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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERFECTION: THE INTERIORIZATION  
OF BUDDHIST RITUAL IN THE EIGHTH AND NINTH  
CENTURIES \*

Since the nineteenth century, the conventional western narrative of the development of Indian philosophy has portrayed the sixth century B.C.E. as a turning point. Before this point, we are told, Indian thought was dominated by the idolatrous rituals of the Vedas. Only with the appearance of the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* was this state of affairs improved. The authors of these new works sought to internalize the Vedic rituals, to discover, 'the inward universe of man himself', and from that point forward Indian philosophy was freed from the 'magic machinery of priestly ritual'.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary with the *Upaniṣads*, early Buddhism was seen as a parallel reaction against Vedic ritualism, and therefore as similarly free from ritual.

The conventional narrative goes on to represent the introduction of tantric ritual into Buddhist practice as a crucial moment of pollution which led to Buddhism's eventual decline in India. In recent years this narrative has been largely rejected. The existence of a pure Buddhism consisting of bare philosophical notions and unencumbered by ritual is now widely recognized as nothing more than a European creation. Over the past decade in particular, archaeological and textual research has revealed ritual practice throughout early Buddhism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zimmer (1951), pp. 356–357. Franklin Edgerton (1885–1963), the author of the influential dictionary *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 1953), represented the *Upaniṣads* in the following terms: 'The dry bones of the Vedic ritual cult frequently rattle about in a noisy fashion, and seriously strain our patience and our charity. But in them the struggling speculations sketched above [in the Vedas] reach a higher development' (Edgerton (1965), p. 28). And the same narrative can be observed in A.B. Keith. *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), pp. 441–447.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gregory Schopen, 'Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism', in *History of Religions* 31 (1991), pp. 1–23; Robert Sharf,



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Given that rituals existed in Buddhism from early on, we may still wonder how they were affected by the introduction of the tantras. Many scholars have observed a close relationship between ritual and tantra, but the precise nature of this relationship remains unclear. If tantra did not instigate Buddhist ritual, how did it alter ritual discourse? A need remains for a more nuanced narrative of the development of Buddhist ritual during the early years of tantra.

That the tantras did produce an irreversible change in Buddhist ritual discourse is clear. By the end of the eighth century, the shift was apparent even to those involved. Buddhist authors at the time described what was unfolding as an internalization of ritual performance; in contrast to the earlier 'external' methods of worship, they termed the new techniques the 'internal yogas'. The significance this shift had for Buddhist ritual discourse is attested by the fact that the tantras composed between the late eighth and early tenth centuries form the canonical core of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition to this day.<sup>3</sup>

The tantric interiorization of Buddhist ritual was not a rejection of ritual. Nor was it a psychologization; it did not reduce ritual, 'to the spiritual state of the faithful practitioner'.<sup>4</sup> This shift took place in the physical realm. Its beginnings can be traced to the first half of the eighth century, and the ritual technologies it spawned continued to develop through the ninth century. By the end of these two crucial centuries, a new ritual discourse of the bodily interior was in place. The tantric subject had become the site for the entire ritual performance; the body's interior provided the devotee, the altar, the oblations, and the buddha to be worshipped.

This article attempts to sketch the broad outlines of this historical narrative. It is already well known that tantric ritual changed radically between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, but a more precise account of how these changes unfolded, of how the tradition moved from point A

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'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience,' in *Numen* 42 (1995), pp. 228–283; Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 30–38. But foremost the recent improvements in the west's understanding of Buddhist tantra have been due to the work of David Snellgrove. Snellgrove was one of the first to criticize the western prejudice against tantra; see especially Snellgrove (1959), p. 5 n. 2 and (1987), pp. 117–118.

<sup>3</sup> The major exceptions are the *Kālacakra Tantra* and the tantras of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), which for the most part emerged two centuries later, in the eleventh century. Whether these works represented a qualitative paradigm shift away from the internal tantras, or were simply further refinements of the same discourse of interior ritual is an interesting question but is beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

<sup>4</sup> As argued by Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme, études et matériaux* (London, 1988), pp. 174–175 (cited in Snellgrove (1987), p. 118).

to point B, is still wanting. Thus it is known that the first Yoga tantras developed during the early eighth century. These were the first ritual systems to thrust the Buddhist practitioner onto center-stage. Where previously the practitioner worshipped an external shrine, in the Yoga tantras he envisioned himself as the buddha and directed prayers and oblations to himself.<sup>5</sup> Well known too are the ritual systems of the Anuttarayoga tantras which were formalized around the turn of the tenth century and have remained basically stable ever since. These forms began to emerge in the first half of the ninth century, as the new prominence of the body and embodied experience attracted complex techniques for dividing, measuring, and manipulating the physical interior.

The years between the earlier Yoga tantras and the later Anuttarayoga tantras (roughly 750–850 C.E.) remain ill-defined. During this intermediate period the early editions of the first Mahāyoga tantras began to emerge. These works presented for the first time the ritualized sexual practices for which tantra has since become so notorious. They focused on the body's interior, on the anatomical details of the male and female sexual organs and the pleasure generated through sexual union. In this way, three periods can be discerned in the development of tantric ritual, each of which focused the Buddhist subject's attention further inwards, first from the external altar to himself, then to his physical anatomy and embodied experience, and finally to the subtleties of his internal physiological processes.

The present article attempts to define better this intermediate period which was so crucial to the development of Buddhist tantra. The ritual manuals dating from this period evidence the technologies of the *śākta*, the powerful ecstatic energies generated through sexual union, though only in a rudimentary form that suggests much about how these complex meditative techniques developed. The ritual arrangements followed during the intermediate period differ markedly from the later normative formulations. This is particularly apparent in the tantric initiation ceremony. By the tenth century, most ritual systems granted a series of four initiations. During the intermediate period, the gradual development of this structure can be observed, with each of the four initiations being added in sequence.

Of particular importance to this historical process was the innovation of the second initiation, the so-called 'secret empowerment' (*guhyābhiṣeka*). This rite, a consecration gained through the ingestion of a drop of sexual fluids, represented the culmination of tantric practice throughout the inter-

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I have decided to use the masculine pronoun as the primary subject in the Buddhist rituals discussed because most of the rituals in question specify a male point of view.

mediate period. In fact, its prominent role may be taken as the principle characteristic defining the period. During these years, the consecration was performed not only as an initiation, but as part of the standard ritual (*sādhana*) practice. In the initiation the disciple would receive the consecration from his teacher, after which he would reenact the same rite privately with a female consort. In this way, the stated goal of tantric practice was to recreate the teacher's original performance of the consecration rite, and – ideally – the experience of enlightenment it engendered. In the later tantric traditions, the secret consecration was restricted to the initiation setting, and its importance in the actual sexual practice was forgotten.

That this intermediate period in tantra's development has so far escaped the notice of scholars is not surprising, for it reflects an effacement of the period by the later tradition. In many cases, this obscuration was likely made necessary by the atmosphere of highly charged rhetoric that came to surround tantric ritual systems. The ritual techniques of the internal tantras – from Yoga to Anuttarayoga – emerged during a period of remarkable innovation but also of intense rivalry between the tantric communities of India and Tibet. With such high stakes, many tantras were reworked or supplemented by their proponents, to bring them up-to-date with the latest ritual technologies. As a result, many of our received tantras reveal little of their rituals' earlier forms, and for this reason the intermediate period has been overlooked.

The effacement of the intermediate period in the development of tantric practice can be overcome by several means. First, through text critical analysis the scholar can sometimes distinguish different compositional layers in a given text, thereby revealing a story of gradual ritual development.<sup>6</sup> Second, the scholar can turn to the extra-canonical tantric collections of the Rnying ma ('ancient') school of Tibetan Buddhism, in which a number of tantras dating from the intermediate period are preserved. Third, and perhaps most importantly, one can take advantage of the treasury of Tibetan manuscripts discovered at Dunhuang, most of which date from precisely the period in question. The present inquiry relies on all three of these methods, but in particular on the latter. The Dunhuang collections contain numerous tantric ritual manuals and commentaries which provide a reliable window onto the development of tantra during the late eighth to the tenth centuries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the best-studied tantra in this regard is the *Guhyasamāja*, within which several compositional strata have been identified (see Matsunaga (1977)). The results of Matsunaga's concise study inform my own analysis of the *Guhyasamāja* below.

<sup>7</sup> It should be recognized that many of the Dunhuang manuscripts date from after the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, which ended around 848 C.E., and thus from after my so-

## 1. YOGA TANTRA: THE SUBJECT MOVES CENTER-STAGE

The first step in the gradual interiorization of Buddhist ritual was marked by the emergence of the so-called Yoga tantras. The most influential of the Yoga tantras was the *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha* (STTS). This work emerged during the first half of the eighth century, probably reaching its final form in the second quarter of that century.<sup>8</sup> It introduced a number of key concepts that were adopted by the later tantric ritual systems.

The Yoga tantra label seems to have been applied to the STTS only retroactively; the term does not appear in the work itself. However, the STTS was definitely known as a Yoga tantra soon after composition; the work is identified as such in Buddhaguhya's mid-eighth century commentary to the *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi Tantra*.<sup>9</sup> Buddhaguhya juxtaposes the STTS and its family of Yoga tantras to the generally earlier Kriyā tantras which advocate worshipping the buddhas as external objects, whether on a shrine or as visualizations.

