

Observations on the Development of the Ritual of Initiation (*abhiṣeka*) in the Higher Buddhist Tantric Systems

The hundreds of texts dealing with initiation (mainly manuals, though including also a few works of more theoretical nature) that have been written by Indian tantric Buddhist authors, for the most part between around the ninth and the thirteenth centuries of the common era, form an immense and complex body of evidence that has so far only barely begun to be explored from a historical perspective. No more than a small percentage of these fascinating texts—in which one can sometimes find, for instance, ritual dialogue that can be shown to have been a half a millenium old or more at the time of compilation next to material that represents the very latest developments—have been edited, and none have been the subject of detailed studies in a modern Western language. The highest priority for scholars, then, would naturally appear to be the production of careful editions and studies of individual works. With this I would agree. Nonetheless I think there may be some use in putting forward here, however premature that may seem, some broad hypotheses regarding the overall picture as I see it at present. In doing so I shall concentrate on the “higher” consecrations, though there is, no doubt, much that can be learned from focusing on other parts of the ritual too.

To explain briefly, in a manner that should be sufficient for the purposes of this paper, what ritual may typically be comprised under the “higher” consecrations, let me quote here a summarized account, based on the *Vajrāvalī* of Abhayākara Gupta and the *Kriyāsamuccaya* of Darpaṇācārya (Jagaddarpaṇa), which was given in an important paper by Alexis Sanderson on the empowerment rituals of the Buddhist Yoginītantras, published in 1994. All the footnotes on the following passage are mine (Sanderson has none on the part quoted).

After the rituals described so far have been completed a tantric ritual feast [*samayacakra*] is served.¹ A candidate for these higher empowerments must leave the

* This paper remains in some respects close to the oral presentation at the symposium in Heidelberg. Substantial parts of my arguments here have been made at presentations elsewhere as well. Parts have also appeared in less finished form, but with documentation that is sometimes somewhat more detailed than here, in a paper (itself an only slightly revised version of a lecture) called “Tantric Buddhism in India (from c. A.D. 800 to c. A.D. 1200).” In: *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Band II*. Hamburg. pp. 23–49. [Internal publication of Hamburg University, now available in slightly corrected form online at http://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/pdf/digitale_texte/Bd2-K02Isaacson.pdf.]

1 The *samayacakra* is not mentioned in the *Vajrāvalī*.

feast with the girl who will be his consort, go in to the guru, give her to him,² and return to the group outside. The guru copulates with the girl. The candidate is then led in by an assistant [*karmavajrin*].³ He kneels down and offers a flower. The guru then⁴ gives him his semen, which the śiṣya must place on his tongue and swallow, thinking of it as the embodiment of all the Buddhas. The female rises and gives him from her sex ‘a drop of the pollen of all the Tathāgatas.’⁵ He must swallow it in the same way. This is termed the ‘secret empowerment’ [*guhyābhiṣeka*]. The guru then returns the girl to the disciple, or gives him another who is bound by the pledges and vows, or is at least endowed with beauty and youth. He unites with her and experiences the four blisses [*ānanda*]. This is ‘the consecration of the knowledge of wisdom’ [*prajñājñānābhiṣeka*]. Finally the śiṣya requests what is termed ‘the fourth empowerment’ [*caturthābhiṣeka*], so called because it is the fourth if all the empowerments up to that of the Vajra Master are counted as one ‘vase-empowerment’ [*kalaśābhiṣeka*]. It takes the form of the guru’s reciting an exposition of the nature of the four blisses, consisting for the most part of quotations from the esoteric Tantras and of Apabhramśa and Sanskrit verses attributed to Siddhas. (Sanderson 1994: 90)

The remarkable ritual prescribed here raises numerous questions, and deserves discussion from many aspects. Sanderson’s own primary aim in the paper from which I have quoted was to argue for the non-Buddhist origin, but simultaneously the Buddhist function, of “almost everything concrete in the system” (Sanderson 1994: 92). The debate on origins remains, fifteen years later, a lively one; it is not my concern here.⁶ Instead, I intend to discuss some aspects of the historical growth of the ritual as we see it in Buddhist texts such as those summarized, and at the same time also to make some observations supplementary to Sanderson’s on the Buddhist function of this ritual.

- 2 In fact the girl who is given to the guru here need not, according to Abhayākaragupta and Darpaṇācārya, be the same as the one who is to be the śiṣya’s consort. After the conclusion of his account of the *guhyābhiṣeka*, beginning his account of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, Abhayākaragupta states: *tadanu tām* (i.e. the consort with whom the guru had copulated in the *guhyābhiṣeka*) *anyāṃ vā prajñāṃ samayasamvarasthām anyāṃ vā rūpayauvanādhyāṃ... śiṣye... samarpayet* (Sakurai 1996: 467). Similarly, Vāgīśvarakīrti refers in his *Samkṣiptābhiṣekavidhi* (ibid.: 417) to a “view that there is one consort [in both the *guhyābhiṣeka* and the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*]” (*ekatathatāmata*) and a “view that [the consort in the *guhyābhiṣeka* and the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*] are different” (*bhinna-mata*).
- 3 This detail is not given in the *Vajrāvalī*, while the *Kriyāsamuccaya* actually says that the śiṣya is led in by a *yoginī* or a *karmavajrin*, i.e. by a female or a male assistant.
- 4 Correcting the typo “them” in the printed version of Sanderson 1994.
- 5 “Pollen” here renders Sanskrit *makaranda* (*Vajrāvalī*; Sakurai 1996: 466); this choice is perhaps misleading, in as much as “pollen” probably suggests to most English-speakers something dry (powdery), while the metaphor used in the Sanskrit, literally “honey, flower-juice”, suggests, more appropriately, something liquid.
- 6 For the latest and most comprehensive, though no doubt not the last, words on this subject see the extremely rich monograph-length article Sanderson 2009, especially pp. 124–243 (with answers to some sceptics and critics at especially pp. 186–92).

