

Introduction

Starting with the middle of the first millennium, South Asia saw the emergence and rise of Tantrism within all major religious traditions, a development that resulted in the production of a rich textual corpus expounding the ritual and philosophical systems of Śaivism, the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra, the Buddhist Mantrayāna, and Jaina Tantra. Despite the fact that Tantric traditions grew to become such an integral part of the religious landscape of early medieval South, South-East, and East Asia, the social reality of how these initiatory groups were organised on the ground and concretely interfaced with the wider community of non-initiates or with competing traditions during this period is still little understood. This is partly due to the fact that the surviving Tantric textual sources are prescriptive in nature, propagating an idealistic vision of their position in society and rarely addressing questions of social relevance.

In order to address the resulting methodological challenge of using these sources for reconstructing the underlying social reality, specialists of the textual traditions and practices of pre-modern Tantric traditions were invited to investigate these largely normative texts for elements that inadvertently reveal aspects of the underlying social reality or larger political agendas at play. Departing from the notion of a religious community, that is to say, a community defined through a shared ritual repertoire and socio-religious visions, the contributors pursue a range of guiding questions that are at the heart of the VISCOM research project, such as: How does a community define itself and what binds it together? How is a sense of belonging expressed? Can we identify networks of relationships through concrete interactions such as collective activities and habitual practices? Which religio-political strategies may be at play in shaping community identity; or to what extent do religious propagators create new religious identities in order to appeal to the royal elite or reach out to mainstream communities? How are deeply embedded social identity norms related to

birth status – the caste and class system in South Asia – negotiated in the context of emerging religious movements that essentially challenge these existing socio-religious structures? And how do religious communities that have developed around esoteric Tantric cults appeal to mainstream communities?

Applying these research questions to ancient texts, often only preserved in unpublished manuscripts, the contributors trace aspects of the socio-religious history of the emergence and institutionalisation of these traditions in different literary genres, including Tantric scriptures, ritual manuals, philosophical treatises, and commentaries as well as non-Tantric sources that contain representations of Tantric communities such as the *Purāṇas*, early sectarian Dharma literature, and belletristic works. In addition, some contributions complement text-based approaches with field studies and art historical analyses. The themes of this volume include the development of Tantric rituals and symbols in relation to the political sphere, the domain of social ritual as an indicator of the various degrees to which Tantric communities were socially integrated at a given place or time, specific points of interface between initiatory and lay communities, and the modalities of the construction of broad as well as specific “confessional” Tantric identities.

Structure of the volume

The volume opens with a keynote article by Alexis Sanderson, based on a lecture he delivered at the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna on February 5, 2015. In his contribution, Sanderson outlines the possibilities and ground-breaking advances in tracing the socio-religious history of South Asian Tantric traditions, based on his long-standing expertise and research experience with Śaivism also in interaction with other Tantric traditions, including the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra and Buddhist as well as Jaina Tantra. In many ways, Sanderson’s ground-breaking research on the historical development of early Tantric traditions in South Asia and beyond has fundamentally shaped and influenced the field of Tantric studies.

Following the opening contribution, the book is divided into four parts. The first contains contributions investigating textual sources that detail certain “Tantric identities.” These chapters offer insights into how various Tantric communities – or groups within a Tantric community – were conceptualised in a range of sources, including those inside and outside the Tantric textual genre.

Shaman Hatley examines the representation of female practitioners and the divinisation of women in the *Brahmayāmala* or *Picumata*. This voluminous Tantric Śākta-Śaiva text affords an unusually detailed (as well as early) window into women’s participation in Tantric ritual. On the one hand, this includes their role as female consorts – called *dūtīs* – in the coital rituals performed for the *sādhaka* practitioner’s purposes of attaining supernatural powers (*siddhi*). On the other, Hatley also points to passages that intimate independent female adepts in representations of *yoginīs*, a category which intrinsically blurs boundaries between women and goddesses. In doing so, he engages with the methodological challenge of deriving social-historical data from literary representations in this genre of Tantric literature.

Csaba Kiss presents a diachronic investigation into the term *bhasmāṅkura*, a term used to describe a social group defined as “the offspring of a fallen Śaiva ascetic and a Śūdra prostitute” in the well-known fifteenth-century Brahmanical, non-Tantric *Jātiviveka*, a treatment of the various castes and classes. Tracing references to this term in Śaiva Tantric literature, including Saiddhāntika ritual manuals as well as the Śaiva scholar Abhinavagupta’s famous work *Tantrāloka*, Kiss locates the origins of this terminology and explores what these passages reveal about the social setting of certain Tantric communities at various times. He shows how the position of the Bhasmāṅkura as the son of a Śaiva ascetic was highly problematic in the Śaiva Tantric socio-ritual world and often condemned. At the same time, he draws attention to the extent to which these insider accounts differ from Brahmanical sources, in which the Bhasmāṅkura is at times associated with Devalakas, who are defined as temple priests that live of the offerings made to idols and thus considered of low status.

