Early Strata of Śaivism in the Kathmandu Valley

Śivaliṅga Pedestal Inscriptions from 466–645 CE

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Abstract

The Sanskrit *liṅga* pedestal inscriptions produced in the Kathmandu Valley during the Licchavi period between 466 and 645 CE are the earliest dated sources for local Śaiva religious activities. This article aims at a comprehensive survey and analysis of this group of inscriptions, examining (1) their material aspects and locations, (2) donative patterns and related social and economic features, such as the prominent agency of merchants and women of high rank, and (3) religious concepts linked to

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the spiritual and soteriological reasons for establishing the *liṅgas*, as expressed in the donative formulas. In addition, these formulas will be compared to contemporaneous prescriptive literature (e.g. the *Śivadharmasāstra*) as well as to Buddhist donative practices. As will be shown, the Pashupatinath temple emerged as a key site in the propagation and shaping of *liṅga* worship, with the accumulation of wealth and related socio-religious activities contributing to the appearance of local Pāśupata groups and the elevation of Pashupatinath's status to that of a national shrine.

Keywords

Licchavi inscriptions – *liṅga* worship – history of early Śaivism – Pashupatinath – *Śivadharmasāstra* – religious donations

Introduction

Historians of early medieval Nepal are fortunate to have access to a relatively large corpus of Sanskrit inscriptions issued during the so-called Licchavi period, that is, from about the fifth to eighth century CE.¹ Several publications based on these have contributed towards a first outline of the history of medieval Nepal and the rise of the Licchavi dynasty, a time during which the public discourse shared political and religious features with the Indic cultural sphere, as expressed in epigraphy, iconography and archeological temple remains.² It is well known that Śaivism held a particularly prominent posi-

¹ These inscriptions have appeared, often several times, in various publications since the late 19th century. A detailed history of publications up to the 1980s can be found in Regmi 1983, Vol. 1: v–xiv. Since Regmi's account, several inscriptions have come to light or have been re-edited in articles, notably, Acharya 1998, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010 and 2015, Garbini 1997 and Rajbansi 1989/1990. In this article I shall refer to the Sanskrit text of inscriptions as found in the edition of Dhanavajra Vajracharya (abbreviated *LA*) unless otherwise specified. For reference purposes, in the list of inscriptions I also include references to Gnoli (1956) and Regmi (1983), despite the fact that the latter is mainly based on Vajracharya's volume and often introduces mistakes; nonetheless, it is a widely used edition, and is the only complete English translation and study of the inscriptions, also including and drawing on the work of Nepalese scholars. While it is a helpful resource when beginning investigations of the Nepalese material, the analysis of the records must be used with caution, since the English translations of the Sanskrit inscriptions are unreliable. Nevertheless Regmi's volumes offer an entry into the material for non-Nepali speakers.

² See, e.g., Levi (1905–1908), Slusser (1982), Pal (1974) and Regmi (1983). Though they mainly

tion in the religio-political landscape of the Kathmandu Valley, next to Buddhism and other brahmanical traditions, in particular Vaiṣṇavism.³ Śaivism's emergence in Nepal is often described as almost directly linked to the presence of Pāśupatas,⁴ a Śaiva ascetic movement attested in Indic inscriptions as early as the fourth century. This is based on the fact that Nepal's national shrine, the Pashupatinath temple,⁵ is dedicated to Śiva Pāśupati and that five inscriptions from the seventh century explicitly mention Pāśupatas: (1) a group of Śrīkhalika Pāśupatas in Pashupatinath, once in connection with a certain Pāśupata Ācārya Pranardana-prāṇa Kauśika during the rule of Jīṣṇugupta (ca. 624–633 CE)⁶ and once in connection with a Pāśupata Ācārya called Dakṣiṇatiludaka in 654 CE (*saṃvat* 69);⁷ (2) a group of Pāśupatas in the area dedicated to a certain Vajreśvara (the *vajreśvaramaṇḍalī*, an unidentified site) somewhere on the east bank of the Bagmati river in 659 CE (*saṃvat* 83), recorded in a stone slab inscription from Patan;⁸ and (3) a group of Vaśa Pāśupatas in charge of the royal temple Śivadeveśvara (site not identified) in 695 CE

focus on ritual and later history, important and extensive studies on Nepal's main shrine dedicated to Śiva Pāśupati have been published by Michaels in 1994 and 2008. For important recent studies that contextualize inscriptions in the Buddhist and Brahmanical sphere based on new editions and close readings of a number of inscriptions, see Acharya 2005, 2007, 2010, and 2014.

- 3 While local traditions, such as those related to goddess cults, are likely to have also constituted an important part of the religious environment, only a few glimpses into such practices are recorded in the inscriptions.
- 4 See, for instance, Pal 1974: 11 and Slusser 1982: 224 and 226. However, Michaels (2008: 9–10) expresses the uncertainty regarding early links between Pashupatinath and Pāśupata groups as follows: "That a pre-Hindu shrine stood at the site, as is constantly asserted, must be regarded as probable, but there is no proof of this. The influence of the Pāśupatas, a sect with a particularly radical form of ascetic practice, is also largely unknown."
- 5 For related studies, see Michaels 1994 and 2008.
- 6 *LA* 112. See n. 99 for the Sanskrit text and its translation. The same Pāśupata Ācārya Pranardana-prāṇa Kauśika features in a now lost pedestal inscription, commissioning the building of a fence around an image of Chattracaṇḍeśvara (*LA* 113).
- 7 *LA* 125. See n. 138 for Sanskrit text and translation.
- 8 *LA* 128, lines 8–9: [- -] *pāśupatau vāgvatīpūrvakūle bhagavadvajreśvaramaṇḍalyām* [- -] *sarvādhikaraṇānām apraveśenāsyā* [- -] *pra* [- -] ..., "[- -] in the area (-*maṇḍalyām*) of the venerable Lord Vajreśvara on the eastern bank of the Vagvatī [river] in the Pāśupati [area] [- -] by non-entry of government officials [- -]"; and lines 16–: [...] *yady asti pariśeṣan tena dravyeṇa bhagavantam vajreśvaram uddīṣya pāśupatānām brāhmaṇānāṃ ca yathāsambhavam bhogaṇaṃ kārāṇīyan* [...], "If there is some left-over [of the donation], they should prepare food for the Pāśupatas and Brahmins with this money [that had been dedicated] to Lord Vajreśvara."

(*saṃvat* 119), recorded in an inscription in Lagantol.^{9,10} This evidence shows that Pāśupata ascetics rose to a prominent position in the wake of the rule of Aṃśuvarman (r. ca. 605–621 CE). While during his reign there is no mention of Pāśupatas, it is likely that his patronage of the Pashupatinath temple was key in popularizing the site and its related religious activities. After all, it was Aṃśuvarman who initiated the tradition of rulers of the kingdom publicly declaring their connection to Paśupati by styling himself as “blessed by the venerable Lord Paśupati” in his inscriptions.¹¹

However, Śaiva religious practices were already present in the valley almost two centuries before the recorded appearance of Pāśupatas in the records. The earliest records of Śaiva religious activities are inscriptions issued for establishing personal *līṅga*¹² shrines, in most cases inscribed directly on the *līṅgas*’ pedestals and in two cases, on platforms that were presumably set up as bases for *līṅga* shrines. Thirteen of the sixteen inscriptions are dated: of these, twelve were issued within the 79 years between 466–545 CE and one, of a different donative type (P10), was issued in 645 CE. They thus provide us with a relatively continuous record allowing us to detect changes in donative patterns and differences in practices according to time and location. These pedestal inscriptions have hitherto been neglected in the study of early Śaivism in the Kathmandu Valley, probably because a purely textual approach gives the impression that these inscriptions do not provide much information beyond the names of the people who commissioned these Śaiva *līṅgas*. However, a more comprehensive approach combining the study of the inscription texts with considerations regarding their material aspects and location yields valuable information regarding the economic and socio-religious sphere related to these devotional

9 LA 139. See n. 106 for Sanskrit text and translation.

10 A handful of scholars have contextualized these references to Pāśupatas within a wider, pan-Indic network of Pāśupata cults, e.g. Slusser 1982: 235. More recently, Acharya tackles this issue in the course of his analysis of the Mathura pillar inscription (Acharya 2005). Bakker (2007b: 11–12), in his analysis of the “Pāśupata Order and the *Skandapurāṇa*”, also presents some of these inscriptions when arguing for underlying cultural relations between Nepal and the Late Guptas of Magadha. Further, he also offers a treatment of the Śṛṅghalika Pāśupatas in Bakker 2014: 149–151.

11 For a discussion of the rise of Paśupati as a tutelary deity in Nepal, also linked to the career of Aṃśuvarman, see Mirnig (2013).

12 In the subcontinent, the setting up of Śiva in his iconic or aniconic form goes back at least to the third century; there is plenty of archeological evidence dating to this time that testifies to this practice in Mathura. For a comprehensive survey of early *līṅgas*, see Kreisel (1986), who also presents Gupta panels with scenes of *līṅga* worship.

practices, which seems to have paved the way for the institutionalization of Pāśupata circles. As such, they also provide us with a case study that falls at the beginning of a transformative period in the early medieval Indic world, namely when Śaivism, in competition with Buddhism and Jainism, gradually starts to appear in epigraphical records as a religion sponsored by the elite and emerges as a powerful alternative to Vaiṣṇavism as a royal religion.¹³ In terms of the literary production of the time, we find that this development corresponds to a surge of new texts on Śaiva practices and mythology, in particular the *Śivadharmaśāstra* (henceforth ŚDh) and *Śivadharmottara*, the first comprehensive works on Śaiva lay religious practices, the *Skandapurāṇa*, the first extant systematization of Śaiva mythology, and the *Niśvāsa*, the first extant Śaiva tantra. The earliest surviving testimonies of all of these texts, in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts, are preserved, incidentally, in the Kathmandu Valley.

The first part of this article introduces the epigraphical evidence for the foundation of *lingas* and focuses on the inscriptions and their medium as artifacts, including their material aspects and location. To give a background, a list of the inscriptions with brief descriptions, bibliographical references and photos will first be presented; readers wishing to go straight to the analysis may wish to skip to page 327, and refer back to the list of inscriptions during the subsequent discussion. The second part is dedicated to questions regarding the socio-religious and economic sphere related to the practice of setting up personal *linga* shrines, including the identification and investigation of donative patterns and the types of practices as based on location and the different groups of agents involved. It will be shown how the shrines in Pashupatinath accumulated a great deal of land, which may have contributed to the site developing a strong position in the religio-political landscape. In conclusion, the third part of the article investigates aspects of the underlying religious concepts and theologies as they are encoded in the donative formulas. These will also be compared to Buddhist donative practices and the practices advocated in early Śaiva literature.

List of Inscriptions and Brief Descriptions: 466 CE–645 CE

The pedestal inscriptions are labeled and grouped according to the three locations in which they are situated: the Lazimpat area (close to the Royal Palace

¹³ See Sanderson 2009, Bisschop 2010a, and Bakker 2014.

in Kathmandu); a site close to the Budhanilakantha shrine¹⁴ (north of Kathmandu towards Shivapuri National Park); and the Pashupatinath temple complex and its surrounding area (towards Kathmandu's east, on the bank of the Bagmati River). Included in this list are also two inscriptions on square platforms (*sthaṇḍila*) that support *liṅgas*. These are of the same type as the pedestal inscriptions and record the setting up of *liṅga* shrines as well as specifications regarding land donations (P7 and P8). Dates are given in *saṃvat* units. The date interpretation is based on the theory that they refer to the Śāka era (which began in 78/79 CE), and then, from a certain point, to a local, newly introduced era—often referred to as the Mānadeva or Aṃśuvarman era—which began in 605 CE.¹⁵

Lazimpat

Three of the pedestal inscriptions are found in Lazimpat (L1–3). Little is known about this area's history due to the lack of archeologically excavated remains, although many Licchavi artifacts seem to be spread throughout Lazimpat, suggesting that it was an active and important area. However, even though all three of the pedestal inscriptions here mention the construction of shrines (*bhavana*), no archeological remains have been found so far. Dhanavajra Vajracharya suspects that earthquakes may have destroyed any existing structures.¹⁶

Budhanilakantha

Budhanilakantha, the site of two pedestal inscriptions (B1–B2), is an old Licchavi area known for the so-called *jalaśayana* Viṣṇu, which is dated to the seventh century. This is based on the fact that in 640 CE (*saṃvat* 64), during the rule of the Licchavi king Bhīmarjunadeva, Jīṣṇugupta issued special concessions for Dakṣiṇakoli village for having provided the stone from which the image was fashioned.¹⁷

14 When referring to modern sites, this article uses modern Roman spelling. Thus, e.g., the Nepali Budhanilakaṃṭha is spelled Budhanilakantha.

15 This date interpretation follows the current scholarly consensus. See, e.g. Slusser 1982: 384–388 for a summary of this position, but also Petech (1961) for a detailed account of various other hypotheses. A more critical examination of the different positions will be undertaken elsewhere.

16 Vajracharya 1996: 32–33. I thank Nirajan Kafle for going through the Nepali notes with me regarding this point.

17 See LA 117.

Pashupatinath

The largest number of pedestal inscriptions (P1–P11) are in the Pashupatinath area in Deopatan, where many ancient artifacts are still *in situ*. In part, this is because the Pashupatinath temple area has remained active through the ages and has not seen any period of disuse. Nonetheless, most of the surviving sculptures are damaged, most likely due to the invasion of Sultan Shams-uddin of Bengal in the fourteenth century. The earliest dated inscription is a damaged pillar inscription of the Licchavi king Mānadeva from 459 CE,¹⁸ while the first reference to the area by name goes back to 533 CE, when the land was referred to as the *paśupatikṣetra*, i.e. “the area of Paśupati” in one of the *linga* pedestal inscriptions (P7).¹⁹ The only record of the temple’s founding is centuries later, in the fourteenth-century chronicle *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, which lists the legendary king Supuṣpa as its founder and also records historic donations and repairs. The historical validity of these, however, cannot be proven by the surviving material sources at the moment.²⁰

It has been argued that the popularity of the site is connected to its strategic location in the valley, namely on an ancient trade route, as has been put forth by Michaels.²¹ However, a material basis for this assumption still needs to be verified through archeological excavations and studies. The same holds true for the work of Tiwari, who attempts to identify ancient settlements in the valley based on inscriptions, legends and chronicles, in the hope of providing guidelines for archeological studies.²² Nevertheless, with these material limitations in mind, two further observations might be ventured based on the current state of research.

First, the temple is in the middle of the valley in relation to the four Narayan temples: Changu Narayan, Bishanku Narayan, Ichangu Narayan, and Budhani-lakantha/Shesha Narayan (see Fig. 1). As discussed by Tiwari, these temples are four ancient Vaiṣṇava shrines located on hills in the four directions from the central valley. They were probably built in ancient settlements that served as tax collection points, sites that were also advantageous for military reasons,

18 Rajbansi 1989/1990.

19 For the Sanskrit text and its translation, see p. 325 and n. 52.

20 As Michaels 1997: 52–53 points out, it is only in the Malla period that we reach more solid ground historically, when recorded structural changes can be correlated with material remains. Since the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* itself is only a product of the Malla period, it is difficult to determine the degree to which its accounts of royal donations in the period before this are accurate records or were influenced by local stories and myths.

