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# Portrait of a Poison: Datura in Buddhist Magic

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Keywords: *Buddhism, Tantra, Ethnobotany, Magic, India, Poison, Hallucinogenic*

*Abstract: The psychoactive plant Datura metel appears across a range of traditions in premodern South Asia preserved in texts. Among those traditions is the form of tantric Buddhism (Vajrayāna) located in the yoginī tantras. In Vajrayāna works, the plant is most prominently used in instructions for bringing about one or more of the magical acts (ṣaṭkarman). This paper explores the possibility that datura was consumed for its hallucination-inducing potential by considering how the plant was viewed and used in premodern South Asia through an ethnobotanical approach to relevant texts. I argue that the material potency of the plant as a dangerous poison, well established in Sanskrit medical literature from an early period, gave it a magical potency that made it a favored ingredient in several hostile magic rites (abhicāra) found in the yoginī tantras. I suggest that the line between material and magical is an inappropriate distinction to draw when examining these tantras, and that the most responsible way to approach the use of psychotropic plants in a premodern culture is by examining what actors from that culture said about the plant rather than relying on our existing knowledge of the effect of that plant.*

*mantrāṇām auśadhīnām ca śaktayaḥ kena nirmītāḥ ||*

By whom or what are the powers of spells and herbs created?

—Kambala, *Ālokamālā*

You can walk into a closed door that appears to you to be wide open. You can converse with friends whom you know well, but whom no one else can see or hear. You can think you are sleeping in bed, but your observer will tell you that you tried to go outside to direct traffic. You are never sure when you are completely down, as you don't remember being up. Never use it without a babysitter.

—Dr. Alexander Shulgin

## INTRODUCTION

In the 19th chapter of the 12th- or 13th-century *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* (*System of the Furious and Enraged Acala*, CMT), within a slew of recipes for magical formulae combined with various incantations designed to bring women under a *yoginī*'s control (*vaśīkaraṇa*), appear instructions incorporating the plant *Datura metel* L. (henceforth *datura*, also often translated as “thorn apple”).<sup>1</sup>



He should pick the fruit of the datura plant when the moon is in the *puṣya* station. During the *āśleṣa* station [he should pick] the bark, during the *hasta* station the leaves, during the *citrā* station the flowers, [and] during *mūla* station the root. He should make a pill with honey that contains powder with an equal share [of each plant part]. Having wrapped [the pill] in a rag he should dry [it]. With betel, he should gift it [to her]. [Taken] with conch shell powder, he or she is made under his control.<sup>2</sup>

All the other prescriptions in this section of the tantra that are undertaken so that “she is controlled” (*sā vaśībhavati*) are plainly magical, with materials such as lizard blood, the tongue of a crow, particular benign woods, flowers, and so forth incorporated into the procedures. *Vaśīkaraṇa*, controlling others, is one of the six magical acts (*ṣaṭkarman*). These six magical acts vary in number and act, but they are always reckoned as six no matter the actual amount (whether six, nine, or some other number).<sup>3</sup> In addition to *vaśīkaraṇa*, the most commonly found *ṣaṭkarman* are attraction of others to oneself (*ākaraṣaṇa*), pacification/stupefication of others (*śānti*), immobilization of others (*stambhana*), killing others (*māraṇa*), confusing others (*mohana*), creating enmity among others (*vidveṣaṇa*), and the removal of rivals from their social/vocational/etc. position (*uccāṭana*). The *ṣaṭkarman*<sup>4</sup> are standard in Sanskrit texts that range from obscure sorcery manuals to famed texts such as the *Kāmasūtra*.

When I encountered this *vaśīkaraṇa* procedure involving datura amidst recipes for controlling potential female partners I was struck by its apparent nefariousness. My discomfort arose from my assumption that the only use of the plant is for its potential to cause powerful hallucinations, which could significantly confuse and frighten someone who unwittingly consumed some portion of the plant. The blood of a lizard, cattle bile, and human menstrual blood are all innocuous insofar as their ability to incapacitate humans, with the efficacy of the procedures using such items entirely magical. Datura is not innocuous in this regard since it possesses a material efficacy to incapacitate.

Let us examine the rest of the instructions involving datura. The tantra instructs the yogin to harvest specific portions of the plant only when the moon is in the appropriate asterism (*nakṣatra*), thereby linking efficacy of the datura to particular periods within the night that it is harvested. Note the sympathetic relationship to these appropriate periods: the fruit is harvested when the moon is at the *puṣya* (flower) *nakṣatra*; the bright, white flowers harvested when the moon is at the brightest, *citrā*, station; and the root is harvested when it is at the *mūla* (root) station. The harvested portions are apparently pulverized, after which a small amount of the resultant powder is mixed with honey to make a pill or tiny bead (*vaṭikā*). After drying this honey-datura powder, the yogin should gift it (*dadyāt*) along with betel. The text does not explicitly tell us if the target consumes the pill, only that he or she is subjugated (*vaśīkaraṇam*) along with conch-shell powder, presumably to indicate that the mixture is only effective if consumed with conch-shell powder.

After closer examination, these instructions involving datura appear more magical in tenor than they had at first glance. The plant is harvested piecemeal according to the location of the moon in the sky as it aligns with thematically corresponding asterisms; a very minute amount of datura powder made from all these parts of the plant is mixed with an equal amount of honey; this globule is gifted to the partner, who then consumes it along with conch-shell powder, thereby becoming subjugated. Betel, a plant whose consumption was governed by several social conventions, is eaten along with it.<sup>5</sup> The noun indicating subjugation (*vaśīkaraṇam*) in this particular procedure is in the

neuter and does not specify the gender of the subjugated target. Note also that those magical procedures utilizing materials I describe above as innocuous were seen by their users as just as effective as procedures utilizing datura. The arguably predatory behavior laid out in the CMT is no less predatory than other instructions for bringing about *vaśīkaraṇa* insofar as their aim, control of another, is identical.

In this paper, I wish to explore the relationship between material potency and magical potency to ask how and why datura was used by premodern Vajrayāna yogins. My primary aim is to answer these questions without relying on any contemporary understanding of how the datura plant can be utilized. As much as possible, I try to understand how datura was viewed in a different time and place (premodern South Asia) without assuming that modern ideas of the plant's usage were held by the actors I examine. Any notion of the plant's "psychedelic" and "entheogenic" qualities is not automatically assumed. In order to paint an accurate portrait of a poison, I wish to examine the evidence separate from contemporary speculations regarding the consumption of mind-altering substances for the purpose of spiritual gain.

## WHERE TO START? THE EXPERIENCE OF ACUTE DATURA INTOXICATION

Let us begin by considering my initial assumption: that the plant was used for its hallucinogenic properties with the predatory aim of confusing and incapacitating a victim. A survey of tertiary literature that treats datura usage in India reveals this assumption as a typical view. This literature tends to cite other tertiary works; often a source is two times removed from even interpretive secondary writings, with primary sources an additional step beyond that. Much of this literature aims to be all-encompassing; a common approach is to trace the thread of psychotropic and entheogenic botanical use across human cultures and time.<sup>6</sup> Datura, perhaps given its status among various Indigenous American cultures, is universally reckoned in these tertiary sources as an entheogen consumed to bring on psychedelic experiences.

To rebut this idea that datura universally functions as an entheogen and psychedelic, let us first consider the experience of acute datura intoxication. Datura is called "jimson weed" in American English in reference to a collective drugging of British soldiers who were sent to quell Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 and quartered at Jamestown, Virginia Colony. These soldiers ate *Datura stramonium* L. leaves as salad and hallucinated for a few days, laughing hysterically, running around naked, and soiling themselves.<sup>7</sup> Their experience, while unintended, seems relatively benign. Several detailed firsthand descriptions of datura intoxication in the experience vaults of Erowid.org (a longstanding non-profit organization promoting education regarding narcotics), however, share more ominous themes: an overwhelming sense of fear, visual hallucinations so intense that the real world is replaced by an envisioned one, and the feeling of having died accompanied by overwhelming dread. The datura-induced hallucinations sought by those seasoned psychonauts sound terrifying. This is a plant labeled "zombie weed" in Haitian Creole for its role in incapacitating victims and making them believe they are dead. An article appeared in the December 1975 issue of *High Times*, the periodical dedicated to cannabis consumption and culture, titled "Jimsonweed: The World's Worst Dope." The author's description of this "mephitic mind-fucker" encapsulates the experiences detailed in Erowid's experience vaults:

After some slight nausea, itching and shortness of breath, I noticed that my heart was throbbing. Vision became blurred, hearing decreased, and my mouth was parched. I realized that death awaited me, and I was assailed by feelings of self-doubt and contrition for sins I had never imagined, let alone committed. The fear of dying grew in me and I ran over to a friend's house, gasping for help. After a while I passed out for about five hours. When I came to, I was completely exhausted. I have never experienced anything but physical pleasure and a blissful consciousness of self-acceptance and love of the world on LSD, DMT, STP, mescaline, peyote, ayahuasca, yagé, marijuana, hashish, opium, cocaine, even the heroin I snorted at Jimmy Farrell's birthday party. I don't know what got into me but it's never going to happen again. Jimsonweed poisoning, though dangerous, is not always fatal. Left alone, a victim will more than likely recover from the effects within a few days, depending of course on how much of the chemical alkaloids he has ingested.<sup>8</sup>

Acute datura intoxication lacks the "physical pleasure and a blissful consciousness of self-acceptance and love of the world" brought about by the plants and chemicals in the large checklist of psychedelics (plus a few non-psychedelics) the author had previously consumed. The psychonauts from Erowid and the author from *High Times* were seasoned psychedelic trippers who took datura with the expectation of a transformative experience similar to that brought on by other psychotropic drugs. Instead, they experienced terror and a feeling of impending death. It was a "poisoning."<sup>9</sup> One might counter that they were not properly prepared and that, in Indigenous American settings, the plant is ritually consumed or administered by a shamanic specialist according to a set procedure. In this case the plant is consumed either for its utility to allow the shaman to access otherwise inaccessible realms to retrieve necessary information to fix a worldly problem, or to induce coma in a patient to heal major injuries such as broken bones.

## ADDRESSING A LACUNA IN THE SECONDARY LITERATURE

Although several species are now located in Eurasia and Africa, *Datura metel* is the only variety of the plant that can be shown to have existed in South Asia in the pre-Columbian period.<sup>10</sup> Regarding the usage of datura in premodern South Asia, no study dedicated to the subject exists. The plant appears in nearly every volume cataloging the *materia medica* of the Indian subcontinent, but modern ethnobotanical details tend to be scarce. When they are given, they do not point to a psychotropic usage of the plant. For example, it is frequently recorded that datura is an analgesic used for toothaches, that its leaves may be smoked to ease asthma symptoms, and that datura decoctions are used to poison animals ranging from fish to rabid dogs.<sup>11</sup> Datura is also a regular homeopathic medicine sold in Ayurvedic pharmacies. In the Asan market of Kathmandu, I have found in many shops the extract (*ras*) of the poison (*vis*) datura combined with alcohol to be taken as a homeopathic medicine. Scholars have rarely drawn a distinction between premodern and contemporary usage of these plants, meaning that ingestion of datura by yogins today is often considered evidence for the same practice going back millennia.

