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EMERGENCE OF A BUDDHIST WARRIOR GODDESS AND THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TANTRIC BUDDHISM: THE CASE OF MĀRĪCĪ

JINAH KIM *

Introduction: On "Tantric" Buddhism and Buddhist goddesses

In studying Indic Buddhism and its cultural history, we find myriads of goddesses from early on.¹ The semi-divine tree spirits such as *yakṣīs* and *devatās* and the nature spirits such as *Hārītī* adorn the entrance to the early Buddhist sites demarcating the sacred space. The development of Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism witnessed the emergence of the goddesses assigned to primary religious roles not only as cultic deities addressing the worldly needs of the devotees but also as the fitting symbols of fundamental doctrinal values. This extolled status is reflected in the regal and heavenly appearance of the quintessential Mahāyāna Buddhist goddesses such as *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Tārā*. But the most fantastic and powerful goddesses appear with the advent of tantric Buddhism. It is not surprising to find fantastic female deities in what is later categorized as tantric

Buddhism or Vajrayāna² because ascendancy of female principles is one of the distinctive characteristics of this school. The general characteristics of tantric Buddhism, however, do not explain specific choices made to represent goddesses in tantric Buddhist context.

As recent scholarship on Indian Esoteric Buddhism asserts, tantric or Esoteric³ Buddhism can be distinguished from the rest of Buddhism principally by its ritual means (*upaya*-s), and it was never a single religious entity with a unified rule on practices.⁴ Ritual practices associated with the *yoginītantras*,⁵ including the sexual yoga and the practices involving five forbidden substances, which seriously undermine fundamental Buddhist values and the *pratimokṣa* vows of both lay and monastic Buddhists, emerged during the period between the ninth and the twelfth century in India. Their emergence has been attributed to the interactions with Śaivas, especially Kāpālikas and Pāśupatas, but also with other medieval Indic religious traditions such as Vaiṣṇavas and tribal

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traditions.⁶ The direction of influence among these religious traditions is a matter for debate, and the question of which of these traditions have the most commonalities with which Buddhist *tantra* still needs to be worked out, but it seems clear that Buddhists creatively appropriated varying elements from all of these sources including those within its own tradition. The surviving sculptures and paintings depicting tantric Buddhist deities in their marvelous and frightening forms suggest that the visual arena was the forte of Indian Esoteric Buddhists' creativity. In this essay, I would like to examine the historical development of the iconography of the goddess Mārīcī in eastern India in response to the interactions with varying elements associated with Tantric Buddhism identified above. By analyzing the paintings and the sculptures of Mārīcī from Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Nepal, I hope to demonstrate the process of the creative adaptations of different elements in reformulating older values. By identifying possible sources for specific iconographic elements of different forms of Mārīcī, I explain the iconographic development of Mārīcī in historical context and locate this process in relation to the development of the Buddhist *tantras*. I suggest that the popularity of Mārīcī images in varying types may be closely related to the goal of Tantric Buddhist ritual practices. I argue that Mārīcī in her most formidable warrior manifestation may have been a favorite goddess of many medieval Indian Tantric Buddhist

practitioners because she served as a perfect symbol of rapid Enlightenment that they sought to achieve.

Transformation of a Maiden of the Aśoka tree into a "Vajrayāna" goddess

Mārīcī, the lady of brilliant light rays, is one of the better-understood Buddhist goddesses. We could identify three main types of Mārīcī in surviving visual representations, a two-armed attendant type (Type 1), a six to eight armed warrior type (Type 2), and a ten-to-twelve armed wrathful type (Type 3) (Diagram).⁷ The first two types belong to the graceful or "*vīra*" or hero category and the last one belongs to the "dwarfed and grotesque" or "*vāmana*" category that Linrothe identifies as the two major types of *krodha-vighnāntaka* or the wrathful deities that go through three-phased Tantric transformations.⁸ In her two-armed form called "Aśokakāntā Mārīcī," "Mārīcī who is the maiden of the Aśoka tree", her origin may be traced back to the ancient tradition of tree spirits as Miranda Shaw suggests, and this may be the earliest form of Mārīcī. In this form, she almost always appears as one of the attendants to the goddess Tārā.⁹ In the *Sādhanaṃālā* the collection of the *sādhana*-s (lit. means of conjuring up a deity, usually an instruction for ritual meditation on a chosen deity, i.e., a deity-yoga or *ahaṃkāra*) compiled during the late eleventh and the early twelfth centuries, Khadiravaṇī Tārā (Tārā of Acacia forest) has Ekajaṭā and

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Aśokakāntā-mārīcī as two attendants on either side. For another popular form, Mahāśrī Tārā, *sādhana* texts list four attendants including Ekajaṭā, Aśokakāntā Mārīcī, Ārya Jāṅgulī and Mahāmāyūrī. Interestingly, Aśokakāntā Mārīcī does not appear as an attendant figure in early independent images of Tārā. When there is only one female attendant, Ekajaṭā, a pot-bellied, menacing goddess who often holds up an elephant skin was a favourite choice.¹⁰ Pairing Ekajaṭā, with a male deity, Hayagrīva, was also a common choice perhaps more so than the case of pairing with Mārīcī in early images of Tārā as seen in a tenth-century stele of standing Tārā now in Indian Museum (A25135) (Pl.1, fig.1). Here Ekajaṭā who is pot-bellied and stands in the terrific mode of *pratyālīḍha* (with her right leg bent and left leg stretched) guards Tārā placed on the proper right side of the goddess, occupying a more important position in the hierarchical arrangement of esoteric Buddhist iconography than Hayagrīva (or Yamāntaka) who stands in a rather relaxed manner in contrast. Ekajaṭā in her terrifying attitude with elephant skin stretched over her head as if it is her shawl also protects the female devotee placed right underneath her. The visual connection between the guardian and the supplicant is unmistakable: the kneeling female devotee whose head is covered with a shawl just like Ekajaṭā with her elephant hide is placed directly under Ekajaṭā hanging potbelly in between her spread legs. Early images depicting Tārā with Aśokakāntā

Mārīcī have Mārīcī to Tārā's proper left, with the more hierarchically important place reserved for Ekajaṭā. In a tenth-century stele of Tārā now in the Guimet museum (Ma2480), Mārīcī appears on Tārā's proper left side holding a twig of *aśoka* tree in her right hand. She leans against an axe, which Hayagrīva usually holds in this position as seen in the Indian Museum image (Pl.1, fig2). In contrast to active and menacing appearance of Ekajaṭā, she appears benign and gentle. Standing sensuously with her right leg bent and crossed behind her left one and with left hand on her hip, she is not too different from an image of Yakṣī at early stūpa sites such as Bharhut and Sanchi but the axe she borrowed from Hayagrīva, and a noose in her evocatively placed left hand signal her impending transformation into a more powerful goddess of Esoteric Buddhist tradition.

