

## **Conflicting Conceptions of the Śrīśrīśrī-Svayambhūcaitya as a Holy Shrine**

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Let me start by telling You that I came to live in Kathmandu in order to learn from You, the learned community of Kathmandu Valley, about Buddhist Newar culture. When I present You here a small extract of the results of my research on the Svayambhūcaitya,<sup>1</sup> I do so with some apprehension. I do not want to suggest that I, an outsider, am in a position to teach You the secret meaning of Svayambhū or something along those lines. Of course, you as native Newars have a more intimate access to the understanding of Svayambhū than my research can ever yield. All the same, I hope that what I am going to speak about in the next half an hour will be of interest to You. I have studied various written sources relating to the conception of the Svayambhūcaitya and here I would like to present some of the conclusions I have drawn from this material.

The early *caityas* in the history of Buddhism function as shrines housing the corporeal relics of a Buddha or some other saint, or objects of personal use such as his alms bowl or robes (*paribhoga*). In the course of time not only such relics but also texts or other sacred objects were deposited inside *caityas* in order to turn them into sacred shrines. In Vajrayāna Buddhism *caityas* are built above various layers of *maṇḍalas*. By this process and by the final consecration of the *caitya*, these Vajrayāna *caityas* become three-dimensional *maṇḍalas*. The *maṇḍalas* usually chosen for this are the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala* and the Dharmadhātuvīgīśvara-*maṇḍala*. The latter *maṇḍala* can be viewed as an extended form of the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala*. Both *maṇḍalas* are built around the *pañcabuddhas* in the centre. Thus the *caitya* comes to be the home, the *ālaya*, of the *pañcabuddhas* and of the deities which inhabit the outer circles of the *maṇḍala* in question.

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If we take the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* as our starting point, the Svayambhūcaitya does not, unlike ordinary Vajrayāna *caityas*, owe its sacredness to *maṇḍalas* projected into it. Nor is it sacred because of relics or other holy objects deposited in it. Rather, it is sacred because it is erected over the very spot where the principle of Buddhahood, personified as the Ādibuddha, manifested itself of its own accord. This is related in the various recensions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*.<sup>2</sup> When Kathmandu Valley was still a lake Tathāgata Vipāśvin<sup>3</sup> cast the seed of a lotus flower into its waters.<sup>4</sup> This seed came to germinate and blossom, and upon this blossom a *dharmadhātu*, that is, a *caitya*,<sup>5</sup> consisting of crystal (*sphaṭikamaya*) and having the form of light (*jyotirūpa*) arose of its own accord (*svayam abhūt samutpannaḥ*). It is qualified as the home of the Jinās (*jinālaya*), as the ontological basis of the five Tathāgatas (*pañcatathāgatāśraya*), as holding the qualities of enlightenment (*sambodhi-śrīguṇādhārah*), as adorned with all the marks (of Buddhahood?) (*sarvalakṣaṇa-maṇḍitaḥ*), as bearing all beautiful objects (*sarvaśubhārthabhṛt*), as bearing the jewels of the right doctrine (*saddharmaratnabhṛt*). These qualifications are in accordance with the general conception of *caityas* in Vajrayāna Buddhism. However, the *caitya* is also described as the Eldest (*jagajjeṣṭha*) of the world, as its Lord (*jagadīśa*), as its Master (*jagatprabhuḥ*), as foremost (*agra*), as supreme (*śreṣṭha*), as having no beginning and no end (*anādinidhana*), and as not ageing (*ajīrṇa*). These characterizations go beyond the ordinary conception of a Vajrayāna *caitya* and show that the Svayambhūcaitya surpasses all other *caityas* and constitutes a particular case in its own right. This particularity is captured in one word in the characterization of it as being *svayaṃbhū*, that is, as being self-arisen and self-existing, and hence as being independent of human agency that would be responsible for its construction and ritual establishment. This independence is the cardinal difference between the Svayambhūcaitya and other *caityas*. Here Buddhahood manifests itself of its own accord rather than being induced to do so by a complex set of rituals performed by human priests. Hence, to be self-arisen, that is, to be *svayaṃbhū*, came to be the decisive characterization of the *caitya*. This epithet became so dominant that it assumed a reality of its own. Thus it seems that in the longer Sanskrit version in verse, in the *Śrīmat-atibṛhat-svayaṃbhūpurāṇa*,

*svayambhū* is no longer the qualifying adjective of the Dharmadhātu-caitya, but (having become nominalised) the deity himself (*svayambhū bhagavān*), who manifests himself in the shape of a *caitya* (*caityarūpaja*) on the lotus flower.<sup>6</sup> As the supreme deity, Lord Svayambhū came to be identified with the Ādibuddha. This identification matches the qualification of the self-arisen Dharmadhātu-caitya as the ontological basis of the five Tathāgatas (*pañcatathāgatāśraya*). Accordingly, the light emanating from Svayambhū came to be looked upon as consisting of five rays, white, blue, yellow, red and green in colour in accordance with the colours of the *pañcabuddhas*.