There is some treatment of the plant in secondary works on tantric Buddhism in South Asia. Ronald Davidson devoted a paragraph to speculate on the plant's usage by Buddhist *siddhas* in his *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*.<sup>12</sup> In his brief mention of the plant, he explicitly stated that datura was consumed by Vajrayāna yogins for its mind-altering properties, suggesting that the emphasis on

flight in *siddha*-oriented texts may be linked to the hallucinations brought about by this plant. Davidson's passage was picked up without citation in Ian A. Baker's marvelously illustrated *Tibetan Yoga*, in a section titled "Entheopharmacology." Baker claimed premodern yogins consumed "marijuana" for its "mind-altering" properties by quoting (again, without citation) David B. Gray's translation of *Cakrasaṃvaratantra/Herukābhīdhāna (Bliss of the Circle System/Discourse of Heruka, CST)*.<sup>13</sup> Gray did not record "marijuana" but rather "hemp." A combination of substances appears in a recipe: "wax gourd, mung bean, gram, hemp, beeswax, Indian mustard, and the leaves of the household tamāla tree." Gray was careful to note that he translated *śaṇa* as hemp and pointed out variations in Jayabhadra's commentary on the CST.<sup>14</sup>

Like Gray, who was cautious not to necessarily conflate this consumption of hemp with the contemporary consumption of cannabis for its "mind-altering" properties, we should take a careful approach when examining how other plants we know to be psychotropic were used in premodern South Asia. James McHugh pointed out the need for caution to begin to understand how *datura* was viewed in a premodern South Asian context, pointing out that tantric yogins "would probably have explicitly stated if they were using *datura* to induce visions," given the detail they provide regarding the consumption of alcoholic drinks. In this paper, I follow McHugh's advice that "scholars should be open to the idea that it was not primarily used as a mystical 'entheogen' [...and] that, morality aside, not all [intoxication] was the sort of thing anyone would willingly pursue—there existed a category of bad narcotics and stupefying drugs."<sup>15</sup>

Where, then, might we turn to as a starting point to answer our two questions, since the subject of *datura* usage in premodern South Asia finds no dedicated study in secondary literature?<sup>16</sup> I will limit the primary object of investigation to an exploration of the usage of *datura* in late (~800–1300 CE) Vajrayāna texts and primarily in texts that belong to the *yoginī* corpus. I will focus on this stratum of the Vajrayāna corpus because instructions for using *datura* occur in Buddhist *yoginī* tantras with some regularity. I will not speculate on when *datura* began to be used as a potentially vision-inducing hallucinogen; evidence suggests, however, that such a development was late, possibly as late as the 20th century. Although there are British colonial reports of the plant being used both as an ingredient to strengthen alcoholic drinks and as a weapon to drug and incapacitate others, one finds no mention there of *datura* consumption for psychedelic purposes.

Tantric works produced after 1500 CE and through the colonial period typically mention *datura* (and rarely) as a material employed in hostile rites (*abhicāra*), as poison (*viṣa*), as something worn by Śiva or his disciples, and/or as synonymous with delirious intoxication.<sup>17</sup> "*Unmatta*" (intoxicated, delirious, *datura*), a name for *datura* in premodern Sanskrit texts, is also a nearly ubiquitous adjective prefixed to Bhairava and Bhairavī in modern Śaiva tantric works, but the sense of the modifier is that the respective deity is intoxicated and/or delirious, rather than *unmatta* signaling an explicit connection to *datura*. Nowadays, the plant is almost exclusively associated with Śiva, with some yogins consuming *datura* alongside cannabis as a mimetic form of worship of the cosmic yoga master.<sup>18</sup>

## TOWARDS A TEXTUAL ETHNOBOTANY

Although contemporary ethnographic data can help us understand textual references better; the Sanskrit textual record, however, provides the most promise for a study of the plant's usage prior to roughly the 14th century. Several Sanskrit names indicate the plant specifically (*dhattūra*,

*dhustura*, *dhūrta*, *kanakaphala*, etc.), words are sometimes prefixed to indicate *datura* (*unmatta*<sup>o</sup>/delirious, *caṇḍa*<sup>o</sup>/ferocious, *moha*<sup>o</sup>/confused), and some words have wide semantic ranges that regularly include *datura* (*unmatta*/delirious, *ukṣipta*/vomit, *upaviṣa*/poison, *kaṅṭhaphala*/thorny fruit). The associated words—delirious, ferocious, confused, vomit, and poison—all carry unpleasant or negative connotations. One name for the plant, *dhūrta*, refers more frequently to rogues and cheats, perhaps indicating an etymological link between fraud and delirium-inducing *datura*.

In the section that follows, I offer a survey of representative *datura* mentions in these traditions to construct a textual ethnobotany to understand how *datura* was perceived among premodern South Asian specialists in *rasaśāstra*, *kāmaśāstra*, magico-medicine, and other satellite esoterica including Vajrayāna. The appearance of the plant outside esoterica, such as in *kāvya* (Sanskrit *belle-lettres*) is also considered. Following the survey of *datura*'s appearances in alchemical, *kāvya*, tantric, medical, and *kāmaśāstra* texts, we will take a brief intermission to consider Śiva's association with the plant, as well as a possible description of the experience of *datura* poisoning. Finally, we will reach the primary subject of our investigation: the usage of *datura* in Sanskrit Vajrayāna texts.

When reviewing the Sanskrit textual tradition, we see mentions of *datura* where one would expect to find them, mainly in texts dealing with and detailing *materia medica*. Among these texts, *datura* is represented predominantly in the *kāmaśāstra* (science of love and/or passion, often in the form of guides to sophisticated behavior), *rasaśāstra* (method dealing with essences, often translated “alchemy”), and medical corpuses (both *āyurveda*, science of life, often translated as “Indian medicine,” and tantric medical texts). *Datura* also appears in many magical formulae within texts that elude distinct categorization.

## PORTRAIT OF A POISON: A SURVEY OF DATURA IN ALCHEMY, KĀVYA, AND ĀYURVEDA

The traditional alchemical (*rasaśāstra*) corpus largely centers on two subjects. These are the transmutation of lesser metals into more valuable metals and the purification of mercury for consumption by alchemy-practicing yogins for the related purposes of life extension (*amṛta*) and the development of magical powers (*siddhis*), including flight, clairaudience, and power over others. *Datura*'s role in both these endeavors indicates the potency associated with the plant.

In the 11th-century<sup>19</sup> *Rasārṇava* (*A Flood of Mercury*), *datura* is included in a recipe for the “destruction of wrinkles and gray hair” (*valīpalitanāśana*), instructions for purifying (“killing”) mercury, and instructions for the transformative *paṭṭabandha*, wherein the alchemical *siddha* smears a *datura*-laced concoction on his forehead.<sup>20</sup> The 14th-century *Rasaratnākara* (*A Mine of Mercurial Jewels*) of Nityanāthasiddha includes 23 mentions of “*dhattūra*.” In the “Section on Killing Mercury” (*rasamāraṇādhikāraḥ*), following several instructions for developing and employing killing mercury<sup>21</sup> (*pāradamāraṇa*), *datura* is listed among dozens of other plants that are used for the purpose of controlling others (*niyāmakauṣadhi*).<sup>22</sup> It also appears in another list of dozens of divine plants (*divyauṣadhi*). Elsewhere in the *Rasaratnākara*, the plant is used in recipes for purifying metals such as copper and sulfur; transmuting copper to gold, silver to gold, and

silver-copper amalgam to gold; making alchemical reagents such as arsenic powder and salts; and brightening lesser metals to disguise them as more valuable ones.<sup>23</sup>

The association of datura with potency in alchemical texts continued through the period of our investigation and into the 20th century. In both the 20th-century *Rasataraṅgiṇī* (*Waves of Mercury*, not to be confused with the 16th-century work on poetics) and *Rasaratnasamuccaya* (*A Collection of Mercurial Jewels*), an eggplant-shaped crucible (*vr̥ntākamūṣā*) is compared in shape to a datura flower.<sup>24</sup> The alchemical potency of the plant extends beyond the Sanskrit world. For example, in the Newar-language *Haritālaśodhanavidhi* (*Manual on Purifying Arsenic*, no earlier than the 18th century), a text employed by tantric physicians (*vaidika*), datura fruit (*dudhalapu*) is named as a possible ingredient to be used in the purification of arsenic.

In the thought world of these *rasaśāstra* texts, datura is seen as a powerful botanical, capable both of transmuting metals and purifying (“killing”) mercury and other toxic elements like sulfur and arsenic. Its consumption is referenced several times in the mid-16th-century *Rasamañjarī* (*A Bouquet of Mercury*) of Śālinātha as a kind of homeopathic weapon against serious maladies or as an ingredient utilized in the control of seminal flow. In *rasaśāstra*, datura is magically potent enough to transform metals, strong (perhaps dangerous) enough to “kill” deadly metals. When consumed along with poison as part of a homeopathic arsenal against serious illness, it can be used to control one’s own bodily functions—and other people.

This latter function of datura, as a substance employed to control other people, is associated with the plant in *kāvya*, Sanskrit *belle-lettres*. Mentions of the plant in the vast *kāvya* corpus are sparse but instructive. The *Kathāsaritsāgara* (*Confluence of the Rivers of Tales*), the 11th-century anthology of tales compiled by the Kashmiri Somadeva, contains an episode in which datura is used to incapacitate several victims.<sup>25</sup> In this tale the murderous and thieving ascetic Siddhikarī, a disciple (*śiṣyā*) to a female Buddhist ascetic (*pravrajikā*), attempts to aid a group of licentious merchants who wish to take advantage of Devasmitā, a trader’s wife whose husband is away on business. When Siddhikarī visits her home, Devasmitā senses that this female ascetic’s intentions are nefarious. As the merchants later come calling on separate occasions, Devasmitā has her maids serve each man datura-spiked wine (*madhudhattūrasamyukta*) that renders him unconscious. The maids then strip each man in turn, brand his forehead, and toss his naked body into a ditch. When each merchant awakes, he has no recollection of how he arrived, nude, in a muddy ditch. Eventually both the female ascetic and her disciple Siddhikarī call on the home of Devasmitā together. Once the pair are incapacitated with the datura-laced wine, Devasmitā cuts off their noses and ears before having them thrown into a mud puddle.

The *Samayamātrkā* (*The Courtesan’s Keeper*) of Kṣemendra, also from the 11th century and Kashmir, features an exciting and adventurous biography of the crook Kaṅkālī embedded within the overall story. The tale describes her duplicitous exploits: posing as a tantric guru, pretending to be a living goddess, and using powders and creams to hide her age and marry a rich old man. In one such deceptive episode, Kaṅkālī drugs a group of travelers with wine laced with strong datura (*bhūridhattūramadhu*) and robs them once they are incapacitated.<sup>26</sup>

In both tales, datura is used to immobilize unsuspecting victims. The motives differ, but the method and substance employed are identical. The aggressor Kaṅkālī serves travelers datura-laced wine to take advantage of them while Devasmitā drugs a gaggle of merchants and female ascetics to prevent them from harming her. Datura is put into something innocuous and associated with

frivolity, wine (and *madhu* is likely grape wine in eleventh-century Kashmir),<sup>27</sup> for hostile purposes. The *datura* incapacitates the unsuspecting victims. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the *datura* victims are so knocked out that they can be stripped naked, even branded, and still not wake up. Kaṅkālī can carry out her treacherous plan against a group of presumably innocent men, while Devasmitā is able to reverse the situation against a group of predatory men. This potent plant allows the women to subjugate multiple male victims. The employment of *datura* by women as a poisonous weapon against men is not confined to literature; medical literature from the British colonial era is filled with descriptions of both men and women murdering men by serving them food or drink poisoned with parts of the *datura* plant.<sup>28</sup>

Compiled around the start of the Common Era, the *Suśrutasamhitā* (*Compendium of Suśruta*) is one of the foundational texts of *āyurveda*. It explicitly includes *dhattūra* in a recipe to eliminate sinusitis.<sup>29</sup> More interesting for the present study, however, is a less explicit reference that appears later in the text. In the second chapter of the *Suśrutasamhitā*'s *Kalpsthāna*, or Section on Drugs, *karambha* and *mahākarambha* are given as plant poisons from three sources: leaf poisons, flower poisons, and root poisons. Dominik Wujastyk translated *karambha* as “thorn apple” and *mahākarambha* as “great thorn apple.”<sup>30</sup> The plants given as sources for poison in this section of the *Suśrutasamhitā* are a mystery. Other English translators of the text left all the Sanskrit botanical terms untranslated.<sup>31</sup> Ḍalhaṇa, the learned commentator of the text, made no attempt to identify these plants, instead stating that they are known to the Kirātas and those of the Himalayas—a roundabout way of saying that these plants are unidentified because they are known only by people in the marginal borderlands.

