

## *Pratiṣṭhā*: Ritual, Reproduction, Accretion

*Pratiṣṭhā* is well known as a term designating the installation of a religious image from the beginning of the Christian era. But installation as a social event had an import far beyond the image as a focus of devotion and worship, for it involved such factors as the spread of religious communities of temple-priests, the religious donation and administration of lands, or the regulation of religious expansion through the agency of political and economic powers. For instance, *pratiṣṭhā* was often accompanied by the notion of ownership by the deity- or Buddha-/Bodhisattva-image (Colas 2009: 110–7). However, because the direct source of knowledge about image *pratiṣṭhā* consists mainly in ritual texts, modern scholarship tends to approach the subject as ritual. For the same reason, the present paper will concentrate on *pratiṣṭhā* as rite. But one must bear in mind that this is not “pure rite”. *Pratiṣṭhā* is intimately connected with other and non-ritual historical parameters, most of which are difficult to elucidate. It forms a very fertile example for the study of ritual.

*Pratiṣṭhā*, like all rites, has evolved over time. Some scholars suggest that it developed from a simple to a complex ritual (see Einoo & Takashima 2005: 2, 3, 137, etc). This implies the notion of a model that gradually included an increasing number of elements, although it contained from the beginning several salient features, such as the opening of the eyes.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it has been said that the *pratiṣṭhā* of the Śaiva *līṅga* in Āgamas evolved from simple to complex and from private/personal to public worship (Takashima 2005: 137). But it should be noted that descriptions of complex public *pratiṣṭhās* could have been almost contemporaneous with those of simple private *pratiṣṭhās*. Some of the oldest descriptions of private image *pratiṣṭhā* are found in late Gṛhya texts (4<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest) (see Einoo 2005: 95). Varāhamihira’s *Brhatsaṃhitā* (middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>) describes the “public”<sup>3</sup> installation of religious images.<sup>4</sup> This maximum span of one and half centuries, between the Gṛhya texts and the *Brhatsaṃhitā*, forms a relatively short period where both kinds of installations were almost, if not completely, contemporaneous. This can hardly be interpreted as a period of fast evolution from a private to a public model of *pratiṣṭhā*, for as we will see, Buddhist epigraphy proves the existence of public *pratiṣṭhās* long before the 4<sup>th</sup> century

1 See Einoo’s “Introduction” in Einoo & Takashima 2005: 3.

2 Renou et al. 1985: 189.

3 The applicability of the distinction between public and private in ancient India remains to be demonstrated, but that discussion would exceed the limits of the present paper.

4 In its chapter 60. This chapter uses the terms *saṃsthāpana* (15) and *sthāpana* (21). The term *pratiṣṭhāpana* appears only in its title (in Bhat’s edition), a position susceptible of interpolation and alterations. For this chapter, see also Colas (2006: 368).



(see below). One could also suppose that the Gr̥hya descriptions are simplified versions of complex *pratiṣṭhās*. The notion of an evolution from a private to a public form of *pratiṣṭhā* remains purely conjectural.

One of the main features of the evolution of *pratiṣṭhā* is the great importance of the dialectical connection between ritual action and its hermeneutics. Ritual manuals bear witness to this interrelation, as we will see. Most of the extant ritual manuals were composed from around the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Because they were supposed to guide and inform practice, their authors probably bore in mind the contemporaneous way of performing when writing them. These authors also had to follow certain conventional patterns with regard to the structure of their composition, and at times they introduced novelties to cater to local or regional needs. As a consequence, the descriptions of *pratiṣṭhā* in ritual manuals are not rational accounts in which the principle of non-contradiction must operate.<sup>5</sup> Catering to the needs of patrons, priests, devotees, ritual traditions and sometimes political powers, the *pratiṣṭhā* evolved against multifarious ideological pressures, especially in the public sphere. Since the installed object (image or other) was a central element and *pratiṣṭhā* determined the ensuing set of rites as well as the human group in charge of them, it was unavoidable that *pratiṣṭhā* should constitute a crucial issue and receive ideological marks from various origins.

We can distinguish three dimensions in the ritual manuals: prescriptive, mantric and descriptive. Prescriptions are the mere enumeration of ritual actions. They consist of the succession of injunctions (sentences often composed with absolute and optative verb forms). Mantras are formulas that accompany and often illustrate the prescribed acts. These solemn enunciations also sometimes connect descriptive and interpretative notions with physical actions of the rite.<sup>6</sup> Descriptive sentences express the interpretative vision of the rite. This is where rite and its accessories are named, where indications of the purport of the rite are sometimes given. Naming actions and objects of the rite sometimes means giving them sense and value. For instance, naming a vase as *śaktikumbha* (“vase of power”) suggests that it is a recipient of divine power. Or again, the statement that God becomes present through meditation (see Colas 1986: 78) goes beyond mere prescription, because it speaks of a spiritual result external to the ritual action.

The descriptive interpretative elements sometimes infiltrate the prescriptive dimension and influence ritual injunctions. For instance, the Vaikhāṇasas who proclaim themselves to be *vaidikas* introduced a large quantity of pseudo-Vedic ritual features into their own prescriptions. This “stuffing” helped to project the image of their being *vaidika* in comparison with the Pāñcarātra, another Vaiṣṇava sect, whom they qualified as *tāntrika* (see Colas 1996: 266–84, 164–71). The present article will study some problems in connection with *pratiṣṭhā*, with no claim, of course, to being exhaustive.<sup>7</sup>

5 See, for instance, Colas 1989: 146–7.

6 “Mantras of prayer” (*prārthanāmantras*), for instance, are directly linked with the content of the action. Some other mantras guide the understanding of the action. See Colas 1996: 236–8.

7 For instance, we will not make use of Tibetan material, for which see Bentor (1998).



## Pratiṣṭhā as “establishing”

The word *pratiṣṭhā* was used in Vedic literature in a wide quantity of meanings. *Pratiṣṭhā* in Brāhmaṇa texts is understood as a place of firm position or as a process of establishing. It also designated a substance on which an object was installed (see Gonda 1975; Schayer 1925: 280). In the *Kena Upaniṣad* (4.8), *pratiṣṭhā* means a base and the verb *pratiṣṭhati* (4.9) means “is firmly seated”. In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (1.6.1–2; 3.6–9),<sup>8</sup> one becomes established (*pratiṣṭhati*) at various steps before becoming the supreme being. In Brāhmaṇas *pratiṣṭhā* also refers to the stabilization of the individual both in nature and in society (Gonda 1975: [341]–[2], [351]–[2]).

