The (un)dreadful goddess: Aghorī in early śākta Tantras

Judit Törzsök

The (un)dreadful goddess: Aghorī in early *śākta* Tantras[1]

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Aghorī, literally 'undreadful,' is a frequently used name for the highest goddess in tantric as well as nontantric contexts, from the earliest period of tantrism. It could therefore be considered just another appellation or epithet of the supreme goddess, employed in a way similar to the word Śiva: in both cases, a potentially dangerous and frightening deity is called benign or 'undreadful' by antiphrasis, to avert the deity's wrath or to transform it into benevolence. Aghorī, however, seems to be more than just another epithet, at least in some early *śākta* Tantras, whose relevant passages I propose to present and analyse in this paper.

First, one could argue that if Aghorī were an epithet, it would have the form of the adjective *aghorā*, and not *aghorī*. Such an argument could be used if our texts followed all the rules of classical Sanskrit grammar; but it cannot apply to early Tantras, in which word formation is often irregular and which thus use the two forms *aghorā* and *aghorī* sometimes interchangeably. To give one example: the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* (of the seventh century approximately) has a set of eight goddesses headed by Aghorā. This Aghorā appears consistently as Aghorī in a reccurring compound that denotes this group: *aghoryādyaṣṭaka*, the Ogdoad starting with Aghorī. That the compound does not refer to a different set of eight starting with Aghorī instead of Aghorā is confirmed by Jayaratha, the commentator of Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* (*ad* 30.27). He explicitly says that the mantra of Aghorī is the one that includes the epithet or name Aghorā in the vocative. (*oṃ aghore hrīḥ iti aghoryāḥ*).

This and other examples show that just as in the case of other deities, the difference between an epithet and a name is not always clear. In spite of the confusion between Aghorās and Aghorīs, epithets and proper names, one could retain as a rule of thumb that when a single goddess is meant, she is generally called Aghorī.

How is tantric Aghorī related to the vedic mantra and its personification, Aghora? In what company and in what ritual context can she usually be found? And how, where and when did she become the supreme goddess? These are the questions I shall attempt to answer, using the evidence of early *śākta* Tantras, mostly dating from cca. the seventh and eighth centuries CE.

1. Aghora, ghora and ghoraghoratara

The male deity or epithet *aghora* plays an important role already in pre-tantric Śaivism. The vedic Aghora-mantra, which evokes three forms of Rudra, is one of the five mantras of the Pāśupatas.[2] The Śaiva Siddhānta adopts these five mantras (commonly known as the five

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[2] See *Pāśupatasūtra*s 3.21.

Brahma-mantras), and, at a later date, associates them with five heads of Śiva.[3] The Aghora mantra thus becomes identified with the frightening Southern face and Bhairava.[4]

This is a rather important detail in the context of *śākta* scriptures, for early *śākta* Tantras categorise themselves as Bhairavatantras and claim to go back to the teaching of Bhairava or Aghora himself.[5] The scriptures are written in the form of dialogues in which the goddess is taught by Bhairava, the originator of the doctrine. This is the case of the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, for example, which in fact derives itself from the *Svacchandabhairava*, and also claims to be part of the *śākta* Tantras of the Vidyāpīṭha. The *Mālinīvijayottara*, which in turn mentions the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* as its source, agrees with this in principle, but not in all the details. The supreme god of the dialogue is called Parameśvara, but it is claimed that the teaching was originally propounded by Aghora.[6]

The Aghora-mantra itself mentions three forms of the god: the undreadful or benign (*aghora*), the dreadful (*ghora*) and the more dreadful than the dreadful (*ghoraghoratara*). Although some *śākta* Tantras do not adopt this and other vedic mantras in their core rituals,[7] the three forms of Aghora figure prominently in several of them. Instead of being forms of Rudra, they represent three groups of female powers, *śakti*s, who govern the world. The earliest *śākta* Tantra that mentions them is probably the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*:

> [The Benign ones:]
> The Female Powers who bestow grace by clearing up the darkness of ignorance which resides in the body of the bound soul are called 'the Benign Ones' (*aghorāḥ*), they give people [help to attain] Śiva[hood]. There are Rudras governed by these Benign Powers. Focussing their minds on Sadāśiva, they release the limited individual soul from its bondage.[8]
> [Dreadful ones:][9]
> [Other Female Powers] who obstruct the way to liberation are known as 'the Very Dreadful Ones.' (?) The Rudras who are possessed by them perform creation and dissolution, they play in the body like children with clay bulls.[10]
> [Extremely dreadful ones:]
> Those [Female Powers] who cause a downward flow [of the souls into lower levels of the universe] and gratify the soul, who make it indulge in objects of enjoyment and in the condition of being bound, obstruct the way to liberation. They are called 'the Ones

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[3] This, however, does not happen in the core part of the earliest Tantra, the *Niśvāsa*, as Goodall 2009 points out.

[4] The Southern face is said to be frightening (*raudra*) already in the later layers of the *Mahābhārata* (13.128.6cd) as Bakker 2002: 398 shows. For representations of the faces, which systematically include a ferocious one as early as the beginning of the Christian era, see Bakker 2002: 398 and Kreisel 1986: 54ff.

[5] See Hatley 2007: 185: 'The emergence of Bhairava in the tantric Śaiva pantheon, whatever his roots may be, appears to have involved some degree of identification with Aghora, the southern, fierce face of Sadāśiva who is said to reveal the *bhairavatantras*.'

[6] *mayāpy etat purā prāptam aghorāt paramātmanaḥ.* *Mālinīvijayottara* 1.14ab.

[7] The *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* does not appear to use them, but the *Brahmayāmala* (ch. 12 ff.) prescribes the *sadyādi* to create five mantric faces (*pañcavaktrāṇi vīrasya sadyādīnaiva dāpayet*).

[8] *pramṛjyājñānatimiraṃ paśudehe vyavasthitam / yāḥ śaktayo 'nugṛhṇanti aghorās tāḥ śivapradāḥ // rudrās tābhir aghorābhiḥ śaktibhiḥ samadhiṣṭhitāḥ / sadāśivārpitadhiyo bandhanān mocayanty aṇum //* *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 2.24-25.