Among her two-armed images, we should also note that the representations that almost exactly match the textual descriptions in the *sādhana*s are found in later images, such as manuscript paintings datable to the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. The attendant type (Type 1) Aśokakāntā Mārīcī in manuscript paintings is always yellow in colour and has three eyes, and she usually holds a sprig of Aśoka flowers. As we notice in the paintings in an eleventh-century Nepalese manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* [*the Perfection of Wisdom sūtra in eight thousand verses*, henceforth *AsP*] now in the Asiatic Society Kolkata (A15)¹¹,

Āśokakāntā Mārīcī became the foremost attendant of Tārā, pushing Ekajaṭā, represented as a blue goddess with menacing red eyes and a *kartri* or a ritual dagger, to the secondary position as seen in a panel depicting Tārā in Potalaka mountain on folio 113r (Pl.2, fig.3). Here, Green Tārā in preaching gesture is seated under a tree facing the entourage of goddesses, and we see that the yellow two-armed goddess Mārīcī sits in the foremost position addressing Tārā directly with her raised hands while Ekajaṭā, is tucked away behind her. She is consistently given the primary position among the attendant goddesses as seen in another panel depicting Khadiravaṇī Tārā (the caption reads “*kṣairavaṇī-tārā-bhaṭṭārikā*”) from the same manuscript on folio 139v, where it is Mārīcī that sits on Tārā's proper right side. This is true of most manuscript paintings of the goddess Tārā with two attendants prepared during the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, including those prepared in eastern Indian monastic centres such as Nālandā.

In the twelfth-century images of Tārā, we see that Mārīcī often holds a *vajra* in her right hand as seen in a sculpture of standing Tārā donated by Bhaṭṭa Išvara now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata (A25158). Mārīcī stands in a relaxed manner on Tārā's proper right with her right leg bent behind the left leg (Pl.3, fig.4). It is unmistakable that she holds a *vajra*, a diamond scepter, in her raised right hand in front of her heart. This feature is also seen in a late twelfth century manuscript donated by a queen

Vihūṇadevī, a number of folios from which are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this manuscript, Mārīcī is always represented with a *vajra* in her right hand and sometimes without the tree branch, as if *vajra* is her main attribute. It seems that her status is promoted above Ekajaṭā by the late tenth century, which may coincide with the advent of the other two types of Mārīcī, and with her rising importance in the development of Tantric Buddhism. As we will see shortly, it does not seem accidental that she holds a *vajra*, the most important symbol of Esoteric or Tantric Buddhism, which is later called “Vajrayāna,” in front of her heart in twelfth century representations.

Mārīcī, the Warrior Goddess of Light: sources and interpretations

The second type (Type 2), Mārīcī in the form of a warrior goddess with six to eight arms, appear as independent images in eastern India around the tenth century. Let us examine various iconographic elements that were incorporated into the formulation of this type. In this form, she stands like a heroic archer, in *pratyālīḍha* attitude with her right knee bent and left leg outstretched (Pl.3, fig.5). One of the interesting elements introduced with this type of Mārīcī is that she rides a chariot drawn by seven pigs or boars, which is driven by a female charioteer who usually is depicted with a porcine head and sits above Rāhu (one of the nine planets, the eclipse deity and the lunar node). The chariot and Rāhu immediately brings to mind the association

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with the Indic Sun god, Sūrya, whose characteristic marker is a chariot driven by his charioteer Aruṇa and drawn by seven horses. Sūrya, who is always represented in erect and rigid standing posture, is not a direct iconographic source for the Type 2 Mārīcī's iconography except for the idea of a chariot drawn by seven animals.¹² This form of Mārīcī is not necessarily a Buddhist response to the idea of Sūrya. Nonetheless, incorporating the essential element of Sūrya iconography highlights her nature as the goddess of dawn. As many surviving images of Mārīcī from Bodhgaya, the site of Buddha's enlightenment, mostly dating from the ninth century onwards, suggest, this aspect seems to have become even more important as her association with Enlightenment grew.¹³ Another interesting iconographic element in Type 2 Mārīcī is that of a boar. As we notice in a tenth-century image of Mārīcī now in the Lucknow State Museum (Pl.3, fig.5), one of her three heads shown here is represented as boar-faced. All of her attendants, who are springing out from Mārīcī to all directions like the rays of the sun, are also boar-faced. This boar aspect of Mārīcī connects her with Vārāhī, the She-Boar among the seven mothers (*saptamātrkā*). As Donaldson notes, the boar element in Mārīcī iconography brings out the solar aspect of Varāha known in the Vedas, which is more or less lost in the later imageries of Vārāhī and Varāha, Viṣṇu's boar incarnation.¹⁴ Although the sow-face in Mārīcī is clearly taken from Varāha and

Vārāhī iconography, Vārāhī is not a direct source for Mārīcī iconography as Vārāhī is almost always a pot-bellied mother who is usually seated, seen in an eleventh century sculpture of Vārāhī from Dharmasālā, Orissa, now in the Orissa state museum in Bhubaneswar (Pl.4, fig.6). In the Orissan image, Vārāhī is shown pot-bellied and voluminous in contrast to the fit and energetic body type of Mārīcī. The only clear common element is the sow face. In her heroic attitude with her right leg bent and left leg stretched, Type 2 Mārīcī may be closer to Varāha, who is often depicted in heroic pose with one leg bent and raised up and the other leg stretched. Whether it is Varāha or Vārāhī that informed the choice of the sow-face in her iconography, her iconography clearly makes a reference to a well-established Vaiṣṇava iconography.

