Amrtasiddhi A Posteriori: An Exploratory Study on the Possible Impact of the Amrtasiddhi on the Subsequent Sanskritic Vajrayāna Tradition

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Abstract: Recent research into source materials for hathayoga (Birch, Mallinson, Szántó) has revealed that the physical techniques and esoteric anatomy traditionally associated with Śaiva practitioners likely found a genesis within Vajrayāna Buddhist communities. The physiology and practices for longevity described in the 11th-or-12th-century Amrtasiddhi are easily traced in the development of subsequent physical yoga, but prior to the discovery of the text’s Buddhist origin, analogues to a hathayoga esoteric anatomy found in Vajrayāna sources have been regarded as coincidental. This paper considers both the possibility that the Amrtasiddhi, or a tradition related to it, had a lasting impact on practices detailed in subsequent tantric Buddhist texts and that this hathayoga source text can aid in interpreting unclear passages in these texts.

Keywords: Buddhism; tantra; yoga; India; Nepal

1. Introduction

This paper will outline an investigation of the possible impact of the hathayoga “source text” upon two late Vajrayāna mūla tantras, namely, the 12th-century Saṃvarodayatantra (SUT) and the 13th-century Caṇḍamahātropātantra (CMT). The hathayoga source text is the 11th-century Amrtasiddhi. This paper will also note some precedents of and parallels with the physiological model found in the Amrtasiddhi in earlier and contemporaneous Vajrayāna texts.

I was first exposed to the Amrtasiddhi in 2016 when James Mallinson regularly came to Oxford to work through it with Péter-Dániel Szántó and I joined in the readings. It was almost immediately evident that the text had Buddhist influences (for example, its opening maṅgala verse is an invocation to the Buddhist goddess Chinnamastā), and Mallinson especially, but Jason Birch and others in the last two decades have illustrated the impact of the text upon the development of hathayoga. The goal of this paper is to begin to investigate the impact the Amrtasiddhi may have had on subsequent developments in Sanskritic Buddhism.

For the purposes of this paper there are two key ideas in the Amrtasiddhi I will discuss, which, when combined, would eventually become the fundamental physiological theory of hathayoga. The first
idea is that if one is able to preserve the store of bindu, or amṛta, that is, semen, in the cranial vault, that one may extend one’s own life. This bindu drips, drop by drop, over a lifetime, and once it is exhausted, the individual dies. In females it is present as well, although as female sexual fluid or menstrual blood, not seminal fluid. The second idea is that through Ṛṇāyāma and physical manipulation of the body, a yogīn can force wind through the nāḍīs, the subtle channels of the body; into the central channel and upwards, and reverse the downward course of the ever-dripping bindu for the specific purpose of prolonging one’s own life. This is the amṛtasiddhi, the accomplishment of immortality.

2. Precedents in Vajrayāna

There is a long, well-documented history of alchemy and practices for longevity in Vajrayāna prior to the Amṛtasiddhi,⁴ but the text’s particular model does not appear to exist in tantric Buddhism, at least not in any of the materials that we are aware known of. That is, the model of a store of life-sustaining substance in the cranium, and the ability to move subtle wind through the channels of the body to propel this substance upwards for the purpose of life-extension or death-prevention. There are, however, similar physiological systems within Vajrayāna prior to the Amṛtasiddhi. The examples presented in this section are not intended to be exhaustive (and indeed they are not), but to showcase the existence of such systems in Vajrayāna prior to or within the 11th century.

The concept of something called bindu is found in the 8th-century Guhyasamājatātantra as a point upon which a yogīn places a seed-syllable visualized in meditation.⁵ There is also a mention of bindu as a drop of seminal fluid produced through sexual union.⁶ In the Guhyasamājtāttara, the 18th chapter of the Guhyasamājatātantra, and likely a late 8th-century addition to the original tantra, we see bindu as an object of the mind during Ṛṇāyāma, a drop or point of prāṇa called “prāṇabindu”⁷. Here bindu is an object in meditation, the point one places one’s own seed mantra upon, not a physical substance; however, it is noteworthy that centuries later, at the time of the Amṛtasiddhi’s production, the famed Nāropā locates this bindu in the forehead.⁸

The Laghuākālacakratātantra, or simply Kālacakra, produced circa 1030 CE (so more or less contemporaneous with the Amṛtasiddhi), includes four, individual bindus located in respective cakras, which lead to wrong speech and behavior but, when purified, result in a perfected body. This purification happens through bindu-yoga, where a drop of semen is sent upwards and then diffuses throughout the body, leading to bliss.⁹

As regards the nāḍīs, a fully developed system of 32 channels, with sun and moon corresponding to the primary right and left channels, respectively, exists in Vajrayāna as early as the late 9th-century