The post-16th-century<sup>32</sup> *Abhidhānamañjarī* (*Bouquet of Synonyms*), based on Vāgbhaṭa's *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdayasamhitā* (*Compendium on the Heart of Eight-Limbed Medicine*), is a *nighaṇṭu* (type of Sanskrit thesaurus) and therefore concerned with identifying medicinal substances. The *nighaṇṭu* identifies *karambha* as a synonym of *dhūtūra*, *dhuttūra*, and *dhūrta*.<sup>33</sup> Although this tells us little regarding what plant(s) Suśruta meant by *karambha* and *mahākarambha*, it does tell us that by the end of the 16th century *datura* was plainly viewed as a *viṣa*, a poison.<sup>34</sup> To put it a different way: although we cannot conclusively identify *karambha* as *datura* in the original composition of the *Suśrutasamhitā*,<sup>35</sup> we can show that within a few centuries of the period under investigation, *datura* was reckoned as the most prolific poison in a foundational text of *materia medica*.

Examples of *āyurveda* texts that categorize *datura* as a poison are found across the Indian subcontinent. In his 1300 CE *Śārṅgadharasamhitā* (*Compendium of Śārṅgadhara*), Śārṅgadhara recommends “monkshood, *datura*, strychnine, as well mercury, opium and cannabis” as poisons to be taken as strong medicine.<sup>36</sup> The 16th-century *Vaidyasārasaṅgraha* (*Compendium on the Essentials of Medicine*), composed in Kannada and Sanskrit by Nārasimhaśāstrin of Kerala, gives a prescription using *datura* as an antivenom for scorpion stings but also provides a recipe for curing a victim suffering from *datura* poisoning.<sup>37</sup> These prescriptions appear in sections incorporating *mantras* and botanicals in concert to cure poisoning from both plant and animal sources. The 17th-century CE *Āyurvedaprakāśa* (*Light on Medicine*) of Mādhava Upādhyāya of Varanasi identifies *dhattūra* as a poison (*upaviṣa*).<sup>38</sup>



## MATERIAL POTENCY IS MAGICAL POTENCY: DATURA IN ŚAIVA AND JAIN TANTRIC WORKS, AND *KĀMAŚĀSTRA*

The South Asian medical tradition is far broader than *āyurveda* alone. Michael Slouber has detailed the medical literature dealing with poisoning, especially from snake venom, which belongs to a corpus he labels “Tantric medicine.” He points out that *āyurveda* was considered the normative medicine of premodern South Asia by modern scholars due to its “rhetorical parallelism” with the “history of biomedicine in Europe,” but that such rhetorical parallelism “is not as easily extended to the more prominently religious tradition of Tantric medicine.”<sup>39</sup> Physicians of *āyurveda* viewed their discipline as complementary to other medical traditions, not in opposition to them. We should take Slouber’s advice to open “a space for considering... Tantric medicine on its own terms” so that it is possible to glimpse “a radically alternative view of health and power” rather than the model most frequently represented in existing scholarship.<sup>40</sup> The material efficacy of datura, made clear by the examples already given, is the operational proof for the same plant to be effective magically. Philippe Descola argued:

The magic incantation is not operational because it is performative or because it may bring about the result that it suggests or make this seem possible in the eyes of the singer. It is operational because it helps to characterize and therefore to render effective the relationship that is established at a particular moment between one particular man and one particular [plant]. [The incantation] picks out from the attributes of each party those that will impart to their confrontation a greater existential reality.<sup>41</sup>

Drawing a distinction between magical power and material power in premodern South Asian medical prescriptions is often difficult, if not impossible and unnecessary.

The tantric Śaiva text *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati* (*Guru Īśānaśiva’s Guidebook*) was composed by Īśānaśiva in Kerala “sometime during or after the twelfth century” CE.<sup>42</sup> The 17th chapter of the text’s *mantrapāda* section provides a litany of procedures for attracting various material and immaterial objects, including a brief section on *vaśīkaraṇa*. Prostitutes (*veśyā*) are controlled (*vaśayet*) with a mead made from honey and crown flowers (*śirīṣakusumair... kṣaudramiśritaiḥ*), and various meads (*madhura*) are respectively (*kramāt*) recommended for controlling (*vaśayet*) members of each of the four *varṇas*. Immediately following these *vaśīkaraṇa* procedures are instructions that involve the burning of datura (*dhurdhūra*). The instructions are not entirely clear to me, so I offer a preliminary translation: “[People who are] amorous ?from consumption of *surā*? (*syurarātayaḥ*) and delirious because of making a ?particular? (*tad*) burnt offering with datura wood, ?their? hatred is destroyed by poisonous neem and cottons and poisons.”<sup>43</sup> This seems to be a procedure for using datura and other poisons for the elimination of hatred, but the two halves of the couplet do not fit well together syntactically. It is also possible that the hatred to be eliminated was generated as a result of datura intoxication. In any case, two things are clear: the burning of datura wood (which is itself obscure, as datura is a non-woody herb; perhaps this refers to sprigs)<sup>44</sup> brings about delirium and possibly amorousness, and poisons are effective in eliminating psychological afflictions. The 44th chapter, devoted to the procedures for alleviating madness and seizures (*apasmāronmādapaṭala*), instructs a patient suffering from any grip of madness/seizure (*sarvonmādahara*) to drink powdered datura root

(*unmattamūlacurṇa*) mixed into *cukra* oil and palm toddy. (It is unclear if *cukra* refers here to tamarind or to the medicinal fermented vinegar.) Given the modern pharmaceutical utilization of the tropane alkaloid hyoscyamine that occurs in *datura* as a muscle relaxer, this is likely an effective short-term treatment for what may be anxiety.<sup>45</sup>

The *Tantrasārasaṃgraha* (*Compendium of the Tantric Tradition*) of Nārāyaṇa, another tantric Śaiva text containing a number of medical instructions and produced in early second-millennium Kerala, offers a procedure for eliminating madness involving *datura* and “*cakra*” oil similar to the one found in the *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati*. Powdered *datura* root (*dhuttūramūlacurṇa*) mixed into *cakra* oil (not *cukra* here) is buried in the ground for seven days, after which it is dug up and applied topically to the patient in order to relieve madness (*unmādaśāntaye*).<sup>46</sup> This may also be a method to combat anxiety. *Datura* is heavily utilized throughout Nārāyaṇa’s *Compendium*: one procedure for *vaśīkaraṇa* uses a paste containing *datura*, while another uses *datura* as an antivenom to neutralize snake venom. We see instructions to counteract poisoning that call for drinking a concoction with *datura*, and hostile magical rites that utilize *datura*. Examples of these hostile rites include one for eliminating an enemy army (*vairiṇaḥ senaḥ*) by burning their emblem in a fire kindled in *datura* fruits, and a rite for killing one’s enemy by burning an effigy of the target in a fire kindled with *datura* and striking its neck with a needle.<sup>47</sup>

The Jain tantric text *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa* (*Tome of the Fierce Padmāvatī*), produced by a Malliṣeṇasūri of 10th-century Karnataka,<sup>48</sup> gives a litany of magical procedures to accomplish the six acts (*ṣaṭkarman*) and is not a medical text per se. Nevertheless, given its affinity with the tantric Śaiva medical texts and the lack of a distinction between medical and magical in the Tantric medicine surveyed, I feel it is appropriate to consider its utilization of *datura* alongside those texts. The *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa* has a section on using magical diagrams (*yantra*) for the purpose of *vaśīkaraṇa*, but no mention of *datura* is found there. The ninth chapter, however, devoted to the *vaśīkaraṇa* of women and others through botanical means (*strayādivaśyausdha*), provides several instructions using *datura*. A procedure calls for mixing into a powder several herbs, including the poisonous shrub *viṣamuṣṭi* and *datura* (*kanaka*). Betel nut (*kramukaphalaṃ*) is then placed into the vessel holding the intoxicating powder (*unmattabhāṇḍagataṃ*) and the target is controlled (*vaśaṃ kurute*). The commentator specifies that the vessel holding the powder of these intoxicating substances (*etaddravyāṇāṃ cūrṇaṃ*) is made of the seedpod of black *datura* (*kṛṣṇadhattūrabhāṇḍamadhye*) and that the powder only gains its potency after being left in the *datura* seedpod for three days (*dinatrayasthitam*). The immediately following procedures instruct the user to mix the same intoxicating herbs given in the previous recipe, along with the betel nut, and then place the mixture into the mouth of a (presumably deceased) snake for three days. After the three days, the substance has become intoxicating betel (*madanakramuka*)<sup>49</sup> and may be used for *vaśīkaraṇa*. Another procedure in the same chapter details placing the extract (*rasa*) from a number of plants, including *datura*, into a betel leaf (*tambūlapatra*, according to the commentator) to turn the victim into a *piśāca* (*piśācayati*). This may be a reference to bringing on a dissociative state akin to that found in the Haitian zombie phenomenon.<sup>50</sup>

Another Jain text that is less easy to place cleanly into any textual category is the *Haramekhalā* (*Girdle of Hara*) of Māhuka. It is part grimoire, part medical text, part formulary recorded in a Jain Prakrit and dated to the 9th or 10th century CE.<sup>51</sup> It will later be shown to share textual parallels with the CMT. The third chapter of the text is devoted to *vaśīkaraṇa*. One procedure

gives instruction to write the name of a desired woman in burnt charcoal (*ṇām akkaṃ gāreṇa*) on the right side of a datura fruit (*ummatta phalha*) and as a result “she, the desired woman, comes quickly” (*eī sā kāmīṇī turīaṃ*).<sup>52</sup>

In *kāmasāstra* literature, datura is most often employed in procedures for *vaśīkaraṇa*. There are two mentions of the plant in the foundational text of *kāmasāstra*, Vātsyāyana’s third-century CE *Kāmasūtra*. Both mentions are in book seven of the text, which Doniger and Kakar titled “Erotic Esotericisms.” In a section on *vaśīkaraṇa* are found the following instructions: “If you coat your penis with an ointment made from powdered white thorn-apple, black pepper, and long pepper, mixed with honey, you put your sexual partner under your power.”<sup>53</sup> The second mention of the plant in the *Kāmasūtra* states that food “prepared with the fruit of a thorn-apple tree makes anyone who eats it insane, and well-aged molasses restores that person.”<sup>54</sup> Although this sounds simple enough, note that it appears in a section detailing the creation of concoctions for attracting a lover, losing a held attraction toward a woman, making things invisible, acquiring fame, and transmuting metal. We have from the earliest *kāmasāstra* text two clear utilities for datura: bringing one person under another person’s control and magically removing a person’s ability to function coherently. Moreover, it is shown that these magical properties may be negated with the correct ingredient.

By the medieval period, *kāmasāstra* had become more sophisticated and complex than the vision presented in Vātsyāyana’s text, and the texts from the centuries around the start of the second millennium present a maturation of the tradition and a normative vision of propriety. The 12th chapter of Padmaśrī’s *Nāgarasarvasva* (*Everything to Do with the Urban[e]Man*), a *kāmasāstra* text likely produced in Nepal between 800 and 1300 CE,<sup>55</sup> is devoted to the preparation of herbs (*auśadhaprayoga*) and gives instructions to make a person one’s slave with a preparation of datura powder that is buried for a time in a charnel ground (*śmaśāne*) prior to use to increase its potency. I suspected that “the plant with golden seeds” (*suvarṇabīja*) mentioned in the instructions refers to datura (“golden fruit,” *kanakaphala*). The 17th-century king of Bhaktapur Jagajyoti Malla, who authored a commentary to the text, also understood “the plant with golden seeds” to refer to “yellow datura” (*pītadhattūra*).<sup>56</sup> The text says that whomever the powder is given to (*pradattam*) will immediately fall (*patitam nūnam*) and become a slave (*dāsatvam*), suggesting that the victim is swiftly incapacitated. It is not said how this powder is administered.