A number of ritual manuals based on recensions of the STTS are found in the Dunhuang collections. The authors of these manuals represent their system in the following terms:

The activities of the Kriyā system involve offering flowers, incense, and the various other great offerings. [Whereas] in the Yoga system, the offerings are made by goddesses through [one's own] meditative visualizations.<sup>10</sup>

called 'intermediate period'. In fact, the Mahāyoga manuscripts in particular often appear to be of a later date. However, the Mahāyoga ritual forms represented in these Dunhuang manuscripts are almost exclusively of the 'intermediate' sort; there is little evidence of the later *Guhyasamāja* exegetical traditions, nor of the *Hevajra* and *Cakrasaṃvara* ritual systems. This may be explained in part by a time lag between the latest religious innovations emerging in India and their arrival in Dunhuang, particularly following the collapse of the Tibetan empire.

With regards to my sources, one further caveat must be made. The *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga Tantra* appears numerous times throughout the Tibetan Dunhuang materials. This work seems to have been of considerable importance in the history of early tantra (as noted recently in Davidson (2002b), p. 75 n. 43). Unfortunately, the title refers to a complicated series of texts in several editions and has yet to be examined in any detail. For these reasons, it has not been considered for the present study.

<sup>8</sup> For a recent discussion of this work's compilation dates, see Hodge (2003), pp. 11–12.

<sup>9</sup> See Hodge (2003), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> ITJ447/1. r19.2: *ki ya'i gzhung las ni men tog dang spos dang mchos pa sna tshogs gyis byed kyi/ yog ga'i gzhu ni lha mo rnam kyis ting nge 'dzin mchod pa'o*. The text cited here is a commentary on a *sādhana* titled the *Āryatattvasaṃgraha-sāadhanopāyikā* that seems to have enjoyed some popularity around Dunhuang since at least two copies are found in the Stein collection (ITJ448 and ITJ417). The *sādhana* is an illuminating example of Yoga tantra ritual technologies and seems to reflect a relatively early stage in the development of tantric ritual. Its introduction explains that the ritual described focuses on a

The text goes on to explain that these inner offerings are secret in the sense that,

They are offered through one's internal meditations. They are causes for the enlightened wisdom, and as such they are not within the sphere of experience of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. Thus they are said to be 'secret'.<sup>11</sup>

In the ritual forms of the Kriyā tantras, we are told, the practitioner worships an external image. Whereas in Yoga tantra the practitioner visualizes himself as the buddha to whom offering goddesses are then imagined to offer oblations.<sup>12</sup>

The principle system used in the Yoga tantras to describe the imaginary transformation of the practitioner into the deity was that of the four *mudrās* ('seals'): *mahāmudrā*, *dharmamudrā*, *samayamudrā*, and *karmamudrā*. *Mahāmudrā* referred to the practitioner's physical appearance as the deity. *Dharmamudrā* referred to the syllables of the deity's speech, i.e., the mantra, visualized atop a moon disc at one's heart. *Samayamudrā* referred to the ornaments adorning the deity such as a lotus flower or a vajra, meant to symbolize the mental purity of the practitioner. And *karmamudrā* referred to the practitioner's postures and activities.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the four *mudrās* functioned as four ritual stages in which the practitioner would first merge the visualized deity's body with his own, then imagine the mantra at his heart, adorn himself with the ornaments, and perform the oblations.<sup>14</sup>

Before performing the Yoga tantra rituals, the disciple first had to be initiated into the maṇḍala specific to the system he wished to practice.

particular form of the STTS's Vajradhātu maṇḍala, one that has the buddha Trailokyavijaya at its centre. The latter is the form taken by the buddha in order to subjugate the demon Rudra/Maheśvara in the central myth of the STTS. On this myth, see Snellgrove (1987), pp. 136–140 and Davidson (2002a), pp. 148–152.

<sup>11</sup> ITJ447/1, r20.4: *de nas gsang ba'i mchod pa zhes bya ba gang zhe na/ nang gi ting nge 'dzin gyi mchod pa ni/ byang cub gyi ye shes kyi rgyu yin bas/ nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas kyi spyod yul du ma gyur pas gsang zhes bya'o.*

<sup>12</sup> The external ritual techniques did continue to play a role in the Yoga manuals, often in the minor supporting rites. See for example, ITJ447/1, r7.8, where the techniques for identifying an appropriate ritual site are described as belonging to the Kriyā system.

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion on ITJ447/1, r7.1–7.

<sup>14</sup> See ITJ417, 39a–39b and the corresponding commentary at ITJ447/1, r21–r22. The fourfold system described here is according to the *Āryatattvasaṃgraha-sādhanoṣṭikā*. A clearer system of the four *mudrās* is described in the Yoga tantra section of the important Dunhuang manuscript PT656 (lines 16–20). According to this system, the *samayamudrā* refers to the visualized merging of the wisdom deity (*jñānasattva*) with oneself, while the *dharmamudrā* refers to one's mental concentration on the enlightened state. However this system likely reflects a later tradition than that of the *Āryatattvasaṃgraha-sādhanoṣṭikā*. In both cases, however, it is clear that the four *mudrās* functioned as four stages according to which Yoga tantra ritual proceeded.

The Yoga tantra initiation ceremony was modelled on the royal investiture ceremonies common throughout India. The teacher would bestow upon the disciple a series of initiations (*abhiṣeka*) which varied in number between five and ten, and might include a garland of flowers, the anointment of the disciple's head with waters, a crown, a sceptre (*vajra*), a bell, a new name, and so forth.<sup>15</sup>

The combined effect of these initiations was to recreate the disciple as a master of Yoga tantra, a pure vessel for the deity to inhabit. Only through such a ceremony could the disciple be authorized to perform the Yoga tantra rites, to sit at the centre of the maṇḍala palace as the buddha himself and receive the inner oblations from the offering goddesses. In these ways, in the systems of Yoga tantra the Buddhist subject became the focus of the ritual.

## 2. EARLY MAHĀYOGA: OPENING THE BODY'S INTERIOR

The next major development in Buddhist ritual technology happened during the second half of the eighth century. The spotlight, which in the Yoga tantras had been turned upon the ritual subject himself, was now directed inwards, to illuminate the practitioner's own body. The new rituals focused especially on the physiological details of the sexual anatomy. The texts prescribing these new techniques came to be known as Mahāyoga ('Great Yoga') tantras.

In terms of ritual structure, these early Mahāyoga tantras introduced the two stages of development (Skt. *utpannakrama*; Tib. *bskyed rim*) and perfection (Skt. *saṃpannakrama*; Tib. *rdzogs rim*). During the development stage the practitioner would gradually construct an imaginary maṇḍala with himself at its center, building up the visualization step-by-step. Generally speaking, the development stage can be compared to the main section of the Yoga tantra rituals, though new terms and techniques were articulated for its description and performance. In this sense, the principal Mahāyoga ritual innovations were contained in the second perfection stage, during which the practitioner would engage in a ritualized sexual practice.

The development stage construction of the maṇḍala typically proceeded according to three concentrations (Skt. *samādhi*; Tib. *ting nge 'dzin*). These

<sup>15</sup> The initiation ceremony described in the *Āryatattvasaṃgraha-sādhanoṣāyikā* is relatively simple, with only five empowerments (see ITJ447/1, r2). For a significantly more complex Yoga tantra initiation manual involving at least ten empowerments, see ITJ576/4, v1–v16.

three concentrations performed a similar function to that of the earlier four *mudrās*, insofar as they were the ritual steps for generating oneself as the deity at the center of the maṇḍala. In the first concentration, the thusness concentration (Skt. *tathatā samādhi*; Tib. *de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin*), the practitioner would meditate on emptiness. Then in the all-illuminating concentration (Skt. *samantāloka samādhi*; Tib. *kun tu snang gi ting nge 'dzin*), a clear moon disc was generated within that emptiness, as an instantiation of the practitioner's mind. Finally in the causal concentration (Skt. *hetu samādhi*; Tib. *rgyu'i ring nge 'dzin*), the deity was imagined to arise out of a seed syllable placed atop the moon disc.<sup>16</sup> Having in that way constructed the maṇḍala, the practitioner then would be purified and the entire visualization gathered back into the seed syllable at his heart, which, in turn, was dissolved back into emptiness.

Immediately following this, the perfection stage would begin. In the early Mahāyoga traditions represented in the Dunhuang collections, the two stages commonly appear together within a single manual, with the perfection stage immediately following the development stage. In contrast, in the later traditions the development stage and the perfection stage were usually performed using separate ritual manuals. Thus today one might spend years training in the development stage before proceeding to the perfection stage.

This gradual separation of the two stages mirrors a similar, though more clearcut, process that happened with the teachings of the Great Perfection. Recent scholarship has suggested that the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) may have originated in the late eighth century as a third stage that represented the culmination of the perfection stage.<sup>17</sup> According to this theory, this third stage of the Great Perfection eventually split from the standard tantric ritual format to become articulated as an independent system commonly referred to as Atiyoga.<sup>18</sup> It seems that a similar process may have been the case for the perfection stage; as the perfection stage

<sup>16</sup> Particularly elaborate examples of the three *samādhis* appear in the first section of ITJ716/1, PT626, and PT634.

<sup>17</sup> See Karmay (1988), p. 138 and Germano (1994), pp. 213–226. This theory will be returned to below.