Evidence from belles-lettres and epigraphy points to the political shade of meaning of the word *pratiṣṭhā*. Viśākhadatta’s play, *Mudrārākṣasa* (3<sup>rd</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>9</sup> displays two different meanings of *pratiṣṭhā*: psychological (personal security and moral or spiritual stability<sup>10</sup>) and political (establishment of dynasty and restoration of monarchical power).<sup>11</sup> A 5<sup>th</sup> century stone pillar inscription of Bhitarī employs the expression *pratiṣṭhā* and its derivatives to signify establishment of the king’s family, its prosperity and government.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the same inscription uses the expression *prati-ṣṭhā* with reference to the installation of a divine image (Colas 2009: 111).

Despite the scantiness of the information about the nature and meaning of *pratiṣṭhā* in early Buddhist period, the meaning of *pratiṣṭhā* at that time seems to have been stabilization and material installation. It was applied to man-made objects (architectural elements, images) as well as objects possessing an inherent religious value (relics). Inscriptions of the first four centuries AD record the *pratiṣṭhā* of images and relics, and, less frequently, of architectural elements (such as *vedī*, *chattra*, etc.) of the *stūpa*.<sup>13</sup>

The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (*-prajñāpāramitā*), which could be ascribed to the first century AD,<sup>14</sup> mentions the installation and worship of scriptures. The installation of Buddhist scriptures in the form of a book was meant for the sanctification of the earth.<sup>15</sup> Buddhist inscriptions convey a similar idea with regard to the *pratiṣṭhā* of relics and *stūpas*. For instance, a first century BC inscription mentions that the members of an association of lay Buddhists established a *stūpa* “dans un endroit où il n’y avait pas de fondation

8 See also 3.10.3 and other passages referred to in the index of the edition, vol. 2, p. 812, col. B, under *pratiṣṭhā* etc.

9 See Renou et al. 1985: 272.

10 See verse 5 of Act II.

11 See verse 9 of Act II; verse 14 of Act I.

12 The inscription states that Skandagupta re-established (*pratiṣṭhāpya bhuyah*) his family (verse 7), the prosperity of his family (verse 6), and that his government was well established (*supratiṣṭhita-śāsanaḥ*, verse 11).

13 See Tsukamoto 1996–98: 135, 300 (AD 12 and 5); 990, 1008–9 (AD 41 and 52); 397 (AD 350–351); 632, 668 (AD 4 and 171).

14 See Lancaster 1974: 287; 1975: 31 (first Chinese translation probably between 147 and 186); Schopen 1997: 127; 2005: 79 (n. 69, precautions about the date).

15 See Schopen 2005: 31, 29. Installation of scriptures is also known in other Indian religious traditions: see, for instance, the Pāñcarātra *Pauṣkarasaṃhitā* 41.77b–142.



auparavant”.<sup>16</sup> An epigraph of the first century mentions the installation of relics also in “un endroit de la terre où il n’y avait pas de fondation auparavant”.<sup>17</sup> The term “fondation” in the French translations corresponds to a term derived from the Prakrit verb equivalent of *pratiṣṭhā*. It may be noted that the Vinaya literature of the first three centuries AD prescribes the installation of relics in “a previously unestablished place on earth” for the sanctification of the surface of the earth. This kind of installation also produces “Brahmic merit”.<sup>18</sup>

Relics perhaps received special attention and treatment, but the *pratiṣṭhā* process did not give them any new quality, for they already had inherent virtues. Relics are in themselves “endowed with life”, according to an inscription ascribed to 150 BC (although perhaps a fake, at least according to Falk 2005: 351),<sup>19</sup> or “infused with morality”, “infused with concentration, wisdom, emancipation, and knowledge and vision” (*samasiprañavimutiñāṇadra(śa)paribhāvita*), according to a first century AD inscription.<sup>20</sup> There seems to be no definite evidence to prove that *pratiṣṭhās* of the early Buddhists were ritualized.<sup>21</sup> But it is difficult to speculate that they could have taken place without public solemnity, at least for those which are documented. These *pratiṣṭhās* were recorded by inscriptions (which emphasizes the importance of these actions), probably took place (at least sometimes) at auspicious moments (see Fussman 1988: 9) and were attended by members of religious and lay communities. To conclude, these instances seem to point to the old Buddhist notion of *pratiṣṭhā* as a public process of stabilizing sacred articles on the surface of the earth and an ideology of terrestrial expansion of the Buddhist religion and message.

### Previously venerated objects *versus* new images

In early Buddhism as known from epigraphy, the distinction between venerated objects (relics) and newly made elements (images and architectural elements) does not seem to have been important with regard to *pratiṣṭhā*. The aim of the process seems to have been the fixation of the object, not its transformation. Chapter 37 of the *Paṇḍita-*

16 *apratīṣṭhāvitra-pruvami* (tr. Sadakata 1996; see *ibid.*: 306–7).

17 *apratīṣṭhāvitra-pruvami padhavi-pradeśami* (tr. Fussman 1986; see *ibid.*: 2).

18 See Schopen 2004: 21. See also Fussman (1994: 22) quoting Salomon & Schopen (1984).

19 Lamotte 1958: 474; Fussman 1993: 101–10; Schopen 1997: 126. Discussion of Falk’s view in Salomon (2009: 128–9).

20 According to the reading and translation by Schopen (1997: 126). Fussman (1982: 4) has a similar reading (with, at the end: *ñāya-deśa(ṇa)-paribhāvita*) and translates: “parfumées de moralité, parfumées de l’enseignement du chemin qui mène à la délivrance par la concentration et le discernement” (*ibid.*: 8).

21 Sadakata (1996: 307) speaks of a “cérémonie d’installation” of relics on the basis of a first century BC inscription.



*saṃhitā*, an early Pāñcarātra work,<sup>22</sup> deals with the “placing” (*nyāsa*), accompanied with rites, of stones marked with footprints, disk or lotus, other supports (of worship), as well as stones “obtained since eternity” (37.1–2). This passage employs the term *nyāsa* (37.1) rather than *pratiṣṭhā*, which only appears occasionally in it. While upholding the sacredness of these stones, the text seems to propose their ritual inclusion into a certain orthodoxy. Here the attempt seems to have been to normalize objects of worship whose prestige and efficiency have long been recognized.