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⁴ For an overview of alchemical practices in both South Asia and Sanskritic Buddhism in general see White, David Gordon. The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. 1996. For practices related directly to the Laghuākālacakratātantra and speculation regarding the wider tradition it draws from, see (Wallace 2001).
⁵ buddhamandaladānityastham vajrākāyānīṃ prabhācyāt | hāmakārṇaṃ hṛdaye dhāryāt cītāṃ bindugatāṃ nyasat || buddhamandaladānityastham amatābhāṃ prabhācyāt | akārṇaṃ hṛdaye dhāryāt vajrāṃ bindugatāṃ nyasat || Guhyasamājatātantra 11.42–43. “He should visualize Akṣobhya situated in the center of the Buddha mandala; then visualizing the HŪM syllable in his heart, he should fix [the syllable] at the bindu at the mind. He should visualize Amītābha situated at the center of the Buddha mandala; then visualizing the ĀḤ syllable in his heart, he should fix [the syllable] at the bindu at the vajra.”
⁶ svamāntram padmasaṃyaktam diyaṇḍidṝaprāṇyojaṭaḥ | svaretbindubhir buddhān vajrasattvān ca pūjyate || Guhyasamājatātantra 7.26. “The two sense organs united, his own penis joined with her vagina, he should worship the Buddhās and Vajrasattvas with drops of his own seed.”
⁷ niṣcāryaṃ piṇḍarūpam niśāṃkīgre tu kalyaṇam | paṭicavaram mahāratnam prāṇāyānam iti śrītām || svamāntram hṛdaye dhāryāt prāṇabindugatāṃ nyasat || Guhyasamājottara 147cd-148. “Exhaling, one should set the great jewel of five colors in the form of a ball (piṇḍarūpa) on the tip of the nose. This is called ‘restraint of the breath’ (prāṇāyām). Having visualized one’s own mantra as located in the heart, he should fix [the mantra] on the prāṇabindu.”
⁸ niṣcāryaṃ piṇḍarūpam | iha piṇḍaṃ sacyatvayamandālantāṃ ekatvam mahāyānam avadhūtyantam prāṇavādyk | “Breathing out in the form of a ball.” Here, the ball is the Prāṇa wind of the manḍalas/areas of the right and left [channels], that is unified in the central channel (madhyamad), the Avadhūti. bindugatam bindushāhām labhāṃ tatra nyasen nirahdoṣaḥ | “at the bindu.” In other words, it must be arrested in the location of the bindu, the forehead.” Sekduḍeśatāka, commentary on GSU 147c and 148d, respectively.
⁹ C.f. (Wallace 2001, p. 22, 200) and the Vimalaprabhā commentary on Kālacakratātantra 4.110.
Hevajratantra. With the Kalacakratantra we see the number of channels suddenly explode to number into the hundreds. The Kalacakratantra also employs a six-limbed yoga (sadanigayoga), detailed in a sort-of commentary on the tantra, the 11th-century Sadaingayoga, which comments on a number of texts to explicate its system. Here, in this six-limbed yoga, the goal is upasiddhi, a partial awakening, leading to mahamudra, the perfected state. As mentioned before, the deeply complicated subtle body detailed in the Kalacakratantra mentions bindu, although not quite in the same way as the Amrtasiddhi. The tantra prescribes methods of pranayama, but to put wind into the central channel for the goals of perfection and awakening, not to prolong the yogin’s life. There is an equating of bindu with seminal fluid and a connection with the moon, but this connection is explained by both the Kalacakratantra and the Sadaingayoga as having to do with a co-mingling of fluids in the uterus leading to the development of a fetus, which is part of a larger journey of perfection in which a yogin is influencing his rebirth, or so it seems.

Bindu can be used by the yogin in his own mental transformation towards perfection in the Kalacakratantra, but what the bindu actually does is not made clear. Somehow an arresting of the semen at the glans of the penis will bring about awakening if, for whatever reason, a perfected yogin does not reach the ultimate goal at the moment he should—“If he does not get this desired perfection of mantrins through pratyahara and so on (that is, through the sadanigayoga), he can accomplish it forcefully (aththa) by a repetition of sound by arresting the bindu in the vajra-jewel in the lotus.” Hatha and the involvement of the seminal fluid are a last resort, employed when all else fails.

It is noteworthy that in texts prior to the timing of the Amrtasiddhi, as well as contemporaneous with it, the concept of using force to bring about physical effects is frowned upon in Vajrayana. Jason Birch and James Mallinson have catalogued over a dozen important Vajrayana texts that censure pratyahara.