<sup>18</sup> My colleague, Sam van Schaik is presently completing an article that traces the different uses of the terms *rdzogs chen* vs. *atiyoga*. Though there are exceptions, it seems that the term Atiyoga began to be used slightly later than *Rdzogs chen*. One significant exception may be in the thirteenth chapter of the *Guhyagarbha* commentary known as the *Spar khab* (P. 4718, 186b.5) which is attributed to Vilāsavajra (Tib. Sgeg pa'i rdo rje). If this attribution is correct, Vilāsavajra's late eighth century dates (see Davidson (1981), pp. 6–7) would make this a particularly early reference to Atiyoga.



practices grew in number, complexity, and popularity, they began to require separate ritual manuals.<sup>19</sup>

The point at which the ritual moves from the development stage to the perfection stage often is not made explicit in the Dunhuang manuals themselves. The *De kho na nyid kyi snang ba dam pa rgyan gi sgom thabs* provides a good starting point to examine this issue. This is a complete manual found only in the Dunhuang collections, and its rites are based on the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*.<sup>20</sup> It makes the shift from development to perfection stage more explicitly than most other Dunhuang manuals, saying,

Upto this point has been the generation of oneself as a son of the Victor. Having thus generated a pride [in possessing] the nature of the five wisdoms, now from here forward one generates the Victor as one's own son.<sup>21</sup>

This passage seems to play on the theme of procreation, so that in the first stage the practitioner has imagined himself as a son of the buddha, generated out of the buddha's seed syllable. Whereas in the second stage the buddha is generated out of the practitioner's own seed, a syllable that arises at the tip of his penis inside the vagina of the female partner. Thus the instructions continue:

Cultivate the single syllable atop the father's five-spoked vajra [i.e., penis], while imagining that within the 'sky' of the mother a sun disc [descends] from the mother onto an eight-petalled lotus. By reciting, 'Jaḥ hūṃ baṃ ho', the *mudrā* of the father siezes [the semen] with an iron hook! Bind it with the lasso! Hold it with the shackle! Ring the bell enthusiastically, and imagine *bodhicitta* within the sky of the mother.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The introduction of the new textual category of Anuyoga may have reflected precisely this separation. After the tenth century, separate vehicles of Anuyoga and Atiyoga continued to be used by followers of the Rnying ma school but were rejected by those of the new (*gsar ma*) schools. The polemical writings of the new schools held that all three stages of development, perfection, and great perfection should remain as stages within a single vehicle (in this case within the vehicle of Anuttarayoga, a class which replaced Mahāyoga around the turn of the eleventh century). Disputes over how to define a vehicle gave rise to a bewildering variety of tantric doxographical systems during the eighth to tenth centuries. For a review of these systems, see Dalton (forthcoming), 'A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra during the 8th–10th Centuries'.

<sup>20</sup> The *Guhyagarbha Tantra* has been preserved primarily in the extra-canonical collections of the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. It exerted a strong influence, especially in early Tibet, where its violent Rudra subjugation myth and its ritual techniques for taming other demonic spirits appealed to the Tibetan's own interests in these matters. For a complete translation of the work, see Dorje (1987).

<sup>21</sup> ITJ332/1, 8a.4–5. *de yan cad rgyal ba'i sras su bdag bskyed pa'o/ de ltar ye shes lnga'i rang bzhin du nga rgyal bskyed nas/ da ni 'di man cad bdag kyi sras su rgyal ba bskyed par bya ste.*

<sup>22</sup> ITJ332/1, 8a.5–7. *de yang yab kyi rdo rje rtse lnga pa'i steng du/ yi ge gcig bsgom/ yum gi mkha' la pad ma 'dam brgyad kyi steng du/ ma las nyi ma'i dkyil 'khor du bsams*

Here the practitioner is instructed to enter an excited state of *coitus reservatus*, avoiding and thereby prolonging his orgasmic pleasure. In Mahāyāna exoteric literature, the term *bodhicitta* ('mind of enlightenment') is associated with the vow made by the bodhisattva to defer his/her enlightenment in order to help all beings. In the tantric literature, the term refers to the drop of semen which is held at the tip of the penis during the perfection stage practice.

The practitioner's excitement is reflected in the above passage's energetic style, and one can imagine it was probably amplified by the enthusiastic ringing of the ritual bell. Another Dunhuang manual, one possibly dedicated to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, describes the practitioner's manner in a similar way:

Take hold of the golden vajra and bell and flourish them with great majesty, pronouncing three times, 'Hūm'! Still more! Stay majestically! In accordance with the ritual manual, strongly stay the precious sprout [i.e., semen] at the top of the head [of the penis].<sup>23</sup>

Out of the brightness of the practitioner's bliss comes the buddha and his surrounding maṇḍala. The generation of the maṇḍala in this setting is quite unlike the gradual process observed in the development stage. This time the maṇḍala appears suddenly, driven by the intensity of the practitioner's psycho-physical state. Its appearance is described as, 'luminously arrayed'.<sup>24</sup>

The practitioner is then instructed to worship the maṇḍala, using the blissful sensations flowing through his body.<sup>25</sup> Such instructions seem to reflect an early prototype of the subtle body systems that were articulated in more complex forms in later works. The later systems involved intricate arrangements of *cakras* and energy channels mapped across the

*ste/ 'dza' hum pam ho zhes brjod pas/ yab kyi phyag rgya lcags kyus bzungs/ zhags pas bcings/ lcags sgrog kyis bsams/ dril bus dgyes par bskyod nas/ byang chub kyi sems yum gi mkha' la bsams ste.* The meeting of a lotus from the father and a sun disc from the mother is a visualization meant to symbolize the union of the sexual organs. Compare the similar description on ITJ716/1, 96–100.

<sup>23</sup> ITJ464, 4a.1–3. *gser gyi rdo rje dril bu dag/ blangs te shin tu bsgyings pa yis/ lan gsum hung dang bcas par gsor/ slar yang bsgyings pa nyid du brtan/ gtsug du rin chen myu gu yang/ cho ga bzhin du rab du gzhas.* Note that ITJ331/2, which is largely the same as ITJ464, reads *rab tu brtag* for *rab tu gzhas*, which is almost certainly a mistake. ITJ464 omits, however, the section following that quoted here, in which the maṇḍala is described. It is on the basis of this description that the manual can be tentatively associated with the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.

<sup>24</sup> *Gsal bar dgod pa* (ITJ331/2, 5a.3–4 or ITJ332/1, 8b.5–6).

<sup>25</sup> There seems to be a disagreement between ITJ331 and ITJ332 on whether the maṇḍala appears first or after the practitioner's worship. In practice, however, one would imagine that the subject (the practitioner's blissful worship) and the object (the luminously arrayed maṇḍala) would arise simultaneously.

body's interior. In the early Mahāyoga texts, however, the technologies are simpler, the descriptions limited to the energies associated with sexual pleasure which rushes through the practitioner's torso.

Descriptions of the perfection stage rituals are famous for their coded language, and the terms used in the Dunhuang manuscripts to describe the internalized worship are particularly difficult to decipher. Yet upon closer examination, a surprising degree of terminological regularity can be observed, even between manuals from distinct ritual systems. This regularity can be exploited to reconstruct what was meant in these obscure passages.

Returning then to our *Guhyagarbha* manual, we read the following instructions:

Then perform accordingly these exhortations with the *shad ta pa* and so forth. Recite in that way, and set forth the four-part propitiations to the four secret places of the consort. This is stated in these words: 'The propitiation, the near propitiation, the evocation, and the great evocation'.<sup>26</sup>

The strange term *shad ta pa* seems to be a Tibetan vulgarization of the Sanskrit *śākta*. *Śākta* ('power') may be known to the reader from the Hindu tantric traditions. There, in its more common feminine form, *śakti*, it is the name of Śiva's mystical consort, so that Śiva-Śakti represent the male consciousness and its female power. More generally, the term refers to the divine power of the universe, and more specifically, in a ritual context it refers to the powerful physical energy that runs up and down the body's center. This is famously depicted as the *kuṇḍalinī*, a snake coiled at the base of one's torso which, when released, moves upwards in a rush of blissful energy to the cranial aperture.<sup>27</sup>

The use of the term *śākta* in our *Guhyagarbha* ritual manual would be somewhat unusual. It would appear to reflect an early phase in the development of the technologies of the subtle body that later became widespread during the ninth century. No mention is made of the complex systems of channels and energies that dominate later discussions of the perfection

<sup>26</sup> ITJ332/1, 8b.2–4. *shad ta pa las bstsoḡs pa yis/ bskul ba 'di dag tshul bzhin bya'/ de ltar brjod pa dang/ yum gi gsang ba'i gnas bzhir/ bsnyen pa'i yan lag bzhi dḡod par bya ste'/ 'di skad ces brjod par bya'o/ bsnyen pa dang ni nye bsnyen po/ bsgrub pa dang ni bsgrub cen po'. The quotation included in this passage certainly corresponds to the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, 187.4–5.*

<sup>27</sup> In the west, the doctrines of *śākta/ śakti* were first discussed at great length in the writings of Sir John Woodroffe. See *Shakti and Shākta* (London: Luzac & Co., 1929) and *The Serpent Power* (London: Luzac & Co., 1931). For a more recent discussion of the different kinds of *śakti* and its uses in Śaiva ritual and doctrine, see H  l  ne Brunner, 'J  n  na and Kriy  : Relation between Theory and Practice in the Śaiv  gamas', in Teun Goudriaan (ed.), *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

stage. The *sākta* of the Dunhuang manuscripts seems to be of an earlier and more rudimentary variety, a raw physical force that is used to worship and energize the buddhas.<sup>28</sup>