However this kind of Hindu prescription is rare and seems to have disappeared from more recent Hindu ritual scriptures. The majority of the prescriptions of temple ritual manuals concern new, man-made images. For example, the scriptural rules of the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual in the Vaiṣṇava Vaiṣṇāsa medieval corpus (around 10<sup>th</sup> century) apply to the “human” (*mānuṣa*) category, that is, temples and images made according to the corpus prescriptions, and not to the other four categories: “self-manifested” (*svayaṃ-vyakta*), founded by gods (*divya*), founded by Ṛṣis (*ārṣa*) or Siddhas (*saiddha*), antique or mythological (*paurāṇa*, *paurāṇika*). This classification is not specific to Vaiṣṇāsa; it is found, more or less the same, in the Śaiva ritual corpus and in Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra texts (see Colas 1996: 189–91; Granoff 2006: 404). The standardization of *pratiṣṭhā* rituals by temple manuals made the *ad libitum* reproduction of the installation rites easy. The great development of image installation coincided with the decline of Vedic rites. While adhering to the traditional *varṇa* division of society, the Vaiṣṇāsa medieval corpus also allowed the classes barred from Vedic rites to practise ritual patronage (see Colas 1996: 122–9). There was probably an economic alliance between these wealthy classes and the priestly groups. Epigraphic evidence from this period abounds with mentions of donations by these classes to temple-deities and temple-priests.

The temple *pratiṣṭhā* ritual was, or perhaps rather became a process during which the human origin of the artefact was obliterated. Ritual contributed to the metaphysical idealization of the man-made image, for it was a substitute for supra-human origin. The aim of setting strict iconographical techniques and standards and imposing them on the craftsmen was to control the production of images and to make them suitable to ritual as prescribed by the manuals. Incidentally, this explains the great wealth of descriptions of artistic and architectural techniques in these manuals (see Colas 1989: *passim*).

The above observations distinguished between two concepts of *pratiṣṭhā*: one being general, ancient and applicable to various kinds of objects, the other being specific to the religious image. This distinction does not, however, have an absolute value in history. It is an outcome of a rational understanding of the evolution of the prescriptions and is not based on textual evidence. On the other hand, as we will see, the *pratiṣṭhā* specific to images influenced that of other objects, over the course of time. This paper will examine three topics: deposits as an example of an ambiguous ritual module, and two

22 I have no definite proof to ascribe it to a date earlier than 10<sup>th</sup> century, but from its style and content it does not seem to be later than the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Even if it were later than 8<sup>th</sup> century, it apparently contains ancient material. On the dates of early Pāñcarātra texts, see Colas (2003: 239).



instances of ritual and hermeneutical accretions: the opening of the eyes of images and the notion of power in the image.

## Names and practices – Relics and “embryo”, ambiguity and modelization

Deposits are important modules in *pratiṣṭhā* rituals. Modern scholarship insists on their differences from relics. Nor do extant textual prescriptions appear to explicitly mention similitudes between the two types of objects. In this respect, naming actions and objects helps to create and maintain divides and contrasts. However, and in spite of the strong arguments in favour of such a clear-cut distinction, some ambiguities may have presided over practices regarding the use of deposits and relics. Deposits were an essential feature in the construction of religious buildings and in the pedestal of images, although we can only speculate about the significance of the act of depositing (referred to as *nyāsa*) and the content of the deposits. Archaeological findings seem to indicate that deposits were placed in or around *stūpas* as early as the first century BC.<sup>23</sup> These deposits consisted of precious and/or symbolic objects. In theory, they should be clearly distinguished from the Buddhist relic boxes, even though the latter, like deposits, also contained precious objects such as precious or semi-precious stones, coins, miniature objects in gold, etc. in addition to relics.<sup>24</sup> Brown (2006) identifies certain common features between the two kinds of containers, but concludes: “the valuable treasure placed with the Buddhist relic is not the same as the highly structured and symbolically potent objects placed in the deposit boxes” (ibid.: 192). Ślaczka (2007: 8–10) provides an elaborate comparative table of the two kinds of containers. It is suggested (Ślaczka 2007: 10, n. 15) that the presence of reliquaries as well as deposit boxes in certain *stūpas* in Sri Lanka indicates that they corresponded to two different functions.<sup>25</sup> Some of the arguments of Brown and Ślaczka may need to be qualified. For instance, Brown observes that boxes of foundation deposit are generally square while reliquaries are circular (2006: 192). But the *Mayamata* and other texts mention circular boxes of founda-

23 See Willis 2000: 80. For observations about deposit boxes in Southeast Asia and the question of the relation with Indian practices (though not with precise historical setting), see O'Connor (1966).

24 See Salomon 1986: 262; 2005: 360, 383–5; Sadakata 1996: plates 1 and 3; Brown 2006: 189–91; Willis 2000: 19–21. See also Willis (ibid.: 80) about the stone casket discovered in the *stūpa* 1 of Satdhāra: “Although this may have been intended as a supplementary relic deposit, it is more likely to have contained symbolic objects associated with guardian deities”. According to Marasinghe (1989: xlviii) the Sinhalese term *yantragala* refers to *ratnanyāsa* foundation deposits and differs from the “relic casket” (ibid.: li). The same term refers to stone reliquaries according to Bandaranayake (1974: 192). But his description (ibid.: 120) of the *yantragalas* found in the Madirigiriya temple (11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century) shows them to be foundation deposits rather than reliquaries.

25 The organic remains found in certain deposit boxes in Java were of animal origin and not human (see Ślaczka 2007: 8, n. 11).



tion deposit.<sup>26</sup> More deeply perhaps, Brown's and Ślaczka's comparative observations are confined to formal differences. A fundamental common feature between reliquaries and foundation boxes is that they contain auspicious objects, be they precious gems, coins, relics, etc. A specificity of reliquaries is that they contain relics.

