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## ■ Extraction of Mantras

**ABSTRACT.** The article presents a brief review of the practical techniques of encoding and decoding of mantras, illustrating them with particular examples from the tantric texts of Northern India. In Hindu tantric traditions, the great majority of methods of reverse transformation of cipher-texts into the original plain-texts of mantras are carried out within the ritual of mantra extraction (mantroddhāra), syllable by syllable, from the Sanskrit alphabet arranged in special tables (prastāra) or by replacing code words by syllables and phonemes constituting the mantra. The ritual of decoding hidden mantras is part of a wider topic of secrecy in the transmission of tantric doctrines. The secrecy in religious teachings, including tantric ones, serves not only the purpose of protecting information from those uninitiated, but also facilitates the authorization and sacralization of these teachings, which has reflected in their methods of obfuscation and deobfuscation. I hope that this article will help the scholars of tantric texts to recognize and decipher hidden mantras in Hindu tantric writings.

**KEY WORDS:** tantra, mantra  
decryption, secrecy, Indian cryptography,  
mantroddhara, prastāra

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## ■ Воссоздание мантр

**АННОТАЦИЯ.** Статья представляет собой краткий обзор методик практической реализации сокрытия и расшифровки мантр, проиллюстрированных конкретными примерами из текстов тантр северной Индии. Подавляющее большинство методов обратного преобразования текстов-шифровок в исходный текст мантр в индуистских тантрических традициях осуществляется в рамках ритуала извлечения мантр (mantroddhāra) слог за слогом из оформленного в особых таблицах (prastāra) санскритского алфавита или путем замещения кодовых слов слогами и фонемами, составляющими мантру. Ритуал воссоздания скрытых мантр является частью более общей темы секретности передачи тантрических доктрин. Секретность же в религиозных учениях, включая тантрические, служит целям не только защиты информации от непосвященных, но и авторизации и сакрализации этих учений, что отразилось на их методах обфускации и деобфускации. Мы надеемся, что статья поможет исследователям тантрических текстов распознать и расшифровать скрытые мантры в текстах индуистской тантры.

**К Л Ю Ч Е В Ы Е С Л О В А :** тантра, воссоздание мантр, секретность, индийская криптография, мантроддхара, prastāra

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## INTRODUCTION

For a contemporary researcher, decoding of ciphered mantras in Hindu and Buddhist<sup>1</sup> tantric texts can be a puzzling but quite feasible task. In unveiling the mystery of encrypted mantras, study of tantric scriptures of the same canon, its exegetical literature, and later monosyllabic dictionaries can be very helpful.<sup>2</sup> Existing written commentaries on corresponding passages with encrypted mantras provide a good chance to access the hidden information. However, we should always bear in mind a possibility of interpretative approaches of some commentators. They sometimes interpret one cipher word twice or even thrice, explain similar instructions of the root text variously, provide different results of deciphering<sup>3</sup> or even fail to arrive at the plain-text of the mantric formula. This may show that even such commentators, who were supposed to have enough authority and knowledge of the tradition they commented upon, might not have had access to detailed initial instructions (*upadeśa*) on the *mantroddhāra* within a particular tradition. Not to speak of a modern researcher investigating mantras of a lost tantric school.

## MANTRODDHĀRA FORMS

The great majority of cryptographic operations in Hindu tantric traditions are realized within the framework of *mantroddhāra* rituals. Following the definition given by Padoux (2011: 13), I understand *mantroddhāra* as a specific ritualized process of selection of the phonemes from the Sanskrit alphabet arranged in a special order and subsequent pooling together the extracted phonemes in one mantric formula.<sup>4</sup> The forms of extraction of hidden letters can be roughly divided into two types: (1) locating a letter within the totality of phonemes and (2) substituting each letter of the plain-text with a meaningful word. Tomabechi (2007: 904) adds another method of a straightforward naming of a constituent letter. The method certainly deserves special mention, but it remains beyond the sphere of cryptography proper and, in the context of *mantroddhāra*, seems to be a complementary method to the two mentioned above. The main two methods have their own sub-varieties, some of which are used independently, while others can be combined with each other. Many

<sup>1</sup> See Tomabechi (2007) on the extraction of mantras in the Buddhist tantric traditions.

<sup>2</sup> As a solution to textual ambiguities, Jayaratha, a commentator of the famous Kashmirian author of the tenth- and eleventh-century CE Abhinavagupta, suggests searching other texts of the same canon or sub-canon, down to the most general layer of *Saiddhāntika* scriptures, until the required information is found (Sanderson 1990: 72).

<sup>3</sup> In the commentary to SvT 12.88, Kṣemarāja disputes earlier interpretation of *svabīja* from the root text as *repha*, or the phoneme RA, instead he offers to read this word as the second phoneme Ū.

<sup>4</sup> “*Mantroddhāra* is the extraction of the mantra out of the totality of sounds, more precisely, out of the totality of the Sanskrit phonemes, the *varṇasamāmnāya*. It is at the same time the selection and composition of the mantra...” (Padoux 2011: 13). See also: (Brunner et al. 2000 V. 1: 231; Tomabechi 2007: 904).

of the discussions of *matroddhāra* procedures in this paper revolve around the famous seed-mantra (*bīja* / *piṇḍa* / *kūṭa*) SAUḤ attested in non-*Saiddhāntika* texts. The seed-mantra SAUḤ is associated first and foremost with the goddess Parā described in the Trika scriptures such as *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* (SYM), *Mālinīvijayottaratantram* (MV), *Parātrisika-vivarana* (PTV), Abhināvagupta's *Tantraloka* (TL), etc. The same seed-mantra and its varieties also occur in other texts in association with other deities and categories of tantric teachings, which will be mentioned further in the article.<sup>5</sup>

#### CODE WORDS

The technique for encryption of mantras by code words is based on a simple replacement of each phoneme of a mantra with a meaningful word. For this method was broadly used in a large number of tantric texts, each alphabetic syllable came to be associated with a list of meaningful words so that they can be eventually collected in a dictionary of syllables.<sup>6</sup> We are probably dealing with this kind of cipher, when a portion of tantric text looks like an incoherent bunch of words, as for example a code text of the mantra HSŪ-AuḤ in TL 30.29cd–30ab is roughly a list of words: goose, nectar, the destructive fire, the Lord of the world, twofold bodiless ones.<sup>7</sup>

Albeit this method seems to be an ordinary system of encryption based on substitution of letters with meaningful words, for which we just need a specialized dictionary, there are several subdivisions according to types of substitution-words. There is a subcategory of code-word type of encoding, which is based on the equation between encoded syllables and doctrinal notions or god-names beginning with those syllables. For substitution words begin with an encrypted letter (*soma* and *sudhāsāra* [SA], *haṃsa* [HA]), the first try to

<sup>5</sup> There is evidence of a close association between the alphabet goddesses *Parā* and *Mātrkā*, which can be seen from the similarities of their seed mantras: HSAUḤ of *Mātrkāsarvasvatī* in the AKP and of one of the forms of *Mātrkā* in the TśBhT, HSAUM of *Śrīkaṅṭhādīmātrkā* in the ŚViT, and HSAUM at IŚGDP (Sanderson 1990: 50). SAUḤ is one of the seed-mantras of *Tripurā* in the VM; one of the *praṇavas* of *Kubjikā* in the KMT; HSAUM and SHAUM are *śrī-prāsāda* and *parā-prāsāda* mantras of *Śiva-Śakti* at the KT and ŚT.

