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*Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism.* By Yael Bentor. Brill's Indological Library Vol. 11, edited by Johannes Bronkhorst. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996. Pp. xxii + 415. ISBN 90-04-10541-7.

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The heart of this carefully presented, but never nit-picking or pedantic, monograph is an explanation of a complex Tibetan ritual enacted yearly by the monks of Dga'-ldan-chos-'phel-gling monastery at Bodhanāth Stūpa, outside Kathmandu, Nepal. The ritual, in essence, is the performance of a text written by Khri-byang Rinpoche, the late Junior Tutor of the 14th Dalai Lama (published in New Delhi in 1975). Its abbreviated Tibetan title *Rab-gnas Cho-ga Dge-legs Rgya-mtsho'i Char-'bebs* Bentor renders as *The Consecration Ritual, Immense Downpour of Virtue and Goodness*. The purpose of the ritual, amongst others, is to rejuvenate the *stūpa* as an effective site for the laity to generate merit from offerings. As Bentor herself says about her research, she was fortunate both in her choice of monastery and text. Dga'-ldan-chos-'phel-gling was founded in Nepal only forty years ago, but the monks of Skyid-grong Bsam-gtan-gling, a monastery just across the border from Nepal in Tibet whose unbroken traditions date back to 1756, took refuge there when they fled the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, bringing with them the entire contents of their monastery and their traditions. Bentor dedicates the book to one of the monks who was a local informant for her work, and one of the ornaments of her book is that she shows sympathy for the Tibetan ritual specialists and their world, while at the same time approaching the ritual and social settings he is studying with a scholarly detachment.

As for the text by Khri-byang Rinpoche, it follows the well-known consecration tradition of the Lower Tantric College (Rgyud-smad Grwa-tshang) of Lhasa. The text's most important feature, from Bentor's point of view, is that it supplies many of the ellipses that earlier ritual texts of this sort usually contain. Although in her description of the text (pp. 66-75) Bentor does not say so, one suspects that Khri-byang Rinpoche supplied the missing parts because he was aware that most of the Tibetan monks in exile able to supply the ellipses were already old, and that the new generation of monks in exile would not be able to properly continue the tradition unless it was spelled out in detail.

The annual consecration of Bodhanāth Stūpa by the monks of Dga'-ldan-chos-'phel-glingon Lha-babs Dus-chen, the 22nd day of the 9th Tibetan month and one of the four important festival days of the Tibetan year celebrating Buddha's descent from the Tuṣita Heaven after teaching his mother, is not an old tradition. The monastery, which Bentor describes as "representing the Dalai Lama" (p. 73), began the annual consecration in 1972 following the repair of the *stūpa* after it had been damaged by fire. It is evident that the consecration ceremony has wider ramifications, both for the Newaris and the new Tibetan refugees of the Kathmandu Valley. Bentor only briefly touches on this subject ("the annual consecration...carries with it a certain

social and political significance" p. 73), and focuses instead on the ritual itself.

The book has a longish Introduction followed by a translation of the entire ritual which she breaks down into three sections corresponding to the three days it takes to perform the complete ceremony: preliminary, main part and concluding rituals. She also includes a copy of the Tibetan text, various lists of Tibetan consecration rituals in a number of appendices, an excellent bibliography and an index. The detailed explanations that precede each part of the translation, incorporating descriptions of the actual ritual she witnessed taking place, cross-references to parallels in *Smarta* (Vedic/Hindu) rituals and identification of Buddhist sources (mainly from the *Kanjur* and *Tenjur*) make for a dense but always informative presentation. Though primarily, no doubt, of interest to the specialist, it is not without interest to a wider audience as well. Given the extreme complexity of the layers of ritual she unpacks in Khri-byang Rinpoche's text it is surprising that Bentor rarely strays into needless repetition. One—perhaps the only—exception to this is on page 114 where she repeats unnecessarily the exact same note found on page 42. It should also be mentioned, given the expense of monographs printed in academic series such as Brill's, that there are a small, but noticeable number of typographical errors. One in particular, eight carnal grounds for charnel grounds (p. 144) stands out. All are unimportant except for an odd series of Tibetan equivalents for cleansing, cleansing materials and cleansing substances given on pages 110-112 (and repeated on p. 215). It seems unlikely to this reviewer that dag, 'dag and even bdag are all correct.