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Amrtasiddhi

So we have a subtle physiology, that is to say a “yogic body”, and there is manipulation of vayus around the body, and, in the case of the Kalacakratantra and its subsequent tradition, a stoppage of the flow of seminal amrta through the body. But even with all this, we do not have the models of life-extending bindu, or techniques to send the substance back up into the cranial vault. That is, we have models where bindu functions as a means to an end, but there are no models where bindu is the end itself, so to speak. However, variations of this model exist in Vajrayana after the Amrtasiddhi, in both

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10 ta eva balanarasane cantrasyau prajnopaya—corresponding Yogaratnamala comm. To Hevajratantra I.1.21. “So the moon corresponds with lalana (the left channel) and wisdom and the sun corresponds with rasana (the right channel) and means.”
11 pratyaharadhibhy eva kulasamalajaajayantyopasaddhi | Kalacakratantra 4.113.i.cd “Near realization (upasiddhi) [is possible] through pratyahara and so on, as well as through the amra that arises from the Vajra (kulisa) lotus.” The gloss of kulasamalajaajayantyopasaddhi in the Sadaingyoga makes clear the identity of amra as seminal fluid. taththa dhyanam pranayama ca dhunyac ca kulisamalajaajayanta ca upasaddha ca | “Thus, near-realization also concerns contemplation, restraint of the breath and retention (of semen).” The near-realization, according to the deep meaning, is carried out “by means of the ambrosia”, viz., the non-emitted (that is, through the kasayi) sadaingyoga commentary—pranayama siddha iti ha yada rasiavishnangarahito yogi bhavati sada madhyamavahita tada pranayama siddhah | “This means here, when the yogin becomes devoid of the sun and moon ways and his breath always flows in the central channel, then, being purified through restraint of the breath, he is honored.” Viz. praise, “praised by the Bodhisattva.” Hevajratantra I.i.21. Corresponding Sadaingyoga commentary—pranayama siddha iti ha yada rasiavishnangarahito yogi bhavati sada madhyamavahita tada pranayama siddhah | “Of the affictions, etc.” Translated in (Sferra 2000, p. 264). Corresponding Sadaingyoga commentary—pranayama siddha iti ha yada rasiavishnangarahito yogi bhavati sada madhyamavahita tada pranayama siddhah | “This means here, when the yogin becomes devoid of the sun and moon ways and his breath always flows in the central channel, then, being purified through restraint of the breath, he is honored.” Viz. praise, “praised by the Bodhisattva.” Hevajratantra I.i.21.
12 Purified through restraint of the breath, and thus devoid of the moon and sun, he is honored by the Bodhisattva. By dint of retention, he comes into conjunction with the ten forces, corresponding to the destructions of the four Maras, of the afflictions, etc.” Translated in (Sferra 2000, p. 264). Corresponding Sadaingyoga commentary—pranayama siddha iti ha yada rasiavishnangarahito yogi bhavati sada madhyamavahita tada pranayama siddhah | “This means here, when the yogin becomes devoid of the sun and moon ways and his breath always flows in the central channel, then, being purified through restraint of the breath, he is honored.” Viz. praise, “praised by the Bodhisattva.” Hevajratantra I.i.21.
13 For a description of this process, see (Wallace 2004, pp. 57–64).
14 I.ii.16. “So the moon corresponds with lalana (the left channel) and wisdom and the sun corresponds with rasana (the right channel) and means.”
15 s.ad. a˙ngayoga commentary—pranayama siddha iti ha yada rasiavishnangarahito yogi bhavati sada madhyamavahita tada pranayama siddhah | “This means here, when the yogin becomes devoid of the sun and moon ways and his breath always flows in the central channel, then, being purified through restraint of the breath, he is honored.” Viz. praise, “praised by the Bodhisattva.” Hevajratantra I.i.21. Corresponding Sadaingyoga commentary—pranayama siddha iti ha yada rasiavishnangarahito yogi bhavati sada madhyamavahita tada pranayama siddhah | “This means here, when the yogin becomes devoid of the sun and moon ways and his breath always flows in the central channel, then, being purified through restraint of the breath, he is honored.” Viz. praise, “praised by the Bodhisattva.” Hevajratantra I.i.21.
16 nādabhidhāna dhathenābhijogakutālanavānā sadhāraṇa bindurodhā | Kalacakratantra 4.119.i.cd. Birch discusses this passage and its treatment in subsequent commentarial literature on (Birch 2011, p. 535) article on uses of the term “hatha”.
17 The word hatha does not appear in either the Samvaranayogatantra or Candamahadosanatantra—we see balena rather than hathena, and we see balena regularly in the context of forcing cūya through the channels.
the SUT and the CMT. That is to say, this model of an ever-dripping, life-extending seminal bindu that can lengthen life and empower the yogin if he manages to get it back into his cranium, through some means.