The term also appears at the same point in the ritual as described in the above-cited *Guhyasamāja* manual:

With internal and external applause and the *sha ta pa* and so forth, in a supremely lustful manner, strongly praise the great lord himself.<sup>29</sup>

Here again the *shad ta pa* is employed to praise and exhort the buddhas. The reading of *shad ta pa* as *sākta* thus depends on the idea of using bliss as an offering. This idea is encouraged by another Dunhuang manual which describes a similar internalized worship (*yid la 'dod pa'i cho ga*), though without employing the mysterious term itself. In this manual the practitioner is advised to, 'offer the supreme blisses of union to the buddhas'.<sup>30</sup> But perhaps even more encouraging is a line from the influential *Dvikramatattvabhāvanā-mukhāgama* (henceforth *Mukhāgama*) ascribed to Buddhajñānapāda and dated by Davidson to the first quarter of the ninth century: 'By unifying the winds, the semen is offered like a jasmine flower'.<sup>31</sup> Here the act of offering is clearly linked to the unification of the body's energies ('winds') within the channel that runs down the centre of the practitioner's torso. Given such passages, it seems safe to read *shad ta pa* as a Tibetan vulgarization of the Sanskrit *sākta*, a term used in the early Mahāyoga ritual manuals as a means for worshipping the maṇḍala generated through sexual practice.

An internalization of ritual worship is also behind the above-cited reference to the 'four-part propitiations'. The four stages of propitiation and evocation appear commonly in Buddhist ritual. They are applied in various ways, usually to organize the ritual worship of a given deity. Propitiation, for example, can refer to the devotional recitations of mantras for the deity,

<sup>28</sup> A notable exception to this rule is the pair of commentaries, PT626 and PT634. Both works are in the same hand and comment on the same root text, and both make brief reference to more subtle manipulations of energies (*dbug bskor ba*) in connection to the perfection stage sexual practices (see PT626, 6r.3 and PT634, 3v.1). Further research is needed to ascertain more precisely the traditions behind these two commentaries, but initial clues suggest a *Guhyasamāja* connection.

<sup>29</sup> ITJ331/2, 5b.3–5. *phyi dang nang kyi stod ra dang/ sha ta pa la stsogs pa yis/ mchog tu gdung ba'i tshul gyis su/ bdag nyid chen por rab du bstod.*

<sup>30</sup> ITJ576/2, Rf.7v.4–5. *sbyor ba'i bde ba mchog rnam ni/ sangs rgyas rnam la phul.*

<sup>31</sup> *Mukhāgama*, 7b.5. *gyur pa me tog ku da 'dra/ lung gi sbyor bas phul bar bya.* Davidson writes that, 'The date of Buddhajñānapāda is predicated on his teacher, Haribhadra, who indicated that his long commentary, the *Āloka*, had been written during the reign of Dharmapāla (ca. 775–812)' (Davidson (2002a), p. 77 n. 69).

and near propitiation to the prayer for the blessings to descend, evocation to the descent and absorption of the blessings, and great evocation to the resulting realization.<sup>32</sup> The application of these four ritual stages here in the context of the sexual practice is a clear example of how ritual was being sexualized and internalized in early Mahāyoga.<sup>33</sup> A particularly colorful example is found in the same section of Buddhajñānapāda's *Mukhāgama* cited above

The vajra touching the lotus is explained as the propitiation. The vajra resting in the lotus is the near evocation. Then trembling and shaking, one shudders and begins to lose consciousness. The hair atop one's head comes loose and one's clothes are cast off. One's body becomes covered in red speckles and one's eyes become bloodshot. Exhorting repeatedly, that is evocation. In that way, one feels relieved, and the observance of the vow makes the bow-shape shake, whereby the wisdom mother blazes at the triple intersection. The elements melt and the sixteen dawn forth. By unifying the winds, the semen is offered like a jasmine flower. Naturally self-pacifying, all phenomena become peaceful, and the bliss dwells as a jewel. In an instant, consciousness is made to flicker. That is the great evocation.<sup>34</sup>

While this passage illustrates how the four stages of propitiation and evocation were reinterpreted as an internalized sexual practice, it clearly adds a number of elements that are not present in our *Guhyagarbha* manual. Compared to the manuals found in the Dunhuang collections, the *Mukhāgama* passage shows evidence of a more complex system of internal energies. The Dunhuang manuscripts, apart from some general allusions, like those cited above which refer to the *sākta*, exhibit remarkably little awareness of the subtle body technologies that came to dominate the perfection stage rituals after the tenth century.

<sup>32</sup> See Dudjom (1991), v. 2, p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> The four stages of propitiation and evocation were commonly applied to the sexual practice during in the Mahāyoga tantras. For the passage in question, our *Guhyagarbha* manual was probably drawing upon the description of the perfection stage which appears in *Guhyagarbha*, 187.4–5.

<sup>34</sup> *Mukhāgama*, 7b.2–6. *rdo rje padmar reg ba ni/ bsnyen pa'i de nyid yin par bshad/ rdo rje padmar zhugs pa ni/ nye bar sgrub pa'i de nyid do/ de nas bsgul zhing bskyod tsam gyis/ snying ni 'dar zhing dran pa nyams/ sbyi boy skra 'grol gos kyang 'dor bar byed/ rdul gyis lus khyab mdog dmar te/ mig dmar phra bas bdag la blta/ yang du bskul bas sgrub pa'of/ de bas sems khral med pa ru/ sdom brtson gzhu dbyibs g.yo ba yis/ sum mdo ye shes ma sbar nas/ khams bzhus nas ni bcu drug char/ gyur pa me tog ku da 'dra/ rlung gi sbyor bas phul bar bya rang bzhin gyis ni rab zhi ba/ chos kun zhi ba de kho na/ bde ba de nyid nor bur 'dug/ skad cig dran med g.yo bar byed/ sgrub pa chen po de nyid do.* The application of the four stages of propitiation and evocation parallels what happened to another foursome, namely the four limbs of *sevā-sādhana-upasādhana-mahāsādhana*, which are applied to the sexual rite in the *Samājottaratāntra*.

But we should return to our *Guhyagarbha* manual for the final act of its sexual practice: Immediately following the instructions to worship by means of the *shad ta pa* and the propitiation and evocation rites, we read that,

In the maṇḍala of the mother's lotus spreads a blissful maṇḍala of mind. All the assembled clouds of buddhas are dissolved by means of the supreme bestowal of the ecstasy of equality.<sup>35</sup>

This passage may be read to simply mean that after performing the sexual practice for some time, one simply rests in the peaceful aftermath, the enlightened state. However, such a reading does not explain the somewhat incongruous reference to a 'supreme bestowal'. Again, we can turn to our *Guhyasamāja* manual to see how this moment is described. Directly after the blissful worship of the luminous maṇḍala, we read:

The blessings from the splendorous *ban da*, real or imagined, are fully offered and accomplishments are received in accordance with the ritual manual.

When the moment has come for sending away [the buddhas], snap the fingers with arms crossed and recite, 'Jaḥ hūṃ baṃ ho'! They are gathered in accordance with the temple. Alternatively, it is also suitable to pray for them to depart.<sup>36</sup>

The final moment of the perfection stage was apparently a more complex ritual moment than a simple dissolution. Rather, it seems a blessing was received, following which the visualized maṇḍala dissolved, either in the ecstasy of that final blessing (as in the *Guhyagarbha* manual) or through the recitation of a final mantra or prayer (as in the just-cited *Guhyasamāja* manual).

The nature of this final blessing remains unclear, however, obscured by yet another code word: *ban da*. Fortunately this term appears in a number of Dunhuang manuals. PT254, an incomplete but useful manuscript, reads:

From within the crossed *ban da* lotus, apply the elixir. Take it with the ringfinger, and grant it, applying it either in one's mind or with the left hand. [All] scatters into the ten directions.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> ITJ332/1, 8b.4–5. *rum gyi pad mo'i dkyil 'khor du/ bde ba thugs kyi dkyil 'khor spro'/ sangs rgyas sprin tshogs ma lus la/ dgyes mnyam mchog gi sbyin bas thim.*

<sup>36</sup> ITJ331/2, 5b.4–6a.2. *ban da dpal dang ldan la stsogs/ dngos sam yang na bsams pa la/ cho ga bzhin du byin brlabs te/ rab du mchod cing bsgrub pa blang/ gtong ba'i dus tshod shes pa na/ se gol snol mar grogs nas ni/ dza hum bam ho zhes brjod de/ gtsug lag bzhin du bsdu ba 'am/ yang na gshegs su gsol yang rung.*

<sup>37</sup> PT254, 5b.2–4. *pad ma ban da rgya gram gyi nang nas gu kul sbyar ste/ srin lag gis blang zhing glan ba yid tsam g.yon du yod bar byas ste/ phyogs bcur gthor zhing/ dga' ldan gyi pho brang klung gi dkyil 'khor na'/ a ma ga si ti bzhus.*

And an even more elaborate description of a similar rite seems to be described in ITJ754, a commentary on a series of topics relating to tantric ritual:

