saiṣeti herukarupā Mahāmāyā*. Elsewhere [G, p 20] Ratnākaraśānti identifies Mahāmāyā as the fundamental identity of both the male Heruka and his consort, Buddhaḍākinī. He writes, “The lord of the maṇḍala is the glorious Heruka, who is Mahāmāyā; the vidyā Buddhaḍākinī is also Mahāmāyā because they both possess a singular intrinsic nature” (*maṇḍalādhipatiḥ śrītheruko mahāmāyā, tadvidyā api buddhaḍākinī mahāmāyā tayoh ekasvabhāvatvāt*).
- 14 See particularly Jamgön Kongtrul (2008) pp 69–70 and 183–86. He writes: “The *Mahāmāyā* and other tantras set forth the threefold [formulation consisting of] appearance, mantra and reality [yogas]. These three apply to both path and result; and within the path itself, to both the creation phase and completion phase.” (We have emended “shape” to “appearance” to conform with the terminology used in this translation.) Though the concepts of the development and completion stages were present in the Indian Buddhist tantric tradition, they never reached the degree of uniformity there that they did in the Tibetan tradition. The terms appear nowhere in the commentarial literature of the *Mahāmāyātantra*.
- 15 S, F.109b.3–4: *sngags zhes bya ba ni mig la sogs pa'i gnas drug tu bkod pa'i om la sogs pa'i sngags so / dbyibs zhes bya ba ni og gnas 'byung ba'i tshul dang / mdog dang dbyibs dang phyag dang zhal gyi bdag nyid can no / chos zhes bya ba ni kun brtags pa thams cad las rnam par grol ba'i rang bzhin nyid do*.
- 16 G, p 28: *etaduktam bhavati buddhaḍākinīyādiyogaṃ kuṅkumāruṇaṃ kṛtvā vīrabhājane kuṅkumāruṇaṃ praṇavaṃ vicintya tadbindau vīraṃ vinasya praṇavaśmibhirvīramaruṇīkṛtya vīrādaruṇaśmirekhādṛvayaṃ niḥsārya ekasyā agre pāśaṃ dvitīyasyā aṅkuśaṃ vicintayet / sādhyam pāśena kaṇḍe baddhvā aṅkuśena hṛdi vidhvā kṣīpramākṛṣyamaṇaṃ vicintayet*.
- 17 On the ingestion of sexual fluids in these tantras, see Dalton (2004) pp 14–17.
- 18 S, F.213a.
- 19 G, p 37: *mahāphalāni tāni jñātvetyarthaḥ*.
- 20 We thank Jacob Dalton for bringing this technique of concealment to our attention.
- 21 The description that follows organizes the sequence of visualization following the *sādhana* composed by Ratnākaraśānti as preserved in the SM.
- 22 The fact that the language of the yoginīs’ song (3.21) is different from that of the root verses is entirely lost in the Tibetan translation. Ratnākaraśānti's *sādhana* preserves the original, which is composed in a form of Prākṛit distinct from the rest of the Sanskrit verses.

