

THE EARTH RITUAL: SUBJUGATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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In Tibetan Buddhism, the Earth Ritual (*sa'i cho ga*) is an essential component of the preliminary rites for the consecration of a site as a suitable place for Vajrayāna practice. It is necessary at the outset of a retreat or practice session, as the foundation for the establishment of the boundaries of the retreat and for the creation of the *maṇḍala*. At monasteries where periodic intensive practice sessions are performed, there may be an annual renewal of the site consecration.²

The rituals described here are from the rNying ma pa bDud 'joms tradition, but both the context for, and even the basic structure, appear to be common to Tibetan Buddhism as a whole.³ In the bDud 'joms tradition, it is

¹ An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the 8th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1998. It had been intended for publication in the conference proceedings, but due to an indefinite delay in this publication, it seemed preferable not to hold back this article any longer. Financial assistance from the British Academy, the Colyer-Fergusson Trust (University of Kent at Canterbury) and the Department of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter, made it possible to deliver this paper at the Bloomington IATS Seminar.

² Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1985: 36) report that the consecration ritual of the Guhyasamāja is performed at least once a year in monasteries which practise this Anuttarayoga tantra tradition. Similarly, at the rNying ma pa monastery in Rewalsar (Himachal Pradesh, India), the Earth Ritual was performed annually at the beginning of the first month practice session (Cantwell 1989: 266ff).

³ A dGe lugs pa version of the rite is translated in Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1985: 37-40); it is also discussed in mKhas-grub-rje's *rGyud sde spyi rnam* [hereafter referred to as KG] in the section on creating the maṇḍala for initiation (Lessing and Wayman: 278-285). It is clear, especially from Lessing and Wayman where the Tibetan is given, that the same themes occur — in parts, virtually the same wording is used — as in the bDud 'joms texts. Moreover, the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* of the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* [hereafter referred to as PCN] shares a similar passage on the Earth ritual with the bDud 'joms *gnam lcags spu gri sgrub khog* text. Furthermore, a ritual manual on the Nine-uṣṇiṣa-deity (gtsug dgu) maṇḍala of the *Durgatipariśodhanatantra* (Stein no.579: ff.3-4) refers to the Earth ritual and also shares two similar verses to those found in the bDud 'joms' manuals, as does the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra* (see note 17; I have consulted the Peking *bKa' 'gyur* edition of this). Thanks to Tanaka Kimiaki of Toho-Kenkyūkai (The Eastern Institute), Tokyo, for alerting me to these two sources and to Burkhard Quessel of the British Library for supplying me with photocopies. These works will be referred to below. Since the original work on this paper was completed, Tanaka Kimiaki has brought my attention to his current work on Nāgabodhi's *Śrī-guhyasamājamāṇḍalopāyikā-viṃśatī-vidhi*, which also contains a version of the verses concerned. Tanaka has worked on a Sanskrit manuscript of the work, photographed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (N.G.M.P.P. E-18322, reel E 920/12), as well as the Tibetan version in the *bsTan 'gyur* (with particular reference to the National Center for Tibetan Studies edition, Beijing 1997). He further notes (2-3, 17) that parallels are moreover found in the *Kriyāsaṅgrahapañjikā* and in Padmaśrimitra's *Maṇḍalopāyikā*, and he suggests (3) that the ultimate source is an old tradition of the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra*. An English translation of the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra* from four Tibetan editions and the Taishō Chinese edition (Hodge 2003) is also now available. Richard Kohn (1997: 369-373) has described an Earth Ritual in the context of the creation of the maṇḍala for the Mani Rimdu (*ma ṅi ril sgrub*) Festival. In this case, the term *sa chog* is used to apply not only to similar rituals of purifying and

in the *sGrub khog* sections of the collected texts of each deity cycle, that full instructions and recitations for the Earth Ritual are given.⁴ These texts give the full details for conducting the intensive ritual practice sessions involving many practitioners (*sGrub chen*) which are regularly performed at monastic institutions, and which require the construction of elaborate maṇḍalas and so on.⁵

Both NCP (230-231) and DG (1b) give the five perfections (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*) — of the place, the principal practitioner, the retinue, the requisite substances and the time⁶ — as the necessary basis for the "Great Accomplishment" (*sgrub chen*). The place (*gnas*) should have the expected qualities necessary for the specific cycle, the Master (*sgrub pa'i slob dpon bdag nyid*) should be genuine and the retinue (*'khor*) endowed with a pure connection (*dam tshig gtsang ba*); the necessities required for the practice (*sgrub pa'i yo byad kyi rdzas*) should be gathered up in advance, and the timing (*dus*) should be astrologically auspicious. Specific details are not supplied in these *sGrub khog* manuals but are well-known from elsewhere,⁷ and in the case of established monasteries, they do not necessitate any special renewed attention.

The Earth Ritual itself constitutes the first part of the foundation practices (*sngon 'gro*) which form the introductory section of the "Actual Stages of the

transforming the earth as those described below, but also to the following rites of establishing the boundaries of the site.

⁴ The ritual manuals drawn on here are:

— *dpal rdo rje phur bu bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri'i stod las sgrub chen gyi khog dbub grub gnyis 'dod 'jo'i dga' ston* from *The Collected Works of H H bDud-'joms Rin-po-che*, Volume 10: 227-277. [Hereafter, referred to as NCP.]

— *'phags mchog nam mkha'i rgyal po'i sgrub chen gyi khog dbub phan bde'i chu gter* from the *dam chos sprul sku'i snying thig*. [Hereafter, referred to as NG.]

— *bdud 'dul dbang drag rdo rje gro lod kyi sgrub pa chen po'i las rim dngos grub gter mdzod* which is the *sGrub khog* section from the bDud 'joms rdo rje Gro lod cycle (printed in Manali). [Hereafter, referred to as DG.]

I was a participant observer of the practice of the ritual from NG at the rNying ma pa monastery in Rewalsar in 1982, and of the ritual from NCP in Canterbury, UK, in 1987.

⁵ "Commentaries" (*bsnyen yig*) on each deity cycle, in contrast, provide instructions for the necessary visualisations and meditations which accompany the recitation of the main sādhana practice, along with advice for conducting the practice under retreat conditions.

⁶ These are a slightly amended version of a list by the same name, also referred to as five certainties (*nges pa lnga*) — of teacher, teaching, retinue, place and time — attributes of the saṃbhogakāya (Dorje and Kapstein, in Dudjom 1991 Vol.2: 141). The "five perfections" seem to have the special senses given here in the specific Mahāyoga Generation Stage context. The list is alluded to in such a context by Dudjom (1991 Vol.1: 280). See also following note.

⁷ For example, although not discussed under the heading of the five perfections, the *bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri bsnyen yig* describes the qualities of the practitioner(s) (76-77), the place (77-78), the time (78-79) and the requisites (79). The commentary on the Phur pa cycle by 'Jam-mgon A-myes-zhabs (*bcom ldan 'das rdo rje gzhon nu'i gdams pa nyams len gyi chu bo chen po sgrub pa'i thabs kyi rnam par bshad pa 'phrin las kyi pad mo rab tu rgyas pa'i nyin byed*) discusses these five perfections at length (146-156), as the first of the *Khog don drug*. It is interesting to note that the PCN mentions the Earth Ritual in Chapter Three on the stages of the maṇḍala (*so so'i dkyil 'khor gyi rim pa bshad pa*) and here too, the Chapter begins by giving information on the necessary qualities of the Vajra Master, the characteristics of the students, appropriate and inappropriate places for the various kinds of maṇḍalas and then it mentions the ritual necessities before referring to the Earth Ritual (see Mayer 1996b: 358-372).

