མངོན་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ལས།

The Rite for Destroying

Abhicārakarman

· Toh 484 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 85 (rgyud ’bum, ta), folio 96.a

For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

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Summary

s.1 *The Rite for Destroying* is a brief instructional manual on how to perform a wrathful burnt offering ritual. Rites for destroying are one of four types of tantric rituals undertaken to attain worldly or spiritual accomplishments. Authorities in imperial-period Tibet apparently regarded this ritual with apprehension, resulting in its excision from *The Tantra Purifying Bad Rebirths.*

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ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of the 84000–UC Santa Barbara Buddhist Texts Translation Initiative. Rory Lindsay edited the translation and the introduction, and Ven. Konchog Norbu copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

Introduction

i.1 *The Rite for Destroying* consists of brief instructions for a *homa,* or burnt offering, a tantric Buddhist ritual performed for worldly or spiritual accomplishments (*siddhi*; *dngos grub*). The text first describes the appropriate environment in which to conduct this practice, followed by the dimensions of the fire pit, the substances used to construct it, and the symbols to be drawn upon it. Instructions on the actual performance of the rite are extremely brief; presumably the practitioner would need to draw on previous training in ritual or refer to other texts to supply the elements common to burnt offering rites in general.

i.2 The substances to be offered in the actual ritual, as with the other elements, are all associated with acts of violence and destruction—substances such as flesh, blood (presumably human),[1] iron filings, powdered bones, poison, mustard seed, feces, and urine. Once the ritualist has invited Agni, the god of fire, they are instructed to make offerings to him one hundred thousand times. Upon the conclusion of the practice, it is said that the persons or beings toward whom the ritual is directed will suffer numerous misfortunes both in this life and the next.

i.3 *The Rite for Destroying* is positioned in the Degé Kangyur between the two translations of *The Tantra Purifying Bad Rebirths* (Toh 483 and Toh 485). The placement of this text reflects the belief among Tibetan scholars that authorities censored this rite during the imperial period, removing it from the first translation of *The Tantra Purifying Bad Rebirths*.[2] According to some Tibetan accounts, the passage on the rite for destroying was never translated from the Sanskrit original; others argue that while this passage had indeed been translated, it was not included in the official Tibetan version, although it may have been inserted as needed in certain ritual contexts.[3]

i.4 Whatever the case may be, Weinberger has argued that *The Tantra Purifying Bad Rebirths* and other tantric works underwent a type of "sanitization."[4] Violent rituals were either selectively translated or censored when such translations were completed in the eighth and ninth centuries. During the later dissemination of Buddhism to Tibet, reform-minded Tibetan rulers such as Lha Lama Yeshé Ö (*lha bla ma ye shes 'od*, 947–1019/1024) sought to limit the translation and dissemination of antinomian tantric texts and to purge what they saw as apocryphal Tibetan tantric traditions. Gray has also noted that only a fraction of the texts containing violent ritual practices were transmitted to East Asia, and when they were, the offensive passages were edited or removed entirely.[5]

i.5 This translation is based on the Degé block print and the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*). The colophon states that the text was translated by the Indian abbot Śāntiṃgarbha (a.k.a. Śāntigarbha) and the translator Bandé Jayarakṣita, both of whom are also credited as translators of the first version of the *Sarva durgatipariśodhana Tantra*.

The Translation

1.

The Rite for Destroying

1.1 [6]“The rite for destroying should be performed
In charnel grounds, in the homes of butchers,
Or in the abodes of rākṣasas.
The inferior, middling, and supreme hearths

1.2 “Should respectively be constructed with a diameter of
Two and a half, three, or nine cubits.
One should construct a platform of that dimension,
Shaped like a triangle or a spearhead.

1.3 “The hearth should be blackened by smearing it
With *luk* powder,[7] charcoal powder, and poison.
At its center, one should draw a nine-spoked vajra,
Which is black and intensely blazing.

1.4 “The top of the perimeter is marked
With three-spoked vajras and crossed vajras.”
On the ring outside of that,
One should draw clubs, axes,

1.5 “And swords, which blaze intensely.
Outside of that are skeletons,
Sugatas, and so forth, marked by mudrās.
The supreme of sages, who is the color of smoky clouds,

1.6 “Sits upon a human corpse, holding a trident,[8]
A ritual ladle, a garland, and a ritual vase.

Having invited the god of fire, who is similar to that,
Perform the burnt offering while gazing south with a wrathful mind.

1.7 “When you have prepared kindling and firewood
From highly poisonous thorned plants,
Rub all the substances—
Flesh, blood, iron filings,

1.8 “Powdered bones, poison, mustard seed,
Feces, urine, and so forth—with poison.
Meditate and perform the fire offering one hundred thousand times.[9]
They[10] will lose their wealth, possessions,

1.9 “Friends, entourage, servants,
Children, and wives.
After losing their life,
They will experience unbearable suffering.”