Regarding receiving the sacrament: From within the *ban da* lotus, with thumb and ringfinger, three red *rhi* [syllables] are consecutively placed upon the tongue, which is visualized as a moon-disc, and swallowed. As the first *rhi* is placed on the tongue, ‘om̐’ is recited, whereby the *rhi* transforms into an *om̐*. From that *om̐* one is filled with the color of Vairocana’s body, that is, as it passes inside, one’s own body is blessed as his body. Then the middle *rhi* is placed on the tongue while reciting, ‘ām̐’, whereby the *rhi* becomes an *ām̐*. From that *ām̐*, one is filled with the color of Amitābha, that is, as it passes inside, one’s own speech is blessed as his speech. Then the final *rhi* is placed on the tongue while reciting, ‘hūm̐’, whereby the *rhi* becomes a *hūm̐*. From that *hūm̐*, one is filled with the color of Akṣobhya’s body, that is, as it passes inside, one’s own mind is blessed as his mind. After swallowing those three *rhi*-s, recite the mantra, ‘tiṣṭha vajra ho’, the meaning of which is said to be the stabilization of the body, speech, and mind as a *svastika*.<sup>38</sup>

As is well known, the ‘lotus’ (*padma*) is the most common euphemism for the vagina. In this final moment of the perfection stage, the term *ban da* seems to have been used to describe the consort’s lotus. Given this fact, we can guess that *ban da* is another Tibetan transcription of a Sanskrit term, namely *bandha*. The definition of this term in Monier-Williams includes, ‘binding, tying, a bond, tie, chain, fetter . . . connection or intercourse with (comp.) . . . putting together, uniting, contracting combining . . . ; a partic mode of sexual union’.<sup>39</sup>

All of the above passages describe a similar rite: ‘the supreme bestowal of ecstasy’, ‘the blessings of the splendorous *ban da* are offered’, ‘apply the elixir’, and ‘receiving the sacrament from within the *ban da* lotus’. A rite similar to the one described here is common in the later tantric ritual traditions. For the past one thousand years, the standard initiation

<sup>38</sup> ITJ754/8, r24–r35. *dam tshig sems pa rnam kyis dam blang ba ni/ dpad ma ban da’i nang nas mthe bo/ dang srin lag kis rhi dmar po gsum res kyis blangs ste/ lce zla ba’i dkyil ‘khor du dmyigs pa’i steng du bzhag cing myid pa ni/ rhi dang po lce’i steng du bzhag la aom zhes brjod pas/ rhi las aom du gyur/ aom las rnam par snang mdzad kyi sku tshon gang par gyur te khong du gtang ba ni/ bdagi lus skur byin kyis brlabs pa’o/ rhi bar ma lce’i steng du bzhag ste am zhes brjod pas/ rhi las am du gyur/ am las snang ba mtha’ yas kyi sku tshon gang par gyur te/ dong du gtang ba ni bdagi ngag gsung du byin kyis brlabs pa’o/ rhi tha ma lce’i steng du bzhag ste hum zhes brjod pas/ rhi las hum du gyur/ hum las rdo rje myi bskyod pa’i sku tshon gang par gyur te/ khong du gtang ba ni bdagi sems thugs su byin kyis brlabs pa’o/ rhi gsum myid pa’i ‘og du/ tishtha ba dzra ho zhes brjod pa ni sku gsung thugs g.yung drung du brtan bar gyur cig ces bya ba’i don no. The syllable *rhi* should probably be *hri*, as indicated in a mantra found on PT321, 10a.5, where the Sanskrit *hr̥daya* is transcribed as, ‘*rhi da ya*’. However, throughout the Dunhuang manuscripts *rhi* is used in this context, so I have left it intact in my translation. The ITJ754 scroll contains a number of interesting items, one of which is a Vajrakīlaya text that was the subject of a recent article (see Mayer (1994)).*

<sup>39</sup> Monier-Williams (1899), p. 720.

ceremony has involved four initiations. In the second of these, the so-called ‘secret initiation’, the teacher performs the sexual practice with a female consort, and then places a drop of their combined sexual fluids on the tongue of the disciple. The early Mahāyoga ritual manuals from Dunhuang appear to be describing the same rite, but as a self-consecration that the practitioner bestows upon himself at the culmination of the perfection stage.

The theory that the practitioner conferred his own sexual fluids upon himself at the end of the perfection stage is made even more explicit in yet another Dunhuang manuscript. Here the practitioner is engaged in the sexual practice when he is advised:

At the time of practicing the *samādhi*, do not practice apart from the vajra emanation. When the *bodhicitta* falls, say, ‘ā la la ho’, imagining that the goddess is pleased. From between the vajra and the lotus, with the ring finger of the left hand, take the dew of the lotus, and offer it to the noble ones. Then oneself and the consort also receive the sacrament.<sup>40</sup>

From the point of view of the later tradition, the presence of this self-consecration is unusual. I believe, however, that it was the defining characteristic of tantric practice during the intermediate period, for it is by no means limited to the ritual manuals discovered at Dunhuang.<sup>41</sup> A particularly important instance of the rite is its appearance in Buddhajñānapāda’s *Mukhāgama*. We have already seen how the perfection stage practices are described in this work in terms of the four stages of propitiation and evocation. At the end of that same description we read:

This has been correctly explained by all the supreme gurus as the perfection stage . . . Then an intelligent one takes the ambrosia semen that abides in the lotus with his mouth and drinks it.<sup>42</sup>

Buddhajñānapāda’s later commentator, Vitapāda, seems to find the consecration rite’s appearance in this context impossible, and dismisses it by

<sup>40</sup> PT841. 2v.2–4. *byang cub kyi sems babs na/ a la la ho zhes brjod de/ lha mo mnyes par bsam/ rdo rje dang pad mo bar nas/ lag pa g.yon gyi srin lag gis/ pad mo’i zil pa blangs nas/ ‘phags pa rnams la dbul/ bdag dang gzungs mas mas kyang dam blang*. The offering of the sacrament to both the buddhas and oneself (in a *sādhana* practice) or the disciple (in an initiation ceremony) appears in a number of other Dunhuang ritual manuals. See for example PT332(e), 1v.1–4 or PT36, v1.4–v2.1, where the buddhas are again referred to as the ‘noble ones’.

<sup>41</sup> The self-consecration rite may be referred to in the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* at the end of its description of the perfection stage practice (see *Guhyagarbha*, 187.6). It is also found in chapter eight of the *Guhyasamāja*, where it is called an ‘offering’ or perhaps a ‘consecration’ (Skt. *pūja*; Tib. *mchod pa*), but never an initiation.

<sup>42</sup> *Mukhāgama*, 7b.8–8a.2. ‘*di ni rdzogs pa’i rim pa yin par bla ma mchog rnams kun gyis yang dag bshad/ . . . padma la gnas bdud rtsi khu ba blo gros can gyis kha yis blangs nas btung ba’o*.



explaining that the sexual fluids are ingested merely, ‘so as not to waste any’.<sup>43</sup> Vitapāda’s aggressive reinterpretation of this passage indicates how completely the tantric ritual format changed in later years; by the eleventh century, it no longer made sense that the perfection stage culminated in a self-consecration by the practitioner.

This theory, that the tantric ritual format of the early Mahāyoga was characterized by a self-consecration at the end of the perfection stage, suggests a number of further insights into the development of tantra. As already mentioned, recent scholarship has suggested that the teachings of the Great Perfection may be traced to a third stage of tantric practice in which the perfection stage culminated.<sup>44</sup> Yet it remains unclear if such a third stage was anything more than an ill-defined, ‘kind of technique-free “natural” immersion in a non-conceptual state’.<sup>45</sup> Now, however, we can suggest that the Great Perfection in its earliest days may have had a specific ritual form, namely the bestowal of the supreme sacrament upon oneself at the end of the perfection stage.

Such a theory is supported by a passage in another Dunhuang ritual manual. ITJ437 is a work possibly related to the *Guhyasamāja*.<sup>46</sup> In the section describing the supreme sacrament, we read:

The *rasāyana* sweet waters of the vajra dew are fully arrayed in the space of the inexpressible all good. This elixir of the *great perfection*, the mind of the great lord himself, an excellent medicinal offering beyond birth and death, is offered as a wish-fulfilling treasury.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Sukusuma-nāma-dvikramatattvabhāvanā-mukhāgama-vṛtti*, 132b.2. *chud mi gsan par bya ba’i phyir*.

<sup>44</sup> Karmay explains that in some of the early references to the Great Perfection, it seems to be less a distinct stage than simply a, ‘high level of spiritual attainment resulting from the meditation of *rdzogs rim*’ (Karmay (1988), p. 138). It is, however, defined as a separate stage in the *Man ngag lta ba’i ‘phreng ba*, a commentary to the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* attributed to Padmasambhava. For a complete translation of this text, see Karmay (1988), pp. 152–162.

<sup>45</sup> Germano (1994), p. 223.

<sup>46</sup> This relationship is suggested by a passage cited (ITJ437, 4.2–4) from chapter two of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. The same passage is cited in the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* (59.5–6), where *Guhyasamāja* is identified as its source, and again in PT42, 38.2–4, which is a Mahāyoga collection more certainly based on the *Guhyasamāja*. On the other hand, there is another quotation that appears at the end of ITJ437 (14v.6) that the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* (52.1–2) attributes to the *Bdud rtsi’i rgyud*. ITJ437 deserves further attention, as it is an unusually long Mahāyoga *sādhana* (made more complete when supplemented by PT324).