Thus, the Svayambhūcaitya is sacred in an immediate and far more concrete sense than an ordinary *caitya*, which only becomes the seat of the *pañcabuddhas* (and thereby of the underlying Ādibuddha) by a set of complex rituals. Here the ontological basis of Buddhahood, the Ādibuddha, manifests itself of its own accord in the form of light (*vyotirūpa*). The physical structure of the *caitya* is thus merely a protective cover for this light (and for the luminous crystal from which this light emanates, as well as for the lotus of jewels and diamonds upon which this crystal rests). This cover was erected by Śāntīśrī (who is only in the longer and later versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* identified with Śāntikārācārya)<sup>7</sup> at the beginning of the Kaliyuga in order to protect the shining crystal upon the lotus blossom from any wrongdoing.<sup>8</sup>

So much for the conception of the Svayambhūcaitya according to the myth related in the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. The situation is, however, more complex than that. In inscriptions, *thāsaphus* and other written sources, the Svayambhūcaitya is frequently referred to as Śrīśrīśrī-Svayambhūcaitya-dharmadhātuvāgīśvara. This appellation as Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara alludes to the aforementioned Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala. This *maṇḍala* has in its centre as the main deity Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara, a deity who is identified with Mañjuḥṣa and is hence a form of Mañjuśrī. That the Svayambhūcaitya is indeed also conceived of as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-caitya, much in the same way as other Vajrayāna *caityas* are, is attested in various Newar chronicles which record previous renovations, *jīrṇoddhāras*, of the Svayambhūcaitya. These chronicles, which were written by participating Vajrācāryas, note how the *caitya* was renovated and which rituals were performed

in the process. It is recorded that at the beginning of the given renovation the *nyāsa* or *jīvanyāsa*, i.e. the *caitya's* deity, is transferred to a special vessel, the *nyāsaghaṭa*, which is kept in a pure place, such as the Thakāli's house or the *digī chem*. There it is worshipped daily until the time of the *caitya's* re-consecration. Part of this *nityapūjā* is the offering of a *nyāsabali* in order to protect the *nyāsa*, which is deemed particularly vulnerable at this stage, from malign spirits etc. After the *nyāsa* has been removed the *caitya* is dismantled by the workers down to the dome. Then the old and worn *yaḥsi*, i.e. the central pole of the *caitya*, is removed and replaced by a new *yaḥsi* which has been prepared in the meantime. After the *caitya* has been built up again, the *jīvanyāsa* is transferred back from the *nyāsaghaṭa* into the *caitya* (*nyāsa luyigu*). After this transference the *nyāsa* is properly re-established in the *caitya* by a set of complex consecration rituals. First the ten *saṃskāras*, i.e. birth, the bestowing of sight (*drṣṭidāna*), name-giving, first feeding of fruits and rice etc. up to the wedding, are performed. Then the tantric initiations, the *dīkṣās*, are conferred upon the deity. This new consecration of the *caitya* is sealed by a complex ritual, an *ahorātrapūjā*, which lasts up to two weeks.

The removal and later re-insertion of the *nyāsa* as well as the subsequent consecration rituals are in this way routinely done in the context of renovations of Vajrayāna *caityas* and *mūrtis*. The precise details of this process depend upon which kind of *caitya* or deity the rituals are performed for. In the case of the Svayaṃbhūcaitya the rituals point to the conception of the shrine as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-caitya. Thus, at the time of reconsecrating the *caitya*, the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala is drawn and ritually empowered. Moreover, the layout of the so-called "Piṇḍikarmmaṇḍala",<sup>9</sup> which was inscribed on a gilded silver plate and in this form inserted in the cube above the *caitya's* dome (*harmikā*) when building it up again in process of renovating Svayaṃbhū in 1757, bears traces of the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala.<sup>10</sup> Thus, as the chronicle of that renovation records, this *maṇḍala* has as its central deity Vāgīśvara, who is – as the other deities of the "Piṇḍikarmmaṇḍala" – represented by his seed syllable (= *mu*) rather than by depicting his implements or his dhyāna, that is, his bodily appearance which is to be visualized in meditation. The chronicles

and also inscriptions dating as far back as to the 13th century (NS 492) testify that in the process of the renovation the *samādhi* of the Vajradhātu is practised for the most crucial rituals. Since the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala can be treated as an extended form of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala, the practice of the Vajradhātu *samādhi* may be looked upon as a proof for the conception of the *caitya* as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala. At the very least, the practice of the Vajradhātu-samādhi confirms that the Vajrācāryas deal with the Svayambhūcaitya as a Vajrayāna *caitya* which is, conceptually, a *pañcabuddha-maṇḍala*.

Thus it can be learned from the records of the Svayambhūcaitya's renovation that it is ritually treated much in the same way as other Vajrayāna shrines. The decisive point of this process is that the divinity, the *jīvanyāsa*, is – from a ritual point of view – clearly dependent upon human agency, notably the officiating priests, the Vajrācāryas. This becomes particularly obvious at the time of renovation when the *nyāsa* is treated almost like a substance, that can be removed from and re-inserted into the *caitya* by a competent Vajrācārya at will. Hence, we have a somewhat contradictory situation. On the one hand, the Svayambhū shrine is ritually treated as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-caitya. As other Vajrayāna *caityas*, it hence owes its sanctity to the *pañcabuddhas* and to the other deities of the *maṇḍala* whom the Vajrācāryas induce to abide in the *caitya* by a series of complex rituals. On the other hand, the *caitya* is conceived of as the mere cover of the sacred, radiant, crystalline Svayambhū Dharmadhātu, which is the form in which the Ādibuddha manifests himself at this spot irrespective of any rituals, solely on his own accord.

It seems that the Svayambhūpurāṇa is addressing this contradictory situation when it introduces the sixth chapter with the question why and since when the Svayambhūcaitya has also been called Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara.<sup>11</sup> Instead of an explicit answer to this question, the following episode, the main subject matter of the sixth chapter, is related: Once a certain *ācārya* called Dharmasrīmitra was teaching the *Nāmasaṅgīti* in the Vikramaśīla Vihāra in India. During the process of this he was asked about the esoteric meaning of the 12 *akṣaras a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, au, aṃ, and aḥ* which are taught in the (*Ārya*)*Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*, in the Māyājālābhisambodhiḡāthās.<sup>12</sup>