<sup>6</sup> Some tantric lexicons were collected in one book by Artur Avalon and later translated into English by Ram Kumar Rai: *Mantrābhidhāna*, *Prakārāntara Mantrābhidhāna*, *Ekākṣarakoṣa*, *Bījanighaṇṭu*, *Mātrkānighaṇṭu* of Mahidasa, *Prakārāntara Mātrkānighaṇṭu I*, *Prakārāntara Mātrkānighaṇṭu II*, *Prakārāntara Varṇanighaṇṭu*, *Bījābhidhāna* of Bhūtaḍamaratantra, *Mantrārthābhidhāna* of Varadātantra (Bhattacharyya 2002). We should add *Bījoddhārakoṣa* by Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Raghuvir & Taki 1978) and unpublished *Dvyakṣarakoṣa* and *Prāṇakṣaṇa-śabdāmbudhi*. Dictionaries of syllables can be directly incorporated in a tantric text as it is done in JY 4.46 (*varṇanāma*). Contemporary editors and researchers also continue compiling dictionaries of substitute words, as it has been done by Gupta (1972: XIII) in his edition of the LT.

<sup>7</sup> For example, TL 30.29cd–30 gives a part of the mantra HSŪ-AuḤ: haṃsaṃ[H] cāmṛta[S]madhyasthaṃ kālārudra[Ū]vibheditam || bhuvaneśa[Au]śiroyuktam anaṅgadvaya[H]yojitam |

decode such cipher text is to select initial syllables of code words.<sup>8</sup> Another type of hint-words is classificatory names. Along with mantras, the syllables of the alphabet were also classified in several ways and their classificatory names could appear in the *mantroddhāra* context. Phonemes can be male, female, and neuter,<sup>9</sup> or solar, lunar, and fiery,<sup>10</sup> *Śiva* and *Śakti*. Vowels can be called immortal / unchangeable digits (*amṛtakalā* or *amākalā*) or lunar stations (*tithi* or *kalā*); a set of Ṛ Ṝ Ḍ Ḍ̄ vowels can be named ‘the seed of nectar’ (*amṛtabīja*) (Brunner et al. 2000). Such classification names employed as substitute words do not enhance obfuscation but, on the contrary, they help to identify a hidden letter. Encryption also becomes weak when substitute words straightforwardly describe syllables’ graphical shapes (e.g. a letter consisting of three dots (*tribinduka*) means I, a letter of a triangular shape (*trikona*) means E)<sup>11</sup> or their sonic characteristics (the first phoneme among long phonemes (*dīrghādyā*) [Ā], a rising sound (*urdhvanāda*) [Ū]), or a syllable’s position in the standard Sanskrit alphabet (*kādyam* [Ḥ]). A phoneme can be even directly named in the text (*a-kāra*, *ka-kāra*, *repha*) among other phonemes mentioned in the hidden form.

Another kind of code words employed for substitution appear to be doctrinal notions and deities, so that in the process of decoding, even unintelligible and

<sup>8</sup> There are many examples of equation between syllables and words beginning with those syllables. For instance, in the chapter *varṇanāma* of JY4, the letter KA can be encoded by KA-initial words *kartana* and *kalaśa*, KhA — *khageśa*, GA — *Gaṇeśa* etc. See also MTB *Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ* (KuKh) 11.11–17ab: *Bhīmā* (Terrible) [BhA], *Gaganā* (Sky) [GA], *Vegā* (Force) [VA] (Dyczkowski 2009 V. 1 Intr.: 67).

<sup>9</sup> The distinction between male consonant letters (*bīja* / *Śiva*) and female vowels (*yoni* / *Śakti*) is made in a broad range of tantric texts: NŚ *Uttarasūtra* 2.8ab, *Dikṣottara* 2.85b–86c (Goodall et al.: 2015), SBhSS 5.2–3, SvT 1.32–3ab, which considers vowels as a male group presided over by Bhairava and consonants as a female group presided over by Bhairavī (Törzsök 2009: 8), SYM (Törzsök 2009: 5), BY 2.8c, and MV 3.10cd–12ab (Hatley 2007: 373). This association appears to be reversed in some tantras: the passage in the SvT coming right after 1.33 associates vowels with the female goddess *Mahālakṣmī*. In TsT 1.227c–228b and 3.330 (see fn.28), all the syllables are associated with *Śakti*. Among the vowels, ṛ ṝ Ḍ Ḍ̄ are singled out as neuter *klība* / *śaṅṭha* / *napuṃsakagana*, or intermediate between female and male (TsT 1.449; TL-*viveka* by Jayaratha on 29.124c). When tantric texts speak of twelve vowels, this group of four letters is often excluded from the list of sixteen vowels.

<sup>10</sup> In SSS 15.22ab the sixteen vowels are associated with sixteen seats of lunar energies: *ṣoḍaśaitāḥ samākhyātāḥ kalāḥ somātmikāḥ priye* | In JY 4.46,17, all vowels are considered to be the rays of the *sun-god* (*sarvasūryās*) and at the same time are associated with sixteen digits of the Moon (*ṣoḍaśa-kalā*). In the LT, chapters on the origin of letters 24 and 25, the first seven vowels are considered to be the rays of the sun-god-form, while the following seven vowels are the rays of moon-god-form (Gupta 1972). In ŚT 2.2cd–3ab, the vowels are called lunar (*saumya*), the consonants are solar (*saura*), and letters from YA to KṣA are fiery (*agneya*) or pervaders (*vyāpaka*). Abhinavagupta in his MV-*varṭika* 1.880–84 also considers vowels to be the Moon.

<sup>11</sup> Here are examples of Newari letters from the JY2 manuscripts NGMCP A 996–2 and A 151–18: tribinduka (three dots) , trikona (triangular)  or trikona vowel from the possibly earliest manuscript of the JY4 NGMPP A 996–3 , (drawn up and down) urdhvādho-karṣaṇa . The connection of letter-names with their graphical shapes tribinduka and trikona is even more visible from older Nepalese scripts before the eleventh century CE:  and  (see the unpublished dissertation by Junlan Bang (2017: 24)). These shapes of the vowels I and E can be easily traced down to one of the earliest Indic scripts, Brāhmī:  .

unpronounceable mantras acquire some kind of ‘hidden’ meaning as a sum-total of the meanings attached to its constituent syllables (Yelle 2004: 52).

In the last type of encoding / decoding method, extraction of mantras through code-words is viewed by many tantric traditions as a step towards ‘the revelation of the secret of the supreme truth.’ Some researchers suggest that in spite of multiple meanings associated with each phoneme of the alphabet, many if not all Hindu traditions have a strong tendency for vacuous content of a secret, or ‘empty obfuscation’ (*tiraskāra*) of knowledge (Lorea 2018: 172; Black 2011: 118; Urban 1998: 360). Such assertions of disappointing obnubilation are difficult to confirm or deny completely. The discussion of the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of mantras has been known in Hindu religious, philosophical, and linguistic literature since the earliest times (Rao 2018: 14–15). The tantric works, which extensively employ code-word ciphers, advocate the meaningfulness of mantras.<sup>12</sup> This position is based on the views of the Sanskrit phonemes as meaningful units, which directly reflect the objective reality. Such ways to create and interpret meaning of mantras differ from those of attaching lexical meaning to a word. For example, the *śrīprāsādaparāmantra* SHAUM in the KT is said to be a combination of Śiva [HA] and Śakti [SA], thus the seed-mantra SHAUM is viewed as a representation of the divine couple.<sup>13</sup>

Another vivid example would be the method of encoding of the seed-mantra SAUḤ in the *Parātrīśikā* (PT).<sup>14</sup> The PT offers a combined method of decoding based on a simple sequential number and replacement-words:

[The mantra composed of the letter called] the third *Brahman* united with the fourteenth [vowel], O Fair One, [and] joined with the [letter] after the Lord of the lunar stations (*Tithīśa*), O fair-hipped Woman, [is considered to be] the heart of the self of Bhairava.<sup>15</sup>

One of the explanations of the verse is offered by Abhinavagupta in the PTLV:

That third Brahma possessing the nature of *Sadāśiva*, which is a universal form of SAT, is to be joined (*yutam*) with the fourteenth vowel, i.e. with the pair [*yutam* = *yugalam* (a pair)] of (1) will-knowledge (*iccha-jñāna*) inherently connected with (2) the power of action (*kriyāśakti*). The [letter] which [comes]

<sup>12</sup> In chapter 30 of Abhinavagupta’s TL, in the PTV and the PTLV, the parallels are made between the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (*varṇas*) and the levels of reality (*tattvas*).