21 Michaels 2008: 5. For his analysis of the site’s topography, see *ibid*: 4–8.

22 Tiwari 2001.

FIGURE 1 *Map of the Kathmandu Valley, including the three locations of pedestal inscriptions and the four Narayan temples*

given their high position with views over the valley.²³ If the Pashupatinath area is seen in relation to these four Narayan temples, it is clear that it is located centrally between them, almost at a cross point. And Pashupatinath itself is also situated next to hills offering good views over the valley, such as the Kailasa plateau directly to the north of the main shrine, and the Mrgasthali area to the east.

Secondly, Pashupatinath lies at the center-most point reached by the holy river Bagmati in its course through the valley. The river even makes a bend towards the valley center at this point (see Fig. 1). Thus, this location may have held an important role in the sacred landscape of the valley from early on. This is also reflected in the fact that the temple is not only a place of Śaiva religious activities, but houses ancient Vaiṣṇava shrines and icons as well. It is also close to Cabahil, an ancient Buddhist site. Further, today one still finds Buddhist

²³ Tiwari 2001: 37–38.

caves along the riverbanks, as well as a strong presence of goddess cults. Both of these may go back to earlier times.²⁴ But one of the most striking features of the Pashupatinath area in its relation to the river is its strong association with death rites. Today it is one of the major centers for cremations, with several funerary pyres burning every day and the ashes of the deceased being poured into the river; we also find a preponderance of *liṅgas* in this area, some of them explicitly votive and others marking the graves of ascetics. This association with death rites may well go back to the period in question, with the Licchavi *liṅga* shrines under examination here being early precursors of later votive *liṅgas*.²⁵

*Conventions for the List of Inscriptions*²⁶

- Located
- ? Not located by the author
- x Lost
- ❖ Inside the Pashupatinath temple complex (i.e. inaccessible for non-Hindus)

Liṅga Pedestal Inscriptions in the Lazimpat Area

□ (L1) LA 3, G 4, R 2. Saṃvat 388. Date interpretation: 466 CE. Number of lines: 2. Condition: Damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of a *liṅga* by a certain Naravarman. There is no title given to Naravarman; all we learn is that he refers to himself as a *bhṛtya*, that is to say, a servant, minister or some sort of dependent of King Mānadeva,²⁷ who is also praised in the inscription. It is noticeable that many figures with names ending in *-varman* feature in the

24 Michaels 2008: 3 points out that historically, Deopatan, that is to say the area around the Pashupatinath temple, constituted a contested area, with “different deities, agents, social groups, ritual specialists and institutions seeking dominance.” See, also, n. 3.

25 For more on possible connections to death rites, see below, p. 347 ff.

26 For each inscription reference is given to the inscription number in the editions of Vajracharya 1996, Gnoli 1956 and Regmi 1983, apart from P3, which has only been edited by Acharya 2003. The Sanskrit text quoted is that of Vajracharya’s edition unless otherwise specified (e.g. Acharya in P3). The number of lines for each inscription is given; for the sizes of the inscribed part and *akṣaras*, see Tab. 1. Symbols: “[...]” = omitted text recorded in the same line of inscription; “(x)” = ‘x’ is supplied by the editor; “[-]” = damaged portion of the text.

27 LA 3, line 2: [...] *bhṛtyena bhaktimahatā naravarmanāmnā prāsādasamsthā anurūpam iha pra(kalpya) cāruliṅgam*, “The servant/dependent named Naravarman established here a beautiful *liṅga* with great devotion, set up in the temple according to the rules (*anurūpam*).”

FIGURE 2 *Linga established by Naravarman in 466 CE (L1), Lazimpat*

FIGURE 3 *Detail of inscription*

inscriptions, usually referring to a minister or *mahāsāmanta*. Even the king recorded in the first epigraph, King Jayavarman, shares this name ending.²⁸ One therefore wonders whether there is a familial connection or whether Naravarman held an important position at the court.²⁹ There are a number of *akṣaras* missing, but from what is left, it appears that Naravarman set up a *linga* within a temple (*prāsāda*).³⁰ It is not clear from the reading whether this was an existing temple or one that he established himself. Although there are missing passages, these do not represent enough space for a record of land grants, nor does the formulation suggest that such a passage is missing. The *linga* bears no name; it is referred to as *cāruleṅga*, “beautiful *linga*.”³¹

𑀘 (L2) LA 6, R 5. Saṃvat 390. Date interpretation: 468 CE. Number of lines: 5. Condition: Not damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of a shrine structure (*bhavana*) and *linga* by Kṣemasundarī, one of the wives of King Mānadeva.³² The *linga* bears no name; it is referred to as *aiśāna liṅga* and is further described as supreme, *agrya*. No land grant.

28 Tamot & Alsop 1996.

29 This connection was first suggested to me by Diwakar Acharya during reading sessions in 2012.

30 See above, n. 27.

31 *ibid.*

32 LA 6, lines 2–4: [...] *śrīmānadevo nṛpaḥ. patnī tasyābhajatrāmalaśubhanayanā ślāghya-saubhāgyarūpā sañcītya kṣemasundaryy anupamaḡaṇadhīr ddharmmakāryyaikakāryyā śrīmatsaṃsthānarūpam bhavanam iha dṛḍhaṇ kārāyitvānurūpam aiśānaṃ liṅgam agryaṃ vidhivad anupamaṃ sthāpayām āsa bhaktyā.*

FIGURE 4 Liṅga established by Kṣemendrasundarī in 468 CE (L2), Lazimpat

FIGURE 5 Rubbing of inscription on the pedestal

FIGURE 6 Liṅga established by Guṇavatī in 497 CE (L3), Lazimpat

FIGURE 7 Detail of inscription

□ (L3) LA 15, R 13. Saṃvat 419. Date interpretation: 497 CE. Number of lines: 3. Condition: Not damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of a *liṅga* by Guṇavatī, another wife of King Mānadeva, for the merit of her deceased father, Kinnaravarman (maybe related to Naravarman in L1?).³³ The *liṅga* bears no name; it is referred to as *śaiva liṅga*. No land grant.

33 LA 15, line 1–3: [...] *bharttuḥ śrīmānadevasya prasāadopacitaśrīyā [bha]ktayā sthāpitam li(n)gaṃ guṇavatīyā śubhecchayā śaivan devālayasthasya pituḥ kinnaravarmmaṇaḥ liṅgaṃ samsthāpya yat *puṇyaṃ* (conj.; *puṇya* Ed.) *dhanañ cākṣayam astv iti*.

Liṅga Pedestal Inscriptions in the Budhanilakantha Area

□ (B1) LA 7, R. 6.³⁴ The date reads *saṃvat* 398.³⁵ Date interpretation: 476 CE. Number of lines: 4. Condition: Damaged. This is a pedestal inscription issued by the Licchavi king Mānadeva recording the establishment of the *liṅga*, which bears no particular name. No land grant.

? (B2) LA 36, R 31. Number of lines: 6. Condition: Damaged. Pedestal inscription issued by a certain *mahārāja* Manudeva, date and reign unclear. The text is not complete since part of the inscription seems to be damaged; the extant text speaks of erecting a jeweled Śiva image.³⁶ It is thus not clear if this record only concerns a sculpture, or a *liṅga* together with a sculpture. I have not yet been able to locate or inspect this inscription,³⁷ and thus I have been unable to check whether the incision in the stone seems to be for a *liṅga* or a sculpture.

34 The inscribed *liṅga* is now located in a little shrine up the hill to the northwest of the Budhanilakantha sanctuary, following the main road heading north. According to local informants, the *liṅga* was moved from its original location, though it is not clear when this happened. Regmi (1983, Vol. 1: 9) describes the location as “more than a furlong from the shrine of Budhanilakantha in the north-west, some 500 ft up the hill, near a banyan tree, where the stream Visnumati flows down to the valley.” I visited the current site in March 2016; the location was further away than in Regmi’s description. A local informant at the time reported that the *liṅga* used to be close to a tree down the hill. I could not see any stream close by, which may indeed mean that it now stands at a different location. And while the *liṅga* is currently close to a tree, it may have been placed there to imitate its original location. In any case, more information about the building at the current location is needed. What is certain is that the *liṅga* pedestal was attached to the ground with concrete after the time of Vajracharya, since the last lines he records are no longer visible due to the concrete. Regmi also records more information than is now visible, but since he tends to rely on Vajracharya’s text, this does not necessarily indicate the condition of the pedestal in the 1980s.

35 Acharya (2008: 36, n. 37) points out that the year of the inscription, which was earlier read as 396, has been corrected by Pant (1986: 275–276) to 398. Regmi (1983, v. 1, p. 9) reads 395.

36 LA 36, line 4: [- -] *saṃsthāpitātra vidhivat pratimā vicitrā śambhor guṇādhikatayā kṣi* [- -] *āharatnī bhāsvadvicitramaṇiratnavibhūṣaṇāḍhyā* [- -].

37 According to Regmi, the pedestal inscription is located in “Gairigaon, a little north of the Budhanilakantha shrine.” However, there must be some confusion since the Budhanilakantha shrine is north of Gairigaon.

FIGURE 8 *Linga established by Mānadeva in 476 CE (B1)*

FIGURE 9 *Detail of inscription now surrounded by concrete*

*Linga Pedestal Inscriptions in the Pashupatinath Area*³⁸

𑂔(P1) LA 10, G 5, R 8.³⁹ Samvat 399. Date interpretation: 477 CE. Number of lines: 5. Condition: Slightly damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of the *linga* Ratneśvara by a certain Ratnasaṅgha,⁴⁰ who is described as a

38 Michaels (1994: 67) gives a table of the names of the identified Licchavi *lingas*, including the inscribed pieces, the only omission being P3, which was only discovered in the 1990s. (Just note that his number 8 (Rāmeśvara) and 10 (Nātheśvara) are actually the same, and that the references to Vajracharya's volume for 18 (Aṃśuvarmeśvara) and 19 (Śūrabhogeśvara) should read 85 rather than 58).

39 Ratneśvara and the *linga* set up by Vimalasaṅgha (P3) are located on the property of Mr. Shivasharan Raj Bhandari in Deopatan, the area around Pashupatinath. According to him, these *lingas* were found when he purchased the land in the early 1980s. Ratneśvara was the first to be discovered; today it is still in the position where it was found, with the spout facing northeast and the entire structure sloping slightly to the northeast, which indicates that it may indeed be in its original position. When discovered, only the top of the *linga* was visible; the rest was unearthed during building. About ten years later, P3, which had been completely covered with earth (apparently 80–100 cm deep), was found when an annex to the house was built. It was located about 10 meters east of Ratneśvara, but was then moved to its present position in the same compound, just southeast of Ratneśvara. Both inscribed *linga* pedestals were found with the *linga* inside; note that both *lingas* feature the *brahmasūtra* and the *parśvasūtra* as will be described below on p. 328.

40 LA 10, line 2: [...] *vidhivad ratnasaṅghena sarvvadā ratneśvaraḥ prayatnena sthāpito 'yaṃ surottamaḥ* [...].

FIGURE 10 *Ratneśvara, established in 477 CE (P1), now located in the house of Shivasharan Raj Bhandari, Pashupatinath area*

FIGURE 11 *Detail: Licchavi stone linga (apparently original) fixed into a base, with the brahmasūtra facing southeast*

sārthavāha, i.e. a merchant, in inscription P2. A large number of land donations are linked to the shrine.

□ (P2) LA 11, G 10, R 9. Saṃvat 402. Date interpretation: 480 CE. Number of lines: 5. Condition: Slightly damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the installation of Prabhukeśvara by the merchant Ratnasaṅgha, the same person who established P1.⁴¹ Land grant.

□ (P3)⁴² Edition published by Acharya (2003). Saṃvat 407. Date interpretation: 485 CE. Number of lines: 5. Condition: Slightly damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of a *liṅga* by a certain Vimalasaṅgha, who identifies himself as the son of a merchant (*sārthavāhasuta*).⁴³ It is specified that the merit of this religious action should go to a certain Nirdantaka, who is described as a *gaṇa*,⁴⁴ as well as towards the welfare of King

41 LA 11, lines 1–2: [...] *yah sārthavāha urudhīḥ kila ratnasaṅghaḥ [- -]minah prabhusaṅgha-nāmnah liṅgāsritākṛtir iyaṃ jagato hitāya prabhukeśvarasya kṣetrābhilekhyam yathā praṇ-prīṇpradeśe śatasya bhūmi 100 [...]*.

42 For the location, see n. 39.

43 For Sanskrit text and translation, see p. 350, n. 156.

44 For an edition of the text, see Acharya 2003, lines 1–3 (text marked with ⟨...⟩ are conjectures by Acharya): [...] *nirdantako nāma gaṇo niyogād devātidevasya maheśvarasya | santaptajāmbūnada[sacchavīnām] kule vijajñe bhuvi licchavīnām || ucchrāyato yo navaki-*

FIGURE 12 *Prabhukeśvara*, established in 480 CE (P2), Pashupatinath area

FIGURE 13 *Liṅga* commissioned by Vimalasaṅgha, in 485 CE (P3), now located in the house of Shivasharan Raj Bhandari, Pashupatinath area

Mānadeva.⁴⁵ There is a record of an attached land grant, but the end is broken off.

𑀓? (P4) LA 13. Saṃvat 410. Date interpretation: 488 CE. Number of lines: 2. Condition: Damaged. A *liṅga* pedestal inscription in the Pañcādeva complex south of Pashupatinath. According to Michaels (1994: 67) this *liṅga* is named Śivapūjeśvara, which is probably a local name. The inscription can no longer be seen, since the pedestal has now almost entirely sunk into the ground next to a tree in the northwestern corner of the courtyard in the Pañcādeva complex (see Fig. 14). The few fragments of text recorded by Vajracharya give the date of consecration as the full moon day of the month of Māgha; the inscription speaks of a childlike son, which suggests that the *liṅga* may have been installed to commemorate the death of someone's son, which is also what Vajracharya suggests in his notes.⁴⁶

ṣkumātro dhātrā nisṛṣṭo jagato hitāya | yasyoraso dakṣiṇataś cakram cihṇaṃ surair dattam atīva bhāti || yo viprakedāramukheśv abhikṣṇaṃ hiraṇyavrṣṭiṃ viśrjaty analpām, “A Gaṇa whose name is ‘Toothless’ was born on earth in the family of the Licchavis, who had a very good complexion of [the color of] heated gold. He is by elevation as tall as nine *kiṣku*(?)-measures and was fashioned by the creator for the benefit of the world; by the gods he was given a discus mark on the right side of his chest, [a mark] which shines excessively; in the mouths of the rice-fields which are the Brahmins, he constantly releases rain of wealth in great amounts.”

45 For the Sanskrit text and its translation, see p. 350 and n. 156.

46 LA 13: saṃvat 490 [- -] māghapaurṇṇamāsyām tasya sutaḥ śaiśa(va) [- -] sa [- -] I thank Nirajan Kafle for helping me to go through the notes in Nepali.

FIGURE 14 So-called Śivapūjeśvara (P4), established in 488 CE, Pañcadevala, Pashupatinath area

FIGURE 15 Vijayeśvara, established in 505 CE (P6), Sūryaghat, Pashupatinath area

❖ (P5)⁴⁷ LA 14, G 8, R 11. Saṃvat 413. Date interpretation: 491 CE. Number of lines: 3. Condition: Slightly damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of the *liṅga* Jayeśvara by a certain Jayalambha, who is not further identified. A land grant is attached to it, with its use specified for performing the shrine's *kāraṇapūjā*.⁴⁸ (On *kāraṇapūjā*, see below p. 333 f.)