Unable to answer this question, Dharmasrimitra set off towards China in order to meet Mañjuśrī and to find out about the 12 *akṣaras* from him. After meeting Mañjuśrī, Dharmasrimitra is first initiated into the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala because only to such an initiate can Mañjuśrī reveal the secret of the 12 *akṣaras*. The *Svayambhūpurāṇa* only mentions that thereupon Dharmasrimitra was taught the secret meaning of these 12 letters, but it does not mention what this secret is. This episode is all that the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* gives in the way of an answer to the question why the Svayambhūcaitya is also called Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara. In the absence of a commentarial tradition which would explain how the episode answers this question, we have to arrive at our own interpretation. I suggest that we can learn two things from the episode: Firstly, it tacitly confirms the link between the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala and the appellation of the *caitya* as Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara. Secondly, it hints that the conception of the *caitya* as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala has to be seen against the backdrop of the *Nāmasaṅgīti* and the 12 *akṣaras* taught therein. This hint makes perfect sense, for the three Māyājālābhisambodhigāthās of the *Nāmasaṅgīti*, where the 12 *akṣaras* are taught, contain – according to the exegetical tradition – the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala.<sup>13</sup>

This link between the conception of the Svayambhūcaitya as Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara and the Māyājālābhisambodhigāthās of the *Nāmasaṅgīti*, which is only hinted at by the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, is made very explicit in a couple of historical architectural drawings of the Svayambhūcaitya.<sup>14</sup> These drawings of Svayambhū not only give the exact measurements of the various parts of the *caitya*, but also provide an esoteric interpretation of the upper section of the *caitya* surmounting the *harmika*. These drawings (see Kölver, *op. cit.*, illustrations 1 and 9, on respectively p. 5 and p. 52) reveal that the *yaḥsi* is marked with the same 12 *akṣaras* which are taught in the *Nāmasaṅgīti* and which Dharmasrimitra went to learn about from Mañjuśrī. Each letter is affixed to the *yaḥsi* in such a way that it marks one of the thirteen rings (Newari: *cakari*) which rise above the *harmika* (Newari: *galatuki*) (as an expression of the absolute, the thirteenth ring remains unmarked). The architectural drawings correlate each letter and thereby the corresponding ring with a particular *bhūmi* (i.e. a particular stage on the path of a Bodhisattva), with a

particular *pāramitā* (i.e. a particular perfection obtained on this path), with a particular *jñāna* (i.e. a particular spiritual knowledge and insight obtained on this path) and a particular *sthāna* (i.e. a particular place for worship and yogic practice such as a charnel field, a *śmaśāna*). In correlating the 12 *akṣaras* and rings with the 12 *bhūmis*, *pāramitās*, *jñānas* and *sthānas*, the drawings provide an esoteric interpretation of the 12 *akṣaras*. It seems that such an esoteric interpretation of the 12 *akṣaras* is in line with the longer versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. For there the hint is given that Mañjuśrī's esoteric teaching on the 12 *akṣaras* contained the secret knowledge of the twelve *bhūmis*.<sup>15</sup> The equation of the 12 *akṣaras* with the 12 *sthānas* matches the correlation adduced by Raviśrījñāna in his commentary on the *Nāmasaṅgīti*, the *Amṛtakaṇikā* (p. 18,11-16). All this shows that the 12 *akṣaras* on the *yaḥsi* of the Svayambhūcaitya refer to the very same 12 *akṣaras* which are taught in the *Nāmasaṅgīti*. Thus we can see that the 12 *akṣaras* of the *Nāmasaṅgīti* are not only linked to the Svayambhū in the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, but that – by virtue of being inscribed on the *yaḥsi* – they are actually physically present in the Svayambhūcaitya.

How does all this help in bridging the gap between the conception of the *caitya* as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala and as a shrine for the divine Svayambhū manifesting himself in the form of the self-arisen radiant *caitya*? I would like to suggest that in a word the answer is 'Mañjuśrī'. Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara, the central deity of the *maṇḍala*, is – as a form of Mañjughoṣa – identical with Mañjuśrī himself. On the basis of this identification, Mañjuśrī can be taken to be the supreme deity of the *caitya*, the Ādibuddha. This interpretation can be substantiated by referring to the 12 *akṣaras* which, according to the architectural drawings, are written on the *yaḥsi*. For in the second Māyājālābhisambodhigāthā of the *Nāmasaṅgīti* these same 12 *akṣaras* are related to Mañjuśrī, who abides as the embodiment of knowledge (*jñānamūrti*) in the heart of the Buddhas of all times and in this sense functions as Ādibuddha.<sup>16</sup> Since the *yaḥsi* of the *caitya* has the same 12 *akṣaras* located on it which are associated with Mañjuśrī, the *caitya* (or, more precisely, its core the *yaḥsi*) and Mañjuśrī can be correlated. Hence by virtue not only of the conception of the Svayambhūcaitya as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala, but also by virtue of the inscription of the *yaḥsi* with the 12 *akṣaras*, Mañjuśrī is

seen to be the underlying supreme deity, the Ādibuddha, of the Svayaṃbhūcaitya.

This is in keeping with the pivotal role which Mañjuśrī plays in the Svayaṃbhū myth. In the form of Mañjudeva he drained the lake covering Nepal in order to make Svayaṃbhū accessible for worship and then he settled the first inhabitants, the forerunners of the present-day Newars, in Mañjupaṭṭana, and taught them agricultural and other skills; in a word, he bestowed civilization upon them.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he conferred tantric *dīkṣā* upon Guṇākara, and thus he is, via Śāntīśrī (or Śāntikārācārya if their identification in later versions of the *Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa* is accepted), at the beginning of all the Vajrācāryas' *paramparā*, that is, their initiatory lineage (see John Locke: *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press, 1985, pp. 256f.). This supreme importance of Mañjuśrī could not find better expression than in the conception of the Svayaṃbhūcaitya as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala with a form of Mañjuśrī in its centre, and in the identification of Svayaṃbhū with Mañjuśrī which is implied by this.<sup>18</sup> I think that this is the true import of the sixth chapter of the *Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa*, which I have discussed above.