In spite of the clear distinction projected by prescriptions and Indology, Buddhist texts and archaeological findings reflect a complex situation where the boundaries between reliquaries, deposits and images are not always clear. A Buddhist image could itself be a sort of reliquary. Early Mahāyāna literature records the existence of images with relics (*dhātupratimā*).<sup>27</sup> Images could also contain inscriptions (especially of *dhāraṇīs*).<sup>28</sup> A deposit (a gold tube containing 95 pearls) found in the base of a Buddha image at Nagarjunakonda apparently also contained ashes that could have been bone ashes (see Bendor 1995: 250). The difference between reliquaries and ritual deposits could be ambiguous, for example, in the *Mañjuśrībhāṣitavāstuvīdyāśāstra*, a Buddhist Sanskrit treatise of architecture.<sup>29</sup> This text prescribes (3.100–5) the deposit of a copper casket below the *stūpī*-finial at the summit of the parasol which shelters the *caitya* (i.e. *stūpa*). This casket, however, resembles the foundation deposit prescribed in Hindu texts. The casket contains *dhātus* and grains and, in its central compartment, a mantra inscribed on a metal sheet. The *dhātus* mentioned by the text have been interpreted as relics,<sup>30</sup> but they are colouring substances, as in Hindu prescriptions. Apparently, the mantra serves as relic in the *Mañjuśrībhāṣitavāstuvīdyāśāstra* prescription. It should be recalled that inscribed mantras and *dhāraṇīs* could be taken as substitutes for relics, al-

26 See *Mayamata* 12.13 (early 9<sup>th</sup> – late 12<sup>th</sup> century: see Dagens 1985: vi and Colas 1986: 5–6); Colas 1986: 154. The deposit box has nine or twenty-five compartments according to the *Mayamata*, nine according to the *Vimānārcanākalpa* (*Marīcisamhitā*) (around 10<sup>th</sup> century).

27 See Schopen 1978: 334; 2004: 296. The *Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhānasattvāvalokanabuddhakṣetradarśanavyūha[sūtra]* (p. 68) mentions the installation of an image (*pratimā*) with relic (*sadhātuka*). This text seems comparatively late. Its manuscript apparently belongs to the younger part of the Gilgit manuscripts (Schopen 2005: 119, 180). The Gilgit manuscripts “can be more or less accurately dated on paleographic grounds to the sixth [seventh] century A.D.” (Schopen 2005: 180; see also 218, n. 40).

28 See Bendor 1995: 254.

29 Belongs to the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century according to Marasinghe (1989: xvi, lii): a hypothesis that should be treated with reservation.

30 See Marasinghe 1989: 193. Verse 100a prescribes the deposit of the mantra in the middle of the casket (divided into nine squares), which is confirmed in verse 103a. Verse 100a also prescribes the deposit of *dhātus* and *bījas* (grains) without specifying the square where they are deposited within the casket. Details about *dhātus* and grains are given in verses 101–2. Grains (then named *aṣṭadhānya*) are placed in the eight surrounding squares from the north-east (*iśāna*) onwards (verse 101b). Then “one places in due order *añjana*, *mākṣa* [for *mākṣika*, pyrite] *hīṅgulya*, *haritāla*, *gairika*, *manaḥśilā*, *antarita* [= probably *darada*] and *rājāva[r]ta*” (verse 102): these are eight colouring substances (*dhātus*; compare with *Mayamata* 12.25b–7a for a list of the colouring substances contained in the “embryo”: *jātihiṅgulya*, *haritāla*, *manaḥśilā*, *mākṣika*, *rājāvarta*, *gairika*, *añjana* and *darada*). This confirms that the *dhātus* mentioned in verse 100 are eight colouring substances and not relics. The inclusion of colouring substances in the foundation deposits is common in Hindu architectural treatises and temple manuals (see *Mayamata* 12.25b–7a, already mentioned; 96; 102; 112; *Vimānārcanākalpa* [= *Marīcisamhitā*] in Colas 1986: 232, 233, [tr.:] 152, 154, 155).



though both types of objects—inscribed formulas and relics—could be put together (see Bantor 1995: 250–8). Thus, the casket seems to combine the characteristics of a deposit and a reliquary.

The earliest non-Buddhist prescriptions of deposits seem to appear in late Vedic texts. They concern religious images. The *Baudhāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭasūtra* and the *Vaiṣṇavasasmārtasūtra* prescribe the deposit of precious stones, pearls, coral, gold and silver, or one of these, at the summit of the pedestal on which the religious image is to be installed (Colas 1994: 514, 517). The *Brhatsaṃhitā* (60.17) enjoins the deposit of a piece of gold in a recess on the pedestal. Treatises of architecture and religious fine arts and temple manuals of the end of the first millenary prescribe deposits below the image to be installed (or at the summit of the pedestal) and various deposits in the temple building and in other buildings in the temple compound: in the middle of the first bricks or stones, in the middle of the bricks or stones of the summit (below the finial). It is also important to point out that these deposits, along with accompanying objects like the first or summit bricks, also receive a ritual similar to the *pratiṣṭhā* of images, although in a reduced form. The placement of deposits gained importance, for some medieval manuals designate them as *pratiṣṭhās* (Colas 1996: 312).

Manuals of architecture and temple rituals designate as *garbha* (“embryo”) the deposit of foundation<sup>31</sup> of temples, non-religious buildings and personal houses. They also designate by the same name, but less frequently, a deposit below an image.<sup>32</sup> The architectural “embryo” is a compartmented casket which contains auspicious objects, miniature reproductions of mountains, weapons, symbols of the classes of the Hindu society, colouring substances (*dhātu*), grains, metals, precious stones, etc. (see Colas 1996: 311; Ślaczka 2007: 178, 224–7). The prescriptions of the medieval Vaikhānasa corpus suggest that the “embryo” represents the nascent universe. Its germinative power is associated with Viṣṇu, who is evoked to prepare the womb; the place of deposit is identified with a fertility goddess.<sup>33</sup> In some Pāñcarātra texts, probably later than the 10<sup>th</sup> century, this deposit is explicitly identified with the *saṃskāra* of the “implantation of the embryo” (*garbhādhāna*), one of the domestic rites of human beings.<sup>34</sup>

It is interesting to mention the expression *dhātu-garbha* (Pāli *-gabbha*), in which *dhātu* means relic and *garbha* a confined space. This Buddhist expression from an earlier period is usually understood as “relic chamber”, the space where the relics were

31 See *Mayamata* 12; 18.147b–50 and 157–8; Colas 1986: 106, 151–6, 159; 1989: 138; 1996: 311–2. On the comprehension and translation of the word *garbha*, see Bhatt et al. (2005, ch. 17, n. 1).