Robert Leach’s paper deals with two important sub-traditions within the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Pāñcarātra – the Āgamasiddhānta and the Mantra-

siddhānta – in South India in the early centuries of the second millennium CE. He examines their relation to each other as well as the possible reasons why the Āgamasiddhānta has ceased to exist as a separate tradition in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Leach shows how the textual evidence suggests that these traditions were in competition with each other for the control of public temples and the right to perform rituals for fee-paying clients. In this process, the followers of the Āgamasiddhānta characterised themselves as exclusively seeking liberation from rebirth and as worshipping Viṣṇu to the exclusion of all other deities. According to Āgamasiddhānta scriptural testimony, these two characteristics set them apart from other Pāñcarātrikas, and there are several passages in Āgamasiddhānta texts wherein the worship of God for mundane and heavenly rewards as well as the worship of gods other than Viṣṇu are roundly condemned. At the same time, there are a number of indications that at least some Ekāyanas modified their positions on both of these issues.

Klaus-Dieter Mathes depicts an example of how Buddhist monastic communities integrated Tantric elements, such as sexual *yoga* during empowerment (*abhiṣeka*) and subsequent practices that were considered problematic from the point of view of mainstream Buddhism. On the basis of thorough text analyses of works of Indian and Tibetan teachers, such as Maitrīpa (986–1063), his disciple *Sahajavajra, 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392–1481), and Dwags po bKra shis rnam rgyal (1511–1587), he shows how the so-called *mahāmudrā* teachings were embedded into Madhyamaka philosophy concepts and thus Tantric and Sūtric methods were syncretically combined into a single system for liberation.

Christian Ferstl turns his attention to the value of Sanskrit poetry as a source for clues about the perceptions and representations of Tantric communities outside the body of Tantric prescriptive literature. Focusing on the *Kādambarī*, a work of the sixth-century court poet Bāṇabhaṭṭa, he examines the portrayal of an elderly Dravidian – often referred to as holy man (*dhārmika*) – living in a goddess temple near Ujjayinī. Identifying features that associate this holy man with practices and works of certain Śaiva initiatory groups, such as the Pāśupatas, Kālamukhas, or Tantric practitioners of the Bhairava branch, Ferstl attempts to trace the religious milieu and associated values envisaged by the poet in the seventh century.

The second part of the volume gathers contributions presenting sources that show how Tantric communities construct identities through rituals that draw boundaries to the non-initiated world by appealing to the exclusivity of the respective Tantric circle.

Judit Törzsök explores the way in which Tantric communities saw themselves within a larger context by analysing their treatments of *samayas*, that is to say, the rules a Tantric Śaiva or Śākta neophyte is to follow after he is introduced into his new community and has received an initiation name, thus essentially constituting part of what defines the Śaiva or Śākta Śaiva Tantric community. Investigating three different types of *samaya* sets, namely those of the Siddhānta, the heterogeneous lists of early Śākta scriptures, and the strictly “nondualist” rules of later Śāktas, she demonstrates to what extent they, on the one hand, relate to Brahmanical rules of the Dharmaśāstras, and, on the other, carefully demarcate various Śaiva and Śākta groups. Further, the author presents some material on lay Śaiva practitioners, showing that in spite of their overall conformity to traditional Brahmanical prescriptions, they also saw themselves as following a different set of laws and rules.

Ellen Gough, one of the rare scholars who studies Tantric aspects of the Jaina traditions, presents the history of the Digambara Jaina ritual of mendicant initiation (*dīkṣā*). This ritual that features Tantric elements, such as *maṇḍalas* and *mantras*, was introduced into the Digambara tradition in the twentieth century. Modern Digambaras claim that this practice is a return to “ancient,” that is, pre-sixteenth-century times. Investigating evidence for this statement, Gough tracks the historical development of this ritual from the first half of the first millennium to the sixteenth century based on thorough textual studies of relevant Jaina works. Thanks to her fieldwork undertaken in Rajasthan in 2013, she also vividly provides insight into the present-day practice and shows that Tantric ritual components have also been used to create Jaina communities.

