

Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism

Volume II:
Lives

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Siddhas

The Sanskrit word *siddha* is a past passive participle from the verbal root *sādh*, which means to attain, to succeed, to accomplish. Besides denoting a somewhat vague class of semidivine beings, in several Indian religious traditions it refers to a person, human or otherwise, who has accomplished some kind of goal, typically one or more supernatural powers (*siddhi*) and/or liberation from the cycle of rebirth (which is sometimes styled “great *siddhi*”). However, not everyone who has accomplished a *siddhi*, lesser or “great,” is called a *siddha*. In addition to their immense and freely wielded supernatural powers, *siddhas* are noted for one or more of the following traits: unconventional behavior and lifestyle, having no hindrances or inhibitions to associate with all levels of human and nonhuman society, somewhat unusual (non-Sanskritic) names, criticism or even mockery of established religion in their literary expressions, and being conceived of as fountainheads and promulgators of new kinds of revelation, which they have achieved in miraculous ways.

The evolution of the term and the kind of being(/s) it denotes has not been charted conclusively, and there is no general consensus on how to translate the word, especially since the interpretation may be context sensitive. Proposed renderings include but are not limited to: adept, attainer, accomplished or realized or perfected being, saint, sage, thaumaturgic ascetic, master of enchantment, magician, and sorcerer. In Buddhological literature, these terms are frequently preceded by the adjective “great” due to the influence of the Tibetan rendering *grub thob chen po*, prevalent in spite of the fact that the compound *mahāsiddha* is found only surprisingly rarely in Sanskrit sources.

Early Occurrences of the Term

Buddhists were certainly not the first to use this term. According to Davidson’s historical overview (2002, 173–176), the earliest dateable epigraphical evidence is Jaina (2nd or 1st cent. BCE), whereas in what is perhaps the second oldest (474 CE), they are

described as worshipping the Sun, and thus they may have belonged to the once very popular and widespread Saura cult.

Occurrences in post-Vedic Brahmanical, and later, especially Śaiva, sources are abundant. With very few exceptions, these early references portray *siddhas* not as individuals but as indistinct members of a class of celestial groups along with other such stock entities straddling the world of men and the world of gods (for instance *gandharva*, *kiṃnara*, *yakṣa*, etc.). It is in the Epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, that we start to have individualized *siddhas*, namely Kapila and Viśvāmītra respectively; here the continuity with the Brahmanical *ṛṣi* is evident. However, there must have been human reflections of these beings, since Kauṭilya’s political handbook, the *Arthaśāstra* (final redaction c. 300 CE), refers to employing *siddhas*, in this case probably best understood as itinerant sorcerers, as agents and spies (Davidson, 2002, 174–175; Olivelle, 2013, 233–234, 407–408). Here the continuity is with the more ancient figure of the *vidyādharā*, a sorcerer seeking powers through means of spells and asceticism.

Starting with the early medieval period and the rise of tantric traditions, the number of individualized *siddhas* increases. The model adopted by Buddhists was probably that of the Śaiva *siddha*, although this relationship is at present poorly understood. The parallels in tropes – itinerant and/or unusual lifestyle, divine vision, fountainhead of a new cult obtained by miraculous means, and so forth – are, however, very close (e.g. Sanderson, 2007, 280, 404–405).

As in the case of any religion maintaining a tradition of “saints,” conceiving of *siddhas* as historical persons is perhaps a futile exercise, for they are complex and fluid characters created by varying measures of historical reality, pious veneration, glorification, visionary experience, and artistic genius. It should therefore be noted that when we are speaking of historical dates of *siddhas*, it is not the person we have in mind, but the personage as a literary event, that is to say either as a subject or as an author. Moreover, although the early *siddhas* were probably genuinely antinomian boundary breakers,

they were eventually turned into a social type or cultural category, with uniform appearance, behavior, and roles. It is very probable that many *siddhas*, especially those lesser known, were completely fictional creations cast by this type.