It has to be conceded, however, that the sixth chapter of the *Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa* does not spell out the link between Mañjuśrī and the Svayaṃbhūcaitya in the way suggested here. Hence my interpretation has to remain speculative. But even if it is not accepted, one can at least find a common denominator between the Svayaṃbhūcaitya's ritual treatment as a Vajrayāna *maṇḍala* and its conceptualization according to the myth of the *Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa* in its function as seat of the Ādibuddha. Every Vajrayāna *caitya* is the abode of the *pañcabuddhas* (see above) and thereby ultimately of the Ādibuddha, who is the personification of the principle of Buddhahood underlying them. Likewise, the self-arisen *caitya* of the Svayaṃbhū myth is identified as Lord Svayaṃbhū and in turn as Ādibuddha. Thus on both counts the Svayaṃbhūcaitya is the abode of the Ādibuddha, and the difference can be reduced to the question whether he manifests himself here solely of his own accord or whether he is induced to do so by human agency. To be sure, this is no mean difference. On the other hand, the tension between the autonomous nature of a deity and its ritual dependency upon human agency is not restricted to the Svayaṃbhū shrine, but can also be found in other

contexts.<sup>19</sup> What is more, to perceive of the dual nature of the Svayambhūcaitya as in some way contradictory is, of course, a very Western perspective. From an Indic point of view there will be nothing disturbing about a *caitya* being treated in one context as a Vajrayāna *caitya* that is dependent upon human ritual agency, while being regarded in another context as completely autonomous. Rather than being perplexed by this lack of consistency, one will happily accept that this *caitya* is not only sacred because of the rituals performed for it, but also because this is the place where Buddhahood manifests itself in any case spontaneously. After all, this complex situation makes for the special sacredness and great importance which sets the Svayambhūcaitya apart from all other Buddhist shrines.

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The conflict between the dependency of the *caitya* as a *maṇḍala* upon human agency (Vajrayāna rituals) on the one hand, and between the autonomous nature of Svayambhū on the other hand, is not the only contradiction in the conception of the Svayambhūcaitya as a holy shrine. I want to point out one more instance. For this I will return to the aforementioned chronicles recording various renovations of the Svayambhūcaitya. In these chronicles it is described how the new *yaḥsi* is felled and brought to Svayambhū. Upon the arrival at Svayambhū it is ritually welcomed by the *nakiṃ*, i.e. the wife of the eldest man of the community of Buddhācāryas. The Buddhācāryas are the clan residing up at Svayambhū and charged with the daily care of the *caitya*. The ceremonial welcome, the *laskus* rite, is performed for the *yaḥsi* in the same way as it is for a new wife. Thus by pulling the *yaḥsi* inside with the help of a key, the *nakiṃ* incorporates it into the Buddhācārya community just as a new bride is taken in. Consequently, at the next renovation when the *yaḥsi* has become old and worn out and is replaced by a new *yaḥsi*, it is ritually treated as a member of the Buddhācārya community who has died. It is cremated by the *guthiyārs* of Svayambhū with the assistance of 2 *segumis* (the *gyāpu* helpers attached to Svayambhū). As the aforementioned inscription of the 12 *akṣaras* on the *yaḥsi* shows, it is the central part of the *caitya*, the part most intimately associated with the sacred life of the *caitya*. Thus the new *yaḥsi* is, after its erection inside the dome,

consecrated by the ten *saṃskāras* even before the *nyāsa* is transferred back from the *nyāsaghaṭa* to the *caitya* and thus even before the *caitya* is consecrated at large. The fact that the *yaḥsi*, the central and in many ways most sacred part of the *caitya*, is treated by the Buddhācāryas as a member of their community shows that from their perspective the Svayaṃbhūcaitya is not only a universal shrine for the *pañcabuddhas* and the underlying Ādibuddha, but also a deity intimately linked to their community and in this sense almost clan-like in nature.<sup>20</sup> This intimate link also finds its expression in the Buddhācāryas' function as *jajamān* for rites performed in connection with the Svayaṃbhūcaitya.

The Buddhist *caityas* and deities scattered over the Valley generally belong to a specific *bāhāḥ*, *bahī*, clan or other group. As such, they are like the Svayaṃbhūcaitya closely associated with the community in question and ritually treated accordingly. What is striking, however, in the case of Svayaṃbhū is that this *caitya* functions also as the focal point for the Newar Buddhist community at large. Beyond the borders imposed by locality and caste, all Newar Buddhists accept Svayaṃbhū as their most sacred shrine, as the centre of their religion and by converging there express their identity as Newar Buddhists.<sup>21</sup> This character of the Svayaṃbhūcaitya to unite the Newar Buddhist community also finds expression at the renovations of this *caitya*. As the aforementioned chronicles record, in the process of renovation just about every section of society gets involved, be it as craftsman, as priest, as donor, as musician, as part of the huge group of people pulling the *yaḥsi* up to Svayaṃbhū or be it in some other way.

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We can affirm, then, that the Svayaṃbhūcaitya is treated both as a local shrine closely associated with the clan of the Buddhācāryas and as the religious centre of the Newar Buddhist community which unites its members beyond local and caste boundaries. This discrepancy in scope touches mainly upon function and is not as striking as the conflicting conceptions of the shrine at Svayaṃbhū as both the seat for the self-arisen Ādibuddha and as a Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-caitya. However, this discrepancy, too, goes to show that there are

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various and partly conflicting ways in which the Svayambhūcaitya is conceived of as a sacred shrine. Whatever the merits of the synthesising explanation of the sixth chapter of the Svayambhūpurāṇa may be, the tensions between the differing perceptions of the Svayambhūcaitya are never resolved completely. I see no harm in this. Buddhahood is beyond the limitations of systematic human thinking, and so why should the same not hold good for the shrines where Buddhahood manifests itself? Indeed, the coexistence of seemingly contradictory conceptions is to my mind a proof of the great spiritual vitality and importance of the Svayambhūcaitya. By being able to accommodate multiple and from a systematic point of view to at least some degree mutually exclusive conceptualizations, the Svayambhūcaitya displays the flexibility and malleability needed to accommodate the different currents within Newar Buddhist religiosity. In this way the conflicting understandings of the Svayambhūcaitya should not be viewed negatively as sign of a lack of coherency on the part of the tradition, but, on the contrary, positively as an indication of the great ability of the tradition to accommodate different and even conflicting perspectives. It seems to me that this ability is an important factor making for the vitality and strength of the Newar Buddhist tradition even today.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I prefer to refer to the shrine at Syeṃgu as "Svayaṃbhūcaitya" without adding the honorific prefix *mahā-* and without adding the suffix *-nātha*.