<sup>47</sup> ITJ437.13v.1. *ra sa ya na rdo rje zil ngar chu/ brjod myed kun bzang dbyings su rab bkod cing/ rdzogs cen bdag nyid chen po thugs kyi bcud/ skye shi myed pa’i sman mchod dam pa ‘di/ thugs dam bskang pa’i dbyig du dbul*.

If it was the case that the Great Perfection was originally associated with the supreme sacrament, it did not remain so for long. Yet many of the very earliest references to the Great Perfection, such as the one cited here, do seem to reflect such an association.

The early Great Perfection seems to have been linked particularly closely to the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*.<sup>48</sup> In the *Guhyagarbha* itself, there are four references to the ‘great perfection’. Of these, two describe it as a ‘sacrament’ (Skt. *samaya*; Tib. *dam tshigs*).<sup>49</sup> The latter term is regularly employed throughout the early Mahāyoga ritual manuals to refer to the drop of sexual fluids that is placed on the tongue.<sup>50</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the Great Perfection was only used in this ritual setting; certainly it also appears as a more general term for the highest state of realization gained through tantric practice. Yet even in such cases, the term may have been understood as a partial or indirect reference to the specific ritual moment in which the sacrament was bestowed.

The first of the two *Guhyagarbha* passages refers to the Great Perfection in the context of, ‘the extremely secret sacrament that spontaneously accomplishes the great perfection’.<sup>51</sup> This line appears in the opening to the work’s thirteenth chapter, so that the entire chapter is preached by the buddha from within that state. This suggests that the thirteenth chapter can be read as an extended poetic discourse on the supreme sacrament, and the language of the chapter would appear to support such an interpretation. The chapter ends, for example, with the closing advice that,

<sup>48</sup> The term’s appearance in the influential *Rdo rie sems dpa’i zhu lan*, for example, can be linked to the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* as follows: A number of other works in the Peking *bstan ‘gyur* are attributed the *Zhu lan*’s author, the early ninth century Tibetan Dpal dbyangs (see pp. 5918–5923). The longest of these works, the *Thugs kyis sgron ma* (P. 5918, ff. 276a.6–276b.1) is a discussion of the doxographical system which appears in chapter thirteen of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. The same work (276a.8) also mentions the *Guhyagarbha* by name. PT322 similarly uses the term *rdzogs chen* (see B1r.1 and B1v.7.) and mentions the tantra by name (B1r.4).

<sup>49</sup> The four passages are translated in Germano (1994), pp. 214–215. In addition to the two references discussed below, an argument could be made that a third reference (appearing in chapter fourteen) was also linked to the supreme sacrament: Chapter fourteen could be understood as a song of experience based on the previous chapter thirteen, which is discussed below.

<sup>50</sup> Examples from Dunhuang include the above-cited passage from ITJ754/8 and PT841, as well as PT321, 10a.2. The term *samaya* also has the sense of a vow, so that having received the sacramental drop of sexual fluids, one is obliged to observe it as a vow in the future. Common even in today’s Tibetan tradition are descriptions of how the fluids, having been ingested, come to rest at one’s heart where they remain as a blessing or a violent, blood-drinking demon, depending on the recipient’s conduct.

<sup>51</sup> *Guhyagarbha*, 192.1 *rdzogs pa chen por lhun gyis grub pa’i dam tshig shin tu gsang ba*.

'It should be bestowed upon those worthy recipients who are steadfast in their noble disposition, who have offered their bodies and riches. It should never be given to others'.<sup>52</sup> This same chapter thirteen is the subject of Padmasambhava's *Man ngag lta ba'i 'phreng ba*, one of the first works to define the Great Perfection as a distinct stage. That Padmasambhava would devote an entire commentary to this one chapter is a testament to the importance of the rite of the supreme sacrament during this intermediate period of tantric development.

The second *Guhyagarbha* passage appears in chapter nineteen, which is titled 'The Sacrament', and is entirely devoted to the topic. After direct reference is made to the bestowal of sexual fluids, the passage explains:

Remaining within the sacrament of equality  
Which equally unites you with equality,  
The great perfection of equality is attained.  
If you transgress it, you will never be a buddha.<sup>53</sup>

According to the *Guhyagarbha* ritual manual we have been examining, the 'supreme bestowal' of the final sacrament causes the maṇḍala visualized during the perfection stage to dissolve spontaneously into a state of equality. In the above passage, the practitioner is then instructed to 'remain within' that state, whereby the Great Perfection is attained.<sup>54</sup>

Further support for this theory on the ritual origin of the Great Perfection may be gained from another short Dunhuang manuscript. PT841 has already been quoted above for its description of the secret consecration rite. Appended to this is a brief interpretation of the three syllables in the word 'heruka'. The passage reads as follows:

<sup>52</sup> *Guhyagarbha*, 194.3. *snod ldan ngang tshul bzang la brtan/ lus dang longs spyod gtong la sbyin/ gzhan du nams kyang sbyin mi bya*. The chapter's very last lines immediately following these describe the violent sufferings that will come to any unworthy recipients of the sacrament. This is a common theme in the early descriptions of the secret initiation (see, for example, PT321, 10a).

<sup>53</sup> *Guhyagarbha*, 211.4–5. *mnyam la mnyam par sbyor ba yi/ mnyam pa'i dam tshig la gnas na/ mnyam rdzogs chen po thob 'gyur bas/ 'das na sangs rgyas ma yin no*.

<sup>54</sup> It is also interesting to note that the same *Mukhāgama* by Buddhajñānapāda is well known for its reference to the Great Perfection. Near the end of the work we read that, 'If this meaning of the unchanging realization [of the perfection stage] is not realized, then one is not practicing that which is called 'Mahāyoga'. But having completely understood in that way, there is the Great Perfection, the form of the highest wisdom'. (*Mukhāgama*, 19b.2: 'di ni rtogs par mi 'gyur 'di don ma rtogs na/ rnal 'byor chen po zhes bya de la mi bya'o/ de ltar rab tu shes par byas nas su/ rdzogs pa chen po ye shes spyi yi gzugs.) This passage, appearing as it does in a text of great renown among the new schools of Tibetan Buddhism, has been used by Rnying ma apologists to defend against accusations that the Great Perfection had no precedent in India. See Karmay (1988), p. 141.

'He' is the sound of the initial summons. All of the three realms are spontaneously accomplished as the great maṇḍala of the body, speech, and mind, resting without wavering at the center of the sky. Through knowing that all of the three realms spontaneously abides in the *mahāmudrā* of wisdom, there is the great delight.

'Ru' is the meaning of resting in the space. The great maṇḍala of wisdom is to abide, indivisible from the vagina of the consort. In order to bring the three realms under control by means of the sacrament of the lustful consort, 'ru' is pronounced; everything is brought into the sphere of all.

'Ka' is the great *bodhicitta*. The *bodhicitta* [that results] from the nondual union with the consort is the pervasive luminosity of all, equal to the sky. The five elements and all the sentient beings of the five continuous ways [of gods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings] dawn as an ocean of compassion; they appear as Samantabhadra.<sup>55</sup>

Earlier in the same manuscript, the viewpoints of Mahāyoga and Anuyoga are juxtaposed, but the term Atiyoga (another name for the Great Perfection) does not appear. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to understand the three parts in the above passage as referring to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga, or their equivalents, the three stages of generation, perfection, and great perfection. It is perhaps significant that the buddha Samantabhadra, who is the principle deity for the Great Perfection traditions, is mentioned in the third paragraph. And the term *bodhicitta* is a common euphemism for the drop of sexual fluids generated through the perfection stage practices, so that here too it seems that the Great Perfection is associated with the secret consecration.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> ITJ841, 4r.1–5. *he ni 'bodpa dang po'i sgra/ 'khams sum thams cad sku gsung thugs kyi dkyil 'khor 'chen por lhun kis grub pa ste/ mkha'i dkyil na myi g.yo bar bzugs so/ 'khams sum thams cad ye shes kyi phyag rgya 'chen por lhun gis gnas par rig pas na/ dgyes pa 'chen po'o/ru ni dbyings su sdud pa'i don/ ye shes kyi dkyil 'khar 'chen po ni yum gi ba ga' dang 'du 'bral myed par gnas pas/ yum chags pa'i dam tshig gis 'khams sus dbang du sdud pa'i phyir/ ru zhes gsung so/ de yang ma lus pas thams cad kyi dbyings su sdus pa'o/ ka ni byang cub sems chen p'o/ de lta bu yum dang gnyis su myed par sbyor ba'i byang chub kyi sems/ mkha' dang mnyam bar kun la gsal khyab ste/ 'byung ba lnga dang/ lam rgyud lnga'i sems can thams chad thugs rje'i lba klong du shar te/ kun tu bzang por snang ngo/.*

<sup>56</sup> We have already noted how the Mahāyāna term *bodhicitta* was used in descriptions of the perfection stage to refer to the drop of semen and the state of mind it carried. The same term was also used in the early Great Perfection traditions, where it described the highest state of enlightenment. The theory that the Great Perfection may originally have grown out of the ritual moment of the secret consecration might partially explain why *bodhicitta* was emphasized so strongly in the early Great Perfection traditions. Such a ritual explanation of the Great Perfection's focus on the term *bodhicitta* should be tempered, however, by a more philosophical explanation, for the term was also taken in a philosophical direction in tantric works like the *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi Tantra*, which was certainly influential in Tibet during the years of the early Great Perfection (see Hodge (2003), pp. 31–32).

