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Portraiture in Early India

Between Transience and Eternity



Vincent Lefèvre

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Portraiture in Early India

Between Transience and Eternity

By

Vincent Lefèvre



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Cover illustration: Couple of donors—Veranda of Karle caitya (India, Maharashtra)—
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To Bruno Dagens

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FOREWORD

In the field of art history, portraiture has always been one of the main topics dealt with by scholars and connoisseurs. For several reasons, which I try to explain briefly in the introduction to this book, this has rarely been so in Indian or South Asian studies. My own interest came also gradually. As a matter of fact, my first research, when I was student at the Ecole nationale des chartes, Paris, focused on Cōla bronzes; as I inquired on who commissioned them, I found the subject of my doctoral thesis: artistic patronage in Tamil Nadu. In the course of this research, I became interested in the representation of many donors and patrons, mostly on temple walls, and I devoted a whole chapter to this issue. However, I soon felt necessary to know more on what happened outside Tamil Nadu, and even before the first South Indian portraits so far preserved. Unsatisfied with this chapter, which appeared soon to be just a preliminary study, and, moreover, stuck by the general lack of interest for portraiture in India prior to the Mughal period, I then decided to go further, first with some papers and then with a more comprehensive research. A first version of this work was presented, in French, as a dissertation for the “Habilitation à Diriger les Recherches”, at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3 in 2007. But, in order to reach a wider audience, I revised it extensively in English.

Consequently, my approach of portraiture is not, strictly speaking, a classic art historical one. I do not look at portraits as an artistic genre, a concept which would be quite irrelevant in the context of early India, as a matter of fact. A ‘portrait’ is indeed strongly related to the social and historical background which has led to its creation; hence it can tell a lot about the people who wished to be thus represented. Besides, such a study is also an invitation to question the origins and the development(s) of Indian imagery.

Since this book is not only about ‘images’ but also, and even more, about the way these images are (or were) considered, it was necessary to bring them together with textual references. Not all my readers being familiar with such diverse sources, especially those whose interest lies mostly outside South Asia, I favoured, inasmuch as possible, quotations (even, sometimes, long ones) instead of bibliographical

references. While vocabulary is important, this book is not meant for philologists: I have then chosen to quote these sources in English and to give the original text in notes. When the quotation is too extensive, I have retained only the useful expressions in the original language. When not specified, translations are mine.

For these quotations and Indian words in general I have used the diacritical marks universally acknowledged for the transcription of Sanskrit and other Indian languages, except for the geographical names for which I have preferred the modern spelling.

A book about portraiture should be lavishly illustrated, since illustrations are here as important as textual references. Ideally, each image mentioned in the text should have been reproduced. For plenty of reasons which will seem obvious to anyone having published a book once, this proved impossible. I had then to find a compromise, holding the most important images for my purpose; I wanted to keep my readers from looking for too many other publications, but I assumed that the most famous ones did not need to be reproduced for the umpteenth time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As explained in my foreword, this book is the last step of a long process which developed in different studies spread on many years. It is then all but natural that many people have helped me, in one way or another, directly or indirectly. It would of course be impossible to cite them all and I would like to apologise to all those I might forget.

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During the elaboration of the first, French, version of this study, I received advice and support from Nalini Balbir, Marie-Luce Barazer-Billoret, Marie-Françoise Boussac, Jean-François and Catherine Jarrige, Edith Parlier-Renault, Marie-Claude Porcher. I thank them all, but more especially Jean-François Jarrige, then head of the Musée Guimet where I was curator, who not only let me do this work along with my museum duty but even encouraged me to do so.

While inviting me to participate to a very stimulating conference on portraiture in London, Crispin Branfoot, who has written inspiring papers on Nāyaka portraits, gave me the strength to go on writing this book in English. I would like to thank also Shafiq-ul Alam, Hans Bakker, Ernelle Berlier, Pia Brancaccio, Colette Caillat (†), Jean Deloche, Suchandra Ghosh, François Grimal, John Guy, Mahmud-ul Haque, Parween Hasan, Oskar von Hinüber, Rezaul Karim, Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Ebba Koch, Robert Knox, Md. Abdul Kuddus, Françoise L'Hernault (†), Gerd Mevissen, Pratapaditya Pal, Christophe Pottier, Ludvine Provost-Roche, Gautam Sengupta, Doris Meth Srinivasan, P. S. Srinivasan, Amina Taha Hussein-Okada, Kapila Vatsyayan, and Michael Willis.

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My mother, Nicole Lefèvre, has been kind enough to check my English in a first version of this book. All mistakes, however, are mine. Many of my friends and colleagues have been very supportive while I was struggling with this study, but I would like to make a special mention for Aurélie Samuel and, last but not least, for Pierre, who certainly finds all this very exotic!

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Fig. 37. *Male figure ('Yakṣa')*—Patna (India, Bihar)—Second-First century BC—Stone—145 cm—Indian Museum, Kolkata (© AIIS)



Fig. 38. *Male figure ('Yakṣa')*—Patna (India, Bihar)—Second-First century BC—Stone—165 × 70 cm—Indian Museum, Kolkata (© AIIS)



Fig. 39. *Male figure ("Yaksha")*—Parkham, Mathura (India, Uttar Pradesh)—Second-First century BC—Sandstone—264 cm—Government Museum, Mathura (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 40. *Male figure ('Yakṣa')*—Pawaya, Gwalior (India, Madhya Pradesh)—
Second-First century BC (?)—Sandstone—State Museum, Gwalior (© AIIS)



Fig. 41. *Medallion of the railing*—Bharhut (India, Madhya Pradesh)—
Ca. 100–80 BC—Sandstone—Indian Museum, Kolkata (Photograph by
Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 42. *King riding an elephant (Dhanabhūti?)*—Bharhut (India, Madhya Pradesh)—Ca. 100–80 BC—Sandstone—Indian Museum, Kolkata (© AIIS)



Fig. 43. *Flag holder (Nāgarakhitā?)*—Bharhut (India, Madhya Pradesh)—
Ca. 100–80 BC—Sandstone—Indian Museum, Kolkata (Photograph by
Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 44. *Greek soldier (Mahila?)*—Bharhut (India, Madhya Pradesh)—
Ca. 100–80 BC—Sandstone—Indian Museum, Kolkata (Photograph by
Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 45. *Vr̥ṣṇi Vira torso* (?)—Mora (India, Uttar Pradesh)—Second-Third century—Sandstone—70 cm—Government Museum, Mathura (E22)
 (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 46. *Vṛṣṇi Vīra* (?)—Mora (India, Uttar Pradesh)—Second-Third century—Sandstone—69,5 × 32,5 cm—Government Museum, Mathura (E25) (© AIIS)



Fig. 47. *Cakravartin*—Amaravati region (India, Andhra Pradesh)—1st century BC–1st century AD—Marble limestone—112 × 78 cm—Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris (MG 19063) (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 48. *Sūryavarman II giving orders to his ministers*—Western part of the southern gallery of the third precinct of Angkor Wat (Cambodia)—First half of the twelfth century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 49. *Varāhāvatāra*—Cave 5, Udayagiri (India, Madhya Pradesh, Vidisha district)—Beginning of the fifth century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 50. *Detail of Varāhāvatāra (Candragupta II ?)*—Cave 5, Udayagiri (India, Madhya Pradesh, Vidisha district)—Beginning of the fifth century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 51. *Viṣṇu sleeping on Ananta*—Udayagiri (India, Madhya Pradesh, Vidisha district)—Beginning of the fifth century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 52. *Devotee (Candragupta II?) kneeling at the feet of Viṣṇu*, detail of Fig. 58 (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 53. *Narasimhavaraman I Mahāmalla*—Dharmarāja ratha, Mahabalipuram (India, Tamil Nadu)—middle of the seventh century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 54. *Arjuna ratha, Southern side, Mahabalipuram (India, Tamil Nadu)—middle of the seventh century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)*



Fig. 55. Seated king 'Simhavishnuṇṇapōttrāthirājan'—
Ādivarāha cave-temple, Mahabalipuram (India, Tamil
Nadu)—Seventh century (© IFP/EFEO)



Fig. 56. Standing king 'Mahendrapōttrāthirājan'—
Ādivarāha cave-temple, Mahabalipuram (India, Tamil
Nadu)—Seventh century (© IFP/EFEO)



Fig. 57. *The 'Great Penance'*—Mahabalipuram (India, Tamil Nadu)—Seventh century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)



Fig. 58. *The 'Great Penance' (detail)*—Mahabalipuram (India, Tamil Nadu)—Seventh century (Photograph by Vincent Lefèvre)

ABBREVIATIONS

AIIS	American Institute for Indian Studies
ARE	<i>Annual Report on Epigraphy</i>
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
ASR	Archaeological Survey of India Report
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
EFEO	Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient
EI	<i>Epigraphia Indica</i>
IC	<i>Inscriptions du Cambodge</i>
IFP	Institut français de Pondichéry
IGNCA	Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts
Kp.	<i>Kriyāpāda</i>
PIFI	Publications de l'Institut français d'indologie
Pk	prakrit
RMN	Réunion des Musées Nationaux
SII	<i>South Indian Inscriptions</i>
Sk	sanskrit
St.	stance

INTRODUCTION

PORTRAITURE, A PROBLEMATIC ISSUE

There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Portraiture is one of the most explored fields in art history: numerous books, papers and even exhibitions have been devoted to it. However this topic remains difficult to grasp, and partly elusive. The first reason is that it is not really an artistic 'genre', as is, for instance, landscape painting—or, it would be more exact to say that it is not *always* (or, necessarily) an artistic genre. Being the representation of real persons (often deemed as 'sitters'), it is a special kind of image, dealing with a lot of conventions, some purely 'artistic', others much more 'social' and 'historical'. As a matter of fact, portraiture is very much the product of the society which leads to its creation—and, as such, it has also a lot to reveal about this society. Its artistic, or even its aesthetic, appreciation is only one of the ways it should be looked at—and sometimes this is the less important, compared to other considerations (social, economic, political, etc.).

In the history of Western art, the importance of portraiture is widely acknowledged but, even there, global and conceptual studies are rather rare (and most of them have been attempted recently)¹—probably because it seems relevant to study it in a specific context whereas a general definition appears to be problematic. However, very often, it is said—or at least implied—that portraiture is an invention of the West and that its existence in other civilizations is debatable. This is the case with Indian art, before the Mughal period. In other words, it is often argued that portraiture is virtually non-existent in pre-sixteenth

¹ Even if the existence of portraiture in Far Eastern art has not been denied in the same way as for South Asian art (especially for Japan), comprehensive studies were also lacking till the publishing of Dietrich Seckel's three volumes on the subject: *Das Porträt in Ostasien—Band 1: Einführung und Teil I: Porträt-Typen* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997), *Band 3: Porträt-Funktionen* (1999), *Band 2, Teil II: Porträt-Gestaltung* (2005).

century art and that its appearance is due to an impulse from outside (Persia and Europe). Of course, before that time, some statues were known to represent real persons and therefore correspond more or less to what is (or should be) a portrait: this is the case of the famous Kanīṣka from Māṭ, near Mathura, the bronze group of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his queens from Tirupati, or, farther in Southeast Asia, the various statues of the Khmer king Jayavarman VII. But these were almost always considered as strange exceptions.

In the more recent decades, specialised studies, dealing with a specific period and/or region or, even, milieu, have deeply increased our knowledge of Indian art and in the course of these books and papers, a lot of images have emerged which are labelled 'portraits', in a way or another. Portraiture, thus, does not seem any more to be an exception or a peculiarity. Because the topic is now much less neglected, it is probably time to propose a more conceptual and broad approach of portraiture in early India. Of course, by tempting such an approach I do not pretend to write a general history of portraiture in India, nor to cover all the aspects of the problem. But my purpose is to show that:

1. In early India portraits were numerous and often played an important role in the development of art and imagery;
2. The practice is ancient and central to the Indian civilization; foreign influences may naturally have occurred but they do not explain the whole phenomenon;
3. Portraiture is a general term behind which lay very different kinds of images, according to their shape, their nature and their purpose;
4. There is a specificity of portraiture in India, as compared with other civilizations.

It is then my hope that this book can help raise further questions, useful for more specialised studies. In the following pages, I will try to address some general questions such as the identification of portraits, the issue of likeness, the origin of portraiture, its functions and its relation to cults, etc., by mixing the analysis of some selected images with the studies of written sources. As will be apparent, the reading of inscriptions or more literary texts is of vital importance not only for identifying portraits but also to understand the way such images were perceived and used.

Besides, even if this book will mainly focus on South Asia before the rise of the Mughal rule, I will sometimes allow myself some incur-

sions not only in the later periods but also in Southeast Asia. A short explanation may be necessary. As a matter of fact, my interest covers all the territories concerned by 'Indianness', that is, all the features related or derived from the Indian civilization. The influence of India on the kingdoms of Southeast Asia is a well-known and well-attested fact; it has even led the first historians to use the expression 'Greater India' about them. Such view, very typical of the colonial era, has been abandoned—and rightly so. On the contrary, more recently, the originality of the Southeast Asian cultures has been emphasized, as well as the fact that other influences (from the Far East) may have occurred. These civilizations—and the plural, here, is important—are then a blend of an important but very little known local substratum with many and varied foreign influences. However, the impact of 'Indianness' cannot be denied: along with Hinduism and Buddhism (and their iconography), Sanskrit and many Indian texts have been adopted and, sometimes, adapted. For instance, Angkor Wat follows the prescriptions of the normative Indian treatises on ritual and architecture: as such, it is a perfect example of what a Hindu temple is supposed to be (even more perfect than most of the Indian examples, as a matter of fact); at the same time, it is the epitome of Khmer architecture. Without denying their originality, looking at some Southeast Asian features is then a way to question the specificities of India. My intrusions in Southeast Asia should thus be interpreted as some kinds of counterpoint.

After these preliminary remarks, it is necessary to precise a few points on portraiture. First of all, in order to reach a definition, we need to get rid of some misconceptions. In that order of idea, a short survey of scholarly opinions on Indian portraiture may not be out of place. Since Partha Mitter and his 'much maligned monsters', the historiography of Indian art has been well known and often studied.² It is not my aim, then, to add something new to what has already been written. However, it is important for us to understand why, for so long, portraiture has been more or less denied to India: in fact, as we will see, the explanations range from pure neglect to more ideological conceptions. Therefore the reasons for this disdain may be today exactly the same that explain why we find an interest in the study of portraiture.

² Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters. A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (London-Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977. New edition, 1992).

Likewise, a summary of these misconceptions will be helpful to set up some rationales.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF INDIAN ART

To put it simply, historical, archaeological and philological research on India really started in the nineteenth century, more especially in the second half for the study of artefacts and archaeological remains. Among the many books written since then, it would be preposterous to say that the word 'portrait' never appears, but its occurrences are very limited. For instance, about the caves at Karle and Kanheri, J. Burgess made the assumption that some relieves could be images of donors, without elaborating any further.³

Before presenting some explanations to this, let us note the uneasiness of many eminent scholars toward portraiture in India. Thus, Vincent A. Smith wrote: "well-authenticated portrait statues are rare in India".⁴ Jean-Philippe Vogel, two decades later, almost said the same: "on the whole, portrait statues of kings are extremely rare in Indian art".⁵ This phenomenon—or at least what was considered as such—was explained by a "Hindu disinclination to or aversion from realistic likeness".⁶ In short, the existence of portraits was not completely denied but was seen as quite negligible, not to say aberrant. Only Stella Kramrisch was not as definite when she declared: "(...) portraiture, in the current sense, does not exist in Indian sculpture. Portraiture belongs to civilisations that fear death. Individual likeness is not wanted where it suffices for the type to continue."⁷

³ James Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions* (London: Trübner, 1883), 62, and *Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta* (London, 1887), 97. But in his famous *Cave-Temple of India* (London: W. H. Allen, 1880), written along with James Fergusson, about the Dharmarāja ratha at Mahabalipuram, it is said (p. 126) that one of the relieves is either a deity or a human being (we now know that it is an image of the king Narasimhavarman I; see K. R. Srinivasan, *The Dharmaraja Ratha and Its Sculptures* [New Delhi: Abhinav, 1975], 24 and 65), but the word 'portrait' is neither written nor implied. See Chapter 5, § 3.2.

⁴ Vincent Arthur Smith, *A History of Fine Arts In India and Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 238.

⁵ *The Influences of Indian Art*, six papers written for the Society by J. Strzygowski, J. Ph. Vogel, H. F. E. Visser, V. Goloubeff, J. Hackin and A. Nell, with an introduction by F. H. Andrews (London: The India Society, 1925), 81.

⁶ Smith, *History of Fine Arts*, 496.

⁷ Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 134.

However, Kramrisch's position came somewhat later, at a time when a change had occurred, thanks to the work of A. K. Coomaraswamy and T. G. Aravamuthan. The former wrote thus an article on painting through literary sources which gave new light on the use of portraits in a secular context.⁸ Ten years later (1939), he developed these ideas in another paper devoted to the 'ideal' portrait in a rather theoretical and abstract perspective mixing up—in his masterful and at the same time misleading way—the *Upaniṣads*, the Neo-Platonists and the masters of medieval scholasticism.⁹ Strangely enough, though he argued portraits were quite common in early India, he at the same time put forward the idea that this practice was against tradition. It was based on a quotation from the *Śukranītisāra* by Śukrācārya, a treatise related to the *Dharmaśāstras*: according to this passage (IV.4.76), the making of images of mortals in their likeness is *asvargya*, that is, cannot lead to heaven nor to *mokṣa*, contrary to the making of divine images. Because of Coomaraswamy's authority, this reference has become quite popular¹⁰ and, consequently, gave weight to the idea of the 'abnormality' of portraits in India. Therefore, it is necessary to look closely at it. First, this quotation does not forbid at all the making of 'portraits': it only creates a distinction between images of mortals and of deities—these latter being the only ones able to give heavenly reward—and, as such, it shows that portraits were considered a common practice. Second (and this is perhaps more important), we know now that the *Śukranītisāra* was composed in the nineteenth century for the Maratha court of Baroda.¹¹ Therefore, this source is much too late to be used as evidence on portraiture in early India. On the contrary, one can wonder whether it does not reflect ideas current on this topic in the nineteenth century and if this 'defiance' against portraiture does not in fact reflect Victorian points of view.

⁸ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, "Nāgara Painting", *Rūpam* 37 (1929), 24–29 and 127–129.

⁹ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, "The Traditional Conception of Ideal Portraiture", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 7 (1939), 74–82.

¹⁰ It has been recently quoted by Padma Kaimal, "The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870–970 A.D.", *Artibus Asiae* 69.1 (1999), 67, but according to a critical approach. See also Vidya Dehejia, "The Very Idea of a Portrait", *Ars Orientalis* 28 (1998), 145.

¹¹ Lallanji Gopal, "The *Śukranīti*—A Nineteenth-Century Text", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25 (1962), 524–556.