[9] One line or more may be missing here, for the characterisation of these powers is unusually brief compared to the others. Moreover, it is also possible that a line is misplaced or became corrupt, for it is also odd to describe these *śakti*s as very dreadful: *ghorataryās*.

[10] *muktimārganirodhinyo †ghorataryās† tu tāḥ smṛtāḥ // āviṣṭāḥ śaktibhis tābhiḥ sargapralayakāriṇaḥ / krīḍante vai tanau rudrā bālā mṛdvṛṣabhair iva //* *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 2.26cd-27.

Surpassing the Dreadful' (*ghorataryāḥ*) The Rudras whose minds are empowered by them are governed by them. They also throw down and down those who are given to the pleasures of the bound soul.[11]

[Summary:]
Since possession by the three [kinds of] Powers is always beneficient / Since Śiva is infused with the three kinds of Powers, they are called[12] the 'Ones More Dreadful Than the Dreadful,' the 'Dreadful Ones' and the 'Benign Ones.' Thus, established in the Power of Rudra, they govern this world.[13]

In the preceding and subsequent passages, the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* also clarifies that these are three manifestations of the supreme *śakti* called the Power of Rudra (*rudraśakti*). The text in fact draws a parallel between the three *śakti* groups and the main triad of goddesses of the Trika, Parā, Parāparā and Aparā. It thus creates a fully *śākta* doctrine and pantheon, inspired by elements of a Vedic mantra.[14]

The teachings about these three *śakti* groups, who appear to be of pure, mixed and dark (*sāttvika*, *rājasa* and *tāmasa*) nature, subsequently become very wide-spread. The same kind of description can be found not only in a closely related Trika Tantra, the *Mālinīvijayottara* (3.31-33), but also in other *śākta* schools and scriptures: in the *Bhairavamaṅgalā* (282-7), in the *Jayadrathayāmala* (3.24.73-83; 4.61.43), in the *Devīpañcaśatikā* (4.38-40), as well as in the *Netratantra* (29.159cd-160). Further triads came to be homologised with them: such as various goddess triads,[15] or the three functions of Volition, Knowledge and Action (*icchā, jñāna, kriyā*).[16]

The later parallels and the occurrence of the Aghora-triad in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, the earliest scripture of the Trika, suggest that the *śāktisation* of members of the Aghora mantra happened in the Trika. This, however, does not seem to be the case. Before the Trika, the Lākulas or Pramāṇa-pāśupatas already expounded a doctrine to this effect. The only surviving passage of their scriptures,[17] a citation given by Kṣemarāja (11th cent.),[18] attests that they posited the existence of three groups of Rudras and *śakti*s in very similar terms.

[Benign Rudras]
'Dreadful' (*ghora*) is the name of the net of bonds, terrible and associated with crimes. Those who lack this net of bonds are known to be the Benign Ones (*aghora*), Rudras

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[11] *adhaḥsrotavidhāyinyāḥ pudgalaṃ rañjayantyapi / bhogeṣu eva paśutve ca pudgalaṃ rañjayanti yāḥ // muktimārganirodhinyo ghoratāryās tu tāḥ smṛtāḥ / upodbalitacaitanyā rudrās tābhir adhiṣṭhitāḥ // paśubhogeṣu saṃsaktān adho 'dhaḥ pātayanty api / Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 2.28-30ab (N.b. *paśutve* is a conjecture, the manuscripts read *paradve*.)

[12] There is a reference to the names of Śiva or Rudra here. Since the three kinds of powers are beneficient (*śaṃkara*), or rather, since Śaṅkara is infused with these three kinds of powers, they are known by his three names.

[13] *śaktitrayasamāveśo yasmāt sarvatra śaṅkaraḥ // ghoraghoratarāghorāghorās tāḥ parikīrtitāḥ / evaṃ bhuvana pāleyū rudraśaktivyavasthitāḥ // Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 2.30cd-31.

[14] This Vedic triad seems central in the system of the text, for its very first verse (1.1, which has been transmitted in a corrupt and incomplete from) appears to say that they form the essence of the Tantra: *aghoraghorarūpāṇi ghoraghoratarāṇi ca / †sthitāni yasya sūtraṃ tu -- -- tantrātmam eva ca†*.

[15] See e.g. *Jayadrathayāmala* 3.24.73ff.

[16] In *Netratantra* 29.159cd-160.

[17] For this fact and an analysis, see Sanderson 2006: 175.

[18] Citation introduced by *śrīpañcārthapramāṇe tu*, in the commentary (*-uddyota*) to *Svacchandatantra* 1.43.

starting with Vāmeśvara, established above the source of this net. They are called the benign ones, listen to the Dreadful Ones told in brief.[19]

[Dreadful Ones]
Rudras headed by Gopati and ending with Gahana are the Dreadful Ones (*ghora*), inhabiting various worlds.[20]

[The More Dreadful than the Dreadful Ones]
And those who start with Vidyeśvara and end with Ananta, the Great Māheśvaras are yet different, known as the More Dreadful Than the Dreadful Ones (*ghoraghoratara*), residing below.[21]

[Their *śakti*s]
Thus, there are Benign Aghoras, Dreadful Ghoras and More Dreadful Than the Dreadful Ghoraghorataras, as well as *śakti*s of the highest lord, Parameśvara, who are always established in them. The *śakti*s of these forms effect everything concerning creation, destruction and maintenance, as well as the acts of binding and release. The individual pays homage to all these forms.[22] The homage is an act of donation [of one's self], which is characterised by cause[23] and effect / having the characteristics of the cause of a [particular] effect.[24]

This passage is very close in wording and content to the description of the *śakti* groups found in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, and the structure of the two descriptions is also similar, although there are a few important differences. The *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* lacks the strong allusion to the wording of the Aghoramantra, which the Lākula passage has at the end, and does not mention the names of Rudras, unlike the Lākula text. In this way, it is further removed from the Pāśupata background. At the same time, although the *śakti*s are mentioned in the Pañcārthapramāṇa, too, it is the male triad that the passage focuses on. The *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* śāktises the passage in that it reverses the order of presentation, and clearly treats the *śakti*s as supreme powers, to whom the Rudras are subjected.