Buddhist *Siddhas*

Early Buddhist sources use the word *siddha* as an adjective (Davidson, 2002, 196, points out the usage of the poet →Mātṛceṭa/Mātṛceta) qualifying great *ṛṣis* (e.g. the *Mahāmāyūrī Vidyārājñī*; Takubo, 1972, 52–54) and/or accomplished sorcerers (e.g. the *Amoghapāśakalparāja*; Kimura *et al.*, 1998, 113, 119, 125, 126). The word is also used in a cliché *tataḥ/evam/ṅ siddho bhavati* “and then/thus [i.e. after having duly performed the ritual described] he [i.e. the practitioner] will become accomplished [i.e. he will have gained access to the effects of the rite].” These effects are supernatural powers such as flying, becoming invisible, obtaining control over meteorological phenomena, gaining entry to the riches and pleasures of underworlds, clairvoyance, and so forth.

Early texts from the more mature tradition, that is to say after the 7th or 8th centuries when tantric Buddhism has become an independent means of liberation, state that for a *siddha* there is nothing more to be done, he is free of ritual obligations and postinitiatory observances (e.g. *Guhyasamājantra* 18.99; Matsunaga, 1978, 120).

Still later sources eulogize *siddhas* as fully accomplished beings, practically buddhas, but the two categories are never conflated. An unpublished subchapter (10.3 or 39) of the *Sampuṭodbhavantra*, a scripture from circa the late 10th century, describes a *siddha* in the following terms (read from Asiatic Society of Bengal Kolkatta, Ms G3828, fol. 54):

“Where does a perfected (*siddha*) man of the spell (*vidyāpuruṣa*) go [and] where does he abide? This is my doubt: tell me, O [Embodiment of] Great Bliss!” The Lord said: “A perfected man of the spell does not go anywhere and does not abide anywhere. He is free of beginning, middle, and end. He is without dualities. He is the light of the Triple Universe. He is everywhere, knows everything, pervades everything, and has all his goals accomplished. He abides in the minds of all sentient beings and is utterly free of the lower rebirths. He is adorned with all virtues and is

suitable to all. He is auspicious/[similar to] Śiva, he is like no other, always exalted, a lord, a protector. He has cast away all conceptualizations. He does not have any shape or form, he is not perceptible even to the Victors, he is a sovereign. He is [like] a diamond (*vajra*), for he cannot be shattered. He is [like] the Moon [which emits cooling rays], for he is free of the burning pain of taints. He is [like] a lion, for he [roams everywhere] without inhibitions. He is [like] a mighty flood of water, for he cannot be fathomed.”

Another late scripture (c. 12th–13th cents.), the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* (unpublished chapter 11, verses 2ff. read from Royal Asiatic Society London, Ms Hodgson 46, fol. 26), states that the eponymous deity can, according to the inclinations of sentient beings, manifest himself as the Buddha/a buddha, a *siddha*, the Dharma, the Community, and so forth. Here we see the *siddha* inserted between the first and the second items of the traditional Three Jewels. He is therefore a figure of paramount importance, but not cosubstantial with the Buddha/a buddha.

The earliest occurrence of the word *siddha* meaning an accomplished tantric practitioner with his/her own name, lifestory, and teaching is at present unknown. Davidson (2002, 169–335) seems to conflate the term *siddha* and what he describes as *si-d-dha* culture with what is perhaps better understood as antinomian esoteric Buddhist practitioners and their (sub)culture. It is more cautious not to apply the term *siddha* to persons not yet described as such by the literature of the tradition.

Most studies on *siddhas* are very optimistic about ascribing to some of them dates as early as the 8th century (a paradigmatic example is Śāṅkṛtyāyana, 1934, 216–229). However, with a few possible exceptions, none can be dated earlier than the 10th century, and most are probably even later.