Compared to Coomaraswamy, Aravamuthan's studies adopted a much more historical and pragmatic approach.¹² As a matter of fact, he dealt with real images and inscriptions, in the context of Southern India, mainly the Tamil region. Thanks to the high number of examples quoted in these two books, like the two Pallava kings in the Ādivarāha cave at Mahabalipuram (Figs. 55 and 56), it was no more possible to have any doubt: portraits had always been a common practice, at least in South India. However, in spite of this new approach, Aravamuthan remained prisoner of the *a priori* commonly accepted in the 1920s and 1930s. This is especially apparent on the question of likeness which, according to the Western conception, was a prerequisite:

Most of these sculptures must have been good portraits: it is unlikely that artists who excelled in every branch of sculpture would have lacked only the genius for portraiture. Mahendravarman I, who prided himself on the exquisiteness of his tastes, and Krishna-deva-raya, whose aesthetic accomplishments are too well known to need recounting, would not have been satisfied with statues which were wanting in the essential quality of faithful likeness.¹³

As we will see below, likeness is one of the conceptions usually (but wrongly) associated with the very idea of portrait. Though this is fully understandable in the context of the 1930s, this utmost importance granted to the likeness issue for the very definition of a portrait is probably one of the main limits of Aravamuthan's approach. For instance, he had sometimes to find clever but at the same time unconvincing explanations to prove a likeness otherwise quite difficult to believe.¹⁴

In spite of these easy criticisms, Aravamuthan's work can be considered a milestone in the study of Indian portraiture. After him, even if it remained a bit anecdotal, the idea that portraits existed in early India has been more or less accepted. Let us mention some more recent books and articles dealing with the subject, usually in a regional approach.¹⁵ It has been the case in J. Rosenfield's classical book on the Kuṣāṇas, even if, there, portraiture is strongly related

¹² T. G. Aravamuthan, *South Indian Portraits in Stone and Metal* (London: Luzac and Company, 1930), and *Portrait Sculpture in South India* (London: The India Society, 1931).

¹³ Aravamuthan, *South Indian Portraits*, 9.

¹⁴ See also chapter 2, § 1.1.2.

¹⁵ For a more global and conceptual approach, see for instance Dehejia, "The Very Idea of a Portrait"; Adalbert J. Gail, "Anmerkung zum Bildnis in Indien", in *Das Bildnis in der Kunst Orients*, ed. Martin von Kraatz (Stuttgart: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990),

to Western (Greco-Roman and Persian) traditions.¹⁶ South India has received a special interest, be it for the Pallava and Cōla period—especially through a PhD dissertation and several papers derived from it by Padma Kaimal¹⁷—or the Nāyaka one.¹⁸ My own interest for portrait arouse from a previous study on patronage in Tamil Nadu.¹⁹ As for North India, there have been less comprehensive studies; however, one can cite a few papers about Bengal²⁰ or, more importantly, on Kashmir bronzes.²¹ However, one of the most extant studies is the one that J. C. Laughlin has devoted to Jain portraits in mediaeval Gujarat and Rajasthan.²² Based on nearly 200 images and 60 inscriptions related to portraits, this book has however a scope different from the present one: to begin with, it is more limited geographically and chronologically; besides, on the whole, the purpose is not the same, since Laughlin is much more interested in the socio-religious use of these images

129–134; Susan L. Huntington, “Kings as Gods, Gods as Kings: Temporality and Eternity in the Art of India”. *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994), 31–38.

¹⁶ John Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993), 138–214.

¹⁷ Padma Kaimal, “Passionate Bodies: Construction of the Self in South Indian Portraits”, *Archives of Asian Art* 47 (1995), 6–16; “The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870–970 A.D.”, and “The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 970–1000 A.D.” *Artibus Asiae* 70.1 (2000), 139–179. See also Gerd J. R. Mevissen, “Mythology Meets Architecture: The Stone Chariot at Dārāsura”, in *South Asian Archaeology 1991*, ed. Adalbert J. Gail and Gerd J. R. Mevissen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), 539–560, and David Theron Sanford, “Ramayana Portraits. The Nageshvara Temple at Kumbakonam”, *Mārg* 45.3 (1994), 43–60.

¹⁸ Crispin Branfoot, “Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple”, *South Asian Studies* 16 (2000), 11–36; “Mangammal of Madurai and South Indian Portraiture”, *East and West* 51.3–4 (2001), 369–377, and *Gods on the Move. Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple* (London: The Society for South Asian Studies, 2007).

¹⁹ Vincent Lefèvre, *Commanditaires et artistes en Inde du Sud. Des Pallava aux Nāyaka* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2006); see also “The ‘Portraits’ of the Cōla King Rājārāja I (985–1014)”, in *Religion and Art: New Issues in Indian Iconography and Iconology (Volume 1 of the proceedings of the 18th conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, London, 2005)*, ed. Claudine Bautze-Picron (London: The British Association for South Asian Studies, 2008), 179–189.

²⁰ See for instance Gouriswar Bhattacharya, “Inscribed Image of a Śaivācārya from Bengal”, in *South Asian Archaeology 1993*, ed. Asko Parpola and Petteri Koskikallio (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1994), vol. 1, 93–99.

²¹ See especially Oskar von Hinüber, *Die Palola Shahis. Ihre Steineinschriften, Inschriften aus Bronze, Handschriftenkolophone und Schutzauber*, *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan* 5 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004).

²² Jack C. Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti/Adhiṣṭhāyakamūrti—Popular Piety, Politics and the Medieval Jain Temple Portrait* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).

and its bearing on Jain history than by the portraits as art objects.²³ Though the two studies were conducted separately and with different aims, I finally found out that some of Laughlin's conclusions are quite in tune with mine.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

Before we turn to a more general discussion on a theory of portrait and the reasons of its relative absence in Indian art scholarship, let us say a few words about the situation in Southeast Asian studies. There, even if one can find from time to time the same kind of reticence as that outlined above about India, debates have been less doctrinal. It is probably because Southeast Asian inscriptions are often more straightforward than Indian ones in stating that images, which look at first as representation of some deities, are in fact images of historical persons, or at least are at the same time portraits of the patrons (or their relatives) of the divine images. The phenomenon seems to have been especially important in Cambodia and in Java—and this is why it was the Dutch scholarship on Indonesia that gave birth to the expression 'portrait-statues' (*portreet-beeld*).²⁴ I will have the opportunity later to quote some of the more important studies. For the moment, let us just say that these images have almost always been linked to the supposed funerary orientation of many Southeast Asian temples or artefacts.²⁵ To put it differently, the existence of images with multiple meanings (that is, at the same time divine image and representation of a donor)

²³ "In this study, I hope to present much more than a catalogue of specimens of this long neglected genre of medieval Western Indian art. I shall attempt to use the evidence of the portraits to shed light upon 'popular' religious practice and political activity among lay and ascetic communities. The monastic portraits in particular give us a glimpse at the historical monks which turn out to be quite different from what we might have expected based upon the description of monastic life in ancient literature (and modern scholarship)." (Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 14).

²⁴ As far as I know, this expression appeared for the first time in W. P. Groeneveldt, "Hindoe-Javaansche portretbeelden", *Tijdschrift voor de Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, uitgegeven door het Bat. Gen.*, Batavia 50 (1907), 140–146.

²⁵ See for instance Willem Frederik Stutterheim, "The Meaning of the Hindu-Javanese Candi", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51 (1931), 1–15; Georges Coedès, *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1947) or August J. Bernet Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959, 21–23. For a critic of this attitude, see Roben Soekmono, *The Javanese Candi, Function and Meaning* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) and, here, chapter 3, § 2.4.

was acknowledged, but they were not recognised as ‘true’ or ‘good portraits’. There was nevertheless one exception to the rule, already mentioned: the several portraits of the Khmer king Jayavarman VII. In his paper devoted to them, Georges Coedès, in a manner obviously influenced by Stella Kramrisch, wrote:

This expression [“portrait-statue”] (...) is not a very good one since it is somewhat misleading. For us, actually, the word “portrait” calls up irresistibly the idea of an image bearing a likeness to a specific character and reproducing as exactly as possible his physical appearance, his face, all his features. One would wish to know of another word to designate an image representing in an atypical, unconventional or idealised way a historical person of whom there is no other contemporary representation which could faithfully transmit his actual look. Such a concern made its appearance in individualistic societies, but there are main civilizations, like the Indian one, which were acquainted with it very late and for which the name given by an inscription to a conventional image was sufficient, in ancient times, to endow it with a specification, a well-defined personality.²⁶

And, a little further, he added:

One could say that the Angkorian period was unfamiliar with portraiture if, in the last quarter of the twelfth century, a great change had not occurred, probably as a consequence of the new trends in all fields, especially in architecture and sculpture. It was the time of King Jayavarman VII.²⁷

SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT PORTRAITURE

From most of the quotations listed above, it is obvious that many scholars, when they did not simply deny the existence of portraiture in India and Southeast Asia (at least before the Muslim period), were quite reluctant to recognise ‘good’ or ‘true’ portraits. There are probably two kinds of explanation: on the one hand, some general *a priori* towards Indian art compared to Western one; on the other hand, some preconceived ideas on portraiture in general.

The Western approach to Indian art during the nineteenth and at least the first half of the twentieth century (but, to some extent, it has not completely disappeared) is too wide a subject to be discussed

²⁶ Georges Coedès, “Le portrait dans l’art khmer”, *Arts Asiatiques* 7.3 (1960), 179.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 181–182.

here at length—the more so because it has been done elsewhere.²⁸ To sum up, it is possible to say that almost all scholars—whether sympathetic to the Indian civilization or not—have been influenced, not to say prisoner, of the Hegelian conception of art. It may not be out of place to recall a few facts about this. To begin with, Western (Greek?) art was considered superior to others because of its ability to represent the Ideal Platonic world beyond the visual, objective one and to transcend reality. However, imbued with romantic ideas, Hegel was also interested in Indian art, but he considered it to have remained at an archaic stage and therefore he deemed it as ‘symbolic’. Some quotations from *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* will give an idea of this. For Hegel, Indian art belonged to the sphere of proper symbolism, defined like this (with special reference to India):

The second stage forms the transition to symbol proper, in that this first unity begins to be dissolved and now, on the one hand, the universal meanings lift themselves explicitly above the single natural phenomena, yet, on the other hand, thus envisaged in their universality they are all the same to come into consciousness again in the form of concrete natural objects. Next in this double struggle to spiritualize the natural and to make the spiritual perceptible, there is revealed at this stage of the difference between spirit and nature the whole fantastic character and confusion, all the fermentation and wild medley, staggering hither and thither, of symbolic art. This art has indeed an inkling of the inadequacy of its pictures and shapes to the point of the boundlessness of a purely quantitative sublimity. At this stage, therefore, we live in a world full of blatant contrivances, incredibilities, and miracles, yet without meeting works of art of genuine beauty?²⁹

When applied to India, such a conception led to this kind of statement:

The first resolution of this disunion is sought by Indian art, as was already indicated above, in the extravagance of its productions. In order, as sensuous figures themselves, to reach universality, the individual figures are wildly tugged apart from one another into the colossal and grotesque. For the individual figure which is to express not itself and the meaning appropriate to it as a particular phenomenon but a universal meaning lying outside its own, does not satisfy contemplation until it is torn out of itself into monstrosity without aim and measure. For here above all

²⁸ Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*.

²⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T. Malcolm Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; reprint, 2010), vol. I, 319.

there is the most extravagant exaggeration of size, alike in the spatial figure and in temporal immeasurability, as well as the multiplication of one and the same characteristic, the many heads, the mass of arms, etc., whereby attainment of the breadth and universality of measures is pursued. (...) Now besides natural objects, human individuals and events are also equally elevated to having the meaning of an actual divine act in such a way that neither the Divine by itself nor the human can be retained apart, but both appear continually entangled hither and thither with one another.³⁰

And, finally, Hegel criticized Indian art regarding its approach of human figure:

But if the purely natural is adopted as the sole subject-matter, the natural for its part does not deserve to be clothed with the human form, and this latter, appropriate only to the expression of spirit, is for its part incapable of portraying the merely natural.

In all this respects this personification cannot be true, because truth in art, like truth in general, requires the harmony of inner and outer, of concept and reality. Greek mythology does personify even the Black Sea and the Scamander; it has its river-gods, nymphs, dryads, and, in general, it makes nature in many ways the content of its anthropomorphic gods. Yet it does not leave personification purely formal and superficial, but shapes out of it human element, which has adopted such natural content into itself, becomes the predominant thing. But Indian art does not get beyond the grotesque intermixture of the natural and the human, so that neither side gets its right, and both are reciprocally vitiated.³¹

Of course, Hegel does not refer here to portraiture, because his conception of 'symbolic' Indian art was completely stranger to the concept of portrait then conceived as the uttermost realistic representation of human figure, and indeed one of the main achievements of all forms of art (especially painting) in their most advanced stage.³² An echo

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 338.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 441.

³² "Yet, even so, if the portrait is to be a genuine work of art, it must, as has been mentioned already, have stamped on it the unity of the spiritual personality and the spiritual character must be emphasized and made predominant. The principal contribution to this end is made by all parts of the face, and the painter's keen sense of physiognomy enables him to bring the special character of the individual before our eyes by treating and emphasizing precisely those traits and parts in which this spiritual special character is expressed most clearly, pregnantly, and vividly. In this respect a portrait may be very faithful to nature and most industriously executed, and yet be spiritless, whereas a sketch thrown off by a master hand with a few strokes may have infinitely more life and be strikingly true. But in that case such a sketch must present in the really significant and expressive strokes the character's simple but entire

of this Hegelian approach—and its all-pervasive reference to Western art—can still be found with Aravamathan, when he tried to demonstrate that South Indian images were nonetheless ‘good portraits’.³³

It is then worth noting that at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when some authors like E. B. Havell or A. K. Coomaraswamy developed an approach to Indian art far from the romantic and Hegelian point of view previously prevailing, they nevertheless viewed Indian art as symbolic and idealised, even if these concepts had a different meaning for them than for Hegel. Both of them did not see the ‘imitation of Nature’ as the main artistic achievement but sought after “an interpretation of the inner beauty, and meaning of the external facts of Nature”.³⁴ Renaissance was not the standard to which each artistic production should be compared anymore—which was probably a good thing; but, at the same time, the stress on the spiritual as against the material world can also explain why portrait, viewed as a “faithful imitation of Nature”, was not highly rated. Therefore, when writing on the traditional portrait in ancient India, Coomaraswamy was only interested with Ideal.³⁵ In fact, the two approaches had in common to deny all historical thought to traditional India. Since portrait is, quite rightly, considered as the more ‘historical’ of all art forms, it is not difficult to see why it was scarcely looked at by all those concerned with Indian art at that time.

fundamental image which less spiritual execution and more fidelity to nature glosses over and makes invisible. In this matter the most advisable course will once again be to keep to the happy mean between such sketching and a faithful imitation of nature.” (*Ibid.*, vol. II, 866)

³³ In his zeal to compare Indian with European art, Aravamathan (*South Indian Portraits*, 15) went so far as to speak of a ‘Dravidian Phidias’!

³⁴ Ernest B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London: John Murray, 1908), 23.

³⁵ “We cannot pretend to have really understood such arts as these [medieval Christian and Asiatic], merely from the provincial standpoint of our own humanism. The medieval and Asiatic artists did not observe; they were required to be what they would represent, whether in motion or at rest. How can we propose to ourselves to judge these arts from a point of view connected historically with the use of death masks and nowadays with the posed model and the study of nature as still life (“nature morte”)? (...) Iconography is the constant essence, style the variable accident of art. All traditional art can be reduced to theology, or is, in other words, dispositive to a reception of Truth, by original intention; its symbolism, in the phrase of Emile Mâle “a *calculus*”, is the technical language of quest. To repeat these formulae merely as in-significant “art forms” is to substitute a mimicry for a mimesis.” (Coomaraswamy, “Traditional Conception”, 81–82).

Leaving aside all the preconceived assumptions on Indian art, one has now to realise that all these scholars had also a preconceived idea of portraiture in general. As already mentioned, comprehensive studies on portraiture are rare. Though mainly concerned with Europe, Richard Brilliant's book is one of the most illuminating.³⁶ But the Anglo-Saxon readers are probably less familiar—because it is published in French in a rather confidential periodical—with a very interesting paper by Philippe Bruneau.³⁷ To understand some of the misunderstandings on portraiture (applied, or not, to South and Southeast Asian art), but also to establish my own study on clear and fresh ground, it would be useful to sum up briefly some of Bruneau's ideas, which, incidentally, tally with Brilliant's, but are set out in a more concise and generic way. The following lines will then be a synthesis of both Bruneau's and Brilliant's ideas, intermingled with some of my own comments.

The first issue we have to address is that of likeness. As will be apparent in the following pages, resemblance is something that was discussed also in India and, for this reason, I will deal with it when necessary.³⁸ But, to start this study, it is indispensable to know whether or not likeness is a criterion for portraiture. It has been a very wide-spread idea since the eighteenth century, and maybe since the Renaissance, even if some very renowned artists, like Michelangelo, have been quite uncomfortable with this idea.³⁹ It is of course far from being absurd:

³⁶ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991). See also Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Joanna Woodall, ed., *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997). For an historical approach on theory: Edouard Pommier, *Théories du portrait. De la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

³⁷ Philippe Bruneau, "Le portrait", *Revue d'archéologie moderne et d'archéologie générale* 1 (1982), 71–93.

³⁸ See especially chapter 2.

³⁹ Michelangelo himself was quite reticent with the making of portraits which were only 'realistic'. Thus according to a letter of Niccolò Martelli, dated 28 July 1544 (*Il primo libro delle lettere di Niccolò Martelli*, Florence, 1546, quoted in John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture* [New York: Phaidon, 1970], 336), when he had to make the statues of Lorenzo and Giuliano da Medici, for their tombs, he chose not to be strictly faithful to Nature and to give them more grandeur and dignity, saying that the statues would be more praised like this and that thousand years after no one would be able to say they were different ('*non tolse dal Duca Lorenzo, ne dal Sig. Giuliano il modello apunto come la natura gli avea effigiati e composti, ma diede loro una grandezza, una proportion, un decoro... qual gli pare ache piu lodi loro arrecassero, dicendo che di qui a mille anni nessuno non ne potea dar cognitione che fossero altrimenti.*'). Besides, Giorgio Vasari (*Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, ed. Paola Barocchi [Pisa, 1994], vol. I, 118), when speaking of the drawing portrait of Tommaso de'Cavalieri, said that Michelangelo "hated

many portraits, especially in the West, *are* true likeness (and this is true also of most of the Mughal portraits). However, at the same time, the stress given to resemblance in the definition of portraiture means giving more importance to technique and configuration compared to the function of the image. For instance, in the San-Paolo-fuori-le-Mura basilica in Rome, one can see a gallery of portraits, in mosaics, of the popes beginning with Saint Peter (Fig. 1): the most recent ones are certainly faithful physiognomic representations of the popes but, for the most ancient ones, they are probably imaginary;⁴⁰ even if all these 'portraits' are nevertheless individualised, individualisation does not necessarily mean resemblance. But, be they faithful likeness or not, all these images responded to the same functional unity.

The importance of function opposed to technique can be illustrated by an interesting counter-example: in 1931, the sculptor Bottinelly, commissioned to realise a Christ for the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul church in Marseille, used as a model the face imprinted on the Holy Shroud from Turin. Leaving aside the tricky question to know whether this Shroud is genuine or not, one has to ask whether this particular Christ was—functionally speaking—different from all the Christ ever realised till then and if the 'resemblance' ever added something to the religious efficiency of the image...

From this point of view, it can be useful to have a quick look at photographic portraiture. Because of the ability of the photographic process to convey reality, the portraits obtained through this medium should be considered the utmost faithful portraits imaginable. Yet, many photographs have been painted afterwards, changing therefore the 'real image' into a fantasy. Such a process was quite customary in the West until very recently and is still common in India.⁴¹ Such a custom existed also much before the invention of photography and it is why archaeologists and art historians have created the expression 'idealised portrait'!

Therefore, likeness seems to be a possibility but not a necessity in the intention to represent an actual person. On the contrary, resemblance

making a representation from real life unless it was of infinite beauty" (*abborriva il fare somigliare al vivo, se non era d'infinità bellezza*).

⁴⁰ The more so because some of the first popes are themselves legendary.