I think it may be helpful to begin our considerations by emphasizing that the main purpose of this Buddhist tantric consecration (or sequence of consecrations) is to entitle the initiate to tantric practice, particularly (*mantra*)-*sādhana*. Herein lies an important difference between Śaiva and Buddhist tantric systems. There can be, to my mind, no doubt that Śaiva Tantra has exercised an important influence on tantric Buddhism, and that there are numerous and widely pervasive similarities between the two esoteric religions.⁷ But it must be noted that the corresponding Śaiva ritual of initiation (*dīkṣā*) is in general held to be itself, directly, salvific—not in the sense that the initiate is immediately thereby liberated, but rather that in the ritual the bonds that hold the soul in its non-liberated condition are cut, with the exception of a tiny portion that gradually decreases (if the post-initiatory observances are kept correctly) till death, when the soul becomes fully liberated.⁸ This was in the main the position even of those Śaivas who maintained that there was in fact another way (through gnosis) to liberation, and that this other way was superior in that it allowed the possibility of liberation in life (*jīvan-mukti*).⁹ As Buddhists, the followers of the Vajrayāna could not accept the possibility that ritual performed by an officiant (*ācārya*) for an initiate could have a directly soteriological effect on that initiate; for them it was in general repeated practice of tantric meditation that brought about liberation. Initiation is none the less essential, inasmuch as this ritual alone can qualify one for the directly salvific meditative practice. During the rite of consecration, the initiate is introduced to a particular *maṇḍala* of deities, and is given mantras that he is later to use in his religious practice. Without consecration, as our texts often repeat, the tantric methods cannot be employed—to attempt to do so is compared with striking the air with one's fist or trying to drink water from a mirage.¹⁰

Now in what is clearly the earliest of the stages of development that I shall be considering, the core and at the same time the culmination of the ritual is a set of five consecrations, concluding with the bestowal of the initiatory name that betokens the initi-

7 There is now no better starting point for the study of their relationship than Sanderson 2009 (cf. my previous note).

8 See, e.g., Sanderson (1995: 25–6) with references to sources in n. 27–32.

9 See, e.g., Sanderson (1995: 20) with references to sources in n. 15.

10 Cf. e.g. from the third *paṭala* of the *Laghuśaṃvaratantra* or *Herukābhīdhānatāntra*, the basic Tantra of the cult of Cakraśaṃvara and his consort Vajravārāhī, *adṛṣṭamaṇḍalo yogī yogitvaṃ yaḥ samī-hate hanyate muṣṭinākāśaṃ pibate mṛgaṭṛṣṇikām* (3.20cd–21ab in the numbering of Pandey; MS Baroda 13290 fol. 4r7–4v1; for *pibate*, which is the reading of the MS, Pandey reads the metrically bad *pibati*, with no variant reported). Here *adṛṣṭamaṇḍalo yogī* means of course a (would-be) *yogin* who has not received the empowerments (of this Yoginītantra system). The second half of the verse is, it should be noted, a formula which is found, with some minor variants, in a number of tantric works both Buddhist (e.g. GuSi 1.63cd, with the grammatically better *hanty asau* for *hanyate* and with *pibec ca* for *pibate*) and Śaiva (e.g. TaSaTa 28.88ab, with *hanate* for *hanyate*). A variant form of this verse is quoted in the *caturthābhiṣekavidhi* section of the *Kriyāsaṃgraha-pañjikā*, with the first half reading *nābhiṣikto hi yo yogī yogitvaṃ abhivāñchati* (Sakurai 1996: 514, 17–8). The vast *sādhana*-literature also contains numerous references to the fact that the meditative practices which they teach are only allowed to one who has received the corresponding con-secrations; cf. e.g. *sādhako bhūtaḍāmaratantra labdhābhiṣeko gurubhir anujñāto...* (SāMā 265, p. 515, 4).

and's new identity. The soteriological relevance of this set of five is often underlined by the fact that they are homologized with the five types of knowledge or cognition of a Buddha (*buddhajñāna*) which are distinguished in tantric buddhological theory.¹¹ The correspondences are as follows:

udakābhiṣeka ≈ *ādarśajñāna*
mukutābhiṣeka ≈ *samatājñāna*
vajrābhiṣeka ≈ *pratyavekṣaṇājñāna*
ghaṇṭābhiṣeka ≈ *kṛtyānuṣṭhānajñāna*
nāmābhiṣeka ≈ *suviśuddhadharmadhātujñāna*

This set survives, with explicit statement of the correspondences that show that it was at one stage intended to be complete in itself, as part of the set of Higher Yogatantra empowerments as taught for instance by Kuladatta in his *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā* and by Darpaṇācārya in his *Kriyāsamuccaya*.¹² It was however not to remain the culmination or the main part of the ritual. In the Guhyasamāja system the *guhyābhiṣeka* was added, first, probably, as a separate ritual,¹³ later as a culmination to follow the Yogatantra initiations. There seems to be no sign in the *Guhyasamājatantra* itself, excluding the *Samājottara* (an originally independent appendix that later was integrated into the Tantra as its eighteenth and final chapter), that a *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* was envisaged; rather the *guhyābhiṣeka* seems to be clearly regarded as the highest of empowerments.

Other textual materials too show signs of a phase in the development of esoteric Buddhism in which the *guhyābhiṣeka* was the final and highest of the series of empowerments.¹⁴ However it seems likely that the supremacy of the *guhyābhiṣeka* was rela-

11 They may also be explicitly homologized with the Lords of the five Buddha-families.

12 It is of interest to note that in his *Vajrāvalī* Abhayākaragupta does not teach the correspondences of the set with the *buddhajñānas*. Is this an example of the way in which Abhayākaragupta appears to have sometimes removed (traces of) elements which, in the course of the centuries of development of the consecration ritual, have resulted in possible inconsistencies or tensions?

13 See especially the eighth *paṭala* of the GuSaTa.

14 In the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra*, an important Yamāritantra which has survived and even been published in Sanskrit, we find four consecrations mentioned (*prathamam maulisekena dvitīyam khaḍga-modanāt | tṛtīyam vajraghaṇṭām ca caturtham candrabhakṣaṇam catvāry ete mahāsekāḥ kṛṣṇasya mukhanirgatāḥ | etatsekaprabhāvena bodhisattvā jinaurasāḥ* (em., *jinorasāḥ* ed.) KṛYaTa 6.5–6), but they clearly do not correspond to the typical later lists of four, culminating in the Fourth. Rather the first three seem to correspond (at least in type) to the lower consecrations, and the last should be understood as referring to the *guhyābhiṣeka*; the “eating of the moon” (*candrabhakṣaṇa* in KṛYaTa 6.5d) is most naturally taken as meaning the consumption of semen that is the defining act in the *guhyābhiṣeka*. It is true that this also often has a part in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, but it cannot be said to be the defining or essential element of that consecration. Indeed there are accounts of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* that do not refer to it at all.

tively short-lived.¹⁵

It is in the *Samājottara* that it seems that the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* first emerges. A key passage here is the following:

*abhiṣekaṃ tridhā bhinnam asmimś tantre prakalpitaṃ |
kalaśābhiṣekaṃ prathamam dvitīyaṃ guhyābhiṣekataḥ |
prajñājñānam tritīyaṃ tu caturtham tat punas tathā ||* GuSaTa 18.113¹⁶

Here there is an explicit statement that consecration is threefold, and that the “Vase Consecration” (about which there is agreement that it comprises the “lower” consecrations, including the old set of five) is the first of these, the *guhyābhiṣeka* the second, and the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* the third. The statement, after this, that “the fourth is that again in the same way” (to attempt a literal translation which does not immediately slant the expression in the direction of one of its possible interpretations) is, to say the least, cryptic. I shall return to this later in considering the next innovation, the introduction of the Fourth consecration.