Accomplishment" (*sgrub pa'i rim pa dngos*) which most of each *sGrub khog* manual is mainly concerned with.⁸

Examining and Requesting the Site

Both in NCP and KG, the preliminary stage in the Earth Ritual is *Examining the Earth* (*sa brtag pa*).⁹ Neither text gives full details, and NCP (231) points out that this examination is unnecessary in an old practice place. Besides involving an investigation of the characteristics of the site, NCP refers to the Belly Wriggler (*lto 'phye*), who is the *klu* deity of the ground whose exact position should be ascertained.¹⁰

The following section, *Requesting* (*bslang ba*) or *Requesting the Site* (*sa bslang ba*) is common to NCP, DG and KG. NCP says that it is necessary to request the use of the land first from visible human owners or authorities,

⁸ In NCP, this section starts on page 231 and runs to page 276; the entire *sGrub khog* is on pages 227-277, only adding a short section on the "Fruits of the Accomplishment" in the last page. In DG, the section (called in full, *sgrub pa'i las rim dngos*) begins on p.1b and ends on the final page (19).

⁹ The PCN also refers in passing to the idea of "examining" the site before the ritual of "holding" it: "lung pa'i ri dang bar snang dang/ rigs lnga so so'i mtshan nyid dang/ rab tu brtags te gzung bar bya/" (Mayer 1996b: 371). Furthermore, in a section on establishing temples, Thubten Legshay Gyatsho (1979: 29-30) begins the discussion of examining and taking possession of the site (*yl sa dpyad dang sa brtag bzung*) with a list of auspicious and inauspicious characteristics of the place. Similarly, Stein 579: 3b-4a (see note 3) discusses examining the place for the maṇḍala and gives a list of its qualities before mentioning the Earth ritual proper.

¹⁰ The *lto 'phye* is mentioned in KG under the section on Clearing the Site (*sa sbyang ba*; see below). In a note, Lessing and Wayman (280-281, nb.4), give the directions in which the *lto 'phye* has its head and tail at different seasons, taken from the discussion in Tsong kha pa's *sNgags rim chen mo*, which is based on Vibhūti's *maṇḍala-vidhi*. Lessing and Wayman (280) suggest that in this context, it is a "tortoise" rather than a "serpent" deity which is intended. In their translation, Lessing and Wayman give "breast goer" for *lto 'phye*, which they equate with Sanskrit *uraga* (280-281). However, while Lessing and Wayman may be correct in the case of their text, when I was working on NCP, my monk informant, the late Lama Lodro of Rewalsar, explained the term *lto 'phye* ("Belly Wriggler") as referring to a *klu* deity. Gyatsho (1979: 30-32) gives virtually identical instructions as those in Lessing and Wayman for ascertaining the position of a *lto 'phye* and for digging out and purifying a rectangular section of soil depicted at the crook of the *lto 'phye's* right arm. Gyatsho (32) describes the *lto 'phye* as a serpent bellied earth deity, having a hood of snakes and the torso of a man, holding a jewel over his hip with his right hand, while his left hand covers his left ear. The lower part of his body has the shape of a snake's tail. A diagram (which, however, is reversed) of the *lto 'phye* on a square divided into small sections to aid in calculating the deity's exact position on any specific day, is given on p.31. The sides of the large square are each at one of the cardinal directions, and the three hundred and sixty small squares along the edges of the large square represent the days of the lunar calendar year, the three winter months at the southern side, the spring months at the western side and so on. At the mid point of each season, the *lto 'phye* will be situated at the central east-west or north-south axis, with its head pointing towards the direction of the day concerned. It gradually rotates in a clockwise direction, each day its head moving along one square. Martin Boord (1994: 10) mentions that a feature of later Buddhist architectural texts is that they give details of calculating the position of the earth-dwelling nāga whose domain is required, and of appeasing the nāga by digging the earth and burying precious offerings in the appropriate spot. Barend Jan Terwiel (1985) gives an interesting account of variants from diverse Asian groups in the idea of an annual rotating nāga, with suggestions about its origins, and with several reproductions of diagrams of the nāga deriving from different cultural traditions. (Thanks to Lambert Schmithausen of Hamburg University for drawing my attention to this source.)

with an honest statement of one's intentions and any required payment, and secondly, from the invisible owners i.e. the earth masters and mistresses (*sa bdag*). KG also has these same two categories for *Requesting*, similarly referring to begging permission (*gnang bzhu*) from the owners and authorities ("sa de'i bdag po rgyal po dang/ grong dpon sogs..." ; 278-279). Interestingly, PCN has a corresponding passage which, as in NCP, specifies the necessity for notifying the owners and paying the necessary price, in order to avoid any later disruption.¹¹

The instructions in NCP and DG for preparing offerings for the invisible *sa bdag* involve arranging heaps (such as flowers) for a maṇḍala offering and other offerings including a general and a specific *sa bdag gtor ma*. Detailed meditations are also given for purifying the ritual vase, scented water and the offerings.

The two *gtor mas* needed for the ritual are the specific *gtor ma* for the principal Earth Goddess (*Sa'i lha mo*) and a general *gzhi bdag gtor ma* for all the numerous lesser earth deities. [See diagram] For the ritual at the Rewalsar monastery, the Master of Offerings (*mchod dpon*) and his assistants arranged the offerings in the western area of the temple, where the maṇḍala was later to be constructed. In the middle of a low table, the principal *Sa lha gtor ma* was set on a tripod, beneath which an upside-down bronze dish was placed with five small heaps of rice, one in the centre and the others at the four directions. The usual set of peaceful offerings — water for drinking and washing, flowers, incense, butter lamp, perfume and food — were arranged in a clockwise circle around the tripod. A dish containing a goblet used for offerings to protective deities was filled with tea and placed to the left. The *gzhi bdag gtor ma*, with two more offering bowls of water each side, and an offering bowl containing two *rdo rjes* was put in front.