If her boar aspect has a Vaiṣṇava connection, her warrior-like stance and the powerful yet graceful form of body can be compared to that of Durgā in the contemporary eastern Indian representations of *Durgā-Mahiśāsura-mardinī* (Goddess Durgā killing the buffalo demon).¹⁵ Especially in her eight-armed form in which we see her wielding a sword in her raised right arm, the comparison does not seem to be out of place. The eight-armed Mārīcī images known from Bihar, such as the late tenth-early eleventh century stele now in Indian Museum, Kolkata, depict her standing heroically in *pratyālīḍha* with her right leg bent and left leg stretched while her eight arms spread around her wielding weapons,

including a sword raised above her head (Pl.4, fig.7). A tenth-century image of Durgā from Bihar now in the National Museum, New Delhi, shows the goddess in a very similar posture, with her right leg bent and left leg stretched and her eight arms spreading around her holding various weapons, one of which is a sword raised up above her head (Pl.5, fig.8). Durgā appears more martial and activated partly because her right leg is bent at more than ninety-degree angle as if she is jumping on the decapitated buffalo, and the weapons in her hands are more discernible, highlighting her martial aspect. But with the same number of arms spread around holding various weapons standing in a formidable pose, Mārīcī is as warrior-like as Durgā. Perhaps, she appears slightly more contained and controlled in her posture with her erect and forward-facing upper body, not forgetting her Buddhist identity as a symbol of enlightenment. By appropriating iconographic elements from well-known Hindu gods and goddesses, the vision of Mārīcī elaborated in these sculptures dating from the tenth through the twelfth centuries presented a warrior goddess of shining light who could serve as a powerful symbol of Enlightenment in tantric Buddhist context.

In an eight-armed form, she often holds a sword, a *vajra*, an arrow and a needle in her right hands and a noose held in *tarjanī mudrā*, an elephant goad (*aṅkuśa*), a branch of *aśoka*, and a bow. While a branch of *aśoka* tree remains the distinctive identification marker of Mārīcī,

a "*vajra*" becomes an indispensable attribute of Mārīcī. In an early twelfth century manuscript of the *Pañcaviṃśatī Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* [*Perfection of Wisdom* in 25000 verses, hence forth *PvP*]¹⁶, Mārīcī appears at least twice, once in her eight-armed form and another in a two-armed form. The eight-armed image is placed on a recto of a folio bearing the end of Chapter 31 of the *PvP*. The eight-armed goddess stands with her right leg bent and left leg stretched (*pratyālīḍha*) in front of flames. She is represented with three heads: the one behind her left ear shows a blue porcine face. A golden yellow coloured boar (or sow) appears in between her spread legs, also emphasizing her boar connection.¹⁷ The image on folio 543r depicts a two-armed goddess standing in *pratyālīḍha* stance. It is most likely that she represents Mārīcī as she holds a twig of flowers in her left hand while her raised right hand holds a *vajra*. She also has three eyes, in addition to the *tarjanī mudrā* held in her left hand, suggesting her identity as Mārīcī. It is interesting to note that the two-armed form is shown in Type 2-mode unlike the two-armed Mārīcī images we have discussed earlier. She stands in heroic pose in which she is ready to strike amidst flame (Pl.6, fig.9). The flame surrounding these two Mārīcī images also suggests her connection to other Tantric Buddhist deities who are often depicted in the midst of flame. Not all Type 2 Mārīcī images are represented with flame, but those with the flame as their iconographic element allude to the next phase of iconographic

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development, the most “tantric” manifestation of the goddess. These iconographic elements such as flames and a *vajra* along with her heroic yet graceful body type suggest a connection between Mārīcī and Vajravārāhī, one of the most important female figures of *yoginītantras*.¹⁸ Vajravārāhī is a *yoginī* who is most often depicted as a naked red woman holding a skull cup in her left hand and a *vajra* in her right hand in eastern Indian manuscript paintings. As seen in the fantastic image of Mārīcī in the *AsP* manuscript now in the Asiatic Society Mumbai BI-210, she is often represented as a voluptuous two-armed naked woman with long disheveled hair wearing only bone ornaments (Pl.6, fig.10). She drinks blood out of the raised skull up and stands in *ālīḍha* attitude with left leg bent and right leg stretched while trampling on two Hindu gods, Kālaratrī and Bhairava amidst flame. Although Vajravārāhī in this late twelfth-early thirteenth century eastern Indian manuscript painting does not have a boar-face that she is sometimes shown with in later Tibetan representations, her physical features, such as slender yet active body type and three-eyed face, are shared with Type 2 representations of Mārīcī, showing common visual traits among tantric Buddhist goddesses known in medieval India.

“Tantric” manifestation of Mārīcī and her role in tantric Buddhist context

Type 3 forms of Mārīcī seem to take the inspiration from a slightly different

source. Type 3 Mārīcī is represented as a pot-bellied (described as “*lambodara*” in *sādhana*-s), wrathful red goddess with ten to twelve arms. If the degree of intensity in frightfulness and sanguine qualities determines the level of tantric efficacy intended in a form, this form of Mārīcī is the most tantric of all three types. Her historical and iconographic origin also indicates the incorporation of the elements of the *Mahāyoga*- and the *yoginī-tantras*. Her designated title, “Oḍḍiyana Mārīcī” in the *sādhana* texts, suggest her connection with a region in present day Swat Valley in Pakistan, which is associated with intense Tantric Buddhist activities in the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁹ It is difficult to determine if this type actually originates from Oḍḍiyana because by the eleventh century when this type emerges the Swat Valley region's Buddhist activities may have been limited. It is more likely that it takes the name “Oḍḍiyana” to denote a strong tantric aspect of the goddess since Oḍḍiyana *pīṭha* is one of the four *pīṭhas* (lit. seat, often powerful sacred sites associated with the *yoginī-cult*) listed in the *Cakrasamvaratantra*.²⁰ Type 3 representations of Mārīcī are rare among the sculptures of Bihari and Bengali provenances.²¹ The two Nepalese manuscripts from the eleventh century present a chance to examine the iconographic characteristics of this type rather clearly. The painting in an *AsP* manuscript dated 1015CE (Cambridge University Library Add 1643) shows the goddess in her ten-armed manifestation