The end of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth century witnessed a strong Tibetan interest in the final state resulting from the self-consecration. The language for describing this state developed rapidly during these years, and by the mid-ninth century an entirely new vehicle of Atiyoga was being employed to refer to the cultivation of this ‘Great Perfection’.

### 3. ADDITIONAL INITIATIONS: MAPPING TECHNOLOGIES ONTO THE BODY’S INTERIOR

The theory that the bestowal of the supreme sacrament was related to the Great Perfection is lent further credence by the ritual system of the *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo* (*Dgongs ‘dus*). This long tantric scripture was probably composed in Tibetan, sometime around the mid-ninth century. Its unusual and elaborate initiation ceremony preserves a number of elements characteristic of early Mahāyoga ritual.<sup>57</sup> Like the later Anuttarayoga systems, the *Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo* has four initiations, but in content they reflect more the ritual forms of the intermediate period. Specifically, the *Dgongs ‘dus*’s fourth initiation corresponds to the second Anuttarayoga initiation. The correspondence is both in name (both are called the ‘secret empowerment’) and in practice (the teacher places a drop of his semen on the disciple’s tongue).

According to the ritual system of the *Dgongs ‘dus*, its four initiations authorize the disciple to practice the four respective tantric classes of Yoga, Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Thus the system’s fourth secret initiation initiates the disciple into Atiyoga, another name for the Great Perfection. In this way, the ritual system of the *Dgongs ‘dus* too reflects the early link between the bestowal of the supreme sacrament and the Great Perfection.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> For more on the *Dgongs ‘dus* and its history, see Dalton (2002).

<sup>58</sup> In Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes’s commentary to the *Dgongs ‘dus*, the *Mdo ‘grel mun pa’i go cha*, we find a single sentence that makes reference to the later normative set of four initiations. The sentence appears in chapter thirteen, where Gnubs chen claims that, ‘These four streams of initiations [of the *Dgongs ‘dus* system] are also called the outer initiations of benefit, the *bodhicitta* empowerment, wisdom through insight, and great bliss’ (*Mdo ‘grel mun pa’i go cha*, Vol. 50, 159.6–7). While the validity of this claim may be argued on a number of levels, in terms of ritual performance it seems inaccurate; I have seen no evidence that the third set of *Dgongs ‘dus* initiations ever entailed the disciple engaging in any sexual practice. The apparent discrepancy between the *Dgongs ‘dus* initiation system and Gnubs chen’s claim may be taken as evidence that some time (at least a couple of decades?) must have passed between the composition of the *Dgongs ‘dus* and Gnub chen’s commentary, and that the normative set of four initiations may have become well known

The disciple's reception of the drop of sexual fluids from the teacher in the context of an initiation was also performed in many, if not all, of the early Mahāyoga tantras. The initiation system of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, which consisted of ten 'initiations of benefit' (*phan dbang*), five 'initiations of power' (*nus dbang*), and three 'initiations of profundity' (*zab dbang*) seems to have included a final initiation in which the sexual fluids are placed on the disciple's tongue.<sup>59</sup> The Dunhuang collections include a number of ritual manuals describing the teacher bestowing the sexual fluids upon the student.<sup>60</sup> Therefore it seems that throughout the intermediate period, the bestowal of the sacrament was performed both as a self-consecration at the end of the actual sexual practice and by the teacher at the end of the initiation ceremony.

While the ways of organizing the initiations varied between the ritual systems of the intermediate period, from the point of view of the later traditions, only the first two of the four initiations were in place. This appears to have been the case starting from around the mid-eighth century, when the early Mahāyoga tantras began to be formulated. The earliest evidence we have of any significant change in this ritual structure comes in the first quarter of the ninth century.

Davidson has recently noted the significance of the *Mukhāgama* in the development of Buddhist tantra.<sup>61</sup> The work's author, Buddhajñānapāda, is traditionally credited as the founder of the Jñānapāda school of *Guhyasamāja* exegesis (the other school being the Ārya school founded by Nāgārjuna). Davidson points to the *Mukhāgama* as the earliest text to formulate a typology of ecstasy. According to the later Anuttarayoga traditions, four kinds of ecstasy can be distinguished in the sexual practices of the perfection stage. These four ecstasies are sometimes associated with the four initiations, so that the disciple is introduced to the highest ecstasy during the fourth initiation.<sup>62</sup> The *Mukhāgama* seems to have been particularly influential in the development of this system.

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in central Tibet during precisely those intervening years. Roughly speaking, I would place the composition of the *Dgongs 'dus* in the third quarter of the ninth century (c.850–875) and Gnubs chen's commentary in the fourth quarter (c.875–900).

<sup>59</sup> This seems to be described in chapter ten, and certainly is claimed as such by the later commentators. The role of the secret initiation in the *Guhyagarbha* is an extremely complex issue that has been argued over for centuries and deserves a separate study. A starting point might be Klong chen pa's commentary on the *Guhyagarbha* (translated in Dorje (1987), see especially pp. 803–804 and 832–835).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, PT321, 9b, where it is clearly stated that the teacher is bestowing the sacrament on the disciples.

<sup>61</sup> Davidson (2002b), p. 46.

<sup>62</sup> See Snellgrove (1959), p. 34.

However, *Buddhajñānapāda* defines only three types of ecstasy. It is probably not coincidence that this difference between these two typologies of ecstasy – that of *Buddhajñānapāda* and that of the later tradition – mirrors another difference, between their respective initiation ceremonies. *Buddhajñānapāda*'s ceremony involves only three initiations and lacks the fourth initiation which became standard in the later tradition.

The *Mukhāgama* is the earliest instance I have seen of the third initiation, called the 'wisdom through insight' (Skt. *prajñājāna*; Tib. *shes rab ye shes*) initiation.<sup>63</sup> In this new ceremonial format, the royal coronation initiations are granted, and then the teacher performs the sexual practice with the consort and bestows the second initiation of the sexual fluids. Then in the third initiation the disciple performs the sexual practice in order to experience the three ecstasies himself, presumably being guided through the ritual by his teacher.

The need for the third initiation may reflect the growing complexity of the ritual technologies associated with the practice. The *Mukhāgama* exhibits a more complex technology of internal energies (*prāṇa*) and channels (*nāḍī*) for the perfection stage practices than is seen in the earlier systems. In the *Mukhāgama*'s description of the sexual practice already cited above, for example, the references to, 'the wisdom mother blazing at the triple intersection', and, 'the unification of the winds', both indicate that the three channels running the length of the torso's core were already in place by the first quarter of the ninth century, when the *Mukhāgama* was composed. The complexity of these new bodily technologies may have made it necessary for the student to perform the sexual practice under the teacher's supervision before being sent out to practice alone.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Vajravarman provides another instance. In his commentary to the *Sarvadurgati-pariśodana Tantra*, Vajravarman provides another instance when he adds a secret initiation and a "means and wisdom" initiation to the tantra's own Yogat tantra-style initiations. See Skorupski (1983), p. 47, n. 31. It is interesting to note that Vajravarman seems to have been active at precisely the same time as *Buddhajñānapāda*, i.e. early ninth century – see Skorupski (1983), p. xxv.

<sup>64</sup> The section in the *Mukhāgama* discussing the initiation ceremony comes just before the section containing the descriptions of the perfection stage practices to be performed subsequent to the initiation. That these two sections should be read in this way – i.e., as two distinct sections – seems to have been missed or ignored by Vitapāda in his later commentary. (If my reading is correct, the transition from initiation ceremony to the actual practices occurs on 7a.1.) Vitapāda reads the two sections as one long discussion of the initiation ceremony, so that the description of the perfection stage practices is simply a continuation of the third initiation. Such a reading, however, requires Vitapāda to gloss over the fact that the disciple is clearly instructed to leave the initiation in order to practice what he had learned in the initiation: 'Then with extreme lust, go practice together with her in a remote place' (*Mukhāgama*, 7a.1: *de nas rab tu chags ldan pas/ de dang lhan cig lus*

The *Mukhāgama* is considered an explanation of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. As is well known, the *Guhyasamāja* had an eighteenth chapter, sometimes called the *Uttaratantra* ('supplemental tantra') appended at some point to its earlier seventeen chapters.<sup>65</sup> The *Mukhāgama* demonstrates no awareness of this *Uttaratantra*. Such is not the case for the founding work of the Ārya school of *Guhyasamāja* interpretation, namely the *Pañcakrama* by Nāgārjuna.