❖ (P6) LA 20, R 18. Saṃvat 427. Date interpretation: 505 CE. Number of lines: 7. Condition: Slightly damaged. Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of the *liṅga* Vijayeśvara by the princess Vijayavatī, daughter of King Mānadeva. The inscription contains a *praśasti* to Śiva, followed by Vijayavatī's genealogy, featuring her father, Mānadeva, and her mother, Śrībhoginī, as well as referring to her husband, Devalābha, who is described as a *vārta*. It is not clear what the exact position of a *vārta* is; it seems likely that it is some sort of official role, close to the royal court.⁴⁹ No land grant.

❖ (P7)⁵⁰ LA 34, R 30. Saṃvat 455. Date interpretation: 533 CE. Number of lines: 4. Condition: Not damaged. Platform (*sthaṇḍila*) inscription recording the setting

47 The pedestal is located inside the sacred compound, and now serves as the base of the large Trīśūla north of the main sanctum.

48 LA 14, lines 1–2: [...] *bhaktiā viśuddhamatinā jayalambhanāmnā liṅgañ jayeśvaram iti prathitaṃ nṛloke saṃsthāpitaṃ saṃpater jgato hitāya bhagavato 'sya liṅgasya kāraṇapūjāyāḥ samyak pravarttanāya svapūṇyāpyāyanārthan dattam akṣayanīyam ...*

49 See Regmi 1983 Vol. 3: 118 for a list of high-ranking figures, such as *dūtakas*, who are referred to as *vārta*. Further, see Sircar 1966: 365, who describes a *vārta* as a grant or share holder, or simply “a person in possession of a *vṛtti*”, i.e. someone with income.

50 Note that nowadays the *liṅga* above the inscription is known as Bhasmeśvara, rather

FIGURE 16 Square base for liṅga pedestal commissioned by Dhruvasaṅgha in 533 CE (P7), Pashupatinath area

FIGURE 17 Pedestal inscription issued by Mānamatī in 545 CE (P9), Pashupatinath area

up of five *liṅga* shrines—Bhadreśvara, Nātheśvara, Śubheśvara, Sthiteśvara, and Ravīśvara—by a certain Dhruvasaṅgha, who held the post of *pratihāra vārta*, probably some high officer in the palace.⁵¹ Note that he did not install a *liṅga* bearing his own name. The area, in which the *liṅgas* were set up is specified as the *paśupatikṣetra*, i.e. the Paśupati area. This is the earliest known epigraphic reference to the Pashupatinath temple area. There is a land grant attached for the *kāraṇapūjā* and for repairs on all five *liṅgas*. The grant is here entrusted to the *svajanagoṣṭhikā* (see p. 342).⁵²

❖ (P8) LA 38, G 16, R 33. Saṃvat 463. Date interpretation: 540. Number of lines: 5. Condition: Slightly damaged. Platform (*sthaṇḍila*) inscription recording the setting up of the *liṅga* Anuparameśvara in the name of Anuparama by his

than Bhadreśvara. In his edition, Vajracharya himself also notes this, explaining that this secondary name came about due to the location of the *liṅga* close to the cremation ground and the association with ash (*bhasma*).

51 For *pratihāra*, see Sircar 1966: 259.

52 LA 34, 1–: [...] *bhagavataḥ paśupateḥ kṣetre svayam pratiṣṭhāpītebhyo bhadreśvaranātheśvaraśubheśvarasthiteśvararaviśvarebhyāḥ pañcabhyāḥ kāraṇapūjānimittaṃ khaṇḍaphuṭṭhapratisaṃskāranimittaṃ ca pratihāradhruvasaṅghavārttena svapūnyāpyāyanārttham mātāpitroś cānugrahārthaṃ ca svajanagoṣṭhikādhinam kṛtvā yūpagrāmasya dakṣiṇena saṃvaidye kṣetran dattaṃ* [...]. “[...] Vārta Pratihāra Dhruvasaṅgha handed over some land [...] in Saṃvaidya (?) to the South of Yūpagrāma to the five [*liṅga* shrines] Bhadreśvara, Nātheśvara, Śubheśvara, Sthiteśvara and Ravīśvara, established by himself in the area of the venerable Lord Paśupati, after having put it in the care of a *goṣṭhikā* [consisting] of his own relatives; [he donates the land] for [the carrying out of] the *kāraṇapūjā* and repairing what is split and broken in order to enhance his own merit as well as for the benefit of his mother and father.” For the *svajanagoṣṭhikā*, see also p. 342.

TABLE 1 *Measurements of the liṅga pedestals (all in cm)*⁵³

Bno.	Inscribed part					Pedestal								
	w	H	At	As	Sp	Shape	a	b	Dia	H	Mid	Lc	Lh	Spout
L1	71	10	2	1–1,5	3	round	–	–	83	?	28×28	77	69	37
L2	87	18	2,5	1	1–2	square	88	87,5	–	22n	21×21,5	58	69	35
L3	92	8	3	1,5	3	round	–	–	84	18n	18×18	62	69,5	24
B1	90	13?	2,5	1	4	square	110	110	–	25n	32×32	87	78	31
P1	115	14	2	1,5	1,8	round	–	–	97	19,5n	32×32	89	?	40
P2	77	13	2,5	1	1	square	80	78	–	25f	22×22	59	64	25
P3	90,5	14,5	1,5	1,2	1,5	square	94	94	–	18	30×30	63	?	16,5
P4	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
P5	72	9	1	1	1	square	94	94	–	?	24×21	– ⁵⁴	–	37
P6	100	14	1	1	0,6–0,9	round	–	–	73	22,5f	20×20	?	?	29
P7 ⁵⁵	76	?	2	1,5	1–8	sthaṇḍila	82	77	–	24	–	–	–	–
P8 ⁵⁶	?	?	?	?	?	sthaṇḍila	?	?	–	?	–	–	–	–
P9	44	14	4	2,5	2	round	–	–	79	17n	21×21	60	19,5	26
P10 ⁵⁷	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
P11 ⁵⁸	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?

wife Ābhīrī, parents of the important minister Bhaumagupta.⁵⁹ The *liṅga* was commissioned on the occasion of Anuparama's death (see p. 347 f). Land grant.

53 Abbreviations: Bno. = Base number as listed above.

Inscribed Part: w = widest part of the inscribed section; H = height of the inscribed section; At = tallest letter (i.e. *akṣara*); As = smallest letter; Sp = Space between the lines.

Pedestal: a = side *a* of a square or rectangular base; b = side *b* of a square or rectangular base; Dia = diameter of a round base; H = height of the base (Xn = height of the base now, i.e. after being relocated and fixed in concrete; Xf = full base height); Mid = sides of the middle square hole for the *liṅga*; Lc = *liṅga* circumference; Lh = *liṅga* height; Spout = approximate length of spout; ? = missing data; – = not applicable.

55 P7 and P8 are not *liṅga* pedestals, but rather square bases under such pedestals; for the sake of being complete, their measurements have nevertheless been included as well.

56 See n. 55. P8 is located inside the sacred compound; I was hitherto unable to receive its measurements.

57 P10 is currently lost.

58 P11 is currently lost.

59 For the Sanskrit text and its translation see p. 347ff and n. 145.

𑀩 (P9) LA 39, G 17 R 34. Saṃvat 467. Date interpretation: 545 CE. Number of lines: 5. Condition: Not damaged. A *līṅga* pedestal inscription recording a land donation to the shrine Nātheśvara (perhaps the Nātheśvara of Dhruvasaṅgha's inscription P7?) as well as a land donation to a *khuḍusvāmi* by a certain Lady Mānamatī.⁶⁰

x (P10) LA 125, G 65, R 118. Saṃvat 69. Date interpretation: 645 CE. Number of lines: 6. Condition: Damaged. A *līṅga* pedestal inscription recording a land donation, for treating the sick, to the Pāśupata Āchārya Dakṣiṇatilūḍaka, who was a representative of the Śṛṅkhalika Pāśupatas, by Suvarṇa Gominī, wife of the Brāhmaṇa Viśvasena.⁶¹

? (P11) LA 188. Undated. Number of lines: 1. Condition: Damaged. The only remaining legible letters are the following: [- -] *vadeva* [- -] *pala ya*

Materials and Structure

With the exception of two of the inscriptions (P7, P8) under examination, all of the records are inscribed directly on the round or square *līṅga* pedestals (also commonly referred to as the *yonī*) into which a *līṅga* is installed.⁶² As far as I am aware, there is no comparable body of Sanskrit inscriptions on *līṅga* pedestals from this period.⁶³ There is only one similar type of inscription, namely a *līṅga*

60 For the Sanskrit text and its translation, see n. 136.

61 For the Sanskrit text and translation see n. 138; see also the further discussion of this passage on p. 345f.

62 Amongst the *līṅga* pedestal inscriptions that I could visit myself (all but P5, P8, P10 and P11), it appears that the text was inscribed directly on to the polished stone surface, though scientific methods in order to determine layers of material need to be done in order to be sure. On the platform inscription P7, which I could inspect personally (P8 is located inside the sacred compound), the text appears to have also been inscribed directly on the polished stone surface. In general, it remains a *desideratum* to scientifically examine the layers of materials and possible traces of writing tools and techniques, which may shed some light on the production of these inscriptions and may help to identify where the stones came from or determine possible workshops. For instance, the Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa inscription in Pashupatinath (LA 50) appears to have been inscribed into some plaster that was put on before; in comparison, Mānadeva's Changu Narayan inscription (LA 2) is carved more deeply into a much harder granite-like stone that was used for the pillar.

63 Thus, this practice is in contrast to the common Indic practice to record such religious donations on copper plates or stone slabs. See, e.g. Salomon 1998: 113 and Willis 2009: 125–126.

inscription dated 435 CE (Gupat *saṃvat* 117), i.e. 30 years earlier than the first dated Nepalese record, which has been discovered in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh; issued by a certain Prthivīṣeṇa, a royal officer of Kumāragupta, the record of the *liṅga*'s establishment is found directly on the lower octagonal part of the *liṅga* itself.⁶⁴ Further, one seventh-century Cambodian inscription edited by Griffiths and Goodall is also located on the bottom part of a *liṅga* pedestal, though not on the *yoni* directly; in terms of inscription type, however, it differs in that it does not record the establishment of the *liṅga* itself, but rather the provision of a sheath for the *liṅga* Vāmeśvara, presumably that same *liṅga*.⁶⁵

The pedestals appear to be all made out of the same dark-grey sandy stone and are fashioned in either round or square shapes. Their sizes vary, but overall they seem rather standardized with similar measurements, as for instance the similar measurements of the square pedestals of P3 and P5, both in the Pashupatinath area, or of the round pedestals L1 and L3, both in the Lazimpat area (see Tab. 1). The *liṅgas* that are currently fixed into the dated pedestals appear to be fashioned out of the same stone. It is difficult to tell whether they are original or whether they were inserted later. Only in the case of the Ratneśvara *liṅga* (P1) and the *liṅga* donated by Vimalasaṅgha (P3) in the Pashupatinath area, have the *liṅgas* been found together with the inscribed base (see n. 39). These *liṅgas*, in turn, are quite similar to the rest of the *liṅgas* attached to the Licchavi pedestals; comparing the sizes we find that they all have a circumference between 58 and 89 cm, with most of them about +/- 60 cm. In addition, in the case of all of the inscriptions I was able to inspect personally, the *liṅgas* share a characteristic shape, with rather broad rounded tops, and the *pārśvasūtra* and *brahmasūtra*⁶⁶ incised, with the latter facing the southeast (see, e.g. Fig. 10). Moreover, they all have a common tripartite structure of a circular top section, an octagonal middle section and a square bottom section, a structure that is commonly found across India and is described in specialized scriptures from the earliest available textual sources, as has been discussed by Goodall.⁶⁷ He shows that while this shape was standard by the time of the Guhyasūtra of the *Nīśvāsa* (i.e. by the seventh century), the scripture *Sarvajñānottara* still teaches

64 CII 3 (1981), no. 21 and Kreisel 1986: A3.

65 Griffiths & Goodall 2013: 424–427.

66 The *pārśvasūtra* and *brahmasūtra* are the stylized lines drawn on the *liṅga*, stylistically imitating the upper part of the phallus; the line drawn all around, meeting upwards in the middle is the *pārśvasūtra* and the vertical line the *brahmasūtra*. See Kreisel 1986: 47–48 and Fig. 10.

67 Goodall (forthcoming). I thank Dominic Goodall for kindly making available to me his pre-publication version of the article.

a variety of forms,⁶⁸ indicating that at the time of this text's composition, there was still a certain flexibility in practices. This fits with the early archeological evidence Goodall presents (including *lingas* discussed by Kreisel (1986)), thus demonstrating that the *linga* structure had not yet been standardized in the early phase of *linga* production. Thus, if the *lingas* currently fixed into the dated pedestals under consideration are original, it is possible to say that they were already subject to the standardization found in Śaiva scriptures, which, in fact would be rather early if they date to the same time as the pedestals. Nevertheless, the only thing we can say with any certainty is that the *lingas* originally fixed into these pedestals had square bottom sections, since all of the dated pedestals have square holes in the middle.

Possible evidence for the tripartite structure having been introduced at some point during the Licchavi period may be found in surviving *ekamukhalingas* that have been dated to the same period due to their close affinity to Indic samples from the Gupta period.⁶⁹ In two such surviving *ekamukhalingas*, the octagonal shape of the middle section is still visible (see, e.g., Fig. 18). However, it is unfortunately not possible to date these examples precisely, and thus one must remain cautious when using them as evidence of *linga* production in the fifth and sixth centuries. There are also other so-called Licchavi *lingas* around Deopatan that have no inscriptions attached to them, such as the locally known Kṛṣṇeśvara; these seem to have the same characteristics and size range.⁷⁰ That this standardized structure was by no means taken for granted at the time of our inscriptions is evidenced by the fact that the inscribed *linga* of Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, mentioned above⁷¹ and dated to 436 CE, has only a round and an octagonal section, onto the latter of which the text is inscribed directly, but no square bottom section.⁷²

There are also some remains dating to the Licchavi period that show us what the structures housing the *lingas* might have looked like. These are decorated

68 *ibid.*

69 See Kreisel 1986: 46, f. 148, who argues that the surviving Licchavi specimens show a striking similarity to and the influence of the Gupta iconography of Mathura (see also Pal 1974: 83–84). Two of these surviving Licchavi *ekamukhalingas* are located in Deopatan and one in Lazimpat (see, Fig. 18).

70 E.g. Kṛṣṇeśvara, located inside a courtyard of a house in Deopatan along the western road leading away from the main gate, has a *linga* circumference of 72 cm and a base with a diameter of 101 cm. Note that Michaels 1994: 67 lists several so-called non-inscribed Licchavi *lingas*.

