

Preface

This volume, dedicated to the investigation of death rites in our earliest Śaiva Siddhānta tantric sources as a mirror of the social expansion of early tantric communities, is a revised version of my DPhil thesis, which I completed at Oxford University. Conducting my graduate studies at that renowned institution under the supervision of Alexis Sanderson, I was fortunate to have been exposed to a vibrant community of scholars editing early Śaiva and Buddhist tantric texts and contextualizing them in the religious world of early medieval India. Inspired by their work, I developed an interest in the socio-religious history of early Śaivism, in particular the fascinating transformation from traditions based on asceticism and an ideology demanding that practitioners live and practice their religion on the fringes of society, to the various tantric schools that increasingly developed a ritual repertoire enabling tantric priests to take on public and political ritual roles. The present survey is informed by the question of how this development was reflected in the formation of death practices for tantric initiates and to what extent religious propagators were willing to accept doctrinal compromises in order to include a wider audience of practitioners within their fold.

This study does not claim to be a comprehensive socio-religious history of early Śaiva tantric traditions. It rather presents one piece of the puzzle in reconstructing the complex dynamics that influenced our texts. It also cannot be considered a historical work in the sense of pinning down developments to certain historical circumstances and events. While some of the texts under examination can be linked to particular places through the names of their authors, for others we know almost nothing of their provenance. Thus it is only possible to establish some general developments as they can be found in the ritual repertoire. It is however my hope that this work will contribute towards larger histories of early Śaivism

which are historically more contextualized. The method adopted in this book is a philological one, focusing on a close reading of text sources followed by their translation and interpretation; it is not embedded in discourses on ritual theory, apart from a few reflections in chapter 1. Nonetheless, I hope the materials and observations found here may inform such studies in future for scholars in the field of ritual studies.

The book is divided into an introduction and five chapters, followed by two appendices, with edited Sanskrit texts in appendix A and English translations in appendix B. The sources of this survey are the early Śaiva Siddhānta scriptures, which contain the earliest extant passages on tantric death rites, as well as early Saiddhāntika ritual manuals. Studies of rituals are necessarily quite repetitive, especially when it comes to discussions concerning ritual details. In order not to tempt the reader's patience too much, the chapters are therefore conceived as individual units, with concluding observations contained within each one, rather than their being summarized again in a concluding chapter. An exception is chapter 4, which contains a descriptive outline of Śaiva tantric cremation.

The introductory chapter contextualizes the study within early Śaiva history and presents the factors that determined the chosen timeframe of the materials under investigation. It includes observations on the constitution of Śaiva communities, also considering the distinction between lay and initiatory communities as informed by my current research on the *Śivadharma* in the context of the FWF-funded project "The Śivaliṅga Worship on the Eve of the Tantric Age: A Study and Critical Edition of the *Śivadharmaśāstra* Chapters 1–5 and 9" (P-27838-G15). Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framework and outlines the fundamental doctrinal tenets at play in the development of Śaiva tantric death rites, particularly regarding the tension that arose when ideals of ultimate liberation met deeply embedded anxieties about ghost-hood and afterlife, as well as established ritual cycles to ensure the continuity of the family line on the occasion of death. Chapter 2 focuses on the early tantric scriptural sources for reconstructing early medieval death rites; each source receives a separate treatment before they are considered collectively and chronologically to illustrate the elaborate tantric initiatory cremation as it developed up to the ninth century. Chapter 3 investigates the earliest extant Saiddhāntika ritual

manuals, which due to their more detailed explanations offer further insights into the socio-religious environs of the tenth to twelfth century, a time in which tantric groups had become well established across the sub-continent. Here, too, each source is treated separately in order to remain source specific. Chapter 4 provides an analytical outline of tantric cremation as was standard at least by the ninth century; it is only here that several sources are considered together to provide an overview of their shared features and differences, as well as to handle the question of the officiants involved in these rituals. The last chapter is then dedicated to the emergence of post-mortuary ancestor worship. It illustrates how by the ninth century there were tantric priests who sought to provide services even beyond the initiatory community.

Some of the sources investigated in this volume have not been published until now, or if so, only in the form of editions that do not take the early Nepalese manuscript tradition into account. For this reason selected text editions and annotated translations are published here in the appendices. To prepare these editions, importance was given to using early Nepalese manuscripts when available. Where works were not available, or only available in South-Indian editions difficult to access, I have referred to transcripts from the Department of Indology at the Institut Français in Pondicherry that are available online via the Muktabodha Indological Research Institute website (<https://muktabodha.org/digital-library/>). This website will enable the reader to access the cited texts directly. This concerns in particular the twelfth-century South-Indian ritual manual *Kriyākramadyotikā*, which has a complex and as yet insufficiently studied textual tradition. Its critical edition is still a desideratum. I also refer to the passages on death rites in the twelfth-century *Brhatkālottara*, a complex eclectic text that needs further research for an edition, a task beyond the scope of this book. When necessary, for this work I refer to a Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript (NGMPP B24/57), which forms part of a preliminary edition by Alexis Sanderson, who kindly shared his text.