<sup>13</sup> KT 3.46: *śrīprāsādaprāmantramūrdhavyam adhiṣṭhitam | āvayoḥ paramākāram yo veti sa svayam śivaḥ ||* Cf. PKS 1.38.

<sup>14</sup> The *Parātrīśikā* is a short *Trika* text dealing in great detail with the Sanskrit alphabet and advocating *Parā* as the supreme deity and *Anuttara system* (Sanderson 1990: 32, 45).

<sup>15</sup> PT 9: *caturdaśayutam bhadhre tithīśāntasamanvitam | trīṅyam brahma suśroni hṛdayam bhairavātmanah ||* This method of the extraction of the *bīja* / *piṇḍa* / *kūṭa-mantra* SAUḤ has been described by Muller-Ortega (2003: 19) and Padoux (2011: 14).

after the lord of the fifteen vowels, i.e. *visarga*, with which, by the proper connection [for *sam* in *samanvitam*], SAT is attached, or [in which SAT] rests...<sup>16</sup>

The third *Brahma* has been explained earlier in the commentary to verse 7cd as the letter SA, the third letter out of five final letters ŚA ŚA SA HA KṢA, associated with five faces of the Lord *Sadāśiva* and with five *Brahma* [mantras].<sup>17</sup> A similar explanation is found in another commentary of Abhinavagupta, in the *Parātrīśikā-vivarāṇa* (PTV) (Singh et al. 1988: 84 of the Sanskrit text).<sup>18</sup> In note 1 to the passage, Jaideva Singh gives another possible explanation of the ‘third *Brahma*’ from BhG 17.23, where a famous formula *om tat sat* is called ‘the three *Brahmaṇas*’.<sup>19</sup>

Most notable for these substitution methods is the absence of strict fidelity with homologization between code words, or replacement words, and phonemes. For example, the word *ananta-candra* in encoding of *śrīprāsādaparāmantra* SHAUṢ in KT 4.4–5cd may refer equally to AU or HA, or Ṣ, or AU/HA + Ṣ (Bhattacharyya 2002). Another example of a vague correspondence between letters and their substitute words is taken from the ŚT. The *prāsādamantra* consisting of eight syllables is given in the encoded form in ŚT 18.98.<sup>20</sup> HA is called in 18.98a *viyad*, then in ŚT 2.76 HA is referred to as *arka*, and as *vyoman* in 6.10. Being more volatile, this method is gradually diluted and replaced by complex explanations of secret esoteric meanings upon a mantra. The disclosures of hidden mantra forms turn out to be cases of traditional elucidation of the secret mantra’s meanings, which establish a link between the mundane and divine in the context of ritual and contemplative practices.<sup>21</sup>

In some cases, encoding a mantra becomes a secondary business, or one of many possible interpretation levels. Paul Muller Ortega calls this phenomenon “deep encoding”, when mantra elements are deeply tucked into the fabric of intelligible sentences in a form of code-words. This is the case of SAUḤ seed-mantra in TL 4.186b–188:

<sup>16</sup> The commentary in PTLV on verse 9 in the PT: *caturdaśena svareṇa...kriyāśaktidvārāntarālinecchājñānāyugalena yutaṃ... yadidaṃ trītiyaṃ brahma sadāśivatattvātmakam ...sadrūpaṃ viśvaṃ tat tithīśānāṃ pañcadaśānāṃ svarāṇāṃ yo ’ntaḥ... visargaḥ tasmīn samyak aviyojena anvitam viśrāntam sat...*

<sup>17</sup> The PTLV on verse 7cd: *pañcakam śādīnāṃ... brahmapañcakaśabdenākhyātam iti* | The five [letters] beginning with ŚA are mentioned [here by saying] “five *Brahmas*”. *adūrdhvaṃ śādi-vikhyātam purastāt brahmapañcakam* || Jayaratha glosses *śādi as śādi-kṣāntam*, i.e. ŚA ŚA SA HA KṢA letters are called *brahmapañcakam*.

<sup>18</sup> PTV: 84 of the Sanskrit text: *caturdaśaḥ okāra-aṃkāramadhyagaḥ | tithīśānto visargaḥ | trītiyaṃ brahma śa-ha-madhyagam* ||

<sup>19</sup> BhG 17.23: *om tat sat iti nirdeśo brahmaṇas trividhaḥ smṛtaḥ* (Singh et al. 1988: 207; Padoux 2011: fn. 11).

<sup>20</sup> ŚT 18.98: *tāro māyā viyad bindum anusvarasamanvitam | pañcākṣarasamāyukto vasuvarṇe manurmataḥ* ||

<sup>21</sup> According to the PTV, the relationship between the words of mantras and their meaning exists at the level of the Supreme Speech (*parā*), which is unconventional (*asāṅketika*), does not belong to the delusive world of *Māyā* (*amāyīya*), and not man-made (*akṛta*) (Singh et al. 1988: 9).

For this real [world] [*sad idam*; *sat* = S] is the root of Brahma referred to as ‘the Sphere of Matter’ (*māyāṇḍam*) [which] cannot be called [the real world] without rising [the trident] of the three powers of precognitive impulse / will (*icchā*), cognition and action [AU]. For it is only due to rising (*-arohāt*) of these three powers within *Bhairava* consciousness, it (*tat*) = [real world (*sad idam*)] can spring forth (*visṛjyate* [= H *visarga*]) outside (*bahir*) from that (*tasmād*) [consciousness of *Bhairava*].<sup>22</sup>

This passage vividly demonstrates how mantra phonemes can be referred to only implicitly in a meaningful verse, which has only religious concepts on view. As it has been expressed by Paul Muller Ortega (2003: 22):

... Abhinavagupta’s intention encompasses much more than the secret embedding of a mantra into a text. Rather, these passages function to convey theoretical justifications for the specific phonemic composition of the mantra.

It would be impossible to unpin the encoded mantra in this verse without the commentary of Jayaratha and without a broad knowledge of all doctrinal links and identifications. The association of *sat* with the letter SA has been confirmed several times in PT 7cd and TL 3.167ab, as well as in TL 5.142ab<sup>23</sup> and a long commentary PTLV to PT 21–24. A compound word there is composed of five S-initial words, which are used as code-words for the phoneme S. The association of the diphthong AU with the trident, the triplet of powers of will-cognition-action, also comes from the commentary PTLV to PT 21–24. Finally, for *visargaḥ* etymologically is originated from the same basis *vi-sṛj* as the verb *visṛjyate*, the two are identified. An equation of the three *Trika* goddesses *Parā*, *Parāparā*, and *Aparā* with the triad of *icchā-jnāna-kriyā* and other doctrinal triplets is known from other *Trika* scriptures such as the SYM, the MV (Törzsök 1999: xviii), and from the JY.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> TL 4.186b–188: *tathā hi sad* [SA] *idaṃ brahmamūlaṃ māyāṇḍasaṃjñitaṃ | icchājñānakriyārohaṃ* [AU] *vinā naiva sad ucyate || tacchaktitritayārohād bhairavīye cidātmani | visṛjyate* [H] *hi tat tasmād bahir vātha visṛjyate ||* The translation is mine. Other versions of translation are offered by Muller-Ortega (2003: 15) and Sanderson (1990: 57).