As for *mahā-*, to my knowledge, the designation of Svayaṃbhū as a *mahācaitya* is in older Nepalese material only attested in the bilingual inscription recording the renovation from 1751 to 1758 (CE) and standing outside the Mūrttisamgrahālaya museum up at Svayaṃbhū. This inscription was commissioned and erected by the Tibetan sponsors of this renovation. The Newari is a straight translation of the original Tibetan text. Hence the reference to Svayaṃbhū as a *mahācaitya* is a translation of the Tibetan *mchod-rten chen-po*, a frequent term to exalt a *caitya* in Tibetan. The usual honorific particle in a Newari context for the Svayaṃbhūcaitya is not *mahā-* but *-bhattāraka*, as recorded in the title of most of the versions of the Svayaṃbhūpurāṇa. In addition, the name "Svayaṃbhūcaitya" may be exalted by prefixing *śrī-* (up to three times). This prefixing, however, refers rather to the deity Svayaṃbhū than to the *caitya* as such. Nowadays the term *mahācaitya* has become so accepted that it can even be found on the 50-paisa coin. I presume that this is mainly (if not exclusively) due to Pandit Hemraj Shakya's encyclopedic study of the Svayaṃbhūcaitya and its environs, which is published under the title "Śrī-Svayaṃbhū Mahācaitya" (Kathmandu 1978/9). As for the suffix *-nātha*, the designation of the shrine at Syeṃgu as Svayaṃbhūnāth is to my knowledge not attested in older sources. The suffix *-nātha* clearly betrays Hindu influence (the Nāthas and in particular Gorakhanātha, the saint whose shrine is housed inside the Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa at Hanumāṇḍhokā; the designation of Paśupati as Paśupatināth etc.) and makes little sense if we look beyond the 19th century and study the Svayaṃbhūcaitya as a sacred shrine that probably has existed for at least some one and a half thousand years. Even nowadays most Buddhists simply refer to the *caitya* as Svayaṃbhū rather than as Svayaṃbhūnāth.

<sup>2</sup> I here follow the *Svayambhūdharmadhātusamutpattinidānakathā* version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* (NGMPP reel no. A 923/3, fol. 8r4-7. Note that the passages adduced from the various recensions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in this essay are cited on the basis of respectively one manuscript only. This is not satisfactory, but should suffice for documenting my summary of the Svayambhū myth. The reading enclosed by square brackets [...] is to be deleted (*ca[r]tur*: instead of the manuscript's reading *cartur* read *catur*). The portion enclosed by pointed brackets <...> has been added to the text found in the manuscript. Where the letters are not in italics, the reading of the manuscript has been emended; the original reading of the manuscript is only reproduced here where it differs significantly from the conjectured reading proposed by me.

*tasmīn eva sare(sic.) tatra puṇyajālāśraye hrade | maṇiṇālaṃ  
mahaddīptihīrakeśaram uttamaṃ ||*  
*pañcaratnamayaṃ divyasarojarāgakarṇṇikaṃ | prādu<r>bhūtaṃ  
mahāpadmaṃ sahasradalakāśitaṃ ||*  
*tasya ratnasarojasya karṇṇikāmadhyamaṇḍale<|> svayam abhūt  
samutpanno dharmmadhātur jinālayaḥ ||*  
*ekahastapramāṇāṃśuḥ śubhraratnasarojjvalaḥ |  
sambodhiśrīguṇādhāraḥ sarvalakṣaṇamaṇḍitaḥ ||*  
*jyotīrūpo jagajj<y>eṣṭha<ḥ> paṃcatathāgatāśrayaḥ | jagadīśo  
jagadvandyo jagatpūjyo jagatprabhuh ||*  
*anādinidhano 'jīrṇṇo mānyaḥ sarvaśubhārthabhṛt ||*  
*samantabhadrarūpo 'ggraḥ śreṣṭhaḥ saddharmaratnabhṛt ||*  
*trailokyasadguṇādhīśaś ca[r]turvarggaphalapradaḥ ||*  
*tasmi ṃścai[r]tye samutpanne ...*  
(तस्मिन्नेव सरे तत्र पुण्यजलाश्रये ऋदे । मणिणालं महदीप्तिहीरकेशरमुत्तमं ॥  
पञ्चरत्नमयं दिव्यसरोजरागकणिर्णकं । प्रादुर्भूतं महापद्मं सहस्रदलकाशितं ॥  
तस्य रत्नसरोजस्य कणिर्णकामध्यमण्डले । स्वयमभूत्समुत्पन्नो धर्मधातुर्जिनालयः ॥  
एकहस्तप्रमाणांशुः शुभ्ररत्नसरोज्ज्वलः । सम्बोधिश्रीगुणाधारः सर्वलक्षणमण्डितः ॥  
ज्योतीरूपो जगज्ज्येष्ठः पञ्चतथागताश्रयः । जगदीशो जगद्वन्द्यो जगत्पूज्यो जगत्प्रभुः ॥  
अनादिनिधनो ऽजीर्णो मान्यः सर्वशुभार्थभृत् ॥  
त्रैलोक्यसद्गुणाधीशश्चतुर्वर्गफलप्रदः ॥ तस्मिंश्चैत्ये समुत्पन्ने ...)