holding a sword, an arrow, a *vajra*, an elephant goad (*aṅkuśa*), a mace in her right hands, *tarjanī mudrā*, a noose, a severed head of Brahma, a *kapāla* (?), a bow and a twig of *aśoka* flower in her left hands.²² She is represented with four faces, which most likely implies a fifth face in the back of the head. Interestingly, a blue boar-shaped head is placed on top of the rest, retaining her boar character from the second Type. This feature is also described in one of the *Oḍḍiyāna-mārīcī-sādhana-s*.²³ The caption next to the panel reads “*oḍḍiyāna-mārīcī*,” clearly identifying the image as *Oḍḍiyāna māricī*. Similar features are represented in another Nepalese manuscript dated 1071CE discussed above (Asiatic Society, Kolkata A 15). Although the unfortunate restoration effort of taping the folio together makes it difficult to see the details, similar features, such as the fifth head on top of the rest in blue boar-faced shape are drawn in this painting (Pl. 7, fig. 11). She also holds a sword, a *vajra*, an arrow, an elephant goad, a mace, in her five right hands, and *tarjanī mudrā*, severed head, a bow, a twig of *aśoka* flower, and a shield in her five left hands. The caption here reads “*otyana māricī*,” suggesting her identification as *Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī*. The pot-bellied aspect along with the boar face may remind us of *Vārāhī* as the possible source, but the combination of her active stance, pot-bellied figure, association with a tree, and fiery aspect of a tantric Buddhist goddess makes it possible to connect her with another Buddhist goddess *Parṇaśabarī*. *Parṇaśabarī*, whose name

literally means a tribal woman (*śabarī*) clothed in leaves (*parṇa*), was an important goddess associated with healing epidemic diseases, such as small pox. Her iconography clearly conveys her healing power as she tramples on two figures stricken by pox as seen in a painting in a twelfth century *Pañcarakṣā* manuscript now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.²⁴ She has three heads each with three eyes, and holds a *vajra*, an arrow, and an axe in her right hands, and *tarjanī mudrā*, a bow, and a tree branch in her left hands. While this iconography is not necessarily based on a tribal goddess, at least not of the *Śabarās*²⁵, her role, her name and her attributes all suggest *Parṇaśabarī*'s strong connection with forest and tribal areas.²⁶ In her terrifying attitude, her pot-bellied figure, and her powerful stance in front of the flaming backdrop, *Parṇaśabarī*'s iconography has a lot of commonalities with that of Type 3 *Mārīcī*. If *Mārīcī*'s most tantric manifestation draws inspiration from *Parṇaśabarī*, this process of iconographic formation parallels the process of the development of the *Mahayoga* - and the *yoginī-tantras* for which some of the creative energies was derived from the *siddha* communities' interactions with the tribal areas as Davidson argues.²⁷ Paintings of these two goddesses in a twelfth century *AsP* manuscript from eastern India now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (IS 4.1958-10.1958) provides an art historical support for the hypothesis that Type 3 *Mārīcī* iconography may draw its inspiration from

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Parṇaśabarī.²⁸ In this manuscript, Mārīcī and Parṇaśabarī are placed on the left and right panels of the last folio respectively. They mark the end of the manuscript as cultic goddesses that can grant protections to the devotees, in this case, the donor Udayasiṃha whose name appears on the verso of this very folio. The left panel of folio 179r depicts Mārīcī in what seems to be the fusion of the two types, the warrior type (Type 2) and the wrathful type (Type 3) (Pl. 7, fig. 12). In this painting, she is not as heavy as the Type 3 images in the Nepalese manuscripts mentioned above. Her skin is yellowish colour instead of red and she does not hold a head of Brahma. She is also represented with eight arms, holding a sword, an arrow, a *vajra* and a mace in her right hands, and *tarjanī mudrā*, a flag, a noose, a bow in her left hands. Although she does not hold her most typical attribute, the *aśoka* branch, we can see her blue porcine face behind her left ear, signaling her connection to Type 2 Mārīcī. Mārīcī and Parṇaśabarī are represented in an almost identical body type and shown in the same stance with the flame in the background. Visually, both Mārīcī and Parṇaśabarī invoke a sense of fright and power, befitting their cultic roles as protectresses at the end of a manuscript. This iconographic configuration with a close association with Parṇaśabarī puts Mārīcī in the lower ranking of cultic and protector deities that deal with worldly issues in the hierarchical organization of Esoteric Buddhist iconographic program apparent in this manuscript. But examining

this manuscript's iconographic program as a whole reveals that Mārīcī appears twice, and she plays a more central role as the symbol and the source of Enlightenment in Tantric Buddhist context in addition to this cultic role.

As seen in the diagram 2, a second Mārīcī resides on folio 90r, in the centre of the manuscript, facing Vajrasattva (Pl. 8, fig. 13). Represented in her Type 2 form with six arms holding a *vajra*, an arrow, a needle, a thread in *tarjanī* gesture, a bow, and an *Aśoka* branch, this magnificent Mārīcī stands under a *caitya* arch. Facing Vajrasattva who is designed as the centre of a *maṇḍala* possibly drawn from the *Pinḍīkrama-akṣobhyamaṇḍala* described in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī* (NSP 2)²⁹, she may be the consort of Vajrasattva, Vajradhātviśvarī. One *sādhana* describes Vajradhātviśvarī Mārīcī as a frightening wrathful goddess with twelve arms. According to the *sādhana* collected in the *Sādhanamala*, she is red in colour with burning yellowish colour hair standing upwards, and has a hanging belly (*lambodaram*). She wears a garland of skulls and stands in *pratyālīḍha* attitude inside a *caitya-garbha* (womb of a *caitya*). Such a terrifying manifestation of a goddess as described in the *sādhana* text would be slightly out of place in the context of the *maṇḍala* constructed here, and it seems that the artisan created a suitable female counter part for Vajradhātviśvarī as the consort of Vajrasattva as well as the central focus of the manuscript's iconographic program, using existing

Mārīcī iconography. She is indeed shown inside a *caitya* just like the Type 3 form of Vajradhātviśvarī- Mārīcī, but her body is slender and fit as in Type 2 warrior forms. She is also yellowish white in colour. Instead of twelve arms and six faces, she has only six arms and three faces, one of which is the blue-porcine head. In this more gracious formulation, Vajradhātviśvarī, in fact, is an esoteric manifestation of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, who is the progenitor and the ultimate symbol of the text itself, in the context of the *Guhyasamājatantra*. The *Pradīpoddyotana*, Candrakīrti's commentary on the *Mūlaguhyasamājatantra*, comments on the verse on the mother of the Buddha in Chapter V of *Guhyasamājatantra*: "Having drawn forth the (lady) Prajñāpāramitā (from the Clear Light) dwelling in his own heart who is the mother of the Buddha, he should engage in union with her, because it is said (in the *Sarvarahasyatantra*, verse 46): "The great goddess dwelling in the heart, causing the *yoga* of the *yogin*, the mother of all the Buddhas, is called "Queen of the Diamond Realm."³⁰ According to Candrakīrti's commentary, Prajñāpāramitā as the mother of all Buddhas is recast as Vajradhātviśvarī or the Queen of the Diamond Realm in the *Guhyasamāja* context. In the heart of the book of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, then, Mārīcī is transformed into the great goddess of the *Guhyasamāja tantra*, as an independent goddess about to embrace Vajrasattva, the ultimate teacher/practitioner, the guru of

all the transcendental Buddhas and *vajrācaryas*,³¹ while radiating clear light from the centre.