Yet, there is no smoking gun, an “ity amrutasiddhī” or obvious direct quotation. But I believe the accumulation of the uncanny connections is enough to make the case that, even if the texts were not drawing directly from the Amrutasiddhi itself, they were likely drawing from the same socio-religious paradigm from which the Amrutasiddhi was produced. Francesco Sferra tells us that the Śadāṅgavyāoga is actually a “collage of quotations” drawn from a number of works, giving us the impression that this text, and by extension possibly the Amrutasiddhi (as well as the Kālacakra), are products of a larger movement within late, esoteric, Sanskritīc Buddhism.18

3. The Śaṃvarodaya and Caṇḍamahārōṣaṇa Tantras

Circumstantial evidence links the Śaṃvarodaya and Caṇḍamahārōṣaṇa tantras to the overall movement towards physical yoga in Vajrayāna, as reflected in the Kālacakra tradition, but none of it ties either tantra specifically to the Amrutasiddhi.

3.1. Subtle Physiology Similarities with Amrutasiddhi

In both the SUT and CMT, we see discussions detailing moving vāyu around the body, with the fifth chapter of the SUT and the 22nd chapter of the CMT devoted to the subject, but as mentioned before, prāṇāyāna is integral to Kālacakra literature as well. There is also an association in the SUT and CMT of the sun and moon with various nādīs,19 but this idea is also found in Kālacakra literature, as is the concept of these internal celestial bodies eclipsing one another.

But there are similarities in the two tantras that do not seem to be found anywhere in Vajrayāna prior to the period of the Amrutasiddhi’s creation. We find a development of a kūḍalini analog in the Amrutasiddhi’s 13th chapter. Here the wind itself ascends the body of the yogin through the female central channel (madhyamā) and pierces (vedha) its way to the top through a series of knots (granthi), culminating in breaking through the door of Brahmatā (brahmāvatāram). This makes yoga successful (yogah prasidhyati), along with the completion of the Great Seal (mahāmudrā) and the Great Lock (mahabandha).20 In the SUT’s 31st chapter there is a similar scenario, where a dormant female energy that lies at a knot around the base of the spine, is moved to action and ultimately ascends the body of the yogin. However, this female energy in the SUT is identified as “yoginī”,21 which is neither the name given in the Amrutasiddhi for the central channel itself, which is madhyamā, nor the kūḍalini of hathavyāga.

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17 “Anupamarakṣa, who is quoted by Nāropa (956–1040), lived between the end of the X and the beginning of the XI century. His main work, the ŚY, cannot be considered original. Apart from the nine initial stanzas composed by the author, this text consists of a well arranged collage of quotations drawn from other works and connected sporadically through short sentences. Furthermore, the central corpus of these quotations is also present in a later work, the SUT by Nāropa, who quotes one of the introductory verses by Anupamarakṣa.” (Sferra 2000, p. 43). For Sferra’s treatment of this milieu see (Sferra 2005).

18 This particular physiological model, that is, of the manipulation of winds through channels in the body into the central channel and then upwards to propel bindu to the cranium (and sometimes beyond) has been related to me by a number of Newar Vajrācārya and Buddhācārya (a subdivision of Śākyas who are caretakers of the Śvayambhū Mahācāitya) informants as the means by which a person both stays alive and potentially extends one’s own life. Newar Buddhism is, of course, the only remaining Sanskritic Buddhism.

19 The equating of the sun and moon with semen and menstrual blood respectively also pervades the Caṇḍamahārōṣaṇatantra, since the co-mingling of the two leads to the production of a fetus in a way paralleling that in the Kālacakratantra. The mixture of these two fluids (or vaginal fluid rather than menses) is the standard biological explanation for the generation of a fetus in premodern Sanskrit texts.

20 See Amrutasiddhi 13.5–12.

21 This yoginī is of four types according the the SUT—padmīnt, hastīnt, saṅkhīnt, or citrīnt. These names are found in a number of lists ranging from Vajrayāna yoginīs (four female members of the jhānacakra in the 12th-or-13th-century Dīkṣāvatāntra chapter 15), to kinds of women in kāmaśīstra (the first chapter of the Anuṣṭavangī is devoted to detailing these four types of women). A few hathāyoga texts include members of this list as names of channels (saṅkhīntī appears in the list of the 14 channels in the 13th-century Vaisāṣasamhitā 2.21–23, the 14th-century Śivasamhitā 2.14–15 and the 17th century Hatharatnacālī 4.34–35. Sivasanāhitā 2.18 also names citrī as a channel.
A unique similarity with the *Amṛtasiddhī* is found in the 22nd chapter of the CMT, the *vāyu*yaṇopapatāla. Here we see a placement of the five winds that mirrors the *Amṛtasiddhī*, with *pṛāṇa* at the heart, *apāṇa* in the anus, *samāṇa* around the navel, *udāna* around the throat, and *vyāna* pervading the body.22 The only other place we see this particular organization of the five *vāyu* predating the *Amṛtasiddhī* is in the 6th-century Śaiva *Niśāsattattvasamhitā* *Naśaśātra*;23 however, it is possible that such an organization has been overlooked elsewhere. The CMT could have taken this organization from the earliest *mantramārga* text, although it seems that a tradition within Vajrayāna, one which the *Amṛtasiddhī* may be connected to, is a more probable source. The *Padmāvati* commentary of the CMT links a breathing yoga to obtaining of five abhijñās, or superknowledges of a Buddha, but there is nothing regarding life-extension.