- 23 “Who destroys all that exists:” this translates the Sanskrit *bhūtasamhārakāriṇī* (Tib: *'byung ba yang dag sduḍ mdzad ma*). We have pushed the translation toward the more extreme end of the term’s semantic range in a nod to Ratnākaraśānti, who glosses the term with (*pralayakartī*), “she who causes annihilation.” [G, p 5] This refers to the dissolution of the universe that comes at the end of the cosmogonic stages of emanation, absorption and dissolution of the universe that are standard in Brahmanical cosmology.
- 24 “Are to be praised:” here we have followed the Sanskrit attested by Ratnākaraśānti which is quite different from the Tibetan translation: the methods (Skt: *upāyāḥ*) of those who are endowed with the five wisdoms (Skt: *pañcajñāninām*) are to be praised (Skt: *pragīyante*) [G, pp 9-10]. This is an interesting verse as it seems thematically disjunctive with the preceding and subsequent lines and may have been inserted here by a later redactor. Kṛṣṇavajra, who is otherwise attentive to every verse, does not acknowledge it at all. Ratnākaraśānti, on the other hand, uses this verse as the basis for an extensive discourse linking into Yogācāra philosophy.
- 25 Ratnākaraśānti identifies the yoginī, mother of yoga (Skt: *yogamātā*), and the entirety of the three worlds (Skt: *tridhātukaṃ aśeṣataḥ*) as the praiseworthy methods of the previous verse [G, p 10].
- 26 The second line of this verse begins a new sequence of verses that identify the accomplishments that will come to the yogī who successfully accomplishes the practices of the *Mahāmāyā Tantra*. It concludes in verse 1.15.
- 27 “Weaves Indra’s Web:” this translates the Sanskrit *indravjālaṃ karoti*, which is rendered as *miḡ 'phrul byed* in the Tibetan.
- 28 The Sanskrit term *vidyā* (Tib: *rig pa*) appears twice in this verse with different connotations. According to Ratnākaraśānti, the first instance is as the technical term for the central female deity of the maṇḍala, Mahāmāyā, and has therefore been left untranslated. The second instance is in specific reference to the knowledge (Skt: *prajñā*) that arises from meditation and has here been translated as knowledge [G, p 13].
- 29 The Tibetan translation adds an additional *rtag tu*, meaning “constant,” which is not attested in any of the commentaries. Because it appears to be largely redundant, it has been omitted here.
- 30 This verse is complicated by two substantial variants. Where the Tibetan translation reads “practice of supreme benefit” (*mchog tu phan pa*), Ratnākaraśānti reads “practice of supreme settling” (Skt: *paramāhita* / Tib: *mchog tu bzhaḡ pa*) [G, p 19]. The similarity of the Sanskrit terms for supreme benefit (*parama hita*) and for supreme settling (Skt: *parama āhita*) probably led to a scribal error resulting in different versions of the verse. Because the version found in the Tibetan translation is attested in Kṛṣṇavajra’s commentary, it was followed here, though Ratnākaraśānti’s reading seems clearer. Where the Tibetan translation reads *sangs rgyas kun gyi rang bzhin 'bab* (“become the nature of all Buddhas”), Kṛṣṇavajra reads *sangs rgyas rang bzhin thams cad 'gyur* (“everything becomes the nature

- of the Buddha”) [S, F.206b] which is in agreement with the Sanskrit attested by Ratnākaraśānti and which is followed here.
- 31 Ratnākaraśānti and Kṛṣṇavajra are unanimous in identifying the spiritual attainment of the great commitment with the perfection of the great pill. This relationship is not clear in the Tibetan translation.
- 32 “Mahāmāyā:” though the Tibetan verse reads *rgyu 'phrul chen po* here, Ratnākaraśānti attests to *Mahāmāyā* [G, p 20].
- 33 This verse appears to be slightly different in the recension of the tantra used by Ratnākaraśānti. A tentative prose reconstruction would read: “To you (Skt: *tvām*), the vidyā Mahāmāyā who is the means for accomplishing the three worlds (Skt: *mahāmāyāṃ vidyāṃ trailokyasādhanīm*) I will explain (*tad ahaṃ vakṣyāmi*) the Vīra, the most excellent among the great yogīs (Skt: *mahāyoginām divyam*) along with the garland of syllables (Skt: *akṣarapaṅktibhiḥ*).” [G, p 21].
- 34 Tathāgatas, or “thus-gone ones” here: where the Tibetan translation reads *de bzhin gshegs pa kun*, Ratnākaraśānti attests to the Sanskrit *tāthāgātī*, a feminine derivative adjective formed from *tathāgata* [G, p 22]. In his reading the term is in the singular. Thus in at least one recension of the text the line would read “the splendor of the thus-gone lady.”
- 35 Kṛṣṇavajra reads a different line here. In the recension of the root text available to him, the final line of the text as translated in Tibetan is *gar ni thugs rjes bsams bzhin mdzad* (“He dances with compassion according to his whim”) [S, F.208a].
- 36 “Virility:” translates the Sanskrit *vīrya* and the Tibetan *brtson 'grus*.
- 37 There are a couple of noteworthy variants of this verse found in commentarial works. The version from the Degé edition translated here, which is supported in Kṛṣṇavajra’s commentary, reads: “Vidyā! In the three worlds (Tib: *'jig rten gsum po na*) there is nothing equal to my knowledge (Tib: *nga yi rig dang mnyam pa med*).” The recension of the tantra used by Ratnākaraśānti appears to have, instead, “there is nothing (Skt: *nāsti*) like you (Skt: *te sadṛśī*) in the triple worlds (Skt: *triṣu lokeṣu*)” [G, p 21]. Taranātha attests to yet another variation. In his *Lamp of Suchness* [F.2b] he cites the same line as “Vidyā! In the three worlds there is nothing like you apart from me” (Tib: *rig pa 'jig rten gsum po na / khyod dang mnyams pa nga las med*).
- 38 “Sustain the upward breath:” this translates the Sanskrit *ucvāsasam kurute*, which is rendered in the Tibetan translation as *dbug gtang bar bya*.
- 39 Ratnākaraśānti reads “restriction” (Skt: *yantraṇa*) in place of “garland” (Skt: *mālā*) [G, p 27]. In his commentary he connects both restriction and retention with the movements of the breath (*yantraṇā dhāraṇā ca prāṇavāyoh*). A variant of the first line of this verse is attested, in Sanskrit, in a sādhana associated with the *Mahāmāyātāntra* found in the

Sādhnamālā (#221 in SM vol. 2, p 434–36): *na japaṃ na vrataṃ tasya nopavāso vidhīyate.*

Kṛṣṇavajra confirms this variant in his commentary.