Perhaps the earliest “*siddhas*” of the Buddhist tradition are *Buddhajñānapāda and the duo *Kukkura/*Kukkurarāja/Kukkurī (lit. Dog, Dogking, or “He of the Dogs”) and Indrabhūti. Although the earliest sources – Tibetan translations of an early 8th-century autobiographical passage and its commentary for the first (see Davidson, 2002, 309–316), and an early 9th-century Tibetan translation for the latter two (see Kanaoka, 1966) – describing them do not call them *siddhas*, they definitely exhibit some of the tropes later prevalent in such hagiographies. Both stories are about a new revelation (the *Guhyasamājantra* and the *Sarvabuddhasamāyo-*

gaḍākinijālaśaṃvara, respectively) which is only poorly, or not at all, understood. An earnest search follows (Buddhajñānapāda travels throughout the Indian subcontinent, while Kukkūrī applies himself to prayer), culminating in a vision of a deity who imparts the true meaning of the text. Having obtained this, a short period of practice follows, which is crowned with success. Following this, both masters gain royal patronage (this moment is not present in Buddhajñānapāda's biography, but is found in later sources) and a group of devoted disciples.

The paradigmatic *siddha* for the more mature tradition was most likely Saraha. He is a well-known and studied figure (Guenther, 1969; Schaeffer, 2005; Jackson, 2004). His verses in Aprabhraṃśa are already quoted in the middle of the 10th century (Szántó, 2012, vol. I, 99) and at least one of his stanzas was incorporated into scripture (Luo, 2010, xxxiii, 5). The 10th century is also the period when the number of *siddhas* starts to grow vertiginously (see Szántó, 2012, vol. I, 47–48). Their number eventually ran into the dozens, and at some point before the end of the 12th century they were canonized in lists. The most commonly known such set is that of the 84 *siddhas*. The number is not entirely stable, for sometimes such lists contain 80 or 85 *siddhas* (Schmid, 1958); moreover, the names in the lists differ depending on the source (Linrothe, 2006a, 422–433).

Literature on *Siddhas* and by *Siddhas*

Literature on *siddhas* and literature attributed to *siddhas* has received much scholarly attention. Inaugurating this process stand two works published incidentally in the same year: Grünwedel's German translation of an anthology of 84 *siddha* biographies – or better, hagiographies – preserved in Tibetan (Grünwedel, 1916) and Śāstrī's "Buddhist Songs and Dohās in the Bengali Language of a Thousand Years Ago" (Śāstrī, 1916). These two emblematic collections, the biographies and the songs, were vigorously reexamined and discussed in the century to come, but several key issues remain to be settled in a satisfactory manner.

Siddha Biographies

It is usually assumed that there was a written Sanskrit work behind the aforementioned anthology of *siddha* biographies, the reconstructed title of which

is given as **Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti*. However, the translator into Tibetan does not state this clearly: he merely says that he has translated the sayings of one *Abhayadattaśrī, a master from Tsam-parṇa (perhaps Skt. **Campāranya*, the *Campā* forest in what is now West and East Champaran border districts of Bihar state). This translator, Smon grub shes rab, most likely a Tangut/Xixia (西夏), is assumed to have been active in the 12th century. (For learned notes and a bibliography of editions, related works, and translations, see Martin, 1997, 26–27. This work – if it was one – is actually considered as part of a corpus, a brief account of which is given by Kapstein, 2006, 52–56.)

Grünwedel was reluctant to provide a critical view of what these stories may have meant, and preferred to postpone judgment until more tantric material was examined (Grünwedel, 1916, 141). A more recent translator suggested that the biographies can be read not only as entertaining didactic stories, allegories of and for tantric practice, but also as works that may provide some historical insights into the life of some personages from between the 8th and 12th centuries (Dowman, 1986, xi). A more nuanced view is that of Robinson, another translator of the same work (Robinson, 1979) and author of a thoughtful essay on the subject (Robinson, 1996), one of the very few that can be described as "literary criticism" of *siddha* stories.