⁴¹ See Christopher Pinney, "Photographic Portraiture in Central India in the 1980s and 1990s", in Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, 131–144.

does not necessarily imply portraiture. For example, one can sometimes recognise the same models in the canvas by Caravaggio, like the young woman in the *Penitent Magdalene* and the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, both in the Galleria Doria Pamphili in Rome: who would think of calling these paintings 'portraits' instead of Virgin Mary or Magdalene? Of course, the solution to this riddle is not always obvious: *Pauline Borghese as Venus Victrix* by Canova is more a portrait 'in disguise' of Napoleon's sister than a statue of a Greek goddess! And, to end with, let us take a photography of Sir Laurence Olivier playing Hamlet: if used in a biography of this actor, the picture would be naturally deemed as portrait; but it can also be published in an edition of Shakespeare's play and thus serves as an illustration of the Hamlet character, without any consideration for the individuality of the actor on stage. To sum up, likeness, though important at certain periods and/or in certain areas, cannot be considered as the main criterion for portraiture, the status of which resides in its function.

About the function, two remarks may be added. First, depending on the time and the milieu, portraiture is something one has to be entitled to. In other words, there is a right to be portrayed—and sometimes a prohibition. Second, portrait is generally associated with a name, which explains why viewers are often embarrassed with 'anonymous portraits'. In many cases, portraits are displayed along with labels and, often, seem to have the same memorial function as inscriptions or coats of arms. If there is a specificity of portraiture, then, it pertains to the social condition of the portrayed person.

As Richard Brilliant summed it up:

Fundamental to portraits as a distinct genre in the vast repertoire of artistic representation is the necessity of expressing this intended relationship between the portrait image and the human original. Hans-Georg Gadamer called this intended relation 'occasionality', precisely because the portrait, as an art work, contains in its own pictorial or sculptural content a deliberate allusion to the original that is not a product of the viewer's interpretation but of the portraitist's intention. For Gadamer, a portrait's claim to significance lies in that intended reference, whether the viewer happens to be aware of it or not. Therefore, the viewer's awareness of the art work as a portrait is distinctly secondary to the artist's intention to portray someone in an art work, because it is the artist who establishes the category 'portrait'. The very fact of the portrait's allusion to an individual human being, actually existing outside the work, defines the function of the art work in the world and constitutes the cause of its coming into being. This vital relationship between the portrait and its

object of representation directly reflects the social dimension of human life as a field of action among persons, with its own repertoire of signals and messages.⁴²

Prevailing is the intention to represent a person whose historicity is real or at least accepted. The portrait is then a means of access to this person: it is an important point that the 'sitter' is much more than the mere subject of the image. For instance, the same picture can represent a grand-father for his grand-children, but only an old man to other people. This distinction between 'person' (*i.e.* identity or self) and 'subject' (*i.e.* the body of the sitter) is something that has to be insisted on, since it is crucial for a general definition of portrait: in a way, there is portrait when the status of person is given to the portrayed character. Compared to other kinds of image, a portrait is then different because of its humanity and its 'raison d'être' is intrinsically linked to the aspirations of the portrayed person.

The definition/function of portraiture is also a consequence of this humanity. To illustrate this, Philippe Bruneau uses a pun, which, luckily, can be translated into English: it is at the same time 'pose' and 'pause'. First, the portrait is a 'pose', because it is a representation of a person (and not a subject) who can choose the way he or she is depicted: the depiction can be a faithful likeness or a modification of the real appearance; this is generally an embellishment, the portrayed person preferring to be depicted in a favourable way; but, sometimes, it is the contrary, for example in the case of caricature. The use of accessories (costume, paraphernalia, etc.) and the setting chosen partake also of this 'pose'. About photography, one usually uses the term 'snapshot': it could be used for portraiture in general!

Second, portrait is a 'pause' because it is a sort of negation of the transitory condition of the subject. Although the subject can, and must, change (and even disappear), the portrait will always remain the same, which explains its commemorative importance. Besides, whereas life is irreversible, portraits can be reiterated: for instance, a same person can be portrayed at twenty and then at fifty and the two images will coexist; also, a portrait can be duplicated, whereas a person is unique. Finally, portraiture can concentrate subjects otherwise scattered—in space but also in time. It is obvious for group portraits, like the popes' gallery mentioned above. In India, a good example is

⁴² Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 7–8.

a famous Mughal miniature, the *Princes of the House of Timur*, kept at the British museum.⁴³ But, from a slightly different perspective, it is possible to find several images for a unique subject, like Bismarck depicted sometimes as Prussian Chancellor and sometimes as the Germanic hero Siegfried. The reverse is also possible, since Pauline Borghese is not the only lady to have been portrayed as Venus.

It is probably not necessary to elaborate any further on the definition of portraiture since it is the underlying purpose of this whole study applied to South (and Southeast) Asia. My point in the preceding lines was to underline the fact that portraiture is indeed a specific category of image which has nevertheless a wide definition. Therefore, I prefer, to begin with, to recall R. Brilliant's simple formulation: "Simply put, portraits are art works, intentionally made of living or once living people by artists, in a variety of media, and for an audience."⁴⁴ Even if some would prefer to use different terms, such as effigies or simulacra, in this book, 'portrait' will then designate the image of a person who had, more or less, a historical existence but which can, as such, be an artistic invention.⁴⁵ In fact, though this idea may not be universally acknowledged, it is actually an ancient one: during the Roman period, Pliny the Elder declared about the so-called 'Homer portraits': (*Naturalis Historia*, xxxv, 9): *Pariunt desideria non traditos vultus sicut in Homero invenit* (Our wish [to enact with great men] gives birth to figures, [the reality of which] has not been transmitted, as is the case with Homer).

Though a bit puzzling at first, it is then necessary to admit, at the start of this study, that portraiture is indeed a relative notion. To sum up, an image, either flat or in the round, is to be considered as a portrait according to three criteria:

⁴³ See, among many publications, Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, eds., *The Indian Portrait* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2010), 50–51.

⁴⁴ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 8. Dietrich Seckel, dealing with Far Eastern portraiture, is more or less in tune with such an idea (*Das Porträt in Ostasien—Band 1: Einführung und Teil I: Porträt-Typen*, 14 and 19–20).

⁴⁵ In the same way, I would recall that in ancient Egypt 'portraits' of Pharaohs very often looked the same but could be identified thanks to an inscription; a very peculiar case is Hatshepsut, the only woman to be called 'Pharaoh' but who was depicted as a man in her temple at Deir el-Bahari.

- The intention: it is the wish of the craftsman/artist and his patron to represent, in one way or another, a specific, historically attested, person.
- The perception: in order not to be an anonymous image, a portrait must be acknowledged as such by the viewer; this can be obtained through a visual examination or a written statement; incidentally, it means that what was at first conceived as portrait may become a simple image, if not identified.⁴⁶ These two criteria are indispensable to give the status of 'person' to the 'subject' of the image.
- The function: technically speaking, a portrait is an image like any other but its specificity relies in the way it is used.

All the images I will mention later in this study—and to which I will naturally (though some people may disagree) give the title of 'portraits'—will combine these three criteria. Of course, this leaves aside the obvious variation in style of these images: my general approach does not seek to pretend that the situation has always and everywhere been the same—quite the contrary.

But, as is already evident, visual examination of South Asian images is not always sufficient to prove the combination of these criteria. It is then necessary to seek further information in other kinds of sources, mainly written ones (sometimes, oral tradition can also be used but we have of course to remain cautious). Written sources are not only useful to give information on specific and still existing images; they are also indispensable on two different aspects: on the one hand, they can shed light on certain types of images which, for different reasons (mostly material ones) have not been preserved to us; thus they can help us show how extant the phenomenon was; on the other hand, they demonstrate the way these images were conceived and perceived. As I have said before, this book does not pretend at being a 'history of portraiture in early India' but rather a conceptual reflection on the role of portraiture in Indian art. In this respect, and even if 'real' images

⁴⁶ The opposite can be true also: what was at first not conceived as a portrait can be considered as such later on. One striking example comes from French cathedrals, especially Notre Dame in Paris: in the gallery on the façade, there was a row of statues representing the kings from the Old Testament; as time went on, they were gradually mistaken for the kings of the three main French dynasties (Merovingians, Carolingians and Capetians) and, for this reason, they were mutilated during the French Revolution. It does not matter that it was due to a total misunderstanding: for those who beheaded these statues, they were undoubtedly portraits...

will be at the core of my reflection, written sources will be almost as important.

Now, written sources cover very different realities and, before moving forward, it may be useful to present briefly the kinds of texts I am going to use. Roughly speaking, they can be divided into three groups: epigraphy, literature and normative treatises.

Epigraphy is the main historical source for the knowledge of the Indian past. Engraved on stone or on copper plates, inscriptions are numerous in South and Southeast Asia. Written either in Sanskrit or in vernacular languages (and sometimes both), they are our principal means at gathering dates, historical events and socio-economical facts, even if recording history was not, *stricto sensu*, their prime objective. For art historians, they are of primary use to date artworks, but also to know more about the context of patronage. As far as early Indian portraits are concerned, epigraphy appears to be essential. First, it is almost always the only way to identify the portrayed person. Furthermore, as we will see so often in the following pages, it is the only means to know that an 'image' is in fact a 'portrait'. But the importance of epigraphy lies well beyond this documentary perspective, because from the very beginning (that is, from the time of their creation), inscriptions and portraits were meant to be interpreted together. Especially in the case of donations, portraits appear to be the visual counterpart of the written statements. I hope this will be clearer when we examine some specific examples.

Literary sources comprise very different types of text. Thus, I will examine the so-called Epics (*Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* but also the *Harivaṃśa*), the narrative parts of some *Purāṇas*, the high Sanskrit literature called *kāvya* (mostly plays and dramas, but also some 'novels', like the *Daśakumāracarita* by Daṇḍin) and other narrative texts (e.g. the *Divyāvadāna* or the *Kathāsaritsagara* by Somadeva). To tell the truth, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one group from another, since they can overlap, but it does not really matter in my perspective. I will concentrate on Sanskrit texts, because of their central position in the Indian civilization but also because of my better knowledge of this language; but, eventually, I will also resort to some vernacular texts, either Indian or Southeast Asian. However, there will not be a systematic study of portraiture in literature, and even less of portrait as a literary figure. But my approach of literature will be twofold: on the one hand, it will be used as a testimony of the importance of portraiture and, eventually, as a testimony of certain types of portraits which

may not have been preserved up to now; on the other hand, it will lead to a more speculative interpretation on the ways portraits were conceived and perceived by their contemporaries: this will be done by an examination of either the narratives or the vocabulary.

Finally, the third type of written sources is what I would collectively designate as 'normative texts'. To make it short, they are, in our case, written sources dealing with the making of images. They pertain to different categories, even if, again, they sometimes overlap from one group to another: *śilpaśāstras*, *āgamas*, *saṃhitās* and *tantras*, and even *purāṇas*. Of course, it is not my purpose to present here an in-depth study of this kind of texts. It will be enough to remind that they are not a 'user guide' intended to allow beginners to make their own artistic object. Their aim is more theoretical, in that they give a sort of official recognition to what might be produced according to a certain amount of rules which guarantee the validity and, hence, the efficiency of the building or the images, as the case may be. It means that these treatises do not pre-exist the artistic production but, on the contrary, describe it in a more or less abstract way in order to have it fit with a (divine) norm. As a matter of fact, contrary to European treatises (e.g.: Vitruvius, Palladio, Androuet du Cerceau, etc.), they never refer—at least explicitly—to actual monuments or images. Thus, the Indian normative texts should not be surveyed for the recipes they could provide but are interesting because they can help us understand how portraiture was conceived (in a way different, but complementary to literature). Besides, it is a well-known fact that some of them were exported to Southeast Asia, where they were used to introduce some artistic models which were then either copied faithfully or interpreted according to the local genius. The use of normative texts in the somewhat narrow perspective of portraiture is not an easy task. As I will try to show, portraits have been quite common from very remote times; the practice was very well established in the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods: it means therefore that, to the best of our knowledge, all the texts that have been preserved are much later than the first portraits produced in the Indian subcontinent. It is not a main problem, but it is nevertheless necessary to be aware of this chronological gap and also of the difficulty in dating those texts. A second difficulty pertains to the identification of portraits in those treatises: they deal at length with the making of images, according to very precise iconographic and iconometric rules, but they use generic terms behind which it is not always easy to recognise portraits. Lastly, normative texts, either in Sanskrit or in

vernacular languages, are countless and most of them are still unknown or unpublished: in the following pages, I will concentrate only on a few of them, which are important from a chronological point of view and which seem to have been read quite extensively.

In this book, written sources will then not be studied as such, but always in relation with 'real' images, every time the recourse to them will be able to shed a different or complementary light.

Before going on, let me add one last word about the chronological terminology used here. As everyone concerned with Indian chronology is aware, time framing has always been an unsatisfactory issue and this, for two main reasons. On the one hand, the immensity and the diversity of the subcontinent prevent us from finding a common rhythm for every regions and kingdoms. On the other hand—and this is even more important—there is an old tradition to use terms borrowed from Western history or, to be more precise, from Western historiography: not only are these terms not wholly adapted to the Indian contexts, but they also convey ideas or values specific to the European context, which is too often misleading. Thus, Indian history is divided into phases deemed as 'ancient', 'classical' and 'mediaeval'. It is of course a bit difficult to know when exactly does 'ancient India' start, but it covers what we could call Vedic India, as well as the Maurya period up to the Scythian and Kuṣāṇa 'invasions'. 'Classical' India designates mostly the Gupta period and the term implies a period of stability and cultural apogee. Finally, 'mediaeval' is probably the worst. In Europe, 'Middle Age' or 'Mediaeval period' has been invented to designate the millennium, often deemed as 'dark ages', between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance; in other words, it is used to designate what we are not able to qualify; besides, it is more or less linked to the idea of feudalism. It is then very problematic when applied to India, the more so because the chronological limits are all but precise: it begins always with the end of the Gupta period (sixth century), but its end varies a lot, from the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate (thirteenth century) to the beginning of the Mughal Empire (sixteenth century), while some authors extend it up to the beginning of the British colonial period!

I will then try to avoid these terms, because of the issues I have just raised but also because this kind of periodisation is not very relevant for my purpose. Since I will leave Mughal portraiture (because it partakes from another tradition) mainly aside, I could use the expression

'pre-Islamic India'. I do not do it either: first—though in our time marred by the 'politically correctness', this may unfortunately sound a little bit 'pro Hindutva'—I think it is much too simplistic to deem a millennium and a half of Hindu and Buddhist history (not to speak of other traditions and religions) as just 'pre-Islamic'; second, this expression would also convey the idea that there is a gap, whereas I contend that portraiture has been so successful during the Mughal and posterior periods because there was already an old tradition and that some of the characteristics may have continued to live sometimes up to the present.

Indian chronological terminology would then need a new assessment which is of course out of the scope of this study. In the meantime, it was necessary to select one term and I have chosen to speak about 'Early India'. While doing so, I am conscious that the neutrality of the term is balanced by its vagueness. But though it is far from perfect, it is convenient enough for a study which will deal mainly with the origins of a phenomenon more than its whole history.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTIFYING PORTRAITS

If a 'portrait' is to be distinguished from an 'image' according to the three criteria I have enounced so far, namely intention, perception and function, it is now time to see what it represents in South Asian art. In this chapter, I will then seek to draw a typology of portraiture in early India; this typology will rely on media as well as on shapes, without taking into consideration (for the moment) the chronological issue.¹ It will become apparent that the boundaries between 'portraits' and other types of 'images' are sometimes blurred. In this typological attempt, I will try to mention also, along with the preserved ones, some types of portraits which may have existed at a certain moment but which have disappeared; in this regard, written sources will be extremely important, and it will be necessary to address the relationship between texts and images.

1. PAINTED PORTRAITS

Before the invention of photography, portraiture conjures almost immediately the vision of a painting. In India, painted portraits were numerous during the Mughal period, but also in the subsequent ones, especially in the Rajput courts. At that time, they were among the most important artistic achievements. It is then quite logical to ask ourselves whether it was a novelty of that period or if it existed before.

Mughal and Rajput portraits were, with very few exceptions,² album pages, the size of a manuscript. Before that time, illuminated manuscripts existed also in India, even if many have disappeared because of their fragility. Production was especially important in the Western part

¹ Even though certain aspects seem long-lived, one has to remain aware that many changes occurred in time and space. While I will try to highlight some of these evolutions in the next chapters, a comprehensive 'history of Indian portraiture' is still to be written.

² See for example the impressive life-size portrait of Jahāngīr attributed to Abu'l-Hasan in Crill and Jariwala, *Indian Portrait*, no. 14.

of the subcontinent, that is, Gujarat, in the Jain milieu, since the copy of the manuscripts is often regarded as a meritorious act in this religion. Among the religious scenes depicted, it is possible to distinguish some representations of donors or historical persons. We can mention thus the wooden cover of a manuscript kept at the Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum, Ahmedabad, on which two laymen—probably the donors—are depicted alongside with two famous teachers, Jinadatta Suri and Guṇasamudra Suri.³ Another example is a fairly well-known copy of the *Kalakācāryakātha*, written in 1278 in Gujarat and now kept in Cleveland:⁴ right, two nuns dressed in white are preaching under a canopy while, on the left, two women from the high society, judging by their clothing and adornments, listen with their hands joined; the short captions, a bit difficult to decipher, identify these people and it is highly likely that the two women are those who patronized the copy of the text and the nuns are those to whom it was offered.

Taken together, these figures show some characteristics (clothing, ornaments), which indicate their social position, but for the rest, they differ little from other painted characters, who belong to the subject of the story. Only the mention of their name in the colophon, or at least the location of the image next to it, allows us to identify them as the sponsors and, therefore, the image as a portrait.

However, these examples are rather few. This failure can be explained easily enough, on the one hand because of the fragility of the media in a tropical climate and, on the other hand, because, beyond their immediate use, painted portraits—in contrast to images of deities—have probably not raised the need to be transmitted from generation to generation. In this regard, literature is of considerable use to learn more about the role of painted portraits in a secular context. Examples are so numerous that the phenomenon must have been really important. To avoid too many repetitions, I will only mention a few significant narratives.

The first one is the *Harivaṃśa*, which is the story of Kṛṣṇa and his offspring; a sort of intermediary between the Epics—since it is supposed to be an appendix (*khila*) to the *Mahābhārata*—and the later

³ Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), 36; Robert Skelton, “The Portrait in Early India”, in Crill and Jariwala, *Indian Portrait*, 21, fig. 4.

⁴ Pratapaditya Pal, et al., *The Peaceful Liberators. Jain Art from India* (Los Angeles, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), no. 80.