With the formulation of empowerment in the Higher Yogatantra as three-fold, it was a natural step, and one that may have swiftly followed, to assign to the three the functions of purification or transformation of, respectively, the initiand’s body, speech, and mind.¹⁷ The empowerments now form a set with what may be called a rather convincing internal logic; the increase in intensity as the initiand passes through them culminates in a natural climax with his experience, guided by the prior instruction of his guru, of the blissful moment of consciousness without duality in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*.

This state of affairs remained for quite some time, perhaps, a widely accepted mainstream one. There was obviously, and unsurprisingly, some controversy concerning the question whether the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* did not involve for a initiand who was a monk

15 On this point I am partly in agreement with Jacob Dalton, who speaks of “an effacement of the period by the later tradition” (Dalton 2004: 4), though the word “effacement” seems to me too strong. Dalton seems to have in mind here, however, mainly a shift in which “the secret consecration was restricted to the initiation setting, and its importance in the actual sexual practice was forgotten” (ibid.). Be this as it may, for my purposes here it is more important to note that even within the context of initiation alone, we can observe that the *guhyābhiṣeka*, once the culminating ritual, is pushed to the background by the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* (and, later yet, by the Fourth), so that, though still a part of the sequence of consecrations, it is accorded relatively little importance. Dalton’s thought-provoking paper contains much that is of value; some of its theses seem to me, however, hard to accept. I comment below, as relevant to my present topic, on our differences regarding a few points.

16 Cf. HeTa 2.3.10 (quoted in n. 29 below) and cf. also *tac cābhiṣekaṃ caturvidham prathamam kalaśābhiṣekaṃ dvitīyaṃ guhyābhiṣekataḥ prajñājñānam tritīyaṃ tu caturtham tat punas tathā* SaTa 2.1.46 and also *ācāryābhiṣekasampūrṇam dvitīyaṃ guhyam uttamam prajñājñānam* (em., *prajñājñāna*° Tsuda) *tritīyaṃ tu caturtham tat punas tathā* SaUdTā 18.28 All of these parallels are from almost certainly later Yoginītantra literature.

17 This correspondence is made explicit at various places in the literature, including in works, such as the *Kriyāsamuccaya*, the *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā*, and Kumāracandra’s *pañjikā* on the *Kṛṣṇayāmāritantra*, in which a Fourth consecration follows after the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*.

infringement of his monastic vows (and similarly whether the *guhyābhiṣeka* did not involve such infringement on the part of the *ācārya*, if he was a monk). Abhayākaragupta and others discuss these doubts explicitly, and the position that we see repeatedly in Indian sources is that contrary to appearances and expectation the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* does not entail sin for a suitable initiand, even if he is an ordained *bhikṣu*. This debate has been discussed briefly by Sanderson in the paper I quoted at the beginning,¹⁸ and in more detail by Sakurai Munenobu in his rich doctoral thesis (Sakurai 1996). I do not wish to take this matter up here, but shall say instead a few words about a no less interesting question which I think has not been addressed by those scholars.

Even if it is accepted by the Buddhist authors—though not, again, without some controversy—that the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* does not entail any sin, this in itself does not explain why the empowerment should be necessary in the first place. So the question remains: what is, from the perspective of the Buddhists who taught and may be presumed to have practised it, the function of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*? Putting it another way, and narrowing it down a little: what reason is given by the proponents of the Vajrayāna themselves for the fact that to enter into this domain of esoteric practice by which liberation is to be achieved swiftly and easily, the initiand must receive the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, ideally with a physical female partner?

On this point our manuals of the ritual may fail to satisfy us completely. The functions they explicitly assign to the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, when they offer any specific explanation at all, do not as a rule go beyond the equating of it with the purification of mind (as part of the set, already mentioned above, of purification of body, speech and mind as the function of the *kalaśābhiṣeka*, the *guhyābhiṣeka* and the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* respectively). While perfectly consonant with the thought of these systems, this does not provide a really compelling or satisfying answer to our question, and hardly reveals anything of the logic behind the necessity of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*. For clear statements that offer more than this we must look elsewhere.

If we do so, it becomes clear that despite the near-silence of the manuals, many Buddhist authors were more or less acutely aware of the question—or criticism—which could easily be raised concerning the sexual character of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* and its function. In a few texts we find explanations of that function which seem to have at least in part the purpose to answer the question or rebut a possible attack on this point. One of the most interesting of such texts that I have seen is one entitled *Abhiṣekanirukti* (AbhiNi) that is attributed in one Tibetan translation (Tōhoku catalogue No. 2476) to the celebrated eleventh-century master Ratnākaraśānti, but more probably was written

18 Sanderson 1994, especially p. 97 and n. 37–8. Note that the material quoted by Sanderson in n. 37 from the *Kriyāsamuccaya* is, as so often with Jagaddarpaṇa, lifted from the *Vajrāvalī*; the only addition is the quotation of the verse beginning *caṇḍālavenūkārādyāḥ* (which corresponds to HeTa 2.4.76, though with a variant in *pāda* c). There are also omissions, including an omission of an auto-reference of Abhayākaragupta's to his *Āmnāyamañjarī* (Sakurai 1996: 445, 15–6).

by a disciple of his called Jinasujayaśrīgupta.¹⁹ This text in fact presents three different views (*pakṣas*) on the function of what is supposed to happen during the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* in the Yogatantras (by which is meant here principally the *Guhyasamājatantra*) and, more briefly, three positions on what happens in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* in the Yoginītantra systems. Interestingly, the author does not himself decide in favour of any particular *pakṣa*—instead, in one of the verses at the conclusion of the work, he says that the wise should select the appropriate one.²⁰