The pre-13th-century<sup>57</sup> *Ratirahasya* (*Secrets of Love*) of Kokkoka mentions datura in its 14th chapter, which is devoted to the topic of *vaśīkaraṇa*. A concoction of several plants, including datura (*mohalatā*), *girīkarṇī*,<sup>58</sup> an oozing and weeping succulent (*rudantika*),<sup>59</sup> and *jālikā*<sup>60</sup> is prepared and given to someone to control them (*vaśam nayati*).<sup>61</sup> Although the commentator has trouble identifying some of these plants (his gloss for *rudantikā* ends with “some herb” (*kācid auśadhiḥ*), he clearly identifies *mohalatā* (creeper of confusion) with *dhattūra*. Following his botanical identifications, the commentator articulates a long list of maladies that the qualities of this concoction drive off, including sickness (*upadravaghnī*), afflictive conditions caused by poisons (*viśadoṣaghnī*), and an overabundance of the three afflictive conditions (*tridoṣaghnī*). Here we see datura utilized both for its *vaśīkaraṇa* potential and for its homeopathic utility as a toxin to counteract illness and/or other poisons.

We see clear connections between these various textual traditions and disciplines. Datura can be employed as poison consumed by a patient to counteract a different poison, a practice

widespread in premodern South and East Asia.<sup>62</sup> Datura is utilized in three of the six magical acts: *vaśīkaraṇa*, *māraṇa*, and *śānti*. Perhaps most prominent is the magical aim of *vaśīkaraṇa*, frequently detailed in *kāmasāstra* and tantric texts. There is no distinction in these texts between the magical and material; the efficacy of both is beyond doubt. As explained in the passage by Descola above, it is the material qualities of datura that make it an effective ingredient in magical procedures employed for *vaśīkaraṇa*, and its further utilization in the hostile rites of *māraṇa* and *śānti*, detailed in the tantric magico-medical texts, indicates that its material potency was indistinguishable from its magical potency. Datura was likely reckoned as a tool for powerful magic due to its established efficacy as a material poison.

### INTERMISSION: CONSIDERING ŚIVA; AND A POSSIBLE DESCRIPTION OF A DATURA-INDUCED HALLUCINATION FROM 11TH-CENTURY KASHMIR

There are two topics that do not fit neatly into the narrative of this paper, but that I wish to touch on. The first concerns the association of Śiva with the datura plant. The iconography of dancing Natarāja includes a datura flower, and there is a modern association of the deity with the plant that derives from the popular belief that datura is (was) consumed for its hallucinogenic properties. The second topic involves a possible description of a datura-induced hallucination in the *Samayamātrkā kāvyā*, presented in the text as a case of accidental poisoning (this is distinct from the drugging with datura in the same text detailed earlier in this paper).

Regarding the first topic of our intermission, datura is given as an appropriate offering for Śiva in a number of *purāṇas*. The late-first-millennium<sup>63</sup> *Nārada Purāṇa* serves as a stock example for such *purāṇas* and it names datura as an appropriate offering for Śiva four times.<sup>64</sup> In the *Nārada Purāṇa* the plant is used more frequently for hostile rites than it is for the worship of Śiva: three rites of killing (*māraṇa*), one rite of defeating an enemy army, and one rite for stunning an enemy (*śānti*).<sup>65</sup> In the tantric Śaiva literature, the evidence for datura consumption to bring on hallucinations is scarce. For example, a recent “thorough” search of the *Jayadrathayāmala* and related satellite literature (*Picumata/Brahmayāmala*, *Matasāra*, etc.) for any indication that datura was consumed, or smoke from datura inhaled, to bring on possession (*āveśa*) “turned up nothing.”<sup>66</sup> Why then is Śiva depicted consuming datura?

I suggest that this depiction stems from two places, Śiva’s identity as the most powerful yogin and his identity as the poison-drinking Nīlakaṇṭha. Newar literature provides ample evidence for the position that Śiva consumes datura alongside poison without being harmed by either, due to his yogic power. When describing Śiva in the opening *stuti* (praise verses) of his *Mūladevaśaśidevopākhyāna* (*Episode Involving Mūladeva and Śaśideva*), the 17th-century king of Bhaktapur Jagatprakāśa Malla described the god smeared with ashes (*vibhutina lepalapu deva*) as the one who likes to eat datura fruit and poison (*dudharapu esa bhope yava*). The opening *stuti* verses in two plays by the king Bhūpatīndra Malla, who ruled Bhaktapur from 1696 to 1722 CE, also depict Śiva consuming datura. When describing the appearance of Śiva in the *Vikramacaritranāṭaka* (*Play on the Prince’s Exploits*), the Malla king wrote that living in a cemetery and consuming datura fruit and poison (*bhope dhudalapu eśa*) pleases the god, and at

the opening of his *Śrīkhaṇḍacaritranāṭaka* (*Play on the Exploits of Khaṇḍa*), the same Nepalese king stated that Śiva consumed mercury, datura fruit, and poison (*bhoṣe nyasa dudharapu vāsa*).

Current recensions of the *Svasthānivratakathā*, a Newar Śaiva-Śākta text used heavily in religious practice,<sup>67</sup> depict Śiva consuming datura alongside cannabis and either poison or mercury. In a familiar scene across Śaiva literature, Śiva's father-in-law Dakṣa chastises his daughter Satī over her choice of a husband. Dakṣa complains that Śiva is busy “smoking marijuana and eating yasa [poison (*vasa*) or mercury (*nyasa*)] and dhattura” and is “afraid of no one.”<sup>68</sup> The potentially fear-inducing datura and cannabis have no effect on Śiva. Due to his yogic powers, he can handle these intoxicants in a way that an ordinary being could not. He “consumes yasa [poison or mercury], *dhattūra*, and marijuana, and then directs Yama the god of death telling him when to kill and when not to kill.”<sup>69</sup> Śiva consumes deadly toxins (datura and poison or mercury) to demonstrate his power over death and, in the case of mercury, his status as the supreme deity for the alchemy-practicing Gorakhnāths. The trope of Śiva consuming datura, cannabis, and poison or mercury likely entered the text in the mid-18th century just after the Bhaktapur kings composed their plays.<sup>70</sup>

The fearless lord of yogins consuming toxins not only demonstrates his supreme yogic power but also links him to the name Nīlakaṇṭha (Blue Throat), a reference to Śiva's throat turning blue following his consumption of the poison plaguing the primordial ocean. In tantric medical texts, Śiva's poison-destroying power is incorporated into a system of “Nīlakaṇṭha” mantras to combat poisoning in a patient.<sup>71</sup> The association of Śiva with datura requires more investigation than is possible here, but I hope that these references will aid in future research.

Regarding the second topic of our intermission, in the first chapter of Kṣemendra's *Samayamātrkā*, the protagonist describes how her maternal grandmother died after accidental poison ingestion.<sup>72</sup> A greedy doctor was called to treat the old woman. He apparently had a draught that he consumed to stay young, despite being an old man. The protagonist's grandmother guzzled up two-thirds of this draught, then became simultaneously hostile and distressed: hostile due to a paranoia in which she perceived enemies everywhere, and distressed due to a paranoia brought about by overwhelming hallucinations (*vañcana* may refer to fraudulence in respect to both persons and perceptions; *prapañcavañcanāvairāt sā tenāturatām gatā*). She then perceived that the ground was made of gold, and shortly thereafter she died.<sup>73</sup>

In his commentary on the text, the 19th-century Kashmiri *paṇḍita* Govind Kaul stated that the old woman's intoxication came about due to her consumption of a particular herb (*auśadhiviśeṣa*).<sup>74</sup> If this is the case, the particular herb triggered paranoid hallucinations accompanied by fear, a terrifying experience that aligns with those detailed above.

But what about seeing the earth as gold? In a Buddhist commentary detailing the creation of a *maṇḍala* for Mañjuvajra that is preserved in Tibetan, we find a potential explanation. The commentator informs us that “by the power of datura, some see the earth as golden colored.”<sup>75</sup> Possibly, the particular hallucination-inducing herb that the grandmother in the *Samayamātrkā* consumed was datura. She was overwhelmed by feelings of paranoia from hallucinations that enemies surrounded her, and she saw the ground as golden colored (*hiraṇyavarṇām vasudhām*). She was eventually killed by whatever she consumed.

Complicating the interpretation that datura was the herb that poisoned the unfortunate old woman is the attribution, in the *Bhagavadgītā*, of seeing the earth as gold to a result of a gnostic,

nondual yogic perception—“the yogin is the one for whom earth, stone and gold are the same.”<sup>76</sup> In another satire, his *Kalāvilāsa* (*Grace of Guile*), Kṣemendra uses this same quality to mock an intoxicated person: “Unhampered by the distinction between real and unreal, considering gold, mud and stones to be the same, the drunkard, even though he has thus attained the state of the Yogin, propels himself into hell.”<sup>77</sup> In his *Deśopadeśa* (*Teachings Regarding the Provincial*), Kṣemendra similarly compares a rogue (*dhūrta!*) to a non-distinction-perceiving yogin, insofar as the rogue swindles friend and foe alike.<sup>78</sup> Since this image resembles that of the intoxicated person who sees without distinction, like a yogin, the gold-seeing description in the *Kalāvilāsa* serves as a mockery of intoxication and religion, whereas the description in the *Samayamāṭṛkā* of the old woman seeing gold contains no reference to the perception of a yogin and is unlikely to have been inspired by the verse in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Perhaps, instead, it is a humorous episode: the old woman, having drunk the greedy doctor’s draught, sees gold everywhere, similar to the contemporary trope of a thief or con man seeing dollar signs over potential marks. The grandmother has, after all, presumably taken on the roguish doctor’s way of seeing. Was Kṣemendra making a play on the potential double meaning of the word *dhūrta*? This is unlikely since the word does not appear in this episode of the *Samayamāṭṛkā*. In any case, it remains unclear if a particular herb was consumed and, if so, what it was.

## DATURA IN BUDDHIST MAGIC

Now that we have seen the material and magical potency of datura to transmute metals, poison victims, neutralize other poisons, and bring others under one’s control, let us turn to the use of datura in Sanskrit tantric Buddhism. Like the previous examples of datura usage from a variety of genres and traditions, the examples that follow of datura usage in *yoginī* tantras are not exhaustive but are representative of how the plant was perceived and utilized in the tradition.<sup>79</sup> I will limit my discussion primarily to the tantras of the *yoginī* corpus, the final stratum of Sanskrit Vajrayāna revelatory literature. The entry of datura into tantric Buddhist magic, however, does not begin with the *yoginī* tantras.

Already in the mid-first-millennium CE *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (*Core Spell Tome of Mañjuśrī*),<sup>80</sup> datura is utilized in various magical rites. An *ākaraṣaṇa* rite involves burning datura in a fire thrice daily for a week in order to attract cattle, and elsewhere instructions are laid out for the *vaśīkaraṇa* of a *śūdra* from afar that involve offering datura flowers into a sacrificial fire.<sup>81</sup> The text gives instructions for a *māraṇa* rite for killing one’s enemy and the enemy’s family and confidants using several ingredients including datura roots and datura broadly speaking (*kaṇṭaka*, likely the seed pod/fruit).<sup>82</sup> It is said that a target may be driven insane from afar if the yogin offers datura into a sacrificial fire, potentially an example of a *mohana* rite. Finally, there is a rite involving immobilizing enemies with illness (*stambhana*) before eventually killing them (*māraṇa*). The yogin may resurrect them by offering milk into the fire and then pacify (*śānti*) any suffering they have upon revival.<sup>83</sup> Already a strong precedent is set in this “proto-tantra” that contains procedures involving datura to accomplish five of the six magical aims, *vaśīkaraṇa*, *māraṇa*, *mohana*, *stambhana*, and *śānti*.<sup>84</sup>

Similar rites continue in Buddhist tantras, such as in the eighth-century CE *Guhyasamājatantra* (*Secret Society System*), reckoned by the Vajrayāna tradition as a transitional text, the “apex of the yoga tantras” (*yogottara*), where a rite of killing utilizing datura is given.<sup>85</sup> Another transitional

text between the yoga and *yoginī* tantras, the eighth- or ninth-century CE *anuttarayoga* (unexcelled among yoga tantras) *Vajrabhairavatantra* (*Vajra System of the One Who Roars Away Terror*) uses datura in three rites for driving away and/or ruining others (*uccāṭana*) and two rites of killing, one of which involves rendering the target insane first.<sup>86</sup> Otherwise, aside from a few mentions, between the appearance of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and the *yoginī* tantras, a period of perhaps three to four centuries, datura is conspicuously absent where one would expect to find it (e.g., *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, *Bhūtaḍāmara*, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*).<sup>87</sup> The especially transgressive *yoginī* tantras, however, show a marked increase in inclusion of magical rites generally—and datura for those rites specifically—over the tantric Buddhist tradition (*kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*) that preceded them.