1.10 *So ends “The Rite for Destroying.”*

Colophon

c.1 Translated by the Indian abbot Śāntiṃgarbha[11] and the translator Bandé Jayarakṣita. May all be auspicious. [12]

Notes

1. See van der Kuijp 1992, p. 115.

2. See Lindsay 2024, pp. 32–35, and Weinberger 2010, p. 149.

3. Leonard van der Kuijp deals with these questions in greater detail in "Notes Apropos of the Transmission of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra* in Tibet," pp. 115–17.

4. Weinberger 2010, pp. 149–50.

5. Gray 2007, p. 255.

6. Following the belief among Tibetan scholars that this text was excised from the earlier translation of *The Tantra Purifying Bad Rebirths*, the present work could be inserted at folio 95.a of the Degé version of that tantra, just prior to the final praises. We have added quotation marks to this translation to reflect that this teaching is given by Vajrapāṇi, who has taken the form of Vajrasattva at this point in the tantra.

7. We have been unable to determine the meaning of *lugs phye*. Clearly it is some kind of powder (*phye*). Some dictionary entries for *lugs* mention casting or founding, as of metal, so this could be a type of metallic powder. It appears in other tantric sources: the *Āryavajrapātālanāmatantrarāja* (*'phags pa rdo rje sa 'og gi rgyud kyi rgyal po*), says *lugs phye bsres pa las gzugs brnyan byas la…* (Hemis 687: vol. 92, folio 134.b.5).

8. The term *rtse gsum* simply means "three-pronged," or trident; it may also refer to a three-pronged vajra.

9. The general procedure for burnt offering rituals is to cast the ritual substances into the fire a set number of times while reciting a specific mantra. Thus, "meditate and perform the fire offering one hundred thousand times" most likely means one should perform the mantra and offering one hundred thousand times, not the entire ritual.

10. That is, those toward whom the ritual is directed.

11. The Degé and Lhasa editions have "Śantiṃgarbha," a variant spelling of Śāntigarbha. The Comparative Edition reads "Śīntaṃgarbha," which is a misspelling.

12. *svaparahitaṃ bhavantu*.

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Glossary

Agni

me lha

མེ་ལྷ།

This refers to Agni, the Vedic deity of fire, who is also invoked in Buddhist burnt offering rituals.

burnt offering

bsreg, sbyin sreg

བསྲེག, སྦྱིན་སྲེག

homa

The casting of a prescribed offering into a ritual fire. The practice of *homa* is first attested in pre-Buddhist Vedic literature, and serves as a core, pervasive ritual paradigm in exoteric and esoteric rites in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions into modern times. In Buddhist esoteric rites, the ritual offerings are made repeatedly, with each offering accompanied by a single repetition of the respective mantra.

charnel ground

dur khrod

དུར་ཁྲོད།

śmaśāna

A cremation ground, or place for discarded corpses, which is frequently described as a type of power place where yogins and yoginīs congregate.

destroying

mngon spyod

མངོན་སྤྱོད།

abhicāra

firewood

yam shing

ཡམ་ཤིང་།

Wooden sticks used for offering in a burnt offering ritual.

hearth

thab khung

ཐབ་ཁུང་།

kuṇḍa

luk powder

lugs phye

ལུགས་ཕྱེ།

A ritual substance the identity of which is unclear.

mustard seed

ske tshe

སྐེ་ཚེ།

rājikā

Brassica juncea or *Sisymbrium heteromallum*.

perimeter

mu ran

སུ་རན།

vedī

The perimeter marking the outer edge of the area in which the substances are offered during the rite.

platform

stegs bu

སྡེགས་བུ།

vedikā

The ritual platform used in a burnt offering rite.

rākṣasa

srin po

སྲིན་པོ།

rākṣasa

A class of nonhuman beings that are often considered demonic in the Buddhist tradition. They are often depicted as flesh-eating monsters that haunt frightening places, are ugly and evil-natured, have a yearning for human flesh, and have miraculous powers, such as being able to change their appearance.

rapeseed

ke tshe

ཀེ་ཚེ།

Rorippa indica or *Sisymbrium heteromallum*.

ring

mu khyud

སྨུ་ཁྱུད།

nemi

The ring outside the perimeter.

rite for destroying

mngon spyod kyi las

མངོན་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ལས།

abhicārakarman

ritual ladle

gzar bu

གཟར་བུ།

tardū

spearhead

mdung rtse

མདུང་རྩེ།

sugata

bde bar gshegs pa

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པ།

sugata

An epithet for a buddha; a fully awakened one.