<sup>23</sup> TL 3.167ab *sukha-sītkāra-sat-samyak-sāmya-prathamasaṃvidah | cf. TL 5.142ab sītkāra-sukha-sadbhāva-samāveśa-samādhiṣu |*

<sup>24</sup> The presence of the word *sat* in the beginning of the passage in the JY is bringing about an association with the phoneme S, and therefore, there is a vague possibility of hinting at the phonemes of the seed-mantra of *Parā* SAUḥ. JY 4.51.23ab–24 (according to the enumeration by Serbaeva-Saraogi and 4.51.59cd–60ab according to the enumeration by Sanderson): *parā caivā sattā(nta)* [SA?] *caivā parāparā || 59 || triskandhā sā tridhāmasthā icchājñānakriyātmikā* [AU?] | Edited by Sanderson (1990: fn. 109).

## ORDER DISTORTION

The most straightforward technique to hamper a smooth reading of mantras is to write them in a reversed or distorted order (*vilomena*, *vyutkramēna*, *vyākulitākṣara*, *pratiloma*). Such mantras are quite easy to identify and to read in the intelligible forward order (*anuloma*). The question here arises: why at all one should use such an easy method? An example from the KMT might give possible answers. The basic sentence of the long sixty-three-syllable mantra in KMT 10.29 is “O [the goddess] *Guhyakubjikā!* ...destroy them all ...”<sup>25</sup> This mantra of the main goddess Kubjikā is called ‘a devouring weapon mantra’ (*Khādakāstra*) with a certain destructive capacity attached to it. Further down in the text, we learn that the reversed order can signal that the mantra is to be properly transmitted orally from the teacher to the disciple with accompanying explanatory instructions (*pāramparyakramāyātaṃ upadeśasamanvitam*). So, the reverse order here may signal about the dangers of the mantra, which should not be approached casually. In support of this hypothesis I should mention the system of division of the Sanskrit alphabet into ordinary and reverse sequences made in KMT 22.1–17, where the reverse order of the alphabet is called *krodha* (angry) (Goudriaan & Schoterman 1988: 125). A much later text of the same tradition MBT *Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ* (KuKh) 9.30–31 and 8.42cd–85ab (Dyczkowski 2009, V 1 Intr.: 232, ff. 1) suggests that the thirty-two-syllable spell of the goddess *Samayā Vidyā* encoded in the reversed order can be recited in both reverse and forward manners to express different aspects of the same mantra-goddess, i.e. the *vidyā* of the dark moon fortnight and the *vidyā* of the bright moon fortnight. Thus, the reverse order of mantras can be not only a mark of danger and particularly careful manner of transmission, but also an indication of the possibility for the bidirectional recitation of mantras, where the reversed order of recitation bears more destructive potentiality. There are also other possible reasons for writing mantras in the reversed order, which rather arise from tantric concepts of reversion than from the intention to hide mantric forms. For instance, the reversed order of syllable-by-syllable recitation can be a part of the purification ritual of mantras (*mantra-śuddhi* in KT 6.19) and for death rites (Goodall et al. 2015: 47). More speculatively, a reversed recitation makes the mantra a defiled one, and therefore, deprived of its power even when read as a part of the text.

<sup>25</sup> KMT 10.29: *hā-svā yai-kā-bji-ku-hya-gu t-pha hūm hrem hūm hrīm hrem li-rā-ka-ṣṭrā-daṃ na-ha na-ha rvān-sa tān ti-ṣya-ri-ka taṃ-pi-rā-kā taṃ-kr na-ye kaṃ-di-gā-yo-pra-rṇa-cu-ntra-ta-ntra-ma-ntra-ya-vān- dra-pa-rvo-sa ma-ma t-pha hūm ke-bji-ku-hya-gu om* || The mantra in the forward order runs as follows: *om guhya-kubjike hūm phaṭ mama sarvopadravān yantra-mantra-tantra-curna-prayogādikāṃ yena kṛtaṃ kārāpi taṃ karīṣyati tān sarvān hana hana daṃṣṭrakarāli hrem hrīm hūm hrem hūm phaṭ guhyakubjikāyai svāhā* ||

## EXTRACTION OF PHONEMES FROM THE SANSKRIT ALPHABET

A widely spread strategy of decoding concealed mantras is to locate each syllable constituting a mantra within the Sanskrit alphabet. This method of turning cipher-text into readable plain-text seems to find new meaning within Hindu tantric traditions. The phonemes extracted from the original undifferentiated (*niṣkala*) totality are believed to carry forth the power of that original totality embodied in the image of a god or a goddess. These phonemes are able to become units of the efficacious magical language, i.e. mantras, precisely because they originate from that undifferentiated whole in the form of governing forces of the universe and means of manipulating this world.<sup>26</sup> *Śaiva* tantras associate the Sanskrit alphabet and varieties of its arrangement with the divine body of a number of alphabet-deities. These are Mātrkā and her male counterpart *Śabdarāśi* presiding over fifty phonemes associated with fifty Rudras of the alphabet; the goddess *Mālinī* associated with a special sequence of the alphabet; *Śāradā*, a Kashmirian goddess of speech and the alphabet; *Śabda-braman* venerated in *pañcaratras* tradition and others. I will not go into the detailed description of the pantheon of alphabet deities for the sake of brevity. It will suffice for our purposes just to trace varieties of alphabets and their arrangements specifically used for *mantroddhāra* procedures.

## MĀTRKĀ

The word *Mātrkā* can have a number of referents associated with the Sanskrit alphabet.<sup>27</sup> First and foremost, she is the alphabet goddess, composed

<sup>26</sup> According to *Kāmadhenutantra* 6.63cd, 5ab, the whole world originates from the phonemes: *sarvaṃ carācaram viśvaṃ varṇāt tu jāyate dhruvam* || ...*akṣarāj jāyate sarvaṃ paraṃ brahma svayaṃ priye* | See also Yelle (2004: 4) and in *Ahīrbudhnyā-saṃhita* 16.94cd: ...*varṇāt tattvasṛṣṭyaṃ tu tat smaret* || According to SvT 7.238a, 259c, the phoneme does not lead to salvation [unless] the unity with the supreme divinity is not realized: *akṣareṣu kuto mokṣa ākāśo kusumaṃ kutaḥ* | *yāvad uccāryate vācā yāval lekhye 'pi tiṣṭhati* || *tāvat sa sakalo jñeyo niṣkalo bhedavarjitah* | ...*śivo hi bhāvito nityaṃ...*||

<sup>27</sup> The referents of the word *Mātrkā*: (1) a single alphabet deity (*Mātrkā devī*) who embodies the essence of other alphabet deities as in TsT, JñT (Sanderson 1990: 47, 49); (2) an alphabet deity who embodies the essence of the eight series of letters as in SvT 10.1143cd: *aṣṭavargavibhinnā ca vidyā sā mātrkāiva tu*, and whose body is made of a series of eight female deities presiding over the eight groups of the alphabet (as in SvT 1.34–36, see also Gonio (1986: 100–1), SYM 31.59–65; Kṣemarāja in his commentary on verse 3.13 of the *Spanda-Kārikā*; in this case, they are called *aṣṭamātrkāḥ* or *aṣṭa-mātarah*); (3) an alphabet deity who embodies the essence of all the letters and whose body is made of all the letters as in LT 23.21–29 (Gupta 1972: 125); (4) the alphabet without any reference to a deity (in such expressions as “he should spread out the alphabet” (*mātrkāṃ prastaret*) in SvT 1.31c.). The word *Mātrkāḥ* in the plural number can refer to all groups of letters or even to all letters (*prastaren mātrkāṃ* as in JY 2.6.15a). In any case, *Mātrkā* appears to be the name associated with the alphabet specially used for mantras: *Mātrkā* is a body of mantras (*mātrkāṃ mantravigrahāṃ* in JY 4.57.4b), the mother of mantras and a stick used for kindling all mantras (*mātrkāṃ mantrajananiṃ* in JY 2.7.11c and *sarvamantrāraṇiṃ* in JY 2.12.16b) capable of producing potent mantric formulas; (5) vowels alone as in NŚ *Uttarasūtra* 2.8ab (Törzsök 2009: 5) and in the LT (Gupta 1972: 124); (6) the consonants alone as in SYM 16.39–43, where eight *Mātrkā*s are associated with seven groups of consonants plus KṣA (Törzsök 2009: 13); (7) a specific female mantra (*vidyā*) as in BY 2.15–16 (Hatley 2010: 375; Törzsök 2009: 2, 4).