I have adopted various conventions to present the material as consistently as possible. In the main body of the text I present the English translations of the cited passages, while the footnotes give the Sanskrit, or, if the quote is from one of the selected edited texts, a reference to the

appendices. The Sanskrit spelling has generally been normalized, unless listed in variant readings. In the case of the *Naimittikakarmānusandhāna*, I have generally provided diplomatic transcriptions. Abbreviations have been used for Sanskrit texts after their titles have been mentioned the first time in full; when the initial mention is too remote, the title is mentioned in full again. In order to avoid repetition, cross references are used to direct the reader to earlier or later discussions of certain aspects.

In publishing this volume, I am extremely grateful to Birgit Kellner, the series editor, and the publication commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences Press for having accepted my manuscript to be included in the series “Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens”. Many thanks also go to the staff at the Press office, in particular Robert Püringer, who oversaw the production process and helped immensely along the way.

This volume was written in several stretches between various projects I was fortunate to have been involved in, but which also meant that its completion was postponed several times over the years. In its basic form the work was conceived during my graduate studies. I was enormously fortunate to have profited from the supervision of Alexis Sanderson, the person who initially introduced me to the field of early Śaiva studies and who generously shared his knowledge with me at every step of the way. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to him for all the time he dedicated to reading texts with me, elucidating them with his vast knowledge, and guiding me through my doctoral studies with generosity and inspiration. The work also profited greatly from the detailed feedback I received from my examiners at the time of my doctoral *viva voce*, namely Dominic Goodall – who also carefully looked at the Sanskrit texts and made numerous very helpful comments – as well as Christopher Minkowski, who provided me with many stimulating remarks.

Parts of the ideas developed in chapters 1 and 5 were worked out and further formulated in the course of my postdoctoral position at the Institute for Indian Studies at Groningen University, where I was employed as part of the project *A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Composition and Spread of the Skandapurāṇa* funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. During that time, in 2012, Peter Berger and Justin

Kroesen invited me to participate in a conference on death and liminality; they provided me with much helpful feedback on my article included in the volume of collected papers, on which I draw here in chapter 1. Further, I was also fortunate to receive feedback and thought-provoking comments from Hans Bakker, who acted as the official respondent at that time.

Large parts of the book were prepared during my ten months in the FWF-project “Visions of Community” (SFB F42-G18), to which Vincent Eltschinger invited me in 2014 for the purpose of revising my book manuscript and working on early tantric communities in the early medieval period. It was thanks to these ten months that I made more substantial progress in completing the manuscript; I am indebted to him for having had that opportunity, as well as thankful for his encouragement. The final push not to delay the publication any further was from Diwakar Acharya, to whom I am grateful for his support as well as the many opportunities we have had for inspiring academic exchange.

I am also grateful to the reviewers of this book, whose suggestions helped greatly to improve the manuscript. In particular, reviewer number one must have taken a great deal of time to carefully read through the entire manuscript, resulting in many valuable suggestions, as well as a considerable list of typos, all of which I took to heart in my final revisions.

In addition to the people and institutions mentioned above, there are various friends and colleagues I would like to thank for their academic exchange, for reading parts of the manuscript at certain stages, as well as for their personal support throughout the years, in alphabetical order: Oliver Frey, Csaba Kiss, Gergely Hidas, Nirajan Kafle, Marion Rastelli, Isabelle Ratié, Bihani Sarkar, Adheesh Sathaye and Péter-Dániel Szántó. The same goes for Helmut Krasser, who is greatly missed; the engaging and challenging discussions I had with him honed many of my ideas.

For the final phase of producing this book, I am particularly indebted to Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek. She not only thoroughly proof-read my English, polishing the entire work, and helped me cope with the intricacies of layout in Word, but she also often challenged and pushed me to sharpen certain arguments with her intelligent remarks – a form of inspiring exchange and support that helped me immensely to get through the final revisions. I am

extremely grateful to her for having seen me through these last stages, in a role far exceeding that of a proof-reader.

I would also like to acknowledge my gratitude to the scholarly community of tantric studies; much of this work to contextualize textual sources within Sanskrit literature and tantric writings in particular would not have been possible without the generous scholarly atmosphere that promotes the sharing and exchange of texts (whether e-texts or manuscripts) to help scholars to advance their research. As for the Nepalese manuscripts, it is through the generosity of the National Archives of the Government of Nepal and the digitizing projects within the framework of the Nepalese–German Manuscript Cataloguing Project that these precious materials are available for study.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my mother Ilse Mirnig, whose encouragement in my research endeavours and unfailing and loving support was absolutely central to producing this manuscript.

Nina Mirnig

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