Purāṇas; it could have been composed during the first centuries of our era, maybe during the Kuṣāṇa period. A tale involving a portrait is narrated about Uṣā, daughter of the Asura Bāṇa: Pārvatī predicts to her that she will soon get a husband, whom she will first meet in a dream; of course, this prediction shortly turns into reality and Uṣā, troubled by this erotic dream, asks her friend Citralekhā for advice:

Citralkhā said: “O beautiful one, it is not easy for us to fulfil your wish. But, my friend, I will do my best. So that you can get what you desire, hear what I say: I am going to draw (*alikhīṣyāmi*) all those who distinguish themselves by their majesty, their appearance and their origin among the Devas, the Dānavas, the Yakṣas, the Gandharvas, the Nāgas and the Rākṣasas but also those famous in the realm of men. In seven days, I will show them to you, O timid one: once you have recognized him on the canvas (*paṭṭa*), you will get your husband.” That said, she went and drew during seven days; the beautiful one fixed their faces on the canvas, then Citralekhā displayed the canvas she had made herself. Her friend Uṣā looked at it closely. “Look at all those I have drawn: thanks to his shape (*yathārūpa*) and your desire, recognize your husband, my friend, the one you have seen in your sleep.” So the bewitching girl looked at them with care; when she reached the Yādavas, she saw the son of Yadu; at the look of Aniruddha, she stood amazed, eyes wide open, and said to Citralekhā: “Here is the thief, my friend, the one who compromised the virtuous girl I am, during my sleep, in my palace. I recognize the unknown robber because of his beauty.”⁵

The same story is to be found, in a more extant version, in chapters 61 to 63 of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, but the interesting verses, for us, are in chapter 62 (v. 12–21):

His virgin daughter named Uṣā, in a dream, had an amorous encounter with the son of Pradyumna while never before having seen or heard of

⁵ 107.61–73: *citralkhābravīd (...) / naiṣo'rthaḥ śakyate'smābhir vettum bhāmini suvrate // kiṃ tu śakyam idaṃ kāryaṃ buddhipūrvam mayā sakhi / prāptum tac chṛṇu me vākyam yathā kāmam avāpsyasi // devadānavayakṣāṇāṃ gandharvoragarakṣasām / ye viśiṣṭāḥ prabhāvena rūpeṇābhijānena ca // yathā pradhānāṃ tām sarvān ālikhīṣyāmy ahaṃ sakhi / manuṣyaloke ye cāpi pravarā lokaviśrutāḥ // saptarātreṇa te bhīru darśayiṣyāmi tām ahaṃ / tato vijñāya paṭṭasthaṃ bhartāraṃ pratilapsyase // ity uktvā saptarātreṇa kṛtvā lekhyagatāṃ tu tām / citrapaṭṭagatān mukhyān ānayām āsa śobhanā // tataḥ prāstīrya paṭṭam sā citralekhā svayaṃkṛtam / uṣāyā darśayām āsa sakhīnām ca viśeṣataḥ // (...) tad etān paśya sarvāṃs tvam yathā bhīlikhitān mayā // yas te bhartā yathārūpo yathābhīlaṣitaḥ sakhi / taṃ tvam pratyabhijānihi svapne yaṃ drṣṭavaty asi // tataḥ krameṇa sarvāṃs tām drṣtvā sā mattakāśiṇī / atītya ca yadūn sarvān dadarśa yadunandanam // tatraniruddhaṃ drṣtvā sā vismayot phullalocanā / abravīc citralekhāṃ tām ayam coraḥ sa vai sakhi // yenāhaṃ dūṣitā pūrvam svapne harmyagatā satī / so'yaṃ vijñātārūpo me kutastyas taskaraḥ śubhe //*

the lover she had found. (...) A minister of Bāṇa, Kumbhāṇḍa, had a daughter, Citralekhā by name, who most curiously questioned Uṣā, her girlfriend. “Who is it you’re looking for, O beautiful eyebrows, what is the nature of your hankering as we as yet haven’t seen anyone taking your hand, O princess.”

“In my dream I saw a certain man with a dark complexion, lotus-like eyes, yellow garments and mighty arms—one of the kind touching a woman’s heart. Him I am seeking, that lover who made me drink the honey of His lips and who, gone to somewhere, has thrown me, hankering for Him, in an ocean of distress.”

Citrলেখা said: “I’ll take away your distress; if He’s to be found anywhere in the three worlds, I’ll bring Him to you, that husband-to-be, that thief who stole your heart—please point Him out to me.”

Speaking thus she accurately drew Devas, Gandharvas, Siddhas, Cāraṇas, Pannāgas, Daityas, Vidyādhara, Yakṣas and mortals. Of the humans she drew Vṛṣṇis like Śūrasena, Ānakadundubhi [Vasudeva] and Kṛṣṇa and Rāma but seeing Pradyumna Uṣā became bashful and with Aniruddha being drawn she bent down her head in embarrassment, O great lord, and said smiling: “That’s Him, that one here!”.⁶

In passing, let us note that the text stresses the very close link between the model and his representation: the very word ‘image’ is never used but the name Aniruddha is accompanied by different forms of the verb *LIKḥ-*, which before meaning ‘to draw’ or ‘to paint’ had the sense of ‘to draw a line’.⁷ But it is also said that Citralekhā—whose name was certainly not chosen by chance!—was faithful (*yathā*) in doing so.

⁶ After the translation by Svāmi Prabhupāda (<http://www.srimadbhagavatam.org>): *tasyoṣā nāma duhita svapne prādyumninā ratim / kanyālabhata kāntena prāg adṛṣṭa-śrutena sā / (...) bāṇasya mantrī kumbhāṇḍas citralekhā ca tat sūtā / sakhy aprcchat sakḥim ūṣām kautūhala-samanvitā / kaṁ tvam mṛgayase subhru kīdrśas te manorathaḥ / hasta-grāhaṁ na te’dyāpi rājaputry upalakṣaye / dṛṣṭaḥ kaścīn naraḥ svapne śyāmaḥ kamalallocanaḥ / pītavāsā brhadbāhur yoṣitām hṛdayaṁgamaḥ / ta mahaṁ mṛgaye kāntaṁ pāyayitvādharā madhu/ kvāpi yātaḥ sprhayatīm kṣiptvā māṁ vṛjinārṇave / citralekhovāca vyasanaṁ te’pakarṣāmi trilokyām yadi bhāvyaṭe / tam āneṣye varaṁ yas te manohartā tam ādiṣa / ity uktvā deva-gandharva-siddha-cāraṇa-pannagān / daitya-vidyādharaṇ yakṣān manujāṁś ca yathālikhat / manuṣeṣu ca sā vṛṣṇin śūram ānakadundubhim / vyalikhad rāma-kṛṣṇau ca pradyumnaṁ vikṣya lajjitā / aniruddhaṁ vilikhitam vikṣyoṣāvānmukhi hriyā / so’sāv asāv iti prāha smayamānā mahipate /*

⁷ Exactly like the French word ‘portrait’ or the Italian one, ‘ritratto’, in their first sense, which was only ‘representation’. The specialization came at a second stage. It probably came from Italy, in the sixteenth century, when a distinction was made between *imitare* and *ritrarre*. The former refers to a creative, intellectual imitation, whereas the latter is a more mechanical process: from it came the substantive *ritratto* which, in the *Vocabolario toscano dell’Arte del Disegno*, was defined by Filippo Balducci (Florence, 1681, p. 137) as a ‘figure taken from Nature’ (*cavata dal naturale*). The word ‘portrait’ comes from the out-of-fashion French verb *portraire* (itself derived

In dramas, painted portraits are so often used as dramatic devices, anticipating the real encounter of the lovers and sparking off different feelings in the main characters of the play, that it becomes commonplace.⁸ Besides, if the portrait seems to be a realistic image, faithful to the sitter, it is at the same time imbued with a sort of magical virtue since one can fall in love with the model just by looking at it—but this is a *topos* in many tales, either Indian or European. Thus, in *Mālavikāgnimitra* by Kalidāsa, the king Agnimitra falls in love with the young and beautiful Mālavikā after seeing her image (*citra*) in the painting hall (*citraśālā*) of the palace. The story is told in the prologue of the first act by two servants:

Kaumudikā: Friend, where are you going?

Bakulāvalikā: I am going, by order of the Queen herself, to ask the noble Gaṇadāsa, the teacher of dancing, what sort of pupil Mālavikā has shown herself to be [or: how she is progressing] in the matter of receiving instruction.

K.: Friend, though kept out of the way of the King by such an employment, she was, I hear, seen by the King.

B.: Oh yes, the girl was seen by the Queen's side in a picture (*devī pāśagado so jaṇo cite deṭṭho* [sk: ām / devyāḥ pārśvagatāḥ sa janaścitre dṛṣṭāḥ]).

K.: How possibly?

B.: Listen. The Queen had gone to the hall of painting and was looking at a painting of the drawing-master's, the hues of the colouring of which were still fresh; at that time came the King (*suṇāhi / cittasālām gadā devī paccaggavaṇṇarāaṃ cittalehaṃ āriassa oloanti ciddadi / tassim antare bhaṭṭhā avatṭhido* [sk.: śṛṇu / citraśālām gatā devī

from the Latin verb *pro-trahere*, to pull out, to draw, to reveal) which meant 'to draw'; so the substantive had at first the very general meaning of 'drawing' and, as such, could designate any kind of image. The first unequivocal occurrence of the specialisation of the word was made in 1676 by André Félibien: "Portraire. Le mot de portraire est un mot général qui s'étend à tout ce qu'on fait lorsqu'on veut tirer la ressemblance de quelque chose; néanmoins on ne l'emploie pas indifféremment à toutes sortes de sujets. On dit le portrait d'un homme, ou d'une femme, mais on ne dit pas le portrait d'un cheval, d'une maison ou d'un arbre. On dit la figure d'un cheval, la représentation d'une maison, la figure d'un arbre." (*Des principes de l'Architecture, de la Sculpture, de la Peinture et des autres arts qui en dépendent. Avec un dictionnaire des termes propres à chacun de ces arts*, Paris, pp. 721–722). The evolution was the same in English as in French (and also in German, where the word *Porträt*, based on the French term, is used along with *Bildnis*) but it is interesting to note that the verb 'to portray' has kept the old general meaning ('to represent').

⁸ On this point, see Virginia Saunders, "Portrait Painting as a Dramatic Device in Sanskrit Plays", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 39 (1919), 299–302.

pratyagravarṇarāgāṃ citralekhāṃ ācāryāvalekayanti tiṣṭhati / tasmin-nantare bhartopasthitāḥ)).

K.: What happened then?

B.: Then, after the usual formalities, the King, who sat down on the same seat with the Queen, beholding her [Mālavikā] in the midst of the Queen's attendants and very near to her, asked the Queen—

K.: What, I pray?

B.: "This is an unknown girl drawn very close to you: what is her name?" (*apuvvā iam dāriā āsaṇṇā a devī ālihidā kiṇṇāmaheatti* [sk.: *apūrveyaṃ dārikā āsannā ca devyā ālikhitā kiṇ nāmadheyeti*])

K.: Extraordinary forms command respect. What followed then?

B.: Then the King, whose words were disregarded, becoming suspicious, began to importune the Queen again and again. Then, when the Queen did not tell, Princess Vasulakṣmī said, "Sire, she is Mālavikā."

K. (with a smile): That is, indeed, quite in keeping with child-nature. Tell me, what happened next?

B.: What else than this? Mālavikā is now kept with especial care out of the range of the King's sight.⁹

In *Mālavikāgnimitra*, the portrait is used only to set the play into action and is thereafter forgotten. It is only said, when the two lovers finally meet in act II, that Mālavikā is even more beautiful than what could be guessed from the painting:

When she was only a picture to me, my mind apprehended that her real beauty might not come up to that of the picture; but now, I think that the painter, by whom she was drawn, was slack in his concentration.¹⁰

However, the play informs us on the existence of something else than portable portraits, painted of a piece of wood or cloth: galleries of portraits hanged on the walls. Rajput palaces have kept such kind of galleries but, obviously, the practice existed long before.

Therefore, it is legitimate to ask if portraits could not be found in mural paintings. As a matter of fact, very few have survived in India. In the most famous ones, in the Ajanta caves, one can suppose that some of them could be 'hidden' among the scenes from the *Jātakas*—but this will most probably always remain pure speculation. Conversely, at Tanjavur, in the Rājaraṣeśvara temple (beginning of the eleventh century), we are on a little firmer ground. In the corridor surrounding the cella, paintings dating from the Cōla period were discovered

⁹ Translation by M. R. Kale.

¹⁰ *citraṅgatāyāmasyām kāntivisāmvādaśaṅki me hṛdayam / saṃprati athilasamādhiṃ manye yeneyam ālikhetā //*

in the 1930s under the Nāyaka murals. Unfortunately, this part of the temple is inaccessible to the non-Hindus and only a few of these paintings have been published.¹¹ So far, we are then forced to rely on these unsatisfactory publications. The corridor is divided into 15 chambers and the paintings appear in chamber 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11. For S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, King Rājarāja could be identified as a young ascetic seated near an older one and hearing Dakṣiṇāmūrti's teaching in the forest in Chamber 5.¹² Now, this man could also be but one of the ascetics from the Purāṇic legend. The identification relies only on the similarity between these two ascetics and the two men in Chamber 10 who are unanimously said to be the king and his *guru*, Karuvūr Devar. As a matter of fact, tradition seems to be the only argument here.¹³ The situation is clearer, however, in Chamber 9: here, a king is depicted along with his three queens worshipping the image of dancing Śiva at Chidambaram, easily recognisable thanks to its characteristic architecture (Fig. 2). Though R. Champakalakshmi has proposed that this 'king' could be the Nāyaṇmār Cērāman Perumāḷ who is also said to have praised the god in Chidambaram,¹⁴ it is quite likely that he is in fact Rājarāja. The importance of the Chidambaram temple for the Cōḷas is a very well-known fact (it was a crowning and legitimization place), and it is often celebrated in the Tanjavur inscriptions. Although this identification remains a matter of debate, P. S. Sriraman, from the Archaeological Survey of India, who has recently undertaken a general study and a photographic survey of all the Tanjavur murals, is convinced that Rājarāja is portrayed in Chamber 9 but also in other

¹¹ On the Cōla paintings: S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples, Rajaraja I to Kulottunga I* (Faridabad, Haryana: Thomson Press, 1975), 29–36; R. Champakalakshmi, "New Light on the Chola Frescoes of Tanjore", *Journal of Indian History*, Golden Jubilee Volume (1973), 349–60 and *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization. South India 300 BC to AD 1300* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 433–435; S. K. Govindaswamy, "Cola Paintings", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 1 (1933), 73–80; 1933; Calambur Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Painting* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1968), 63–71; B. Venkataraman, *Rājarājaśvaram, the Pinnacle of Chola Art* (Madras: Mudgala Trust, 1985), 118–131.

¹² Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples*, 31.

¹³ A stone carving representing two ascetics—one young and one old—on the side of the Sarasvatī panel on the eastern part of the north staircase to the sanctum is also presented as a portrait of the king and his *guru*, since it looks like the paintings in the corridor. But once again the only proof is the local tradition.

¹⁴ Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization*, 434. A comparison between the worshipping king and the figure of Cērāman Perumāḷ on his horse in Chamber 7 is another argument toward this interpretation.

places in the corridor.¹⁵ In the hope that this study will be published soon, but not having seen the murals myself, I will remain cautious.¹⁶ But, we can nevertheless keep in mind that the Tanjavur murals *may* comprise portraits.

Again literature is useful to testify to the role of portraiture in narrative wall painting. For instance, this is the case in one of the three plays composed by Bhavabhūti (eighth century), the *Uttararāmacarita*. As implied by its title, the play is about the last adventures of Rāma, after his return to Ayodhyā. In the first act, he has just been crowned king and Sītā feels sad after the departure of her father, Janaka; to cheer her up, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa show her a gallery of the palace newly adorned with mural paintings narrating their story up to Sītā's ordeal. The three of them comment the different scenes which they identify easily, at least most of the time: in fact, Sītā seems to need, at times, some explanation—but this is surely a device invented by the writer to have the subject of the paintings presented to the audience. It is quite natural that the three characters should be able to recognize their own story but, more often than once, they underline the realism of the depiction: Sītā is so deeply moved by the resemblance that Rāma must remind her that this is only a painting (*ayi viyogatraste citram etat*). This long and beautiful scene fulfils different dramatic needs: first, this is a means to refresh the audience's memory with the events preceding the beginning of the play; then, it sets the story into motion, because the feelings aroused by the paintings in the young queen will give her the desire to visit again the places where she has happily dwelt with her husband; finally—and this is probably the most important aspect—this poetical evocation is a way, for the author, to show the depth of the love between Rāma and Sītā and, thus, prepare the ground for their grief when they will be obliged to part. Once again, portraits are used as dramatic devices. But what is of interest for us here is a bit more practical: indeed, the portraits are not individual images drawn or painted on a mobile mount but are part of narrative murals. Moreover, even if they are contemporary with the depicted models, they are infused with a sort of historical value, since they will serve as testimony for the next generations. Besides, even if the purpose of

¹⁵ Personal communication.

¹⁶ I am however more balanced than in Lefèvre, "The 'Portraits' of the Cōḷa King Rājārāja I (985–1014)".

Bhavabhūti is essentially literary and poetic, his characters are kings and queens, that is, have a political function: the paintings have then also a public, if not ideological, role, since they display the achievement of the reigning family.

2. PORTRAITS IN THE ROUND AND DEVOTIONAL PORTRAITURE

In spite of so many losses, we know that painting was very important in early India. However, sculpture represents nowadays the vast majority of what remains of the art of that period. It is then legitimate to direct now our inquiry into portraits in the round.

2.1. *Life-size and free standing portraits*

The identification of the first statues produced in India being problematic, I will leave them aside for the moment (this issue will be addressed in chapter 4) and will concentrate on clearly attested portraits, either in stone or in metal, carved from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards. Though I firmly believe that portraiture existed in India before the arrival of the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas, I must acknowledge a change at that time. First, the number of clearly evidenced portraits increases significantly. Second, some foreign influences appear, due to the influence of Indo-Greek kingdoms, and even more so, those D. Schlumberger called the ‘non-Mediterranean descendants of Greek art’.¹⁷ But—and I must emphasize this point—this influence has not established the art of portraiture in the Indian subcontinent;¹⁸ on the contrary, it could be so significant because the land on which it has developed was already well acquainted with this practice. A proof can be taken from a famous episode of the *Mahābhārata*—which can be dated earlier than the Kuṣāṇa period—, when the warring Brahman Droṇa starts teaching weaponry to the young Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas; he rejects Ekalavya because of his low-caste status and this latter makes a portrait of Droṇa, worships him and becomes a mighty archer:

¹⁷ Daniel Schlumberger, “Descendants non-méditerranéens de l’art grec”, *Syria* 37.1–2 (1960), 131–166, and 37.3–4 (1960), 253–318.

¹⁸ *Contra e.g.* Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, especially 153 and 173, who interprets this as a Western import.

Among those that came there, O monarch, was a prince named Ekala-vya, who was the son of Hiranyadhanus, king of the *Niṣādas*.¹⁹ Droṇa, however, cognisant of all rules of morality, accepted not the prince as his pupil in archery, seeing that he was a *Niṣāda* who might (in time) excel all his high-born pupils. But, O oppressor of all enemies, the *Niṣāda* prince, touching Droṇa's feet with bent head, wended his way into the forest, and there he made a clay-image of Droṇa, and began to worship it respectfully, as if it was his real preceptor, and practised weapons before it with the most rigid regularity. In consequence of his exceptional reverence for his preceptor and his devotion to his purpose, all the three processes of fixing arrows on the bowstring, aiming, and letting off became very easy for him.²⁰

The case of the Kuṣāṇa statues is well known and there is no need to insist. The most famous and most representative come from the 'twin' shrines of Surkh Kotal and Māt.²¹ Excavated at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Māt shrine housed portraits of Kuṣāṇa rulers and other princely figures, identified by inscriptions carved directly on the statues: Vima Kadphises (Fig. 3), Kaniṣka (Fig. 4), Caṣṭana (Fig. 6), along with a standing female figure; besides, an inscription seems to indicate that there was also a portrait of Huviṣka.²²

The link between the two monuments is quite obvious and the portraits relatively well identified at Māt have helped to identify those from Surkh Kotal. However, the latter appear to have served as prototypes for the former, although the precise date of each of the sanctuaries is not clearly established. Indeed, the costume of Kaniṣka from Surkh Kotal (Fig. 5) is treated with great realism, while the one from Māt is less understood by the sculptor and, indeed, seems unlikely. In other words, the statue from Māt seems to be an imitation by an Indian artist of an artefact more related to the Iranian tradition. There is no need to multiply examples here: in general, Śaka and Kuṣāṇa portraits are

¹⁹ The lowest of the mixed orders.