32 For instance in the medieval Vaikhānasa corpus (see Colas 1989: 148). *Contra* Ślaczka’s statement (2007: 210 and n. 42) that *garbha* is not applied to image deposits.

33 Colas 1996: 311. See also Ślaczka 2007: 201–15. The deposit of grains is reminiscent of prescriptions of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*: water containing barley (*yava*) grains is besprinkled on the *udumbara* post of the *sadas* (3.6.1) and on the sacrificial stake (*yūpa*) (3.7.1) and in each case the rest of that water is poured in the holes that will receive the post and the sacrificial stake. This water containing barley grains is said to keep from enemies and endow with strength and sap the worlds symbolically situated in the post and the stake (3.6.1.[11]–[2]); 3.7.1.[5]).

34 See Smith 1980: 30–1 (entry *garbhanyāsa*) and its mentions of *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā*, *Brahmarātra*, 8.14b–5a (for the date of this text, see Colas 1996: 54, n. 4) and of *Agastyaśaṃhitā* 1.34–74.



placed in the *stūpa* (see Willis 2000: 20). The coincidence in the vocabulary of Hindu and Buddhist descriptions is striking. Can we venture the hypothesis that non-Buddhist texts reinterpreted Buddhist vocabulary at a time when the Buddhist religion was on the verge of disappearing in most parts of India?

Deposits seem to form an ancient and enduring element in *pratiṣṭhā* rituals. While the concept of deposit could have combined to some extent with the Buddhist concept of reliquary, it also acquired, with the “embryo” deposit, a strong symbolic meaning in Hindu temples. It is difficult to know the significance of deposits in the early Buddhist period. But one notion at least, that of auspiciousness, seems to emerge from the observation of the constituents of the deposits; symbols of auspiciousness also accompanied ashes and bones in the relic caskets. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, bones of deceased Hindus could be the object of veneration and of a particular treatment: they were anointed with perfumed paste before being worshipped, then placed in a box with precious stones and metals; they were transported up to a *tīrtha*, where they were finally thrown, mixed with gold.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, deposits, like *pratiṣṭhā*, seem to have had the function of contributing to the stability of the installation of objects. The importance of the notion of “embryo” from the end of the first millenary onwards seems to corroborate this.

## The opening of the eyes

The anthropomorphic representation of the religious image in general gave rise in ritual manuals to such conceptions as considering the image as a human being or as an incarnation of a superhuman being. These conceptions sometimes went beyond the realm of ritual rhetoric and materialized as ritual accretions, especially in the *pratiṣṭhā* of images. A striking instance is the *pratiṣṭhā* which the Buddhist text *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā* (prior to 1216) describes and prescribes. This description systematically identifies the different steps of the *pratiṣṭhā* of the image with the *saṃskāras* of human beings. Such idea also appears in Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa texts, but often remains incidental and rhetorical.<sup>36</sup> Does the account of the *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā* go beyond rhetoric and reflect actual prescriptions? It appears that the identification of the steps of the

35 As is prescribed by Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa in the *Sāmānyapraghaṭṭaka* section of his *Tristhalīsetu* (639.2–11; tr. Salomon 1985: 432–3).

36 For *garbhanyāsa* identified as *garbhādhāna*, see above. According to the Vaikhānasa *Vimānārcanakalpa*, the *pratiṣṭhā* of an image in a context of reinstallation is said to be analogous to the *saṃskāra* needed by men when they take a new body (see Colas 1996: 309, n. 4). However, the Vaiṣṇava ritual manuals give complete prescriptions for the marriage of the two goddesses Śrī and Bhū with god. The Vaikhānasa medieval corpus gives these prescriptions after the *pratiṣṭhā* of the new images of both the goddesses: see, for instance *Vimānārcanakalpa* 39, pp. 245–50. The *Viṣṇu-tilakasamhitā*, a comparatively late Pāñcarātra text (see Smith 1975: 385), includes the possibility of a marriage of the goddesses with the god during the *pratiṣṭhā* of their images (see 7.584–612). Phyllis Granoff informs me that the identification of the *pratiṣṭhā* ceremony with life-cycle rituals is common to the Jains as well. The Digambara *pratiṣṭhā* texts in particular are modeled on the life-cycle model.



*pratiṣṭhā* with the *saṃskāras* often remains superficial. Firstly, it appears mainly in the titles of the chapters: *sīmantonmayana*, *jātakarman*, *nāmakarman*, *upanayana*, etc. Secondly, the elements contained in the *saṃskāra* framing of the description often have little to do with human *saṃskāras*. For example, the text integrates the opening of the eyes (which belongs to the then-current ritual model of image *pratiṣṭhā*) into the ceremony of the new-born (*jātakarman*). Yet the *saṃskāra* interpretation sometimes seeps into the prescriptions, for instance with regard to the *saṃskāras* of tonsure and marriage.

The ceremony of the opening of the eyes<sup>37</sup> of the image is often considered to be a characteristic feature of the image *pratiṣṭhā* ritual. But it does not seem to have been universal in *pratiṣṭhā* prescriptions, as we will see. The Buddhist text *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā* alludes to the opening of the eyes several centuries before Buddhaghosa (5<sup>th</sup> century AD). Buddhaghosa himself mentions the ritual introduction of power in an image by means of painting its eyes (see Schopen 1997: 138, n. 9). He also states that the emperor Aśoka celebrated this ceremony for seven days.<sup>38</sup> The *Bauddhāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭasūtra* and the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra* (two “late Vedic” texts that could be contemporaneous with Buddhaghosa) describe the ceremony of the opening of the eyes of divine images installed at home. According to the first text, the eyes are opened with a pointed tool made of gold; according to the second, they are opened “with gold”, i.e. with a pointed tool made of gold.<sup>39</sup>

However, the 6<sup>th</sup> century text *Brhatsamhitā* does not mention the opening of the eyes in its chapter (60) dedicated to the installation of images, as pointed out by Hikita (2005: 151). This absence might be significant. For chapter 60 of the *Brhatsamhitā* gives a set of prescriptions that all worshippers can apply for the installation of the respective deities, including Buddha and Jinas. The omission of the eye-opening ceremony in this comparatively late text suggests that certain ritual circles may not have included it in their installation ritual. Perhaps they perceived it as unorthodox or were reluctant to apply this act to images because they considered them as inert, or because they considered the eye-opening ceremony as popular.