Now does the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* borrow this passage and doctrine directly from the Lākulas? If it did borrow much of this passage from somewhere, its source may have been a text of the Siddhānta rather than this Lākula passage directly. For there is a very odd detail in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*'s version that cannot come from the Lākulas, and it does not fit in the doctrine of the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* either: it is the fact that the benign Rudras in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* concentrate on Sadāśiva (*sadāśivārpitadhiyo*), the godhead of the Siddhānta, while releasing the individuals[25] from their bonds.

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[19] *ghoreti pāśajālākhyaṃ pāpayuktaṃ bhayānakam / tad yeṣāṃ tu na vidyeta hy aghorāḥ parikīrtitāḥ // vāmeśvarādayo rudrā jālamūloparisthitāḥ / te hy aghorāḥ samākhyātāḥ śṛṇu ghorān samāsataḥ //*

[20] *proktā gopatipūrvā ye rudrās tu gahanāntagāḥ / te tu ghorāḥ samākhyātā nānābhuvanavāsinaḥ //*

[21] *vidyeśvarādyanantāntā mahāmāheśvarāś ca ye / ghoraghoratarās tv anye vijñeyās tv adha āśritāḥ //*

[22] The wording echoes part of the Aghoramantra itself.

[23] The exact understanding of this expression is not straightforward. The effect (*kārya*) could be creation and the cause (*kāraṇa*) the deity; or, rather, the cause may be the homage and the effect liberation. The compound is reminiscent of the compound *kārya-karaṇa* (denoting the 23 *tattva*s or the body, see e.g. *Pāśupatasūtrabhāṣya ad* 5.13), and therefore one may be tempted to emend *kāraṇa* to *karaṇa*, but that would result in a major violation of the metre.

[24] *ete aghorā ghorāś ca ghoraghoratarās tathā / eteṣv avasthitā nityaṃ śaktayaḥ pārameśvarāḥ // sthitipralayasargeṣu bandhamokṣakriyāsu ca / sarvārthaprerakatvena rūpeṣv eteṣu śaktayaḥ // rūpebhya ebhyaḥ sarvebhyo namaskāraṃ karoty aṇuḥ / namaskāraḥ parityāgaḥ kāryakāraṇalakṣaṇaḥ //*

[25] Note that *aṇu* is used in both texts.

Whether the direct source of the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* was a Lākula or a Śaiva Siddhānta passage here, the parallels show us some details of the way in which the *śaiva* doctrine of the Aghora triad became śāktised and provide us with yet another example for continuities between pre-tantric and tantric currents, including the presence of *śakti*s in the pre-tantric scriptures of the Lākulas.

2. Aghorī in groups of eight goddesses

2.a The octad starting with Aghorī / Aghorā

Another way in which the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* and the system of the Trika śāktised the Aghora mantra is that they introduced a *śakta* mantra starting with the feminine vocative of Aghorā, which thus functioned as some kind of female version of the Vedic Aghora mantra. This female mantra (*vidyā*), which includes a number of meaningless seed syllables and a series of proper names in the vocative, incorporates a set of eight goddesses in its word elements (*pada*s), in the following order: Aghorā ('undreadful'), Paramaghorā ('extremely dreadful'), Ghorarūpā ('she who has a dreadful form'), Ghoramukhī ('she who has a dreadful face'), Bhīmā ('terrifying'), Bhīṣaṇā ('frightening'), Vama[nī] ('vomitting / creating'), and Piba[nī] ('drinking / withdrawing'). The full sequence forms one of the main female mantras of the system, the mantra of the middle goddess of the Trika, Parāparā.[26]

> *Oṃ Aghore hrīḥ Paramaghore huṃ Ghorarūpe haḥ Ghoramukhi Bhīma-Bhīṣaṇe*
> *Vama Piba he ruru rara phaṭ huṃ haḥ phaṭ.*

The eight goddesses incorporated in it, about whose iconography the text remains silent (although it describes the three main mantra goddesses in detail), have an important function: they are projected onto eight body parts of the practitioner from head to foot (*Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 7.27 ff.) during his ritual transformation into Bhairava, after he has placed the three goddesses on his head, in his heart and on his feet.

The eight goddesses are also present on the *maṇḍala* of the cult: before placing the goddess triad on the tips of a trident in the centre of the *maṇḍala*, the practitioner must project this ogdoad on the eight petals of the lotus from which the trident rises.[27] The eight goddesses in fact replace eight male deities who would occupy the petals in the *śaiva* Siddhānta and related systems. For the Siddhānta usually has the eight Vidyeśvaras in this arrangement, while the *Svacchandatantra* puts eight Bhairavas there.[28]

Thus, the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* and related Trika texts, which took over these mantras, produced a *śakta* version of two ritual elements. First, they created a *śakta* version of the vedic

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[26] For the encoded description of the mantra, see *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 3.23ff, *Mālinīvijayottara* 3.42ff and *Tantrāloka* 30.20 ff.

[27] For the *maṇḍala* itself, see e.g. *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 6.12ff; for this arrangement of the eight goddesses, see e.g. *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 6.28ab: *pūrvapatrādike nyasya tato 'ghoryādikaṃ gaṇam*. For an illustration, reconstuction and analysis of the *maṇḍala*, see Sanderson 1986: 171ff.

[28] For an example of the Siddhānta, see *Mataṅgapārameśvara, kriyāpāda* 1.33 ff, for *Svacchandatantra* see 5.57ff and Törzsök 2003: 200. The design of the *maṇḍala* of nine lotuses is the same in both cases, in which the arrangement of the central deities on the nine lotuses reproduces their arrangement on the middle lotus.