71 See above, p. 328.

72 Kreisel 1986: 51 and image A3.

columns and large stone slabs in the shape of roofs (see Fig. 19), some located in Pashupatinath⁷³ and some at a site near the village of Lele.⁷⁴ Slusser suggests that the form of some columns indicates that slabs were once placed between them to form an enclosed shrine, as can be seen in later examples (e.g. Slusser 1982: Plates 250–253). The reason for dating these remains to the Licchavi period is that two such elements bear Licchavi inscriptions. The first is an undated inscription on a broken part of a roof; it was probably issued by the wife of Amśuvarman, which would place the inscription in the early seventh century.⁷⁵ The second inscription (also undated) is on a column that, according to Slusser (ibid.: 170), is now buried in the ground close to the Bhuvaneśvara temple, near Pashupatinath. It merely reads that a certain Pradyumnaprāṇa carried out this meritorious work (*kīrti*).⁷⁶ According to Vajracharya, these shrines may be what is referred to as *āvaraṇa* (cover) in Licchavi inscriptions.⁷⁷

Bathing the Icon: Pedestals with Waterspout

Since this group of dated *liṅga* pedestals is the earliest thus far known, they provide us a possibility to reconstruct their form and function in the context of *liṅga* worship. A noticeable feature is that all of them have a spout through which any liquid used during the *liṅga*'s worship can run off. This so-called *praṇāla* usually faces the northeast. Compared to Indic examples found in Mathura, one of the main centers for the production of *liṅgas* already in the first centuries of the Common Era, this kind of structure became common only after the Gupta period. Until then, *liṅgas* were installed on various kinds of platforms that lacked water drains, as discussed by Kreisel.⁷⁸ He points out that this

73 See, e.g. Fig. 19. For more photos of such remains in Pashupatinath, see Slusser (1982: Plate 245) and Michaels (1994: 52, Abb. 13); Michaels also records a presumed Licchavi shrine in the Pashupatinath area that is now lost.

74 See Slusser 1982: Plates 247–249.

75 LA 87. Slusser (1982: 169) describes the location of the inscriptions as “engraved on the edge of a typical but previously unidentified roof, now broken and used to cover a spring in Bankali, near Paśupatinātha.” I have so far been unable to locate the piece myself.

76 LA 193: *pradyumnaprāṇasya kīrti*.

77 See Vajracharya's notes on LA 87 and LA 193.

78 See Kreisel 1986: 52, n. 164. Here, Kreisel also mentions the pedestal of a Nepalese *ekamukhaliṅga* as possibly one of the earliest examples. He was not aware at the time of the dated pedestal inscriptions, which provide firm evidence. Further, see the image of scenes of *liṅga* worship mentioned above in n. 12, which depict pedestals without spouts. Another such example is mentioned by Willis (2009: 142), who speaks of locating, in Udayagiri, the earliest extant example of a *liṅga* installed on some sort of platform, but it features only “a plinth in a square cella,” not a waterspout.

FIGURE 18 *Licchavi ekamukhalinga in the Lazimpat area*

FIGURE 19 *Remains of a Licchavi linga shrine in the Pashupatinath area*

indicates that the customary bathing of the *liṅga* was probably not a feature of worship in the early period; rather, Gupta-period iconography portrays worshippers with garlands and bowls of flowers.⁷⁹ Corroborating this fact with epigraphical evidence, Willis has pointed out that the first mention in epigraphy of bathing an image is found on the Valkhā plates, dated to the fourth century.⁸⁰ These plates constitute the earliest extant body of Pāśupata inscriptions and record the religious activities and tasks carried out by the Pāśupata Ācāryas in public temples, including the worship of non-Śaiva deities. However, amongst these Pāśupata records, only the last one speaks of bathing as part of rituals offered to the deity (XIII). The others use formulaic expressions such as “... *balicarudhūpagandhapuṣṣamālyopayojyam* ...”: offerings of *bali*, *caru*, incense, sandal-paste, flowers and garlands.⁸¹ This suggests that even then, bathing was

79 See Kreisel 1986: 52, n. 164.

80 Willis 2009: 93 and 282–283, n. 64.

81 See Ramesh & Tiwari 1990, nos. IV, V, VI, IX; further, see no. III: “... *gandhadhūpabalicarusatropayogādiṣūpayojayamānāḥ* ...”; no. II: ... *balicharusatropayogādiṣu gandhadhūpamālyopayogādiṣu copayojayamānā...*; no. X: ... *balicharusatradhūpagandhapūjyamālyopayojyabhogāyavam* ...; no. XII: ... *balichatrusatradhūpagandhamālyapūṣpayojyam* ... Further, a sixth century Nerman record (Fleet, CII 3 [1888]: 289 [lines 6–7] and Willis 2009: 137, n. 246) also mentions the worship of the established *liṅga* shrine Mihireśvara at Kapāleśvara, but does not mention its bathing: *kapāleśvare jananīratīṣṭhasya śrīmihireśvarasya kapāleśvarabalicarusatrasragdhūpadipadānāya satatam*.

not a standard procedure and that practices were still in flux, something not surprising since the fourth and fifth centuries appear to be a period in which the repertoire of religious activities involving images was still in a formative phase.⁸²

Already by the mid-fifth century, however, the bathing of the *liṅga* was clearly an important part of worship in the Kathmandu Valley. But it was not a practice confined to *liṅga* worship; we also find regular images on pedestals with spouts. For instance, a dated rectangular base with a spout and an incision in the center for erecting an image records that in 505 CE, a certain Nirapekṣa established effigies of his deceased parents (see Fig. 20).⁸³ Another inscribed rectangular pedestal with a water spout is the base for a tall pillar, with an inscription on the pedestal recording the erecting of a stone pillar (see Figs. 21 and 22),⁸⁴ and a rectangular pedestal with a water spout dating to 489 CE records the establishment and worship of the goddess Śarvāṇī.⁸⁵ Further, Licchavi period reliefs in Changu Narayan are placed on such pedestals with water exits; while it is difficult to tell whether this is the original usage, it appears to represent a long-standing tradition.⁸⁶ Also the inscriptions themselves sometimes explicitly mention bathing (*snāpana*) as part of the religious activities to be performed for deities.⁸⁷

82 Bühnemann (1988) provides a comprehensive treatment of *smārta pūjā* rituals, whose earliest forms are found in the appendices (*pariśiṣṭhas*) of the *Gr̥hyasūtras* (Bühnemann 1988: 11).

83 LA 19. The rectangular base is now found amongst the debris at the Changu Narayan temple. At the time of my visit (2012) it could be found lying to the left of the main entrance of the shrine.

84 LA 8. The inscribed pedestal is currently located at the same shrine as Mānadeva's pedestal inscription (B1). The measurements of the rectangular base are as follows: base: 83 cm × 93.5 cm; current height above the ground: 8 cm; dimensions of the square hole in the middle for the pillar: 38 cm × 38 cm; spout length: 25 cm.

85 An edition, analysis and detailed discussion of the material aspects of the inscription are found in Garbini 1997.

86 See also Pal 1974: 6–7, which quotes Chinese observations during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE): “... They adore five celestial spirits, and sculpture their images in stone. Each day they wash them with purifying water ...”

87 This is in contrast to the contemporaneous records of the Indic sub-continent I have been able to access so far, with the exception of the Kadamba records from Karnataka. It is noticeable that none of the Licchavi inscriptions include the triad of *bali*, *caru* and *sattrā*, as is commonly found in Indic epigraphical material of the same period, as discussed by Willis (2009: 96–113).

FIGURE 20 Pedestal inscription issued by Nirapekṣa (LA 19) in 505 CE, Changu Narayan

FIGURE 21 Pedestal inscription recording the setting up of a pillar (LA 8)

FIGURE 22 Detail of inscription

From the early records onwards, there is also a so-called *kāraṇapūjā* performed for the deity, with the earliest occurrence in a pedestal inscription for Śarvāṇī dated 489 CE, closely followed by the *liṅga* pedestal inscription of Jayalambha for Jayeśvara in Lazimpat dated 491 CE (L1), Dhruvasaṅgha's base inscription dated to 533 CE (P7), as well as other, partly non-Śaiva records.⁸⁸ Various hypotheses have been brought forth regarding the procedure denoted by this term,⁸⁹ but all we can say with any certainty regarding the *kāraṇapūjā*

88 Other instances of *kāraṇapūjā* being mentioned include the procedure for a Śaiva image (LA 36), Vajrabhairava Bhaṭṭāraka (LA 141), the deity Vaiśampāyana in *saṃvat* 452 (LA 28), and Nārāyaṇasvāmin during the rule of Dhruvadeva and Jiṣṇugupta (LA 109). Under the reign of Śivadeva II, the *kāraṇapūjā* is listed as one of the duties of the villagers at the Vaiṣṇava temple of Puttinarāyaṇa (LA 143).

89 Indrajī & Buehler (1880: 167, n. 16) have translated the term as “occasional worship” (also quoted as such by Sircar [1966]) and that “it is probably an equivalent for *naimittikapūjā*, and refers to the worship on the days of the new and full moon and other festive seasons.” Dhanavajra Vajracharya seems to share this opinion (Kunwor 1984: 5 quoting Vajracharya). Another interpretation has been offered by Regmi (1983: 182 and 209), where he links the term to the Pāśupata milieu, suggesting that *kāraṇa* refers to Śiva as the primal cause of the universe as is taught in the *Pāśupatasūtras* (Regmi 1983: 182 and 209). He also says that this ritual is prescribed for any kind of deity (and implies that it is performed with or without alcohol, although it is unclear to me where he has derived this information), but at the same time nonetheless points out that the worship is restricted to only Śiva and Viṣṇu. Garbini (1997: 352), however, points out that this is not the case and that the *kāraṇapūjā* is employed for a variety of deities, such as Śarvāṇī. Another suggestion has been put forward by Slusser (*1982: 273), who, based on some notes of Dhanavajra regarding inscriptions 14 and 112, speculates that the *kāraṇapūjā* is a tantric rite. On this point Regmi (1983: 181) draws attention to the fact that no tantric elements, such as *nyāsa* or *mudra*, are part

in the early Licchavi period is that it was carried out for various deities, appearing to be a general mode of worship rather than being specific to a certain deity. Later, an inscription issued by King Narendradeva in 659 CE gives more detailed information about the procedure of the *kāraṇapūjā* as it was envisaged at the time. Here there even seems to be a link to the rainy season,⁹⁰ with the following activities to be performed at the occasion: bathing the icon, offering perfumes, flowers, incense and lamps, and playing musical instruments related to the rainy season in order to increase prosperity through the rain, muttering prayers, cleansing the icon, smearing it with cow-dung and offering oblations.⁹¹ It may be that a similar sequence was portrayed in the undated inscription mentioning the *kāraṇapūjā* for Vajrabhairava, where one of the preserved sections lists singing.⁹² As such, by the late seventh century, the *kāraṇapūjā* constituted a set of procedures commonly associated with general *pūjā* activities. We find that its mention in inscriptions is frequently paired together with formulaic expressions regarding repairs to temples, which commonly feature in donative records, such as *khaṇḍasphuṭitasamśkāra-kāraṇapūjādikam*, “[they carry out] such things as repairing what is split and broken and the *kāraṇapūjā*”.⁹³

Returning more specifically to the case of *liṅgapūjā*, also with an eye on corroborating this evidence with textual material about the formation of early *liṅga* worship, it is worth noting that the first half of the Licchavi period—up to about the seventh century CE—also corresponds to the period in which the first comprehensive textual treatments of *liṅga* worship were produced, in particular the ŚDh.⁹⁴ This text is devoted entirely to the topic of lay devotional

of any rituals mentioned in the Licchavi inscriptions. Without any certain evidence in this direction together with the testimony of Narendradeva's edict, which describes the *kāraṇapūjā* as a general means of image worship, I believe it unlikely that the *kāraṇapūjā* was tantric at this time. It may be, however, that the *kāraṇapūjā* changed in character over time and eventually came to include tantric elements.

90 Note that Indrāji and Buehler have suggested that the *kāraṇapūjā* is some festival; see above, n. 89.

91 LA 128, lines 14–16: ... *snapanagandhapuṣpadhūpapradīpavarṣavardhanavarṣākālavā-dītrajapakādikā kāraṇapūjā kartavyā maṇḍalyāñ ca upalepanasammāranjanapratīsaṃskārādikaṃ kṛtvā* ...

92 LA 141, line 6: ... *vajrabhairavabhaṭṭā(ra)[- -]*, line 7: *kāraṇapūjā[- -]*, and line 12: *vāditrañ ca praye(ka)[- -]*. Only the far left side of the inscription seems to have been preserved.

93 See, e.g., LA 143, lines 8–9: ... *devakulasya khaṇḍasphuṭitasamśkāra-kāraṇapūjādikam ebhīr eva kartavyam* ...

94 Hazra (1952–1953: 15–16) proposes a very early date between 200–500 CE for the ŚDh. Bisschop (2010b: 233–249) argues that at least some parts of the sixth chapter cannot

activities centered on the worship of *liṅgas*. The modes of worship it depicts closely mirror the kind of devotional activities spelled out in Narendradeva's inscription. Moreover, a great deal of emphasis is placed on bathing *liṅgas* with various substances, as well as building shrines for them and repairing and maintaining them.⁹⁵ As such, the ŚDh, two chapters of the probably contemporaneous *Skandapurāṇa* (chapters 27 & 28),⁹⁶ and the *Niśvāsamukha*,⁹⁷ which was perhaps composed slightly later, are the earliest extant comprehensive writings on this topic, marking a period of an upsurge in the production of Śaiva texts. This development went hand in hand with the increased institutionalization of sectarian Śaiva groups. While the ŚDh is a text of pan-Indic importance, with manuscript evidence spread across the subcontinent, it is known to have been particularly important in Nepal, where it became the foundational text of an entire corpus of Śaiva scriptures that were transmitted exclusively there.⁹⁸ The prevalence of *liṅga* pedestals with waterspouts dating to as early as the mid-fifth century, thus, fits the ritual world of *pūjā* practices depicted in texts such as the ŚDh particularly well.

Donative Patterns: From Personal Shrines to Pāśupata Groups

Amongst the pedestal inscriptions, including the two platform inscriptions, we find the following basic types: (1) *liṅga* foundation inscriptions, further divided into (1a) only the foundation of a *liṅga* (L1–L3, B1, P6) with a shrine, and (1b) the foundation of a *liṅga* together with land donations (P1–P3, P5, P7,

predate the sixth century. Several editing projects on the ŚDh and *Śivadharmottara* are currently in progress. Most research indicates that the text has undergone several revisions before the recensions preserved in our earliest surviving Nepalese palm-leaf manuscripts.

95 For instance, the fifth chapter of the ŚDh is a long chapter teaching the merits that result from the various devotional activities one can perform for a *liṅga*. These include bathing the *liṅga* with various substances, lustrations, polishing it, smearing it with fragrant pastes, playing music, repairing any damage to it or the shrine that houses it, and making various offerings, such as guest water, fans, yak tails, flowers, fruits, leaves, herbs, incense, cardamom, different kinds of foods, mirrors, flags, umbrellas, bells, musical instruments or clothes. A critical edition of this chapter is currently under preparation by the author.