One of the main points Bentor makes in her Introduction, and it is timely given the number of new books dealing with Buddhist philosophy, is the need to balance the unwarranted division between the study of Buddhist ritual and the study of Buddhist philosophy. She observes that Tibetan monks, both learned and unlearned, spend much of their day performing rituals of one sort or the other, and a modern scholar with a knowledge of only philosophical texts is not studying philosophy and contemplating philosophical problems in quite the same way. Her point is that ritual texts are suffused with ideas spelled out systematically in the philosophical texts. Not only are there explicit references in the ritual itself to the illusory nature of phenomena and to such rituals being merely skillful means for the benefit of those who do not understand, as Bentor makes clear, the entire ritual is built up and performed within a world transformed from an ordinary into a sacred appearance. In other words, it is built up in the ritual specialist's imagination by the exercise of meditative powers.

In this regard, the question of the relationship between the dam-tshigsems-pa and the ye-shes sems-pa is a central concern of hers. She re-

tains both Tibetan terms untranslated throughout, but in essence the *dam-tshigs sems-pa* is the symbol (the statue, *stūpa* or book) and the *ye-shes sems-pa* is that which is symbolized. In Buddhist terms, the former is the conventional truth—the realm of diverse appearance, and the later (in Bendor's reading) the ultimate truth beyond expression and diversity. She grapples with the central paradox of Tibetan rituals, namely how an all-pervading essence (an emptiness or *dharmatā*—the *ye-shes sems-pa*) which is without difference or location can be caused, through ritual, to be located in a particular place—in this case Bodhanāth Stūpa. She cites a number of Tibetan authorities, all of whom, with slight differences say (as Bendor summarizes on p. 18): "Thus, consecration is explained as a process of the localization of the omnipresent 'divine power' for the sake of those who do not know its true nature."

Bendor's point about the study of texts is unassailable, but the philosophical position she arrives at based on her study of the ritual texts raises the question of whether the Tibetan Buddhist ritual she is studying is simply a Hindu one under a different name. One rather suspects that it is, but one should point out that the Tibetan ritual specialists involved would strenuously object to such a characterization and insist that what makes their ritual different is their "understanding of emptiness."

Another central theme of Bendor's monograph is that Tibetan Buddhist rituals as we now have them are built up out of many historical layers of text. She makes no sweeping statements, but shows that pre-tantric Mahāyāna Buddhist elements are found in the rituals as are pre-Mahāyāna ones. The ceremony of opening the eyes—which she speculates to have been an early complete consecration ceremony in itself—in Khri-byang Rinpoche's ritual text becomes just one part of a number of sub-initiations, and the recitation of the very old verse of dependent origination beginning *Yedharmā...* is integrated into the second day of the ritual even though there is evidence to show that in ancient times just the recitation of it alone sufficed to bless and enliven a statue, reliquary or book. Her larger point is that Tibetan ritualists feel comfortable with any number of different strategies which tradition has deemed efficacious, and present day rituals bring them all into one larger ritual without feeling any contradiction. She replaces the earlier, incorrect notion that the ritual was written as a single piece by a writer who was unaware of inconsistencies or incoherence with the understanding of a complex ritual built up out of many different bits each from a different layer of history.

A final important contribution Bendor makes is to demonstrate conclusively how this specific consecration ritual, i.e. a complex ritual performed only once during the year, is seamlessly built up on and out of the daily rituals that define the life of a Tibetan monk. Since her informants were from

the Dge-lugs-pa sect the basic daily ritual that she found them using was the *Rdo-rje 'Jigs-byed sādhana*. This basic ritual text (in other sects it might be Cakra-saṃvara, Hevajra, etc. but the basic ritual remains the same) is a vehicle for transforming the ordinary person and the world into a divine being in a sacred world—a world suffused and given meaning by the presence of and search for enlightenment. The breakdown and analysis of this basic daily ritual and the explanation of how it fits in with the other rituals takes up a major part of Bentor's work, and it is in her ability to focus on the centrality of the daily ritual and show how the other complex ritual fits in with it that her greatest contribution lies. The reader unfamiliar with Tibetan rituals will still be hard pressed, just from reading her book, to build up a sense of the entire Tibetan ritual day, the immense mass of detail Bentor presents always threatens to overwhelm the reader, but there is no doubt that by taking the trouble to spell out in careful detail the ritual from the bottom up, so to speak, leaving out no part, she comes as close as a writer can to recreating the authentic experience of the ritual act.