Aghora mantra, or, more precisely, a *śakta* mantra somewhat reminiscent of the Aghoramantra. Second, they replaced the Siddhānta's and the Svacchandabhairava's eight male deities on the lotus petals of the *maṇḍala* with eight goddesses.[29]

The thirty-eight syllable mantra of Parāparā and its octad of mantra goddesses then found their way from Trika scriptures (the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, the *Tantrasadbhāva* and the *Mālinīvijayottara*) into related *śakta* Tantras: they figure in an inflected form in the *Kubjikāmata* (18.34),[30] and they are prescribed in a different form but still as parts of Parāparā and as the 'Octad Starting with Aghorī' (*aghoryādyaṣṭaka*) in the *Kularatnoddyota* (5.135, 6.258-266).[31]

2.b Octads ending with Aghorī

In addition to the so-called *aghoryādyaṣṭaka* or the octad starting with Aghorī, one also finds a very different set of eight goddesses in the Trika, which, however, functions as an alternative to the Aghorī octad. In this different set, the name Aghorī does not always figure, and when it does, it is the last one, rather than the first. The *Tantrāloka* (33.3) mentions Māheśī, Brahmaṇī, Skāndī, Vaiṣṇavī, Aindrī, Yamātmikā (i.e. Yāmyā), Cāmuṇḍā and Yogīśī (i.e. Yogeśī). The first six names derive from the well-known Mother goddesses, who epitomize the *śakti*s of their respective male deities, while the last two, Cāmuṇḍā and Yogeśī or Yogeśvarī, are independent goddesses. It is the last one, Yogeśī, a synonym of *yoginī*, who is alternatively called Aghorī (*Tantrasadbhāva* 3.216). The octad is commonly called Brahmaṇyādi (*Tantrasadbhāva* 3.216, 8.22) or Māheśyādi[32] (*Mālinīvijayottara* 20.37).

An almost identical set of deities ending with Aghorī is described in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* (ch. 16) as eight goddesses presiding over groups of consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet. They are listed following the order of consonants they are to be worshipped with. Brāhmī is identified with the velars, Vaiṣṇavī with the palatals, Māheśī with the retroflex consonants, Yāmyā with the dentals, Kaumārī with the labials, Vāsavī (a synonym of Aindrī) with the semi-vowels, Karṇamoṭī with the sibilants and Aghoreśī, the supreme one (*parā*), with the ligature of Anger, *KṢA*. The order of these Mother-goddesses is different from the above-mentioned sets and Karṇamoṭī stands for Cāmuṇḍā. It would require a separate study to examine the order of these goddesses and the possible reasons of how and why such lists differ. Here, I would only like to point out that in spite of differences in order, differences that concern both the beginning and the middle of the list, Aghorī or Aghoreśī always remains at the end.

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[29] Parāparā's octad may also be added to an equivalent set of male deities, as a passage of the *Mālinīvijayottara* suggests. See 8.77cd: *aghorādyaṣṭakaṃ dhyāyed aghoryādyaṣṭakānvitam.*

[30] This octad is said to be situated in Aghori (*sic!*): *18.33 puryāṣṭakam aghoristhaṃ yathāvasthāṃ vadāmi te / 18.34 hrīṃ ru aghore hrīṃ shauṃ aghoryāyai prathamaṃ śiraḥ //1// hrīṃ ru paramaghore hūṃ shauṃ paramaghorāyai mukham //2// hrīṃ ru shauṃ ghorarūpe shauṃ ghorarūpāyai hṛdi //3// hrīṃ ru shauṃ ghoramukhi shauṃ ghoramukhyai guhye //4// hrīṃ phaṭ bhīmanāme shauṃ bhīmāyai dakṣiṇabhuje //5// hrīṃ hūṃ bhīṣaṇe shauṃ bhīṣaṇāyai vāmato bhuje //6// shauṃ hrīṃ haḥ vama shauṃ vamanyai dakṣiṇoru //7// hrīṃ hūṃ phaṭ piba he shauṃ pibanyai vāmatoru //8// 18.35 etat puryāṣṭakaṃ devyā aghoryāṣṭakasaṃyutam / nyased aṣṭavidhāṅgaṃ tu aṣṭapattreṣu sādhakaḥ.*

[31] *aghoryādyaṣṭakaṃ devi padāṣṭakasamanvitam / parāparāyā vidyāyāḥ nyāsamārgo yathā bhavet* (5.135).

[32] This appellation may be due to an attempt to śaivise the Mothers by making Śiva's *śakti*, rather than Brahmā's, the first Mother.

This is also the case in the *Brahmayāmala*, whose composition perhaps slightly predates that of the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*. Its standard set of eight[33] consists of Māheśī, Brahmāṇī, Vaiṣṇavī, Kaumārī, Yāmyā (called Vaivasvatī and sometimes replaced by Vārāhī in the latter half of the text), Aindrī / Vāsavī / Māhendrī, Cāmuṇḍā (also called Carcikā as well as Caṇḍikā) and the last one alternatively called She Who Completes the Mothers (4.257) and Aghoreśī (89.92), who is also said to be Yogeśī or Yogeśvareśvarī (58.1).[34]

The various names of the last goddess, her position in the ogdoads and the fact that she is generally absent from early representations of the standard set of Mother goddesses (*mātṛ*) suggest that she was added later to the already existing pantheon of Mothers. She is also absent from the *Brahmayāmala*'s *yoginī* clans, which are based on the Mother goddesses and end with Cāmuṇḍā as the Leader of Mothers.[35] As is common for newcomers in an alredy existing pantheon, one of her main functions appears to supersede all other Mother goddesses. She is therefore called the Supreme one (*parā*).