Building on an idea already voiced by Dowman, Robinson points out in detail that the biographies follow two narrative patterns. The first is simpler and more prevalent. After presenting the *siddha*-to-be's name, their often menial occupation/caste, and country of birth (East Indian polities dominate), there occurs a crisis situation which prompts the character to seek the Dharma. The hero of the story is usually a layman, but there are female (Shaw, 1994) and monastic characters as well. To solve the crisis situation, a *guru* or a deity intervenes, initiating the protagonist into a tantric cult and its teachings. The now initiate hero engages in practice, typically for 12 years, and achieves success. (The names, countries of origin, original occupation/status, *gurus*, tantras followed, and timespan of reaching *siddhi*, are tabulated in a helpful chart in Robinson, 1979, 285–288.) The practice they engage in is often related to their former occupation or destructive compulsion, reinterpreted and elevated to allow for a mystical experience.

After having become *siddhas*, they display miraculous feats, become *gurus* to others, and finally depart to a tantric otherworld at will. The second type of narrative is more complex, and is usually associated with more famous *siddhas*. This type includes several episodes, sometimes trials and tribulations, initial failures, and idiosyncratic feats.

The *siddhas'* questionable idiosyncratic acts – including eating things beyond ritual purity and general human taste, drinking liquor in excessive quantities, slaughtering animals, and such – almost invariably turn out to be spiritual tests posed to a disciple or a group of people that are to be converted. Some *siddhas* on the other hand do not challenge the social order, pretending to lead perfectly ordinary lives. Their spiritual status is discovered only “accidentally” by others, who were nevertheless meant to do so on account of their karmic fruition.

Very few such stories survive in the original Sanskrit. The best known example is the “Siddha Biography” manuscript (Isaacson & Sferra, 2014, 60–71, 421–430). A similar, albeit much shorter, narrative exhibiting some of the same tropes, but in which the protagonist is not referred to as a *siddha*, can be found in Sferra (2000, 73–74). A rather remarkable document in this respect is an inscription from Bodh Gaya, dated to the late 12th century (1183–1192 CE). Here (ed. & trans. in Sanyal, 1929), the donor of a cave temple housing some Buddhist images, one Śrīmitra, is eulogized as “foremost of the class of enlightened Siddhas” (*saṃbuddhasiddhānvayadhuryabhūtaḥ*) and a “great saint” (*paramānvadhūtaḥ*). Note, however, that the word *anvaya* can also be interpreted as “succession,” “lineage,” even “tradition.” He was no doubt seen as a miracle worker, for one of the verses narrates how wild animals became obedient to him when he raised an arm. The eight *siddhis* – it is unclear which set the author had in mind – are said to have flocked to him like young women desirous for a husband, but he paid little attention to them and remained faithful to his “wife,” liberation while still alive (*jīvanmukti*). He is also praised for having converted a number of kings, and the then ruler of Benares, Jayaccandra (r. 1170–1194 CE) is described as his disciple through initiation. In addition, he is praised for having recovered or made popular again a large number of lost or forgotten sacred texts (*śāstragrāmādikamagnam*).

Dohās

The most common form of literary expression attributed to *siddhas* is the *dohā* verse, rhyming couplets written in a kind of late Middle Indic. A collection of such songs was first published by Śāstrī in 1916 on the basis of Nepalese palm leaf manuscripts discovered by him about a decade earlier. This pioneering volume included the so-called *Caryāgīti* collection of various *siddhas* with the commentary of Munidatta, the *Dohākoṣa* of Saraha with the commentary of (an) Advayavajra, the *Dohākoṣa* of Kāṇha with an anonymous commentary, as well as extracts of Apabhraṃśa passages from the *Ḍākārṇavatāntra*. The various reeditions and studies of the following six decades are summarized in Kværne (1977, 9–16; the works of Bagchi, 1935, 1938, and Shahidullah, 1928 merit special attention). More recent studies include Jackson (2004) and Schaeffer (2005). On the textual side, some significant improvements were provided to Kāṇha's *Dohākoṣa* by an anonymous edition of Amṛtavajra's commentary (see *Śrīkr̥ṣṇavajrapādadhohākoṣatikā*).