Modern scholarship sometimes sees a connection between the opening of the eyes of images and the Vedic ceremony of anointing the eyes of a person undergoing a *dīkṣā* and of a student at the ceremony marking the end of Vedic studies (*samāvartana*).<sup>40</sup> Ac-

37 Terms which designate this ceremony are numerous: *akṣyunmeṣaṇa*, *akṣimocana*, *nayanonmīlana*, etc.; see Hikita 2005: 191. Harting (1922: 65–6) quotes some ethnographic accounts.

38 Gombrich 1966: 26. A frieze of the Thousand Buddhas from Dunhuang dated 439–535 (reproduced in Giès & Cohen 1996: 125) seems to be another early testimony. The eyes of the Buddhas and the dancing girls on this painting have been left unpainted, which apparently shows that the eyes have not been “opened”. However, the author of the notice attributes the absence of the delimitation between lower and upper eyelids to the bad conditions of conservation.

39 Colas 1994: 514, 516. The *Āśvalāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭa* 4.5 of the Poona edition (p. 177, 1.13) also enjoins the opening of the eyes of the image (Einoo 2005: 98; Hikita 2005: 192). But this version of the text seems to be later than the version edited by Aithal, which does not prescribe the *pratiṣṭhā* of images (see Aithal 1993: 230–2).

40 See Hikita 2005: 193.



cording to Vedic texts, especially Brāhmaṇas, this anointing enables one to destroy enemies, protect oneself, obtain truth, etc. Some Hindu and Buddhist texts prescribe eye-anointing during or after the opening of the eyes of the image.<sup>41</sup> However, it is difficult to consider this prescription as a specific Vedic influence, for the Vedic interpretation of anointing the eyes may stem from a general conception of the power of vision in ancient Indian society, not exclusively from Vedic circles.

The assessment of the role of the craftsman with regard to the rite also influenced the structure of the opening of the eyes. The *Baudhāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭasūtra* and the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra* do not mention the craftsman. In the first text, the ritual performer himself makes the image. The second text does not mention any intervention of a craftsman in the *pratiṣṭhā* rite (see Colas 1996: 24–5). Both texts mention only briefly the act of opening of the eyes. Later temple rituals distinguish between two kinds of opening of the eyes, one material, realized by the craftsman, and the other purely ritual, performed by the ritual performer. Two ancient Pāñcarātra texts, the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* and the *Sātvatasamhitā*<sup>42</sup> refer to this distinction (see Hikita 2005: 192–3). In both these texts, the ritual opening of the eyes precedes the action of the craftsman. According to the Vaikhānasa medieval corpus, the first opening of the eyes is performed without mantras by the craftsman. It consists in drawing or sculpting the eyes. This is immediately followed by a ceremony of purification of the image from the touch of the craftsman. The second opening of the eyes is performed with mantras by the priest who mimes the work of the craftsman.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the order of the actions of the priest and the craftsman seem to be reversed in the Vaikhānasa texts as compared to the two ancient Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās. This reversal is not insignificant, for it brings out the cruciality of the ceremony: it purifies the image from the touch of the craftsman, removes the image from the human realm and introduces it into the process of ritual divinization (see Colas 1989: 140, 148–9).

The *Mayamata*, a treatise of fine arts and architecture, does not highlight the distinction between the roles of the priest and the craftsman with regard to the image. The only actor in the opening of the eyes is the craftsman-architect.<sup>44</sup> However, the roles of

41 See Hikita 2005: 192. Eye-anointing and eye-opening should, perhaps, sometimes be considered as two different operations. See, for instance, *Agnipurāṇa* (58.9cd–13): after the opening of the eyes, the ritual performer anoints the eyes of the image with various ingredients, such as honey or clarified butter, while reciting appropriate mantras. In Abhayākara Gupta's *Vajrāvalī* (11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century), the opening of the eyes apparently consists of the application of butter and honey with a "stick" of gold (Mori 2005: 217). The Buddhist *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā* (p. 180) prescribes the opening of the eyes with a golden pointed instrument smeared with clarified butter and honey, but does not prescribe a separate anointment before or after the opening of the eyes.

42 But the *pratiṣṭhā* portion of the *Sātvatasamhitā* was probably added later. Firstly, because it includes many Vedic mantras and non-Ekāyana Brahmins assume a major role in this portion, and secondly, because it contains passages parallel to prescriptions of other sects. I thank Professor Hiromichi Hikita for this observation.

43 The priest sometimes adds the last touch of painting (Colas 1989: 139, 140–1; 1996: 313–4).

44 *Mayamata* 18.185–8. See also the quotation from P.K. Acharya about the *Mānasāra* in Harting (1922: 66).



the Master and the craftsman are distinguished in the adaptation of the ceremony for *lingas*.<sup>45</sup> The Master is apparently a ritualist who recites the required mantra and draws several lines on the *linga* with a golden stylus. The craftsman then completes the details of the sculptural work. There is no mention of purification from the touch of the craftsman nor of any further action by the Master with regard to this ceremony. This omission, together with the order of the performance, when this is a significant element, could testify to the desire of craftsmen to retain a maximal symbolic role in the image making.<sup>46</sup> It must be added that the probable competition between priest (in general) and craftsman to control the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual was perhaps only one among other socio-religious rivalries. Debates also apparently arose at times about the religious importance and social qualification of several performers which were particular to the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual. Such is the case of the “placer” (*sthāpaka*), for instance.<sup>47</sup> This could testify for a relative lability of social relations within *pratiṣṭhā* rites even in predominantly brahmanized context. Extant Sanskrit sources rarely make explicit these debates. The relative importance ascribed to the various performers of *pratiṣṭhā* was significant in the eyes of the patrons, who paid them according to a specific hierarchization.<sup>48</sup>

In several other comparatively late sources (that is, dating from 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards), the opening of the eyes is clearly interpreted as a process of giving knowledge<sup>49</sup> or power. According to some manuals, the opening of the eyes apparently corresponds

45 *lakṣaṇoddharaṇa*: “bringing forth the characteristics” (33.101–9).