3.2. Storage of Bindu in the Cranial Vault

We also find mention in both the SUT and CMT of a store of *amṛta*24 above the *ghaṇṭikārāṇḍhara* in a peculiar way. Following coitus, the yogin is told he “should inhale [his ejaculate] through a pipe in his nose to increase his power.”25

The CMT presents this model of a store of *amṛta* in the cranium above the *ghaṇṭikārāṇḍhara* in a peculiar way. Following coitus, the yogin is told he “should inhale [his ejaculate] through a pipe in his nose to increase his power.”27 The *Padmāvati* commentary of the CMT tells us “sometimes he should draw [male and female sexual fluids] from the Lotus (i.e., a female sexual organ) with his mouth, place them in a vessel, insert a straw (nālikāṁ), take note of his breath, and ingest it through his nostril, that is to say the aperture [beyond the uvula]”; the *ghaṇṭikārāṇḍhara*.28 After giving an alternate way

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22 kṛdū pṛāṇa vasen niṭtāmaṇaḥ guṇadamandale | samāṇa nābhidesaṅga tu samodānasaṅca kanthake || vyānaḥ vyāpi sārce ca pradhānāḥ paṁca vāyuñāḥ | Amṛtasiddhī 6.7–6.8ab. “Pṛāṇa always resides in the heart, apāṇa in the anus, samāṇa in the region of the navel, and udāna is always in the throat, and vyāna pervades the body. These are the five main winds:” kṛdū pṛāṇa gude pāṁca samāṇo nābhidesaṅga | udānaṁ kanṭhadeśaṅga tu vāyuñāṁ sarvasvarāṇagah || Čandamahābhāratantra 22.1 “Pṛāṇa is in the heart, apāṇa is in the anus, samāṇa is in the region of the navel, udāna is in the area of the throat, and vyāna is in the all the body.”

23 kṛgūde nābhikāntu ca sarvasvandhau tathāiva ca | pṛāṇaḥdhyāṁ samāṇaḥ bhute ṛṣayān lāṅdaṁ ca me śrīnyah || Niśāsattattvasamhitā Naśaśātra 4.119. “Beginning with pṛāṇa, these are situated [with pṛāṇa] in the heart, [apāṇa] in the anus, [samāṇa] in the navel, [udāna] in the throat, and [vyāna] in every joint.” The Niśāsattattvasamhitā shared several similarities with early Vajrayāna (C.f. Goodall 2015, pp. 31–32). In fact, the verse just preceding Naśaśātra 4.119 prescribes the use of ṛṣayānāh along with prāṇāhā and ṛṣayāṁ, among other techniques. The issue at stake here is the particular arrangement of the winds, that is, which corporeal location each corresponds to. The five (pṛāṇa, apāṇa, udāna, samāṇa, and vyāna) also find the pattern of corresponding to the wind names Nāga, Kurma, Krākara, Devadatta, and Dhanarāja before the Amṛtasiddhī (for example, the pre-10th-century Śaiva Svaychandatantra 7.17) and after the Amṛtasiddhī (for example, the 18th-century lathasyogīc Gherandasamhitā 5.61). The Gherandasamhitā also has the arrangement of the five winds found in the Amṛtasiddhī (Ghs 5.62), but this is a direct quotation of the Amṛtasiddhī, and within a tradition locating authority in the older winds. For more arrangements of the five winds (although not the model found in the Niśāsattattvasamhitā, Amṛtasiddhī, and Čandamahābhāratantra detailed above) see Zysk, Kenneth G. “The Bodily Winds in Ancient India Revisited.” In *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13, pp. S105–15. 2007. For a further description of the record of the five winds in the Niśāsattattvasamhitā and yoga texts in general see (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, pp. 187–98).

24 Mallinson notes a handful of Śaiva texts with the model of a store of *amṛta* in the cranial vault in (Mallinson 2007, p. 28, n. 123). These texts are Sūdhamogasvarinata purata 11a, Mālinivijayottaratana 16.53–54, Kaulajñānānirnaya 5.5–13, and Nṛtratantra purata 7. All these texts predate the Amṛtasiddhī.