Péter Szántó provides rare insights into the early history of the *gaṇacakra*, a ritualised communal feast as celebrated by followers of the Vajrayāna, i.e., Tantric Buddhist communities. The earliest Buddhist evidence for this ritual, which was probably originally designed by imitating a Śaiva ritual, dates to the early eighth century or possibly slightly earlier.

While several Buddhist works from this time onwards describe or refer to the *gaṇacakra* ritual, there are only two known complete, self-standing manuals surviving in Sanskrit, as Szántó demonstrates. One is found in the so-called Ngor Hevajrasādhana collection, the other one, the *Gaṇacakraavidhi* attributed to Ratnākaraśānti and transmitted in a Nepalese manuscript, is presented here. Szántó delivers an annotated diplomatic edition of this work, which is supplemented by a – because of several difficulties of the text – tentative translation and a detailed explanation in order to make the content of this fascinating document accessible also to non-Sanskritists.

Turning to the sphere of Buddhist Tantric rituals for the public domain, Ryugen Tanemura examines surviving pre-modern ritual manuals and exegetical works on Buddhist Tantric death rites and explores how they may inform us about the potential clientele served by Buddhist Tantric priests. Having identified the relevant textual sources – all of which were edited by the author for the first time – he focuses in particular on the *Mṛtasugatini-vojana*, a manual of the funeral rite by Śūnyasamādhivajra, the final section (*Antasthitikarmodeśa*) of Padmaśrīmitra's *Maṇḍalopāyikā*, and the final chapter (*Nirvṛtavajrācāryāntyeṣṭilakṣaṇavidhi*) of Jagaddarpaṇa's *Caryākriyāsamuccaya*. In his analysis, he principally concentrates on passages that indicate which kind of Tantric practitioner is intended as the recipient of a Tantric funeral, which, in turn, offers clues about the scope of Tantric community envisaged by the sources.

The third part of the volume consists of contributions that collect and discuss sources that provide insights into how certain Tantric communities construct a public identity, negotiated through apotropaic empowering rituals for the royal sphere or public rituals and festivals.

Marion Rastelli describes a specific strategy pursued by Tantric officiants of the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Pāñcarātra to convince rulers to employ their services. The *Ahīrbudhnyasaṃhitā*, a South Indian work probably from the thirteenth century, expounds the ritual worship of Sudarśana, the discus of Viṣṇu. This worship mainly serves the purposes of kings, including, for instance, military purposes. These rituals are usually not performed by the king himself but by his personal priest (*purohita*, *purodhas*). Rastelli

demonstrates how it is a great concern of the *Ahīrbudhnyasamhitā* to show the importance of a personal priest and his relation to the king, which is why it also presents several narratives. These narratives mostly follow a similar pattern: a particular king is in a certain form of distress and finally reaches a solution to his problem with the help of a *purohita*, namely, the *sudarśanamāntra* and its ritual worship. While the primary purpose of these narratives is evident, they also throw light on the background of the redactor of the *Ahīrbudhnyasamhitā* as well as its target audience, that is, kings and their specific needs.

Francesco Bianchini provides yet further insights into the *Ahīrbudhnyasamhitā* by highlighting passages that exhibit the ruling elite's concerns and the services that Tantric officiants could supply, thereby adding to our understanding of how Tantric traditions advanced and spread in society through affecting and gaining support by the rulers. Among the issues that he addresses are the association of specific Tantric theological tenets with offices and concepts of the royal court, the methodological problem of identifying different classes of officiants on the basis of the kind of information given by the *Ahīrbudhnyasamhitā*, the main goals of the rulers, and the repertoire of rituals that the Tantric priest as described in the *Ahīrbudhnyasamhitā* offered in comparison to that of a traditional Atharvavedic officiant.

Dominic Goodall examines the emergence and development of festivals (*mahotsava*) in Śaiva Tantric communities, i.e., the Śaiva Mantramārga. While such religious processions are commonplace in several South Indian Tantric scriptures, Goodall observes that these are never mentioned in pre-twelfth-century Tantric authoritative scriptures. First, he traces the earliest sources on Śaiva religious processions, namely the sixth/seventh century non-Tantric *Śivadharmasāstra*. Second, he provides an in-depth analysis of the *damanotsava*, a festival in which Śiva is worshipped with the various parts of the Damana plant (*Artemisia indica*). His treatment demonstrates how Śaiva Tantric priests adopted a popular annual festival associated with spring and with love, transforming it into a Śaiva reparatory ritual with soteriological function, and he explores the socio-religious reasons that may have driven such changes in the Tantric ritual repertoire. In his analysis, he also includes critical observations on the transmission history of the

famous South Indian twelfth-century Saiddhāntika ritual manual *Jñāna-ratnāvalī*.