of all the phonemes in mantras.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, the name *Māṭṛkā* applies to the Sanskrit alphabet arranged in the standard alphabetical order, as it takes place in the context of *mantroddhāra* ritual. The standard Sanskrit alphabet is grouped into eight series (*vargas*). The first *varga* consists of fourteen vowels plus two tantric extra phonemes, *anusvara* and *visarga*. The next five *vargas* consist of consonants arranged in accordance with the place of pronunciation. Each *varga* includes five letters. Then come two *vargas* of four semivowels and four sibilants. The tantric alphabet often ends in a composite letter *kṣa*, thus totaled of fifty syllables.<sup>29</sup> *Māṭṛkā*, or the standard alphabet as it is or inscribed in a grid (*prastāra*), is commonly used for many kinds of encoding / decoding operations.

#### NUMERICAL CODE

Numerical code is a rather simple and straightforward method of encryption. The simplest way is just to assign each letter a numerical value. This method is mostly applied to vowels, e.g. A = 1, Ā = 2, I = 3, and so on. Thus, in the expression ‘the letter joined with [the letter] after the third one’ (*trītyāntasamāyuktam* JY 2.10.24), the third letter is I and the letter after it is the letter Ī. Such method is often combined with another numerical method, which uses a Polybius-like cipher (Kondo & Mselle 2013) with a pair of digits mapping each character. When the standard alphabet, or *Māṭṛkā*, is used as a Polybius-like square, the first digit indicates one of the eight groups (*varṇa*) and the second digit is a sequence number of the letter in the group.<sup>30</sup> The use of numerical code is quite an ancient method of encoding, as it has been already attested in the VŚ. This text describes a *prastāra* where the alphabet is written in a reversed circular manner. Then this *prastāra* is used as a Polybius-like square to map letters: the cell two-seven [which is] the second seed-[mantra] has been extracted [=BhA]. A vivid example can be found in the JY. The two verses in the main text just give a list of numbers: 2 2 2 3 2 4 3 3 4 4 2 4 3 4

<sup>28</sup> TsT 3.130: *sarve varṇātmakā mantrā varṇāḥ śaktyātmakāḥ smṛtāḥ | śaktis tu māṭṛkā proktā sā jñeyā tu śivātmikā ||*

<sup>29</sup> The system of *vargas* is a very early one described in the early texts on Sanskrit phonetics such as *Āpiśaliśikṣā* (Cardona 1980). This type of arrangement became a standard for alphabets in the Indian subcontinent and thus adopted in tantras too. Kṣemarāja explains the system of *vargas* in the Tantric alphabet in his commentary to SvT 1.31–33ab.

<sup>30</sup>

1	a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	e	ai	o	au	aḥ
	1	2	3	4	5									
2	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṇa									
3	ca	cha	ja	jha	ṇa									
4	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa									
5	ta	tha	da	dha	na									
6	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma									
7	ya	ra	la	va	-									
8	sa	ṣa	sa	ha	kṣa									

Figure 1. *Māṭṛkā*

4 5 2 5 4 6 2 7 2 8 3 8 4 8 5.<sup>31</sup> With the help of the commentary, we learn that this is a numerical code (where one digit after the tenth is skipped intentionally or unintentionally), which should be applied to the standard Sanskrit alphabet: 22 23 24 33 34; [4]2 43 44; 52 54 62 72; 83 84 85. With the help of these numeric keys we extract fifteen syllables (KhA GA GhA JA JhA ṬhA ḌA ḌhA ThA DhA PhA RA SA HA KṣA), which are refined further on until we extract the five seed-mantras of the five faces of the Lord Sadāśiva. At the next decryption step, the mantrin again should follow a numerical instruction code to locate and extract a short list of five letters (KhA GA PhA RA and SA) from a longer list of seventeen letters.<sup>32</sup> Then PhRĪM should be added to each letter, thus arriving at five seed-mantras of *Sadāśiva*: KhPhRĪM GPhRĪM PhPhRĪM RPhRĪM SPhRĪM.

The change from the alphabet to the short list of seventeen letters and then to the extra short list of five syllables in the process of mantra extraction is the example of a further complication of the algorithm for performing decryption by changing one or several elements in the cipher key without any clues or hints about changes in the cipher-text. In such cases, a reader is bound to random guessing of what a cipher word would be applied to. With commentarial assistance, it is much easier to know whether the ordinal number in the cipher-text refers to the position of a syllable in the whole alphabet, or in a specific list of letters, or in the plain-text. There can be other complications of decryption algorithms. For instance, they can involve variations in inserting styles of the Sanskrit alphabet in a Polybius-like tabular or variations in tabular shapes (see below on *prastāras*). Other complications can be added by introducing an unusual manner of counting: not only forward but also backward and diagonally beginning from a particular letter.<sup>33</sup> Yet several decoding methods can be applied in combination to one cipher-text: numerical codes, straightforward naming, code names, and alphabetic mapping.

#### ALPHABETIC MAPPING

The technologies for deciphering mantras (*mantroddhāra*) imply as an aid, or a cipher key, various grids. Grids with the Sanskrit alphabet arranged

<sup>31</sup> JY 2.10.33–34: *dividvitricaturthaṃ tu tritriś caiva caturthakam | divitīyaṃ ca tṛtīyaṃ ca caturthaṃ ca samuddharet || pañcadviśāṅgararasā divitīyaṃ saptamaṃ dvikam | nāgāgnivedaviśayā deśapaṃcakan nyaset ||*

<sup>32</sup> JY 2.10.34a: *ādyantaikādaśāntāntam* — first, after, eleventh, after, after [the letters].

<sup>33</sup> In JY 2.10.18c: *prathamam akṣaram pūrvoddhṛtam repham asya prathamam ya-kāram* | The word *prathamam* (the first one) might be interpreted by the commentator twice: (1) as the first letter RA, which is a starting point for the numerical code and (2) as the first syllable [counted backwards] from the letter RA, which is YA. Alternatively, *pūrvoddhṛtam repham* could be taken not as an explanation of *prathamam*, but as a commentarial way of unveiling the secret letter RA as a starting point for counting. Then the next instruction *saptamāntastham* means “the letter situated after the seventh letter from the letter YA, i.e. HA”.

in them have visual geometrical or natural shapes of rectangles, squares, triangles, wheels, lotuses, umbrellas, *vajra* (hourglass-like) and even more complex figures. The most general word in scriptures for a grid is ‘*prastāra*’ (Goodall & Rastelli 2013).<sup>34</sup> Other scriptures like the KMT, the ŠSS, and *Śrīmatatantrasāra* make a distinction between *prastāra* and *gahvara* (Schoterman 1982: 181, 184). These two names are often attached to a more specifying part of grids’ names, which shows correlation with grid shapes so that they are variously called ‘a wheel’ (*chakra-prastāra*), ‘a lotus’ (*kamala-prastāra*), ‘a womb’ (*yoni-gahvara*), ‘a mountain’ (*meru-gahvara*), etc. KT 15.86 and ŚT 2.127–8 use for alphabetic grids other names such as *cakra* and *māṭṛkāyantra* in the context of mantra examination ritual (*mantravicāra*) (Bühnemann 1991: 293–299). Passages with descriptions of alphabet grids and methods of their drawing occur in tantric texts beginning from *Vīnāsikhatantram*, which is the earliest text known to us (VŚ) (51–57).<sup>35</sup> Probably from that time onward the usage of grids as an aid for extraction of mantras increased and became well established by the ninth century, and beyond Abhinavagupta’s temporal demarcation line multiplying in a broad range of texts belonging to later *Krama*, *Kaula*, and *Kaula Śrīvidyā* traditions.<sup>36</sup> Shapes of tables, sets of the alphabet syllables, their sequences, and the manner in which the syllables are written in a table can be very different. I will skip these important details here for the sake of brevity with just a reference to the research on the topic presented in Schoterman (1982: Appendix I). Our main concern here is that *prastāra* with the inscribed alphabet in them serve as a cipher key, or as a kind of map, where one should find a target phoneme by following instructions from the text.