After the basis of the usual practice (of generating oneself as the *yi dam* deity), the first recitation of the ritual, for purifying the ritual vase and its water, begins by mentally cleansing the water and invoking the appropriate deity — Amṛtkuṇḍalī in the case of NCP; Hayagrīva for NG — upon a lotus and sun throne above the water.¹² In NG, after the deity's primordial awareness (*jñānasattva*) has become inseparable from the visualised form, Hayagrīva is praised and the practitioners visualise a stream of elixir

¹¹ The wording has some exact parallels with NCP:

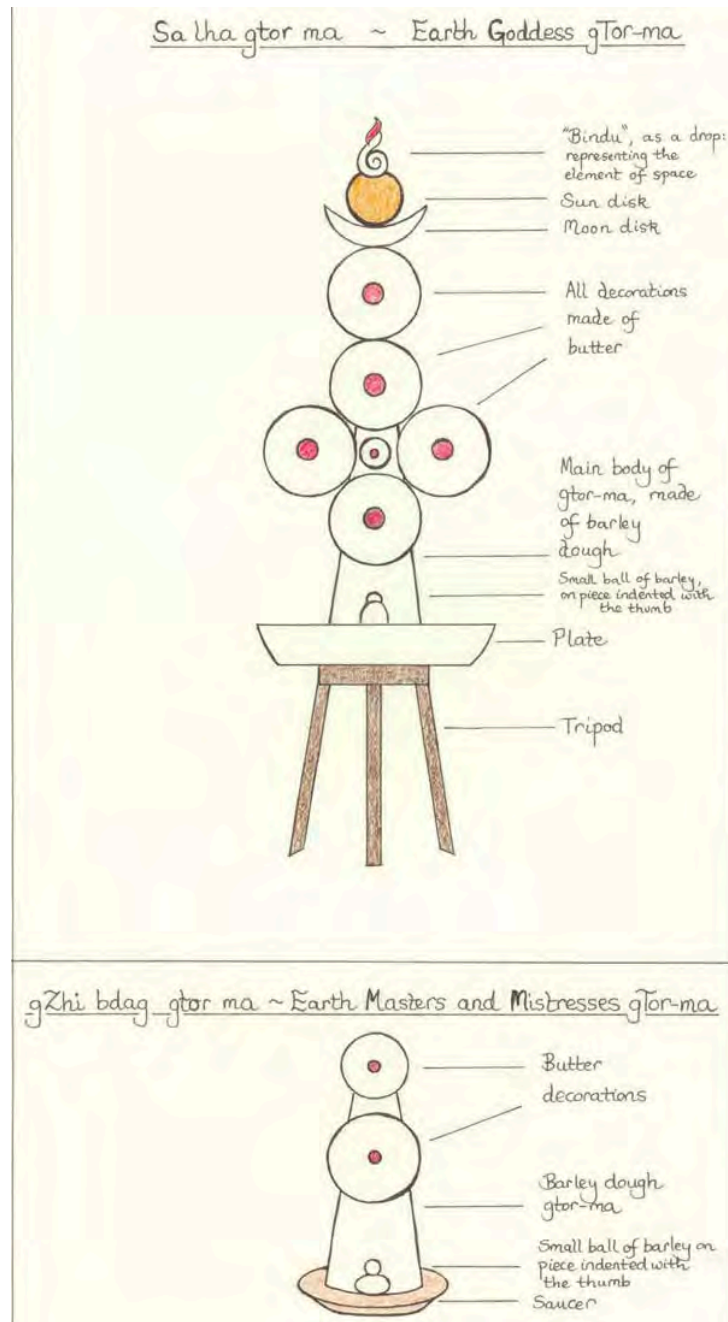
"rgyal po'am sa bdag la sogs la/
dbang btsan thug thub ma yin par/
bden pa'i gdam smras rin gyis blang/" (Mayer 1996b: 373. Three of the editions have *bslang* for *blang* and Mayer notes that this reading is preferable).

This compares with NCP's "rgyal po la sogs pas yul de bdag tu bzung ba yod no dgos pa'i rin dang bden pa'i gdam gyis bkrol te gnang ba zhu zhing slad mar bar chad mi 'byung ba bya'o/" (my emphasis). Gyatsho (30) also has a parallel passage concerning the request from "land owners, such as the king or his ministers" ("rgyal po blon po sogs/ sa yi bdag po..."), made by an agreement or payment, followed by the request to the invisible earth goddess ("mi snang sa'i lha mo..").

The shorter DG does not mention the request to the human owners, beginning with the same wording as in the first lines of NCP for the request to the invisible owners.

¹² Our other texts are more terse. KG (Lessing and Wayman: 279-281) gives brief instructions for Requesting the Site from the invisible owners but not the full recitations and it does not mention these introductory purificatory rites. Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1995: 37) briefly refer to the preparatory rituals in which one visualises oneself as Vajradhara and consort and the various ritual implements and offerings are blessed. DG has no specific section on the ritual vase. It simply mentions that after one's own yoga (practice), the offerings are to be purified with the Horse Mantra (presumably, Hayagrīva's).

flowing down into the water from the seed syllable and surrounding mantra



at the deity's heart. After a mantra recitation, the deity melts into light, dissolving into the droplets of water/elixir, the nature of which should be imagined to be tiny wrathful deities. NCP is slightly briefer: the visualisation of the deity is followed by the mantra recitation and a meditation on the deity dissolving into the atoms of water which each take on the essential nature of Amṛtakundalī.

The *gtor mas* and offerings are then purified and consecrated; virtually the same verses are used in NCP, DG and NG. After the mantra referred to as the Svābhāva mantra ("oṃ svābhāva śuddhaḥ sarva dharmāḥ svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ") and the accompanying meditation on Emptiness, a jewel offering dish is visualised overflowing with innumerable offerings together with the appropriate offering goddesses. The offering mantra and a further verse proclaiming that the *gtor ma* is heaped up within the immeasurable jewel *gtor ma* vessel as a mass of substances delighting the senses is recited together with the syllables "oṃ āḥ hūṃ" three times.

Requesting the Site from the Earth Goddess

The imagery drawn upon in this ritual derives from the mythological accounts of the Enlightenment of the Buddha Śākyamuni. It is a well-known story throughout the Buddhist world, and can be found in the *Lalitavistara*, a Sanskrit composition of around the turn of the Christian era, and in a slightly different version in a later influential Pāli text, the possibly fifth century *Nidāna-kathā*, which was composed in Ceylon.¹³ Essentially, in this myth which expresses the Buddha's pre-eminence, it is the earth itself, represented by the Earth Goddess, which legitimates the Buddha's claim as being uniquely worthy to realise and proclaim his Enlightenment. When Śākyamuni takes his seat at Bodhgaya intent on his resolution to attain the perfect and complete Enlightenment of a Buddha, he is challenged by Māra, whose assaults on Śākyamuni's equanimity have miserably failed. Māra refuses to accept defeat and chides Śākyamuni to get up since the bodhisattva has no living witness to affirm his right to transcend worldly existence. In response, Śākyamuni touches the earth with his right hand - a gesture which became established as representing the Enlightenment in images of the Buddha - and calls upon the earth as his witness. The earth rumbles, the Goddess emerges from it and confirms that the bodhisattva has won the right to attain Enlightenment through his unsurpassed practice of generosity and the perfections throughout innumerable previous lifetimes. At this Māra and his host scatter in confusion, and are thereafter unable to disturb the bodhisattva's meditation.