In the ninth-century *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, datura is thrice employed in magical rites. In one procedure the plant, referred to as the “five intoxicants,” which the Tibetan exegete Bu ston says “refers to the root, stem, leaves, flowers, and fruit of the datura plant,”<sup>88</sup> is used to render a victim insane. Bhavabhaṭṭa, in his commentary of the ninth-century *yoginī* tantra *Catuspīṭhatantra* (*System in Four Sections*, CPT), also identifies the five intoxicants as datura when glossing a prescription in the ninth chapter of the root tantra that involves using datura to render a victim insane.<sup>89</sup> In the CST, “one who wishes to make [one] a substance and/or non-substance” (*dravyam adravyam kartukāmaḥ*) is instructed to burn 108 datura fruits (*kanakaphalāni*; the commentator Jayabhadrā writes “*kanako dhutturakaḥ*”). It is unclear to me what “substance and/or non-substance” refers to, although it may be instructions to conduct a *stambhana* rite or even to evoke a dissociative state. A killing procedure instructs the yogin to burn mustard oil and crow wings (a common ingredient in *abhicāra*/hostile rites) in a fire kindled with datura.<sup>90</sup>

The third section (*yogapīṭha*) of the CPT provides instructions for inducing madness in a target by drugging him or her with a spirituous concoction containing datura, human oil, and bdellium. The procedure prescribes feeding the victim ghee to reverse the effects of the maddening concoction.<sup>91</sup> The *Maṇḍalopāyikā* (*Initiation into the Maṇḍala*), a 10th-century initiation manual for the CPT, gives instructions for using datura to help bring on possession (*adiṣṭhā*<sup>92</sup>) in a yogin. He is to make a spirituous concoction with equal parts of the five parts of datura (*unmattādikapañcasya samabhāgam*) along with human oil. Merely by tasting this with his tongue (*jihvendriyasya svādasya*) he is immediately possessed (*āviṣṭas tatkṣaṇād*).<sup>93</sup> This procedure for possession through magico-material aid (which the text considers inferior to non-aided possession) is immediately preceded by instructions involving fumigating a spirituous concoction with bdellium (*guggula*) and the “seven great herbs” (*saptamahauṣadha*). As soon as the yogin smells it (*ghrāṇitagandhasya*) he is immediately possessed (*āviṣṭa tatkṣaṇād*). It is unclear what the seven herbs are; one of them (or a single, sevenfold herb) may be datura. Also unclear is how a presumably wet concoction prepared with a solution (*amṛtodaka*) may be burned; perhaps it is left to dry prior to fumigation.

The *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* (*Black Yamāri System*, KYT) is a *yoginī* tantra composed around 900 CE that contains a few prescriptions that use datura. The toxic botanical is employed in a procedure in the section on killing by means of the magical tradition of spells and diagrams (*yantramantratantramāraṇapāṭala*). Later in the tantra, among plainly magical procedures (e.g., ending droughts, immobilizing a victim/*stambhana*), the text states that by mixing rice and beans with 1,000 datura seeds (*caṇḍabīja*) while performing 8,000 recitations (*aṣṭalakṣaprajaptena*) the

god (the commentary identifies this god with Yamāri) is to be seen (*deva tu drśyatām*) as result of the sacrificial fire (*homāt*). No mention is otherwise made of a burnt offering, and the commentator Kumāracandra glosses *homāt* as “according to a procedure of magical attraction” (*ākṣṛṭikramena*). Although the commentator sees this as a rite of *ākaraṣaṇa*, the root tantra is not entirely clear. It is therefore open to interpretation if the “god is to be seen” in a hallucination brought on by the yogin’s consumption of datura seeds, whether in gross form or through smoke from a fire. This procedure is immediately followed by a description of a rite of making a victim sick by smearing datura extract (*unmattarasalepena*) onto a doll made from *gañjana*. It is unclear what *gañjana* is here (hemp?) and the commentary identifies it as burnt wood. The commentary also interprets the procedure as a way to use datura to nullify poisoning (*nirviṣaṃ karoti*).<sup>94</sup>

The 10th-century *Samputodbhavatantra/Samputatantra* (*System Arising from the United Couple*, ST) includes datura in no fewer than 10 magical procedural instructions. Along with crow feathers and other materials, datura is utilized in a spell to make two other people enemies with each other (*vidveṣaṇa*) and in two rites of repelling (*uccāṭana*). Two rites employ datura to drive a victim insane (*mohana* rites), and in one of these two procedures, the victim dies after seven days. There is a rite for immobilizing (*stambhana*) an enemy army. The tantra also lists datura as an effective substance for eliminating manifold poisons (*kṣapayati viṣaṃ vicitram*). The seeds of datura are said to make a person into a ghost (*preta*), which may refer to an acute datura intoxication that resembles the Haitian zombie state, or it may mean killing the victim. The use of datura is prescribed in a rite of protection for the yogin himself in which he is to draw an effigy and inscribe it with various protective mantras. The effigy is to be drawn with an ink mixture that includes poison, neem, charnel ground ash, and datura extract (*unmattakarasa*). The instructions state that, if worn by the yogin as a protective talisman, this effigy will counter the spells directed at him by his enemies (this is somewhat confusing, since he was instructed the draw the effigy, but it is not specified onto what).<sup>95</sup>

The 12th-century *Samvarodayatantra* (*Arising of Samvara System*, SUT) is likely a product of Nepal. In three places, it prescribes using datura while undertaking magical acts. The text contains a particularly violent procedure for killing someone with mantras that begins with the yogin drawing a *maṇḍala* with a crow’s wing using ink made from a variety of liquid extracts, including neem, “poison,” and datura. Instructions for a rite of ruining another socially (*vidviṣṭa*) state that the yogin should burn crow and owl nests along with neem leaves in a fire kindled in datura (*dhūstūrāgnau*). There is a rite of attraction (*ākaraṣaṇa*) involving datura in which the yogin is to draw the target (*sādhyā*) on a human skull, but the text is not clear how the plant is to be used. The author of 13th-century *Padminī* commentary on the *Samvarodayatantra*, Ratnarakṣita, states that the stylus used to draw the image of the target on the skull should be made of datura wood (*dhūṣṭūrakāṣṭhalekhanyā*).<sup>96</sup>

The 12th- or 13th-century *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*, a product of Nepal and mentioned at the opening of this paper, is possibly the final tantra composed in Sanskrit. Aside from the *vaśīkaraṇa* instructions that launched this investigation, the text contains two other procedures involving datura. Neither of these procedures involves conventional magical acts (*ṣaṭkarman*), but they do align thematically with procedures located in the *kāmaśāstra* tradition. One calls for making a paste with buffalo butter, *aśvagandha* (*Withania somnifera* L.), and datura extract, storing the



mixture in a datura seedpod for one day and night, then applying it to the penis, whose size, it is said, will increase.

The other procedure utilizes datura to restrain the semen. Unspecified portions of datura taken from the north side of the plant are tied to the yogin's hips, along with nontoxic botanicals and the bone of a black cat's left paw. If the yogin dances with his hair unbound and these items affixed to his hips, he gains the ability to restrain his semen.<sup>97</sup> Although neither of these procedures has magical aims, the means to get the results are plainly magical. Datura, whose potency is well established, is mixed with butter and *aśvagandha* and applied to a penis to increase its size. In the case of restraining semen, by attaching datura to oneself (which *must* come from the north side of the plant) along with objects such as the bone of a cat's paw (which *must* be from the left paw) and dancing with hair unbound, the mechanical process of seminal ejaculation is stopped.

### **CONCLUSION: WAS DATURA CONSUMED BY PREMODERN YOGINS FOR ITS PSYCHOTROPIC EFFECTS? YES AND NO, AT ONCE.**

In the Vajrayāna texts surveyed here, datura has a central function in 31 magical rites. These rites include all eight of the possible *ṣaṭkarman* listed at the start of this paper: *ākaraṣaṇa*, *vaśīkaraṇa*, *māraṇa*, *mohana*, *stambhana*, *śānti*, *uccāṭana*, and *vidviṣena*. Often datura is used through the duration of a procedure that involves multiple magical acts (e.g., *mohana/māraṇa*, *stambhana/māraṇa/śānti*), and there are instances when it is employed for magical aims that do not constitute a particular *ṣaṭkarman* (e.g., sickening a target from afar, empowering an amulet to counter hostile spells aimed at the wearer). The *ṣaṭkarman* are common throughout the *yoginī* tantras. For example, the same chapter of the CPT that gives instructions for bringing on possession gives procedures for five magical acts (*ākṛṣya*, *uccāṭana*, *stambhita*, *kali*, *śānti*/pacification);<sup>98</sup> the 47th chapter of the CST lists five (*ākaraṣaṇa*, *stambhana*, *śoṣaṇa*, *mohana*, *jambhana*) just after instructions involving datura; and the SUT names at least three (*śānti*, *sphīta*, *vaśya*).

These Vajrayāna texts contain three descriptions of datura consumption, which may provide instructions to intentionally produce hallucinations. These are the instructions in the CST where “one who wishes to make [one] a substance and/or non-substance” (*dravyam adravyam kartukāmah*) burns datura; the procedure in the KYT in which datura is used along with rice and beans so that “the god is to be seen”; and the instructions in the *Maṇḍalopāyikā* manual to the CPT that instructs the yogin to consume a concoction containing datura to bring about possession. In the examples from the CST and KYT, datura is burned and the effect occurs after combustion. This may suggest that these procedures are entirely magical, with no material dimension, as burning datura will eliminate the plant's psychoactive qualities. For the commentator on the KYT, the magical quality of the procedure is explicit, as his gloss on *ākaraṣaṇa* makes clear that, for him, magically and materially induced visions are categorically identical.

The hallucinogenic quality of datura (and all psychoactive plants in the Solanaceae family) derives from some combination of tropane alkaloids present in the plant (atropine, hyoscyamine, and scopolamine in *D. metel*). When these tropane alkaloids are subjected to boiling at 100 degrees Celsius, they degrade significantly. The degradation of their chemical structures is so great that pouring boiling water is an “effective way to decontaminate samples [such] as other cereal or pseudocereal or processed food” that have been contaminated with tropane alkaloids.<sup>99</sup>

The combustion temperature for wood is 600 degrees Celsius. If the tropane alkaloids that give datura its psychotropic quality are rendered ineffective by exposure to a temperature of 100 degrees Celsius, it seems probable that those same alkaloids would degrade to the point of ineffectiveness at the necessary temperature for wood combustion. In Indigenous American cultures from California to Mesoamerica to the Andes, datura is always either consumed in a liquid concoction or portions of the plant eaten in gross form.<sup>100</sup> This is also true for other Solanaceae plants used for similar purposes, such as *toé* (*Brugmansia suaveolens* L.).<sup>101</sup> In fact, no evidence exists to corroborate early Spanish accounts claiming that the “smoke of tobacco and other stupefying herbs was used to induce visions” by any Indigenous American group.<sup>102</sup> Even the contemporary accounts of datura intoxication given on Erowid note that, when smoked along with cannabis and/or tobacco, datura had no noticeable effects; hallucinations occurred only after a portion of the plant was ingested by the user. Jarrod Hyam noted that the plant was ingested alongside cannabis when consumed by *jhākris* in Nepal for its psychotropic effects, not smoked, during Śivarātrī, the festival celebrating Śiva’s consumption of poison.<sup>103</sup> Recall as well that the leaves of *D. metel* are smoked medicinally in parts of South Asia to ease asthma symptoms and that *D. stramonium* was smoked widely across Europe and North America in the 19th century for the same reason. In both instances, smoking datura leaves brings on no psychotropic effects.