It was perhaps not without nationalist sentiments that Śāstrī advocated the language of the *dohās* as Old Bengali. Enthusiasm for “Old Bengali” is current even in our days (Moudud, 1992). More cautious authors call it Apabhraṃśa or Eastern Apabhraṃśa, but this too is problematic, inasmuch as the language of the *dohās* does not conform entirely to any standard Apabhraṃśa, and when it does it is because the verses have been practically rewritten according to rules the originals may not have observed (for example Bhayani, 1997).

Moreover, the songs are for the most part transmitted in Nepalese manuscripts, often fragmentary and quite corrupt. We have only a handful of commentaries surviving in the original Sanskrit, but these too are replete with philological problems, in spite of the not insignificant efforts several scholars have invested into making sense of them. One of the most commonly used of such works, Kværne (1977), employs the commentary of Munidatta, but a closer scrutiny reveals that this exegete's text is not only very badly transmitted, but that he was not a very bright, well-informed, and precise commentator to begin with. In addition, quite a few of the songs were reconstructed by editors from the commentaries' lemmata and Tibetan translations. Studying the *dohā* corpus is therefore a formidable philological and linguistic challenge.

The *dohās*' literary imagery and their doctrinal substrate pose a challenge of equal magnitude. There are various studies on these two subjects, for example, Kværne (1977, 30–64). The songs sometimes have two meanings. The superficial meaning is often mundane and sometimes shockingly anti-nomian. The deeper meaning always refers to some kind of doctrine, most often elements of tantric practice. For example, one of Kāṇha's famous songs runs as follows (material from Kværne, 1977, 119–122):

māria śāsu naṇanda ghare śālī |
mā māria Kāṇha bhāila kabālī ||

“After having killed [his] mother-in-law, [his] aunt, and [his] sister-in-law in the house, [and] after having killed [even his own] mother, Kṛṣṇa became a skull-bearer.”

Here Middle Indic *śāsu* is equivalent to both Skt. *śvaśrū* (mother-in-law) and *śvāsa* (the vital breath), whereas *mā* corresponds to both Skt. *mātṛ* (mother) and *māyā* (the illusory world of bondage). The doctrinal equivalent of the other two female relatives is somewhat unclear. Munidatta gives us the key to “house,” which he interprets as the Discus (*cakra*) of Great Bliss, the supreme abode in yogic physiology and also informs us, alluding to a standard etymology, that skull-bearer (*kapālin*) means someone who is able to maintain (*pāla*) bliss (*ka*). In other words, Kāṇha professes himself as a mass murderer turned penitent skull-bearer only for shock value; the “yogic” interpretation is that he became able to experience Great Bliss only after having done away with the vital breath, the movement of which is inextricably related to conceptualization, the cosmic illusion of bondage in transmigration, and so on. The sometimes shockingly colorful imagery is still a matter of dispute, as illustrated for example by the exchange of Siegel (1981) and Ray (1985), and again Siegel (1985).

Other songs are more straightforward, without any mystical meaning. For example, this is how Saraha criticizes fake tantric *yogins* (I disregard here the numerous philological problems; slightly corrected text and translation from Jackson, 2004, 55):

akkhi nivesī āsaṇa vandhī
kaṇṇehiṃ khusukhusāi jaṇa dhandhī |
raṇḍī muṇḍī aṇṇa vi vesem
dikkhijjāi dakkhiṇa uddesem ||

Fixing his gaze,
bound in a posture,

he whispers into the ears
of rich folk.

For widows and nuns
in their special garb,
he grants consecration –
for a fee.