In tantric Buddhism, as in the non-tantric Mahāyāna, the practitioner aims not merely at personal freedom from suffering and rebirth but at helping all sentient beings by becoming a Buddha.²¹ To become a Buddha may be paraphrased as the acquisition of the bodies of a Buddha, the most important of which (*pradhāna*) is the *dharmakāya*. In the *mantranaya*, these bodies are to be achieved through specifically tantric methods, such as the meditative evocation of a deity who is a transformation from a mantra, the emanation and resorption of *maṇḍalas* of deities and so on. Now for it to be possible to meditatively cultivate in the *mantranaya* the non-dual, transcendent and supremely blissful goal that is that which is called the *dharmakāya*, it is necessary first to have some sort of cognition or experience of it.²² We might put it that a glimpse of this tran-

19 The author is thus named in the colophon of the sole complete manuscript of it that I am aware of at present; if this attribution—which is also made in the colophon of another Tibetan translation (Tōhoku 2477), independent of the abovementioned one—is correct, the author has incorporated his name in the last verse of the work as preserved in this manuscript (*abhidadhatā tattvam idam puṇyam yad avāpi paramasekasya jinasujayaśrīguptaṃ jagad idam akhilaṃ tato bhavatāt* AbhiNi fol. 45r3–4). The attribution of Tōhoku 2476 to Ratnākaraśānti has been accepted without question by Sakurai (1996: 41 and 238) and Davidson (2002: 199); both were evidently unaware of the fact that Tōhoku 2477 is another translation of the same work, with different attribution, and that the text is extant in Sanskrit, again not attributed to Ratnākaraśānti. Having examined all versions that are known to survive, I conclude, on grounds of style and terminology, that it can be ruled out that the work was written by Ratnākaraśānti. It is quite clear that the work has been re-redacted deliberately at the same time that it was re-attributed; note for instance that at one point when the text refers to a *Sahajasādhana* “extracted” from the *Hevajratantra* by the author’s guru (this is probably a reference to the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* of Ratnākaraśānti preserved in Royal Asiatic Society, London, MS Hodgson 35 as the work directly following the *Abhiṣekanirukti*) the Tibetan translation that ascribes the *Abhiṣekanirukti* to Ratnākaraśānti has *kho bos (sDe dge bstan ’gyur, rgyud* vol. zi fol. 168v1) where the Sanskrit MS has *asmadgurubhiḥ* (AbhiNi fol. 44v9). We are looking, I suggest, at a deliberate attempt to pass the work of an otherwise unknown (and hence in some sense at least “minor”) student of Ratnākaraśānti as the composition of the master himself, and to give it thereby an interest and authority that it could not normally hope to acquire.

I have made an e-text of the *Abhiṣekanirukti* available online at <http://tantric-studies.org/e-texts/bauddha/AbhiNir.txt>. A printed text, based on an earlier draft of my e-text, is included, with attribution to me, in an appendix in an unpublished Oxford Ph.D. dissertation (Onians 2001: 351–68), together with an English translation (ibid.: 323–48).

20 *prajñājñānābhiṣekasya prabhedā lakṣyalakṣaṇāḥ | trayāḥ proktā nirūpyātra yukto grāhyas tu paṇḍitaiḥ* AbhiNi fol. 45r1.

21 In this paragraph and the following I paraphrase freely from the *Abhiṣekanirukti*.

22 See especially ... *pradhānaṃ dharmakāyākhyam phalaṃ suviśuddhadharmadhāturūpam yogatantraṣu bhāvanāsādhyaṃ. na cājñātaṃ bhāvayituṃ śaktam. na ca samprati tadālabhanam jñānam* (em., *tadālabhanajñānam* MS) *asti, tatprāptau bhāvanāyā vaiyarthya-prasaṅgāt* (AbhiNi fol. 40v1).

scendent target must be had, in order that one can later firmly set one's meditative sights on it. It is the function of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* to provide this glimpse.

Having been instructed by the guru what he must do and on what he must concentrate, the initiand, uniting with the consort, must mark that moment of blissful experience that, checking or counteracting all other sensations offers an at least apparent absence of all duality (*advayābhāsa*). This experience is said to occur in the brief interval between the moment in which the intiand's *bodhicitta*, that is his semen, is in the center of the *maṇi*, that is the glans of his penis, and the moment of emission. Though not the goal itself, it is so to speak an illustration or example (*drṣṭāntabhūta*) of what the nature of that goal is.²³ This is roughly the first position or theory (*pakṣa*) set out in the *Abhiṣekanirukti*; it is the simplest and most straightforward one. Without going into the other positions, something for which the time and space at my disposal now are insufficient, it should be clear that we see here both awareness of the problem—the need to provide some justification for the prescription of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* as essential for bestowing *adhikāra*—and an answer to it that is at least more satisfactory than anything that we find in the ritual manuals. This illustrates, I think, what Sanderson means by the thoroughly Buddhist function and self-perception of tantric Buddhism.

The existence of sophisticated justifications such as those given in the *Abhiṣekanirukti* seems to me to confirm that the stage of development of the ritual in which it is the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* that is the highest, culminating, element was an enduring one. It was not, however, the final stage to which our texts bear witness. Rather, we have abundant evidence to show that the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* was eventually in its turn widely superseded by a further consecration which took its place as the highest. This consecration was usually known simply as the “Fourth” (*caturtha*, *caturthābhiṣeka*).

Those whose knowledge of Buddhist Tantra is mainly based on contemporary secondary sources or on the Tibetan traditions as they are known today may possibly be surprised to learn that the Fourth was not always the culmination of the initiation ritual of the higher Buddhist tantric systems. But our Indian sources show us clearly that it was not; and that even after a Fourth had been introduced by some, there was for centuries a lively controversy about whether or not it should be a part of the sequence of consecrations, and what its nature should be if it was included.

An important source for this controversy is, again, the *Abhiṣekanirukti*. There are however many other textual sources which shed light on it as well. From a survey of these sources, published and unpublished, it emerges rather clearly, in my view, that the debate, and almost certainly the very idea of a Fourth consecration as possibly following the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, goes back to the passage from the *Samājottara* that we have already seen, and to a controversy concerning what the cryptic line “the fourth is that again in the same way” (GuSaTa 18.113f.) might mean.

23 See especially *tantroktalakṣaṇamudrāsaṃyoge gurūpadeśato bodhicittamaṇimadhyasthitibahirnirgamayor antarāle yad upalabhyate sarvānyopalambhapratyanīkabhūtam advayābhāsaṃ mahā-sukhākāraṃ jñānaṃ tad drṣṭāntabhūtaṃ draṣṭavyam* (AbhiNi fol. 40v2–3).