Aghorī's role and position among the Mothers also suggests that through her, the nontantric cult of mothers was assimilated and at the same time allegedly superseded in the Bhairavatantric systems. For, as the case of the original *Svacchandatantra* shows, the mother goddesses were not fully part of the original Bhairavatantric pantheon. In the *Svacchanda*, they do not appear as alphabet goddesses in the earlier, shorter recension of the text, and were clearly added there at a later date, including some inconsistencies in their enumeration.[36]

This also implies that by the time the earliest *śākta* Tantras were redacted, the cult of Mothers as manifestations of *śakti*s must have been developped. This does not need any demonstration, but certain details in the development of the cult of Mothers as *śakti*s and their iconography may shed more light on the dating of *śākta* Tantras. One rather interesting detail concerns Brāhmī, who is associated with the antilope hide in *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 29.24.[37] This iconographic feature appears in the sixth and seventh centuries in various regions of India, but disappears by the eighth century, when a larger scale standardization seems to take place.[38] In addition to confirming the tentative dating of the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* to a period probably around the seventh century, the borrowing of this iconographic detail also suggests that the cult of mothers was perhaps integrated into *śākta* tantrism around this time, or, in any case, not much earlier or not in a more archaic form.

No matter how exactly this assimilation or adaptation happened, the addition of Aghorī / Yogeśī allowed the smooth integration of the seven mothers into the tantric system, which commonly arranged deities in circles of eight. Aghorī thus indeed completed the Mothers conveniently, who needed a last member, so to speak, in order to be worshipped on the eight petals of the generic lotus design of the Tantras.

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[33] For the set, see e.g. *Brahmayāmala* 4.255-7 and 46.27-32. For a detailed discussion of the early history of the Mothers and their role in tantric currents, especially in the *Brahmayāmala*, see Hatley 2007: 31ff.

[34] For this synonym, see Hatley 2007: 67, referring to e.g. *Brahmayāmala* 35.32, *Tantrasadbhāva* 14.155b, and *Tantrāloka* 29.52d.

[35] See Hatley 2007: 415ff.

[36] For the two recensions of the *Svacchandatantra* and the question of Mothers in them, see Sanderson 2001:21, Törzsök 1999:198ff and Hatley 2007:149.

[37] In fact, the text prescribes that the practitioner should show the *mudrā*s of the ascetic bowl and the antilope skin to *yoginī*s belonging to the Brāhmī clan. Just as in the other cases, the *mudrā*s represent attributes, which the *yoginī*s should recognise.

[38] Panikkar 1997: 149.

3. Aghorī or Aghoreśī as the supreme goddess

Aghorī played a much more important role than just completing and superseding the Mothers in early *śākta* tantrism. Aghorī is the name of Svacchandabhairava's consort in the *Svacchandatantra*, and Aghoreśī or Aghoreśvarī is also one of the names of the supreme mantra goddess in the *Brahmayāmala*.[39] Surprisingly, she also appears once as the highest goddess in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, whose main pantheon is supposedly different. At the end of its third chapter, a few lines celebrate the infinite power of the mantra goddesses and the power of the system or doctrine of *yoginī*s, the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* itself. In the last verse of this passage, the three mantra goddesses or *śakti*s are said to bestow all kinds of success. They are called the Heart of All Śaktis, and are declared to be the means to attain the goddess Aghoreśī.[40]

It is in the *Brahmayāmala* that Aghorī or Aghoreśī is described in detail as the supreme goddess of the cult. This goddess is also called Bhairavī, and, more specifically Caṇḍā Kāpālinī, for she appears in, or rather, as the nine-syllable root mantra of this system: *HŪṂ CAṆḌE KĀPĀLINI SVĀHĀ*.[41] Her name also figures in the form of Caṇḍikā or Caṇḍaśakti (46.95).

The mantra, or rather, *vidyā*, that is Aghoreśī or Caṇḍā Kāpālinī is the source of the six *yoginī*s of the system, who are said to emerge from the limbs of Aghoreśvarī. This Aghoreśvarī is clearly distinguished from the one who is the last member of the series of Mother goddesses.[42]

In this context, it is tempting to speculate on whether this nine-part mantra is not a *śākta* version of the very widespread Navātman mantra. The Navātman is an important *śaiva* mantra already in the earliest surviving Tantra, the *Niśvāsa*,[43] and it is also described and used in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* and related texts.[44] Later, the *Kubjikāmata* makes him the male consort of its supreme goddess.[45] However, it rarely figures in the *Brahmayāmala*. It is in fact absent in the first and earlier half of the text, which uses the compound *navātman* or *navātmaka* in a different meaning. For in the system of the *Brahmayāmala*, the practitioner does not normally transform his body with the help of the Navātman-mantra. One of the most common expressions that describe the body of the practitioner as transformed into the deity is *avadhūtatanu*, which does not mean that he has discarded his (worldly) body (as a straightforward interpretation of the compound would suggest), but refers to the fact that he projects the nine *akṣara*s of the main goddess of the cult, also called Avadhūtā, onto his body.[46] It seems therefore possible that the nine-syllable Caṇḍā Kāpālinī usurps the place of the otherwise ubiquitous nine letter Navātman-mantra, at least in the earlier section of the *Brahmayāmala*.[47]

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[39] See Hatley 2007: 34 ff.

[40] *uktaṃ śaktitrayaṃ devi divyasiddhipradāyakam / hṛdayaṃ sarvaśaktīṇām aghoreśīprasādhakam // 3.54*

[41] See Hatley 2007: 251.

[42] See Hatley 2007: 254ff.

[43] See *Niśvāsa Mūlasūtra* 2.3ff.

[44] *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 17.8, 17.15, and especially 20.34-38.

[45] See *Kubjikāmata* chapter 2, Sanderson 1988: 686-7, and Kiss in *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa* vol. III. at *navātman*.

[46] For Avadhūtā as a mantra goddess, projected on the parts of the body, see e.g. *Brahmayāmala* 4.503, 12.96, 49.34.

[47] The Navātman is known only in the latter, chronologically later, half of the text; but even there the passage describing it is clearly borrowed from the *Niśvāsa*, as Hatley 2007: 219-20 points out. It is noteworthy in this context that the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* shows a similar distribution of the Navātman: its first, probably earlier, half does not mention the Navātman at all, while the second, later, half describes and uses it.

Whether this Aghorī / Caṇḍā Kāpālinī represents a *śakta* version of the Navātman or not, she was adopted in an altered form in the *Tantrasadbhāva*, which calls her Aghorī, and gives her mantra in the form *Oṃ cāmuṇḍe kāpālini svāhā*.[48] The fusion between various fierce goddesses, Caṇḍikā, Aghorī and Cāmuṇḍā, here becomes complete.