The principle of the ritual request to the Earth Goddess is that the Vajrayāna practitioner has the authority to stand in for the Buddha; the Earth Goddess is obliged to recognise the legitimacy of using the earth for the Buddhist maṇḍala, to surrender her prior rights to the possession of the earth and to act as a benevolent protectress of the practice. There is a ritual re-enactment of Śākyamuni's summoning of the Earth Goddess as witness, with an additional feature that in return for relinquishing her ownership of

¹³ In Lamotte (575), the *Lalitavistara* is described as, "a Sarvāstivādin work strongly tinged with Mahāyānism", and (653-654) its dating and characteristics are discussed. It would seem to be a familiar source on the Earth Goddess story for Tibetan scholars: Dudjom (1991 Vol.1: 420) quotes from it (Ch.21 v.87-88) in this context. In Poppe's English translation of the Mongolian version (based on the Tibetan), the account of the Earth Goddess can be found on page 157. The *Nidāna-kathā* constitutes the introduction to the *Jātaka* and became the most important hagiography of the Buddha in the Pāli tradition — See Thomas: 134-135, 282-283. In this version, the themes are virtually identical but it would seem from Thomas' rendition that the goddess is not described and it is the earth itself which acts as the bodhisattva's witness (Thomas: 138-9).

the land and agreeing to support the Vajrayāna transformation of it into the maṇḍala, the practitioner must make an offering as recompense.¹⁴

Thus, the ritual proceeds with a Vajrayāna version of touching the earth and calling forth the Goddess. In NCP, the wording is as follows:

- 232 line 6 - (One) should make the gesture of striking the earth with the
 233 line 1 rdo rje in the right hand.
 "Ha ha hūṃ hūṃ he he%
 Through (my) enjoining the Goddess's continuum with Vajra
 laughter,
 the earth opens up and the Ancient Established Goddess
 (arises),
 her colour like purified gold.
 line 2 (She has) one face and two hands;
 (she) holds a vase of jewels.
 (She) is peaceful, with a smiling expression.
 (She) wears a mantle of silk and is adorned with various jewel
 ornaments.
 line 3 (She) issues forth above the earth which comes up to her
 navel."
 See (her thus).

NG describes the earth touching gesture¹⁵ and the Goddess's appearance similarly, adding that she is surrounded by a retinue of earth masters and mistresses (sa bdag) and that her visualised form is inseparable from her primordial awareness (Cantwell 1989: 228). Here, DG is a little more elaborate (2b, lines 2-3), including a meditation on inviting the primordial awareness Goddess and retinue from below the ground with light rays from one's heart. With the invitation mantra, the primordial awareness merges indivisibly into her form and with a mantra of investiture, she is empowered and crowned by Ratnasambhava. This reaffirms that the ultimate nature of the element earth is that of the Ratna Buddha family — the primordial awareness of equanimity.

Then, offerings are made and the Goddess is reminded of how she was enlisted to assist Śākyamuni to vanquish Māra:

- NCP 233, "Oṃ pri thi vī de vi sa pa ri vā ra a rghaṃ pra ficcha svā hā"
 line 3 Make offerings with this and the other (mantras), up to (and
 including "śapda".¹⁶
 "Oṃ a kā ro mu khaṃ sarva dharmā ṇaṃ ādya nutpanta totte
 oṃ aḥ hūṃ phaṭ svāhā"

¹⁴ Many Vajrayāna protective deity practices share a similar theme: the Vajrayāna practitioner takes the place of Guru Rinpoche or whichever Vajra Master is said to have subdued the deity, and renews the original pact by which the deity accepts the offerings and is thereby bound under oath to protect the Vajrayāna practice.

¹⁵ In a translation of a burnt offerings ritual, an abbreviated version of the preliminary blessing of the site is given as an alternative to a full Earth Ritual where the ground has already been blessed. This very short rite, reduced to essentials, nonetheless includes the generation of oneself as the Vajrayāna deity and the placing of the right hand, holding the vajra, on the ground (Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott 1987: 3).

¹⁶ That is, the words for the various offerings, padyaṃ, puṣpe etc. should be substituted for arghaṃ in turn.

- line 4 With (this mantra) three times, offer the *gtor ma* and seal (it) with subduing (the earth).
"You, Goddess, were mastered (by dint of) all the Buddha Protectors' methods of activity and especially, (the bodhisattva) stages and perfections!
Just as the Protector, Lion of the Śākyas,
line 5 overcame the host of Māra,
So I too have been Victorious over the host of Māra,
and I am drawing the maṇḍala!"

Telling the Goddess to enjoy the offering, the practitioners should then meditate that she bestows the earth and dissolves back into it. The entire section is word for word the same in DG;¹⁷ NG has longer verses, also addressing the Goddess's retinue and specifying that the Vajrayāna practitioner follows Śākyamuni in perfecting the two accumulations (of merit and wisdom). Requesting the earth for the maṇḍala, in order to purify the obscurations to Enlightenment, the Goddess is asked to ensure the safety of the place and to grant it prosperity and good qualities (Cantwell 1989: 228-9).¹⁸

¹⁷ Interestingly, although the account of the Earth ritual in Stein 579: 4a (see above, note 3) is brief, after the instruction to prepare the Earth Goddess's *gtor ma*, to invite her and to make offerings, the text has two verses which represent a close parallel to the verses here. I translate them as follows: "You, Goddess, have been witness to activities appropriate to all the Buddha Protectors, (the bodhisattva) stages and perfections! Just as the Lion of the Śākyas overcame the māras and attained Buddhahood, so I am victorious over the māras, drawing the maṇḍala!" The theme is clearly the same: the most significant difference in meaning is the substitution of "dbang du gyur" (mastered/brought under control) in NCP and DG for "dpang du gyur" (have been witness) in Stein 579, a reading found also in Nāgabodhi's *Śrī-guhyasamājamaṇḍalopāyikā-viṃśati-vidhi* (Tanaka: 7). The verses in Stein are followed by a mantra and the instruction to scrape the earth with the hand, meditating that it is requested ("bslang ba") and granted with the offering. For comparison, I give the transliterations of the verses here. NCP 233, line 4-5: "skyob pa sangs rgyas thams cad kyi/ spyod pa'i tshul dang khyad par du/ sa dang pha rol phyin rnams la/ lha mo khyod ni dbang du gyur/ sā kya seng ge skyob pa yis/ ji ltar bdud kyi sde bcom pa/ de bzhin bdag kyang bdud sde las/ rgyal bar byas te dkyil 'khor bri/". Stein 579 4a, line 3-5: "skyob pa sangs rgyas thams cad kyi/ spyod pa'i tshul du spyad pas ni/ sa dang pha rol phyin pa la/ lha mo khyod ni dpang du gyur/ ci ltar shag kya seng 'ge 'es/ bdud rnams bcom nas sangs rgyas pa/ de bzhin bdag gis bdud las ni/ rgyal bar byed de dkyil 'khor bri/". Parallel verses, slightly closer to the NCP version, also occur in the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra* (PTT No. 126 Vol.5, 244.3: line 5-6). In the Peking *bka' 'gyur* version, it shares NCP/DG's reading of "dbang du gyur", although Hodge 2003: 88, 479, gives, "You are a witness", which might suggest that the weight of the other *bka' 'gyur* editions he consulted, the Chinese Taishō edition, Chinese commentarial literature and versions of Buddhaguhya's *Piṇḍārtha*, would favour "dpang". Tanaka (personal communication 27/9/03) confirms that he believes "dpang", corresponding to Sanskrit "sākṣi" (which he found in the Sanskrit manuscript of Nāgabodhi he studied, and which Hodge [546 note 6] found in a transliteration of Sanskrit given in Chinese commentary on the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra*), to be the "correct" original reading. In the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra*, few details of the rite are given; it is mentioned (PTT No. 126 Vol.5, 244.3: line 6-7) that the earth is touched, the goddess summoned and established, flower and incense offerings are made, mantras recited and prostrations made to the tathāgatas, so that the earth is cleansed or purified (sa gzhi sbyang bar bya).