That a separate Fourth empowerment was originally intended herewith seems to me, as to Sakurai (who has probably written more extensively on the problem of the Fourth than any other modern writer), extremely unlikely. The strongest arguments here are the fact that the same verse explicitly refers to the empowerments as three; that the early Jñānapāda tradition (as well as, to the best of my knowledge, the early Ārya tradition) of Guhyasamāja exegesis and practice not only does not teach a Fourth empowerment but even seems ignorant of any suggestion that there might be such a thing; that elsewhere too it seems clear that a stage in which no Fourth was known preceded that in which the Fourth was commonly accepted; and that we find a range of widely (not to say wildly) diverging interpretations of what the Fourth might consist in if it is indeed referred to in this verse.²⁴

Apart from the view that in the Guhyasamāja system there are only three consecrations, no Fourth, which both the *Abhiṣekanirukti* and Vāgīśvarakīrti's *Tattvaratnāvaloka* mention, and which corresponds to a very real, early, and well-documented position, several other positions can be found mentioned in our sources which are at variance with what came to be the "standard" view on the Fourth. Two which I would like to mention very briefly are found reported in the *Tattvaratnāvaloka* and its *vivarāṇa*, though not in the *Abhiṣekanirukti*.²⁵ The first of these, which is reported in *Tattvaratnāvaloka* 15 and the *vivarāṇa* thereon, is that the Fourth empowerment consists in the initiand, after the copulation with a female partner in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, taking the *bodhicitta*, that is semen, from his partner's sex with his tongue. Here it should be noted that it cannot be the action itself that Vāgīśvarakīrti condemns, for this quite commonly forms part of the ritual, and does so also in Vāgīśvarakīrti's own manual, the *Sāmājika Saṃkṣiptābhiṣekavidhi* (SaAbhiVi), edited by Sakurai in an appendix

24 Dalton, on the other hand, apparently suggests that the *locus classicus*, GuSaTa 18.113, did originally intend a Fourth consecration. This seems to me historically unlikely in the extreme, mainly for the reasons just given. Dalton suggests that the original intention of the verse may have been that the Fourth initiation was to be "a repetition of the second initiation," (i.e. of the *guhyābhiṣeka*) "but this time as a self-consecration" (Dalton 2004: 26); compared to this he finds the standard interpretation of the Fourth as a verbal instruction "incongruous". The only Indian source for such an interpretation which Dalton cites is Vāgīśvarakīrti's *Tattvaratnāvaloka*; Dalton does not make it clear, however, that it is there only one of a number of different interpretations of the Fourth which are strongly rejected by Vāgīśvarakīrti. See my discussion below. From the perspective of the vast majority of tantric teachers, I would think that such an interpretation of the Fourth would seem far more incongruous, an inexplicable step backwards after the logical progression from the *guhyābhiṣeka* to the even more intense experience of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*. Dalton appears in his paper of 2004 to have been unaware of the important investigations which Sakurai published (in Japanese) in 1996. It should be added, though, that he does express justified reservations concerning what he is evidently aware is a somewhat speculative suggestion.

25 This need not mean that the author of that text did not know of them: we know in fact that he did not set forth all the different views with which he was familiar, but only those which he did not consider to be utterly indefensible. These two positions, both rejected vehemently by Vāgīśvarakīrti, may well have been among those which the author of the *Abhiṣekanirukti* knew but felt not to merit consideration.

of his book. It is rather the interpreting of this element as constituting a separate, Fourth, empowerment that our author rejects.²⁶

The next position, which Vāgīśvarakīrti explains and rejects in the following verse of his work, sees the Fourth consecration as being the sexual enjoyment of women by the initiand after the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, i.e., evidently, after the completion of the entire empowerment ritual. It is indeed somewhat surprising that some authorities should thus have regarded what would normally (whether condoned or not) be considered to fall clearly under post-initiatory practice (*caryā*) as a Fourth empowerment. This too Vāgīśvarakīrti rejects. I have not found any other text that explicitly mentions either of these two positions, let alone one that actually upholds one of them. I do not rule out that such texts may still exist, but I should think that it is also possible that the strong condemnation of these views voiced by Vāgīśvarakīrti—in which he surely would not have been alone—may have actually resulted in their disappearing without leaving other traces.

We come now to the final *pakṣa* with reference to the *Guhyasamājatantra* system's Fourth empowerment that I wish to draw attention to. It is that which became, I think we may say, the standard orthodoxy, also in the Yoginītantra systems. At the same time it is a solution which is a little difficult to pin down; or, to put it differently, it could and perhaps should be differentiated into two or possibly more very closely related but slightly divergent variants. This would require a very close and careful examination of a not inconsiderable number of texts, something which I have not yet been in a position to do. I shall therefore gloss over these possible differences here, and can refer you to Sakurai's book for a tentative distinction into two *pakṣas* of what I shall treat for our present purposes as one.

The defining characteristic of this *pakṣa*, then, is that it holds that the Fourth empowerment is one which is bestowed verbally, i.e. by the initiating guru giving a verbal instruction to the initiand. Now some texts seem to indeed refer to this consecration as only verbal—Vāgīśvarakīrti in his *Samkṣiptābhiṣekavidhi*, calls it the *vacanamātrābhiṣeka* (cf. Sakurai 1996: 419, l. 11 and l. 13), and in this text at least does not indicate that anything more is involved than this speech by the guru. But it is also clear that in fact usually, if not always, the Fourth empowerment was seen as having, theoretically at least, another component as well. Indeed, had it been otherwise, that which as the final one one expects to be the culminating or crowning empowerment or consecration could well seem an anti-climax. This no doubt was as clear to these tantric authors as it is to us. The way that this added element is sometimes expressed in is that the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* and the Fourth empowerment are said to be related to each other as mark/characteristic and that which is marked, or ultimate goal. In theory, the verbal instruction received from the guru is supposed to cause the bliss experienced, for an instant, without sensation of duality in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* to become strong or steady.

26 As mentioned in n. 24 above, this view is taken by Dalton as evidence for what Dalton suggests was the form of the Fourth originally intended in GuSaTa 18.113.