²⁰ *Mahābhārata* 1.123.10–14 (I follow the text of the critical edition) : *tato niṣādarājasya hiranyadhanuṣaḥ sutaḥ / ekalavyo mahārāja droṇam abhyājagāma ha // na sa tam pratijagrāha naiṣādir iti cintayan / śiṣyaṃ dhanuṣi dharmajñas teṣāṃ evānvavekṣayā // sa tu droṇasya śirasā pādau grhya paramtapāḥ / aranyam anusamprāptaḥ kṛtvā droṇaṃ mahimayam // tasminn ācāryavāttiṃ ca paramām āsthitas tadā / iṣvastre yogam āsthe paraṃ niyamam āsthitāḥ // parayā śraddhaya yukto yogena paramena ca / vimokṣādānasaṃdhāne laghutvaṃ param āpa saḥ //*

²¹ For a more in-depth study, see Chapter 3, § 2.2.

²² Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, 140–151

derived from Western prototypes (such as Nimrud Dagħ, for example) but are rapidly assimilated at Mathura and its surroundings.²³

At almost the same time, portraits were also produced in the Southern part of the subcontinent. The first known example is a little problematic and somewhat controversial: it is the excavated sanctuary of Nanaghat, not far from Nasik.²⁴ Seven characters have been carved on the wall of the cave, but today little more than the feet remains. However, an inscription above refers to the founding of the sanctuary by a Sātavāhana queen, probably in the first century BC, and identifies the characters: it would be Śimukā, founder of the Sātavāhana dynasty, Śīrī Sātakarnī, probably the second king of the lineage, Nāganikā, his widow and patron of the monument (represented during her lifetime), three Sātavāhana princes and one of their vassals who is the father of Nāganikā.²⁵ The commemorative aspect seems to be obvious, but we cannot detect any sign of cult in the cave.

Next to the questioned portrait of Gautamiputra Śātakarni which has been installed, according to an inscription (*EI*, xv: 261, 270, No. 39) by a woman (perhaps the mother of this king) in the second century AD near the *stūpa* of Amaravati,²⁶ it is important to mention the famous *cāyastambhas* (literally ‘shadow pillars’) from Nagarjunakonda and its surroundings. One of the most famous, found near the *stūpa* no. 9, was built by several princesses (sisters, mothers and wives) in memory of the deceased king Vāsiṭhīputta Śrī Cāṃtamūla; the inscription (*EI*, xxi: 63–64) is dated from the reign of his son. The pillar has five carved registers representing various court scenes with the (fat) king standing in the centre, or riding an elephant, or leading a kind of religious ceremony.²⁷ Again, on the same site, one might also mention the foundation in memory of Queen Vammabhaṭṭā, dated in the 11th year of reign of Rudrapuruṣadatta in the early fourth century AD, and kept in the local museum: the queen, of foreign origin, is represented

²³ Several examples can be found in Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts*.

²⁴ Aravamuthan, *Portrait Sculpture*, 3–5; Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, 152–153; Giovanni Verardi, “The Kuṣāṇa Emperors as Cakravartins. Dynastic Art and Cults in India and Central Asia: History of a Theory, Clarifications, Refutations”, *East and West* 33 (1983), 244–250.

²⁵ Georg Bühler in Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 59–74.

²⁶ Aravamuthan, *Portrait Sculpture*, 17–18 and fig. 1.

²⁷ H. Sarkar, “The Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Phase of the Lower Kṛṣṇā Valley Art: A Study Based on Epigraphical Data”, in *Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art*, ed. Frederick M. Asher and Govind Swamirao Gai (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company and the American Institute of Indian Studies, 1985), 29–34

with a costume different from those usually seen on the Sātavāhana or Ikṣvāku sculptures.²⁸

From that time, the tradition went on in South India. At Mahabalipuram, we can mention the two Pallava kings (Figs. 55 and 56) in the Ādivarāha cave. Examples were also numerous during the Cōla period: along with stone statues (Queen Śembiyaṇ Mahādevī [Fig. 7], King Rājarāja, etc.), bronze portraits were also produced. Such images were usually installed in the galleries surrounding the temple. An inscription (ARE, 481 of 1925) allows us to know that Śembiyaṇ Mahādevī was also portrayed in such a way in her eponymous village.²⁹ Some of them are still preserved at Kalahasti, such as Queen Cōlamahādevī, wife of Rājendra I³⁰ and King Kulōttuṅga III,³¹ along with persons of lesser social rank, such as Kettaṇ Adittaṇ and his sister.³² In the Vijayanagara period, such bronze images portrayed also Kings Kṛṣṇadevarāya and Tirumalarāya at Tirupati.

In Northern India, to the best of my knowledge, such free standing or life-size (or almost life-size) portraits cannot be found during the Gupta period—but, as we will see later on, other types of portraits existed at that time. However, examples can be mentioned in the ‘post-Gupta’ period. Let us just mention a devotee from the Pāla-Sena period (eleventh-twelfth century) in the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin, coming perhaps from Monghyr District.³³ It is interesting to compare this sculpture with several representations of Garuḍa in the round produced in the same period: see for example the one from Maldah (Fig. 8),³⁴ or the two-sided one from Chandpur (Fig. 9), both

²⁸ Elizabeth S. Rosen, “A Dated Memorial Pillar from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa”, in Asher and Gai, *Indian Epigraphy*, 35–41.

²⁹ However, the identification of this portrait with the famous Devī from the Freer Gallery, proposed by Vidya Dehejia (*Art of the Imperial Cholas* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 1–4; “The Very Idea of a Portrait”, 43; *The Sensuous and the Sacred. Chola Bronzes from South India* [New York: American Federation of Art, 2002], 124), seems to be very speculative.

³⁰ Aravamuthan, *South Indian Portraits*, 29.

³¹ Dehejia, *Art of the Imperial Cholas*, 92.

³² Aravamuthan, *South Indian Portraits*, 35.

³³ Claudine Bautze-Picon, *The Art of Eastern India in the Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin*, Inscriptions read by Gouriswar Bhattacharya (Berlin, Monographien zur Indische Archäologie. Kunst und Philologie, Band 12: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1998), no. 216.

³⁴ On the base of this sculpture, one can see the donor’s family (in a rather bad condition today).

kept in the Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi:³⁵ apart from some distinctive but discreet iconographic features (hooked nose, frowning eyebrows cusp, wings of Garuḍa), the two types of images are very close, which shows parallel implementation of some portraits with the first devotee of the god.

2.2. *Devotional portraiture*

This last example reminds us that, though all the stone or metal portraits mentioned so far looked autonomous, they were nevertheless set up in temples and were in a secondary position towards the deities housed in the shrines.³⁶ Even if on an impressive scale (especially the Māt statues), they were then representations of devotees. Functionally speaking, these portraits were not different from all the small portraits of donors and devotees which can be found at the feet of many divine images.

They are almost always small pictures, placed on the pedestal of the image in order to distinguish them from the different celestial characters surrounding the main deity. The devotion of the portrayed person is expressed by his/her joined hands or the presence of offerings close to him. The character can be either a man or a woman, he may appear alone or in pair, or with his entire family. Thus, on the fragment of a pedestal initially supporting a Jain image found in Mathura and dating, according to the inscription engraved on the statue, from AD 417, next to the lion supporting the throne, one can see two young men, quite clumsily carved, with joined hands, whom we may assume to be the donors of the image.³⁷ Also in Jain art, we can mention the Pārśvanātha

³⁵ See Vincent Lefèvre and Marie-Françoise Boussac, ed., *Art of the Ganges Delta. Masterpieces from Bangladeshi Museums* (Paris: RMN, 2008), 232–235.

³⁶ Such impressive portraits also exist in Southeast Asia. For instance, in the Ānanda pagoda at Pagan, the four giant Buddhas are surrounded by praying figures. In three cases, these characters, according to their costume, seem to be monks, but in the western sanctum, which is in the main axis, one praying figure is obviously a rich layman; the local tradition identifies him with the great king Kyangzittha (1084–1113), founder of the monument, and the monk facing him would be Shin Araham, the great propagator of Theravāda Buddhism in Pagan. No positive evidence can support this identification, but it seems very likely, especially as the technical and stylistic analysis of the two lacquer images suggests that they are contemporaneous with the founding of the monument (Paul Strachan, *Pagan. Art and Architecture of Old Burma* [Oxford: Kiscadale Publications, 1989], 65–71, especially 70).

³⁷ Joanna G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India. Empire and Province* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pl. 59. The inscription is lacunar and does not give

from Kahaum, dated AD 460–461.³⁸ This kind of figures appears also very often—almost systematically, as a matter of fact—at the foot of the Buddha in the Gupta period, both in Mathura and Sarnath. Let us point out, for example, a Buddha kept at the Indian Museum, Kolkata (Fig. 10), the one from Govindnagar, dated AD 434–435,³⁹ the one from Jamalpur,⁴⁰ or that from Bhita, dated AD 430–450, with the donor on one side, his wife and daughter on the other.⁴¹ This latter sculpture bears an inscription stating that it was given by a monk (*bhikṣu*) called Bodhivarman: the depicted man does not look as a monk, the more so because he is represented with his wife and their child, but we may surmise that Bodhivarman became monk after leaving a mundane life and that the gift was made when he chose monkhood; or the people could be his parents since it is said that the gift is made so that they can gain supreme knowledge (*yad atra tad bhavatu mātāpitroḥ sarvasattvānām cānuttarajñānāvāptaye* /).⁴²

The phenomenon is also common in Hindu sculpture. In Western India, we may mention the Viṣṇu from Cātsū, kept at the Hawa Mahal Museum, Jaipur: on both sides of the god, one can first see two small gnomes, one of whom is holding a disc and the other a conch and who, therefore, are the personified attributes of Viṣṇu; behind them are two young women, probably the wives of the god, and finally, in third place, two characters with joined hands, fine costumes and headgear, who could be attendants of Viṣṇu but, if compared with the other images mentioned above and because of the richness of their attire, could also be regarded as rich sponsors.⁴³

In Eastern India, under the Pālas and Senas, figuration of donors on the pedestal of the images is almost *de rigueur*: their absence is more

much information outside the date, see Heinrich Lüders, ed. and trans., *Mathurā Inscriptions*, ed. Klaus L. Janert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1961), 53; and Johanna E. van Lohuizen-De Leeuw, *The “Scythian” Period, An Approach to the History, Art, Epigraphy and Palaeography of North India from the 1st Century B.C. to the 3rd Century A.D.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1995), 321 and fig. 65.

³⁸ Williams, *Art of Gupta India*, pl. 88.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pl. 61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pl. 64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pl. 105.

⁴² John Faithfull Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, III* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1888), 270–271, no. 68.

⁴³ Cynthia Packert Atherton, *The Sculpture of Early Medieval Rajasthan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), pl. 61.

the exception than the rule. In the case of the Camuṇḍā from Ram-pal (eleventh century), kept at the Bangladesh National Museum, the whole family is represented, with men on one side and women on the other (Fig. 11).⁴⁴ It should also be noted that very often these devotees are paralleled with the vehicle of the divinity or his main (celestial) devotee (which is often the same): Garuḍa in the case of Viṣṇu, Nandi in the case of Śiva, Bhūdevī in the case of Buddha, etc. Also at the Bangladesh National Museum, one can see a stele representing Viṣṇu as the fish *avatāra* from Vajrayogini and dating from the eleventh century: the little Garuḍa is in the middle and on the right a small character—most probably the donor—is kneeling (Fig. 12).

The presence of patrons and donors at the foot of the gods is not limited to India. In Southeast Asia the phenomenon also exists, although perhaps slightly less frequent. One can see examples on the reverse side of a Khmer stele found at Wat Phu and today kept at the Museum of Pakse (Fig. 13), on many headstones from the Nagayon temple (built under, and possibly by, Kyangziththa at the end of the eleventh century) in Pagan,⁴⁵ kept in the archaeological site museum, or on a tympanum from My Son, in Champa, with a dancing Śiva: the character slightly bowed and hands joined at the right end of the image—as if outside it—is certainly the patron of the work.⁴⁶

The same principle also applies to metal images, which are generally mobile. Examples are to be found on many bronzes from Kashmir, as the famous early ninth century Viṣṇu Caturvyūha kept at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art:⁴⁷ below the pedestal, on a strip of metal, there is a kneeling and richly dressed woman, whose face has unfortunately been too polished by use; obviously she is the queen that the inscription on the pedestal states to be the donor of the image. Some of these small portraits are quite individualized—which seems to be a particularity of Kashmir. Thus, a Buddha dated AD 714, formerly belonging to the Pan-Asian Collection and now part of the collections of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts raises his blessing hand to the head of the donor, whom the inscription identifies as King

⁴⁴ On this sculpture, see Lefèvre and Boussac, *Art of the Ganges Delta*, 266–267.

⁴⁵ Strachan, *Pagan*, 62–65.

⁴⁶ Pierre Baptiste et Thierry Zéphir, eds., *Trésors d'art du Vietnam: La sculpture du Champa (V^e–XV^e siècles)* (Paris: RMN, 2005), 187–188.

⁴⁷ Pratapaditya Pal, *Bronzes of Kashmir* (New York: Hacker Art Book, 1975), no. 9.

Vikramāditya Nandi, probably sovereign of the Śāhi dynasty.⁴⁸ It is worth noting here, on the one hand, the direct relationship between the deity and the donor and, on the other, the very special costume of the king, probably of Scythian origin, which distinguishes him from many portraits of the same type.⁴⁹

In South India, particularly in the Tamil country under the Pallavas and, above all, the Cōlas, the devotees appear not so much on the steles that directly on the walls of temples.⁵⁰ The Konerirajapuram temple—example among many others—presents numerous specimens, usually placed near the niches containing the image of gods (Fig. 14). There is actually no real difference with what we have just seen, except that the temples of South India are most of the time made completely of stone, while in the North, particularly in the Northeast, they are frequently made of brick: therefore, the donors who wanted their image to persist, in the case of temples of brick, had to be displayed on stele, embedded in the wall, whereas in the case of stone temples there were more opportunities to insert these portraits.

Although rarer, however, there are comparable examples in the North. The aim for the portrayed person was probably to be associated with the whole foundation and not just to appear in prayer at the foot of a single image. Thus, one can cite a panel (Fig. 15) dating from the reign of Śaṅkaragaṇa (eighth century) from Sagar, in Rajasthān, representing a Kṛṣṇādevī who made a donation on behalf of her parents who are probably the couple surrounding the small female figure.⁵¹ Again in the same area, a number of portraits from Jain shrines may be mentioned.⁵² One of the most famous is the minister Tejaḥpāla

⁴⁸ This bronze (accession number 86.120) has been published many times and can be seen on the museum's website. See also Pal, *Bronzes of Kashmir*, no. 31 and Gérard Fussman, "Chilas, Hatun et les bronzes bouddhiques du Cachemire", *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan, Reports and Studies* 2 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993), no. 6.5.

⁴⁹ On Gilgit bronzes with such kind of portraits, see Fussman, "Chilas, Hatun", no. 6.3, 6.6, 7.4 et 7.6 and pl. 23–27, 31, 33, 35–39; Pratapaditya Pal et al., *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure* (Chicago: University of California Press, 2003), no. 62, 63 et 64 and App. p. 285; Hinüber, *Die Palola Shahis*.

⁵⁰ Kaimal, "Problem of Portraiture in South India"; Lefèvre, *Commanditaires et artistes*, chapter 8.

⁵¹ Donald M. Stadtner, "Nand Chand and a Central Indian Regional Style", *Artibus Asiae* 43 (1981–1982), 131–132 and "The Śaṅkaragaṇa Panel in the Sagar University Art Museum", in Asher and Gai, *Indian Epigraphy*, 165–168; Packert-Atherton, *Sculpture of Early Medieval Rajasthan*, pl. 132.

⁵² Pal, *Peaceful Liberators*, nos. 111, 112 and 113.

and his wife Anupamādevī in the temple of Lūṇa Vasahī that he had built on Mount Abu, in the thirteenth century.⁵³ But let us remember that Jack C. Laughlin has devoted a whole comprehensive book to these images.⁵⁴

3. COINS

A last category of 'evident' portraits must now be shortly examined: the numismatic portraits. The first coins in use in India—from the Maurya period—were of a particular type: the punch-marked coins. If these bear a number of symbols, there is almost never any human figure on them, and certainly no representations of real characters. However, a representation of Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, that is, the first of the Vṛṣṇi Viras, might be identified on a post-Maurya coin⁵⁵—I will go back to this issue when dealing with the representation of heroes and the origin of portraiture (see chapter 4) and, for the moment, it will be enough to keep it in mind. In India, the habit to represent a ruler—usually a bust in profile—whose name is given by the caption on coins comes, as it seems, from the Indo-Greek kingdoms of the Northwest of the subcontinent (Fig. 16). As a matter of fact, the practice to mint a royal portrait on a coin seems to be a creation from ancient Iran: Persia imitated Greek coinage but this latter had only images of gods. This 'Persianized' Greek model then went back to the Mediterranean shores.⁵⁶ At the same time, the model migrated to the East, that is, India. The principle was adopted by the dynasties of Scythian origin, and especially the Kuṣāṇas. Under the latter, one finds profiles (Fig. 17) as well as full-length portraits, especially of the king performing a sacrifice (Fig. 18). These can also be compared with the large statues in the round discovered in the sanctuaries of Māt near Mathura and Surkh Kotal in Bactria. In the same way, in the Āndhra kingdom, the appearance of the bust of the sovereign on the Sātavāhana coins is most certainly due to the dissemination in this

⁵³ Susan L. Huntington, with contributions by John C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India. Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (New York-Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985), fig. 20.58.

⁵⁴ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*.

⁵⁵ Parmeshwari Lal Gupta, "Early Coins of Mathura Region", in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, ed. Doris M. Srinivasan (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 127.

⁵⁶ Dieter Metzler, *Porträt und Gesellschaft. Die Entstehung des griechischen Porträts in der Klassik* (Münster, 1971), 129ff.

region of Roman sesterces and *denarii*. After the Kuṣāṇas, the practice seems to be very well established in India, even in the far South, where Rājārāja I Cōḷa (985–1014) appears to be one of the first to adopt this principle (Fig. 21). But the most famous of these coins are those of Gupta (Figs. 19 and 20).

Without going too far in the study of Indian numismatics, we can be content with a few remarks. If the Indo-Greek, and to a lesser extent, Indo-Scythian portraits on coin seem relatively realistic, those of purely Indian dynasties appear however quite stereotyped. In the case of the Guptas who have left us with many and varied examples, it seems to be dealing more with an image of the king (or even kingship) than with an individual portrait. It is in this category that we can classify frequent types such as the ‘archer king’ or the ‘tiger-slayer’ which are found in several reigns, only the title of the king changing in the caption.⁵⁷ Other types seem more related to specific rulers. Thus the *aśvamedha* type is represented only under Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I, probably because such sacrifices took place only under their reigns.⁵⁸ More rarely, the iconography seems to have something more personal. For example, the type of the king with the lyre which appears under Samudragupta, of whom the Allahabad inscription says that he was an accomplished musician.⁵⁹ However, this type will be adopted by some of his descendants, thus losing its biographical value to become simple plastic model.⁶⁰ On the contrary, it is remarkable that the ‘Kārttikeya type’ (Fig. 20) appears only during the reign of Kumāragupta, underlining the portrait-value of the representation of Skanda, and the close link between the king and his elected divinity.⁶¹

Another important problem should also be addressed in passing: the relationship between these numismatic portraits and the specific features of the sovereigns. Indeed, it seems, in practice, that any interpretation from this variable should be taken with great care:⁶² it is

⁵⁷ Ashvini Agrawal, *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 15–33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 and 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Contra* A. K. Narain who wrote, for instance, in the *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* (no. XVIII: 159): “These portraits sometimes tell the historian of the time range of a king’s reign, and moreover they may betray more convincingly than even a biography the character and personality of the king”.

enough to see the many different opinions of experts regarding the age of the sovereign represented.⁶³ It is thus unwise to rely only on such a criterion to rebuild, for example, dynasties, as in the case of the Greco-Bactrian or Indo-Greek coinage.⁶⁴ Besides, the comparison of the features of the same king on his different issues can show significant differences, which suggests that we are dealing more with stylistic variations due to different mints rather than a physical evolution of the sovereign.⁶⁵

4. DOUBLE-MEANING IMAGES

Numismatic portraiture has thus introduced two new notions: 'typological portrait' and 'double-entendre portrait' or 'image' (Kumāragupta as Kārttikeya, for instance). This last category needs a more thorough study, since it is rather peculiar to South (and also Southeast) Asia. Let us start with some examples.