We have very little information concerning the performative aspect of these songs. They were no doubt sung (commentaries sometimes provide us with the name of the musical scale), perhaps even accompanied by other singers, instruments, and dance (Kværne, 1977, 8). The Newar *cacā* performances (for an accessible description of this still rather secretive tradition, see e.g. Ahmed, 2003) may preserve many original features (Widdess, 2004).

Other Literature Attributed to Siddhas

The Tibetan Canon preserves scores of works attributed to *siddhas*. A useful but uncritical survey of such works can be found in Robinson (1979, 289–307). Beyond the already mentioned songs, here we find commentaries, short teachings, treatises, practical manuals, and so forth. One may say that there is virtually no genre of esoteric literature untouched by *siddhas*. A fair number of these survive in Sanskrit, and there are also works extant which were unnoticed or not translated into Tibetan.

It is usually assumed that *siddhas* produced nonconformist texts while the monastic environment tried to “tame” these through exegesis. This strictly dichotomous model cannot hold, however, since there is much evidence for *siddhas* producing commentaries, as witnessed not only by the aforementioned canonical attributions, but by works such as Bhavyakīrti's **Vīramānoramā*, which cites a plethora of varying explanations by authors who, judging by their names, were *siddhas* (Szántó, 2012, vol. I, 47–48). Moreover, most commentators do not try to “tame” the texts in any way.

Some material attributed to *siddhas* can also be found in scripturalized form. The *Buddha-kapālatantra* incorporates one of Saraha's *Apabhraṃśa* songs attributing it to a *tantra*, while Saraha himself is also a commentator of the text (Luo, 2010, xxxiii, 5), whereas the *Samputodbhavantra* recycles long passages from Anaṅgavajra's *Prajñopāya-viniścayasiddhi* (as first noted by Noguchi, 1995).

Siddhas are also often portrayed as revealers of *tantras* and other esoteric teachings. It is noteworthy that the basic practical manuals for the greatest *yoginītantra* cults were authored by persons identified by the tradition as *siddhas*: Saroruha for the *Hevajra* (*Hevajrasādhanopāyikā*); Lūyipāda, Ghaṅṭāpāda, and Kṛṣṇācārya for the *Cakrasaṃvara* (Sugiki, 2000, 45); and Āryadeva for the *Catuspīṭha* (Szántó, 2012, vol. I, 145–149).

Notwithstanding the relatively large amount of published works and secondary literature based on them, there remains much *siddha* literature to be examined both in the original Sanskrit/Apabhraṃśa and Tibetan translations. There are also many works which inhabit a gray area, that is to say, they are transmitted in Tibetan and although they preserve a large number of features that may point to an Indian original, they are probably not “authentic” compositions (see e.g. Kapstein, 2006, 56–60). Moreover, there is also a thus far unique case, that of the so-called Vanaratna codex (Royal Asiatic Society London, Ms Hodgson 35; Isaacson, 2008), in which works by *siddhas* have been translated back into Sanskrit from Tibetan. Vanaratna (1384–1468 CE), the presumed author of this multiple text manuscript, also mentions several *mahāsiddhas* by name, this being one of the very rare occasions where the term is “attested” in Sanskrit.

The Jñānamālā

One unambiguously Indian text is the *Jñānamālā*, a collection of short, usually one-, maximum two-verse *siddha* teachings preserved in a Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript (National Archives, Kathmandu 4–1171 = NGMPP reel no. A 59/20). The copy is undated; judging by features of paleography, it is probably a product of the second half of the 13th century. The language is not Apabhraṃśa, but a somewhat bizarre mix of Middle Indic and Sanskrit, which is occasionally very difficult to make sense of.