Treating the Fourth empowerment as representing or being, in some way, the ultimate goal, means that explanations of its nature may vary according to just how that goal is envisaged. In the—as far as I can tell at present very influential—works of Vāgīśvarakīrti, the transcendental or goal-aspect of the Fourth empowerment is explained as being seven-fold or having seven aspects, the so-called seven *aṅgas* of *mahāmudrā*.²⁷ I don't want to go into an explanation of this rather complicated matter here; let me just conclude our brief survey of the Guhyasamāja *pakṣas* by repeating that in the last solution, which I referred to as the orthodox one, we find two elements combined: first the notion that the Fourth empowerment is given verbally to the initiand by his guru, and secondly that it in some way should also be seen as being or as containing, ideally at least, the goal (*lakṣya* or *phala*).

Let us now turn our attention to the Yoginītantra or Yoganiruttaratantra systems. Here the quantity of literature is far greater than that dealing with the Guhyasamāja system, and to survey it all is a task that will require many years of study. Still, following the lead of the *Abhiṣekanirukti*, I shall at least touch on the question of the existence and nature of the Fourth empowerment in the Yoginītantras too. The *Tattvaratnāvaloka* and its *vivaraṇa* provide us with no information, for Vāgīśvarakīrti does not there refer to, nor show any awareness of, these systems. But the *Abhiṣekanirukti*, after its account of the different *pakṣas* in the Guhyasamāja system, goes on to tell us that there are some who hold that in the Yoginītantras such as the *Hevajratantra*, too, there is no Fourth empowerment.²⁸

Now, at first sight at least, it may well be found surprising that, as we are told, some teachers held there to be only three kinds of consecration even in the “Yoginītantras such as the *Hevajratantra*”. For in the HeTa itself there is clear reference to the empowerments being four in number.²⁹ And indeed in the commentatorial and other material directly related to the HeTa that I have been able to study till now, I know of no passage that denies existence of a Fourth empowerment.

But if we take other Yoginītantra cycles into consideration, there are, I think clear signs to be found that a Fourth empowerment indeed was not an element that was invariably present. Here, however, much of my evidence must necessarily be negative. But I believe that the absence of any mention of a *caturthābhiṣeka* in an otherwise detailed account of the ritual of empowerment must be taken as a significant and probably reliable indication that no Fourth empowerment was envisaged. This is the case with the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*, a work famous rather for its frankness and lack of reticence. In its third chapter, called the *abhiṣekapaṭala*, this scripture teaches how the *abhiṣekas* are to be performed, and does so with no mention of the Fourth empower-

27 Though his *Samkṣiptābhiṣekavidhi*, as I said, does not discuss this other component, Vāgīśvarakīrti goes into this in detail in other works of his: both in his *Saptāṅga* (Tōhoku catalogue No. 1888, Ōtani catalogue No. 2752) and in his *Tattvaratnāvaloka* and the auto-commentary *vivaraṇa* thereon.

28 *yoginītantra tu hevajrādau kecid ācāryās trividham abhiṣekaṃ manyante* AbhiNi fol. 44r10.

29 Cf. *ācāryaguhyaprajñā ca caturthaṃ tat punas tathā ānandāḥ kramaśo jñeyāś catuḥsecanasamkhyayā* HeTa 2.3.10.

ment. Rather, at the end of the account of the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, we are told simply that the ritual concludes with a tantric feast (*bhakṣaṇacakra*, corresponding to what is usually called a *gaṇacakra*).³⁰ The sole commentary that seems to exist on this Tantra, the *Padmāvatī* by Mahāsukhavajrapāda (PaCaMaTaPa), gives us much useful additional material on the empowerment rituals, but it too simply does not mention any further empowerment after the *prajñābhīṣeka* (as the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* is called in these texts).³¹

The CaMaTa is not the only Yoginītantra that has, or that originally had, no Fourth empowerment. But in what may perhaps be called the Yoginītantra mainstream, the cults of Heruka forms such as Hevajra and Cakraśaṃvara and Vajravārāhī, it is pretty clear that it was, or came to be, the overwhelmingly widely held view that a Fourth empowerment followed the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, and that this empowerment was verbal in nature. This mainstream view is virtually identical with the final *pakṣa* we saw in the Guhyasamāja system, which as I said seems to have become established as the standard orthodoxy. In the Yoginītantras too (even more so perhaps than in the literature relating to the Guhyasamāja), it would be possible and useful to distinguish between slightly different variants of this *pakṣa*, but again I shall not here try to do so.³²

Another important idea which I should mention here, however, is one which is expressed by, among others, Kamalanātha in his commentary on the *Hevajratantra*. This is the notion that the Fourth empowerment, understood as the state (or the realization of the state) which is the goal, is experienced directly by some few (fortunate, or rather advanced) disciples during the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*. For others, however, it must be re-

30 See CaMaTa (ed. George) 3.9.2.

31 I must admit that I have not yet read more recent sources for the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* ritual of empowerment, which continues to be practised in Nepal; it would not surprise me to learn that in later times the Fourth consecration was imported into the cult of *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa* from, for instance, the Hevajra or Cakraśaṃvara systems. But it seems certain that it did not originally form a part of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa* consecrations.

32 I may however point out some points of particular interest in the *Abhiṣekanirukti*'s second and main *pakṣa* with regard to the Yoginītantras. One of the features here which is as far as I can see not common, is that the Fourth empowerment is said to be or involve an expansion of the bliss that was initially experienced during the the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* to fill first the initiand's entire body and than all things, moving and unmoving, which the initiand is to cause to become of the nature of, or one might say suffused with this bliss. This is therefore said to be, like the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, a consecration or empowerment of the initiand's mind. So the *caturthābhīṣeka* here, and as I say this seems to me uncommon, seems to represent both the fruit and a part of the cause, the purification or transformation of the initiand's mind. Cf. *tatra prajñāṅgasāṅge sahajamahāsukhasya yat sthīrīkṛtya lakṣaṇaṃ tat prajñāṅgāśrayatvāc cetasaḥ prajñājñānābhīṣeka ity ucyate. yat punaḥ sthīrīkṛtasya sahajamahāsukhasya yathāśakti samāhitena manasā sarvāṅgapratyaṅgavyāpanaṃ viśvavyāpanaṃ ca viśvasya ca tanmayīkaraṇaṃ tat prajñājñānavad advayaṃ akalpaṃ mahāsukhamātrapratibhāsam, ataḥ so 'pi cetasa evābhīṣekaś caturthaṃ tat punas tathety anena nirdiṣṭo veditavya iti manyante* (AbhiNi fol. 44v7–9).

vealed with words thereafter.³³ This is an interesting proposal;³⁴ it divides the two components I spoke of above, which indeed are a little difficult to integrate in a natural fashion. The verbal instruction is only needed for those who do not have this intense experience of enlightened bliss in the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*. Presumably, however, this would in Kamalanātha's view have applied to most cases, and the advanced who did not need the oral instruction would have been indeed few.