Interestingly, the *Brahmayāmala* tends to call this main mantra goddess Caṇḍā in chapters concerning mantra descriptions, while in narrative passages, such as in the story of the transmission of the Tantra or in the narration of ritual events, she is more commonly called Aghorī. This may or may not be due to exigencies of the metre. In any case, the very first chapter of the *Brahmayāmala* puts this name in the foreground.

The first chapter relates, as is customary, the mythical transmission of the text: the *tantrāvatāra*. Again, as is customary in *śakta* Tantras, the goddess, here in the form of Aghorī, asks Bhairava to teach her the secret doctrine.[49] Bhairava relates that he himself obtained the teaching from Śrīkaṇṭha and transmitted it to the goddess. She, however, started teaching it to her attendants without any authorisation. Seeing this, Bhairava was filled with anger and destroyed the goddess's knowledge of the scriptures. At the supplication of the goddess, he finally conceded that she could regain her knowledge if she was to be reborn and to worship him. The goddess then took up a new body in the house of a brahmin in Prayāga and worshipped the *liṅga* devotedly. When she obtained perfection (*siddhi*), Bhairava bestowed knowledge upon her with the following words:[50]

> You are that *śakti*, O highly fortunate one, whom of old I had cursed when a transgression was made. Remember yourself! Your name is now Aghorī. You are my Great Śakti, the agent of grace for all. I shall teach you that knowledge which was lost when you made a transgression, the great[51] [*tantra*] spoken by Śrīkaṇṭha, after it came into being from the *sadāśiva tattva* (?),[52] together with its secrets, O Mahādevī; listen with single-minded attention.[53]

Here, the name Aghorī is presented as a reward. The same name, in the form of Aghoreśī, also appears in titles of scriptures listed in the *Brahmayāmala*: three *śakta* Tantras of the Vidyāpīṭha (within the Bhairava current) bear the titles *Aghoreśī*, *Aghoreśvarī* and *Krīḍāghoreśī*.[54]

Given the prominence of Aghoreśī / Caṇḍā Kāpālinī, it is surprising that one finds hardly any mention of her in the maṇḍala-description of the *Brahmayāmala*. It is observed by Sanderson (1988: 672) that the text presents Bhairava as the supreme deity in the iconic representation of the pantheon, even if he is transcended by Caṇḍā Kāpālinī on the mantric plane. In addition, as Kiss 2010: 18 remarks, the maṇḍala-description of chapter 3 shows almost

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[48] See *Tantrasadbhāva* 21.154cd-156ab Hatley 2007: 71 and 226.

[49] The *tantrāvatāra* of the *Brahmayāmala* is rather complicated; here, I summarise only the section that is relevant in the context of this paper.

[50] For the edition of this passage and its translation, which I cite here without alteration, see Hatley 2007: 296 and 347.

[51] Hatley signals in his translation that the interpretation of *mahān* ('great'), which is difficult to account for grammatically, is tentative. It indeed appears to refer to the doctrine, the *tantra* itself. The purport may be that initially the text had its full, original length, i.e. it was longer than the actual 'human recension'; but it is also possible that *mahān* is just a common verse-filling adjective.

[52] It is odd that the doctrine of the *Brahmayāmala* should be said to originate in the Sadāśiva realm, which belongs to the Siddhānta; perhaps the line or the expression was borrowed from a text of the Siddhānta.

[53] *sā śaktis tvaṃ mahābhāge yā śaptā viplave kṛte / purā mayā smarātmānāṃ aghorī nāma te 'dhunā // madīyā tvaṃ mahāsaktiḥ sarvānugrahakārikā / tat pravakṣyāmi te jñānaṃ yad bhraṣṭaṃ viplave kṛte // śrīkaṇṭhena mahān proktaṃ bhūtvā sadāśivāt padāt / sarahasyaṃ mahādevi śṛṇuṣvekāgramānasā // Brahmayāmala* 1.31-33. See Hatley 2007: 296.

[54] See Hatley 2007: 218.

no awareness of a female central deity, even in her mantric identity. The description of the maṇḍala and the rituals performed around it lack any explicit mention of an all-transcending central goddess. Csaba Kiss concludes that the maṇḍala description itself may belong to an early phase of the cult of Kapālīśa, which was not yet dominated by a *śakti*. Thus, it seems that Aghoreśī / Caṇḍā kāpālinī, both in her all-transcending form and in her lower manifestation as the eighth Mother goddess, represents an addition to already existing pantheons and cults, at least in the system of the *Brahmayāmala*.

Although Caṇḍā Kāpālinī / Aghorī is absent from the maṇḍala and the rituals connected with it, she is very much present in a series of chapters that prescribe and describe rituals whose aim is to obtain supernatural powers, carried out in the cremation ground. These chapters form a cluster near the end of the first and earlier part of the text, from chapters 46 to 49. She is mentioned and appears in each of them, often together with groups of female spirits or with Bhairava. She is most often called Aghorī, but occasionally also Caṇḍaśakti (e.g. 46.95) and Caṇḍikā (e.g. 46.107). The first rite is called the Great Churning (*mahāmanthāna*), the second prescribes the construction of a Magic Pavilion (*siddhamaṇḍapikā*, wrongly entitled in the manuscripts as magic *maṇḍala*), the third one explains the Worship of Deities in a Hole (*gartāyāga*) and the last one concerns the use of yantra diagrams (*yantrārṇava*). A number of elements link these chapters together, which are of strongly *kāpālika* character. They prescribe rites in the cremation ground, and in almost all of them the practitioner must transform his body according to the *mahāvrata* as a preliminary (*mahāvratatanusthitaḥ*), i.e. he must wear the five insignia, which include bone ornaments, the skull bowl etc. During most of these rites, he will be possessed primarily by Bhairava, but also by his retinue of goddesses; in this way, his transformation into Bhairava is completed through possession, just as it was said to happen for *kāpālikas*.[55]

Aghorī plays various important roles in these rites: she is a mantra to be recited in one's heart (49.32). The practitioner can see her form (*chāyā*) as a reward, and she bestows all kinds of *siddhi*s on him as a boon (48.20ff). Alternatively, she can send thousands of spirits (*bhūta*) to give him a boon, or the seven mothers may appear and elect the practitioner as their eighth member (*aṣṭamaka* 48.27ff). Aghorī commands groups of *śākinī*s, *yoginī*s (*mahāvīrā*) and *cāmuṇḍā*s (47.18, 26); and she appears in front of the *sādhaka* to accept him as her son at the end of the so-called Great Churning.