96 For the sixth/seventh century dating see Yokochi 2014 and Bakker 2014.

97 See Kafle 2015. On the reasons for this early dating of the *Niśvāsa* corpus, see the Prolegomena in Goodall 2015.

98 For the transmission of the ŚDh in Nepal and local corpus production, see De Simini (2016).

p8) (in one case including a donation to a person, namely P3); and (11) pure land donations unrelated to the *liṅga* of the pedestal (P9, P10). One undated pedestal inscription, (B2) in Budhanilakantha, is difficult to classify, since it is not clear whether the text is referring to the setting up of a *liṅga* according to type (1a), or whether it simply records the establishment of a Śiva sculpture. In any case, the majority of the dated pedestal inscriptions were issued during the earliest phase of epigraphic records, between 466 and 505 CE, and belong to group (1). The two platform inscriptions, which were issued after a short time gap in 533 CE (P7) and 540 CE (P8), also fall into category (1). Only the last two dated records from 545 CE (P9) and 645 CE (P10), respectively, which are again inscribed directly onto *liṅga* pedestals, belong to group (11), recording not the foundation of *liṅgas* but rather, (a) in the case of P9, land grants for another shrine called Nātheśvara and for a certain *khuḍusvāmin*, who was likely some sort of Śaiva ascetic,⁹⁹ and (b) in the case of P10, the donation of land to a certain Pāsupata Ācārya Dakṣiṇatiluḍaka, who received the gift on behalf of the Śṛṅkhalika Pāsupatas for the treatment of the sick. Until now, no pedestal inscriptions of this kind have been found in the Kathmandu Valley that date later than those under discussion here. In this group of pedestal inscriptions itself, we can observe certain changes in the type of records they contain, shifting from records directly relevant to the *liṅga* in question, to records of land donations for shrines other than the personal one just established as well as for religious individuals.¹⁰⁰ As a consequence, the object of the *liṅga*

99 See Acharya 1998. In LA (lines 10–20) 112 mention is made of *khaḍukas* who are amongst the different representatives of Pāsupata groups constituting the committee of Pāsupata Ācāryas being handed over some sort of donation by the Pāsupata Ācārya Pranaradanaprāṇa: ... *ācāryabhagavatpranarddanaprāṇakauśikena bhagavataḥ ścchatra(ca)ṇi-
deśvarasya [- -]kugrāme praṇālikāyās ca kha(ṇḍ)asphuṭitasamādhānārtham uddi(śya)
muṇḍaśṛṅkhalikapāsupatācāryaparṣadi vārāhasvāmi umasoma[- -]krasomakhaḍukānāṇi
ca aśī(ti)[- -]piṇḍakamānikānāṃ bhū pratipādītāḥ* ..., “... The venerable Ācārya Pranaradanaprāṇa Kauśika provided land *procuring* 80 units of *piṇḍakamānika* (i.e. revenue from the land) to the *khaḍuka* [ascetics] Vārāhasvāmi, Umasoma, and [- -]soma of the committee of Pāsupata Ācāryas belonging to the Muṇḍaśṛṅkhalikas for the purpose of repairing what is broken and split in the temple of Chattracaṇḍeśvara and for a water conduit ...” It seems likely that a *khuḍusvāmin*, perhaps a variant of *khaḍuka*, may thus be a Pāsupata mendicant, even though it is not clear whether this is a generic term for referring to him or a personal name that is descriptive of the type of ascetic he is. Regmi (1983: Vol. 2, 23), in his translation, supplied in brackets that this Khuḍusvāmi is “belonging to (a) Pāsupata sect,” but provides no evidence as to how he has arrived at this conclusion.

100 And in one case (the early P3 inscription), recording a donation only to a religious person.

installed onto the inscribed pedestal grew to have secondary importance, the shrine serving merely as a medium for recording the donative act.

These patterns suggest the following two developments. While it is possible that the custom of erecting such small private *linga* shrines with their records inscribed directly onto the pedestal fell out of use, this does not mean that the practice of establishing shrines themselves was no longer common. As an example, a stone slab inscription now situated at the western entrance to the Pashupatinath temple area describes an edict issued by Aṃśuvarman which regulated the handling of three Śaiva shrines that had been established by female members of his family (LA 85).¹⁰¹ Further, the practice of erecting memorial *lingas* has remained prevalent until recent times.¹⁰² This thus suggests, first, that the method of record-keeping simply changed, most likely with a shift to another medium such as copper plates, actually common for this kind of record in India.¹⁰³ Indeed, this shift in the medium used for such records does not seem to have been specific to these *linga* shrines, since non-Śaiva donative records in the valley, although they are fewer in number, show the same tendency. The last such land-donation record dates to 538 CE.¹⁰⁴

Secondly, a development more specific to the Śaiva community is the gradual emergence of Śaiva officiants, most probably ascetics, as agents managing the transactions related to the donations specified in these pedestal inscriptions. As we have just seen, the medium of the *linga* pedestal shifted from recording the establishing of small private shrines to recording donations directly addressed to representatives of religious groups in the Pashupatinath area¹⁰⁵—in P3 and P9, to religious people of unspecified religious affiliation, though most likely Śaiva ascetics of some sort, and then in P10 to a Pāśupata Ācārya. With P3 and P9 having been issued in 485 CE and 545 CE, respectively, and P10 much later, in 645 CE, it may well be that these pedestal inscriptions are representative of the development in which increasingly organized Pāśupata groups moved into this sacred space revolving around these personal *linga* shrines and their related religious activities. Their aim of institutionalizing themselves in the Pashupatinath temple area was successful, as is apparent

101 For the Sanskrit text and its translation, see p. 343 and n. 131.

102 Michaels 1994: 66.

103 See, e.g., Salomon 1998: 113–116. In the Indic Gupta records surveyed by Willis (2009: 127–128), the act of establishing a shrine is recorded on stone tablets, with endowments recorded separately on copper plates. For comparable examples of changes in writing mediums, see, e.g. Coningham & Gunawardhana 2013: 445.

104 For land donations to shrines not connected to *lingas*, see below, p. 341.

105 None of the other donative records contains a specific recipient.

from the inscriptions, which depict them managing local temple assets and getting involved in public life (see below, p. 345 ff). Indeed, Suvarṇagominī's donation for the treatment of the sick (P10) shows that these Pāsupatas were not only concerned with religious ceremonies, but also took care of public services. From stone slab inscriptions of the last third of the Licchavi period, we know that these groups continued to strengthen their public position, with the Licchavi king Śivadeva even handing over the administration of an entire temple in his name to a group of Pāsupatas.¹⁰⁶ In general, one sees a pattern over time of the number of smaller private donations recorded in such inscriptions decreasing and, by the last third of the Licchavi period, there being only larger donations, issued either by the king himself or under the authority of the royal house, recorded on stone.

Different Localities, Different Practices: The Pashupatinath Area vs. Lazimpat and Budhanilakantha

To continue the above, even though the epigraphical record for this period is rather small, with only 16 inscriptions as yet found, comparing them reveals some clear distinctions in practices at *liṅga* shrines between the Pashupatinath area and the other locations. The first distinction is that the private *liṅga* shrines in the Pashupatinath area, with the exception of the *liṅga* commissioned by Vimalasaṅgha (P3), have been given specific names according to the Indic practice of combining an element of the donor's or beneficiary's name with an ending marking the deity of the shrine. In the case of Śaiva shrines, this ending is *-īśvara*. This practice is not followed in the inscriptions of the Lazimpat group or in Mānadeva's inscription at Budhanilakantha. In contrast, they refer to their icons simply as the *liṅga*, describing it as the *liṅga* of Īśāna (*aiśānaliṅga*), that of Śiva (*śaivaliṅga*), or as a beautiful *liṅga* (*cāruliṅga*).¹⁰⁷

106 LA 139, lines 4–9: [...] *viditam astu bhavatāṃ yathāyaṇ grāmaḥ* [...] *bhūmicchidranyāyenā-grahāratayā mātāpitror ātmanas ca vipulapūṇyopacayahetor asmābhiḥ svakārīta śrīśī-vadeveśvaraṃ bhaṭṭārakan nimittikṛtya taddevakulakhaṇḍasphuṭitasamśkārakaraṇāya vaśapāsupatācāryebhyaḥ pratipāditaḥ* [...], “Let it be known that I have allotted (*nimittikṛtya*) this village (called Vaidya) to [the temple of] the venerable Lord Śivadeveśvara, which I have commissioned myself in order to accumulate merit for my mother, father and myself, and [now] hand [this village] over to the Ācāryas of the Vaśa Pāsupatas as an *agrahāra*, by the law of *bhūmicchidra*, for the purpose of fixing what is split and broken in the temple.” For *bhūmicchidranyāya*, see Sircar 1966: 58; the term *bhūmicchidra* refers to tax-free land, literally “a hole in the land”, in the sense of a plot of land from which no tax income can be collected.

107 For *cāruliṅgaṃ*, see LA 3, for *aiśānaliṅgaṃ*, LA 6, and for *śaivaṃ liṅgaṃ*, LA 15.

The named *lingas* in the Pashupatinath area are only the first of many, this being a practice that continued for many centuries at the site. Michaels has recorded a number of *lingas*, especially from about the middle of the 18th century, which he refers to as “votive *lingas*”, since they commemorate a donor or benefactor, sometimes marking their death.¹⁰⁸ But in addition to its memorial function, the practice of naming a *linga* shrine provided a legal identity, binding donations for activities such as the worship of particular shrines or their repair, a common practice in the early Indic world.¹⁰⁹ This ties in with the second clear distinction, namely that it is only amongst the Pashupatinath group that we find land donations attached to the *linga* shrines.

There are also differences between the social groups behind the Pashupatinath group and those in the other areas. The Budhanilakantha inscription (B1) and two of the Lazimpat group (L2, L3) have been issued by kings or members of the royal family; the third in the Lazimpat group has been issued by a royal official (L1). Notably, the three *linga* pedestal inscriptions in Lazimpat mention a temple or shrine. In contrast, in the Pashupatinath group, this is the case only for Anuparameśvara.¹¹⁰ While we do not have enough information to determine how these royal shrines were administered, a possible explanation for the lack of attached land grants might be that the financing of the maintenance and religious activities of these shrines was paid directly from the palace budget. Evidence of this is found in the Hadigaon inscription of 606 CE, which in essence lists the palace's payroll for the staff and palace affairs as confirmed by Aṃśuvarman at the beginning of his independent reign.¹¹¹ The payments were in cash and the first recipients were religious shrines, which must have been considered part of the palace affairs.¹¹² Thus, there was perhaps no need

108 Michaels 1994: 66–79. As Willis (2009: 136–140) observes, early image installations of the Gupta period also suggest votive functions related to spiritual goals after death. More about the local practices recorded in the inscriptions in question will be discussed below, p. 347 ff.

109 See Sanderson (2003: 415, n. 250) and Willis (2009: 122–125 and 136, fn. 242) regarding legal identities, as it were, of shrines. For instance, in the case of Mānamatī (Pg), whose *linga* pedestal inscription records only the donation of land and not the setting up of her *linga*, we see that the recipient is specified as the shrine Nātheśvara, which would have left no doubt as to which shrine the revenue was to go.

110 LA 38 (= P8); see p. 347 f. and n. 148 for the Sanskrit text and its translation. A non-Śaiva example in this area is the Trivikrama image set up by Mānadeva, now located further south on the eastern bank of the Bagmati stream (LA 2).

111 LA 72.

112 This form of cash donation is also found in Aṃśuvarman's Harigaon edict, which lists the religious institutions receiving a share of the tax money (LA 76).

for personal royal shrines to have separate land grants. Suggestive of this fact is maybe also that in the Pashupatinath group the only *īśvara* shrine that does not have a land donation attached to it is at the same time the only royal *līṅga* foundation on site, commissioned by King Mānadeva's daughter Vijayavatī.¹¹³

With the exception of this single royal *līṅga* shrine in the Pashupatinath area, we find a strong presence of merchants—*sārthavāhas*¹¹⁴—as well as women from high-ranking families and royal officials. The merchants in question—Ratnasaṅgha, Prabhusaṅgha, Vimalasaṅgha and Dhruvasaṅgha¹¹⁵—appear to belong to the same group or perhaps clan, given that their names all end with *-saṅgha*. Of these, the first, Ratnasaṅgha, is explicitly referred to as a *sārthavāha* and the third, Vimalasaṅgha, is identified as the son of a *sārthavāha*.¹¹⁶ Dhruvasaṅgha, the last merchant appearing in the inscriptions, is identified as a *pratihāra vārta*, which seems to indicate that he held a high position at the court.¹¹⁷ In terms of spatial distribution, it appears that there was even a quarter, now situated up a hill to the northwest of the western gate, linked to the Śaiva devotional practices of the merchant community, in particular to those of the *saṅgha* group. Here, the two *līṅgas* commissioned by Ratnasaṅgha (P₁, P₂) and the one of Vimalasaṅgha (P₃) were established near one another.¹¹⁸

Further, it is clear that these individuals were rich landowners and thus high-ranking members of the mercantile community. We don't have any means of determining the size or value of the units used in the land grant records,¹¹⁹

113 Note that it is also exceptional in that its text has a more elegant style, including a full *praśasti* (i.e. poetic eulogy); visually it is also stylistically different in having been executed with a particularly good writing technique.

114 For a definition of *sārthavāha*, see Sircar 1966: 302. Schopen 1971: 39 translates *sārthavāha* as caravan merchant or itinerant trader. Such *sārthavāhas* also appear early in the Pali Canon, as well as in Indic inscriptions close in time to the inscriptions under examination here, as for instance the Damodar copper plates (see n. 133). Note that geographically, these places are quite close to each other.

115 That *-saṅgha* was not a local generic ending for all merchants can be seen in LA 12 (line 2), where we find a *sārthavāha* named Guhamitra: ... *vaṇijāṃ sārthavāhena guhamitreṇa bhaktitaḥ saṃsthāpito* [...].

116 See below, p. 350 and n. 156.

117 See above, p. 325 and n. 52.

118 See above, n. 39.

119 The units of land donations are expressed in *bhūmi* (or *bhū*), *mānika* (*mā*) and *piṇḍaka mānika*. Unfortunately we don't have any information allowing us to determine the size or value of these units. Compared to general principles of land donations in the early medieval Indic world, the most likely interpretation is that *bhūmi*, literally meaning "land",

but by comparing the different numbers of *bhūmi* units of land donated by merchants to Śaiva shrines, it appears that the *saṅgha* groups' donations were very large.¹²⁰ For example, Ratnasaṅgha donates 2620 *bhūmi* units for Ratneśvara (P1)—by far more than all the others—and another 450 *bhūmi* units for Prabhukeśvara (P2). The inscription recording the donation of Vimalasaṅgha is broken off and therefore the complete number can no longer be read, but his donation was at least 580 *bhūmi* units (P3). That of Jayalambha was 450 (P5) and of Dhruvasaṅgha, 400 (P7). In comparison, a royal donation by the Licchavi king Vāmanadeva for a Vāmana shrine was only 200 *bhūmi* units (LA 37). A slightly larger grant was given by a group of Vedic Brahmins, their donations amounting to 240 *bhūmi* units for performing the *kāraṇapūjā* for the Lord of the Veda (LA 28). Further, another merchant (*vāṇik sārthavāha*) named Guhamitra, of a different family, donated 100 *bhūmi* units for establishing and worshipping Divākara (LA 12). On the Buddhist side, a Mahāyāna inscription records a gift of only 45 *mānika* units (which seems to amount to around 3 *bhūmi* units) for repairs on a Buddhist structure depicting a Jātaka, and only 28 *mānika* units for feeding the community of monks (LA 1, Acharya 2008: 26–35). In general, the land grants donated by women, however, were much smaller in size. Anuparama's wife Abhirī, who commissioned the establishment Anupameśvara at her husband's death, is said to have given two plots of land (*kṣetrakhaṇḍadvayam*¹²¹) for worshipping and maintaining the *liṅga* and the shrine (P8).¹²²

From this evidence, it appears that the community of land-owning *sārthavāhas* with names ending in *-saṅgha* was a social group particularly engaged in the practice of establishing named *liṅgas*. The group also added greatly to the

designates a certain size of a piece of land; in our inscriptions this land unit is often followed by units of *mānika* or *piṇḍaka mānika*, which are probably measurements for the produce yielded by the land unit in terms of rice and barely. At this point, however, this remains guesswork. A comprehensive study of the Licchavi administrative system and its development remains a desideratum.