Epilogue: Mārīcī and tantric Buddhist masters

Type 2 and Type 3 forms of Mārīcī suggest a process of appropriating various prevailing iconographic elements from different sectarian and communal groups into a Buddhist symbol, which mirrors the developmental process of the Buddhist *tantras*. As we have seen, their formal and iconographic features indicate Mārīcī's general connection to other tantric Buddhist goddesses. The development of Type 2 and Type 3 forms of Mārīcī may be related to the advent of the *Mahāyoga*- and *yoginī-tantras* in eastern Indian monastic circles. It is hard to establish where these forms were formulated, but they were certainly known in monastic circles along with other tantric deities during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries as surviving images from monastic sites such as Nālandā suggest. If the monastic authorities and *paṇḍitas* sought to tame the tantric texts like the *Buddhakapāla-tantra* and bring them into the main stream Buddhist fold through "hermeneutic gymnastics" as Davidson argues³², the formation of Esoteric Buddhist iconography as we have seen in the development of Mārīcī iconography often reflects a similar process of taming tantric, and often, external elements into a Buddhist image through appropriation of different iconographic motifs, which were

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often given symbolic values associated with Buddhist doctrine and practice. In particular, Mārīcī, as a goddess of radiating light ray that incorporated all the martial and sanguine elements of tantric deities in her iconographic development, seems to have had a special connection with tantric Buddhist traditions. Her importance and role in tantric Buddhist traditions can be further illuminated through considering possible ritual practices related to the production and use of her images.

The ritual procedures described in the *sādhana*-s for Mārīcī are straightforward as in any other *sādhana* texts: they lead a practitioner to the visualization of the goddess and ultimately to the practitioner's identification with the goddess, a common goal of the deity yoga (*ahamkāra*). One intriguing detail on an eleventh century Mārīcī stele from Orissa now in the National Museum, New Delhi, raises a tantalizing possibility that Tantric Buddhist masters may have been involved in the rituals related to Mārīcī (Pl.9, fig.14). An eight-armed Mārīcī in Type 2 form stands formidably on a chariot drawn by seven horses.³³ The five *tathāgatas* that are depicted as if flying outward from her amidst flames convey Mārīcī's importance as the direct source of Enlightenment. Right next to her bent right leg sit two devotees, possibly a man and a woman. On the other side on a slightly raised platform than the opposite side sit two figures, again male and female (Pl.9, fig.15). The male figure, here shown wearing a crown and holding *vajra* and *ghaṇṭa*, represents a

ritual master or Vajrācārya.³⁴ A ritual master is not an uncommon common element in the steles of Buddhist deities from eastern India. But what is interesting about this particular stele is that we have a woman seated right next to him. This may be a devotee as well, but given what we know about the ritual practices of Tantric Buddhism, some of which involved sexual *yogas* and required female partners for Vajrācāryas, and since we know that there were also married lay Tantric Buddhist masters (*gr̥hasthācārya*)³⁵, it is also possible that this woman is the female partner/wife of a Vajrācārya. The fact that the woman is seated with the man on an elevated platform also supports this possibility because all other cases where a Vajrācārya is represented, the ritual master is always seated on a slightly higher seat than the rest of the devotee group: various visual devices such as ritual offerings and implements and a higher seat, are employed to separate him from the rest. This is the single case I know of where a Vajrācārya and his female partner are represented together. But I do not think this is an isolated incident. More examples like this may come to light once we start looking at the bottom register with these little figures more carefully.³⁶ While it is impossible to make any generalized statement about Mārīcī's role in tantric Buddhist practices based on this single occurrence, it may not be beyond the realm of possibilities to suggest that Mārīcī in her magnificent warrior-like manifestation was a favorite goddess among tantric

Buddhist practitioners who were well versed in the *Mahāyoga* and the *yoginī-tantras* as a symbol of rapid Enlightenment.

Footnotes

1. For a clear and encompassing discussion of Indian Buddhist goddesses, see Miranda Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006).

2. The term "Vajrayāna" is often used to denote the Tantric schools of Buddhism in India, but in practice, this term seems to have been rarely used to express religious affiliation or identity in medieval India. The epigraphic evidence from the ninth through the thirteenth centuries demonstrate continued use of the term "Mahāyāna" as in a "foremost Mahāyāna follower" (*pravaramahāyānayayina* or *-nyā* in case of female) in donor inscriptions and colophons even when the images and the texts seem to belong to the Tantric Buddhist schools.

3. I use "tantric" and "Esoteric" as interchangeable terms throughout this study. The term "Esoteric" denotes this tradition's adherence to the secrecy of transmission of the teaching from a *guru* (preceptor) to an initiated disciple, while "tantric" has a clear reference to the class of texts, i.e., *tantra*, that are associated with this school of Buddhism.

4. Alexis Sanderson, "Vajrayāna : Origin and Function," in *Buddhism into the Year 2000*, ed. Dhammakaya Foundation (Bangkok and Los Angeles: Dhammakaya Foundation, 1994); Harunaga Isaacson, "Tantric Buddhism in India (from C. A.D. 800 to C. A.D. 1200)," *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 2 (1998).

5. This group would belong to what is often referred to as the *anuttarayogatantra*, which follows the categorization by the fourteenth century Tibetan theologian, Buton (Bu-ston Rin-chen Grub), the eleventh abbot of the Shalu monastery in central Tibet. But as recent scholarship on Indic tantric

texts suggests, this term does not seem to appear in surviving medieval Indic Sanskrit texts. See Isaacson, "Tantric Buddhism in India (from C. A.D. 800 to C. A.D. 1200)," 5.