40 “Wisdom syllable:” according to Ratnākaraśānti, this term only appears in some recensions of the text [G, p 27]. As he does not gloss it in his commentary it seems it did not appear in his recension of choice.

41 Ratnākaraśānti attests to the syllable *ā* [G, p 27], which has been used here instead of the syllable *a* as given in the Tibetan translation.

42 Kṛṣṇavajra reads *kṣa* in place of *khe* [S, F.211a]; Ratnākaraśānti reads white in place of red [G, p 30].

43 The Tibetan syntax differs significantly from the Sanskrit, which has been translated here. In the Sanskrit the subject, the yogīs, is in the plural, not the instrumental as in the Tibetan. The object, the posture (*mudrā*), is in the accusative singular, not the genitive as in the Tibetan, which construes with the term “sporting lion” (*siṃhavikrīḍitā*). The Sanskrit attested by Ratnākaraśānti could read as follows: *siṃhavikrīḍitāṃ mudrāṃ bandhayanti yoginaḥ* [G, p 32].

44 “Awakened ones:” the Sanskrit word here is *saṃbuddhāḥ*, which conveys a slightly different sense than the Tibetan term used, *sangs rgyas rnams*. Whereas the latter could easily be translated as “buddhas,” the former is best rendered as “awakened ones.”

45 Essence of the substances: Ratnākaraśānti reads “the essence of buddhahood” (Skt: *buddhātman*) in place of “the essence of the substances” (Tib: *rdzas kyi bdag nyid*). [G, p 34].

46 “Mothers of the spirits:” we have here followed Ratnākaraśānti in reading the Sanskrit term *gūḍhamātaraḥ* [G, p 36], which appears as *’byung po mi rnams* in Tibetan translation. In South Asian mythology, the *gūḍhas* are a class of beings that attend upon Kubera, the lord of wealth.

47 Kṛṣṇavajra identifies this line as corrupt [S, F.213b]. He notes that it should read “from the eighth until the fourteenth,” which is the span of seven days mentioned in the next verse.

48 Ratnākaraśānti cites a different line of verse here, which collapses this line and the first line of the next verse: “On the night of the spirits (Skt: *bhūtarau*) these fruits of accomplishment (Skt: *siddhārthaphalāni*) are to be placed inside a jackal (Skt: *śivāṅgamadhye sthāpyānti*).” [G, p 37].

49 According to Ratnākaraśānti’s commentary, the deity has a purely white face in the west [G, p 39].

50 “Yoginī:” Ratnākaraśānti reads “yogas” (Skt: *yogāḥ*) [G, p 41] where the Tibetan has “yoginī” (Tib: *rnal ’byor ma*).

51 This line corresponds closely with verse 12.52, line 2 of the *Guhyasamājatantra*.

- 52 Ratnākaraśānti reads *siddhānāṃ kanyām*, “the maidens of the siddhas” [G, p 41]. This line corresponds closely with verse 12.52, line 3 of the *Guhyasamājantra*.
- 53 This line corresponds closely with verse 12.53, line 2 of the *Guhyasamājantra*.
- 54 This line corresponds closely with verse 12.55, line 1 of the *Guhyasamājantra*.
- 55 This line corresponds closely with verse 12.55, line 2 of the *Guhyasamājantra*.
- 56 In his commentary on verse 3.18 Kṛṣṇavajra gives the mantra as *om a guhya aguhya bhakṣa abhakṣe hūm* [S, F.216a].
- 57 Both Ratnākaraśānti [G, p 160] confirms a genitive relationship between the terms “vajra yoginīs” and “realization,” which has been followed here. The Tibetan editions all contain the agentive *kyis*.
- 58 This song has been translated from the Prākṛit as it appears in Ratnākaraśānti’s *sādhana* [SM #239, p 460]: *hale sai vīasia kamalu pabohiu vajjeṃ / a la la la la ho mahāsuheṇa ārohiu ṇaccem / navikiraṇeṇa paphulliu kamalu mahāsuheṇa / a la la la la ho mahāsuheṇa ārohiu ṇaccem*.

b.