¹⁸ Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1985: 38) do not give a full account of the section concerning the Earth Goddess in the consecration ritual they describe, but simply mention that she is invited, offerings are made and her permission sought for the use of the earth. They also write that she is later invoked again, after drawing the grid for the maṇḍala, and after further offerings, she departs to her own abode (1985: 40). Similarly, Gyatsho (30-31) gives

The main elements of this ritual — the earth touching gesture, the invitation to the Goddess, the offerings, the protection gained from māras and hindrances to practice — are all mentioned in the PCN's Chapter Three.¹⁹

The Offering to the lesser Earth Masters and Mistresses and the Treasure Vase

Having secured the Earth Goddess's support, the *gzhi bdag gtor ma* is offered and the minor deities are similarly asked to relinquish the site for the purpose of constructing the maṇḍala.²⁰ They too are visualised coming to the place, bestowing the earth and then returning to their own individual abodes (NCP 233 line 6 - 234 line 2; DG 3 line 1-3; Cantwell 1989: 229-230).²¹ Finally, a "treasure vase", filled for example, with jewels, medicinal herbs, grains and certain other foodstuffs, is offered to the Earth Goddess and her retinue in order to help to create auspicious circumstances for the practice (NCP 233 line 3-5; Cantwell 1989: 230).²² It is placed in the middle of the offering shelf where it remains throughout the practice session. This completes the section on *Requesting*.

Cleansing the Earth

Following *Examining* and *Requesting the Site*, the third section of the Earth Ritual is *Cleansing the Earth* (*sa sbyong ba*).²³ In NCP (234-235), scented water

a brief summary of the offering to the Earth Goddess. Jackson translates: "Then, one must make offerings to the invisible earth goddess, and one should perform the ritual in which one receives her acknowledgement of the sincerity of one's endeavours in the same manner that she acted as witness for the Lord Buddha at the time of his overcoming the host of Māra".

¹⁹ Mayer 1996b: 372-3. Mayer translates (1996a: 128):
"Then at that moment, having adopted the mudrā,
One invites the witnessing goddess,
and having made offerings (to her she) dissolves into light
and is reabsorbed back into the earth.
Māras and vicious yakṣas
will (then) be unable to cause hindrances."

²⁰ In the tradition described by Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1985: 37-38), it seems that an offering to the kṣetrapālas comes before that to the Goddess.

²¹ It is also at this point in NG that the *gser skyems* (golden drink libation), prepared in the goblet for the protective deities (see above), is scattered outside (NG 6 line 1).

²² Similarly, Stein 579 (4a-b) mentions that a casket (*za ma tog*) filled with jewels, medicinal herbs and grains should be placed on the offering shelf (*stegs bu*). In the *Śrī-guhyasamājamāṇḍalopāyikā-viṃśati-vidhi* (Tanaka: 4, 8-11), detailed instructions for the preparation of the vase (as in our ritual manuals, we have "bum pa") are given, and this is the main topic of the fifth chapter.

²³ NCP and DG both give this section here, as does KG where it is referred to as *sa sbyang ba* (Lessing and Wayman 278-283 translate this as, "Clearing the site"). NG reverses the order of *Cleansing* and *Holding the Earth* (Cantwell 1989: 230-231). PCN mentions three purifications (*sa sbyong dang po*, *gnyis pa*, *gsum pa*: Mayer 1996b: 372), before describing the request to the witnessing goddess. Mayer (1996a: 128 nb.20), following Zangkar Rinpoche's advice, notes that such anomalies in sequence are not unusual in such texts. Stein 579 4a, line 1-2, seems to use the term "cleansing" or "cleansing the earth" (*sa gzhi sbyang ba*) to refer to the Earth ritual as a whole.

which is to be mixed with medicinal herbs and the five products of the cow,²⁴ is then sprinkled on the ground where the maṇḍala is to be constructed, at the different directions in turn, starting at the north-east. With appropriate mantras, the earth is meditated upon as open and empty, then generated as the Vajra Ground (*rdo rje'i sa gzhi*), and bound to its true vajra nature, thus consecrating it. One should meditate that all the various dharmas constituting the earth come to share the single flavour of emptiness. Though worded quite differently, NG has the same theme of meditating on purifying the earth in emptiness, upon which it is transformed in line with the Vajrayāna perspective — in this case arising as the Padma Akaniṣṭha Buddhafield. With the Svabhāva (Emptiness) mantra (see above: 6), the Vajra Master meditates on the five fingers of his right hand as a five-spoked rdo rje and after waving his hand in the air, he touches the earth, ritually establishing the earth in its pure vajra nature (Cantwell 1989: 230-231). DG begins the section with a purificatory mantra invoking Amṛtakunḍali and then summarises NCP's *Cleansing*, giving the instruction to anoint the ground for the maṇḍala from the north-east as above, while making a "vajra fist" (*rdo rje khu tshur*), after which the Svabhāva mantra should be recited seven times and the components of the earth are meditated upon in their emptiness nature. KG (Lessing and Wayman: 280-283) is a little different in that there are two alternative sequences, the first of which — "with digging" (*brkos pas sbyang ba*) — deals with clearing away any material debris (such as stones, thorns, broken bricks) from the site, and also mentions the necessity to examine the position of the *lto' phye* (see above, note 10), which as we have seen, is discussed in NCP under *Examining the Earth*. The point is then made that this activity is not required in a monastery, temple or house, in which case, the second alternative sequence — "without digging" (*rko mi dgos pa'i sbyong*) — is performed. This is clearly very similar to our other texts: the same mantra of purification used in NCP is referred to, and the ground is ritually purified with substances such as water, ashes and white mustard seed, with an accompanying contemplation on emptiness. The text adds that this meditation is also necessary when the *sbyang ba* is carried out "with digging". PCN has three purifications (see above, note 23), the first of which is analogous to this cleansing through meditating on emptiness which occurs in all our other texts.²⁵ From a single-pointed samādhi, one meditates that all outer and inner phenomena lack own-being.²⁶ The second purification is

²⁴ *ba byung lnga. Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1802) gives for these the following list: "ba las byung zhing sa la ma lhungs pa'i ba'i chu dang/ lci ba dang/ 'o ma dang/ mar dang zho bcas lnga'o/ - ie. five products of the cow which should not have fallen on the ground: urine, dung, milk, butter and curds. This list does, of course, derive from Indian Hindu sources where such a mixture also acts as a purifying agent; the Tibetan given above substitutes butter for the ghee which is more normal in India.