6. Sanderson, "Vajrayāna: Origin and Function."; Isaacson, "Tantric Buddhism in India (from C. A.D. 800 to C. A.D. 1200)."; Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism : A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

7. Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Between Śākyamuni and Vairocana: Mārīcī, Goddess of Light and Victory," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 7(2000). Bautze-Picron categorizes the surviving images of Mārīcī by regional types and discusses more detailed iconographic variants. The larger scheme proposed here with three types follows the general pattern discussed by Miranda Shaw. Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 203-23.

8. Robert N. Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion : Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

9. There are examples of independent images of Type 1 Mārīcī, but they are rare and miniature in size, such as an image in a niche of a votive stupa. A few examples are known from the votive stupas found at Ratnagiri. Debala Mitra, *Ratnagiri*, 1958-61, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981). A painting in a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (*the Perfection of Wisdom in eight thousand verses*) *sūtra* now in the Cambridge University Library (Add.1643) has an image of Type 1 Mārīcī where she is shown as a two-armed figure seated next to a stūpa. The Sanskrit caption accompanying this painting reads, "*dvibhujamārīcicaitya* (two-armed Mārīcī *caitya*)" See Cambridge University Library Add. 1643, folio 222r.

10. For example, a *circa* ninth-century image of Tārā now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.76.2.30) donated by a monastic elder (*sthavira*) has a small image of Ekajaṭā tucked in the corner of the stele under Tārā's left knee. No other attendant

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figure appears in this stele except for the image of the monastic donor, whose name is difficult to read in the inscription placed underneath him, placed right next to Tārā's hanging right foot.

11. The manuscript is dated N.S. 191, 1071CE. According to the colophon on folio 185r, it was prepared by one Kiraṇasimha.

12. In Ratnagiri, there are examples of Mārīcī depicted with a horse-drawn chariot. Thomas E. Donaldson, "An Oḍḍiyana Mārīcī image from Orissa," *Oriental Art* vol.XXXIV, no.3 (Autumn 1988), 213-217.

13. Janice Leoshko, "The Implications of Bodgaya's Sūrya as a Symbol of Enlightenment," in *Akṣayanīvī, Essays Presented to Dr. Debala Mitra in Admiration of Her Scholarly Contributions*, ed. Gouriswar Bhattacharya (Delhi: 1991); Bautze-Picron, "Between Śākyamuni and Vairocana: Mārīcī, Goddess of Light and Victory."

14. Thomas Eugene Donaldson, "Orissan Images of Vārāhī, Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī, and Related Sow-Faced Goddesses," *Artibus Asiae* 55, no. 1/2 (1995).

15. Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*.

16. This manuscript is now dispersed between a few different collections. Ten illustrated folios and sixteen text folios from this manuscript are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The paintings of Mārīcī discussed here come from this group. Stylistic and palaeographic characteristics of the folios in the Metropolitan Museum collection suggest an early twelfth century date and the ancient region of Vaṅga (especially southeastern part of undivided Bengal) as a possible production site. They are quite similar to the folios in the Baroda Picture Gallery and Museum dated Harivarman's 8th year (ca. 1100CE). Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Buddhist Painting During the Reign of Harivarmadeva (End of the 11th c.) in Southeast Bangladesh," *Journal of Bengal Art* 4 (1999). I am preparing a detailed study of this dispersed manuscript and a few others.

17. This image with many other images in this manuscript have decorative garland hanging from the top of the panel, implying their placement inside

a sacred space, i.e., a temple.

18. B. Bhattacharya disputes the theory that Mārīcī and Vajravārāhī are the same. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography, Mainly Based on the Sādhnamālā and Cognate Tantric Texts of Rituals*, (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1968). Their similarity in iconography can be related to the tantric aspect/status of Mārīcī.

19. There has been a debate regarding the location of Oḍḍiyana-piṭha, whether it should be located somewhere in Orissa where actual archaeological and art historical evidence of intense Esoteric Buddhist activities survive from, or in the Swat Valley, which has been identified as the kingdom of Uḍḍiyana based on earlier sources. Huntington speculates that Oḍḍiyana of the eighth and ninth centuries when Tantric Buddhism flourished in the region need not be the same as the earlier kingdom. John C. Huntington, "The Phur-Pa, Tibetan Ritual Daggers," *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* Vol. 33 (1975), fn.11. Donaldson makes a similar suggestion in his article on Vārāhī and Mārīcī.

Donaldson, "Orissan Images of Vārāhī, Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī, and Related Sow-Faced Goddesses," 180.D.C. Sircar has long argued for the location of Oḍḍiyana in the Swat Valley, and as Davidson cites, the eighth century inscription found in Afghanistan records a donation of a Gaṇeśa image as that of a king of Uḍḍiyāna ("oḍḍiyāna-śāhi"). D. C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971); Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. For the inscription from the Swat Valley, see Kuwayama Shoshin, "L'inscription du Ganesa de Gardez et la Chronologie des Turki-Sahi," *Journal Asiatique* 279(1991).

20. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, 208.

21. There seems to have been more images of this type in Orissa. Donaldson identifies and discusses two such images surviving in Orissa. Donaldson, "Orissan Images of Vārāhī, Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī, and

Related Sow-Faced Goddesses."

22. R.C. Jamieson trans. *The Perfection of Wisdom: Extracts from the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. (Penguin Books, 2000), 71.

23. For example, this is the feature described in the *sādhana* called, "dvādaśabhujaṣṭhānakrama-mārīcī-sādhanam." SM 140, Benoytosh Bhattacharyya ed., *Sādhanamālā* vol. 2 (Baroda: Baroda Oriental Institute, 1968), 140.

24. Pratapaditya Pal, *Indian Painting* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993), 66-67; Jinah Kim, "A Book of Buddhist Goddesses: Illustrated manuscripts of the Pañcarakṣā sūtra and their ritual use," *Artibus Asiae* vol. LXX, no.2 (2010), fig.31.

25. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, 212.

26. Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 188-202.

27. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*.

28. For the overall iconographic program, see J.P. Losty, "The 'Vrendenburg Manuscript' in the Victoria and Albert Museum," in *Makaranda: Essays in honor of Dr. James C. Harle* ed. Claudine Bautze-Picron (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1990); Jinah Kim, "Unorthodox Practice: Rethinking the cult of illustrated Buddhist books in South Asia" PhD dissertation in History of Art. (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 2006), 217-231.

29. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *Niṣpannayogāvalī of Mahāpañḍita Abhayākara Gupta*, Gaekwad's oriental series, v. 109 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1949), 7.

30. Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra: the arcane lore of forty verses; a Buddhist tantra commentary*, 305-06.

31. Vajrasattva's role as the ultimate teacher and role model for all the human practitioners of the Vajrayāna, is much emphasized in Esoteric Buddhist traditions, as seen in the priestly figures appearing on the bottom registers of medieval

Buddhist steles from eastern India. These figures are often shown in the identical hand gestures as Vajrasattva, and they wear conical-shaped hats. See the discussion of these figures in Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Between men and gods, small motifs in the Buddhist art of Eastern India, an interpretation." In *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art, Proceedings of a seminar held at Leiden University, 21-24, October 1991*, eds. K.R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere (Groningen: Egbert Forsten), 1995, 59-79.

32. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 245-252.

33. Donaldson considers this iconographic element of a horse-drawn chariot as an earlier aspect of the Mārīcī iconography reflecting more reliance on Sūrya. This image certainly lacks the association with a sow and there is no visual reference to her porcine aspect. Thomas Eugene Donaldson, *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa* vol. 1(text) (Delhi: Abhinav Publications for Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts), 309-310.

34. Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Between Men and Gods: Small Motifs in the Buddhist Art of Eastern India, an Interpretation".

35. According to Sanderson, the *Vimalaprābhā*, the commentary on the *Kalacakra-tantra*, "condemns the practice of monks venerating married Vajra Masters [*grhasthācārya*] as their gurus if any ordained Vajra Master is available."

36. I am currently working on a research project surveying these human figures on surviving sculptural evidence from Bihar, Bengal and Orissa.

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Delhi.

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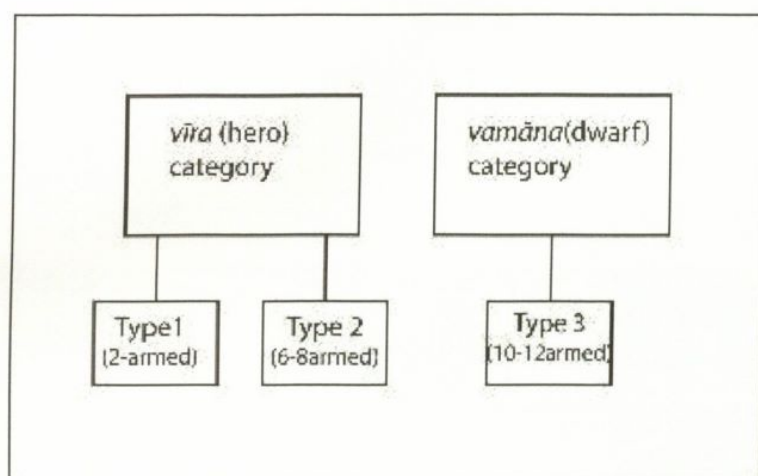


Diagram 1

Three types of Mārīcī in comparison with the two types of *krodha-vighnāntaka-s*

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*Four Buddhas		Eight-armed Goddess	Prajñāpāramitā preaching to Buddhas & Bodhisattvas	Eight-armed Goddess	*Three Buddhas and Maitreya
* Eight Buddhas of the past, present, Future					
fol 1v	Vajrapāṇi		Amitābha		Mañjuśrī
fol 2r	Maitreya		Potalake Avalokiteśvara		Lokanātha
fol. 89v	Sarvanivārṇa- viśakambhū		Vajrasattva (in place of Aksobhya)		Samantabhadra
fol. 90r	Kṣīgarbha		Mārīcī- Vajradhātviśvarī		Ākaśagarbha
fol. 178v	Mahāśrī Tārā		Lokanātha		Ucchuṣma- Jambhala
fol. 179r	Oḍiyāna Mārīcī		Vasudhārā		Paṇasābart
Eight scenes from the Buddha's life and a protector deity (Order: Birth, Enlightenment, Miracle, Subjugating the mad Elephant, First Sermon (center), Descent from the heaven, Monkey's offering of honey, Parinirvāṇa)					

Diagram 2

Iconographic structure of the *AsP* Ms, Rāmapāla's 36th year (ca.1113CE),
Victoria and Albert Museum IS4.1958-10.1958.

EMERGENCE OF A BUDDHIST WARRIOR GODDESS AND THE HISTORICAL
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Fig.1. Standing Tārā with Ekajātā and Hayagrīva (or Yamāntaka), *ca.* 10th century, Bihar, Indian Museum (A25135)



Fig. 2. Two-armed Mārīcī (Type1), detail of the stela of Stading Tārā with Ekajātā and Mārīcī, Bihar, *ca.* 9th century, Musée Guimet, Paris (MA2480)

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Fig. 3. Yellow two-armed Mārīcī in the panel of “Tārā in Potalaka” (“*potalake-
bhagavatī-tārā*”), fol.113r, a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā
Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* [*the Perfection of Wisdom sūtra* in eight thousand verses,
AsP], 1071CE, AS Kolkata A15.



Fig. 4. Detail of Mārīcī (left) and Ekajaṭā (right), detail from the stele of Standing Tārā with Mārīcī and Ekajaṭā, Rāmapāla's 2nd year (*ca.* late eleventh century), Indian Museum, A25158

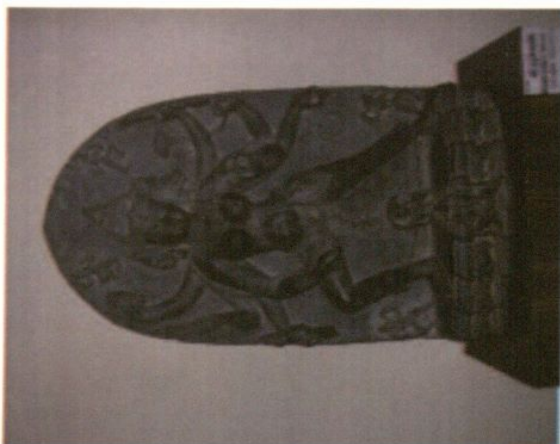


Fig. 5. Eight-armed Mārīcī (Type 2), Bihar, c.10th century. Lucknow State Museum, B.282.

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Fig. 7. Mārīcī, Bihar, c. late 10th-11th century, Indian Museum, Kolkata 3827/A25131.



Fig. 6. Vārāhī, Dharmasālā, ca. 11th century, Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswara.

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Fig. 8. Durgā-Mahiṣāsuramardinī, Bihar, c. 10th
century. National Museum, New Delhi.