The text has three significant historical–philological merits. First, the colophon provides subcontinental hard evidence for the tradition of grouping *siddhas* into 84 (the numeral used here is *corāsi* and not the Sanskrit *caturaśīti*). Second, it transmits yet another list and contains in the original the names of many *siddhas* which are sometimes transmitted garbled in Tibetan (34 matches) or not transmitted at all (there are about 40 such names). Third, most of the *siddhas* record the names of their masters in

what may be called the signature line; therefore, here we have relatively early and original subcontinental testimony for such spiritual connections, which can be compared with information from the Tibetan tradition.

By far the most influential master in this collection is Lūyi (also spelt Lūyī, both forms can have the honorific *-pā* or *-pāya*, i.e. Skt. *-pāda*), closely followed by Viruvā (i.e. Virūpā, the same suffixes can apply, alternative name given in a gloss: Nyāsavira), Gorakha/Gopāla (never Gorakṣa), Macchendra/Mīnanātha (never Matsyendra), and Līlā. The only female *guru* referred to unambiguously is Mekhalā. There are three names which seem to have been important for the *Jñānamālā* but are completely ignored by the aforementioned Abhayadattaśrī: Abhavabhūti, Sogaḍa/Sogata, and Māhila/Māhilavīra. To give a general idea about the language and contents of the collection, here is an example verse:

*svayasaṃvedanā tatra udesā gurunā vaca |
navakūpanibaṃdhena vyomāmāna manaṃ kuru ||
Telo ātmavisuddhāya Māhilasya prasādanu |*

Reality is to be experienced by oneself;
the word of *gurus* is only a brief outline.
By blocking the nine wells [i.e. the apertures of
the body],
make the mind equal the sky in size.
[This is the teaching of] Telo for the purification
of the person,
[which was obtained/is transmitted] by the grace
of Māhila.

A similar, but much shorter, compilation has been published as the *Nānāsiddhopadeśaḥ* (1994). Here we count 14 *siddhas*, but it is unclear whether they were seen as a set.

Siddha Iconography

Siddhas are frequently portrayed on various media: cloth paintings, murals, statuary, stone and metal reliefs, as well as book illustrations. (For an overview of names and distinctive iconographical features, see Robinson, 1979, 262–283.) They are represented either as sets or individuals, as well as subordinate figures (e.g. above, near, or around a main deity if they occupy a role in the transmission lineage).

Siddhas are most frequently portrayed with the features of *yogins*: long hair (disheveled or tied in a topknot), wearing a loin cloth or naked with bone ornaments, wearing the yogic belt, seated on animal skins or corpses but sometimes also hovering or flying, accompanied by a consort and/or disciples/devotees. Some are portrayed as scholarly monks (e.g. Śāntipā), whereas royal figures are represented as wealthy laymen (e.g. Indrabhūti). Some of the more celebrated *siddhas* are portrayed as if captured in a snapshot, the pose and surroundings evoking one of their famous miracles (e.g. Virūpā pointing at the Sun stopping it in its course or Lūyipā eating fish guts). Again others are presented with implements alluding to their names (e.g. Śavaripā, lit. “Hunter outcaste,” with a bow and arrow, or Sarahapā, lit. “He who has cast the arrow,” as a fletcher). A distinctive feature is that they are usually not drawn facing the viewer directly, as in the case of deities. Some *siddhas* are portrayed in outright grotesque fashion and in this they are similar to the Chinese tradition of depicting →arhats (such as “the 18 arhats”). However, no link between the two traditions has yet been found (Linrothe, 2006a, 24).

Perhaps some of the most splendid *siddha* representations can be seen in Gyantse, Central Tibet (Tib. Rgyal rtse), for an ample study of which see Schroeder (2006). There are also numerous Tibetan scroll paintings (Skt. *paṭa*; Tib. *thang ka*) of considerable artistic merit. An early Nepalese masterpiece (not later than the beginning of the 12th cent.) depicting *siddhas* in cremation grounds is analyzed in Sinclair (2014). A fine example of block print depiction is given in Egyed (1984).