²⁵ Similarly, in the brief ritual which is a preliminary to a fire offering ritual described by Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1987: 3), a relative purification in which hindrances are destroyed and the faults of the earth purified by the three vajras, is followed by an absolute purification which is a transformation of the faults of the earth into emptiness. Gyatsho (33) gives a meditation on emptiness as a superior alternative to the earth ritual involving seizing the site with phur pa rites etc. ("...sa bzung phur gdab sogs/ sa chog bzhin nam bla na med/ rten 'brel stong nyid sogs kyis sbyang/". A similar perspective appears to be expressed in Buddhaguhya's *Pinḍārtha* (Hodge 2003: 480).

through the sun and the moon at the right and left eyes respectively and the wind from the nose, burning, scattering and washing (impurities).²⁷ This is a little similar to a meditation in NCP under *Holding the Earth* (see below). The third purification is with bodhicitta water.²⁸

Holding and Protecting the Earth

Having gained the right to possess the ground (by *Requesting the Site*) and purified it into a suitable support for the maṇḍala (by *Cleansing the Earth*), the practitioner must take hold of or seize the site (*sa bzung ba*),²⁹ after which it is firmly secured by *Protecting the Earth* (*sa bsrung ba*).³⁰ These two sections are connected and I am considering them together since their specific ritual components are allocated in some cases to the first and in other cases to the second. NCP (235) has the most elaborate instructions for *Holding the Earth* . The Vajra Master should stand at the centre of the area destined for the maṇḍala and should take the "vajra walk" (*rdo rje'i 'gros*), with three steps to the south in spring, three steps to the west in summer, three steps to the north in autumn, or three steps to the east in winter. Laughing, he should then roar, "Ha ha hūṃ hūṃ hrīḥ hrīḥ phem phem", with the meditation of himself as the deity, a sun and moon respectively arising from the syllables "ma" and "ṭa" at the two eyes. The eyeballs as the syllable "hūṃ" then blaze out like the fires at the end of an aeon. Staring with a furious look of hatred, any obstacles are smashed to dust, and reciting the mantra, the practitioner looks in all directions, generating the Vajra "Pride" of identity with the deity. At the soles of the feet, the syllable "hūṃ" is visualised, becoming blazing rdo rjes, while gracefully, the rdo rje is brandished. Ringing the bell, with vajra steps, the practitioner revolves in a clockwise direction towards the north-east. Then, following the regular Ritual Manual (*las byang*) of the deity's practice, the *bgegs gtor* is offered and the *Command* (*bka' bsgo*) is given to expel the obstacles.³¹ One meditates that numerous wrathful ones emanate, vanquishing the obstacles while through the reverberation of the syllable "hūṃ", the ground for the maṇḍala is transformed into its true vajra nature. The text adds that if one prefers a more demonstrative performance, the appropriate costume can be worn,³² and reciting the wrathful sound of "hūṃ", with the postures and expressions of the ten wrathful ones, the earth is held. *Protecting the Earth* (235-236) begins with the Vajra Master taking up and rolling a large phur bu, meditating on it being instantly transformed into Vajrakīlaya, the upper part

²⁶ Mayer 1996b, 372: "dang po rang lus rnal 'dug ste/ ting 'dzin rtse gcig byas nas su/ phyi nang dngos po thams cad la/ rang bzhin med rtog des bsgoms na/ de ni sa sbyong dang po yin/".

²⁷ Mayer 1996b, 372: "mig g.yas nyi ma g.yon zla ba/ sna nas rlung gi bsreg gtor bkrus/ de ni sbyong ba gnyis pas yin/".

²⁸ Mayer 1996b, 372: "byang chub sems chus rab bsal ba/ de ni sbyong ba gsum pa'o/".

²⁹ KG gives this section as *sa gzung ba* (Lessing and Wayman: 278, 282).

³⁰ Given as *sa srung ba* in DG (3b line 1) and *sa bsrung zhing byin gyis brlab pa* in KG (Lessing and Wayman: 278).

³¹ For descriptions of *bgegs gtor ma* offerings and *bka' bsgo ba* , see Cantwell 1989: 126-129, 163-165. *bGegs gtor mas* are all very similar in design, as are the recitations for them.

³² According to Lama Lodro, this should be the Black Hat (*zhva nag*) costume.

corresponding to the deity's usual appearance while the lower part is an iron phur bu, radiating sparks of fire. Then, the Vajra Master strikes and plants the phur bu in the central point of the ground,³³ reciting the following mantra three times: "Om̐ gha gha ghā ta ya ghā ta ya sarva duṣṭan vajra dha rod ā jñā pa ya ti sarva vighnān kā ya vāk citta vajra kī li kī la ya hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ%".³⁴ The Earth Ritual is concluded with the meditation that small wrathful ones and fire light radiate from the phur bu, filling the ground.

The essential components of these ritual activities of *Holding* and *Protecting* can be seen by a comparison with NG (Cantwell 1989: 230-231), in which their order is different and the meditations are modified in accordance with the deity cycle concerned. *Holding the Earth* in this case begins with a parallel rite to that described under *Protecting* above. The Vajra Master stands in front of the ground prepared for the maṇḍala, holding a large red phur bu made of acacia wood, with a red silk scarf tied around it as a headdress. With the meditation of oneself as the deity Hayagrīva, light radiates from the seed syllable "hrīḥ" at the heart, penetrating the phur bu which itself transforms into the red Hayagrīva, the top half in accordance with the deity's iconography, the lower half a phur bu. Reciting "Om̐ hrīḥ padmanta kṛta mahā kro dha haya grī va hu lu hu lu hūṃ phaṭ%" seven times, the Master strikes the ground with the phur bu, leaving it inserted at the central point, and one meditates that light from the phur bu is suffused throughout the earth, bringing the whole phenomenal world under one's control.

In the case of this version of the Earth Ritual, the *Cleansing* (see above) follows the *Holding* , and the rite is concluded with *Protecting the Earth* , which blends a similar meditation to the second part of NCP's *Holding* with the final act in its *Protecting* . Using the regular Ritual Manual,³⁵ a *bgegs gtor* is offered with the appropriate verse, the obstacles are commanded to be gone and are expelled with the wrathful mantra and powerful substances (mustard seeds ; Cantwell 1989: 163-165). Multitudes of tiny wrathful ones of the ten directions emanate, filling the earth. The ritual practice phur bu is held and rolled between the hands, meditated upon as Hayagrīva with the lower section a red hot iron phur bu point, spitting forth sparks of fire. With the same mantra ("Om̐ gha gha ghā ta ya...") as for the NCP *Protecting* , one meditates on the wrathful ones and sparks of fire shooting from the phur bu into and penetrating the entire earth. The rather more concise rites for *Holding* and *Protecting* in DG (3-3b) exactly follow the structure of NCP but share the meditation on the phur bu as Hayagrīva with NG. In this instance, the central deity for the intensive practice session is rDo rje Gro lod, a wrathful emanation of Guru Rinpoche, and thus of the Padma Buddha family, for which Hayagrīva is the appropriate representative in this context.

³³ Usually, this is ritually enacted by setting up a suitable triangular container into which the phur bu's point can be inserted (see Cantwell 1989: 230). It remains in place throughout the intensive practice session or retreat (Cantwell 1989: 279-280).

³⁴ This mantra is similar to one found in a Dunhuang manuscript fragment on Vajrakīlaya and one in PCN (Chapter 13), in both cases, for the moment when the obstacles are killed and liberated by striking, after rolling the phur bu (Mayer and Cantwell 1994: 60-61, 64 nb.25, 65 nb.26).

³⁵ In the case of the performance at the Rewalsar monastery, this was the bDud 'joms "bla ma thugs kyi sgrub pa'i las byang dngos grub 'dod 'jo'i dga' ston" (see Cantwell 1989: Appendix 4).