25 kanyāṁ sambhogacākaraṁ śoḍdaśaṅgadaṁ raktvām tanmanḍradeśe omkāraṁ || taṁ sarṣṭhou ṛṣayāṁ ghaṇṭikārāṇḍhramārgaṅmaṁ tataṁ sarvatā nītattarām || Svaranarādayatantra 31.24. Translated in (Isuda 1974, p. 326).

26 For a detailed description of this practice see (Mallinson 2007).

27 nāṣyāṁ nālīkāgyatāḥ pibet sāmarthāyaṁdhyāyaḥ || Čandamahābhāratantra 6.75 ab.

28 kadācāṁ padmānukhaṁ matsreṇāḥ bhājanam samāṇaṁ nālīkāṁ prakṛtopa svāśam āhātāṁ niśākayaḥbhāvahañāḥ || ghaṇṭikārāṇḍh ℝeṛ应急预案 arthāḥ | 1... 1... 1... arthāḥ | sātapatraṇagāraṇaṁ vāpaśāntyaḥgāhīmergyunāṃśaṁ yogyo naḥsamāṁśayanāḥdhir bhvanāt || Padmāvati commentary on Čandamahābhāratantra 6.75. “Sometimes he should draw [the male and female sexual fluids] out from the Lotus with his mouth, place them in a vessel, insert a straw, take note of his breath, and ingest it through his nostril, that is to the aperture [beyond] the uvula (ghaṇṭikārāṇḍhara).” The meaning is this: by constantly performing [these] procedure[s], there will be a great increase in the yogi’s strength, inasmuch as he will stop wrinkling, greying, and [even] death.” Translation (Grimes and Szántó 2018, p. 686). The practice may be intellectually connected to the idea of circulation
to nasally ingest these substances, the commentary tells us why one should do this—"by constantly performing these procedures, there will be a great increase in the yogi’s strength, insasmuch as he will stop wrinkling, greying, and [even] death."29 When considering the model we find in the Amṛtasiddhi, this procedure suddenly seems less strange. Bearing in mind the model of a store of life-extending amṛta above the aperture behind the uvula, I suggest the technique the CMT prescribes is alchemical, performed, as it says, to stop aging and even death. The Kālacakkritraṇtra itself details a number of elixirs to eliminate wrinkles and gray hair; however, there is no mention anywhere of sending seminal fluid into the cranial vault by nasal means for the purpose of death-prevention.

3.3. Amṛtasiddhi as a Textual Interpretation Aid

It looks as if the Amṛtasiddhi may potentially help clear up textual puzzles in subsequent Vajrayāna works. In the SUT, the description of bindu ascending the body through a progression of corporeal locations corresponding to vowel characters reaches its climax by saying that on the day of the full moon, the yogini (the apparent kundaliṇi analog who/which has presumably been travelling upwards with the bindu) is to the left and the right of mada (intoxicating, intoxicating, or even semen, among other meanings).30 Now this makes no sense. What is mada doing here? The Tibetan translator changed the meaning to mṛdhīna (forehead or head),31 which thematically makes sense, since the bindu is in the cranium at this point, but the Sanskrit manuscript witnesses all read mada. The SUT has a chapter on mada, devoted to spiritual liquors and their production, so there is precedent with the term in the text, but not in a way that makes sense here. We can of course guess that the meaning of mada is essence or seminal fluid, but the text does not give us precedence to do so.

The seventh chapter of Amṛtasiddhi can strengthen the case of this interpretation, however. It glosses bindu by equating it with several apparent synonyms. “This is bindu, this is candra, this is bija, this is mada, this is tattva, this is jīva, this is the essence of everything.”32 So here we have mada used in the SUT as the thing in the midst of the ascended yogini at the aperture of the head following a