120 Incidentally, it is noteworthy that none of the donations to personal shrines are listed in terms of monetary units.

121 See p. 347 and n. 145.

122 Further, it is specified that she did so with the permission of her son, indicating that she did not fully control her own assets, as one might expect in the Indic cultural sphere. See, for instance, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, Ācārādhyāya 85d: *na svātantryaṃ kvacit striyaḥ*. However, Diwakar Acharya (2015) points out that there is early Dharmaśāstric and epigraphical evidence suggesting that under some circumstances, women had quite a bit of freedom and rights in the Kathmandu Valley.

assets of the Pashupatinath area, a factor that must have also increased the economic and social power linked to these shrines.¹²³ In the last inscription under consideration here (P7), it seems, as mentioned above, that the *saṅgha* donor was even a high-ranking official at the court, a *pratihāra vārta*.¹²⁴ As I have conjectured elsewhere, Śaiva practices around such named *liṅgas* were actively shaped by court officials and merchants who were part of a non-royal social substratum, thereby facilitating Pashupatinath's rise to prominence, after its having been drawn into the religio-political discourse by the non-royal ruler Aṃśuvarman.¹²⁵ Incidentally, one of the earliest extant records of a named *liṅga* being established is found in Gupta records, namely the installation of Pṛthivīśvara, which goes back to a royal official named Pṛthivīṣeṇa rather than a member of the Gupta royal family.¹²⁶

Administration of Land Donations in the Pashupatinath Area

For the first half of the Licchavi period, we have little information about how these land assets were administered. The only exception amongst the pedestal inscriptions under consideration is the record of Dhruvasaṅgha dated 533 CE, where it is specified that his grant be entrusted to a *svajanagoṣṭhikā*, that is to say, a governing body consisting of his own relatives.¹²⁷ When comparing this to other inscriptions, as well as to administrative models on the Indic subcontinent, it seems that *ghoṣṭhīs/goṣṭhikās/gauṣṭhikas*, i.e. committees or social organizations formed for a certain task,¹²⁸ were established to oversee shrines. In Licchavi records, such groups organized for certain religious or social purposes appear frequently. For instance, *gauṣṭhikās* dedicated to shrines, social groups and professional tasks such as providing lamps for worship or water supplies are listed in an edict issued by Śivadeva (I) together with Aṃśuvarman in 604 CE, in which the land grants previously assigned to certain *gauṣṭhikās* are reconfirmed so that they cannot be revoked.¹²⁹

123 For more on this topic, see below, p. 342ff.

124 See above, p. 325.

125 Mirnig (2013).

126 See also Bisschop 2010: 478.

127 See LA 34. For Sanskrit text and translation, see n. 52.

128 Cf. the epigraphical glossary of Sircar (1966), where *goṣṭhī* is defined as “an assembly; a corporate body.”

129 See LA 70. There are, for example, *gauṣṭhikās* of Vāsudeva or Indra, *gauṣṭhikās* related to social groups such as the *brāhmaṇagaṣṭhikā*, and many related to professional tasks, such as the *pradīpagaṣṭhikā*, responsible for lamps used in rituals, the *dhūpagaṣṭhikā*, responsible for incense, and the *vāditragaṣṭhikā*, responsible for musical performances.

Another administrative body that features in connection with such Śaiva shrines is the *pañcālikā*. From an inscription issued in 615 CE, which we have already seen earlier,¹³⁰ we learn that the administration of three family shrines in Pashupatinath was handed over by Aṃśuvarman to an *adhaśālā pañcālikā*, with the stipulation that any legal problems were to be handled by this group.¹³¹ If it failed to do so, problems were to be brought to the king. The exact meaning of the term *pañcālikā* is uncertain, but from its use in other inscriptions it seems to have been an organizational unit larger than that of the *goṣṭhikā*, the latter having been assembled only for a specific purpose. The *pañcālikā* in contrast appears to have had power of jurisdiction over a certain area.¹³² It is also reported in this inscription that Aṃśuvarman favored this *pañcālikā* by forbidding the entry of certain officers into the area, thus indicating that the land under its jurisdiction enjoyed a special status in exchange for protecting the shrines.

It thus appears that during the early phase of the *liṅga* pedestal inscriptions, the administration of shrines was generally not handled through religious bodies directly, but rather through bodies made up of non-religious members. This ties in with what we see in Indic records from the Gupta period. There, too, funds did not go directly to religious officiants, but were handled by lay people, with a strong presence of members of the mercantile class and guilds, who were part of organizations responsible for handling religious donations. There

There are also *gauṣṭhikās* for non-religious tasks, such as the *prañālīgaṣṭhikā*, responsible for water channels. See also Regmi 1983: 113–114.

130 See above, p. 337.

131 LA 85, lines 7–15: ... *viditam bhavatu bhavatām paśupatau bhagavāñ cchūrabhogeśvaro 'smad bhaginyā śrībhogavarmajananyā bhogadevyā svabhartūrājaputraśūrasenasya punyopacayāya pratiṣṭhāpito yaś ca tadduhitrāsmad bhāgineyyā bhāgyadevyā pratiṣṭhāpito laḍīṭamaheśvaro yaś caitat pūrvajaiḥ pratiṣṭhāpi(to) dakṣiṇeśvaras teṣām adhaśālāpañcālikebhyaḥ paripālanāyātisṛṣṭānām asmābhiḥ paścimādhikaraṇasyāpraveśena prasādaḥ kṛto ...*, “... Let it be known to you that in the Paśupati [area], Lord Śūrabhogeśvara installed by my sister and mother of Bhogavarman, whose name is Bhogadevī, for the sake of the accumulation of merit of her husband, who is called Rājaputra Śūrasena, and further Laḍīṭamaheśvara, installed by her daughter and my niece Bhāgyadevī, and also another [one] established by their ancestors, namely Dakṣiṇeśvara, are all assigned to the local officials (*pañcālika*) of the *adhaśālā* (?) for the sake of protection. I am making the favor that no western authority is allowed to enter ...” Note that a *pañcālika* associated with a shrine also features in Śivadeva's and Aṃśuvarman's joint edict in Lele (LA 70), namely the *pañcālika* of Bhagavat Cūḍikeśvara.

132 See Regmi 1983, v. 3: 256–259.

are also records of such people being part of larger administrative structures such as city boards, incidentally also including *sārthavāhas*.¹³³

However, in the Pashupatinath area, as mentioned above, there are three exceptions to this, with land donations addressed directly to individuals. The first is that of the merchant Vimalasaṅgha, who donates land to the *līṅga* shrine he is establishing as well as to a certain Nirdantaka, who is praised in the inscription as a religious figure.¹³⁴ The other two cases are the last type of pedestal inscriptions listed above (11), which do not record the installation of the *līṅga* itself despite being engraved on a *līṅga* pedestal, but only record land donations: P9 with a grant to the Nātheśvara shrine and a certain *khuḍusvāmin*, and P10 with a donation to the Śṛṅkhalika Pāsupatas for the sick. Thus, amongst the Pashupatinath *līṅga* pedestal inscriptions, we see a clear shift from, in the early period, pure land donations for establishing shrines, these probably administered by some non-religious body, to donations to individual religious people or religious groups, who administered the funds directly. This is also found in a pillar inscription at the Chattracaṇḍeśvara shrine, dated about a century after our early pedestal inscriptions, where a land donation for maintaining the temple and building a water conduit is given directly to a committee of Pāsupata Ācāryas in the Pashupatinath area.¹³⁵

We learn very little from the early pedestal inscriptions about the administrative procedures behind land grants or the legal status held by this land once it was assigned to a shrine. In Mānamatī's 545 CE inscription (LA 39), the process of alienating the land so it could be handed over to the shrine and the Śaiva mendicant was done through the authority of a *mahāsāmanta* named Kramalīla, not through the reigning King Rāmadeva. This suggests that authority over land was held locally rather than centrally. There is, however, no information about how this was precisely done.¹³⁶ It must remain a matter of

133 See, e.g., Thaplyal 1996. There is evidence from Damodar, near Nepal, that presents merchants, referred to as *sārthavāha*, as part of the district's central governing body (CII 3, p. 339). Bakker (2013: 11) provides still other examples of such bodies.

134 For the Sanskrit text and its translation, see n. 44.

135 LA 112, lines 10–17: [...] *ācāryabhagavatpranarddanaprāṇakauśikena bhagavataś chattracaṇḍeśvarasya* [-] *kūgrāme praṇālikāyās ca kha(ṇḍ)sphuṭitasamādhānārtham uddi(śya) muṇḍaśṛṅkhalikapāsupatācāryaparśadi vārāhasvāmi umasoma* [-] *krasomakhaṇukānāṇi ca* [...]. For more Sanskrit text and the translation, see n. 99.

136 LA 39, lines 2–5: ... *bhaṭṭārakamahārājaśrīrāmadevasya sāgram varṣaśataṃ samājñāpayati mahārājamahāsāmantaśrīkramalīlaḥ kuśaliḥ bhagavataḥ nātheśvarāya mānamatyaḥ dattaṃ dovagrāmoddeśe śālagambikṣetrapīṇḍaka mā 28 tatra deśe khuḍusvāminah dattam mā 2*, "While King Rāmadeva was ruling for a hundred years and more, the venerable

speculation whether Mānamatī's land grant for the Nātheśvara shrine was then administered by a *goṣṭhikā*, or whether the mentioning of the Śaiva ascetic as a recipient of a second grant indicates that religious groups were already in charge of the land at that time.

Suvarṇagomī's *liṅga* pedestal inscription dated 645 CE, a hundred years after Lady Mānamatī's inscription, is more informative about the administrative process involved in the land donation. Here, the revenue of the land, the *pratyāya*, which would usually go to the king, is to be handed over to the representative of the religious group of the Śrīkhalika Pāsupatas, namely the Ācārya Dakṣiṇatilūḍaka. The donation is to be formalized through a person with the title *mahābalādhyā*, probably designating some kind of high-ranking army commander,¹³⁷ who is to note the grant down in writing with a certain Rāmasvāmin as a witness (*dūtaka*). The Pāsupata Ācārya Dakṣiṇatilūḍaka, in turn, is to act as an administrator of the grant on behalf of his institution and is said to personally hand over the donation to the entire group for the purpose of providing medicine for the sick.¹³⁸ Another case in which a Pāsupata Ācārya appears to have control over property is the Pāsupata Ācārya Pranardaprāṇa mentioned above. In contrast to Dakṣiṇatilūḍaka, the recorded grant was actually a gift from the Ācārya himself. This indicates that either he had accumulated his own wealth—which theoretically is problematic given his position as a Pāsupata ascetic practitioner who is supposed to have no belongings,¹³⁹ but something that we nonetheless encounter in other South Asian epigraphical

Mahārāja Mahāsāmanta Kramalīla, being healthy, issues the order that Mānamatī has given a [land-grant] in the area of Śālagambī with a produce of 28 *mānika* to Lord Nātheśvara, and [a further land-grant] in the same area yielding 2 *mānika* to the *khuḍusvāmin*."

137 The term *mahābalādhyā* is probably similar in meaning to *mahābalādhyakṣa* or *mahābalādhyakṛta*, for which see Sircar 1966: 174.

138 LA 125, lines 2–4 (with the conjecture *dānaṃ* by Diwakar Acharya, recorded in Bakker 2014: 149, n. 463): ... *śālaṅkāvēstavyabrāhmaṇaviśvasenasya patnyā suvarṇagomīnyā 7 pratyāyam mahābalādhyaprasāda* [-] *lekhyam rāmasvāminā dūtakena dāna(m) pāsupatācāryyadakṣiṇatilūḍakasya tenāpi dāna(m) śrīkhalikapāsupatānām glānabhaisajyārthaṃ dattaṃ* ..., "... Suvarṇagomīnī, wife of the Brahmin Viśvasena who is a resident of the lower part of Śālaṅkā town, donates seven types of revenue (regarding the land listed later on), put down in writing by the favor of the chief army commander, with the witness Rāmasvāmin, to the Pāsupata Ācārya Dakṣiṇatilūḍaka; he himself, in turn, gives [the grant] to the Śrīkhalika Pāsupatas for the purpose of medicine for the ill ..." For *pratyāya* denoting tax/revenue, see Sircar 1966: 262.

139 See, e.g., LA 113 for Pranardanaaprāṇa being described as *varṇāśramodvāsita*, "one who has quit the four stages of life."

records¹⁴⁰—or that he was in control of the temple assets and simply assigned a certain portion of them to this particular shrine.

The land assets accumulated in connection to shrines in the Pashupatinath area must have given these foundations a great deal of economic independence and power, a power that Pāśupata groups appear to have tried to consolidate under their authority. The royal shrines, on the other hand, may have been more dependent on politics and the economic situation of the royal household, if the hypothesis is correct that these shrines were financed from the palace budget.

From Merit to Liberation: Patterns in Donative Formulas

The devotional practice of establishing *lingas* feeds into a long standing Indic tradition of establishing images, icons or temples for the sake of one's own merit for oneself, for a relative alive or dead, or for a higher figure such as the king, based on the belief that the king receives part of each subject's merit in order to protect the kingdom. It is thus not surprising that in our inscriptions we find rather common Indic formulaic expressions having to do with merit (*punya*) and general welfare (*hita*), such as *svapunyaṅpyāyanārtham*, “for the purpose of increasing [his] own merit,” or *akṣayāya*, “for un-decaying [merit],” describing the spiritual outcome of establishing the *linga* shrines.¹⁴¹ According

140 On the discrepancies between the practices of Pāśupata Ācāryas regarding material assets and the doctrinal injunction for Atimārgic practitioners to renounce any property and the prohibition to act as officiants for the laity and the king, see Sanderson 2014: 226–234.

141 Accordingly, (P2) Ratnasaṅgha has erected Prabhusaṅgha for the benefit of the universe (*jagato hitāya*), and (P5) Jayalaṃbha has established Jayeśvara for the benefit of the entire world including the king (*saṃpater jagato hitāya*) and further specifies that the merit for himself shall be undiminishing, using the phrase *svapunyaṅpyāyanārtham*, “for the purpose of increasing [his] own merit,” commonly used in Indic inscriptions. Similarly, though not explicitly stated, (P6) Vijayavatī has established Vijayeśvara for eternity, *akṣayāya*, which probably refers to undiminishing merit. Also (P7) Dhruvasaṅgha uses the phrase *svapunyaṅpyāyanārtham*, further specifying that his act has also been undertaken to favor his parents (*mātāpitroś ca anugrahārtham ca*). (P8) Ābhirī, who established Anupameśvara, has done so explicitly for the merit of her deceased husband Anuparama (*pataye tridivasthāya punyāpyāyanārtham*) as well as for the health of her offspring, including Bhaumagupta, and for their attaining enjoyment, health, long life and undiminished merit (*bhogārogyāyurānantyāvāptaye*). (L3) Guṇavatī has erected the *linga* for undiminishing merit (... *yat punyadhanam cākṣayam astv iti*). Exceptions to this practice of using a formula to describe the hoped-for merit are two inscriptions in Lazimpat, namely that of (L1) Naravarman and (L2) Mānadeva's wife Kṣemasundarī, as well as (P1)

to common popular practices of the time, meritorious acts were believed to procure merit leading towards Brahmanical householder aspirations such as heaven, long life, and health,¹⁴² as is made explicit in the case of the inscription of Ābhīrī (P8).¹⁴³

Further, two, and maybe three, pedestal inscriptions indicate that the *liṅga* in question has been established for someone recently deceased. The first is that of Queen Guṇavatī (L3), who set up the *liṅga* for her deceased father Kinnaravarman, but without naming the shrine after him. The one which cannot be determined with certainty due to damage to the inscription is P4, where a childlike son is mentioned in the genitive, suggesting that the *liṅga* was installed in his honor after death. And the inscription of Lady Ābhīrī states that she commissioned the *liṅga* Anuparameśvara in the name of her husband Anuparama, father of the famous minister Bhaumagupta, after his death. It is also reported in the inscription that on the day of its installation she presented lavish gifts to Brahmins prior to the *liṅga* being established, thus even suggesting a possible link to *śrāddha* rituals, where Brahmins are presented with gifts and food on behalf of the deceased¹⁴⁴:

On this auspicious day, Ābhīrī, wife of the son of Paramābhimāni, whose good qualities are well known, after worshipping Brahmins with plenty of gifts established [this *liṅga* of] Śiva together with two measures of [land-] donations¹⁴⁵ with the permission of her son to increase the merit of [her]

Ratnasamgha's record of installing Ratneśvara, although the latter has applied the formula in the case of installing Prabhukeśvara (P2).