For *Holding the Earth*, one meditates on oneself as the wrathful Gro lod and makes the *bgegs gtor ma* offering and the *Command*, as in the Gro lod Ritual Manual.³⁶ Then for *Protecting*, a red acacia wood phur bu with a red silk headdress is held, meditating on the syllable "hrīḥ" at one's heart radiating like a blazing butter lamp, dissolving into the phur bu which becomes red Hayagrīva whose lower half is the point of a phur bu. As in NG (see above), the "Om hrīḥ padmanta kṛta..." mantra is recited seven times, the ground is struck with the phur bu and light rays pervade the earth, bringing the phenomenal world under control. In KG (Lessing and Wayman: 282-283), *Holding the Earth* simply consists of the mental determination to hold the site and draw the maṇḍala, made while seated in the centre of the site, facing the direction for the eastern door of the maṇḍala, after meditating on the full sādhana practice. *Protecting and Consecrating* (*sa bsrung zhing byin gyis brlab pa*) involves both the expulsion of the obstacles and a rite of stabbing with a phur bu. The section begins with four Vajra Masters making maṇḍala offerings at the four doors with a supplication for the deity maṇḍala to be drawn, and a visualisation of the maṇḍala raised up in the space above. The text then instructs that the deity meditation should be done (giving examples of which deity is appropriate for different maṇḍalas) and from the north-eastern direction, with (Vajra) Pride, the obstacles should be commanded to depart, after which all the Vajra Masters at the different directions, either briefly or elaborately, perform various postures and gestures and any remaining obstacles are struck with the phur bu. Meditating on the Protective Circle (*bsrung 'khor*) protects from the obstacles, and the mantras and mudrās consecrate the ground for the maṇḍala in its own true vajra nature. This ritual has clear parallels with the rNying ma pa tradition although in this case, the text is not explicit that the phur bu should ritually strike and be inserted into the ground. It may be that this is implied. Certainly in the Guhyasamāja consecration ritual described by Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrot (1985: 38-39), there is a section which the translators give as, "Utilising the Site", which requires the ritual implantation of Vajrakīlas. This follows the offerings to the Earth Goddess and a purificatory ritual eliminating the hindrances, in which all the atoms (of the ground) take on the nature of the three vajras. Then, the generation of the deity and the maṇḍala is performed along with offerings and praises,³⁷ and with Divine Pride, "spirits" who may obstruct the creation of the maṇḍala are warned, the site is again blessed as the vajra ground, and visualising "hūṃ" at the soles of the feet, the Vajra Master and other practitioners circumambulate the area. This part is obviously analogous to NCP's *Holding the Earth* (see above). It continues with the arising of the deity Dveṣavajra to implant Vajrakīlas; the ten Furies³⁸ are meditated upon and ten phur bus are planted in the ten directions by the Vajra Master. However, this ritual activity which seems here to correspond to the function of firmly securing the earth with the phur bu which concludes our rNying ma pa Earth Rituals, in fact more

³⁶ "bdud 'dul dbang drag rdo rje gro lod kyi las byang dngos grub 'dod 'jo" (see Cantwell 1989: Appendix 4).

³⁷ Here, the text appears to closely follow KG: the disciples make a maṇḍala offering from the four doors while the Master sits at the centre. The visualised maṇḍala is elevated into the space above, prostrations are made and then bodhicitta is generated and the practitioners assume divine pride (Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott 1985: 39).

³⁸ Presumably, the *khro bo bcu*, which I translate as the ten Wrathful Ones.

closely parallels the techniques for establishing the ten Wrathful Ones to act as an inner or secret boundary protecting the maṇḍala, which is given later in the three *sGrub khog* manuals referred to.³⁹ Thus, while the ritual function of holding and protecting the earth may appear to correspond with the placing of this meditation on the ten Wrathful Ones here, there may not be an exact parallel to the rite of stabbing the central point of the earth with a large ritual phur bu.⁴⁰

Concluding Remarks

I have mentioned that the Earth Ritual is generally performed as the basis for the construction of a maṇḍala for an intensive ritual practice session. Once completed, the ritual boundaries for the retreat can be erected, the maṇḍala can be drawn and decorated and the deities invited to reside in it.⁴¹ It should also be clear that much of the structure and symbolism is shared by different versions of the ritual: differences are for the most part, variations on a common theme and rather as Lévi-Strauss long ago pointed out that repetition in myth and transformations of the relations between its constituent units may serve to mutually reinforce a common message,⁴² so these Earth Rituals are all intended to bring about the same ritual process. In the generally longest section devoted to making offerings to the Earth Goddess and her retinue, a Vajrayāna replay of Śākyamuni's victory over Māra serves to generate a recognition of the importance of the environment in which the practice is to take place and, together with the section on *Cleansing*, a sense of its ultimate emptiness nature, expressing the primordial awareness of the Ratna Buddha family. There is no separation between inner meditation and outer environment — the two must be linked through the earth touching mudrā — and the environment must be transformed into the vajra ground as the basis for the Vajrayāna maṇḍala. Yet this process is not simply a passive one of recognition or meditative vision of the earth's essential nature. The ritual process is brought about partly by a forcible seizure of the earth and a violent display of domination. Even in the relatively polite section in which the earth is "Requested", the conversation is one-sided. The Buddha's mastery of the Perfections, and the Vajrayāna practitioner's right to identify with him, make the Earth Goddess's presence and her submission a foregone conclusion. She has no choice but to

³⁹ NCP: 241-242; DG: 6-6b. For a description of the ritual and discussion of NG, see Cantwell 1989: 234-236.

⁴⁰ In the case of the Rewalsar ritual, small triangular containers were set up at points indicating the ten directions, surrounding the large central phur bu. Small phur bus representing the *khro bo bcu* were hammered in using a "vajra hammer" at the appropriate point in the ritual (see Cantwell 1989: 230, 235-236).

⁴¹ Full instructions for these activities are given in our three *sGrub khog* manuals. A relatively short description is to be found in Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott 1985. PCN's Chapter 3 also gives details for establishing maṇḍalas of different Buddha families (Mayer 1996b: 373ff). In the case of KG, the maṇḍala drawn is for the purpose of an initiation ritual. Short versions of the Earth Ritual may also be done on other occasions, such as for a preliminary to the fire offering ritual described by Sharpa Tulku and M. Perrott (1987). In this case, there is no symbolic maṇḍala construction, although of course, the practice contains the usual meditative generation of the maṇḍala.

