

Materials for the Study of the Female Tantric Master Lakṣmīṃkarā
by Dr. Ulrich Timme Kragh

In Buddhist sources, the valley of Uḍḍiyāna became famous in the 8th-9th century and onwards as a land of *ḍākinīs*, a unique place with several great female Tantric masters. Located in the present-day Swat valley of NW Pakistan, Uḍḍiyāna was always a place with an influx of a great many new trends. The trade routes between India and Central Asia went through Uḍḍiyāna or the neighboring Indus valley. On the Peshawar plain, immediately to the south of the valley, ran the trade route between India and the Middle East. Consequently, the area experienced diverse political cultures, in different periods including that of the Greeks, the Persians, the Indians, and the Huns. It is therefore not surprising that Uḍḍiyāna became a fertile ground for novel ideas and practices. Following a period of Gandhāran Buddhist monasticism in the 1st to 5th centuries, the monastic culture was replaced after the destructive Central Asian Hun invasions in the 5th-6th centuries with a religious Tantric culture performed by yogins, yoginīs, and lay-people. It was in this new environment that Uḍḍiyāna gave rise to a number of female masters, four of whom became so well-known that their teachings were preserved through subsequent transmissions. The most famous of the female Uḍḍiyāna masters was Lakṣmīṃkarā (c. 9th century), a guru of King Indrabodhi and in some later sources also thought to have been his sister. Lakṣmīṃkarā was a highly learned master, who authored several important texts preserved in Sanskrit and/or Tibetan translation. One of her works was included in the major cycle of Tantric scriptures called *Guhyādy-Aṣṭasiddhi-Saṃgraha*, and her biography was also adopted in *Abhayadattaśrī*'s stories of the 84 Mahāsiddhas. The study of Lakṣmīṃkarā's writings is, however, hampered by the lack of a clear overview of her works. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that texts were authored by three different Lakṣmīṃkarās, only one of whom was associated with Uḍḍiyāna. The second Lakṣmīṃkarā or Lakṣmī was a Kashmirian nun of the 10th-11th century, who was the founder of the tradition of the thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara fasting practice known in Tibetan as *smiyung gnas*. The third Lakṣmīṃkara was a male paṇḍita, who immigrated to Tibet in the early 13th century as part of the entourage of the Indian scholar Śākyaśrībhadrā. I shall here present a hitherto unattempted comparison of the three Lakṣmīṃkarās and detangle their history and works in order to establish the materials needed particularly for the study of the Uḍḍiyāna Lakṣmīṃkarā.