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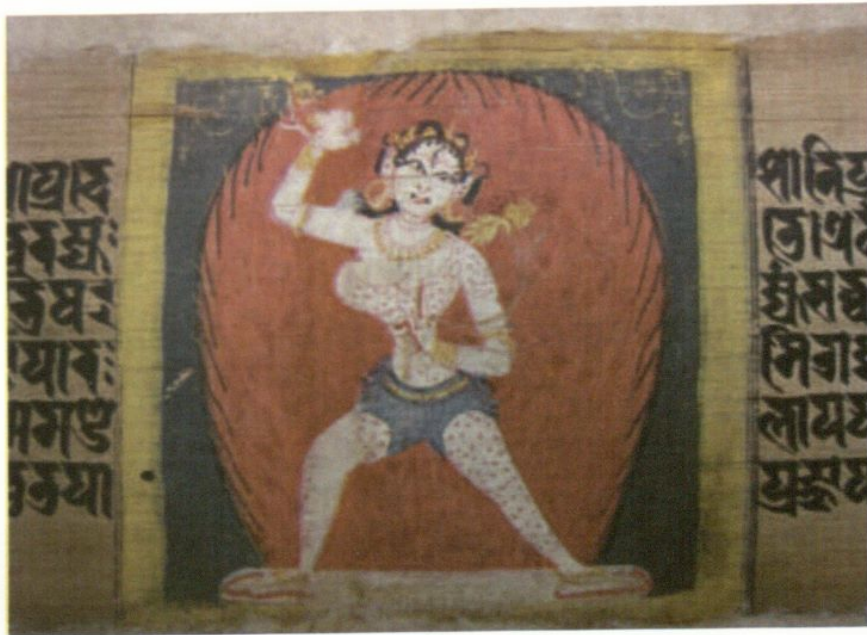


Fig. 9. Two-armed Mārīcī, folio 543r, A palm-leaf manuscript of the *Pañcaviṃśatī Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, Southeastern Bengal, c. early 11th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art Acc. No. 55.121.36.3



Fig.10. Vajravārāhī, folio 107r, left panel, *AsP* Ms, Govindapāla's 32nd year (c.1207CE), Asiatic Society Mumbai BI-210.

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Fig.11. Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī (“otiyāna māriciḥ”), fol. 148v, *AsP Ms*, N.S. 191 (ca. 1071CE), Asia Society, Kolkata A15.



Fig.12. Mārīcī (Type 3), left panel of folio 179r, *AsP Ms*, Rāmapāla's 36th year (c.1113CE), Victoria & Albert Museum, IS 10.1958.

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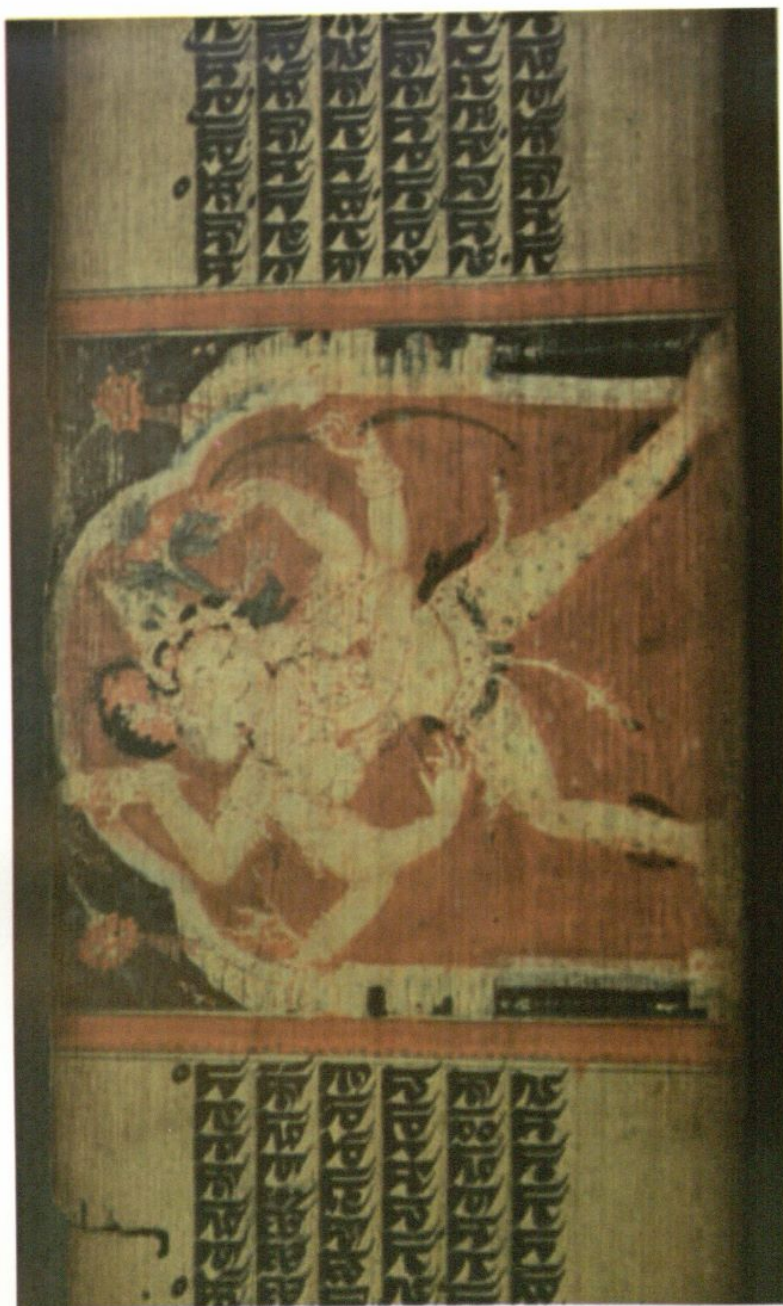


Fig.13. Vajradhatvīśvarī-Mārīcī, central panel, folio 90r, *AsPMs*, Rāmapāla's 36th year
(c.1113CE), Victoria & Albert Museum.

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Fig.14. Stele of Mārīcī, Orissa, *ca.* late 10th century, National Museum, New Delhi.



Fig.15. Detail of Figure 14 showing the two devotees (left, next to Mārīcī's right leg) and a Vajracārya and his female partner (right, next to Mārīcī's left leg), National Museum, New Delhi.