⁴² See, for example, Lévi-Strauss 1955 or 1967.

relinquish the earth and bestow her protection on the maṇḍala. In the mythology of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Māra's challenge is presented as a real threat with an uncertain outcome until the bodhisattva enlists the earth's support. In contrast, the victory of the Buddhist practitioner is inevitable in this ritual reenactment. There is no dialogue. Moreover, there is an interesting divergence from the mythological Enlightenment scenario. Here, rather than a struggle between the practitioner and Māra, in which the Earth Goddess intervenes to uphold the bodhisattva's position, the focus has shifted from Māra who makes no appearance, onto the relationship with the Earth Goddess herself. It is through calling *her* to witness or even bringing her under control that Māra's defeat will follow — the subsequent practice will be undisturbed. An element of this theme of domination is present in the original story: the earth is summoned and has to confirm the bodhisattva's status; in some renditions, the Goddess is portrayed as showing respect and praising the bodhisattva.⁴³ Yet this aspect is far more prominent in the Earth Ritual; even the use of the rdo rje, representing the invincible power of the Vajrayāna realisation, is a transformation of the earth touching gesture expressing stronger force. Most versions of the ritual are explicit that the earth is "subdued",⁴⁴ and the addition of ritually making offerings underlines this sense of the Goddess's subservience. In the Indian context, the acceptance of offerings frequently implies deference to authority and an acceptance of a lower servile status.⁴⁵ Such imagery is certainly a component of the dharma protector class of ritual offerings to which the *gtor ma* offering to the Goddess conforms, and the following almost cursory treatment of the lesser earth deities reflects an even more superior, condescending attitude.⁴⁶

The still relatively mild and partly implicit statement of domination present in *Requesting the Site* becomes far more forcible and violent in the sections on *Holding* and *Protecting the Earth*. The imposing power of the Vajra Master is expressed, e.g. in NCP, by the Vajra Walk and the Vajra laughter which is often a feature of Vajrayāna rituals, symbolising exultation in the Vajrayāna victory. Then there is the visualisation of furious fires blazing from angry eyes, smashing obstacles, and the wrathful seed syllable

⁴³ See, for example, N. Poppe 1967: 157.

⁴⁴ For instance, see above, 6: "offer the gtor ma and seal (it) with subduing (the earth)" (NCP: 233) - "gtor ma phul las gnon gyi rgyas".

⁴⁵ Quigley's discussion of the status of Brāhmins and priests in the Indian caste system (Quigley 1993: Chapter 4) gives a good illustration of this principle. Quigley (62) points out that priests are degraded by their acceptance of gifts. The function of a brāhman officiant in preclassical times was to take over the impurity of the patron by eating from the sacrificial offerings and this role was only modified in the classical conception of the brāhman in so far as the brāhman could evade the position of sacrificial officiant (58). In the precolonial era, the king's supremacy was enacted through such ritual relations with inferiors. Quigley (68, 72) also summarises the work of Raheja (Gloria Raheja 1988 *The Poison in the Gift*): in Pahansu, UP, the dominant landowning caste of Gujars make payments to all other castes for ritual services, and these groups are *obliged* to accept the offerings, to ensure the well-being of the patrons.

⁴⁶ There would appear to be some connection between the size of the gtor ma offering and the status of the deity. The Goddess is singled out and treated with some level of respect as the one who legitimates the Buddha's Enlightenment - she receives a relatively large and ornate gtor ma - while the retinue of lesser deities receive a small gtor ma of more basic design. It is also not elevated on a large tripod but simply placed on a plate in a low position.

"hūṃ" at the soles of the feet, becoming blazing rdo rjes, while the rdo rje in the hand is brandished. The aggressive imagery of the *bgegs gtor* offering and the *Command* follows, with the meditation on Wrathful Ones emanating and destroying obstacles while the syllable "hūṃ" penetrates the earth. This meditation leads to the ritual culmination of the domination in a classic act of *sgrol ba*⁴⁷ (killing and liberating) – the earth itself is struck and penetrated with the ritual dagger, now an emanation of the Vajrayāna deity, eliminating any opposition and totally establishing dominion over the entire earth. Aggressive sexual imagery adds an emotional forcefulness to the ritual activity — especially in this context,⁴⁸ the phur bu has phallic connotations and strikes, is inserted into and penetrates the "female" earth.⁴⁹ All versions of the ritual share the theme of a violent possession of the earth in which obstacles are destroyed and all the *sGrub khog* manuals consulted also include the ritual activity of stabbing the phur bu in the central point of the area. Thus, the Earth Ritual does not simply represent an integration of the physical environment into the Vajrayāna vision, but a radical and violent take-over and transformation of it.⁵⁰

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⁴⁷ For more on *sgrol ba*, see Cantwell 1997.

⁴⁸ The extent to which sexual implications are overt is variable in phur bu rituals; in destructive rituals where the focus is on the total annihilation of the hostile forces, they may not be well developed. Although none of our *sGrub khog* texts are explicit at this point, it would seem that the sexual dimension is important in phur bu rituals aimed at the domination of the earth. For example, when the Inner Boundary of the ten Wrathful Ones is conducted in NCP, and the ten phur bus are hammered in at the appropriate directions of the maṇḍala, the phur bus are visualised as impaling and piercing through the private parts of the negative forces, which are pinned to the ground, forced to submit passively ("remaining without movement"), in the "single taste of Great Bliss" (NCP 241-242: "g.yo 'gul med cing bde ba chen por ro gcig du gyur").

⁴⁹ Of course, the image of sexual intercourse also suggests connotations of fertility, and such connotations do appear to be important in many Tibetan rituals focussed on earth deities, such as the *sa bcud bum pa* ("Earth Fertility Vases") ritual mentioned in Atisha 1991. In the case of the monastic ritual considered here, any implication that the ritual might enhance fertility is not made explicit. The literal fertility of the earth does not seem to be at issue here, although the implicit connotations of fertilisation no doubt contribute to the idea that the following religious practice is made fruitful and auspicious as a result of the ritual.

⁵⁰ I have considered elsewhere (Cantwell 2001) what these features of the Earth Ritual may suggest about attitudes towards the environment.

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'Jam mgon A myes zhabs, Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams:

bcom ldan 'das rdo rje gzhon nu'i gdams pa nyams len gyi chu bo chen po sgrub pa'i thabs kyi rnam par bshad pa 'phrin las kyi pad mo rab tu rgyas pa'i nyin byed, reproduced from manuscript copies of the ancient Sa-skya xylographic prints by Ngawang Sopa, New Delhi, 1973. [Microfiche, The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, 'Khon lugs Phur pa'i rnam bsad, 'Chams yig brjed byañ.]

From the works of bDud 'joms Rin po che, 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje:

dpal rdo rje phur bu bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri'i stod las sgrub chen gyi khog dbub grub gnyis 'dod 'jo'i dga' ston from *The Collected Works of H H bDud-'joms Rin-po-che*, Volume 10: 227-277. [Referred to as NCP.]

bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri' bsnen yig: dpal rdo rje phur bu bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri'i stod las byang chub sgrub pa'i man ngag gsal bar byas pa dngos grub rgya mtsho'i dga' ston from *The Collected Works of H H bDud-'joms Rin-po-che*, Volume 11: 71-177.

bdud 'dul dbang drag rdo rje gro lod kyi sgrub pa chen po'i las rim dngos grub gter mdzod which is the *sGrub khog* section from the bDud-'joms rdo rje Gro lod cycle (printed in Manali). [Referred to as DG.]

'phags mchog nam mkha'i rgyal po'i sgrub chen gyi khog dbub phan bde'i chu gter from the *dam chos sprul sku'i snying thig*. [Referred to as NG.]

rnam par snang mdzad chen po mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa rnam par sprul pa byin gyis rlob pa shin tu rgyas pa mdo sde'i dbang po rgyal po zhes bya ba'i chos kyi rnam grangs (= Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra). PTT No.126, Vol.5, 240.3.3-284.3.1.

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