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GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Akaniṣṭha

'og min

འོག་མིན།

The highest of the buddhafields. The term can be used to indicate the pure realm of the dharmakāya in general or can refer to the the six realms between the highest heaven of the form realm and the realm of dharmakāya.

g.2 Āli kāli

A li kA li

ཨ་ལི་ཀ་ལི།

The vowels (*āli*) and consonants (*kāli*) of the Sanskrit alphabet.

g.3 Commitment

dam tshig

དམ་ཚིག།

samaya

The level of commitments specifically associated with tantric practice. Also rendered here as “samaya.”

g.4 Completion stage

rdzogs pa'i rim pa

རྫོགས་པའི་རིམ་པ།

niṣpannakrama

The second of the two stages of tantric sādhana practiced. Its practices are specific to individual tantric systems but typically include sexual yogas, the consumption of illicit substances, manipulation of the subtle energetic anatomy or resting in an uncontrived state.

g.5 Dākinī

mkha' 'gro ma

མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ།

Like yoginīs, these are semi-divine female beings who have long haunted the margins of South Asian culture. They are frequently propitiated in order to acquire mundane and transcendent spiritual accomplishment.

g.6 Development stage

skyed pa'i rim pa

སྐྱེད་པའི་རིམ་པ།

utpattikrama

The first of the two stages of tantric practice focused on the visualized development of the tantric maṇḍala and its deities and the recitation of mantra.

g.7 Egg of Brahmā

tshangs sgo nga

ཚངས་སྒོ་ང།

brahmāṇḍā

Traditional Brahmanical term for the created universe.

g.8 Gö Lhetsé

'gos lhas btsas

འགོས་ལྷས་བཙམ།

—

11th century translator and teacher of *Guhyasamājatantra*.

g.9 Great Illusion

sgyu 'phrul chen mo

སྐུ་འཕྲུལ་ཆེན་མོ།

Mahāmāyā

The female central deity of the *Mahāmāyā Tantra* who appears in the form of the male Heruka. She was also a popular form of the Brahmanical great goddess (Mahādevī), to whom the Buddhist figure is intimately related. Also rendered here as “Mahāmāyā.”

g.10 Guhyaka

gsang ba pa

གསང་བ་པ།

A type of semi-divine being frequently found in the entourage of Kubera, the lord of wealth.

g.11 Heruka

he ru ka

ཧེ་རུ་ཀ།

The wrathful form of Akṣobhya, buddha of the vajra family, who appears in the center of many tantric maṇḍalas. He is typically depicted wearing mortuary implements and wreathed in flame.

g.12 Indra's Web

mig 'phrul

མིག་འཕྲུལ།

indrajāla

Traditional Brahmanical term for the illusory structure of mundane reality.

g.13 Khaṭvāṅga

kha TwAM ga

ཁ་ཧྲཱམ་ག།

A staff with a single or three pointed tip and a freshly decapitated head, a rotting head and a skull skewered on its shaft.

g.14 Knowledge

rig ma

འཇིག་མཁའ།

vidyā

An epithet of the female deity of the maṇḍala (most frequently as the consort of the main deity) who represents knowledge; the tantric consort; knowledge; frequently used in the sense of magical incantations and magical power. Also rendered here as “vidyā.”

g.15 Kṛṣṇavajra

nag po rdo rje

ནག་པོ་རྡོ་རྗེ།

An 11th or 12th century Buddhist commentator. Wrote *Recollection: a commentary on the Mahāmāyā Tantra*.

g.16 Kukkuripa

ku ku ri pa

ཀུ་ཀུ་རི་པ།

Counted among the most famous of the Indian Buddhist Mahāsiddhas and renowned for his association with packs of dogs (*kukkura*), he is a central figure in a number of tantric lineages, specifically of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and *Mahāmāyā Tantra*. He was active sometime between the 8th and 10th centuries.

g.17 Mahāmāyā

sgyu 'phrul chen mo

ལྷ་འཕྲུལ་ཆེན་མོ།

The female central deity of the *Mahāmāyā Tantra* who appears in the form of the male Heruka. She was also a popular form of the Brahmanical great goddess (Mahādevī), to whom the Buddhist figure is intimately related. Also rendered here as “Great Illusion.”

g.18 Mahāyoga

mal 'byor chen po'i rgyud

མཎ་འབྲོར་ཆེན་པོའི་རྒྱུད།

mahāyogatantra

A term used to describe the later tantras of the Yoga class that incorporated more transgressive practices and a wrathful aesthetic. Typified by the *Guhyasamājatantra* and *Guhyagarbhatantra*.