I suggest that the instructions to burn datura to potentially bring on a dissociative state (in the CST) and to help the yogin see the deity (in the KYT) are entirely magical. Due to the chemical degradation of the tropane alkaloids when exposed to the temperatures necessary for combustion, it is impossible for the smoke of datura to induce the same hallucinations that result from orally ingesting the plant. The material potency of the plant, which when ingested can bring on powerful hallucinations, leads to the magical potency the plant possesses when burned. This same logic applies to the instructions for possession in the *Maṅḍalopāyikā* manual on the CPT. The yogin is “instantly” (*tatkṣaṇād*) possessed after tasting the datura concoction. Following the ingestion of datura it takes more than an instant for intoxication to take effect, and that intoxication cannot come about simply by tasting a concoction containing the plant. Again, it is the material potency of hallucination-inducing datura that gives the plant its magical efficacy.

In addition to the impact of the material efficacy of datura on its utilization in magical rites is the shared thought world of several overlapping traditions in its use. Procedures in the *yoginī* tantras that employ datura often reflect a sharing of ideas and methods between Vajrayāna yogins and other magico-medical specialists. Parallel procedures are given above from both the *Kāmasūtra* and the CPT for rendering a victim insane with datura, then pacifying the effect of the drug by giving the victim a viscous substance, either ghee or molasses. The same procedure is also located in the Śaiva *Uḍḍāmareśvaratantra*, where datura is prescribed to induce madness and a ghee-based concoction is recommended to counteract the effect.<sup>104</sup> The *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa* recommends giving datura to turn an unsuspecting victim into a *piśāca*, and the SUT recommends the same to turn a victim into a *preta*. Of the texts discussed here, the intertextual overlap is not limited to datura. For example, the CMT and *Haramekhalā* share a *vaśīkaraṇa* procedure involving applying a *tilaka* (unclear if upon the intended victim) made from ingredients including *bhṛṅgarāja* (*Eclipta prostrata* L.) and the tongue of a blind *śīśu* (calf?).<sup>105</sup>

Bearing all this mind, let us turn to our opening question: Was datura consumed by premodern yogins for its psychotropic effects? Datura was simultaneously consumed and not consumed for

its psychotropic effects by premodern Buddhist yogins, but not to “trip” or use as an “entheogen.” In the case of a drugging with datura for the purpose of *vaśīkaraṇa*, such as in the aforementioned procedure from the CMT, the victim was intoxicated both magically and materially. The known psychotropic effects of the plant imbued it with magical potency, and it was due to this potency that the plant was used for its psychotropic effects. Material potency was caused by magical potency, which was seen as the cause of the material potency, and so on.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thank you to Patricia Sauthoff and Michael Slouber for invaluable feedback on previous drafts of this paper. Thank you to James McHugh for being a conversation partner on intoxicants for several years and encouraging me to pursue this research into datura. Thank you to Dominic Steavu for being a sobering guide to premodern usage of intoxicants in Asia. Thank you to the eleventh-hour style editor for increasing the readability of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> *puṣyanakṣatreṇa dhusturasya phalaṃ saṃgrahet | āśleṣanakṣatreṇa valkalaṃ hastena patraṃ citrayā puṣpaṃ mūlena mūlaṃ samabhāgacūrṇaṃ madhunā vaṭikāṃ kuryāt | karpaṭe badhya śoṣayet | tāmbūlena dadyāt | śāṅkhacūrṇena vaśikaraṇam || CMT 19.8 ||.*

<sup>3</sup> Aaron Michael Ullrey, “Grim Grimoires: Pragmatic Ritual in the Magic Tantra” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2016), xvi.

<sup>4</sup> To reemphasize, the exact number of magical acts is not always six, and the types of acts are not necessarily the six listed above. This particular set of eight (*ākarsaṇa*, *uccāṭana*, *māraṇa*, *mohana*, *vaśikaraṇa*, *vidveṣaṇa*, *śānti*, and *stambhana*), however, contains the acts most commonly given. For the most recent study of the six magical acts and a review of the extant secondary literature see Ullrey, “Grim Grimoires.”

<sup>5</sup> James McHugh, *An Unholy Brew: Alcohol in Indian History and Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 64–73.

<sup>6</sup> This tertiary literature is not produced in obscure corners of the counterculture. An extract from an ethnobotanical survey of human use of hallucinogenic plants coauthored by pioneer anthropologist Richard Evans Schultes, the synthesizer of LSD Albert Hoffman, and ethnobotanist Christian Rätsch is representative of the treatment of datura in the context of Indian religion in the tertiary literature. “In India, it was called tuft of Shiva, the god of destruction. Dancing girls sometimes drugged wine with its seeds, and whoever drank of the potion, appearing in possession of his senses, gave answers to questions, although he had no control of his will, was ignorant of whom he was addressing, and lost all memory of what he did when the intoxication wore off. For this reason, many Indians called the plant ‘drunkard,’ ‘madman,’ ‘deceiver,’ and ‘foolmaker.’ The British traveler Hardwicke found this plant common in mountain villages in India in 1796 and reported that an infusion of the seeds was used to increase the intoxication from alcoholic drinks. During the Sanskrit period, Indian medicine valued *Datura metel* for treating mental disorders, various fevers, tumors, breast inflammations, skin diseases, and diarrhea” (Richard Evans Schultes, Albert Hoffman, and Christian Rätsch, *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers* [Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2001], 108).

<sup>7</sup> “The James-Town Weed [...] was gather’d very young for a boil’d salad, by some of the soldiers sent thither to quell the rebellion of Bacon; and some of them ate plentifully of it, the effect of which was a very pleasant comedy, for they turned natural fools upon it for several days: one would blow up a feather in the air; another would dart straws at it with much fury; and another, stark naked, was sitting up in a corner like a monkey, grinning and making mows [grimaces] at them; a fourth would fondly kiss and paw his companions, and sneer in their faces with a countenance more antic than any in a Dutch droll. In this frantic condition they were confined, lest they should, in their folly, destroy themselves—though it was observed that all their actions were full of innocence and good nature. Indeed, they were not very cleanly; for they would have wallowed in their own excrements if they had not been prevented. A thousand such simple tricks they played, and after eleven days returned themselves again, not remembering anything that had passed” (Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*. 4 vols. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013], 105–106). This story, told roughly 30 years later, is based on observation and hearsay.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Block, “Jimson Weed,” *High Times*, December 1975, 80.

<sup>9</sup> “Jimsonweed is a major cause of accidental poisonings and death by those looking to get a cheap high.” “The Powerful Solanaceae: *Datura*,” US Forest Service, Accessed 5/4/2023 [https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/ethnobotany/Mind\\_and\\_Spirit/datura.shtml](https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/ethnobotany/Mind_and_Spirit/datura.shtml).

<sup>10</sup> The old-world status of *D. metel* is well-established. For example, see R. Geeta and Waleed Gharaibeh, “Historical Evidence for a Pre-Columbian Presence of *Datura* in the Old World and Implications for a First Millennium Transfer from the New World,” *Journal of Biosciences* 32, no. 7 (2007): 1227–44.

<sup>11</sup> For representative examples of such entries on *D. metel* as one among many *materia medica* in South Asia see Chandra Chakraborty, *A Comparative Hindu Materia Medica* (Delhi: D. K. Publishers, 1983), 125–6; T. K.

Rajbhandari, N. R. Joshi, T. Shrestha, S. K. G. Joshi, and B. Acharya, eds., *Medicinal Plants of Nepal for Ayurvedic Drugs* (Kathmandu: His Majesty's Govt. of Nepal, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Dept. of Plant Resources, Natural Products Development Division, 1995): 133–9; M. K. Kaul, *Medicinal Plants of Kashmir and Ladakh* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1997), 114; Purushotam Kaushik and Anil Kumar Dhiman, *Medicinal Plants and Raw Drugs of India* (Dehradun, India: Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh, 2000), 386–8; Keshab R. Rajbhandari, *Ethnobotany of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Ethnobotanical Society of Nepal, 2001), 142; Bejoy Gurung, *The Medicinal Plants of the Sikkim Himalaya* (Chakung, West Sikkim: Jasmin, 2002), 137; Narayan P. Manandhar, *Plants and People of Nepal* (Portland: Timber Press, 2002), 189; and Deepak Acharya and Anush Shrivastavan, *Indigenous Herbal Medicines: Tribal Formulations and Traditional Herbal Practices* (Jaipur: Aavishkar Publishers, 2008), 122–3). The smoking of datura leaves and roots as a treatment for asthma was widely used in Europe and North America from the mid-19th century to the first decades of the 20th century. This practice was directly adopted from traditional usage of the plant in India as observed by East India Company agents. For the history of this practice in Europe and North America see Mark Jackson, “‘Divine Stramonium’: The Rise and Fall of Smoking for Asthma,” *Medical History* 54, no. 2 (2010): 171–94.

<sup>12</sup> “Moreover, many of the siddha scriptures discuss ointments and drugs, especially those applied to the eyes or feet. The use of the various species of datura (especially *Datura fastuosa* [another name for *Datura metel*]) is particularly evident. Sometimes termed the ‘crazy datura’ (*unmattadhatura*) or ‘Śiva’s datura,’ it was generally employed as a narcotic paste or as wood in a fire ceremony and could be easily absorbed through the skin or the lungs. The seeds of this powerful narcotic, termed ‘passion seeds’ (*caṇḍabīja*), are the strongest elements and contain the alkaloids hyoscyamine, atropine, and scopolamine in forms that survive burning or boiling. In even moderate doses, datura can render a person virtually immobile with severe belladonna-like hallucinations. The drug has been used by Indian criminal gangs like the Thugīs to incapacitate unsuspecting travelers. This may have something to do with the siddha fascination with flying or perhaps inform their iconography, for a common report from the use of datura is the sensation of aerial transport or the feeling of being half-man and half-animal.” (Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2002], 201).

<sup>13</sup> Ian A. Baker, *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2019), 233.

<sup>14</sup> David B. Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra (The Discourse of Sri Heruka): Śrītherukābhīdhāna: A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies and Columbia University Press, 2007), 373–4.

<sup>15</sup> McHugh, *An Unholy Brew*, 224.

<sup>16</sup> A possible exception to this is Bulcu Siklós, “Datura Rituals in the Vajramahabhairava-Tantra,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47, no. 3 (1994): 409–16. But this short article primarily argues that the transliterated “*da dhu ra*” is *Datura metel*, not *Datura stramonium*, and that the former is an old-world plant. As far as texts are concerned, Siklós only includes references to the plant in the Buddhist *Vajrabhairavatantra*.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., *Kulapradīpa* 4.3 (Muktābodha Catalog Number M00068) names datura as a poison (*viṣa*), Bhāskararāya’s commentary on the *Lalitāsahasranāma* 1.97 (Muktābodha Catalog Number M00057) names “*dhattūra*” as a possible synonym for *mada*, and the *Śaktisaṅgamatantra Sundarīkhandā* 6.7 (Muktābodha Catalog Number M00129) instructs a yogin to empower a garland for the worship of Śiva by drawing an imaginary weapon (?on the garland?) with ink from datura (*nāmamāyāstradhatturalikhitaṃ*) before burying it in the earth by flowing water, where it is left for a period of time to power up. Bhāskararāya’s gloss of *mada* (specifically “*madanāśinī*,” where he is describing *kleśas* to be destroyed) as *dhattūra* is, frankly, a bit odd, since the other gloss he gives is *madana*, suggesting that he is unaware that *dhattūra* is a plant, instead taking it as another name for *unmatta* as intoxication. I thank Elaine Fisher for the *Kulapradīpa* and Bhāskararāya references.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jarrod Hyam, “The Transformational Body: Bāul and Jhākri Approaches to Embodied Healing” (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2019), 191, where the ingestion by Nepalese *jhākris* of datura alongside cannabis was observed in Nepal by Hyam during Śivarātrī festivities.

<sup>19</sup> All dates for *rasaśāstra* texts are taken from G. Jan Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature. A History of Indian Medical Literature* (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1999), vol. 2A.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 9 of David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions In Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) for a discussion of the *bandhas*’ place among other steps given in the

*Rasārṇava* in the process to transform oneself into an immortal *siddha*. In the *Rasārṇava*, the use of datura for the destruction of wrinkles is found in 18.72 and for purifying/killing mercury in 17.2.

<sup>21</sup> “Killing” mercury refers to the process of rendering mercury fit for usage, whether in metal transmutation or actual oral consumption.