46 The third *khaṇḍa* (97.1) of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* goes as far as identifying the craftsman-architect (*sthapati*) as one of the sixteen *ṛtvijs* of the *pratiṣṭhā*. This text is liberal in assigning the *ṛtvi* title, for the astrologer too is included among the *ṛtvijs*. The editor, Shah, dates this *khaṇḍa* to “between circa 450 and 650 A.D. An earlier date after the third century A.D. however is not excluded by the evidence.” (introduction, xxvi). But the debate over the age of this *khaṇḍa* remains open. Chapters could be of different dates (Colas 2002: 301–2). Phyllis Granoff draws my attention to chapter 4 of the (*Ārya*-)*mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, a Buddhist text, and informs me that this chapter does not minimize the role of craftsmen; the painting on cloth is never consecrated ritually, but the steps that lead up to its completion are all ritually regulated (personal communication). Craftsmen (weaver [pp. 55–9] and painter [p. 61]) cooperate closely with the main performer of the rite (the *sādhaka*, also called *vidyādhara*, pp. 56, 58) (see Lalou’s translation for informative notes). The (*Ārya*-)*mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* was gradually composed between the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the end of 10<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter 4 most probably did not escape additions and recasting but apparently belongs to the older stratum of the text (Przyłuski 1923: 302–4, 306). 20<sup>th</sup> century Ceylonese Buddhism does not seem to require the participation of a priest in the opening of the eyes, which is done exclusively by a craftsman (Gombrich 1966: 24–5; 1971: 113).

47 See Granoff 2006: 390–1; Colas 1996: 313. The *Brhatsaṃhitā* mentions twice the *sthāpaka* in its chapter dedicated to the installation of images. The *sthāpaka* lays down the image to sleep on a couch (60.14). He is specially honoured, like the astrologer, the craftsman-architect, members of the assembly, etc. (60.18). However the text neither shows nor states that the *sthāpaka* is the main performer of the installation ceremonies.

48 At least according to Vaikhāṇasa sources; see Colas 1996: 215–7.

49 For instance, after the opening of the eyes, the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* (20.166a) states: *nirīkṣeta tato bimbaṃ pradīptaṃ jñānacakṣuṣā*. In the Buddhist Kuladatta’s *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā*, the mantra accompanying the action of the eye-opening identifies it with removal of the “cataract of ignorance” (180, 280). The association of power with the eye-opening could be earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> century, as we saw above.



to the sudden release of divine power through the eyes of the image-deity. This is indicated by a supplementary module enjoined immediately after this opening, namely the presentation of appeasing objects to the newly-opened divine eyes. A cow and her calf, grains, clarified butter, etc. are the auspicious objects placed in front of the image.<sup>50</sup> This seems to mean that the first gaze of the divine image is held to be violent and needs to be pacified. This ritual module is prevalent in the Vaikhānasa medieval corpus.<sup>51</sup> But according to the same texts, the introduction of power in the image takes place through another ceremony at the end of the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual. To state that the image emits power at the stage of the opening of the eyes would seem to undermine the interpretation of *pratiṣṭhā* as power-giving rite. It could be explained that it is the *first* act of manifestation of divine power in the image (see Colas 1986: 77). But most probably the arrangement of the ritual succession needed not fit the modern norms of coherence (Colas 1989: 146–7) and this kind of discrepancy was not considered a major flaw.

Interestingly, the ceremony of opening of the eyes of the image was reproduced, though in a modified form, in the *pratiṣṭhā* of other objects. The equivalent of this ceremony with regard to *liṅga*, the “bringing forth of (auspicious) characteristics” (*lakṣa-noddharana*), appears in the Śilpaśāstra and in Śaivatantras. Practically, it consists in tracing the various parts of the *liṅga*. According to the *Mayamata* (33.101–9; Takashima 2005: 121), it is accompanied by a mantra dedicated to the eyes (33.106) and followed by the presentation of auspicious objects to the *liṅga*. This clearly shows that the opening of eyes was the model for the *liṅga* ceremony. In some Buddhist ritual traditions, the “opening of the eyes” of the manuscripts of scriptures is performed by reflecting them in a mirror.<sup>52</sup>

## Empowering of the image

From the notion of installing, placing, the rite of *pratiṣṭhā* acquired the signification of transforming the object into a power-suffused entity. This interpretative overlay was not part of all the earliest versions of the ceremony. The idea of ritually empowering (or giving life to) the religious image through an elaborate process could be the ritual and articulated translation of a current belief in the innate power and life of the representation of a supra-human or divine being. This very belief may not have been origi-

50 Colas 1989: 140–1. See also *Mayamata* 18.189. Observations made in 20<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka recorded the belief that the opening of the eyes of Buddhist images is a dangerous operation for the craftsman who performs it (Gombrich 1966: 24–5).

51 It is, however, absent in the rituals prescribed in early texts like *Baudhāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭasūtra* and *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra*, and in the two ancient Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās, the *Jyākhyā*- and the *Sātvata*-.

52 According to Abhayākara’s *Vajrāvalī* (Mori 2005: 217) and Kuladatta’s *Kriyasaṃgrahapañjikā* (181). According to several Purāṇas the *pratiṣṭhā* of trees comprises a ceremony of “ear-piercing” of the tree with the help of a golden needle (Filliozat 2004: 99).



nally “Hindu”, but could have belonged to a common and wide-spread devotional conception. The ritual transposition of this idea could express both the legitimation of this belief and the desire of priests to retain the agency of making the image a powerful or living being.