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29 A similar practice involving a straw sending a mixture of seminal fluid and menses into a person’s naval cavity is found in Vāgīṣvaraṅkūṭṭī’s 11th-century Mṛtyuvaṅcana-padeśa (Teaching on the Cheating of Death), although in a different context than the one found in the CMT. Whereas the purpose of the practice detailed in the CMT is for a living yogin, the procedure detailed in the Mṛtyuvaṅcana-padeśa is intended to revive a recently-deceased corpse. mṛtasamājyartham api ksa cād dṛṣṭaṃ upaśayataḥ | tūmakarāṇāharoṣu śrīkaliṇīśe samuttathāḥ || 74 || śrīvinnambhāvaśrīkaṃśuśaṅhithāḥ nāśtāḥ tālāḥ | sadā yad va mṛtasamāja pataī sa śrīkaliṇī śrāvaṇāḥ || 75 || ghṛtakṣaṇākṛtaṇāṅtrānāṃ praveśitaḥ | vahīd mṛtyuvāntaśrīgrapunotapanta kramāt || 76 || punarudāyaṇam dṛṣṭaṃ nirodhaś cātraśaśāyaḥ | pratyakṣadṛṣṭāsānāṁtiḥ yogyo ‘yaṃ bhūṣhānaḥ || 77 || “The revival of the dead is even seen by an appropriate means, through the elements which arise due to the union of a man and a menstruating young woman. Namely this occurs with the ingredients being semen mixed with uterine blood, which is not too cold (i.e., fresh), or with drops of those same substances (or “of that same substance”) which have fallen from the dead body itself. By [those drops] entering the space through a straw smeared in ghee (presumably as a lubricant to get up to the nasal cavity) he should send it in stages into the nostril [of the dead], [having already] drawn it up into the cavity of his own nose. The revival is seen, and the restraint is here detailed. The effectiveness of this practice, respected by many, is clearly observed.” Mṛtyuvaṅcana-padeśa 3.74–77. I translated nirodha as restraint, because it perhaps refers to the necromancing yogin holding the substances up his own nose, before deploying them into the nose of the deceased. Two translations have been done of this work, one in English and another in German. The English, translated by Michael Walter under the title “Cheating Death,” is not reliable (although it is useful as a summary and outline of the text), and it appears in Tantra In Practice (ed. David Gordon White 2000). Although he does not specify if he translated from the Sanskrit or the 11th-century Tibetan translation, Walter’s inclusion of untranslated Tibetan words suggests he translated from the latter. Johannes Schneider’s 2010 study, edition of the Sanskrit text, and German translation is recommended for further study. For biographical details on the text’s monastic author, Vāgīṣvaraṅkūṭṭī, see Taranātha’s Rgya gar chos ‘byung. For the geographic range of Vāgīṣvaraṅkūṭṭī’s intellectual influence, see Péter-Dániel Szántó’s chapter in a forthcoming festschrift for Prof. Alexis Sanderson; and for Vāgīṣvaraṅkūṭṭī’s impact in Nepal see Iain Sinclair’s 2016 dissertation “The appearance of tantric monasticism in Nepal: A history of the public image and fasting ritual of Newar Buddhism, 980–1380” pp. 57–61. I thank Shamin Hatley for drawing my attention to the Mṛtyuvaṅcana-padeśa.

30 madaśa vīmadakse ne pātrāmāśe amalatāḥ | saṃvega-vedantam 31.34 “On the day of the full moon, there is [the goddess] who has the nature of the characters AH and AH left and right of mada.” Translated in (Isuda 1974, p. 328).

31 spyi gtsug in the Tibetan.

32 idam bindur idam candrum idam bijam idam madaḥ | idam tattvaṃ idam jīvaḥ sarvasāramayām tv idam || Amṛtasiddhi 7.3. Unpublished edition Mallinson & Szántó.
description of bindu’s ascent, and we have the Amṛtasiddhi telling us that mada can mean bindu. I do not think it is a stretch to interpret the SUT’s mystery mada as bindu. In fact, mada is also mentioned at the beginning of this overall section in the SUT when we are told that a subtle, four-petalled lotus is located in the mahāsukhacakrā in the head and that it is the place of mada. Again, the place of intoxication makes no sense in this context. We can see that mada must refer to bindu, and the Amṛtasiddhi gives us support. Just below this, mahāsukhacakrā is said to be a 32-petalled lotus from which the syllable HAM flows downwards—“ḥāṃkārō adhomukham sravati.”33 We are told that this 32-petalled lotus is bhijabhūti, made of seed. Here, again, the Amṛtasiddhi can potentially clear things up if we take take bhijabhūta to mean this 32-petalled lotus is made of bindu; however, it is also possible bhija refers to the downward-flowing HAM, since bhija, or more frequently svabhitva, has the esoteric sense of referring to a seed syllable.

4. Final Remarks

Based strictly on the materials reviewed here, namely the Samvardayā and Cāndamahāroṣana tantras, it does not appear that the Amṛtasiddhi was important in subsequent Sanskritī Vajrayāna textual traditions. While the physiology the yogic text employs does include innovations which seem to be found in these two tantras, the lack of any quotations or references to the text itself makes the possibility of drawing a direct connection very unlikely.

Techniques for placing bindu back into the cranium, whether through the circulation of wind detailed in the Amṛtasiddhi, or snorting it through a straw as in the Cāndamahāroṣanatantra illustrate common physiological models, but not a textual connection. The shared organization of the five winds in this tantra and in the Amṛtasiddhi is striking,35 but again, this may be attributed to something wider than a single—possibly originally fringe—yogic text. The ability of the Amṛtasiddhi to clarify the otherwise-confusing usage of mada in the Samvardayātantra also lends support for the existence of a shared intellectual landscape regarding subtle physiologies and how the body might be manipulated.