The first one is well-known. Mid-way to the summit of the rock at Tiruchirappalli, in Tamil Nadu, stands the cave known as Lalitānkura, carved under the patronage of the Pallava king Mahendravarman, in the early seventh century. Just opposite to the cella stands the famous panel depicting Śiva as Gaṅgādhara (Fig. 22). According to the first verse of the foundation inscription (*SII*, I, 33 and 34), the king has installed an image of Śiva and his portrait in the sanctuary, but only one image is to be found nowadays: that of Śiva receiving waters of the Ganges in his hair. Two assumptions can be made: either the portrait mentioned in the inscription has disappeared, or it is one and the same with Śiva. However, apart from a pun on the word *sthānu*

⁶³ This issue is already raised by the Seleucid coinage: some rulers are depicted younger than their actual age whereas some young kings are portrayed older because they could not appear as immature persons.

⁶⁴ On this issue, see for example Olivier Guillaume, *L'analyse des raisonnements en archéologie. Le cas de la numismatique gréco-bactrienne et indo-grecque (Travaux de la mission archéologique franco-indienne, n° 2)* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 68–71.

⁶⁵ See the case of Candragupta II's coinage studies in Ellen M. Raven, "Candragupta II, the Lion-slayer", in *South Asian Archaeology 2001. Proceedings of the sixteenth international conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists, held in Collège de France, Paris, 2–6 July 2001*, ed. Catherine Jarrige and Vincent Lefèvre (Paris: Editions Recherches sur les Civilisations, 2005), vol. 2, 615–622.

(‘fixed, immutable’, but also a name Śiva) applied to the two statues in the inscription, doubt may be permitted:

When king Guṇabhara [Mahendra] established a stone image [the relief image of Śiva-Gaṅgādhara] in the wonderful stone abode on top of the King of Mountains [the Rock-Fort Hill], this ruler, (entitled) Vidhi [the Creator], made Sthānu [Śiva] true to His name [‘*sthānu*’: stationary / firmly fixed] and became himself *sthānu* [fixed, immortal] together with Him, on earth.⁶⁶

But, the fifth verse establishes, through the literary figure called *rūpaka*, a parallel between Śiva’s evocative love for the Gaṅgā and that of the Pallava king for the Kāverī river (which flows at the foot of the hill). It is then impossible not to see a portrait of the sovereign ‘disguised’ in the divine image:

Suspecting that the God [Śiva], who is fond of rivers, on seeing the Kāverī, whose waters please the eye, who wears a garland of gardens, and who possesses attractive qualities, might fall in love with her also, the ‘Daughter of the Mountain’ [Gaṅgā? or Pārvatī?] has left her father’s family to reside, I reckon, permanently here on this mountain, calling this river [Kāverī] the beloved wife of the Pallava (king).⁶⁷

The epigraphy is thus much more than a tool for the identification of characters: it is a set of documents necessary for understanding the nature of the portraits. Likewise, an inscription from Mount Abu (EI, VIII, 218) expressly states that ten images representing the minister Tejaḥpāla and nine of his relatives were intended to appear as Guardians of the Quarters (*lokapāla* / *dikpāla*). By comparison, the same interpretation can be made for two similar groups at Dhaboi and Mount Girnar.⁶⁸

On this point, Southeast Asian epigraphy is often more explicit and straightforward than the Indian one. Thus, the famous stele K. 806

⁶⁶ Translation by M. Lockwood (*Pallava Art* [Chennai: Tambaram Research Associates, 2001], 50): *śailendramūrdhāni śilābhavane vicitre śailin tanuṃ guṇabhara nṛpatir nidhāya/ sthānuṃ vyadhātā vidhir eṣa yathārthasamjñam sthānuḥ svayaṃ ca saha tena jagatsu jātaḥ/*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: *kāvirin nayanābhirāmasalilām āramamāla dharām devo vikṣya nadīpriyaḥ priya(gu)ṇamapy eṣa rājyed iti/ sāsamkā girikanyakā pitṛkulam hitveha manye gi(rau) niyan tiṣṭhati pallavasya dayitām etām bruvāṇā nadīm/* M. Lockwood, who revised E. Hultzsch’s original translation, interpreted ‘Daughter of the Mountain’ as Gaṅgā, which is consistent with the relief, but one can wonder whether this is not an allusion to the very common theme of Pārvatī’s jealousy.

⁶⁸ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 95–117.

describes the foundation in AD 961 of the Pre Rup temple, in Angkor (IC 1937, 73–142): among the many images that king Rājendravarman installed there, we learn that Viṣṇu is called Rājendraviśvarūpa, probably in memory of one of the king's ancestors called Viśvarūpa (st. CCLXXIX), that a Pārvatī is also a representation of Jayadevī, Śrī Harṣadeva's mother and younger sister of the king's mother (st. CCLXXX) and that his cousin, Śrī Harṣavarman gave his features to Śiva called Īśvara Rājendravarmanmadevēśvara (st. CCLXXXI).⁶⁹ The phenomenon not being unique to Cambodia, let us mention also an example from Champa: the second stele from Dong-duong, C.67. This inscription dates from the reign of Jaya Simhavarman in Indrapura (Śaka 820) and mentions the religious foundations of his aunt Haradevī (personal name or *nāmadheya*), Princess Po ku lyān Śrī Rājakula (official name, or *ājñā*), widow of a king bearing the posthumous name of Paramabuddhaloka, undoubtedly Indravarman (II). According to the text carved on the B side of the stele, Haradevī had her portrait in the guise of goddess Haromadevī, obviously a form of Pārvatī; she had also installed an image called Parameśvara for the merit of her late husband Paramabuddhaloka, another called Rudrapameśvara for the merit of her father and a third one called Rudromā for the merit of her mother.⁷⁰ Only in the case of Haradevī it is explicitly said that the Goddess is also a portrait of the princess—and note in passing that this image was done in her lifetime, not posthumously. But it can be assumed that the other divine images made in honour of her parents had more or less the same functions.⁷¹

⁶⁹ K.806, CCLXXVII–CCLXXXI: *sa śrīrājendrabhadreśvara iti viditaṃ liṅgaṃ atra idam agryaṃ gaurīśaurīśvarāññāñ catarbhir abhirāmābhir arccābhir ābhiḥ kirttiṃ vaktuṃ prasannaṃ mukhaṃ iva muditasordhva āsyaiś caturbhiś śambhor bhāsadbhir iddhe śikhitanuvasubhi sthā(59)payāṃ śāke / tenānimādyair nni-hito guṇaiś śrīrājendravarmmeśvara īśvaro yaṃ aṣṭābhir indrādibhir ātmabhūtyai bhūpālabhāvas sva ivāgnidikṣṭhaḥ / rājendraviśvarūpeśvaro'piviśvākṛtir harir hāri tribhuvanakevalakāntiprakara ivākāri tenāsmiṃ / śrīharṣadevajananījayadevyās svarijjayāya janitāśrīḥ jananijaghanyajāyās tene(60)ha sthāpitā girijā / rājendravarmanmadevēśvaram īśvaram īśvaro vanīśānām śrīharṣavarmanmanpater anujasya sa bhūṭaye kṛtvān /*

⁷⁰ Louis Finot, "Notes d'épigraphie IV: Inscriptions du Quang Nam", *BEFEO* 4 (1904), 105–112.

⁷¹ By comparison, we may infer that the images mentioned in the stele from Bo-Mung (C. 108) are also sort of portraits (Edouard Huber, "Etudes Indochinoises XII: L'épigraphie de la dynastie de Dong-Duong", *BEFEO* 11.3 [1911], 269–277). The inscription was commissioned by a minister of Indravarman (II), S.E. Mañicaitya, in Śaka 811, or AD 889.

The fact to 'portray' a real person under the garb of the deity—unless it is the contrary!—is also attested in treatises on image-making. The *Mayamata* thus states that an image (of a deity) may be made in the likeness or not of its sponsor.⁷² The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, meanwhile, says that the kings should be represented as the gods.⁷³ Javanese literature is especially rich in stories where kings or queens are represented, after their death, under the garb of a god or goddess. For example, in the *Sumanasāntaka* by *mpu* Monaguna (beginning of the thirteenth century), the *apsara* Hariṇī, heroine of the poem, incarnates in princess Indumatī who, with her brother Bhoja, can communicate with their dead parents represented as Ardhanārīśvara in a shrine of the *kraton*.⁷⁴ But the most reknown text is the *Nāgara-Kertāgama* precisely dated from 1365. The whole book V is thus dedicated to the kings of the Rājasa family, from 1182 to 1343: many of them are said to have been portrayed in the guise of either Śiva or Buddha.⁷⁵

In this regard, we can go back to classical Sanskrit *kāvya*, with the drama *Ratnāvalī*, composed by the famous seventh century king, Harṣa. Once more, a portrait is the dramatic device which is used by the poet to put the hero and the heroine in touch: it would seem a quite banal trick, were it not imbued with some interesting variations. Princess Ratnāvalī is to marry king Udāyana but, for different reasons, she has reached his court incognito and has become lady-in-waiting of the queen under the name Sāgarikā. Fearing the young girl's beauty, the queen keeps her far from the king's sight; however, at the end of the first act, Ratnāvalī/Sāgarikā sees from a distance a ceremony performed by Udāyana whom, at first, she takes for Kāma, the god of Love, himself; but she soon realizes her mistake and discovers at once how deeply in love she has fallen. At the beginning of the second act, she despairs about what appears to be an impossible passion and wanders in the garden of the palace, looking at the portrait of Udayāna she has started to paint on a board (*citraphalakā*). At this moment, she

⁷² *Mayamata* 36.293a: *svarūpaṃ vā'tha kartavyaṃ virūpaṃ vā yadrcchayā /*

⁷³ *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 3.42.1a: *yathā devās tathā citre kartavyāḥ prthivīśvarāḥ /* On the other hand, the Brahmins, the ministers, etc. are depicted, like the *ṛṣis* and the *gandharvas*, in the Bhadra mode (3.42.2), and so forth in descending order.

⁷⁴ Petrus Josephus Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan. A Survey of Old-Javanese Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 206 and 300.

⁷⁵ Theodore Gauthier Pigeaud, trans. and ed., *Java in the Fourteenth Century; A Study in Cultural History. The Nagara-Kertagama by Rakawi Prapanca of Majapahit, 1365 AD*, 5 vols. (The Hague, 1960–63).

is surprised by her friend Susaṃgatā who, looking above Ratnāvalī's shoulder, immediately recognizes the king and understands the whole situation; however, she shrewdly asks her who is this young man; embarrassed, Ratnāvalī answers this is an image of Kāma. Susaṃgatā then takes the board and draws Ratnāvalī's portrait nearby Udāyana; Ratnāvalī is of course upset but her friend replies with humour that she has only added an image of Ratī! Thus discovered, Ratnāvalī must start her confession...

This representation of the king as Kāma is obviously a poetical allusion to her vision at the end of the preceding act and, at the same time, a metaphor of Ratnāvalī's feelings. However, the important point here, from our perspective, is that a 'real' character (in the play, at least) is depicted in the guise of a god. Susaṃgatā is certainly not fooled, but Ratnāvalī can defend herself: she has only painted a divine image! In a way, this painting appears as a counterpart of the Sanskrit literary figure of speech called *śleṣa* (*double-entendre*): it is at the same time a portrait and a divine image; besides, the link between the two is not fortuitous but, on the contrary, is meaningful.

'Double-entendre' portraits or images are thus the visual counterpart of the *śleṣa* literary device. This notion is central to the Indian culture and, in order to show its significance, I will finish this development with the mention of the literary portrait based on it. The *Rāmacarita* is indeed a whole poem constructed according to the *śleṣa* style figure. Written by Sandhyākaranandin, this text tells both the exploits of Rāma and the history of the Pāla dynasty in the twelfth century: emphasis is placed on the figure of Rāmapāla whose accession to the throne was very complicated. An anonymous commentary, interrupted in its current state after verse 35 of the second canto, helps clarify the double meaning of the poem. Here is a specimen taken from the first canto:

tasya mahīpālaḥ atha surapālopi puruṣottamo rāmaḥ /
sphuraḍṛṣyaśṛṅgasambhāvitārupāścārubhāgyasampannaḥ / / 10
jagadavanaikadhurīṇaḥ sāmāyikamahomahānalo bharataḥ /
apī lakṣmanopī śatruḡhṇalakṣmaṇo jajñīraṃ tanayaḥ / / 11

First meaning: Then (four) sons were born to him (= Daśaratha): Rāma, who ruled over the earth (*mahīpāla*), protected the gods (*surapāla*), who was an incarnation of Puruṣottama (= Viṣṇu), whose appearance (in human form) was made possible by the glowing Rṣyaśṛṅga (sage) (performing a sacrifice), and who owed his birth to a portion of *cāru*; (and) Bharata, the only competent person to offer protection to the world,

whose spirit, like a great fire, (burst forth) just in time, and (the third) Lakṣmaṇa; and (the fourth) whose name was Śatrughna.

Second meaning: Then (three) sons were born to him (= Vighrahapāla III): Mahipāla (II), Surapāla, and the eminent person (*puruṣottama*) Rāma (= Rāmapāla), whose form was resplendent, charming and rich in majesty, who was endowed with good fortune (*cārubhāgyasampanna*), the only competent person to offer protection to the world, great by timely use of power, never given to greed, of auspicious signs, and who possessed all marks (*lakṣmaṇa*) indicative of victory over enemies (*śatrughna*).

As *śleṣa* allows it, the text juxtaposes two meanings which have between them a subtle link and can illuminate each other: in this case, as in many portraits, the figure of style sets an analogy between the character represented and the divinity to whom he lends (or borrows?) his features.

5. NAMING THE IMAGE

These last examples highlight the strong relationship between portraits and written statements. At the beginning of this chapter, literary testimonies could be taken as simple documents showing the importance of portraiture in daily life. But, in the course of this development, we have seen also that visual art and literature can share many concepts. Besides, portraits and texts are very often closely linked together, especially in the case of epigraphy. In fact, inscriptions are very often the only way to identify an 'image' as a 'portrait': without the mention of the name, a small kneeling figure at the bottom of a stele is only deemed as a devotee; likewise, without the inscription, King Mahendravarman would be only identified as a carving of Śiva Gaṅgādhara. Thus, epigraphy is part of the 'intention' and is constitutive of what I would call the 'portraying value' of an image.

At the same time, an inscription needs to be read and even deciphered, which was a real issue in a civilisation where illiteracy was more the rule than the exception. As we know, most of the inscriptions record religious donation. The carving of the text had an economic value, the perpetual donation being thus acknowledged; but it had also a religious and a socio-symbolical impact. Therefore, for those unable to read the inscription, the sight of the portrait was also a memory of the donation. We could even say that portraiture acted as a sort of visual signature.

But, beyond this socio-economical (and even ideological) value, the relationship between a portrait and a written statement underlines the fact—crucial to the Indian civilisation—that an image has to be named and that this naming is part of its efficiency.⁷⁶ The common practice is to form the name of the image as a compound consisting of an individual's name (the donor himself or the person he wishes to honour through the donation) followed by a term designating the deity invoked in the image: *-īśvara* for Śiva, *-svāmin* for Viṣṇu, etc. Such compound can be grammatically interpreted as a *tatpuruṣa* or a *karmadhāraya*: in the first case, the meaning is 'the Lord of X', whereas in the latter it is 'the Lord who is X'; but in fact, both interpretations are valid at the same time and, once again, we see a sort of double-meaning. To this, two remarks must be added. First, as A. Sanderson has put it, religiously speaking the image remains the deity: "The Śiva [or Viṣṇu, according to the case] in an image is never worshipped under this name but only as Śiva pure and simple".⁷⁷ Second, if the practice is widely acknowledged through epigraphy, at least from the Gupta period on (see below), it is also attested in religious treatises; however, to the best of my knowledge, such mention does not appear in the canonical texts (such as *āgamas* and *saṃhitās*) dealing with installation ritual (*pratiṣṭhā*), but only in later manuals, like the *Somaśambhupaddhati*, the *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati* or the *Śivaliṅgapratiṣṭhāvidhi*.⁷⁸ It means that the significance of such naming was much more social than religious; it highlights also at the same time the importance of such a practice as its transitory nature: the association of the individual's name with the image is valid as long as it is known.

Interestingly, this naming practice is not restricted to 'images' *stricto sensu* but applies also to symbolic or aniconic cult objects, which is not without consequence for our main concern. In this respect, we

⁷⁶ On the role of names and inscriptions on a religious monument, see Gregory Schopen, "What's in a Name: The Religious Function of the Early Donative Inscriptions", in *Unseen Presence: The Buddha and Sanchi*, ed. Vidya Dehejia (Mumbai: Marg Publication, 1996), 58–73; reprint in Gregory Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matter. Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 382–394.

⁷⁷ Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Religion among the Khmers, Part I". *BEFEO* 90–91 (2003–2004), 415, fn. 250.

⁷⁸ See the references in *Somaśambhupaddhati*, t. 4: xxiv and Sanderson, "The Śaiva Religion", 415; but these are only a few examples.

can mention an inscription on a pillar from Mathura, dating from the reign of Candragupta II, in 61 of the Gupta era, *i.e.* AD 380 (*EL*, xxi, 1–9), which, incidentally, is the first genuine date in the Gupta era, and also the earliest evidence of such kind of image naming. It is about a Māheśvara spiritual master named Uditācārya who belonged to a lineage of teachers (*ācārya*, *guru*): he is said to be the tenth in descent from Kuśika and was preceded by Parāśara, Kapila and Upamita. After a fairly tight study, D. R. Bhandarkar, who edited the inscription, states that this lineage belongs to the Lakulīśa sect. Kuśika would be a direct disciple of Lakulī. But what interests us here is that Uditācārya has installed two ‘cult objects’ in a *gurvāyatana*; this term, which literally means ‘the abode of the masters’, seems to have been a kind of sanctuary where the ‘cult objects’ were installed to commemorate the lineage spiritual masters. They are known as Kapileśvara and Upamiteśvara. They seem therefore to be the portraits of Uditācārya’s two immediate predecessors. But the *-īśvara* suffix applies mostly to a *liṅga*, which seems surprising at first sight. Therefore D. R. Bhandarkar assumes that the inscription refers in fact to a kind of *mukhaliṅga*, the *liṅga* combined with a portrait of each guru, or at least his face.⁷⁹ While plausible, this interpretation remains partly speculative because, to reach this, Bhandarkar, proposes to read on line 10 *guru+++++* as *guru-pratimā-yutau*. Recently, H. Bakker has raised some doubts about this reading, not without reasons:

To me this conjecture does not appear very plausible, for reasons of Sanskrit construction—one would expect the conjectured adjunct before and not after *gurvāyatane*, whereas the position of *guru...* directly before *pratiṣṭhāpitau* suggests an adverbial adjunct saying that the installation was for the benefit/to the memory of the *gurus* or something like that—and because we, to my knowledge, do not possess archaeological evidence of *liṅgas* that are adorned with portraits of human teachers.⁸⁰

He proposes then that the ‘cult objects’ may have been an iconic representation of Śiva.