Compare the corresponding passage in the shorter and presumably older *Gośṅgaparvatasvayambhūcaityabhaṭṭārakoddeśa* version:  
*tasmiṃś ca hrade śakatacakrapramāṇaṃ sahasradala<m>*

*samañinālakam sahrakesaram* (Ms: sahitakeśara )  
*jvalatsarojarāgakarṇṇikam paṃcaratnamaya<a>m mahāpadmaṃ*  
*prādurbhūtaṃ<l> tasya karṇṇikāyām yo 'sau dharmmadhātu<m>*  
*sphaṭikamaya<m> sarvalakṣaṇasampūrṇo jyeṣṭhaḥ śreṣṭho*  
*vaṃdanīyaḥ pūjanīyo manorathādhikaphalaprado*  
*devāsurasamanuṣyānām hitāya sukhāya mokṣāya ca svayam utpannaḥ.*  
(manuscript, private property of Badrīratna Bajrācārya, fol. 4r6-v3).  
(तस्मिंश्च ऋदे शकटचक्रप्रमाणं सहश्रदलं समणालकं सहीरकेसरं ज्वलत्सरोजरागकणिर्णकं पंचर  
त्नमयं महापद्मं प्रादुर्भूतं । तस्य कणिर्णकायां यो ऽसौ धर्मधातुः स्फटिकमयः सर्वलक्षणसंपूर्णो ज्येष्ठः  
श्रेष्ठो बंदनीयः पूजनीयो मनोरथाधिकफलप्रदो देवासुरमनुष्याणां हिताय सुखाय मोक्षाय च  
स्वयमुत्पन्नः ।)

<sup>3</sup> I follow the Newar and Sanskrit sources consulted by me which exclusively read Vipāśvin. This version of the name is also found in the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, a text of Newar provenance closely related to the *Svayambhūpurāna*. Of course, as we know from countless other occurrences of the Tathāgata's name in a different context, the "proper" name should be Vipāśyin.

<sup>4</sup> This planting of the seed by the Tathāgata Vipāśvin is related in the *Svayambhūpurāna* translated (as it seems rather freely) by Mana Bajra Bajracharya and edited by Warren W. Smith (*Mythological History of the Nepal Valley from the Svayambhu Purana*. Kathmandu: Avalok Publishers 1978). In the older versions of the *Svayambhūpurāna*, there is no mention yet of the planting of the lotus seed by Vipāśvin. They only state that at the time of the Tathāgata Śikhin a lotus with Svayambhū in its midst arose from the lake covering Nepal. This is more coherent inasmuch as the planting of the seed of the miraculous lotus flower would seem to be somewhat at odds with the supposed self-origination of the *caitya* that manifests itself upon its pericarp.

<sup>5</sup> In the present passage, the self-arisen *dharmadhātu* is clearly understood to be a *caitya*, since it is referred to as such in the next sentence (*tasmiṃś caitye samutpanne*). This usage of the term *dharmadhātu* is also attested in the *Kriyāsamgraha* (cf. Mireille Bénisti: "Étude sur le Stūpa dans l'Inde Ancienne." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* L,1 (1960), pp. 37-116: p. 90). For fur-

ther references of this usage of *dharmadhātu* see Heino Kottkamp's *Der Stupa als Repräsentation des buddhistischen Heilsweges* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), p. 465.

<sup>6</sup> NGMPP reel no. E 1293/8, fol. 25v4-7: *tatra sphaṭikasamkāṣaḥ svayambhūr bhagavān prabhuḥ | ... caityarūpajaḥ ... j<y>oti<r>bhiḥ pūrītaḥ so <'>yam bhagavān jagadīśvaraḥ.* (तत्र स्फटिकसंकाशः स्वयम्भूर्भगवान् प्रभुः | ... चैत्यरूपजः ... ज्योतिर्भिः पूरितः सो ऽयं भगवाञ्जगदीश्वरः ।)

<sup>7</sup> It is to my knowledge only in the longer versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* with ten chapters (rather than with eight only) that Śāntīśrī, the builder of the *caitya* covering Svayambhū, is identified with Śāntikara (more precisely, with Śāntikaradeva, as he is actually called in the manuscripts consulted by me), the Vajrācārya who pacified the *nāgas* and thus ended the long period of draught which had troubled the Valley. The explanation of this identification, which is related in chapter 9, is problematic in itself. According to it, Śāntīśrī came to be called Śāntikara after and because he had pacified the *nāgas*, but in the previous chapter, relating the draught and its termination, the *ācārya* is called Śāntikara right from the beginning, even before setting out to pacify the *nāgas*.

<sup>8</sup> This myth of the origin of the Svayambhūcaitya has some interesting parallels in the aforementioned account of the Dhānyakaṭaka Stūpa transmitted in the Tibetan tradition (cf. Arianne MacDonald, "Le Dhānyakaṭaka de Man-luṅ guru", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 57 (1970): pp. 169-213: 178f). According to this account, the Dhānyakaṭaka Stūpa was erected over the *maṇḍala* (according to the testimony of Abhaya and Ca-mi, the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala – *ibid.*) which the Buddha (identified as Ādibuddha by Sureśamati – *ibid.*, p. 176) had drawn in order to give initiations to his listeners before revealing the *Kālacakratantra* to them. Initially, the *maṇḍala* was left uncovered after the Buddha had imparted the *Kālacakratantra*. At that time, the mere sight of it afforded liberation. Then, "out of envy" (*phrag dog skyes nas!*), the Digmahārājas had the *maṇḍala* covered by a *stūpa* so that it would no longer grant liberation to each and everyone setting their eyes on it.