When the alphabetical grid is drawn correctly according to the instructions, the *mantrin* should begin the procedure of extraction following the corresponding instructions. The simplest instruction is just to indicate the number of the cell among 49 or 50 cells as it is done in the VŚ: the twenty fifth cell is called the first seed-mantra.<sup>37</sup> Another natural way to identify the location of the wanted syllable is based on the fact that a target phoneme is embedded among other phonemes, i.e. by simple indication of adjacent letters. Depending on the type of the grid and position of the letter in that grid, the latter can have three (a corner letter) to eight neighbors. There are 6 possible ways to indicate a target

<sup>34</sup> A grid, or *prastāra*, is a rather general term used for many kinds of grids far beyond *mantroddhāra* practices: for numerical tables in mathematics, astrology, architectural diagrams, sacred diagrams with inscribed letters in them (*yantras*), gaming boards, and figurative poems (*citrakāvya*). It is noteworthy that the language of drawing diagrams in different fields shows parallels and similarities (Battistini 2014: 24).

<sup>35</sup> After the description of the grid drawing (51–57), the VŚ gives seed-mantras in the encoded form in 57–67, 123–136b and 332–339b (Goudriaan 1985: 3; Schoterman 1982: 181; Törzsök 2009).

<sup>36</sup> The first extant Sanskrit *Śrīvidyā* text is the *Vāmakeśvarīmata*, also referred to as *Nityāṣoḍaśrikārṇava* or *Catuṣṣatī*. The text was probably composed in the early eleventh century. On the date and character of the *Vāmakeśvarīmata* see: (Brooks 1992: 38; Slouber 2012: 58).

<sup>37</sup> VŚ 62cd: *pañcaviṃśatikoṣṭhaṣṭhaṃ* [25 cell = KṢAM] *prathamam bījam ucyate* ||

location: (1) situated between / at the conjunction of X and Y (*XY-madhya-gata*, *-stha* / *sandhi-gata*); (2) in the interval between X and Y (*XY-randhre*), which can cover a wider neighborhood; (3) above X (*X-ūrdhva*); (4) below X (*X-adha*); (5) before X / to the left of X (*X-pūrva*, *X-ādi* / *X-vāma*); (6) after X / to the right of X (*X-pāścima*, *X-anta* / *X-dakṣiṇa*).

A helpful example of extraction of the seed-mantra SAUḤ from the standard alphabet through indication of the neighboring letters comes from VM 1.82cd, a text of the later *Śrividya* tradition: the one which is after the one which is after Ś [=S] is joined to the one which precedes KA [=AḤ] and joined to the one which comes after the one after AI [=AU].<sup>38</sup> Another example of extraction of the seed-mantra HSAUḤ<sup>39</sup> based on a different grid is found in KMT 5<sup>39</sup>: the fifth [letter] is situated between YA and SA [=HA], and [the letter] located in the position between BA and HA [=SA], joined with the one preceding AṀ [=AU], adorned by the [phoneme] after AṀ [=AḤ].<sup>40</sup>

There are other possible names for orientation points, which supply navigation instructions in a *gahvara-prastāra*. (1) Orientation of the diagram according to cardinal points, four or eight. Grids are usually orientated to the East or to the North. (2) Orientation of the diagram according to deities presiding over cardinal points or other groups of deities such as eight *mātrikas*. (3) Association of the central cell of the grid with the four / six / eight (KMT 2.115–116) sacred seats (*pīṭhas*), which may supply navigation in the diagram.<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, the fifty (*pīṭhas*) are juxtaposed to all the fifty cells of the table in the much later text of the sixteenth-century MBT, KuKh (6.212cd–219ab) and,

<sup>38</sup> The seed-mantra SAUḤ appears as a part of the first spell (*vidyā*) in the context of eight spells of eight goddesses presiding over the eight groups of letters. The first spell is called ‘a purifier of hands’ (*karaśuddhi-karī*)—AṀ KLĪM SAUḤ—where SAUḤ is called the seed of power (*śakti-bījam*): *sāntāntaṃ kādisaṃyuktam aikārāntāntayojitam* || 82 cd ||.

<sup>39</sup> A series of five praṇavas are taught in the Kubjikā cult (AṀ HRĪM SRĪM PHREM HSAUḤ) KMT 5.34-41 (Goudriaan & Schoterman 1988: 114).

<sup>40</sup> KMT 5.39: *pañcamaṃ ya-sa-madhyasthaṃ ba-ha-madhyāsane sthitam | aṃ-pūrveṇa samayuktam aṃ-pāścimavibhūṣitam* || The extraction is based on the following grid:

					a					
				ja	jha	ā				
		cha	bha	ma	ña	i				
	ca	ba	sa	ha	ya	ṭa	ī			
	ña	pha	ṣa	śa	va	la	ra	ṭha	u	
gha	pa	na	dha	ḍa	tha	ta	ṇa	ḍha	ḍa	ū
ga	kha	ka	aḥ	aṃ	au	o	ai	e	ī	ṛ

Figure 3. *Mālinī-gahvara* (Goudriaan & Schoterman, 1988, Appendix I, Fig. 3)

The *gahvara* is called *Mālinī* probably because the same grid is used for the extraction of *nādi-phānta-krama*.

Drawings of the same grid under the name *meru-prastāra* are attested in a number of manuscripts of the KMT, the SSS, and in the manuscripts of their sub-commentaries. See Figure 5.1 for the drawing of this grid in the KMT in the unpublished doctoral thesis of Jung-Lan Bang.

<sup>41</sup> For example, in SSS 8.38cd–40 cf. 34.2–3ab, the three corner cells and the central cell of the triangular sumeru-gahvara are associated with the four sacred seats (*pīṭha-s*): Kāmarūpa with A, Pūrṇagiri with R<sub>ḥ</sub>, Jālandhara with GA, and Oḍḍiyāna with HA — each of which governs a group of other cells with letters.

in AMS 5.2–9, 15cd–16, the fifty seats are employed as code words to hide the letters of mantras.<sup>42</sup>

### MĀLINĪ

*Mālinī* is the name of the alphabet goddess who embodies a distinct sequence of syllables called *nādiphāntakrama*, i.e. sequence [of syllables], beginning with NA and ending in PHA, also called *kulaputtalikā* (TL 15.129d). *Mālinī* sequence is described in many texts of the *Vidyāpīṭha* currant, *Trika*, its sub-schools, and in the *Kaula* tradition.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, the sequence of letters of *Mālinī* itself is extracted from a grid containing the standard Sanskrit alphabet, as described in the TsT and the parallel passage in the KMT.