It is not known with certainty when and where the codification of iconographical features took place. In this respect, the textual and material evidence from the South Asian heartlands is very thin. At least 17 *siddha* portrayals are canonized in an unedited passage of the *Kriyāsamuccaya* of Jagaddarpaṇa (Nepal, before the mid-13th cent.), but a scroll painting earlier than that author already displays a similar arrangement (Sinclair, 2014, 214). We see here the features later widely portrayed in Tibetan art: Śabara is carrying a bow and arrow, Viṇāpāda plays the lute, Ḍheṅkī/Ḍheṅgī is pounding rice, Virūpā is drinking liquor binding the Sun to a tavern [table], Ḍombī is riding a tiger together with his consort, Kambālī is spreading a blanket on himself, Kukkuripāda is childishly amusing himself

with bitches. (Based on one of the earlier of many witnesses, National Archives Kathmandu 4–123 = NGMPP reel no. B 31/5, fols. 40–41. Unfortunately the passage, which consists of four *sragdharā* verses, is quite corrupt.)

The Afterlife of Indian *Siddha* Culture

With the almost complete disappearance of Buddhism from India, the cult of *siddhas* vanished, too. The only exception on the subcontinent are the Newars centered on the Kathmandu Valley, who preserve not only the iconography but also some of their songs (Newar *cacā* from Skt. *caryā*), albeit in a corrupt and for the most part little understood form.

There were many epigons in the Tibetan tradition inheriting the features mentioned above. →Mi la ras pa, Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas (Martin, 2006), Bon personages (K.S. Brown’s descriptions in Linrothe, 2006a, 378–385), or the Bhutanese folk hero ’Brug pa kun legs (Stein, 1972) are without hesitation identified as *siddhas*, and even in our days unusual acts of high ranking masters are interpreted as *siddha*-like behavior (Kapstein, 2006, 60, points out the famous example of Chögyam Trungpa; another example is given in Smith, 2006, 67; →Tibet’s Crazy Yogins). Many Tibetan masters composed their own *dohās*, adapting the genre to their environment (see Ardussi, 1977).

Tibetans also compiled their own *siddha/mahāsiddha* lists. The numbers vary greatly (see Smith, 2006), but a particularly popular and early set was one of eight figures (Luczanits, 2006; Jackson, 2006). These are sometimes portrayed one in each of the eight cremation grounds surrounding the central portion of some *maṇḍalas* from the *yoginītantra* class. Some authorities (e.g. Luczanits, 2006, 89) seem to accept that this is done on the authority of an Indian source, namely the *Śmaśānavidhi* of Lūyipāda, but the reading in question is both metrically and grammatically corrupt. Lūyipāda does teach placing *siddhas* in the cremation grounds in the same text just one verse before, but they are not in a set of eight and they are not styled “great.”

No genetical link can be demonstrated between *siddhas* and late medieval or early modern poets such as Kabīr (early 15th cent.) or the still active Bāuls of Bengal. The typological resemblances, however, are quite striking: itinerant lifestyle or

keeping to one's menial labor, expression in songs promoting social critique and nondualistic mystical experiences, and unusual behavior. (For a more optimistic view on this relationship, see Jackson, 2004, 42–48.)

It has been postulated for a very long time that there was a connection between Buddhist *siddhas* and *yogins* of what became various Nāth denominations; after all, some of the personages such as Matsyendra, Gorakṣa, and Cauraṅgī, as well as famous pilgrimage sites such as Śrīśailam, are venerated by both traditions. However, it is only very recently that evidence started mounting for such a link: most importantly, it seems that the earliest *haṭhayoga* texts were created in a tantric Buddhist environment and that these works are linked to the famous Virūpa (see Mallinson, forthcoming).

The charisma and appeal of *siddhas*, whichever tradition they may hail from, has not diminished. Scores of modern ventures (yoga, alternative medicine, etc.) will meet the reader after a brief search on the World Wide Web.

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PÉTER-DÁNIEL SZÁNTÓ