<sup>9</sup> I have dealt with the insertion of this kind of *maṇḍala* into *caityas* in an essay (*On the Conception of the Stūpa in Vajrayāna Buddhism. The Example of the Svayaṃbhūcaitya of Kathmandu*) published in the Journal of the Nepal Research Centre (N.11, 1999: pp. 121-147).

<sup>10</sup> NGMPP E 1743/3, folio 25r2-5: *thva piṇḍikarmmamaṇḍalasa vīja* || *vāgisvara mu* || *dathusa* || *vajradhāteśvarī dathusaṃ theṃli catudalasa* || *pūrvvasa jinajika, rāgarati* || *dakṣiṇasa ratnādhrka dheṣarati* || *paścima, ālorika, moharati* || *uttara viśvadhṛka moharati* || *thvaṃpi sakatām* || *piṇḍikarmmamaṇḍalavat* |||| *vīja* || (श्व पिण्डिकर्ममण्डलस वीज ॥ वागिस्वर मु ॥ दथुस ॥ वज्रधातेश्वरी दथुस थैलि चतुदलस ॥ पूर्वस जिनजिक, रागरति ॥ दक्षिणस रत्नाधृक धेषरति ॥ पश्चिम, आलोरिक, मोहरति ॥ उत्तर विश्वधृक मोहरति ॥ श्वपि सकतां ॥ पिण्डिकर्ममण्डलवत् ॥॥ वीज ॥)

<sup>11</sup> – Gośṛṅgaparvatasvayaṃbhūcaityabhātāarakoddeśa (manuscript, private property of Badrīratna Bajrācārya) folios 19b7-20a2: *dharmadhāto<r> buddhadharmabodhi<sa>tvālayasya katamasya tathāgatasya kālasamaye kasmād dhetor dharmmadhātuvāgīśvara iti nāmābhini<r>v<r>tti<r>(?) bhavati* ||

(धर्मधातोर्बुद्धधर्मबोधिसत्त्वालयस्य कतमस्य तथागतस्य कालसमये कस्माद्धेतोर्धर्मधातुवागीश्वर इति नामाभिनिर्वृत्तिर्भवति ॥)

– Svayaṃbhū Mahāpurāṇa (manuscript, private property of Ratnakāji Bajrācārya) p. 264, 11f.: *āva srīsvayaṃbhūbhagavānāyāta srīdharmadhātuvāgīśvara dhakaṃ gu byalasaṃ nīyaṃ nāma praśyāṃta jula chuyā hetunaṃ jula*. (आव सीस्वयम्भुभगवानयात सीधर्मधातुवागीश्वर धकं गु व्यलसं निस्यं नाम प्रष्यात जुल छुया हेतुनं जुल ।)

<sup>12</sup> These 12 letters represent the male vowels (*āli*); *r*, *ṛ*, *l* are considered to be neuter (*napuṃsaka*) since they are not pure vowels; the consonants are female (*kāli*). See Raviśrījñāna's commentary on the *gāthā* in question in his *Amṛtakaṇikā* (edited by Banarsi Lal, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1994 CE: p. 18,8 et segg.): *rkārādicaturṇāṃ napuṃsakatvena varjanā*.

The same differentiation between male, neuter and female letters can also be found in the tradition of Kashmiri Śaivism, e.g. in the *Śrī Śrī Parātrimśikā* (edited by Ācārya Nīlakaṇṭha Gurutū, pp. 283-6) or in Abhinavagupta's *Tantrasāra* (*Abhinavagupta: Tantrasāra with*

*Hindi Translation and Annotation by Pt. Shree Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Sansthan, 1986: p. 13).*

<sup>13</sup> See Wayman 1985: 23f and 27f.

<sup>14</sup> These drawings have been published by Prof. Bernhard Kölver in his book *Re-building a Stūpa. Architectural Drawings of the Svayambhūnāth* (Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1992). Manuscripts "A" and "B" of Prof. Kölver's study record the Svayambhūcaitya's measurements from respectively NS 832 (1712 CE) and NS 937 (1817 CE), and manuscript "C" records the measurements after the renovation at the end of Jayaprakāśa Malla's reign (completed in NS 877 = 1757 CE).

<sup>15</sup> *Svayambhū Mahāpurāṇa* (manuscript, private property of Ratnakājā Bajracarya) fol. 274,3 et segg.: *thanalīṃ thohma dharmasrīmitranam thohma śrīmahāmañjuśrīguruyā kṛpānam abhiṣeka lānāva dvādaśabhuvanayā gūhekañjāna lānāva ...* .(थनलि थोम्ह धर्मश्रीमित्रं थोम्ह श्रीमहामञ्जुश्रीगुरुया कृपानं अभिषेक लानाव द्वादशभुवनया गृहेकज्ञान लाडाव ...) – *Svayambhūdharmadhātusamutpattinidānakathā* (NGMPP reel no. A 923/3) 29b2 et segg.: *tatas tasmai prasannāya mañjudevo yathāvidhi<h> || dvādaśākṣaraguhyārth<ā>ṃ viśuddhiṃ samupādiśat || tato labdhābhiṣeko 'sau dharmasrīmitra utmanā<h> || dvādaśabhūmiguhyārtham viśuddhiñjānam āptavān ||* (ततस्तस्मै प्रसन्नाय मञ्जुदेवो यथाविधिः ॥ द्वादशाक्षरगुह्यार्था विशुद्धिं समुपादिशत् ॥ ततो लब्धाभिषेको S सौ धर्मश्रीमित्र उत्तमनाः ॥ आदशभूमिगुह्यार्थं विशुद्धिज्ञानमाप्तवान् ॥)

<sup>16</sup> Nāmasaṅgīti, verse 26: *a ā i ī u ū e ai o au am aḥ sthito hṛdi | jñānamūrtir aham buddho buddhānāṃ tryadhvavartinām ||* (अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ए ऐ औ अः स्थितो हृदि । ज्ञानमूर्तिरहं बुद्धो बुद्धानां त्र्यध्ववर्तिनां ॥) (*a ā i ī u ū e ai o au am aḥ* - I am the Buddha who abides the Body of Knowledge in the heart of the Buddhas occurring in the three times [= past, present and future].)