Therefore, these two texts approach *Mālinī* as if it was a supreme (parā) mantra originating from and empowered by *Mātrkā*-alphabet.<sup>44</sup> The *Mālinī* system of encoding is based on assignation of body parts with syllables and female deities (Vasudeva 2007: 530). Then, a cipher-text looks like an oddish instruction to connect “the soul with the heel”. The mantra of the goddess *Parā* SAUḤ is encrypted in the *Mālinī* code in SYM 3.46, cf. MV 3.54cd, cf. Viveka to TL 30.27ab (Törzsök 1999: 11): the living soul [SAḤ] decorated with the left shank [AU] [and] arranged in the proper order.<sup>45</sup> The alignment between bodily parts and letters, code-words and encoded elements is ensured somewhere earlier in the same texts: SYM 3.15a, cf. MV 3.39d, cf. TL 15.123d for SAḤ and SYM 3.17c, cf. MV 3.40cd, cf. TL 15.124cd for AU. In spite of a few discrepancies, the correspondence of letters to bodily parts is rather standard in many texts. AU corresponds to the left shank of the goddess *Mālinī* in all the sources consulted by Somadeva Vasudeva, but the story with SAḤ is different. SA appears combined with *visarga* in the texts showing more textual affinity.<sup>46</sup> However, SA appears alone in *Kularatnodyota* 5.95d and in *Śrīmatottara* 22.28.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The grid *meru-gahvara* described in AMS 5.2–9, 15cd–16, looks similar to *mālinī-gahvara* both in shape and the manner of insertion of the letters, the latter employed also in the earlier KMT, but with the only difference that in the MBT the syllables are paralleled with the names of the sacred seats, which serve as code words for extraction of the letters in the *Mālinī* order of the alphabet. See the *Mālinī* grid in fn.41 and the edited text from MBT, KuKh and AMS with translation in Dyczkowski (2009 V. 1a: 145 and V. 1b: fn.167).

<sup>43</sup> *Siddhayeśvarīmata*, *Mālinīvijayottara*, *Trīrohbhairavatantram*, *Tantrasadbhāvantram*, *Kubjikāmata-tantram*, *Ṣaṣṭhasrasaṃhītā*, *Kularatnodyota*, *Śrīmatottara*, Kashmirian ritual manual *Agnikāryapaddhati*, *Vāmakeśvarīmata*.

<sup>44</sup> See details of drawing the grid called *Mālinī* in KMT 4.76–80 (Schoterman 1982: 183–186) and the grid of *Mālinī* here in fn. 41.

<sup>45</sup> SYM 46ab: *vāmajaṅghāsamāyukta ātmā deyaḥ sa eva tu || MV 3.54cd: vāmajaṅghānvito jīvaḥ pāraparyakramāgataḥ ||*

<sup>46</sup> The texts having SAḤ as one unit are SYM 3.15a, MV 3.39d, TsT 3.122d–3a, and KMT 4.98bc. For example, TsT 3.122d–123ab: *ma-ṣa-madhyagataṃ devi ātmābījāmṛtāmakaṃ || visargasahitaṃ rudre uddhṛtaṃ mantraṃ uttamam | [SAḤ].*

<sup>47</sup> *Śrīmatottara* 22.28: *aiḥ sa paramātmaśakti jīvaṃ namaḥ ||*

## FIFTY RUDRAS

There is another encoding/decoding system resembling the system of *Mālinī* in a way that fifty syllables are also associated there with the bodily parts and with names of gods. However, this system uses rather fifty names of male deities, *Rudras* or *Bhairavas*, and their consorts, than parts of the divine body. The close affinity between *Mālinī* and fifty *Rudras* is indicated in MVT 3.15, where the fifty *Rudras* are mentioned as partners of the fifty female deities residing in the *mālinī-gahvara*.<sup>48</sup> The KMT confirms a close bond between *Mālinī* goddess and fifty *Rudras* by saying that *Mālinī* is the essence of all the *Rudras* and their female consorts *Yoginīs*.<sup>49</sup>

The system is described in a number of texts of the *paścimāmnāya* current.<sup>50</sup> In chapter 24 of the KMT, the alphabet appears in the reverse (*samhāra*) order.<sup>51</sup> In the direct order, the list of *Rudras* begins with *Śrīkaṇṭha rudra* associated with the vowel A and the forehead. Immediately after the list of *Rudras* (KMT 24.21–350), comes the list of names of goddesses associated with the syllables in the reverse sequence of *Mālinī*.<sup>52</sup> The description of the two systems one after the other in one text reinforces the idea of a close relationship between *Rudras* and *Mālinī* goddesses where the latter can be perceived as *Rudras*' consorts (Goudriaan & Schoterman 1988: 128, Table 3). With regard to the encoding / decoding methods, the *Mālinī* system employs bodily parts as code words for a cipher-text, while the system of fifty *Rudras* uses proper names of gods in the role of code words.

In verses 18.30b–31 of the KMT, we find a long variant of the *Parā* mantra consisting of six phonemes H-S-R-Ū-AU-M in the encoded form in the system

<sup>48</sup> MVT 3.15–16ab: *śatārdhabhedabhinnānām tatsaṃkhyānām varānane | rudrānām vācakatvena kalpitāḥ parameṣṭhinā || tadvad eva ca śaktīnām tatsaṃkhyānām anukramāt |* ‘Oh lovely-faced goddess, *Rudras*, whose number amounts to fifty different kinds [of gods], are formed by the language expression of the supreme Lord. And, in the similar manner, [*Rudras* obtain] equal number of corresponding female counterparts (*śaktis*).’ The same association between *Mālinī* and fifty *Rudras* is repeated by the Kaśmirian commentator Kṣemarāja in his exegetical work *Śivasuvarāṣinī*, where he explains the meaning of *sūtra* 19 of the *Śivasūtras* by Vasugupta.

<sup>49</sup> KMT 4.107d.9–10: *Mālinī sarvakāmadā ...rudrānām yoginīnām ca sā [Mālinī] mātaiva nigadyate | avarṇā varṇasamyogā jñātavya tu śubheṣaṇe || 109 || sarvarudrātmakā mantrā rudrāḥ śaktyātmakāḥ priye | śaktis tu mātṛkā jñeyā tu śivātmikā || 110 ||* ‘She, *Mālinī* who bestows everything desired, is said to be the only mother of *Rudras* and *Yoginīs*. Oh beautiful-eyed goddess, though she has no letters, she is taught to be a combination of letters. The mantra has the nature of *Rudras*, *Rudras* have the nature of power (*śakti*), oh beloved, but the power is taught to be *Mātṛkā* who is Śiva by nature.’

<sup>50</sup> The texts are KMT 24.1–20ab, §§S 7.45–66, KRU 5.50, and commentaries to them.

<sup>51</sup> KMT 24.1–20ab: *Samvarta Lākulin Bhṛgu Śveta Bakṣa Khaḍgīsa Pinākin Bhujāṅga Vālisa Mahākāla Dvirāṇḍa Chagalandina Śikhin Lohitarudra Meṣa Mīna Dhātṛ Diṇḍin Āṣāḍhin Ardhanārin Dārūkarudra Lāṅgalin Someśvara Śarman Īsa Caturmukha Ekākṣa Kūrma Ekarudra Śiveśa Pracaṇḍa Caṇḍa Krodha Mahāsenarudra Krura Anugrahīsa Saḍyadeva Bhauktin Jhaṇṭīsa Hara Stānu Tithīsa Bhārabhūti Arghīsa Amarīsa Trimūrti Sūkṣma Ananta Śrīkaṇṭha.*

<sup>52</sup> In the direct order, begin with NA corresponding to the goddess *Nādinī* and end with PhA corresponding to the goddess *Phetkarikā*.

of the fifty *Rudras*. The mantra appears in the context of the three-fold spell (*vidyā*) of the three *Trika* goddesses *Parāparā*, *Aparā* and *Parā* collectively called Trividya, or Tatgraha-mantra (Sanderson 1990: 46; Goodall & Rastelli 2013: 71). The entire mantra contains fifty syllables, the number equal to the number of letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. HSRŪ-AUM peak-mantra of *Parā* is the last one: *Lakulaṃ* = H, *Bhṛgu* = S, *Bhujāṅga* = R, *Arghīśa* = Ū, *Anugrahīśa* = AU, and *bindunāda* = AM.<sup>53</sup> Here, like in the Mālinī system of encoding described in the MV, association of the Sanskrit phonemes with bodily parts of the divine body and, ultimately, the body of a human practitioner, plays essential role in the rituals of those two deities, but only names of Rudras are used in the systems of mantra encoding.