A final selection from the vast Yoginītantra literature that I wish to mention here is one to which Snellgrove has already drawn attention in his book *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, though it seems that Snellgrove was not fully aware of the unusual character of his source, nor of the underlying problems.³⁵ This is a manual of the ritual of empowerment or initiation into the *maṇḍala* of Hevajra, written by an author of whom nothing seems to be known beyond his name, Prajñāśrī, if that.³⁶ This is Snellgrove's translation of the description of the *caturthābhiṣeka* in this work:

Then on the western side of the main *maṇḍala* one should prepare the *maṇḍala* for the Fourth Consecration one fathom across, sprinkling it with sandalwood scent and so on and with *bodhicitta*. On it one places a white blanket and so on and then the Wisdom-maiden, who is consecrated, adorned and honored just as before. Then the pupil makes his request in this manner:

Salutation to you, the inward self of the sensible world,
Salutation to you, inwardly gentle to sensible things
and inwardly released from the sensible world.
Inward bestower of sensible things, salutation to you!
O excellent lord, grant to me, the excellent Fourth Consecration.

33 From the commentary on *Hevajratāntra* 2.3.10b: *tad eva prajñājñānam. punar iti paścāt. yadi paścād api tad eva kiṃ caturthenety āha—tatheti. tad eva prajñājñānam rūpaviśeṣeṇa jalam iva taraṅgarūpeṇotpannam caturtham ity arthaḥ. sa punar ayaṃ mahāsukhamayo vajradharaḥ. sa cāyaṃ keśāmcit tadaiva prajñājñānābhiṣekakāla eva cakāsti, tadapareṣāṃ vacasā prakāśyate* (RaĀvHePa fol. 17r6).

34 It is incidentally followed, it seems, by Abhayākaragupta in his famous commentary *Āmnāya-mañjarī* on the *Samputodbhavantra*; cf. *de yañ bsod nams dan ye śes kyi bag chags bsags pa rnams la śes rab ye śes kyi dbaṅ gi dus kho nar gsal zñi. de las gzan rnams la tshig gis gsal bar bya'o* (quoted in Sakurai 1996: 251, n. 76). There is evidence, which I intend to discuss elsewhere, that Kamalanātha precedes Abhayākaragupta.

35 I may perhaps be permitted to remark here that Snellgrove's account of Higher Yogatantra initiation in this book, though treating some interesting material, is very inadequate as far as his grasp of the historical development is concerned, and in several respects seems to me both confused and confusing.

36 Though it is purportedly a translation into Tibetan from Sanskrit, I have come to the opinion that this is in fact an indigenous Tibetan work. I cannot examine the evidence for this in detail here; for my purpose in this paper the provenance of the work is not of great importance, since it is the motivation which can be sensed behind its innovations, be they of an Indian or of a Tibetan teacher, which I wish to highlight. Let me mention however as one point that should arouse suspicion the (repeated) use of such structuring elements as (to cite one example): *las la 'jug pa la yañ gñis te| dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga dan| dbaṅ bskur ba'i cho ga'o|| dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga la yañ bcu gsum ste | ...* (AbhiVi Derge fol. 41v1).

Then the master speaks thus:

You must slay living beings. You must speak lying words.
 You must take what is not given. You must frequent others' wives.
 If you do these things, no evil is done, great merit is yours.
 If these things you can do, I will give the Fourth Consecration.

The pupil replies:

Great protector, by your gracious favor, I can.

Then he unites in the embrace, performs coition, and as the great bliss descends to the palace of knowledge, he reverses it upward to the level of non-cognition, holding it there. This experiencing of noncognitive knowledge is the Fourth in terms of its (psychophysical) support. The Fourth in terms of no support is to be known from one's master's mouth. (Snellgrove 1987: 259–60)³⁷

As Snellgrove remarks, a “distinctive feature of this account is the deliberate separation of the Fourth Consecration from the preceding one[s], each taking place at one of the four sides of the main maṇḍala” (Snellgrove 1987: 260). Also noteworthy is that in Prajñāśrī's account of the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka* (translated in Snellgrove 1987: 258–9), the intiand is said to retain rather than emit his semen; in the Fourth consecration, in which as we see the copulation is repeated, he not only retains it but is said to reverse it upwards. In itself this is a not uncommon yogic sexual technique; but in the context of what should be an initiatory rite, the entrance of a pupil into the religion, it is highly unnatural that that pupil should be expected to perform so advanced a feat. And in forbidding emission of semen in the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, while making it perhaps a little easier for the intiand to repeat his performance in the *caturthābhīṣeka*, Prajñāśrī appears to go against the *Hevajratāntra* itself, which should have presumably been his main scriptural authority.³⁸ Altogether, Prajñāśrī's anomalous account is for many reasons clearly “secondary”. I shall return below to what may underlie what one cannot but suspect were innovations intended for the use of at most a tiny group of virtuosi.

I have presented just enough material here to show that in Yoginītantra as in the Guhyasamāja system we do not find a single unanimous view either on the existence or the nature of the Fourth empowerment. There is much that I am leaving unreported here, but I believe that we are not overlooking anything that would very substantially affect the overall broad picture that emerges of a historical development and of its underlying motives.³⁹

37 For the Tibetan text see AbhiVi Derge fols. 48v7–49r4.

38 That the *Hevajratāntra* itself did prescribe emission of semen during the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, followed by the intiand's consumption thereof, is seen most clearly in HeTa 2.4.39: *na kareṇa tato grhyet śuktikayā na śaṅkhakaiḥ amṛtaṃ jihvayā grāhyam edhanāya balasya vai*.

39 My most important omission here (Sakurai too, no doubt for reasons similar to mine, leaves it out of consideration) is the Kālacakra system, in which of course much interesting, and in several respects untypical or innovative material is to be found.

Historically speaking, the evidence points quite clearly to the fact that this Fourth was an addition, and one which is fundamentally connected with the cryptic formulation of GuSaTa 18.113. In the different *pakṣas* we saw as to the nature of this Fourth consecration we can now easily discern different strategies. The first of the two *pakṣas* rejected by Vāgīśvarakīrti can be seen as an attempt to accommodate a Fourth empowerment without actually adding anything to the ritual performance; the taking with the tongue of the semen from the consort's sex, usually a part of the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka*, is labelled the Fourth empowerment. The idiosyncratic solution chosen by Prajñāśrī is an interpretation in ritual of the cryptic *caturthaṃ tat punas tathā*; if the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* consisted in the initiand's uniting with a consort, to say that the "fourth is that again, in the same way" must mean that in the Fourth empowerment the act of copulation is repeated. Of course there are other factors involved in the development represented by Prajñāśrī's solution, but it seems to me that it is above all the formulation *caturthaṃ tat punas tathā* that is to be seen as underlying it.