Gudrun Bühnemann deals with the worship of the monkey deity Hanumān under royal patronage in mid-seventeenth- to mid-eighteenth-century Nepal. Presenting rich sources including texts, such as inscriptions, accounts in chronicles (*vaṃśāvalī*), and ritual works, and both published and hitherto unpublished images of sculptures, paintings, and line drawings, she provides new insight into how the kings of the late Malla period promoted the worship of Hanumān in the Kathmandu Valley and what goals they wished to attain through the worship of both the public exoteric and the specifically esoteric, Tantric manifestations of the guardian deity.

The fourth part of the volume presents contributions that engage with the role of lay communities and examines how their shared community practices and self-representations relate to the emerging Tantric traditions.

Nina Mirnig turns to the sixth/seventh-century Śaiva text *Śivadharmasāstra*, the earliest extant normative work to promote an entire Śaiva social order, which has proven pivotal for understanding the emergence of Śaivism and the Tantric traditions in the early medieval period. Against the historical backdrop of the religious milieu at the time – including the prominence of Vaiṣṇava devotional movements, Buddhism, and Śaiva ascetic traditions – Mirnig discusses the novel ways in which community identity is constructed in the *Śivadharmasāstra* by promoting Śaiva devotees as divine beings on earth, granting them a superior spiritual status independent of the existing socio-religious system defined through caste and class, thereby also opening the system up to lower social classes. Identifying the various social and ritual implications initiated by this new conceptualisation, this contribution also traces the ritual and conceptual continuities into the Śaiva Tantric sphere, whose propagators build on the kind of socio-religious structures expounded upon in the *Śivadharmasāstra*.

Peter Bisschop analyses the ways in which the earliest extant Śaiva texts of the sixth and seventh centuries deal with the worship of other gods than Śiva, thereby investigating how emerging Śaiva communities promoted their religion as superior to their competitors. Building on Paul Hacker's theory of inclusivism as "a specifically Indian way of thinking" and a

means of inclusion by subordination, Bisschop investigates three works that were practically unknown at Hacker's time but provide important case studies for tracing this phenomenon in early medieval South Asia: the sixth chapter of the *Śivadharmasāstra*, which contains a lengthy *mantra* of pacification (*śāntimantra*) invoking all deities for protection; *Skandapurāṇa* chapters 27–28, which are related in content to the teachings of the *Śivadharmasāstra*; and the third chapter of the *Niśvāsamukha*, which deals with mundane religion and has a lengthy section on the worship of different gods. In his investigation, he presents the varying degrees of “inclusivism” suggested by these early sources, a strategy that also reflects the socio-religious setting in which these newly emerging Śaiva communities had to secure their position among the dominant religious traditions of the time.

S.A.S. Sarma deals with the ritual worship of the female deities collectively known as the Seven Mothers (*saptamātṛ*) with Bhadrakālī as the principal deity. He investigates how these rites bind together certain Tantric ritual communities, presenting hitherto unpublished Mātṛtantras composed in South India and sharing his vast knowledge about the communities and temples associated with this worship. The first part of his paper describes important works devoted to the worship of the Seven Mothers, namely, two texts labelled *Brahmayāmala* and associated with the Kolārammā Temple of Kōlār, the *Mātṛsadbhāva*, composed in Kerala before the fifteenth century, three chapters of the *Śeṣasamuccaya* attributed to Śaṅkara, and several texts on the rare cult of the goddess Rurujit, a specific form of Bhadrakālī. The second part of the paper then deals with the Keralese communities associated with the worship of Bhadrakālī and especially Rurujit. These include the Nampūtiri Brahmins, who are the officiating priests in Bhadrakālī temples, as well as three particular non-Nampūtiri communities, namely, the Mūssads, the Piṭāras, and the Aṭikaḷ. Finally, Sarma depicts illustrative examples of rituals in concrete South Indian temples that also address the multifarious interactions of various communities of South Indian society.

Gergely Hidas turns to the earliest extant manuscript sources on Buddhist *dhāraṇī*, a popular practice centered on spells. Focusing on the *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī*, a magical-ritualistic scripture of Dhāraṇī literature that has likely emerged in North India between the third and sixth

centuries, he presents and examines newly identified fragments in the Gilgit collection and places them within the whole Mahāpratisarā corpus. His treatment also pursues the question why so many copies of the same scripture were likely to be kept in one collection and what this could tell us about the ritual practices of the Buddhist community in the area as well as its relation to esoteric Buddhism.