Because of Aghorī's significant role in the last rite, it may be useful to summarize it briefly. The churning is performed in the cremation ground and preceded by a worship of deities in nine skulls arranged on a *maṇḍala* and filled with blood, alcohol (*madirā*) and the mingled sexual fluids (*picu*). For the churning, which is carried out on top of a corpse, the practitioner must use materials obtained on the spot: the *ad hoc* pavilion he constructs is made of human bones, the vessel used is fashioned of clay he finds in the cremation ground, the churning stick is a large bone such as the tibia, and the rope is made of human hair and intestines taken from the dead. The rite mainly consists of acting out the cosmic churning of gods and demons in its cremation-ground version. Accordingly, it produces various miraculous objects, such as the Kaustubha gem or the moon, and makes groups of mythical beings and powers present, whose help may be refused if one aspires for greater powers or results. The practitioner in fact prepares his own Soma of impure substances in a vessel called *sthālī*, which he identifies with Aghorī, while the churning stick is to be identified with Bhairava and

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[55] For additional analyses and details, see Törzsök 2011 and Törzsök forthcoming.

himself.[56] Near the end of this rite, Bhairava appears with his goddesses, and they enter the practitioner. Then, at the very end, Aghorī herself appears before him and starts a puraṇic-type conversation:

> Well done, noble being, you who are honoured by gods and demons alike. You have performed a true miracle here, concerning this *sādhana*, my son. You have become the ornament of the world, an eminent man. Sit on my lap, my son, and choose yourself the right boon: immortality, bhairavahood, through which you can fulfill [even] the wishes of Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Indra, or whatever you wish, my dear son, together with your fellow practitioners.[57]
>
> The practitioner then replies: If you are satisfied with me, o goddess, then give me your breast, o Mother.
>
> Hearing these pleasant words of the *sādhaka*, the goddess [says]: Come, come, noble being, drink from my breast, my adopted son. Which other noble being than you would deserve to be my son? Therefore, I shall embrace you, heroic practitioner, and give you my breast. [...] The goddess then does so and the eminent practitioner, after drinking the nectar of immortality left-and-right [i.e. from both breasts] will become omniscient in a second. He will become Bhairava in person, the Lord of Guhyakās. All the seventy-million mantras will enter his heart.[58]

Contrarily to the mantric Caṇḍā Kāpālinī, this Aghorī seems to be a visually perceivable being. When she appears, her features are described in a few lines:

> While he [the practitioner] churns for one more second, making obeisance to Caṇḍikā, the goddess Aghorī, who bestows supernatural powers, will arise there [in the churning vessel]. Her form is like the rainbow, she looks like ten million suns. She is adorned with all kinds of ornaments and is seated on a throne [made of / decorated with] skulls. She is surrounded by young maidens like herself and her body extends from the underworld up to the sky, filling the whole space.[59]

This chapter of the *Brahmayāmala* combines various aspects of Aghorī: the mantra-goddess, who must be recited mentally during the rite, the ruler of *yoginīs*, *śākinīs* and other spirits, the

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[56] *aghoryā[ṃ] sthālirūpān tu dhyāyen mantrī suśobhanāṃ / śaktisthāṃ śaktirūpāñ ca dhyāye somātmake sthitaṃ // manthānabhairavaṃ devaṃ śuddhasphaṭikanirmalaṃ / sahasrabhujaparyantaṃ cinten manthānarūpiṇaṃ //* 46.48-9.

[57] *sādhu sādhu mahāsatva surāsuranamaskṛtaḥ // mahāścaryam idam vatsa kṛtan te sādhanaṃ prati / pṛthivyān tilako jātam tvam eṣa puruṣottamaḥ // utsa[ṅge] tiṣṭa me putra varaṃ vṛṇīṣva sobhanaṃ / amaratvaṃ bhairavatvañ ca brahmaviṣṇendrakāmadaṃ // yañ ca yācayase vatsa sakhāyaiḥ saha putrakaḥ /* 46.111cd-4ab. My understanding of *kāmadaṃ* is tentative. It may also be intended in the sense that the *sādhaka* obtains whatever he wants, i.e. *brahmatvaṃ viṣṇutvam indratvaṃ vā svakāmataḥ*. Alternatively, it could also mean that bhairavahood is something all these deities wish to obtain (i.e. *kāmadaṃ* for *īpsitaṃ*?). Finally, one could understand that bhairavahood bestows the qualities of Brahma, Viṣṇu, Indra and Kāma (the *-tva* suffix being ommitted). The construction of the compound would normally allow none of these interpretations.

[58] *sādhakovāca: yadi tuṣṭāsi mān devi stanaṃ me dada ambike // srutvā vākyaṃ tato devyāṃ sādhakasya susobhanaṃ / ehi ehi mahāsatva stana me piba putrakaḥ // tvaṃ muktvā tu mahāsatvaḥ ko nyo putratvam arhati / pariṣva[jya] tato vīraṃ stanan dadāmi sādhakaḥ //* 46.114cd-116. *evaṃ kṛtvāpi vai devi m amṛtaṃ sādhakottamaḥ / savyāsavyan tato pītvā sarvvajño bhavate kṣaṇām // bhairavo tha svayaṃ sākṣā guhyakānāṃ prabhu bhavet / saptakoṭyas tu mantrāṇāṃ viṃsati tasya vai hṛdi //* 46.120-1. *viṃsati* is to be emended to *viśanti*, following Shaman Hatley's suggestion.