Practically a similar *Śrīkaṇṭha-ādi* list of *Rudras* is found in AP 145.28–30 and 293.40–47, but the list of associated female consorts is different. Another text entitled *Śāradātilaka*<sup>54</sup> provides in verses 2.29–35 a shorter version of the same list of Rudras and their consorts. The ŚT uses these couples differently, i.e. places them within a graphical representation, or the circle, of a hip of sounds (*śabdarāśī-maṇḍala*).<sup>55</sup>

The system of fifty *Rudras* is also employed in the *Śaiva-Saiddhāntika* tradition: *Makuṭāgama*, *charyāpāda* 6.5cd cf. CjñA 4.23cd prescribes a ritual worship to this group of *Rudras* in the context of establishment of six liṅgas, and MkA 6.14–20 provides a complete list of *Rudras* without their female counterparts and MkA.<sup>56</sup> This list begins with *Khaḍgeśarudra* (*Khaḍgeśādi*) and, albeit it includes many names similar to *Vidyāpīṭha* recension, the names are presented in a different order and correspond to the alphabetic grid (*gahvara*) of the *Saiddhāntika* tradition.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I have made an attempt to collect, classify, and describe some representative examples of mantra decryption procedures (*mantroddhāra*). The collected mantroddhāra methods can be roughly divided into two main groups: methods based on alphabetic grids (*prastāra*) and methods without them. The *mantroddhāra* forms employing grids can be subdivided further depending on

<sup>53</sup> KMT 18.30b–31: parāṃ devīm tato vakṣye śivatattvānusāriṇīm lakulaṃ [H] | bhṛgusaṃsthaṃ [S] hi bhujāṅgena [R] samanvitam || arghīśāsanam [Ū] āruḍhaṃ ’nugrahīśena [AU] bheditam | bindunādakalākrāntam [AM] uddhṛtam paramaṃ priye || Cf. ŚSS 1.16 (Schoterman 1982: 44) bhṛgulākulayogaṃ [SA HA] vai arghinā [Ū] krūrādipitam [AM] śānto’haṃ mālikādyena [S] bhuvanam śivaśaktigam [HS] || = SHŪM.

<sup>54</sup> The ŚT authored by Lakṣmaṇadeśika belongs to the eclectic Smārta Tantric tradition originating from Orissa of around the twelfth century (Sanderson 2014: 82).

<sup>55</sup> For references and comparative tables see Dyczkowski (2009 V. 1 Intr.: Appendix VII and Table 17) and Schoterman (1982: Appendix II, 218 and Table III).

<sup>56</sup> MkA 6.5cd: ācārādikaṣaḍliṅgasthalaśaṭkasamāśrayam | anuttaram ca pañcāśadrudrārādhanaṃācaret || One should perform an oblation with the names of the fifty Rudras to the supreme abode of six kinds of places for liṅgas beginning with ācāra.

the shapes of grids, manner of writing letters in a certain order, arrangement of letters in grids, and on the methods of mapping letters for extraction within those grids. A distinctive feature of all these decoding methods is their dependence on writing. The employment of diagrams also shows some commonality of these methods with other tantric and non-tantric practices of drawing and figurative writing such as sacred diagrams (*yantras*) with the inscribed mantras in them, figurative poetry (*citrakāvya*), magical grids of various shapes with inscribed digits in them, various divination tables, or gaming boards. The relationship between various traditions employing grids and tables needs to be studied in more detail in a separate research work.

The methods of *mantroddhāra* without involvement of alphabetic tables form a different type, which can be subdivided further into two big groups: (1) methods based on reversion and distortion of the sequence of letters in plain-texts and (2) methods based on various kinds of substitutions of plain-texts. The methods of *uddhāra* based on models of substitution are intriguing ones because they are somewhat paradoxical processes of hiding mantra forms and, by doing so, revealing their hidden, or esoteric, meanings. The richness of denotations attached to a syllable sometimes defies the imagination. By compilation of meanings of a syllable from multiple sources, we can observe diversity of types of meaning such as lexical, etymological, explanatory (*nirvacana*), associative, metaphorical, and symbolic ones. While esoteric meaning of a mantra can endlessly remain to be a conundrum, a language form of a mantra is liable to be ciphered and deciphered as any other plain-text. However, many difficulties in deciphering mantras can arise due to inaccessibility of detailed and clear explanations. We can only speculate whether the explanations were lost in the course of time or they never appeared in the written sources, or they could have been made intentionally or unintentionally scanty and corrupt. There are also numerous less dramatic difficulties. For instance, slight ambiguity arises when no clear differentiation between the syllable and the phoneme is made, or when there are no clear instructions on the sequential order of the extracted phonemes. Such obstacles to understanding the process of decryption were probably created intentionally either to keep some degree of secrecy or with the hope that the readers of the exegesis had enough knowledge and experience to make the right choice.

The lack of cipher keys and clear explanations certainly aggravate the task of solving decryption puzzles. There are even some cases when all the literary sources of a died-out tradition fail to assist in retrieving the correct mantric form. Fortunately, the majority of ‘deep dark forests’ of cipher-texts in the Hindu tantric traditions are quite liable for conversion to open texts with the help of the later exegetical literature, relevant explanatory passages or even with bits and pieces of information in the same text, and in the corpus of literature of the

same tradition. As we have seen, many cipher-texts do not serve the sole purpose of hiding mantric form, but the purposes of sacralization of mantras, thus making the task of deciphering an adventurous investigation of tantric ways of establishing meanings and sacral values.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- AKP — Agnikāryapaddhati  
 AP — Agnipurāṇa  
 UcT — Śrīmaducchuṣmatantram  
 BhG — Bhāgavadgīta  
 BY — Brahmayāmala  
 JñT — Jñānārṇavatāntram  
 JY — Jayadrathayāmala  
 IŚGDP — Isānaśivagurudevapaddhati  
 KMT — Kubjikāmatatantram  
 KRU — Kularatnoddyota  
 LT — Lakṣmītantram  
 MV — Mālinīvijayottarantram  
 MkA — Makuṭāgama  
 MBT — Manthānabhairava-tantram  
 KuKh — Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ  
 AMS — Ambāmatasamhitā  
 NK — Niśvāsakārikā  
 NŚ — Niśvāsātattvasamhitā  
 NT — Netrantram  
 PKS — Paraśurāmakalpasūtra  
 PTLV — Parātrīśikā-laghuvṛtti  
 PTV — Parātrīśika-vivaraṇa  
 SBhSS — Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha  
 ŚSS — Śaṭsāhasrasamhitā  
 ŚT — Śāradātilaka  
 SvT — Svacchandalalitabhairavatantram  
 ŚViT — Śrīvidyārṇavatāntram  
 SYM — Siddhayogeśvarīmatatantram  
 TL — Tantraloka  
 TsT — Tantrasadbhāvatāntram  
 TśBhT — Trīśirobhairavatantram  
 VM — Vāmakeśvarīmata  
 VŚ — Vīnāśikhatantram

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