142 For a discussion of early sources on merit transfer, see Hara 2002; for textual passages that exemplify the point that merit goes towards ensuring heaven for oneself or others, see in particular Hara 2002: 115–121.

143 For the Sanskrit text and its translation, see p. 347 f. and n. 148.

144 Another possibility is that these Brahmins were involved in establishing the *liṅga*, and thus these gifts were the ritual fee they received (*dakṣiṇā*) (e.g. Willis 2009: 131–134, in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*'s account of establishing an image). However, it seems odd that this is explicitly mentioned here.

145 The prose following the verses acts almost as a commentary on it, specifying further what has already been mentioned. Thus, we learn that these two measures refer to the two plots of land in Vemagrama on the bank of the Swayapu River; LA 38, lines 3–5: *bhagavate devadevāyasmai svayam pratiṣṭhāpitāyanuparameśvarasamjñitāyābhyaṅgasnapanārcanagandhadhūpabalinivedanādipravarttanārthaṃ khaṇḍaphuṭṭāapratisaṃskārārthaṃ ca patidevaprāṇābhīrīgominīyā pataye tridivasthāya puṇyāpyāyanārthaṃ āyusmatāṃ cāpatyānām bhaumaguptādīnām bhogārogyāyur ānantyāvāptaye vempāgrāme svayapupāropitanadikṣettrakhaṇḍadvayaṃ dattam iti.*

husband, who has departed and reached godhood. And to this Śiva, worshipped in the shrine, she gave [this] permanent endowment¹⁴⁶ [consisting of] things such as *vapra* (cultivated land?), garments and ornaments,¹⁴⁷ [and she also gave] the name Anuparamēśvara [to the *liṅga*].¹⁴⁸

It is likely that the installation of a *liṅga* in the name of Anuparama was linked to a custom connected to death rites and not an expression of Anuparama's personal religious identity. This is suggested by the fact that during his lifetime he issued a stele inscription containing a long poem declaring his devotion to the Vedic seer Vaiśampāyana.¹⁴⁹

Other cases in which *liṅgas* were established in someone's name, possibly after their death, may be Prabhukeśvara, commissioned by Ratnasaṅgha for Prabhusaṅga, and the five *liṅgas* mentioned in Dhruvasaṅgha's inscription. These shrines may have been established on the occasion of a collective death, as for instance, during a military coup or a war.¹⁵⁰ In the case of Ratneśvara, Jayeśvara and Vijayeśvara, we know that the donors were alive at the time

146 On *akṣayanī* for "permanent endowment" and the appearance of the term in the Gupta period, see Willis 2009: 126.

147 I am unsure how *vapra* should be interpreted here. It can refer to cultivated land or a raised riverbank, but neither meaning seems to fit in a list of items that are to be sponsored from the produce of the land, namely the ornaments and garments for worshipping the *liṅga*. In the prose passage following the verses (for the Sanskrit text, see n. 145), which provides a sort of commentary on the verses, the activities that are sponsored through the land donation are listed as follows: worshipping the *liṅga* with smearing and bathing it and offering perfumes, incense and *bali* offerings, as well as repairing anything that is broken. However, if indeed a plot of land is intended with the term *vapra*, the fact that it can denote a "raised river bank" might fit the location of the donated land, which is described as located on the raised river bank at the Svayapurā, an unknown location.

148 LA 38, lines 1–2: *ābhīrī khyātaguṇā bhāryyā paramābhīmāninaḥ sūnoḥ | puṇyavivṛddhyai bharttur devatvam itaḥ prayātasya | puṇye 'hani dhananicayair dvijajanam abhipūjya dānamānābhyām | putreṇānujñātā cakāra saṁsthāpanam śambhoḥ || datvā cākṣayanīvīṇ vapraparicchadavibhūṣādīm | anuparamēśvarasaṁjñāṇ ca śambhor bhuvanamahitasyaśya.*

149 See Acharya 2007.

150 In a personal communication, Diwakar Acharya informed me of his hypothesis that these *liṅgas* were erected for ministers who had died in a military coup. This seems to be supported by Vajracharya, who makes the point that two of the five are attested in other sources, making it likely that they are all historical figures. A similar case is found later in the Śāha and Rāṇa period; Michaels (1994: 71) refers to a certain Pandraśivālaya group of *liṅgas* that were erected after the Koṭ massacre (19 Sept. 1846), which led to Jaṅga Bahādu Rāṇā ascending to power.

the *liṅga* was established. Indeed, as Michaels has pointed out, erecting votive *liṅgas* prior to death came to be a common practice in Pashupatinath, at least in later periods,¹⁵¹ so it is possible that this practice was introduced at this time.

There is comparable material amongst the approximately contemporaneous records that have been collected by Willis, particularly in connection with Gupta records, regarding which he argues for a strong connection between *liṅga* shrines and votive practices. He has put forward the hypothesis that in the Gupta period, votive shrines, especially *liṅga* shrines combining the beneficiary's name with the suffix *-īśvara*, fulfilled the function of portraying the equality of the beneficiary and god; he argues that these evoked soteriological goals of final liberation and equality to Śiva that had developed in Śaiva renunciate circles, thus providing the locus for the divine manifestation of the deceased.¹⁵² In our material, we find that the link to votive roles is also strong, but that in the majority of cases the spiritual goals connected with installing a shrine are formulated in brahmanical terms of merit, such as long life and heaven, rather than liberation. While the *īśvara* naming practice may have indeed evoked the identification of the beneficiary with the god, we also have the case of Guṇavatī, who established a *liṅga* shrine for her deceased father, but without naming it after him. Here, the purpose was simply to dedicate the merit procured through the act of establishing the *liṅga* to her father rather than establishing the godlike nature of her father, as it were.¹⁵³

A soteriological ideology close to what Willis might have in mind is only expressed in two exceptional samples, although they are not connected to votive practices since neither bear *īśvara* names. These, B1 and P3, depart from the "brahmanical" dictum and explicitly introduce a soteriological agenda into the donative formula, in which the merit procured through the act of installing the *liṅga* does not go towards reaching heaven or having a long life, but towards the destruction of suffering (*duḥkha*). The first of these is King Mānadeva's inscription at Budhanilakaṇṭha:

... since [things come about] by your deeds, therefore, without any restraint (*avihatam*), this world arises from you and dissolves [in you]. Those blameless kings of the sages, whose minds are clear, completely devoted, and also the gods together with Indra praise and venerate you, O Lord. Those people who don't attend to you with devotion in [this

151 I would like to thank Prof. Axel Michaels for this observation in response to a lecture I gave in Heidelberg in January 2014.

152 Willis 2009: 136–139.

153 Donative records for other kinds of sacred images are also formulated this way.

world], which is terribly dark because it is seized by bad thought [and - -], which is of various forms, where many hells, ghosts and animals are established, they repeatedly go through birth, death, affliction and pain. The King Śrī Mānadeva, bowing down, said; “May the merit that is produced by establishing you increase from the root¹⁵⁴ and serve to destroy the suffering of myself and the entire world at all times.”¹⁵⁵

Similarly, the text of the inscription commissioned by the merchant Vimalasaṅgha also speaks of suffering and its end as the spiritual goal to be achieved through the establishment of the *liṅga*:

For the merit of that [Nirdantaka] and for the welfare of the venerable Mānadeva, whose fame and merit are supreme, here, [on this spot], Vimalasaṅgha, the son of a merchant, who is afraid of *saṃsāra*, has, by the grace of the king, installed properly, with devotion, the Lord Śiva, who is beneficial to all the worlds, for the sake of the cessation of the threefold sufferings (*duḥkhatrayavinivṛtyarttham*), as well as for the accumulation of merit for the king.¹⁵⁶

The underlying concept communicated in these inscriptions is not that era's conventional Brahmanical concern of procuring merit for reaching heaven or attaining a good rebirth, but is rather the complete exit of the system,

154 I have read *vivṛddhamūlam* as an inverted compound. Note that *kuśalamūla* is a common Buddhist expression found in donative formulas, such as for instance that quoted by Schopen 1997: 39: *imena kuśalamulena sarva(satana)anuttarajñānaṃ prātp(i)m*, with his translation “through this root of merit may there be the attainment of supreme knowledge for all beings.” Further, *mūla* also refers to the capital invested in something, and thus this may be a play on both meanings, namely, the root of merit, which is also the meritorious financial investment of establishing a shrine.

155 LA 7, lines 1–3: [- -] *s tvatkrteneha yasmāt | tvattas tasmāj jagad avihatañ jāyate līyate ca | bhaktiprāñair amalamatibhis tvam munīndrair anindyaiḥ | devais sendrair api ca bhagavan stūyase vandyase ca || [- -] kumatigrastaghorāndhakāre | nānākāre pracuranarakapretatīryakpratiṣṭhe || ye sevante na khalu bhagavaṃs tvāṃ janā bhaktiyuktāḥ | te sevante janānamaraṇavyādhiduḥkhāny abhikṣṇam || (śrīmānadeva)nṛpatiḥ praṇato jagāda tvatsthāpanājanitam asti yad atra puṇyam tat sarvalokasaḥitaṣya vivṛddhamūlam duḥkhakṣayāya bhagavan mama sarvathāstu.*

156 Edition by Acharya 2003, lines 3–5: *puṇyāya tasyottamapuṇyakīrtteḥ śrīmānadevasya hitāya caiva sārthavāhasutenātra saṃsārabhayabhīruṇā duḥkhatrayanivṛtyarttham bhūpateḥ puṇyavṛddhaye bhagavāṃ sthāpitāḥ samyak rājñāḥ pādaprasādataḥ bhaktiā vimalasaṅghena sarvalokaśivāḥ śivāḥ.*

i.e. liberation through the destruction of all suffering (e.g. *duḥkhakṣaya*). The fact that these texts are supporting the notion of liberation is emphasized by Vimalasaṅgha being described as “frightened of the cycle of rebirth” (*saṃsārabhayabhī*). Also Mānadeva’s inscription speaks of this world as a dark place and portrays those who are not engaged in worshipping Śiva as perpetually afflicted by the classical sufferings of illness, old age and death. These sentiments indeed call into mind the spiritual aspirations of renunciate circles, in which Brahmanical worldly values were rejected in search of true knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Thus at first sight they seem out of place in the sphere of Brahmanical lay devotional practices followed by the proprietorial segment of society, to which both King Mānadeva and the merchant Vimalasaṅgha belonged.

By looking closer at the wording of these particular two inscriptions, it is possible to recover aspects of the socio-religious context in which they were produced. Perhaps surprisingly, the terminology is reminiscent of the Sāṃkhya system, with Vimalasaṅgha’s inscription referring to the cessation of the threefold suffering (i.e. *duḥkhatrayavinivṛti*), *duḥkhatraya* being a specific Sāṃkhya term.¹⁵⁷ Thus, while it is tempting to think that Pāśupatas were already on the scene, we must take this terminology into consideration. We do know that the Sāṃkhya system was highly influential in the Pāśupata system’s development, in many ways serving as a basis for Pāśupata doctrinal features, and in fact, of all the brahmanical philosophical systems, the Sāṃkhya was never condemned to the same extent that other systems were in Śaiva literature influenced by the Pāśupatas.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, whether the author of the inscription consciously chose to use Sāṃkhya terminology or wished to express the Pāśupata soteriological goal of *duḥkhānta*, “the end of suffering”, and was merely influenced by Sāṃkhya terminology is beyond our grasp.

What is clear from the inscription above, however, is that the soteriological goal of liberation is being linked to the mundane practice of establishing a *linga* and making a donation to a shrine, despite the fact that according to Pāśupata doctrine and other renunciant movements, spiritual liberation can only be reached through severe ascetic practices, in which the mendicant is cut off

157 See, for instance, *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 1.1. for the usages of the term *duḥkhatraya*: *duḥkhatrayābhigātājijñāsā tadapaghātake hetau | drṣṭe sāpārthā cen naikāntātyantato ‘bhāvāt*.

158 See, for instance, Bakker 2014: 8–9. Incidentally, he points to a passage in the *Skandapurāṇa*—a text that shows signs of being influenced by Pāśupata groups despite being a text on Śaiva mythology for the laity—in which a Sāṃkhya teacher is described in very similar terms as our Vimalasaṅgha, namely as *duḥkhatrayavinirmuktaḥ*, “free of the threefold suffering” (SP 172.62).

from all societal, familial and material bonds. Yet stepping out of the prescriptive and theoretical context, there are countless instances in which religious practices do not follow clear-cut boundaries. Commonly, much transformation in ritual practices takes place as a result of appropriating and accommodating new requirements and values as ritual specialists see fit. It is thus not surprising that Śaiva propagators in the sectarian sphere—most likely a Pāśupata member—blend a soteriological agenda into a common donative practice of installing a *liṅga* with the aim of promoting an even more potent outcome of the meritorious act. This variable attitude towards the spiritual outcomes of lay practices related to *liṅga* worship is also reflected in the ŚDh, as mentioned above, the earliest text containing a comprehensive treatment of *liṅga* worship.¹⁵⁹ While many of the spiritual rewards listed in the text reflect ordinary goals such as heaven or a fortunate rebirth as a king, some prescriptions also link practices with soteriologically oriented goals, leading to seemingly contradictory spiritual outcomes for *liṅga* worship. In some cases, these are mentioned together, as in ŚDh 3.38:¹⁶⁰

*yas tu pūjayate nityaṃ liṅgaṃ tribhuvaneśvaram*¹⁶¹ |
*sa svargamokṣarājyānāṃ*¹⁶² *kṣīpraṃ bhavati bhājanam* || 38 ||

He who constantly worships the *liṅga* that is Śiva quickly attains heaven, liberation or a kingdom.

A spiritual trajectory that first leads to heaven and then, optionally, to liberation or mundane goals such as rebirth as a king is even explicitly outlined in ŚDh 3.59–62:

yo liṅgaṃ sthāpayed ekaṃ vidhipūrvaṃ sadakṣiṇam |
sarvāgamoditaṃ puṇyaṃ koṭikoṭiguṇaṃ labhet || 59 ||
*mātrjaṃ pitrjaṃ*¹⁶³ *caiva yāṃ caivodvahate striyam*¹⁶⁴ |
*kulaikaviṃśam*¹⁶⁵ *uttārya rudraloke mahīyate* || 60 ||

159 See above, p. 334.

160 The numbering of the verses is based on my preliminary draft edition of the text. For manuscript descriptions, see the bibliography.

161 tribhuvaneśvaram] N2N3T1, tṛbhuvaneśvara N1.