⁷⁹ Lakulī being indeed considered as an incarnation of Śiva, such a combination is not illogical. Besides, in the inscriptions, Uditācārya’s three predecessors are deemed as *bhagavat*, whereas he is only entitled *ārya*.

⁸⁰ Hans Bakker, “Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Forms of Śiva Worship”, in *Les Sources et le temps / Sources and Time: A Colloquium*, Pondicherry 11–12 January 1997, ed. Nicolas Grimal (Pondicherry: PIFI, 2001), 401.

If we follow Bakker, it would mean that double-entendre image/portrait may have been attested at the beginning of the Gupta period. However, his overall point of view—which is well beyond the scope of this study focussing on portraiture—is that “during the first centuries of the Christian era, the brahmanical elite, whether priest, king, or renouncer, preferred to venerate Maheśvara in iconic form and frowned upon *liṅga* worship”.⁸¹ This is open to discussion—and even more recently M. Willis has interpreted Upamiteśvara and Kapileśvara as Śiva *liṅgas*.⁸² As far as I am concerned, I see this Mathura inscription has a crucial testimony of the fact that, quite early in Indian art, some individuals could be ‘represented’ through different kinds of objects or images which we would not deem as ‘portrait’ in the current sense. Though Bakker’s opinion that the images were representations of Śiva—which would not be, on the contrary, in contradiction with the ideas I have developed *supra*—deserves attention, I would be inclined to think they were in fact *liṅgas* named after the demised *gurus*. But, contrary to Bhandarkar, I do not think they were necessarily *mukhaliṅgas*. As a matter of fact, there are other epigraphic testimonies of the fact that *liṅgas* could be considered as ‘portraits’. The clearer are to be found in Cambodia. For instance, in the stele from Prasat Tor (K. 692) which was engraved in AD 1189 under the reign of Jayavarman VII, it is said at the stance xxv that the king has erected a golden statue of his maternal grandfather, Harṣavarman III, probably in Prasat Tor;⁸³ at the stance XLIX, we learn that Bhūpendrapaṇḍita I (grandfather of the author of the inscription) erected ‘here’ a *liṅga* along with his likeness (*pratikṛti*), unless it is *liṅga* which is simultaneously his likeness.⁸⁴ Finally, in the stances LVII and LIX, it is said

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁸² Michael Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual. Temples and the Establishment of the Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 135.

⁸³ Edition and French translation by G. Coedès (*IC*, I, 227–249); st. xxv: “Il a érigé sur terre cette image d’or incomparable, à la ressemblance de son propre grand-père maternel monté au ciel, avec une quantité inouïe de richesses variées, en même temps (qu’il plantait) dans les points cardinaux la jeune pousse de sa gloire.” (*kṣonyām imām anupamām pratimām suvarṇām svarggasvakiyajananījanakānusārīm / yo sthāpayed vividhabhogacayair apūrvvaiḥ kāṣṭhāmukheṣu ca samam svayaśaḥ pratānam //*)

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, st. XLIX: “D’abord il érigea seulement un *liṅga*, en même temps que son image [ou: qui était en même temps son image (?)], ici, dans le Bhūpendradeśa, pour le bénéfice de tous les mondes; ensuite, il alla au ciel en vue de purifier (par sa présence) le palais des dieux.” (*liṅgam param pratikṛtim svayam eva samyag bhūpendradeśa iha yas samatiṣṭh[i]pat prāk / puṇyāya lokanikarasya tataḥ param sa svaryāta eṣa suramandirapāvanārtham //*)

that Bhūpendrapaṇḍita II (half-brother of the author of the inscription) has erected (during Śūryavarman II's reign?) an image of his mother, Bhagavatī, as well as his own and that of his wife⁸⁵—but we do not know where—and then consecrated the image of his parents at the foot of a mango tree.⁸⁶ It should be noted in passing that the deceased parents (*pitṛ*) are called gods (*giriśa*).⁸⁷ In this example, doubt is still permitted, but it is not the case anymore with the inscription from Phnom Sank Kon (K. 232; IC, vi, 228–233), which dates from Śaka 929 (AD 1007) for the Sanskrit part, and Śaka 938 (AD 1016) for the Khmer one. Three brothers, along with their nephew, install a *liṅga* and images of Śambhu and Devī. According to the names that appear in the Khmer part, one understands that these three ‘images’ are also ‘portraits’ of the father of the founders and the parents of the latter. If one is not surprised to see the grandparents of the founders represented under the features of Śiva and Pārvatī, we find that the ‘portrait’ of the father is indeed here a simple *liṅga*, while there is no indication of a face.

This phenomenon is not restricted to *liṅgas* but could apply to other symbolic (or aniconic) cult objects. Thus in Java the inscription of Pūrṇavarman in Ci-Aruton suggests indeed that Viṣṇu's foot-prints are also those of the king.⁸⁸ Admittedly, foot-prints are not a portrait, but the underlying idea is always that of an image with double meaning. This inscription dates from the fifth century and, therefore, is more or less contemporary with Mathura pillar inscription, which shows that the phenomenon was both early and widespread (even to Southeast Asia).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, st. LVII: “Śūryapaṇḍita, président de cour, érigea sa vénérable mère Bhagavatī, au profit de la poussière des pieds de son père Bhūpendrapaṇḍita, et érigea sa propre image avec son épouse, par dévotion envers ses deux (parents).” (*asthāpayad bhagavatīm jananiṃ satīm śrībhūpendrapaṇḍitapituh padapāṇsulavdhyai / śrīśūryapaṇḍitasabhāpatir ātmarūpaṃ bhaktyaitayos saha kalatram atīṣṭhipad yaḥ //*)

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, st. LIX: “Dans le village, situé au pied d'un manguier, comblant de félicité le pavillon des dieux, il établit, par sa puissance, l'image de ses parents et transféra rapidement à ces dieux or, éléphants, joyaux, rasa (?), chevaux, cuivre et argent.” (*yo sthāpayat pratikṛtīm vibhavana mitror [lire: pitror] girvāṇamandirasukhāpuracūtam ūle / grāme suvarṇagajaratnaraśāśvatāmratāran tatāra tarasā giriśeṣu teṣu //*)

⁸⁷ In spite of a grammatical inconsistency between dual and plural.

⁸⁸ D. Paul, “Deity or Deified King? Reflections on a Unique Vaiṣṇavite Sculpture from Java”, *Artibus Asiae* 60 (1978), especially 320–321.

For sure, many people would not agree with me if I would affirm that a symbolic or aniconic cult object *is* a portrait. It would be somewhat excessive. But my point is that the intention to represent an individual through this kind of 'image' is not fundamentally different. Here the word 'represent' has to be understood literally as 'to make (physically) present'. As a matter of fact, the difference between a double-entendre divine image (which is at the same time a portrait) and a cult object named after an individual is scant! The main difference may in fact come from the more or less explicitness of the inscription accompanying the image (but, as said before, this written statement is also part of the 'intention').

The ideological and religious consequences of this will have to be discussed later on. For the moment, it was enough to show that, in India, portraiture is indeed a relative—and sometimes blurred— notion, and that behind the very word 'portrait' lays the much wider concept of 'representation'. Portraiture covers then many realities, ranging from realistic painted likeness to idealized statues and even symbolic objects.

CHAPTER TWO

VIDDHA / AVIDDHA. DIFFERENT KINDS OF PORTRAITS FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF PURPOSE

In beginning this study, when looking for a basic definition of portraiture, I have firmly stated that likeness or resemblance is not a relevant criterion: once again, it is a *possibility*, not a *prerequisite*. Now, likeness remains an issue that has to be addressed in this book and this for at least three reasons. First, since it is, for so many people and even (or especially) scholars,¹ so much linked with the very idea of portraiture, it is certainly something that has to be discussed thoroughly. Second—and more importantly—this issue has also been addressed in early India: as we have already seen, there are many stories about resembling portraits in Indian literature and, as I will try to show, vocabulary is also related to the notion of likeness. But let us say without further delay that some early Indian portraits appear to have been ‘real likenesses’, whereas others were not, and not even sought to be so: what seems to be at first glance a contradiction is in fact a testimony that portraiture was a complex phenomenon. In this regard, the resemblance issue can shed light on the functions of portraiture.

1. SOME STUDY CASES

The best way to prove that a portrait is resembling (or not) is to compare it with its model. When it is not possible, and in the absence of any photograph, the only means is then to compare several portraits of the same person. Of course, it is not that easy, because the case appears seldom in early India. Moreover, even if this method seems to be rather logical, it is not completely conclusive: all we can be sure of, is that all the images look the same but they could in fact be all derived from a common visual source which is not a ‘real likeness’. Be it as it

¹ When discussing Indian portraiture with colleagues at conferences or other scholarly venues, I have been told more than once that, though my ideas may be interesting, the images I was referring to were not ‘real portraits’.

may, it is worth trying this kind of approach. Thus, before going back to a more comprehensive and conceptual perspective, let us examine some study cases.

1.1. *Narasimha Gaṅga*

King Narasimha I (1238–1264), from the Gaṅga dynasty, is famous for having built the Sūrya temple in Konarak. Several low-reliefs on the temple or kept in various museums (Site Museum, National Museum in New Delhi, Victoria and Albert Museum in London) represent a king, often with his *guru*: sometimes he is holding a bow, perhaps returning from a military campaign (Fig. 23), or he is sitting on a swing (Fig. 24), listening to a sermon (Fig. 25) or paying tribute to the *liṅga* and the images of Durgā Maḥiṣāsurmardini and Jagannātha of Puri (Fig. 26).² No inscription accompanies these sculptures about 80 cm high, but a chronicle of questionable authenticity, the *Baya Cakaḍā*, states that Narasimha had his portrait as victorious warrior done.³ The argument cannot be held as definitive, but given the unity of the architectural program of the Sun temple and the personality

² This latter image is particularly interesting from the point of view of the relationship between kingship and religion, a topic which will be developed later in this book (see chapter 5). Its importance for the King is shown by the fact that there were originally four similar slabs on all sides on the Konarak temple: nowadays, two are in Konarak Museum, one is in the *bhogamaṇḍapa* of the Jagannāth Temple in Puri and the last in National Museum, New Delhi. It has been studied by H. von Stietencon to whom I owe the following remarks. The three gods are the three most important deities of Orissa: Śiva from the Liṅgarāja/Tribhuvaneśvara of Bhuvaneswar, Puruṣottama-Jagannātha of Puri and Virajā of Jāipur. In 1216, Narasimha's father, Anaṅgabhīma III had declared to be the deputy (*rāuta*) and son (*putra*) of these three deities (Drākṣārāma inscription: *SII*, iv, no. 1329) but, later on, he gave more importance to Puruṣottama; originally, the three gods were installed as a triad in the Puruṣottama (now Jagannāth) temple in Puri but, with the extension of Vaiṣṇavism, Śiva was replaced by Balabhadra and Durgā by Ekānamśā or Subhadrā. However, Narasimha I reversed this policy and gave back to Śiva and Durgā their share in the kingdom's welfare. That is what is shown in this image. But, the King, while declaring to be a devotee of Śiva, deemed himself as the son of 'only' Puruṣottama and Durgā (Kapilās inscription (*El*, xxxiii.1, 41–45), and that is probably why the *liṅga* is here given less preeminence (contrary to the other two, he is not enshrined). See Heinrich von Stietencon, "Political Aspects of Indian Religious Art", *Visible Religion* 4–5 (1985–1986), reprint in *Hindu Myth, Hindu History. Religion, Art and Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 23–29.

³ Alice Boner and Sadasiva Rath Sarma, with the help of Rajendra Prasad Dās, *New Light on the Sun Temple of Konārka. Four unpublished Manuscripts relating to Construction, History and Ritual of this Temple*, English translation and annotation (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1972), especially 126 and 118.

of the patron, this identification is highly likely. By comparison, it is possible to recognize the king in other representations in the temple, in particular the devotee to the right of Sūrya in the main niche of the temple (Fig. 27).⁴ Two remarks: first, apart from his high stature and his costume that highlight his royal status, Narasiṃha's features are not particularly individualized; besides, these images are similar to one another. However, the image does not necessarily resemble the model since this similarity can be explained by the fact that all the sculptures are from the same place, are contemporaneous to each other and were otherwise carved by the same artist or at least the same workshop.

1.2. *Kṛṣṇadevarāya*

A few centuries later, we meet a case quite similar with the Vijayanagar king, Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Two of his portraits are known to this day. The most famous one is the bronze group from Tirupati where the king is represented along with his two wives, Tirumaladevī and Chinnadevī. The identification is sure thanks to the labels carved on the figures' shoulder. Besides, to my knowledge, it is one of the few preserved portraits mentioned in literature. In the *Rāyavācakamu*, a Telugu biographical narrative of the king most probably written at the Nāyaka court of Madurai, we can read:

Krishnaraya arrived at Tirupati and beheld Kalyana Venkateshvara and the goddess Alamelumanga. He made a gift of gold and cash and worshipped the lord by giving him all sorts of ornaments. He performed the Sixteen Great Donations there and then had a copper image made of himself, with his hands folded in respect and flanked by his queens Tirumaladevi and Chinnadevi, so that he could always remain standing there in the eastern doorway to attend on his lord.⁵

Indeed, apart from the worshipping attitude, the group is reminiscent of the classical attitude of Viṣṇu accompanied by his two consorts, Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī. The faces are completely stereotyped, so that the three characters are not at all individualized.

⁴ It is remarkable that in the Sun temple, Narasiṃha I expresses his devotion to Sūrya in depicting himself as a small kneeling character, while the image (discussed in the preceding note) where he is bigger than the three deities (*liṅga*, Puruṣottama and Durgā) is more a political statement (Stientencron, *Hindu Myth*, 25).

⁵ Phillip B. Wagoner, *Tiding of the King. A Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Rāyavācakamu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 157.

Kṛṣṇadevarāya is again portrayed in the passage of the northern gateway (*gopura*) he had built at Chidambaram (Fig. 28). The costumes and ornaments and, of course, the craftsmanship are a bit different but, for the rest, the king looks almost the same—which does not mean that these two portraits were likenesses.⁶ As a matter of fact, the Portuguese traveller Paes has left an eye-witness description of Kṛṣṇadevarāya: “The king is of medium height, and of fair complexion and good figure, rather fat than fin; he has on his face signs of small-pox”.⁷ Obviously, this description does not fit with the two elongated figures from Tirupati and Chidambaram. But the depiction

⁶ *Contra* Aravamuthan (*South Indian Portraits*, 18–20): “The statues of the emperor and his queens, however, seem to agree so closely in the features and even the expression that one questions oneself whether the statues do not represent a brother and his sisters. Knowing as we do definitely that Krishna-deva-raya and his two queens came from three different families in no wise related to one another, it is not easy to account on the resemblance. Perhaps the taste of Krishna-deva-raya which we know to have been fastidious, led him to choose for wives two ladies whose features and expression answered to his standards of beauty, and it is not altogether remarkable that the features and the expression agreed with his own. Or, perhaps, the queens could not, owing to the custom of seclusion, give sittings to the sculptors, who must, in consequence, have been forced to rely on unfaithful and uncritical accounts of the appearance of the queens or to give free rein to their fancy. Or, it may be that the sculptors followed the age-old Indian artistic tradition of concentrating their attention on the principal figure in a group to the utter neglect of the subsidiary figures. If, however, after Mahendravarman I another *Vichitra-chitta* sat on the throne of any south Indian kingdom, it was Krishna-deva-raya, and we cannot believe that he would have allowed figures to be set up as likenesses which lacked the essential qualification of being good portraits. We have to conclude that the statue of Krishna-deva-raya was certainly a portrait and that perhaps the statues of the queens were also good portraits. The Chidambaram statue may not be compared with that at Tirumalai. Though the violence of some vandal has damaged the nose of the statue at Chidambaram, it is yet possible to see that the features are those of a person determined in will and cultivated in tastes [*sic*]: the sculpture clearly shows a person strong in limb and graceful in carriage. These qualities of the Chidambaram statue answer to all the details we have of Krishna-deva-raya to be fairly accurate, though perhaps not an artistically adequate, portrait of that emperor. The Chidambaram statue would seem to show Krishna-deva-raya grown a little older than in the group at Tirumalai—a little flabbier in muscle, a little fuller about the waist, a little mellower in expression. (...) If we isolated the copper-statue of Krishna-deva-raya from the Tirumalai group and placed it alongside of the stone statue and compared the two statues, making allowance to the differences in the material, the pose and the expression, and also for the mutilation of the Chidambaram figure, there can be little doubt that they will be found good likenesses of the same person.”

⁷ Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagara, a Contribution to the History of India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1900; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2000), 246–247.

of the devotion of the king was probably more important than the transmission of his actual features.

1.3. *Rājarāja I*

More complex and rich is the case of the Cōla king Rājarāja I (985–1014), the builder of the Great Temple of Tanjavur. I have presented already some of his images in the previous chapter; besides, I have had the opportunity to study elsewhere and in greater detail this case and therefore I refer to this article, briefly summarized here.⁸ Leaving aside his coins (Fig. 21), it is indeed possible to assemble several images considered as portraits of the king. The only one clearly attested is a small relief in Tiruvisalur (Fig. 29), where he is accompanied by his wife, Lokamahādevī; an inscription (ARE, 42 of 1907) just below connects the small relief with the *tulābhara* ceremony (weighing of the king against gold) performed by Rājarāja; the relief belongs to the tradition of devotional portraiture on temple walls.

At Tanjavur, epigraphy leaves no doubt that Rājarāja had set up his own image in bronze in his temple (SII, II, 38, v. 14): once again represented with Lokamahādevī, the king was part of a group of Nāyanmār (Sundarar and Paravai, Sambandar and Appar) worshipping Śiva Candraśekhara; such a group was probably reminiscent of the ceremony performed at Chidambaram when the king, along with Nambi Andar Nambi, assembled the images of the three Nāyanmār in front of a sealed chamber where the manuscripts of the *Tēvāram* were kept. However, the current statue kept in the temple appears far too late to be the original portrait.⁹

Tirunaraiyur is the birth place of Nambi Andar Nambi. Interestingly the gallery of the Siddhanāthasvāmin temple housed two images (one in bronze, one in stone) traditionally identified as Rājarāja. Since the temple was a royal foundation and because of the link with Nambi Andar Nambi and the legend of the rediscovery of the *Tēvāram*, this identification is not at all inconsistent. But there is no inscription testifying it. The two statues share the same attitude, close to the one of Śiva reclining on the bull, but they are definitely later than Rājarāja's reign (the bronze may even be post-cōla).

⁸ Lefèvre, "The 'Portraits' of the Cōla King Rājarāja I".

⁹ ARE 1925, 81; Aravamuthan *Portrait Sculpture*, fig. 11; J. M. Somasundaram Pillai, *The Great Temple at Tanjore* (Tanjore: Tanjore Palace Devasthanams, 1935), pl. 30.

The last ‘portrait’ to be mentioned here is again identified only by local tradition: it is the stone bearded devotee from the Gaṅgajāṭadhara at Govindaputtur. The temple benefitted from the king’s generosity; otherwise no positive proof can sustain this identification which, for the rest, is not completely unlikely. Now, if we compare this bearded man, with the plump and moustached one from Tiruvisalur and the heroic figures from Tirunaraiyur or the painted ones at Tanjavur, we are forced to say that the likeness is all but evident.