33 sirasi mahāsukhacakre caturdālapdam naścim | madasthānam sarvasaśādiśatārāpātupat || 19 || bodhimandascvakāthāna bhijabhūtāna bhūhi dvātiṃśaśaładapdam | tanmādhye āṃkārō dhīhomukham sravati || 20 || Samvardayātantra 31.19–20 “A subtle, four-petalled lotus is [located] in the mahāsukhacakrā in the head. It is the place of mada due to its being the supportive form of everything. Outside [of it] is a thirty-two-petalled lotus made up of bhija [and] having the nature of the seat of awakening. In the middle of it is a HAM syllable that flows downwards.” Translated in (Tsuda 1974, p. 328). Alexis Sanderson pointed out to me that “adhomukham” could mean “facing downwards” here, in the sense that the imagined character of the seed syllable is turned upside down, but added either reading is possible, and an obvious one is not clear. (Personal communication on 29 September 2019) The reading of an upside-down seed syllable is supported a few lines later in the 25th verse of the same chapter—bhūte dharmacakram astadālam vīsuṇpadnam maṇḍye hūṃkārē adhomukhasthitam. “An eight-petalled viśe lotus (lotus with pedals facing both up and down, recognizable from Buddhist iconography as the throne sat upon by Buddhas) is in the heart. In the middle [of the lotus] is situated a HUM syllable facing downwards.” The flowing from HAM could still be downwards, regardless of which direction the seed syllable is facing, so the ambiguity remains.

34 Since they are recorded entirely in Tibetan, and not translations from Sanskrit or any Sanskritī tradition, I have not included mention of the biographies of Sāriputra (1335–1426 CE), the East Indian abbot of Mahābodhi temple in Bodhgaya during a period typically viewed as being after Buddhism had disappeared from within the borders of modern India. His life is detailed in-depth in Arthur McKeown’s 2019 Guardian of a Dying Flame, Harvard Oriental Series 89. At a point within Sāriputra’s esoteric biography, recorded in the margins of the manuscript McKeown examined, are details of practices similar to those in the Amṛtasiddhi intended to extend life, taught to the abbot by his teacher Gholenāth (whom he wrote a biography of). Coincidentally, it is today the position of the Nātha sampradāya that hathayoga originated with their order. By extension, due to its being a foundational text for hathayoga, there would be teachings of the Nāthās originating in the Amṛtasiddhi, meaning that if Sāriputra had a Nātha guru, it is possible he received teachings from, or at the very least, connected with a tradition placing authority on the Amṛtasiddhi. Sāriputra also reportedly authored a biography of Gorakhnāth (Gorakṣa), one of the nine Nāthās of the Nātha sampradāya who is credited with founding the order. There is another possible connection between Sāriputra and the Amṛtasiddhi—the Mahābodhi temple abbot also penned a biography of Virūpākṣa, the mahāsiddha praised in the opening of the Amṛtasiddhi. In this biography Sāriputra details a sādhana taught to Virūpākṣa by Chinnamastā herself, the Buddhist goddess praised in the Amṛtasiddhi’s opening margāla verse. For more on Sāriputra’s life see the translations and editions of the various biographies and autobiographies recorded in Tibetan and attributed to him in the appendices of McKeown’s 2019 book, and McKeown’s explanations of what is recorded in the primary sources in the corresponding chapters. For a detailed examination of the possible Buddhist connections of the early Nātha sampradāya see Mallinson, James. “Kālaśaṇcana in the Konkan: How a Vajrayāna Hathayoga Tradition Cheated Buddhism’s Death in India.” Religions, 10, 273.: 1–33. 2019.

35 Since its only chronologically antecedent location is an early Śaiva text!
for longevity. As mentioned in the opening, Mallinson has made clear the importance of the *Amṛtasiddhi* on subsequent *hathayoga* traditions. The present inquiry could be expanded to ask, not only why the text did not gain traction within Sanskritic Vajrayāna traditions, but also why it was nevertheless so successful in the so-called “Hindu” *hathayoga* ones.

Far more study needs to be done on the milieu from which all these ideas were generated. For example, the *Samvarodayatantra* has a chapter on “rasāyana” that is as yet unedited. There is a project underway by a group of Japanese scholars to slowly edit the *Padmīnt* commentary of the *Samvarodayatantra* and I am myself in the process of editing and translating the *Padminī* commentary of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*. The *Dākarnavatāntara*, which is contemporaneous with the *Samvarodaya* and *Caṇḍamahāroṣana* tantras, apparently has lengthy discussions of physical manipulation of the subtle body, however, with the exception of its *apabhraṃśa* songs, it remains unedited. David Grey and others are in the process of editing and translating the Sanskrit text. There is also a need for a comprehensive collation of materials preserved in Tibetan, Javanese, Khmer, and other translations, as the Buddhist yogic tradition was never confined to India and it continues to this day.

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