g.19 Marpa Chökyi Lodrö

mar pa chos kyi blo gros

མར་པ་ཚོས་ཀྱི་བློ་གྲོས།

(1012 - 1097) Tibetan translator and lay practitioner from Lhodrak, traveled several times to Nepal and India to receive tantric Buddhist teachings, notably from Nāropa and Maitripā, and in Tibet established an important set of lineages through his “four pillar” disciples Milarepa, Ngoktön Chöku Dorje, Tshurtön Wangki Dorje, and Metön Tshönpo.

g.20 Movement of breath

srog dang rtsol ba

སྲོག་དང་རྩོལ་བ།

prāṇāyāma

The manipulation of breath by means of yogic exercise. The Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit compound *prāṇāyāma* is more usually the compound *srog rtsol*.

g.21 Nāropa

na ro pa

ནོ་ལ།

Indian scholar and practitioner (956 - 1041), a major figure in the transmission of tantric Buddhism to Tibet; earlier in his life he was an important paṇḍita of Nālandā, but left to become a yogi and siddha, the student of Tilopā, and later the teacher of Kukkuripa, Marpa, and others.

g.22 Ratnākaraśānti

rin chen 'byung gnas zhi ba

རིན་ཆེན་འབྲུང་གནས་ཞི་བ།

An important 11th century Buddhist monastic scholar who wrote prolifically on a number on both Mahāyāna and Mantrayāna works.

g.23 Sacramental substances

dam tshig gyi rdzas

དམ་ཚིག་གྱི་རྩམ།

samayadravya

Sacramental substances ingested as part of tantric ritual; frequently composed of bodily fluids or illicit meats.

g.24 Sādhana

sgrub thabs

སྒྲུབ་ཐབས།

The method of practice. Experiential methods for actualizing spiritual attainments and liberation.

g.25 Samaya

dam tshig

དམ་ཚིག།

The level of commitments specifically associated with tantric practice. Also rendered here as “commitment.”

g.26 Semen

byang chub kyī sems

བྱང་ཆུབ་གྱི་སེམས།

bodhicitta

In normative Mahāyāna doctrine, bodhicitta refers to the awakened mind both in its relative and absolute aspects. In tantric thought it is frequently used as a code word for semen in the context of its generation and manipulation in sexual yogic rites.

g.27 Spiritual attainment

dn̄gos grub

དོན་གྲུབ།

siddhi

The mundane and transcendent abilities that are conferred through the perfection of yogic practices.

g.28 Unexcelled Yoga tantra

bla na med pa'i rnal 'byor gyi rgyud

བླ་ན་མེད་པ་དེ་རྣམ་འབྱོར་གྱི་རྒྱུད།

yoganiruttaratantra

A category of tantra that includes the so-called father tantras like the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and the “mother,” or Yoginī, tantras into a single genre of tantra.

Vidyā

g.29 *rig ma*

རིག་མ།

An epithet of the female deity of the maṇḍala (most frequently as the consort of the main deity) who represents knowledge; the tantric consort; knowledge; frequently used in the sense of magical incantations and magical power. Also rendered here as “knowledge.”

g.30 Vidyādhara

rig pa 'dzin pa

རིག་པ་འཛིན་པ།

A type of semi-divine being whose identity has shifted over time and genre. In their most popular form they are spell (*vidyā*) wielding (*dhara*) beings capable of granting magical abilities to those they favor. The Buddhist tradition associated them more closely with soteriological aims, identifying them as realized beings who possess (*dhara*) knowledge or awareness (*vidyā*).

g.31 Virile One

dpa' bo

དཔའ་བོ།

vīra

Closely associated with notions of virility, this term can denote the male deity of the maṇḍala (whose consort is the Vidyā) or the yogī who practices this mode of Tantra.

g.32 Yoga

mal 'byor

མཎ་འབྱོར།

A term which is generally used to refer to a wide range of spiritual practices. It literally means to be merged with or “yoked to,” in the sense of being fully immersed in one’s respective discipline.

g.33 Yoginī

mal 'byor ma

མཎ་འབྱོར་མ།

With a long history in South Asian folklore and religious traditions, yoginīs are liminal, transgressive and often ferocious semi-divine female figures associated with the bestowal of temporal and transcendent spiritual accomplishment. In Buddhist tantra they are identical to ḍākinīs.

g.34 Yoginītantra

mal 'byor ma'i rgyud

མཎ་འབྱོར་མའི་རྒྱུད།

yoginītantra

The last development of Buddhist tantra in India; focused upon the figure of the yoginī and the meditative manipulation of the subtle energetic anatomy of the physical body. Typified by the *Hevajratantra*, *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* and the *Mahāmāyātantra*.