As for the solution that came to be the preferred one, I see it as having, aside from the *caturthaṃ tat punas tathā*, two main factors that shaped its two components. First of all, the idea that the Fourth empowerment consisted in an oral instruction of the initiand by the guru was probably, on one level at least, another attempt to accommodate a further empowerment without significantly changing the way in which the ritual was performed. For it seems to be an early tradition that after the *guhyābhiṣeka* and the *prajñājñānābhiṣeka* the guru proceeded to impart instruction on the nature of reality (or on the true meaning of the initiations received). This is found stated in the important and early *Guhyasamājamaṇḍalavidhi* by Jñānapāda's pupil Dīpaṃkarabhadra, but with no hint that it is understood as forming a separate empowerment.⁴⁰ This manual can be shown to have retained its importance for centuries; an extensive commentary on it exists (Tōhoku catalogue No. 1871 by Ratnākaraśānti)—a very unusual distinction for a mere manual of the ritual—and it is quoted and referred to explicitly in several later texts, including works that themselves belong rather to the Yoginītantra systems.⁴¹ It is thus conceivable that it is indeed this ritual manual by Dīpaṃkarabhadra that, while not knowing a Fourth empowerment itself, provided the element that was re-interpreted as

40 *maṇḍalaṃ devatātattvaṃ ācāryaparikarma ca | saṃkathya guhyaprajñābhyāṃ siktṛvā tattvaṃ samud-diśet* GuMaVi fol. 15v3–4.

41 Cf. e.g. VaĀv MS A fols. 59v7–60r1, MS B fol. 55r1–2; YaTaMaUpā fol. 26r4. That Abhayākara-gupta held the *Guhyasamājamaṇḍalavidhi* in high esteem is clear already simply from his references to and acknowledged quotations from it. Close examination of the YaTaMaUpā shows the deep influence, though in this case not explicitly acknowledged, of Dīpaṃkarabhadra's work; the same holds true, I do not doubt, of many other ritual manuals.

being the Fourth.⁴²

The second factor that I suggest was involved is one which is even harder to pin down, and which I extrapolate from some accounts of the Fourth empowerment rather than being able to attest its prior existence. Let me put it that it was the not always clearly formulated idea that while the empowerment ritual, and particularly the set of three consecrations, was a cause (though an indirect rather than a direct one) of the initiand's future Buddhahood, the ritual should contain also an element that corresponded to his enlightenment itself; that even the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, though a religious act, was nonetheless in a sense worldly (*laukika*) or conventional (*saṃvṛtisat*). The Fourth empowerment was then to serve ideally as the goal, ultimately real (*paramārthasat*), utterly transcendent (*lokottara*). Such a role had probably been previously played, at least to a certain extent, by the *prajñājñānābhīṣeka*, but this had meant that that element of the ritual had had the double function of being both a purifier (of the initiand's mind) and a foretaste or representative of the pure goal.⁴³

Once the orthodox solution had become the most widely accepted,⁴⁴ its spread may have been furthered by the composition of manuals giving a general account of Higher Yogatantra consecrations, meant to serve as a template no matter which particular cult was being followed or into which *maṇḍala* a pupil was being initiated. In the popular manuals of this type, the *Vajrāvalī*, the *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā* and the *Kriyāsamuccaya*, the consecration always includes some form of the orthodox type of *caturthābhīṣeka*. It may have been under the influence of such texts and of the practice that they reflect that Kumāracandra felt motivated to give an account of Kṛṣṇayamāri empowerment ritual that conformed to the "Yoginītantra-norm" rather than accepting at face value what from a historical perspective seems clearly to be an older (or at least archaic) form of the ritual envisaged by the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* itself.⁴⁵

There are, I think, lessons of various kinds that can be learned from what has been considered here. Let me conclude by emphasizing only two points. Firstly, and I think most obviously, it is instructive to see how much of the multiplicity of views, positions, and arguments preserved in our texts can be plausibly seen as, in the first place, the

42 It cannot be ruled out however that Dīpaṃkarabhadra himself was following an earlier, possibly scriptural, source. This may perhaps be suggested by the quotations I have noticed of what seems to be a single *pāda* of a metrical text, of which it is not made quite clear however whether or not it is scriptural, which speaks of an instruction following the *abhīṣekas*: *siktvā tattvaṃ prakāśayet* (APa fol. 14r5; ViPra ad *Kālacakratantra* 5.112, vol. 3 p. 53, 1). But note that both the authors who quote this *pāda*, Abhayākara Gupta and the self-styled Bodhisattva who authored the *Vimalaprabhā*, postdate Dīpaṃkarabhadra by several centuries; till the source of the *pāda* has been found we have no good reason to assume that Jñānapāda's disciple indeed knew it.

43 The same double role is played by the *caturthābhīṣeka*, it is interesting to note, in the second *yoginītantra-pakṣa* in the *Abhīṣekanirukti*; cf. n. 32 above.

44 Its wide acceptance among the Tibetans is indicated by the fact that in indigenous Tibetan works the *caturthābhīṣeka* is not infrequently called *tshig dbaṇi*, a term for which I have seen no exact equivalent in an Indian work available in Sanskrit, though it may be noted that Vāgīśvarakīrti in his *Samkṣiptābhīṣekavidhi* twice uses the expression *vacanamātrābhīṣeka* (cf. p. 270 above).

45 Cf. n. 14 above.

result of alternative exegetical, interpretive, strategies. Scripture and how to interpret scripture play central roles even where one might not at first expect it.

Secondly, I for one cannot help being struck by the creativity with which Indian Buddhist tantric teachers often found new ritual solutions for problems with which they were faced, and with which they attempted to resolve inconsistencies, keeping in mind the Buddhist function which their rituals should have. As masters not only of ritual but of ritual scholarship, they deserve the respect of modern ritual scholars; and it would be a pity if the Collaborative Research Center “Ritual Dynamics”, with its far-ranging span of studies, were not to give more attention to these predecessors and to the remarkable rituals, and texts teaching and discussing rituals, which they created.

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