The *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra* may be considered as one of the earliest extant texts to prescribe the introduction of power in the religious image. It enjoins the worship of a vase containing water imbued with power, which is poured over the image through the intermediary of a bunch of sacred herb (see Colas 1994: 516–7 and 518). The Pāñcārātra *Pauṣkarasaṃhitā* (43.96–7) considers the introduction of power-consciousness (*cicchakti*) into the image as an essential moment in the *pratiṣṭhā* of the image. Later, the Vaikhānasa medieval corpus also prescribes the preparation and worship of a vase filled with water, various objects and sacred syllables that are mentally deposited in the vase, which is considered as a “vase of power” (*śaktikumbha*). The water of this vase is poured over the image at the end of the *pratiṣṭhā* (Colas 1989: 77–9, 142; 1996: 290–1). The vase also functions as a substitute of the image until the *pratiṣṭhā* of the image is completed. Śaivatantras such as the *Ajita*- and the *Rauravatantra* also enjoin the introduction of power through the vase of power.<sup>53</sup>

The *Vimānārcanakalpa*, besides the two ceremonies discussed above, refers to another power-giving action with regard to religious images made of clay. In the last phase of making the image, colour is applied onto it. A mantra identifies the colour with “life”. The text then prescribes a second application of colour mixed with gold and identifies it with “power” (see Colas 1986: 244). This confirms that discrepancy is not a major problem in ritual injunctions and that the theological overlay of giving power can repeatedly find its way amidst the prescriptions.

However, opening of the eyes and pouring of empowered water are mainly performed by two different actors. The first is primarily the work of a craftsman (even though the ritual prescriptions add a second opening of the eyes, by a priest) and is conceived to release violent power from the image. The second is performed by a priest. Could we presume that the opening of the eyes originated in the circles of image-makers and that the element of the “vase of power” was incorporated into the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual either for the purification of the image or to safeguard the socio-religious superiority (and economic interests?) of the priests?

Apparently the notion of empowering the religious image was not conceived as essential to the *pratiṣṭhā* ritual in all religious and ritualist circles. The *Baudhāyanagr̥hya-pariśiṣṭasūtra* contains ritual and mantric elements often similar to those of the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra*. But this text is not sectarian: it prescribes *pratiṣṭhā* rites for Viṣṇu and Rudra, as well as the daily worship of these two gods together (see Colas 1994: passim). Unlike the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra*, it does not mention the introduction of divine power into the image (Colas 1994: 518). The installation described in the *Bṛhat-*

53 See Colas 1994: 518, n. 3. The date of these Tantras is difficult to determine. However one may presume that their most ancient chapters contain conceptions which were current at the beginning of the second millenium.



*saṃhitā* does not prescribe the introduction of power in the religious image either. However, the reason for this absence of empowering of the image may differ according to the text. The *Baudhāyanagr̥hyaparīśiṣṭasūtra* perhaps intentionally rejected the introduction of power for an ideological reason (resistance to Tantrism), while the *Br̥hatsaṃhitā* prescribed a unificatory ritual model that catered to all obediences. Like the absence of reference to the opening of the eyes, the absence of reference to power introduction might also reveal the reluctance of certain religious traditions about this notion, perhaps considered as unorthodox or “popular”. Or, perhaps, the *Br̥hatsaṃhitā*, not being a priestly text, was not so keen on mentioning the introduction of power in images (through a vase or by another means). The *Mayamata* mentions the opening of the eyes, but not the power in the vases of deities (see 18.185–90a and 18.215–6). It is a supra-sectarian text (including prescriptions for Buddhist and Jaina images in 36.281–91), though it shows a leaning towards Śaivism.<sup>54</sup> This could explain why it does not mention the introduction of power in images, a conception which perhaps was unacceptable to certain milieus. However, being later than the *Br̥hatsaṃhitā*, it could have retained the ceremony of opening of the eyes because this element was commonly accepted by then.

## Conclusion

To describe a rite is to interpret it. All scriptural depiction of ritual acts presupposes an analysis of these acts. As we observed, ritual manuals sometimes integrate theological interpretations of the *pratiṣṭhā*. Priests, who used them, were probably anxious to legitimize this rite with theological arguments. Some non-ritual texts also use metaphysical or philosophical interpretations to justify the commonly practised *pratiṣṭhā* rite. The Jaina author Haribhadra (8<sup>th</sup> century?), for instance, describes *pratiṣṭhā* in a verse which may be translated as: “*Pratiṣṭhā* is indeed of one’s own feeling relative to a deity; according to the Scriptures it is the establishment of the supreme in one’s own self.”<sup>55</sup> According to the commentaries the installation can be neither of a liberated particular deity nor of a living being who is a deity. The installation is of the supreme in one’s own self as “I am that” and—when it concerns an external image—it is of the feeling relative to a deity as “this is that”. The Naiyāyika author Udayana (11<sup>th</sup> century), in his *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, does not accept that *pratiṣṭhā* gives a specific power to images. He interprets *pratiṣṭhā* as an act bringing about the conscious reflection, by deities, of themselves as being present in the image (see Colas 2004: 160–4).

This paper, however, focused on the testimony of ritual manuals. If we were to admit that *pratiṣṭhā* is a unique ritual model, we would have to consider it as a stable structure which gathered “meanings” and dynamics in the constant accretion and rein-

<sup>54</sup> See Dagens, *Mayamata*, Introduction: p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *bhavati ca khalu pratiṣṭhā nijabhāvasyaiva devatoddeśāt | svātmany eva param yat sthāpanam iha vacananīyoccaiḥ* (Śoḍaśaprakaraṇa 8.4).



terpretation of details that were not an integral part of the original model. We would also have to postulate that there is a single, simple origin of the model. The available documentation seems to a certain extent to support this theory, because the prescriptions of *pratiṣṭhā* in the extant ritual manuals from around the 8<sup>th</sup> century up until modern times show a certain unity. But this model does not have a precise form and escapes all clear definition probably because it never existed except as an ideal. All that we observe in the ritual manuals are particular ritual forms, which nevertheless share certain common points.

Early Buddhist documentation about *pratiṣṭhā* is rare but precious because it reveals the vulnerability of the premise of an exclusive model. For, as we have seen, the elaboration of this rite was a response to various needs, and its various elements may have been brought (sometimes to the forefront) from different horizons, some Vedic (or late Vedic), some theological or yogic, etc. A ritual model results from a historical construction, that is to say, from routinizing, simplifying and sometimes complexifying, while at the same time enhancing, salient features or modules that were supposed to provide rites with “meaning”. The authors of ritual manuals analyzed and synthesized; constructions and reconstructions were meant to regulate practice and to canonize the rules obtained, an effort bound to re-occur. The process of modelization was constant, but no model resisted the continual process of modelization.

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