In this verse of the Nāmasaṅgīti Mañjuśrī is actually not named explicitly. Rather, the Buddha who is the subject of the sentence is referred to as "I" (*aham*). In the immediate context of the Nāmasaṅgīti, the referent of *aham* should be Śākyamuni. But in the wider context of the Nāmasaṅgīti the referent should be Mañjuśrī. The solution to

this problem could lie in the compositional structure of the Nāmasaṅgīti. The three Māyājalābhisambodhigāthās are incorporated into a different context in the Nāmasaṅgīti, so that the *aham* of the second *gāthā* may have a different referent in the original (and no longer extant) text. Hence Śākyamuni who seems to be the obvious referent in the immediate context of the Nāmasaṅgīti may not be the real referent of the "I" of the *gāthā* in question.

The heart-mantra (*hṛdayamantra*) given for Mañjuḥṣa, a form of Mañjuśrī, in the Niṣpannayogāvalī at the end of its treatment of the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala supports the identification of *aham* with *Mañjuśrī* in the second Māyājalābhisambodhigāthā. In accordance with this *gāthā*, the *mantra* identifies Mañjuḥṣa as "the heart of all Tathāgatas" (*sarvatathāgatahṛdaya*), as "the body of knowledge" (*jñānamūrti*).

<sup>17</sup> This role of Mañjuśrī is also recorded in the "Sthirobhava-vākya" published by Mary Slusser in her *Nepal Mandala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982: vol. 1, p. 420). Here Mañjuśrī is not only credited with "having created" the artisans needed for building houses but also with providing the building materials.

<sup>18</sup> The identification with Svayambhū implies that Mañjuśrī becomes the supreme "deity", the Ādibuddha. Even though Mañjuśrī is usually thought of as a Bodhisattva, this identification is in line with Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara's (= Mañjuśrī's) supremacy in the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara-maṇḍala, and with his correlation with Vajrasattva and Mahāvairocana in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*'s treatment of this *maṇḍala* (edited by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1972: p. 65,9 *et seqq.*: *iha bhagavān mahāvairocanātmā mañjuḥṣaḥ suviśuddhadharmadhātujñānavabhāvaḥ svābhavajrasatvena mudritaḥ*). On the identification of certain Bodhisattvas as Buddhas see Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann's article "'Dieux Polyvalents' du Tāntrisme Bouddhique." (*Journal Asiatique* 252: 365-377).

<sup>19</sup> So, for instance, in the case of Buṅgadyaḥ, one of the most important Buddhist deities of the Valley. In his study of the annual *yātrā* of this god ("Human Agency and Divine Power: Transforming

Images and Recreating Gods among the Newar." *History of Religions* 34 (3): 201-240.), Bruce McCoy Owens has discerned tensions similar to those referred to here. On the one hand, Buṅgadyaḥ is dependent upon human agency (not just priests but a whole array of other groups within Newar society involved in his *yātrā*); on the other, he is a powerful god who cannot only grant rain and bounty, but also spell disaster for the people of Nepal, including those upon whom he is ritually dependent himself.

<sup>20</sup> When recording the consecration of the Svayambhūcaitya by Vṛṣadeva, the Gopālarājavamśvali (edited by Dhanavajra Vajrācārya and Kamal P. Malla, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985) refers to it as "Singuvihāra-caitya" (folio 20v3). Since the Singuvihāra is the *bāhāḥ* of the Buddhācāryas this appellation confirms the link between this clan and the *caitya* for a very early period.

<sup>21</sup> Again the situation is somehow similar in the case of Buṅgadyaḥ. On the one hand, he is the local deity of Buṅgamati, hence his name "Buṅgadyaḥ". On the other hand, during his *yātrā* he becomes the focal point of worship for the Newars from Patan and its environs, and to a lesser extent also for the Newars from other parts of the Valley and beyond. The ambiguity of being both local and pan-Newar deity finds its perfect expression in the way Buṅgadyaḥ shares his year between his residence in his temple in Buṅgamati and his *yātrā* in Patan (including his five month stay in Ta Bāhāḥ in Patan prior to the *yātrā* as such).

In the case of Svayambhū the opposition in scope between local shrine and pan-Newar sanctuary is not expressed by a similar spatial separation, but finds its expression in the organisation of the daily worship (*nityapūjā*) of the Caitya. in addition to the *pūjā* offered by the *dyahpālā* of the Buddhācāryas on behalf of their Thakāli and the clan as a whole, the *caitya* is worshipped in the name of the so-called day duty group (*hni sevā khala*). This group is composed of Thakālis from some of the *bāhāḥs* of Kathmandu and acts on behalf of the Newar public at large. Nowadays (and according to my informants also in the past) the turnholder of the *hni sevā khala* does not offer the *pūjā* himself, but provides the *dyahpālā* of the Buddhācāryas with the *pūjā* materials (financed by the Guthisamsthān) which the

latter then offers on behalf of the day duty group and indirectly of the Newars as a whole. Thus the *caitya* is worshipped by the *dyaḥpālā* once as a shrine of the Buddhācāryas and once as a pan-Newar sanctuary. It may be added that - in line with the general decline of ritual practice - nowadays the turnholder of the *hni sevā khala* does not come up to Svayambhū every morning to provide the *pūjā* materials (as he used to do and should), but only once a week, namely on Tuesday when his (one week long) turn commences. Thus the offerings he brings along have to be portioned so that they last for seven days.