This work relies heavily on the *Uttaratantra*, as well as a circle of 'explanatory tantras' (*ākhyānatantra*) which were probably also written sometime in the ninth century.<sup>66</sup> For this reason, the *Uttaratantra*, the *Pañcakrama*, and the explanatory tantras can be taken provisionally as a group that developed apart from Buddhajñānapāda's work. In fact, the *Pañcakrama* and its circle seems to employ slightly more sophisticated technologies of the bodily interior, with more elaborate practices for manipulating the body's energies. For this reason, the *Uttaratantra* and its associated Ārya school texts may represent a slightly later phase in the development of tantric ritual than the *Mukhāgama*.<sup>67</sup>

The *Uttaratantra* is the earliest text I have found to describe all four initiations as a standard set. The *Uttaratantra* follows a system similar to that outlined by Buddhajñānapāda, calling the third initiation that of 'wisdom through insight', but adds a final fourth initiation. The famous verse that came to be the *locus classicus* for the four initiations reads as follows:

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*kyi ni/ spyod pas dben pa'i gnas su spyad*). Vitapāda's misreading may have been forced by a wish to read Buddhajñānapāda's description of the sexual practice's results as a final explanation given by the teacher. This would allow him to claim that the fourth initiation is present in Buddhajñānapāda's work. We have already noted Vitapāda's reinterpretation of the self-consecration rite at the end of the perfection stage, so it is not unreasonable to assume that he may also have interpreted the entire section describing the perfection stage as a continuation of the third initiation so that it fit into the later ritual format.

<sup>65</sup> The Peking edition of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* includes the *Uttaratantra* as an eighteenth chapter, while the Derge edition makes it a separate text. For a concise analysis of the stages of composition that the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* underwent during the eighth and early ninth centuries, see Matsunaga (1977).

<sup>66</sup> Matsunaga (1977), p. 113.

<sup>67</sup> This is admittedly a tentative proposition and we should not assume that a more developed ritual is necessarily later. That said, the fact that the third initiation bears the same name in both the *Mukhāgama* and the *Pañcakrama* seems at least to suggest that the third initiation developed before the fourth. A more precise comparison of the ritual technologies in the *Mukhāgama* to those in the *Pañcakrama* might help to solidify our picture of the situation, but even then a definitive answer might be impossible.



In this tantra the initiations are divided into three types. The initiation of the vase is the first, the secret initiation is the second, wisdom through insight is the third, and the fourth is likewise that again.<sup>68</sup>

The matter of how to interpret this passage is unclear and has attracted considerable attention from Buddhist exegetes. Two principle problems immediately present themselves: First, why does the passage begin by identifying three initiations and then list four? Second, how are we to understand the fourth initiation? A variety of opinions on these questions seem to have been circulating in India by the eleventh century. The three principle opinions are summarized by the scholar Sujayaśrīgupta in his *Abhiṣekanirukti*.<sup>69</sup> The first gives precedence to the opening statement that there are in fact only three initiations and that a fourth is unnecessary. The second opinion takes the phrase at its most literal and reads the fourth initiation as a repetition of the previous third initiation. But the third opinion eventually became the standard interpretation of the fourth initiation. According to this reading, a distinct fourth initiation should be performed. Practically, it should involve the teacher verbally ‘marking’ (*lakṣaṇa*) the great bliss, i.e., the enlightened state that results from the sexual practices of the perfection stage. By doing so, the teacher establishes that state as the target towards which the disciple will then strive in his own practices. Even today, this is how the fourth initiation is understood in the Tibetan tradition, as a verbal explanation of the enlightened state.

The identification of an intermediate period in the development of tantra again suggests a new possibility for interpreting the fourth initiation as it was originally described in the *Uttaratantra*. It has been proposed that the intermediate period was characterized by the unusual prominence of the granting of the supreme sacrament. The presence of this rite at the end of the perfection stage dwindled over the late ninth and early tenth centuries, so that by the eleventh century it had been completely forgotten by Indian scholars like Vitapāda (commentator on the *Mukhāgama*). Given

<sup>68</sup> *Guhyasamāja Tantra* 18. 113a–f. *abhiṣekaṃ tridhā bhinnam asmiṃs tantre prakal-pitam kalaśābhiṣekaṃ prathamam dvitīyaṃ guhyābhiṣekataḥ/ prajñājñānaṃ trīyaṃ tu caturthaṃ tat punas tatā.* (For Tibetan, see p. 81, 162b.3–4.) The influence of this verse is evidenced by the fact that the description of the fourth initiation in the *Hevajra Tantra* repeats the same enigmatic phrase, that it is ‘likewise that again’ (*Hevajra Tantra*, II, iii, 11). Davidson has suggested that the *Hevajra Tantra* was not compiled until the late ninth or early tenth century (see Davidson (2002b), p. 65). That *Hevajra* appears to repeat the *Uttaratantra* in its discussion of the fourth initiation supports Davidson’s suggestion.

<sup>69</sup> An English translation and a discussion of this text can be found in the appendix to Onians (2003). The section on the fourth initiation appears in that translation on pp. 342–347.

how completely the rite was erased from the actual sexual practices, it is quite possible that it also may have disappeared from the initiation ceremony. That is to say, perhaps the fourth initiation was originally intended as a repetition of the second initiation, but this time as a self-consecration.

According to this reading, in the second initiation the teacher performed the sexual practices and then bestowed the sacrament. In the third initiation the disciple performed the sexual practices, and in the fourth he did 'likewise that again', bestowing his own sexual fluids upon himself.

Such an interpretation of the fourth initiation is not entirely unknown in the later Indian sources. According to the *Tattvaratnāloka* an early eleventh century work by Vāgīśvarakīrti, 'experiencing the taste of the *bodhicitta* is explained as the fourth initiation'.<sup>70</sup> In spite of such opinions surviving the tenth century however, the later Buddhist tradition chose the somewhat incongruous reading of the fourth initiation as a verbal instruction imparted by the teacher.

Care must be taken here; a theory which contradicts a thousand years of traditional scholarship should not be accepted too quickly. Certainly the reading suggested here requires further research before a judgement can be made. However, at first blush it does seem to explain the obscure verse in the *Uttaratantra*, and it reflects well the prominence of the supreme sacrament during the intermediate period of tantric development.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This article has narrated the development of tantra as a gradual internalization of Buddhist ritual. This was a physical interiorization, not a psychologization nor a spiritualization in the sense intended by earlier western narratives of the shift from the *Vedas* to the *Upaniṣads*. Tantric ritual certainly involved many psychological aspects, but the process outlined in these pages was entirely one of the physical realm, as the ritual space moved from the external shrine to the body's interior.

The first stage in this process corresponded to the first half of the eighth century, when the first 'internal' Yoga tantras were composed. These works cast the Buddhist subject as the buddha at the center of the ritual, so that the oblations which were previously directed towards an external shrine were

<sup>70</sup> *Tattvaratnāloka*, 240a.3. *byang chub sems/ ro myang dbang bzhir 'chad pa*. This reference was received indirectly thanks to an unpublished paper by Harunaga Isaacson, entitled 'The Fourth Empowennent (*caturābhiṣeka*)' and given in 1997 at Oxford University. The latter seems to be a review of the various Indian interpretations of the fourth initiation. Unfortunately, I have been unable to consult this paper for the present study. Vāgīśvarakīrti can be dated to the early eleventh century on the basis of Mimaki (1992), p. 297 n. 1.

now offered to oneself. The second, intermediate period is represented by the early Mahāyoga tantras, and spanned the second half of the eighth and the early ninth century. During this period, ritual worship moved to the body's interior, with particular attention given to the details of male and female sexual anatomy. Thus the visualized maṇḍala was generated inside the vagina at the point of sexual union, and it was worshipped by means of pleasure generated through the performance of *coitus reservatus*. The third period is characterized by the later Mahāyoga tantras, most of which were eventually classified as Anuttarayoga. This period unfolded gradually over the ninth century, with Buddhajñānapāda of the first quarter of the ninth century being a transitional figure. Overall, this period witnessed the development of increasingly sophisticated technologies for describing and manipulating the body's subtle internal energies. These complex systems were mapped onto the ritual space of the body's interior, a space that had first been opened during the intermediate period.

The first and the third periods are relatively well documented in traditional and modern sources alike, and for this reason they have been treated here somewhat cursorily. This article attempts to contribute to our understanding of tantra's development by drawing attention to the intermediate period. This period was characterised above all by the prominence of the supreme sacrament, the ritual ingestion of sexual fluids. This definition of the intermediate period facilitates a more nuanced historical picture of early tantra, with greater continuity in our understanding of Buddhist ritual development. It also may help to explain a number of issues, including the ritual origins of both the Great Perfection and the four initiations.

The narrative of the internalization of Buddhist ritual suggests several further lines of inquiry. Foremost, the basic elements outlined here must be checked against the other major tantras from the eighth and ninth centuries. Additionally, in light of the fact that the subtle body technologies of the *cakras*, channels, and energies seem to have emerged over a number of decades, the development of these technologies needs to be studied in greater detail. As much as possible, the relevant texts must be read in their own terms, without applying any later interpretive categories that might obscure the historical process.

Finally, the ritual internalization narrative suggested here should also be considered within the wider context of Indian society, beyond the immediate sphere of Buddhist ritual. Societal influences on the development of Buddhist tantra have begun to be explored in recent years. In particular, Davidson has drawn attention to the feudalization of medieval India, and how the changes in the political and military spheres of Indian society were reflected in the early tantric traditions. A similar consideration of the wider

social context within which the interiorization of tantric ritual discourse took place might reveal other ways in which the Buddhist practitioner's subjectivity was altered during these years.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ITJ IOL Tib J: Reference for Tibetan-language materials from the Stein collection of Dunhuang manuscripts held by the British Library.
- PT Pelliot tibétain: Reference for Tibetan-language materials from the Pelliot collection of Dunhuang manuscripts held by the Bibliothèque Nationale.
- P. Peking edition of the Tibetan canon.

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