<sup>22</sup> *Rasaratnākara Rasakhaṇḍa* 3.37.

<sup>23</sup> In the *Rasaratnākara*, datura is used for purifying copper in *Rasakhaṇḍa* 3.37; for purifying sulfur in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 3.67–78; for transmuting copper to gold in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 6.30; for transmuting silver to gold in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 4.159, 7.60; for transmuting silver-copper amalgam to gold in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 7.46; for making arsenic powder in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 7.13; for making salts in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 10.84; and for brightening lesser metals to make them appear more valuable in *Vādakhaṇḍa* 19.70.

<sup>24</sup> *Rasatarāṅgiṇī* 3.19 and *Rasaratnasamuccaya* 10.23. The text of both the *Rasatarāṅgiṇī* and the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* was sourced from the *Digital Corpus of Sanskrit* (<http://www.sanskrit-linguistics.org/dcs/index.php>).

<sup>25</sup> This tale appears in chapter 5 of book 2 of the *Kathāsaritsāgara*.

<sup>26</sup> *Samayamātrkā* 2.90.

<sup>27</sup> McHugh, *An Unholy Brew*, 134–6.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Norman Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India, Including the Outline of a History of Crime Against the Person in India* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1870), 193–211. I thank Dominik Wujastyk for providing me with this reference. “There appears to be no drug known in the present day which represents, in its effects, so close an approach to the system of Slow Poisoning believed by many to have been practised in the Middle Ages as does the datura” (Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India*, 211).

<sup>29</sup> *Suśrutasaṃhitā, Cikitsāsthāna* 17.37. The same recipe instructs the physician to administer seeds of both datura and “maddening millet” (*madanakodrava*), along with oil, to the patient suffering from sinusitis. *Madanakodrava* may refer a hallucinogenic yeast derived from kodo millet, perhaps akin to ergot. McHugh (*An Unholy Brew*, 222–4) notes instructions for the utilization of the “narcotic kodo millet” (*madanakodrava*) as a weaponized drug in texts such as the *Artha Śāstra*, as well as the linking of the narcotic to datura in late-medieval *materia medica* texts.

<sup>30</sup> Dominik Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 140.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Priya Vrat Sharma, *Suśruta-Saṃhitā with English Translation of [sic] Text and Dalhaṇa’s Commentary along with Critical Notes*. 3 vols. Varanasi: Chaukambha Visvabharati, 2001; G. D. Singhal, L. V. Guru, L. M. Singh, K. P. Siṃha, and K. R. Sharma, eds., *Suśruta-saṃhitā* (Allahabad: Singhal Publications, 1972); and Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, *An English Translation of the Sushruta Samhita Based on [sic] Original Sanskrit Text* (Calcutta: Wilkins Press J. N. Bose, 1907).

<sup>32</sup> Meulenbeld, *History of Indian Medicine*, vol. 2A, 442.

<sup>33</sup> *Abhidhānamañjarī, Madanādigaṇavarga* 18.270–272. Hosted at “e-NIGHANTU (Collection of Āyurvedic Lexicons),” <https://niimh.nic.in/ebooks/e-Nighantu/>. Accessed May 9, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> In several other *nighaṇṭus*, *karambha* is consistently identified as *dronī* and *karkaśa*, both of which can refer to more than one species of plant but not to datura. I thank Dominik Wujastyk for generously sharing his materials with me as I investigated this possible reference to datura as a poison in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, as well as informing me of the reference to datura in the *Abhidhānamañjarīnighaṇṭu*.

<sup>35</sup> Given that “*dhātura*” is explicitly mentioned in the *Cikitsāsthāna* of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, it seems unlikely that a different word is used to refer to the same the plant in the *Kalpasthāna*, although the possibility may not be ruled out. In any case, the exact identity of the *karambha* plant meant by the author(s) of the text around the start of the Common Era has no bearing on the current study.

<sup>36</sup> Wujastyk, *Roots of Ayurveda*, 257.

<sup>37</sup> Datura as an antivenom for a scorpion sting at *Vaidyasārprakāśa* 13.18 and instructions for treating datura poisoning at 14.40.

<sup>38</sup> *Āyurvedaparakāśa* 6.108.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Slouber, *Early Tantric Medicine: Snakebite, Mantras, and Healing in the Garuda Tantras* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Slouber, *Early Tantric Medicine*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). This passage refers specifically to the invocation of particular animals in magical incantations but can include plants as well, since Descola’s example is meant to capture the entire natural world.

<sup>42</sup> Slouber, *Early Tantric Medicine*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> *dhurdhūrakāṣṭhais taddhomād unmattāḥ syurarātayaḥ | vidveṣo nimbakārpāsair mārayet saviṣairviṣaiḥ || Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati, Mantrapāda, 17.87.*

<sup>44</sup> A commentary on the Śaiva *Svacchandatantra* by the 11th-century exegete Kṣemarāja may help clear this up. When he names the five parts of the datura plant (*Svacchandatanthroddyota* 13.36), rather than wood he records stem (*kāṅṭa*).

<sup>45</sup> I suffer from abdominal attacks for which I have been hospitalized several times and received three surgeries to address, all to no avail. No drugs are effective to stop the attacks, save one, hyoscyamine, which can entirely eliminate these abdominal attacks within 10 minutes. Hyoscyamine, for me, is a miracle drug. It was first isolated from datura. It has no cognitive side effects that one might expect from with an alkaloid derived from datura.

<sup>46</sup> *Tantrasārasaṅgraha* 14.2.

<sup>47</sup> The respective verses of the *Bhairavapadmāvāṭīkalpa* are 28.50 for *vaśīkaraṇa*, 8.59 for antivenom, 9.40 to counteract poison, 17.20 for defeating an enemy army 17.20, and 17.30–31 for killing another.

<sup>48</sup> Ullrey, “Grim Grimoires,” xvii.

<sup>49</sup> Ullrey understood this procedure to call for the user himself to hold the mixture in his own mouth for three days. This is a possible reading from the root text alone, but the commentator recorded “*mukhanihitam sarpāsye sthāpitam*.” In a note, Ullrey stated that betel “put into the mouth of a snake is seen elsewhere, but the root verse contains nothing serpentine. After much consideration, I have left out the interpretation of the betel nut in a snake’s mouth” (Ullrey, “Grim Grimoires,” 728n182). However, in the body of his translation, Ullrey recorded “placed in the mouth [of a snake]” (Ullrey, “Grim Grimoires,” 728). This seems to me to be the correct translation. Given the long-standing connection between snakes and poison in premodern South Asia, I have elected to accept the commentator’s gloss, interpreting the procedure to call for preparing the mixture in the mouth of a dead snake over three days, rather than in the user’s own mouth. The material potency of venom is signaled by the snake, and it increases the potency of the intoxicating betel. Furthermore, holding these substances for three days in one’s own mouth would render one rather unable to complete the procedure.

<sup>50</sup> The procedure in the *Bhairavapadmāvāṭīkalpa* involving the datura seedpod vessel appears in 9.12, the procedure in which a powdered mixture is placed in a snake’s mouth in 9.12–14, and the instructions to turn a victim into a *piśāca* in 9.20. Regarding the last of these, the commentator is not helpful as he glosses the verb *piśācayati* merely to say that it refers to a *piśāca*.

<sup>51</sup> James McHugh, “The Disputed Civets and the Complexion of the God: Secretions and History in India,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132, no. 2 (2012): 245–73.

<sup>52</sup> *Haramekhālā* 3.3.

<sup>53</sup> Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar, trans., *Vatsyayana Mallanaga Kamasutra: A New, Complete English Translation of the Sanskrit Text with Excerpts from the Sanskrit Jayamangala Commentary of Yashodara Indrapada, the Hindi Jaya Commentary of Devadatta Shastri, and Explanatory Notes by the Translators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 163. *dhattūrakamaricappalīcūrṇair madhumiśrair liptaliṅgasya samprayogo vaśīkaraṇam | Kāmasūtra 7.1.25*. This function of the plant as an aid in the enhancement of sexual members and pleasure has endured for the entirety of *kāmasāstra*. For example, the 16th-century *Anaṅgaraṅga* (The Arena of Romance) gives instructions for creating a penile ointment with a mixture including datura to increase the likelihood of the subject’s female lover having an orgasm (6.10).

<sup>54</sup> Doniger and Kakar, *Vatsyayana Mallanaga Kamasutra*, 170. *dhattūrāphalayukto ‘bhyavahāra unmādakaḥ | guḍo jīrṇitāś ca pratyānayanam | Kāmasūtra 7.1.44–45*.

<sup>55</sup> Daud Ali, “Padmaśrī’s *Nāgarasarvasva* and the World of Medieval *Kāmasāstra*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 39 (2011): 41–62.

<sup>56</sup> The modern editor of the text, Tanusukharam Sharma, glossed *suvarṇabīja* as “*pārada*” (mercury) (Padmaśrī, *Nāgarasarvasva*, ed. Tanusukharam Sharma [Bombay: Manilal Iccaram Desai, 1921], 27). This is untenable as gold (*suvarṇa*) is not mercury, and there is nothing in the verses to suggest the use of mercury. Further, datura is well attested as “the gold fruit plant” (*kanakaphala*), and my interpretation and the commentator Jagajyoti Malla both reflect this fact. Datura is also well attested as an ingredient in *vaśīkaraṇa*; mercury is not. Mattia Salvini notes that “The modern editor of the text (Tanusukharāmaśarma, probably a pseudonym) offers an

interesting twentieth-century commentary, including unusual ideas about the history of Buddhist literary aesthetics, and the cultural translation of ancient technology (*kr̥trimaliṅga* is glossed in Sanskrit as *ḍiḷḍo*.)” (*Nāgarasarvasva*, 3314).

<sup>57</sup> For the dating of this text see Ali, *Medieval Kāmaśāstra*, 43–4.

<sup>58</sup> “*Girikarṇā*” refers to *Clitoria ternatea* L., which is widely used in Ayurvedic medicine. “*Girikarṇī*” (according to Monier-Williams) refers to *Alhagi maurorum*. The commentator glosses “*girikarṇīm*” as “*indravāruṇīm*,” which refers to *Citrullus colocynthis* L., a bitter gourd. I have therefore left *girikarṇī* untranslated. It is a botanical; that much is clear.

<sup>59</sup> This translation is based both on Monier-Williams and the commentary.

<sup>60</sup> Mylius includes a note for *jālikā* that reads “Ein Pflanzenart, wohl identisch mit Koṣātakī (*Trichosanthes dioica* oder *Luffa acutangula*)” (Klaus Mylius, ed., *Das Ratirahasya des Kokkoka und der Anaṅgaraṅga des Kalyāṇamalla* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009], 77). That he left the term untranslated in the body of the text indicates that he, too, is unsure of the plant’s actual identity.

<sup>61</sup> *Ratirahasya* 14.27–28.

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed study of a parallel practice in China see Yan Liu, *Healing with Poisons: Potent Medicines in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021). For detailed studies of similar practices in Tibet see Charles Ramble and Naljor Tsering, “A Rare Treatise on Toxicology from the Mardzong Collection: Translation and Preliminary Remarks,” in *The Mardzong Manuscripts: Codicological and Historical Studies of an Archaeological Find in Mustang, Nepal*, vol. 48, Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library (Leiden: Brill, 2021), and Barbara Gerke, *Taming the Poisonous: Mercury, Toxicity, and Safety in Tibetan Medical Practice* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Press, 2021).

<sup>63</sup> For the dating of this text see Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, in *A History of Indian Literature 2* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 203.

<sup>64</sup> *Nārada Purāṇa* I.13.61, III.79.234, IV.113.32 and IV.115.52–53. *Nārada Purāṇa* III.67.60 states that datura is inappropriate as an offering to Viṣṇu.

<sup>65</sup> *Nārada Purāṇa* III.74.35–37, iii.76.31, and III.87.28 for rite of killing; III.75.81cd–86 for rite of defeating enemy army; and III.86.106–109 for rite of stupefying/stunning enemies.