162 sa svargamokṣarājyānāṃ] N2, sa svargamokṣarājyānā N1, svargamokṣe ca rājyānāṃ T1.

163 mātrjaṃ pitrjaṃ] N1N2, mātrtaḥ pitṛtaś T1.

164 yāṃ caivodvahate] conj., yaṃ caivodvahate N1pc (i.m.)N2, yaṃ vodvahate N1ac (unmetr.), yataś codvahate striyam T1.

165 kulaikaviṃśam] N2T1, kulekaviṃśad N1.

*bhuktvā*¹⁶⁶ *ca vipulān*¹⁶⁷ *bhogān pralaye samupasthite |*
*jñānayogaṃ samāsāḍya sa tatraiva vimucyate*¹⁶⁸ || 61 ||
*atha vā*¹⁶⁹ *rājyam ākāṃkṣej jāyate sa bhavāntare |*
saptadvīpasamudrāyāḥ kṣīter adhipatir bhavet || 62 ||

He who establishes one *liṅga*, following the prescriptions, together with gifts [as the ritual fee] attains ten million times ten million of the amount of merit arising from all religious traditions (*sarvāgamoditam*). Having rescued twenty-one generations from the mother's side and the father's side, and the wife he has married, he is celebrated in the heaven of Rudra. After having enjoyed plenty of pleasures [there, in heaven], he reaches union through [ultimate, liberating] knowledge (*jñānayogaṃ*)¹⁷⁰ and is liberated right there. Alternatively, if he desires a kingdom, he will be born in another life as a powerful king over the earth with its seven continents and oceans.

On the other hand, the practice of establishing *liṅgas* for the merit of someone else—found so frequently in our prescriptions—or links to death practices are curiously not found in the ŚDh or any of the early Śaiva texts on this topic, and thus there is at the same time a discrepancy between the prescriptive texts and actual practices.¹⁷¹ As is well known, it is not uncommon to find such inconsistencies between textual sources and practice when investigating pre-modern Indian religion, and thus a close study of epigraphical material often reveals that prescriptive literature and the popular devotional idiom do not always harmonize.¹⁷²

166 *bhuktvā*] N1N2, bhūtalāt T1.

167 *ca vipulān*] N1N2, sakalān T1.

168 *vimucyate*] em., vimuñcati N1N2T1.

169 *vā*] N1N2, vai T1.

170 Note that the translation of this term here is uncertain. It appears that *jñānayoga* is a technical term in the *Śivadharmottara*, in which the spiritual and soteriological path is further systematized and *jñānayoga* refers to a sequence of practices that lead to liberation, an interpretation which may or may not already apply here in the earlier ŚDh. A study on the *jñānayoga* in the *Śivadharmottara* is currently being carried out by Florinda De Simini.

171 So far, the closest connection in which a connection to *śrāddha* rituals is explicitly made is in ŚDh 5.33 (T1): *pitṛṇ uddiśya yo liṅgaṃ snāpayec chivavāriṇā | tṛptāḥ svargaṃ prayāsyanti pitaro narakād api ||* “If he bathes a *liṅga* with *śiva* water on behalf of his ancestors, the ancestors will be satisfied and go to heaven, even [if they had been in] hell.”

172 See, for instance, Sanderson 2013.

Inspiration from the Buddhists?

In linking soteriological goals with the establishment of shrines and choosing a wording that revolves around the topic of the destruction of suffering, it seems that to some extent these Śaiva authors may have been inspired by the donative formulas and practices of their Buddhist competitors. Indeed, in Mānadeva's inscription we find not only *duḥkhakṣaya*, but also the long-standing Buddhist donative formula "... *yad atra puṇyam tat ...*". As Acharya has pointed out, this indicates "[...] that Buddhist ideas were already popular in Nepal by this period and were even adopted by other religious groups".¹⁷³ Amongst the records from the Licchavi period, the same formula is found in two other inscriptions, both Buddhist and containing texts typical for the Māhāyāna. The first is an undated inscription, probably from the sixth century,¹⁷⁴ and the second is an inscription dated to the period of Aṃśuvarman or Jīṣṇugupta (i.e. sometime in the first half of the seventh century).¹⁷⁵ Although only fragments of the latter survive, here the formula is combined with the phrase *niḥśeṣaduḥkhavinivartaye*, "for the cessation of all suffering".¹⁷⁶ This wording is reminiscent of Vimalasaṅgha's phrase *duḥkhatrayanivṛti*. And if we turn to the use of the word *duḥkha* itself, we find that aside from the two Śaiva inscriptions (B1 and P3), the other instances are all Buddhist. Although it is in a different context, the first extant mention of the word *duḥkha* in the surviving Licchavi corpus is found in an early inscription issued some time before Mānadeva (i.e. perhaps the fourth century CE), in which the Buddha is described as having liberated all beings from suffering (*duḥkha*), and in which the female donor wishes to attain manhood in order to break out of the cycle of rebirth.¹⁷⁷ The second mention of the word is in the above-mentioned inscription from the Aṃśuvarman or Jīṣṇugupta period, in the phrase *niḥśeṣaduḥkhavinivartaye*. And lastly, there is an undated and damaged Buddhist inscription in which the formula-

173 Acharya 2010, 36.

174 The name of the reigning king is partially damaged. Gnoli reads Rāmadeva (ca. 547 CE), Vajracharya places it in his chronologically organized list of inscriptions as earlier than 558 CE, and Acharya reconstructs the name Gaṅgadeva (ca. 567 CE) as the reigning king, based on his reading of the lower part of the ligature before "deva" as "ga" (Acharya 2010: 37). The inscription ends with the words "*deyadharmo yaṃ paramopāsakamaṇiguptasya bhāryayā mahendramatyā saha yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bha[va]tu mātāpitṛpūrvvaṇgamaṃ kṛtvā sarvvasattvānāṃ sarvākāraṇaropeta(4)++++sarvvajña-jñānāvāptaye (LA 40)*".

175 However, note that this has only been dated on paleographical grounds.

176 LA 90.

177 See LA 1 and for a new edition and translation Acharya 2010, 29–33.

tion *duḥkhaḥkṣaya*, i.e. the destruction of suffering, can still be discerned.¹⁷⁸ This is the same wording as in the inscription of Mānadeva we saw earlier.¹⁷⁹

If we look at Indic epigraphical records outside Nepal, we find that in the Buddhist tradition, the concept of attaining liberation through donative acts was already well established at this time; as Schopen has shown, this concept goes as far back as the second century BCE.¹⁸⁰ The principle was that through performing this type of *pūjā* (worship), one could attain ultimate liberation (*nirvāṇa*), also on behalf of another, bestow good health on someone, or gain merit for relatives, whether dead or alive, or even for the entire world.¹⁸¹ It is not surprising for similar strategies to have been employed by both Śaivite and Buddhist ritual specialists, given that they were in close contact with one another and perhaps often competed for the same ritual space. Evidence for early Buddhist presence in Nepal has been summarized and analyzed by Acharya, who provides evidence that rather well-developed Mahāyāna concepts such as the six perfections (*pāramitā*) and the cult of Amitābha in Sukhāvātī were already known there by the sixth century.¹⁸² Further, another fact attesting to a strong Buddhist presence in Nepal is the large number of Buddhist monasteries that are listed in Licchavi epigraphical records.¹⁸³ Lastly, by the sixth century, Anuparama, in his long stele inscription dedicated to the Vedic seer Vaiśampāyana of 540 CE, warns of the growing influence of Buddhists in quite explicit terms, referring to them as “evil-minded and covered up in vice”, to use Acharya’s translation.¹⁸⁴

With this in mind, when looking again at Mānadeva’s *līṅga* pedestal inscription, we see Śiva placed explicitly at the top of the hierarchy. He is thus lifted

178 LA 146.

179 See above, p. 350.

180 See, e.g., Schopen 1997: 23–55.

181 See Schopen 1997: 34–36. Although we find this practice carried out by lay people, it was predominantly carried out by members of monastic communities, despite the fact that it presents a fundamental contradiction to Buddhist doctrine, in which one is personally responsible for one’s own fate, similar to the situation in Hinduism (Hara 2002: 106). Schopen (1997: 35–36) also illustrates how in practice, these activities appear not to have been considered in conflict with the functions of monks, who are referred to as specialists of the theoretical literature. This discrepancy between philosophy and practice resembles features found in Śaiva circles as well as, more specifically, in the material under consideration here. See, e.g., Sanderson (2014) for a survey of prescriptive texts versus epigraphical material.

182 See Acharya (2010: 4 and 13).

183 See Sanderson 2009: 74–77.

184 See Acharya 2007: 47.

above the Vedic gods (*devais sendrair api*), who worship him, as well as above the blameless *munīndras*. Although this expression usually refers to the “kings of sages”, i.e. the wisest of the wise, it could be, especially in light of the socio-religious environment of the time, that here it refers to the Buddhists. In the Buddhist Mahāyāna context, the term *munīndra* refers to a Bodhisattva who has achieved liberation. Thus, the use of the word in this *liṅga* pedestal inscription may evoke the image of the highest spiritual beings in Buddhism bowing to Śiva, which, indeed, would be a case of rather strong inter-religious rhetoric.¹⁸⁵ It is also noteworthy that amongst the surviving Licchavi records, we find this blending of Brahmanical donative practice with a soteriological agenda only in the Śaiva inscriptions, not in other Brahmanical inscriptions such as those of the Vaiṣṇavas.

While this analysis is specific to early sources in the Kathmandu Valley, it may well represent wider trends; after all, the fact that practices were developed that borrowed from successful Buddhist customs is not surprising. Bisschop, in the context of gathering sources of Śaiva religious ideas in the Gupta-Vakāṭaka age, has observed that many features in the organization of the Śaiva religious community may have been developed based on Buddhist and Jain models, traditions that had already been in place for a long period.¹⁸⁶

Concluding Remarks: More Light on the Early Period of the Pashupatinath Temple Site

To summarize, this group of pedestal inscriptions show that Śaivism was already firmly present from the time of the earliest extant recorded Licchavi history onwards. This is visible in practices centered on the installation of personal *liṅga* shrines, which had a relatively standardized production. Notewor-

¹⁸⁵ Note that also the Buddha himself is referred to as Mahāmuni in a Licchavi inscription of the early fifth century (Acharya 2008: 26 ff.); here the Buddha is also referred to as *bhavachid*, which is close to Pranārdanaprāṇa's *samsārachid*. Rhetorical strategies regarding subservience between deities are also a strong feature in early Śaiva works on mythology and rituals. Thus, the ŚDh's origination myth of *liṅga* worship features a long series of deities who have attained their divine status by worshipping Śiva in a *liṅga*. In some recensions of the ŚDh, this list even includes the Buddha. For more on this “inclusivist” attitude, see Bisschop's forthcoming article “Inclusivism revisited” in the proceedings from the symposium *Tantric Communities in Context*, 5–7 February, 2015, Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia, Vienna.

¹⁸⁶ Bisschop 2010: 486.

thy is that they are the first dated structures with waterspouts, and thus show that the bathing of icons constituted an important part of devotional activities at this time. Analyzing them according to their location has shown that the Pashupatinath area stands out as a particularly important site for such Śaiva lay religious activities, with two features specific to this area: (1) *īśvara*-type *līṅga* shrines, with strong votive functions connected to the beneficiary, sometimes deceased, and (2) a high number of land grants donated to these *īśvara* shrines. We find that in the early phase, a merchant community, perhaps more specifically a group of individuals, most likely a clan or family, with names ending in *-saṅgha*, was particularly active, as well as women from high ranking families.

The amount of land that was thus accrued in the Pashupatinath area must have contributed to a certain degree of economic, and perhaps even political, independence. It is likely that this constituted an important factor for the increasingly prominent status of the site, which in the seventh century entered the political arena as the national shrine. Analyzing donative patterns has shown that most of the donations were assigned directly to the personal *līṅga* shrines themselves, but it has also been noted that some were handed over to individual people, as for example Nirdantaka (p3) and the *khuḍusvāmi* ascetic (p9). In the last pedestal record, 100 years after the last of the early group, the recipient is even specified as a representative of an organized Pāśupata community, namely the Śrīkhalikas, who appear to have also been responsible for the public task of treating the sick in the Pashupatinath area. Together with another donation to the same group, this time for religious activities, these are the earliest explicit records of a Pāśupata presence in the Kathmandu Valley. Even though we can glean only a limited amount of information about the administration of these shrines, it is noticeable that there is a change in pattern from the earlier records, in which the non-religious administrative bodies named *goṣṭhikā* and *pañcālikā* are mentioned as overseeing the shrines, to the appearance of Pāśupatas as recipients and administrators of donations. These Pāśupata groups thus appear to have both profited from the increasing popularity of the site, and at the same time have been instrumental in bringing it about.

That their first appearance in the Nepalese records is found in Pashupatinath is not surprising, given the cremation ground setting of the area. As Bakker has pointed out, the growth of Pāśupata communities tended to occur near sites connected to cremation and death; indeed, Pāśupata observances included practices such as living in cremation grounds and smearing one's body with ashes.¹⁸⁷ Thus, it is likely that ascetics of this type were present at the site even

187 Bakker 2014: 13–14.

before they appeared in the records. We might even venture to hypothesize that figures such as the *khuḍusvāmi* in Pg belonged to such ascetic circles. The popularity of setting up personal *liṅga* shrines in the Pashupatinath area—probably also encouraged by the site's connection to death-related practices—may well have led to some of these practitioners starting to take active roles in managing the increasing number of personal *liṅga* shrines. Incidentally, the installation of such votive shrines in the name of the deceased may have been even more reminiscent of practices connected to Pāśupata circles than our material suggests at first. A sign of this might be seen in the case of the famous Mathura pillar inscription, in which it is recorded that a certain Uditācārya installed the shrines Upamiteśvara and Kapileśvara in the memory of the two Pāśupata Ācāryas Bhagavat Upamitavimala and Bhagavat Kapilavimala.¹⁸⁸

This set of inscriptions, thus, reflects the same sort of development that we can glean from contemporaneous textual sources, namely, that members of initiatory Śaiva movements started to encroach on a well-established sphere of lay Śaivism, a model which has already been put forth by Sanderson.¹⁸⁹ An insight into how this interaction was formed can be found in the donative formulas, which show that the practice of establishing *liṅgas* was conceptualized by some in terms of mundane spiritual goals, but by others in terms of soteriological goals that were formerly restricted to ascetics. This same fluidity of practices is also reflected in contemporaneous textual sources, some of which show signs of having been influenced by Pāśupatas, such as the *Śivadharmasāstra* and the *Skandapurāṇa*. At the same time, however, we have also seen that there are noteworthy discrepancies between these textual sources and our inscriptions; neither do the former promote the installation of personal shrines of the *īśvara* type, nor are *liṅga* shrines explicitly linked to votive practices. Some donative formulas seem to show some Buddhist influence, leading to the suspicion that to some extent the concept of connecting soteriological goals and the cult of icons may have been influenced by long-standing Buddhist donative practices. As such, the *liṅga* pedestal inscriptions provide us with a small window into the complex dynamics related to the early phase of Śaivism in the Kathmandu Valley, where the religion holds a prominent place up until today.

188 See Bakker 2001: 401, who doubts, however, that these were *liṅga* shrines. See also Willis 2009: 134–136, who in contrast asserts that the shrines were indeed probably *liṅgas* (see, in particular, Willis 2009: 135, fn. 237).

189 Sanderson 2014: 222–223.

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