[59] *kṣaṇamātraṃ mathed yāva namaskṛtvā tu caṇḍikām / tatrottiṣṭhati vai devi aghorī siddhidāyikā // śakracāpanibhākārā sūryakoṭisamaprabhā / sarvvābharaṇasaṃyuktā kapālāsanasaṃsthitā // ātmanaḥ sadṛśaiḥ kanyaiḥ samantā parivāritaḥ / pātālañ ca nabhañ caiva sarvvam āpūrya saṃsthitā //* 46.107-9. (Hatley's transcription reads *ka[rm/vy]aiḥ* for *kanyaiḥ*.)

all-transcending cosmic *śakti*, and the Mother goddess, who adopts the practitioner as her son. It is therefore all the more interesting to see once again that she does not figure, at least not with the name Aghorī, on the maṇḍala described at the beginning of the chapter.[60] The order of the Mothers in the eight directions, surrounding a male god in the middle and each accompanied by their own male consort, is as follows (starting from the East): Māheśī, Brahmāṇī, Vaiṣṇavī, Kaumārī, Vivasvatī (=Yāmyā), Vāsavī (=Aindrī), Bhairavī/ Yogeśī and Guhyaśakti. Another surprising detail is that the passage describes the seventh mother, the emaciated Bhairavī / Yogeśī, in the most detailed manner and therefore suggests that she is the central one in the system. Her two names, Bhairavī and Yogeśī, are alternative names of Aghorī / Caṇḍā Kāpālinī in the *Brahmayāmala*, which also points to their identity. However, it is the last Mother, Guhyaśakti, whose radiant appearance agrees with Aghorī's. While no detail is given on the previous six Mothers at all, the last two goddesses are described as follows:

> Bhairavī is flat-nosed, red-eyed and wrathful. She is emaciated, seated on a corpse and has a thousand creeper-like arms. Facing Bhairava, she looks like ten million suns. She is [also called] *yogeśī* [i.e. a *yoginī*] she wears all kinds of ornaments and is placed on the northern petal.
> One should place [the eighth goddess] Guhyaśakti in the north-eastern direction, o fortunate one. She is like the rising sun and is known as the Mother of All.[61]

Whether one identifies Aghorī's lower manifestation with the emaciated seventh or with the radiant eighth mother in this case, with neither or with both of them, it is certain that this passage shows some hesitation as to who is the supreme Mother and her potential equivalent on the maṇḍala. I take this to imply, once again, that Aghorī's cult was not directly connected to the Mother goddess cult, in spite of her having motherly characteristics when she appears at the end of the so-called Great Churning.

Conclusion

To summarize these investigations concerning Aghorī in early *śākta* Tantras, the following factors may have contributed to the shaping of her identity and cult:

First, continuities with pretantric currents, in particular the Lākulas, should be emphasized. The idea of the three kinds of *śakti*s headed by the benign Aghorās predates the *śākta* tantras, although it is only in the *śākta* sources that the role of male and female deities becomes reversed and goddesses dominate their Rudras.

Second, it is possible that some elements of Aghorī's cult came from a pretantric *kāpālika* cult. As I pointed out in this paper (and elsewhere), a number of particularly remarkable *kāpālika* elements figure in the *Brahmayāmala*, in the cluster of chapters (46-49) in which Aghorī also appears as a main goddess: they include the practice of the Mahāvrata, possession by Bhairava (and possession, *āveśa* is often attributed to the Kāpālikas), cremation ground rituals etc. Aghorī is also named a skull-bearer in her mantra (*kāpālinī*), and in this

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[60] It is to be noted that this maṇḍala is different from the elaborate one described in chapter 3 of the text.
[61] *bhairavīṃ cipiṭanāsan tu kruddhāṃ saṃraktalocanāṃ // nirmānsā[ṃ] pretam ārūḍhāṃ sahasrabhujaballarīṃ / bhairavābhimukhāṃ kruddhāṃ sūryakoṭisamaprabhāṃ // sarvvābharaṇasaṃyuktāṃ yogeśīm uttare dale / īśāne tu mahābhāge guhyaśaktin tu vinyaset // udayārkkanibhākāraṃ sarvveṣāṃ jananī smṛtām /* 46.30cd-33ab

context one cannot but recall the name of the Kāpālika practitioner from the Mālatīmādhava: Aghora-ghaṇṭa. Therefore, it is not impossible that Aghorī as a supreme goddess has some *kāpālika* antecedents.

Third, Aghorā or Aghorī in their mantric identities often seem to śāktise, so to speak, existing male *śaiva* entities. In the Trika system, Aghorā is the first member the Parāparā mantra, whose eight goddesses replace the male Vidyeśvaras / Bhairavas on the maṇḍala; and in the *Brahmayāmala*, Aghorī's nine-syllable mantra functions as a substitute of the male Navātman.

Fourth, Aghorī is also used, quite evidently, to draw the cult of the seven mothers in the *śākta* tantric doctrine and ritual. She is the eighth Mother, but at the same time she supersedes them, just as the tantric cult of the Mothers is meant to supersede the nontantric one. In this sense, it seems that the cult of the Mothers is not a direct precursor of śāktism, but is rather one of the cults that *śākta* Tantras adopted and transformed, just as they adopted and transformed pretantric *śaiva* doctrines and practices of the *atimārga*.

Finally, in the midst of these multiple Aghorās and Aghorīs, one should not forget that Aghorī may also function as an epithet: one with strong vedic associations, recalling the universal strands of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, conveniently usable for an all-transcending as well as all-encompassing principle and goddess. Whether Aghorī is just another name or an identifiable, possibly *kāpālika*, deity, she played no small role in the process by which *śākta* tantric doctrine and practice evolved.

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Abbreviations

GRETIL Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages. E-texts available online at <http://fiindolo.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil.html>
IFI / IFP Institut Français de Pondichéry
KSTS Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies
MIRI Muktabodha Indological Research Institute. E-texts available online at <http://muktalib5.org/digital_library.html>
NAK National Archives, Kathmandu

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