<sup>66</sup> Skype correspondence with Alexis Sanderson, April 18, 2021. There are instructions in the *Jayadrathayāmala* for bewildering (*mohayet*) a person by fumigating something that may be datura (*mātula*). These instructions are located in *Ṣaṭka* 4, *Prayogamaṅgalyākuhākādividhipaṭala*, vv. 42c–45, in National Archives of Kathmandu MS 1/1468=NGMPP B 122/4, 144r, lines 2–4. Note that in this section *mātula* is explicitly identified as a poison (“*mātulaṃ viṣam eva ca*”). I thank Alexis Sanderson for sharing his edition of the relevant section.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed study of this text see Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz, *Reciting the Goddess* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Linda Louis Iltis, “The Swasthānī Vrata: Newar Women and Ritual in Nepal” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985), 177.

<sup>69</sup> Iltis, “The Swasthānī Vrata,” 178–9.

<sup>70</sup> Email correspondence with Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz, January 23, 2023.

<sup>71</sup> Slouber, *Early Tantric Medicine*, 78–82.

<sup>72</sup> I am indebted to Péter-Dániel Szántó for drawing my attention to the commentary on this episode, as well as informing me of the \*Mañjuvajrodaya reference to gold and datura. I thank him for graciously sharing materials with me.

<sup>73</sup> *Samayamātrkā* 1.29–31.

<sup>74</sup> From a commentary on *Samayamātrkā* 1.30 found in Bodleian Library MS Stein Or.c.6, ser. no. 96.

<sup>75</sup> *da du ra yi mthu yis ni | ‘ga’ yis sa gzhi gser gyi rang bzhin mthong | \*Mañjuvajrodayamaṅdalavidhisarvasattvahitāvahā* (Dpal ‘jam pa’i rdo rje ‘byung ba’i dkyil ‘khor gyi cho ga sems can thams cad kyi bde ba bskyed pa). Tōhoku no. 2590, folio 225b. The *Mahākālatantra* gives datura (*tripuronmatta*) among several other botanical ingredients for an eye ointment (*añjana*) that is applied in order to see a hollow in the earth bearing treasures (*divābhūganidhi*), but there is no mention of gold. One procedure given to acquire the same aim included defecating on a piece of mantra-inscribed birch bark before eating the soiled item in order to find treasure (William George Stablein, “The *Mahākālatantra*: A Theory of Ritual Blessings and Tantric Medicine” [PhD diss., Columbia University, 1976], 169–70).

<sup>76</sup> “*yogī samaloṣṭāsmakāñcanaḥ*,” *Bhagavadgītā* 6.8cd. Cited in Somadeva Vasudeva, trans., *Three Satires by Bhāllata, Kshemendra and Nīla Kantha*, Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 363–4. I thank James McHugh for pointing this out to me.

<sup>77</sup> Vasudeva, *Three Satires*, 235. *Kalāvīlāsa* 6.17.

<sup>78</sup> *Deśopadeśa* 1.6.

<sup>79</sup> For example, *Vajrāmṛtatantra* Tōh. 435, 22 *recto*, cited in Péter-Dániel Szántó, “Selected Chapters from the *Catuṣpīṭhatantra*: (1/2) Introductory Study with the Annotated Translation of Selected Chapter” (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2012), 406, *Catuṣpīṭhatantra* 3.3.63–64, and *Dākārṇavatāntra* chapter 40 (28v and 29r of NGMPP A138–9), to name a few. I thank Tsunehiko Sugiki for sharing with me the relevant manuscript images for the *Dākārṇava*.

<sup>80</sup> All dates for Buddhist tantras and their satellite literature are taken from Tsunehiko Sugiki, “On the Chronology of the Buddhist Tantras,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Tantric Studies*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Glen Hayes (Oxford University Press, 2022).

<sup>81</sup> In the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* the *ākaraṇa* rite involving datura is located in 28.20, the *vaśīkaraṇa* of a *sūdra* in 28.26.

<sup>82</sup> *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* 51.58–59. The instructions are redundant, calling for “*dhudhūrakasya ... mūlāni*” and “*madanodbhavamūlaṃ*.”

<sup>83</sup> *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* 52.18.

<sup>84</sup> There is possibly a procedure that prescribes using datura for rites of *śānti* and enrichment (*pauṣṭika*) in 14.91 where “*madanodbhavaṃ*” is listed alongside neem and mango as an optional ingredient. Mical translates this as “thorn-apple bush” in his translation for the 84000 Project. The only reason I do not include this in the body of the paper as an example of datura usage is because that immediately after naming these plants the procedure says that any thorn-bearing plant is to be avoided (*sarvakaṅṭakino varjyāḥ*) due to being well associated with hostile rites (*pāpakarmeṣu kīrtitāḥ*). This would seem to explicitly exclude datura, a thorn-bearing plant used in hostile rites, yet the prescription closes by stating, “he should perform hostile rites” (*pāpaṃ karma samācāret*). The *Hevajratāntra* (II.i.10) also specifies that thorny plants are to be used for killing (*māraṇa*) and division-between-people-causing (*dveṣa*) rites. In any case, there is ample evidence elsewhere of the employment of datura for magical rites in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*.

<sup>85</sup> *Guhyasamājatantra* 14.80.

<sup>86</sup> In the *Vajrabhairavatantra* the *uccāṭana* rites using datura are located in chapter 2 (137 *verso*) and chapter 4 (144 *recto* and *verso*), and the *māraṇa* rites are in chapter 2 (136 *recto* and 138 *verso*). Page numbers correspond to the *Vajramahābhairavatantra*/\**Mahāyamāntakatantra* (‘jigs byed chen po’i rgyud) Peking Blockprint of the Tibetan Kanjur (catalogue Ui 1934).

<sup>87</sup> Nor is it found in the first major *yoginī* tantra, the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvara*.

<sup>88</sup> Gray, *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, 352n12.

<sup>89</sup> Szántó, *Catuṣpīṭhatantra* 1/2, 405.

<sup>90</sup> In the CST, the instructions that use datura to render a victim are at 44.11, the instructions for substance and/or non-substance are found at 47.6, and the *māraṇa* rite is at 50.6. The verse numeration here matches that found in the Sanskrit edition created by Wiesiek Mical for the 84000 Project. The translation and edition verses do not match, so the numeration given here does not match that of the 84000 Project translation.

<sup>91</sup> CPT 3.363–64.

<sup>92</sup> “Although the term *āveśa* is not unknown to the *Catuṣpīṭhatantra*, it nevertheless prefers to call possession *adhīṣṭhā* or *adhīṣṭhāna*, ‘empowerment.’” Szántó, *Catuṣpīṭhatantra* 1/2, 381.

<sup>93</sup> *ummattādīkapañcasya samabhāgaṃ tu kārayet mahātailena m-āloḍya amṛtodakamiśritam jihvendriyasya svādasya āviṣṭas tatṣaṇād api* | 3 *verso* of National Archives Kathmandu MSs 5–89/1 = NGMPP A 1298/6. This is the *Caryāvratīpāda* recension of the *Maṅḍalopāyikā*. I thank Péter-Dániel Szántó for providing me with the relevant text and manuscript images of the *Maṅḍalopāyikā*.

<sup>94</sup> The utilization of datura in the killing spells and diagrams section is in KYT 4.44. The 1,000 datura seeds that help the practitioner see the god are mentioned in 9.4 of the tantra and the smearing of datura extract onto an effigy is in 9.5.

<sup>95</sup> In the ST, the instructions that use datura for *vidveṣana* are at 7.59/7.1.59, the *uccāṭana* rites are located at 7.147/7.2.27 and 7.154/7.2.34, the rites of *mohana* at 7.56/7.1.56 and 7.57/7.1.57, the rite of *stambhana* at

7.221/7.3.63, the antivenom at 7.1.37, turning someone into a *preta* at 7.1.53, and the drawing of an effigy with datura ink at 7.3.66.

<sup>96</sup> *Padminī* ms, 46 *recto*, line 6.

<sup>97</sup> The procedure involving datura as a recipe for increasing the size of one's penis is in CMT 17.20, and the procedure for retaining semen is in 19.20.

<sup>98</sup> For the CPT: *ākṛṣya*/attracting (3.3.39), *uccāṭana*/driving away (3.3.34), *stambhita*/paralyzing (3.3.44), *kali*/dividing individuals (3.3.72), *śānti*/pacification (3.3.72). For the CST: *ākaraṣaṇa*/attracting, *stambhana*/paralyzing, *śoṣaṇa*/causing enmity, *mohana*/bewildering, and *jambhana*/ruining another appear with other acts such as causing blindness or muteness in 47.3. For the SUT: 7.295–296/7.4.41–42. Lists of the *ṣaṭkarman* are not limited to *yoginī* tantras that give instructions involving datura. For example, verses I.ii.12–18 of the 9th- or 10th-century *Hevajratantra* (which never mentions datura) list seven (*stambhana*, *vaśya*, *uccāṭana*, *vidveṣaṇa*, *abhicāruka*, *ākaraṣaṇa*, *māraṇa*).

<sup>99</sup> Jesús Marín-Sáez, Roberto Romero-González, and Antonia Garrido Frenich, “Effect of Tea Making and Boiling Processes on the Degradation of Tropane Alkaloids in Tea and Pasta Samples Contaminated with Solanaceae Seeds and Coca Leaf,” *Food Chemistry* 287 (2019): 265–272, pp. 271.

<sup>100</sup> For a discussion of various methods of datura consumption in several American cultures see Anna Hadwick Gayton, “The Narcotic Plant Datura in Aboriginal American Culture” (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1928).

<sup>101</sup> Glenn H. Shepard Jr., “Toé (*Brugmansia Suaveolens*): The Path of Day and Night,” *The Ethnobotanical Society*, 2019. <https://www.tea-assembly.com/issues/4/to-brugmansia-suaveolens>.

<sup>102</sup> Gayton, *The Narcotic Plant Datura in Aboriginal American Culture*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Hyam, “The Transformational Body,” 191.

<sup>104</sup> *Uḍḍāmareśvaratantra* 2.32–35ab.

<sup>105</sup> CMT 19.5 and *Haramekhalā* 3.5–7. I offer a provisional edition of this section of the CMT, since the 84000 Project version of the text does not include portions of this section that are glossed in the *Padmāvātī* commentary on the tantra. The three manuscripts (sigla G, J, and O for the CMT in the Works Cited section of this paper) were not used in the preparation of that edition. *adaśanaśiśulonām khadirakīlena grīvām vidārayitvā grhya bhṛṅgarājagorocanābhyām puṣpavattikām kṛtvā tilakena vaśikaraṇam | gorocanāsvayambhūkusumena bhāvyaṭe tilakena vaśikaraṇam || bhṛṅgarājamūlam ātmaśukreṇāñjanāt tathā || 19.5 || adaśanaśiśulonām] em., adarśanaśiśulolām G, adaśanaśiśulānām J, adaśananiśulānām O; khadira°] em., khadīra° GJO; grīvām] J, grīvā G, grīvā O; grhya] G, grhyam JO; bhṛṅgarājagorocanābhyām] J, bhṛṅjarājagorocanābhyām G, bhṛṅgarājagārocānābhyām O; tilakena vaśikaraṇam] JO, tī++++<ś>īkaraṇam G; gorocanāsvayambhūkusumena] J, +r<o>canāsvayambhūkusumena G, gālocanāsvayambhūkusumena O; bhāvyaṭe] O, bhāvya G, bhāvya J; tilakena] GO, tilakeṇa J; bhṛṅgarājamūlam] GJ, bhagarājamūlam O; ātmaśukreṇāñjanāt tathā] G, ātmaśukreṇāñjanātathā J, ātmaśukejanāt tathā O. “Having rent the neck [of the *śiśu*] with a bolt made from betel wood, the tongue of the blind *śiśu* is to be taken with [a mixture of] bhringaraj and cattle bile the color of orpiment; having made a *tikā* from the blooming (*puṣpavattikām*) [of that mixture], with the *tilaka* [he or she is] made under [his] control. With [a mixture of] self-produced menstrual blood and yellow cattle bile [a *tilaka*] is brought about; with the *tilaka* [he or she is] made under [his] control. The same effect is brought about (*tathā*) from the ointment [mixing] bhringaraj root with his own semen.” CMT 19.5.*