1.4. *Jayavarman VII*

Our last study case transports us to Cambodia at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when Jayavarman VII was ruling the Khmer empire at its apogee. The so-called ‘Bayon style’ of that period is marked by the development of portrait art.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, if epigraphy testifies of the fact that many divine images were at the same time portraits of ancestors and other people, no textual evidence exists to positively identify the presumed portraits of Jayavarman VII. However, since these statues of a praying devotee are completely devoid of any divine attributes, this identification is very likely. Two almost complete statues exist: one from Krol Romeas, near Angkor Thom, kept at the Phnom Penh National Museum (Fig. 30), and one from Phimai (formerly in Bangkok, now in the local museum); a head from Preah Khan of Kompong Svay (now in Phnom Penh) has recently been joined to a torso found at the same site,¹¹ as for the last head in a public collection, the one from the Guimet Museum in Paris, it has no recorded provenance but it might come from Ta Prohm.¹²

It is of course impossible to know whether the king actually looked like his portraits but it is evident that they all look similar to each other, so that we can at once recognize one as ‘Jayavarman VII’. Slight differences from one portrait to another have led some authors to speculate about the supposed youth or old age of the model, but it does not seem

¹⁰ Coedès, “Le portrait dans l’art khmer”.

¹¹ Christophe Pottier, “A propos de la statue portrait du roi Jayavarman VII au temple de Préah Khan de Kompong Svay”, *Arts Asiatiques* 55 (2000), 171–172; Nadine Dalsheimer, *L’art du Cambodge ancien. Les collections du musée national de Phnom Penh* (Paris: EFEO et Magellan & Cie, 2001), 160–161, no. 73.

¹² Pierre Baptiste et Thierry Zéphir, *L’art khmer dans les collections du musée Guimet* (Paris: RMN, 2008), 263–266. Another—smuggled—head has been found in Battambang in 1989 (Helen I. Jessup and Thierry Zéphir, eds., *Angkor et dix siècles d’art khmer* [Paris: RMN, 1997], 353, cat. 90, fn. 1).

to be very obvious. More interesting is the fact that these portraits were present in very different places, which indicates that they were a means for the king to show himself (or at least his image) in every corner of his huge empire.

Be it as it may, and in spite of their specific features, these portraits show a close affinity with all the figures carved in the 'Bayon style'. This may temper the idea that they are real likeness but, conversely, it may imply that all the sculptures were more or less modelled on the king's features. It is a well-known fact that Khmer styles are rather homogenous: though no 'realistic' portraits are to be found for periods antedating Jayavarman, could we postulate that these styles were also established according to the features of the sovereign?

These four study cases do not permit a definitive answer to the likeness question. On the one hand, many images are either stylized or even stereotyped; on the other hand, even if they look specific or individualized, it is impossible to prove they were 'real likenesses'. But we have seen that all these portraits were inserted in a specific context and, thus, served a specific function. It implies that the shape of a portrait is related to its purpose. Now that I have approached the 'likeness issue' through practical examples, it may be useful to look at it in a more theoretical way.

2. THE LIKENESS ISSUE: TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

Some ritual treatises consider the making of images of devotees. The *Kāṃikāgama*, a śaiva text pertaining to South Indian Śaivāsiddhānta, thus says (II.66.1–3a) that these devotees can belong to the four *varṇas* or to a mixed class (*antarālaja*), they can be accompanied by their wives and their *gurus* (?); the list includes also the anointed (*abhiṣikta*) king; these portraits, which can be executed either when the sitter is alive or after his death, must have true likeness (*pratīkṛti*).¹³ I will come back to this term in a short while.

¹³ *Kāṃikāgama* II.66.1–3a: *vakṣyāmi śivabhaktānāṃ pratiṣṭhāṃ bhogamokṣadāṃ / brāhmaṇāḥ kṣatriyā vaiśyāḥ śūdrā vā hy antarālajāḥ // striyo vā guravaś caīśāṃ abhiṣikto nṛpo'thavā / śivabhaktisamopetā jīvanto vā mṛtās tu vā // teṣāṃ pratīkṛtiṃ kṛtvā pratiṣṭhāpya samarcayet /*

However this is followed by a sort of stereotyped description concerning the hairdo or the postures and ornaments: for instance, if the devotee is a king, he has to wear

According to other texts, different kinds of image (*citra*) exist. For the twelfth-century *Mānasollāsa* (3.1.899cd–903ab), all creatures are too numerous to be described but they must be represented according to their own shape (*rūpa*), which seem to imply a faithfulness to the model. It then considers three possibilities: *viddha*, *aviddha* and *bhāva(citra)*:

An image which is painted in a resembling (*sādrśyam*) way as if it were reflected in a mirror is called *viddha* by the wise men like Viśvakarman, etc.; what is painted with the words ‘I am drawing casually’ in mind, so that the result evokes only the form and the measurements, is called *aviddha*; when *rasa*, such as the *śrīgarā*, etc., is revealed by mere observation, it is called *bhāvacitra* because it creates wonder in the mind.¹⁴

C. Sivaramamurti was probably the first to attract attention to this passage.¹⁵ Unfortunately, he cut it so as to reduce it to the opposition *viddha/aviddha*, whereas the original tripartition gives a wider perspective: likeness, image drawn at random and image imbued with emotions (even if the *rasas* are emotions expressed in a normative way). Later, I will try to show that *viddha*—which comes from the verb *VYADh-*, the first meaning of which is ‘to pierce’, ‘to attach to’, hence ‘to affect with’—can have also a wider meaning than only ‘resembling’. For the moment, it will be enough to note that it is equated with *sādrśya*, ‘resemblance’ or ‘likeness’.

If *viddha* is to be found in literature (it is the title of a play by Rājaśekhara: *Viddhaśālabhāṅjikā*) and normative texts, *sādrśya* is much more frequent. For instance, in Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvamśa* (8.92), when Aja mourns his beloved and departed wife, Indumatī, he tries to find solace at looking at her resembling portrait (*pratikṛti*):

a crown or tiara and hold weapons or join the hand; if he is a simpler man, he can be depicted with one lock of hair, or with an abundant hair, or bald; his wife can also be present (II.66.25b–28a: *śikhī vā badvakeśī vā muṇḍito jaṭilo’tha vā / abhiṣikto nṛpaś cet tu kirīṭamakuṭānvitaḥ // yatheṣṭāyudhayukto vā namaskārayuto’thavā / sarvalakṣaṇasaṃpannaḥ sarvābharaṇabhūṣitaḥ // gāyakā nṛttayuktā vā pūjakā vā yatheṣṭakāḥ / striyas tad anurūpeṇa bhūṣaṇair upabhūṣitaḥ //*). In a way, everyone could be portrayed in every fashion!

¹⁴ *Mānasollāsa* 3.1.900cd–903ab: *sādrśyam likhyate yatra darpane pratibimbavat // tac citraṃ viddham ity ahur viśvakarmādayo budhāḥ / ākasmike likhāmīti yadanuddiśya likhyate // ākāramātrasaṃpanne tad aviddham iti smṛtam / śrīgarādirāso yatra darśanād eva gamyate // bhāvacitraṃ tad ākhyātaṃ cittakautukakāraṇam /*

¹⁵ Calambur Sivaramamurti, *Sanskrit Literature and Art, Mirrors of Indian Culture*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955), 91.

sādrśyapratikṛtidarśanaiḥ priyāyās svapneṣu kṣaṇikasamāgamotsavaiś ca.¹⁶ It is again found in the third book of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, which is a very well-known treatise dealing (among many other things) with image-making. Thus chapter 41 presents the different types of images:

Painting is said to be of four types: *Satya* (“Naturalistic”), *Daiśika* (provincial/local), *Nāgara* (Urban/professional) and *Miśra* (Mixed). I shall speak about its (their) characteristic(s) (1).

Whichever painting that bears a similarity with the world, [that painting] is called *Satya* (“Naturalistic”) (2ab).

That [painting] which has elongated figures, is large in size, effortless [ly painted], profusely decorated, symmetrical [in composition], fully complete, in which the figures are neither difficult to accomplish nor strong in shape and in which the plumb line is used for making symmetrical [i.e. frontal] postures is called *Daiśika* (2cd–3).

[That painting] in which all the figures are firmly developed [so as to appear three dimensional], in which calculation [for foreshortening] is derived from a circle and very little decoration in form of garlands is used, such a painting is called *Nāgara* (4).

O Best of Men, a *Miśra* [painting], in short, is known to be mixed [i.e. a combination of the three types as listed above]. The three types of line-rendering are said to be: *Patrajā* (leaf/paper-born), *Acchaidikā* (unbroken) and *Bindujā* (dot-born) (5).¹⁷

I adopt here P. D. Mukherji’s edition and translation (2001: 159).¹⁸ She is probably right in separating 2ab and 2cd. The definition of *satyam*

¹⁶ See also *Kathāsaritsagara* 12.34.79–82: *tad dr̥ṣṭvā mantriṇas tasya jagadus tām tapasvinīm / ārye sundaraseṇam tvaṃ devam atra paṭe likha // sadr̥śālekhyavijñānam tāvad vīkṣāmahe tava / tacchrutvaiva lilekhaitaṃ kumāraṃ sā kṣaṇāt paṭe // tam cātisadr̥śaṃ dr̥ṣṭvā sarve’py atraiyam abruvan / nāstyālekhyavisamvādo bhagavatya manāgapi // ayaṃ kumāra eveti citre’smin jāyate hi dhīḥ / tan mandāravatīdevīrūpaṃ nātra visāmvadet //*

¹⁷ *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 3.41.1–5: *satyaṃ ca daiśikaṃ caiva nāgaram miśram eva ca / citraṃ caturvidhaṃ proktaṃ tasya vakṣyāmi lakṣaṇam // yat kiñcīl lokasadr̥śyaṃ citraṃ tat satyam ucyate / dirghāṅgaṃ supramāṇaṃ ca sukumāraṃ subhūṣaṇam // caturasaṃ susampūrṇaṃ ca durghaṭolvaṇākṛtim / samānasthānalambādhyam daiśikaṃ tan nigadyate // dr̥ḍhopacitasarvāṅgaṃ vartulanayanolvaṇam / citraṃ tan nāgaram jñeyaṃ svalpamālyavibhūṣaṇam // miśram miśram samākhyātam samāsānmanujottama / tisraś ca vartanāḥ proktāḥ patrācchaidikabindujāḥ //*

¹⁸ *The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, critically edited and translated by Parul Dave Mukherji (New Delhi: IGNC, 2001), 159. However, I would prefer to translate *citra* by ‘image’, instead of ‘painting’. As a matter of fact, the adjective *citra* designates first something surprising then something colourful, hence the extension to ‘painted’ and the formation of a substantive. In many *śilpaśāstra* or in *āgamic* texts, this term is used for image in general, according to a ternary division. See for instance *Suprabhedāgama, kriyāpāda* 34.3–4 or also an unidentified quotation in *Vedajñāna*

(‘real’, ‘faithful’) is then a short one: it is ‘resembling’ the world. Interestingly all the famous scholars (Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch, Sivaramamurti) who translated this passage before read 2cd as belonging to *satyam*, which was not without consequence: on the one hand, the definition becomes contradictory; on the other hand, it has led to justify that even naturalism in Indian art was idealized (Coomaraswamy translated *satyam* by ‘Pure or Sacred’!). In fact, what we can gather from these texts is that likeness and resembling images were known and acknowledged but that, at the same time, it was just one category among different types of images. As I have said before, likeness is then a possibility.

Bearing this in mind, it is now time to examine the terms used in literature to designate a portrait. Strangely enough—but we will see that it is very significant—the first literary evidences do not even use a substantive. In the preceding chapter, I have already mentioned a passage from the *Mahābhārata* where Ekalavya makes a portrait of Droṇa: in fact, there is no word here for ‘portrait’ but only an expression meaning ‘Droṇa made of clay’ (*droṇam mahīmayam*). Farther in the same book, Duryodhana has an iron-image of his intimate enemy, Bhīma, made in order to train with the mace. This metallic statue appears again after the great battle when the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra meets the victorious Pāṇḍavas:

He embraced and addressed kindly to Dharmarāja, O Bharata, but he sought for Bhīma with evil-mind, burning like a fire, moved by the fire of his rage and the wind of his sorrow. He looked at Bhīmasena as a forest to be burned but Hari [Kṛṣṇa], conscious of his malevolent intention towards Bhīma, drew this latter away and placed in the king’s hands the iron Bhīma. Thanks to his great presence of mind, Hari had understood his aim and the full-knowledgeable Janārdana acted in accordance. Having seized the iron Bhīma in his hands, the mighty king, strong as a myriad of snakes, shattered Vṛkodara [Bhīma] into pieces; after having

Śaivāgamaparibhāṣamañjarī (sixteenth century), 3.140–141: ‘There are three modes for making images: ‘in the round’ (*citra*), ‘in relief’ (*ardhacitra*) and ‘flat’ (*citrābhāsa*): when all the limbs [of the image] are depicted integrally, it is said to be ‘in the round’; when the limbs are depicted only half-way, it is ‘relief’ and when [the image] is drawn on material or on wall it is ‘flat’ (*citraṃ citrārdhakaṃ caiva citrābhāsam iti tridhā / sarvāvayavasampūrṇaṃ citraṃ tad drśyam ucyate // ardhāvayavadrśyam ardhacitraṃ ihocyate / paṭe tu bhittau yallekhyam citrābhāsam iti smṛtam //*). See also *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 3.38.

destroyed the iron Bhīma, the king, his breast crushed, shed his blood through his mouth.¹⁹

Again, one cannot find a specific word for ‘portrait’—even ‘image’ is not used; instead, one finds the name of the portrayed person with an adjective indicating the material used to fashion the image (*ayasmaya*, *āyasa*, etc.). This lack of any specific term at the same time reinforces the link between the portrait and its model: the image *is* the person, only the medium being different.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is also possible to find the same kind of image. Indeed, in the last book (*Uttarakāṇḍa*), Rāma decides to perform a horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*). It is a well-known fact that the sacrificer’s wife plays an important part in such ceremony; however, at this moment of the story, Sitā has already been sent into exile in the forest by her husband; therefore, Rāma has an image of her made of gold so as to replace her.²⁰ Like in the *Mahābhārata*, there is no specific word to designate the image but only an adjective for the material: literally, it means ‘my golden wife’.

In later texts, we find portraits designated by a whole range of terms, but none of them seems to be really specific. The list below is probably not exhaustive, nor have I attempted any statistical approach in the use of these terms:

- *Bimba* (‘reflection’, ‘shadow’, ‘image’)
- *Citra* (‘bright object’, ‘wonder’, ‘picture’)
- *Mūrti* (‘solid body’, ‘material form’; hence ‘embodiment’, ‘manifestation’, ‘image’, ‘idol’)
- *Vigraha* (‘separation’, ‘isolation’; hence ‘separate, i.e. individual, body’, ‘form’, ‘figure’)
- *Rūpa* (any outward appearance, ‘form’, ‘figure’, ‘shape’; ‘likeness’, ‘image’, ‘reflection’)

¹⁹ *Mahābhārata*, XI.11.13–18: *dharmarājaṃ pariṣvajya sāntvayitvā ca bhārata / duṣṭātmā bhīmam anvaicchad didhakṣur iva pāvakaḥ // sa kopapāvakas tasya śokavāyusamīritāḥ / bhīmasenamayam dāvaṃ didhakṣur iva dṛṣyate // tasya saṃkalpam ājñāya bhīmaṃ praty aśubhaṃ hariḥ / bhīmam ākṣipyā pāṇibhyāṃ pradadau bhīmam āyasam // prāḡ eva tu mahābuddhir buddhvā tasyeṅgitaṃ hariḥ / saṃvidhānaṃ mahāprājñaḥ tatra cakre janārdanaḥ // taṃ tu grhyaiva pāṇibhyāṃ bhīmasenam ayasamayam / babhaṅja balavān rājā manyamāno vṛkodaram // nāgāyutabalaprāṇaḥ sa rājā bhīmam āyasam / bhaṅktvā vimathitoraskaḥ susrāva rudhiraṃ mukhāt //*

²⁰ *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, 91.25: *kāñcaniṃ mama patniṃ ca dīkṣāyajñāś ca karmāṇi / agrato bharataḥ kṛtvā gacchatvagre mahāyaśāḥ //*

- *Pratimā* ('image', 'likeness', 'symbol')
- *Pratikṛti* ('counterpart', 'substitute', 'image', 'likeness', 'model')

As a matter of fact, the translation of these terms by 'portraits' depends only on the context in which they are used, because in general they can designate any kind of image. In mediaeval Western India (Gujarat and Rajasthan), Jack Laughlin has found a kind of specialisation, especially in epigraphy: *mūrti* is used for lay portraits, *pratimā* for the images of the gods and *bimba* for the images of the Jinas.²¹ But, to the best of my knowledge, it seems to be a regional practice at a specific moment. For instance, in the *Dīptāgama* (chapter 52), a South Indian ritual treatise from the Śaivasiddhanta, a portrait of the king is deemed as *pratimā*, like all the images mentioned in the text.

Except for *citra* which designates any kind of picture, all the other terms—when we examine their etymology—deal more or less with the notion of likeness or corporeal reality, not to speak of presence of the model. For instance, in Buddhist texts, *vigraha* is used to gloze *śarirā* that is, the relics of the Buddha, which means that the Buddha is physically present in the relics.²² Likewise, the word *pratimā*—from the root *prati-MĀ*, 'measuring according to something'—convey the idea of imitation or copy. But, in Sanskrit literature, *pratikṛti*—which means 'made after'—may be the most common term used to designate a portrait. It is already attested in Pāṇini's grammar (*Aṣṭādhyayī* 5.3.96–101) where it designates either divine images (e.g. Vāsudeva or Kāśyapa) or representations of men.

To conclude temporarily, it appears that the notions of likeness, resemblance and imitation are very much developed in Sanskrit texts. Not only there are some words (*viddha*, *sādṛśya*, *satya*) that distinguish a resembling image from another but all the terms used to designate a portrait convey in their etymology the very idea of likeness, or even of the physical presence of the model. At the same time—and it is noteworthy—none of these terms is limited to the specific meaning of 'portrait' but can designate any kind of image. It points out the fact that 'image' and 'portrait', in Indian art, are not fundamentally different from each other.

²¹ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 34.

²² See for instance *Sadharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* 11.15: *ātma-bhava-vigraha*, 'whose physical shape is my being'.

3. PHYSIOGNOMIC PORTRAITS

Now that we have seen that even the ancient Indian texts acknowledged that some portraits were *viddha*, whereas others were *aviddha*, we have to examine this distinction in order to know whether the difference in appearance was also related to a difference in the function of the image.

3.1. *Portraiture and identity*

When applied to portraiture, the Sanskrit adjective *viddha* could be technically translated by physiognomic. By this, I do not of course refer to any relationship between the physical appearance of a person and his psychology but to the naturalism of the representation. As we have seen already, it is very difficult to find a portrait preserved in South (or Southeast) Asia before the Mughal period that can be undoubtedly proven as truly physiognomic—although the case of Jayavarman VII might fall within this category.

Here, literature is crucial. Examples are so many that they cannot all be quoted. I will mention only a few representative ones. A classical situation (already referred to in the previous chapter) is the encounter of two lovers through a portrait; what is interesting here is that the characters are never deluded by the likeness²³ and occurrences are so numerous that it is impossible to think that the readers or the audience would have accepted something that never happened in ‘real life’.

Thus, in the third book of the *Daśakumāracarita* by Daṇḍin—who is supposed to have lived in Kanchipuram in the eighth century—one of the ten princes, Upahāravarman reaches the kingdom of Videha and meets by chance his old nanny; she informs him that his father, King Prahāravarman, has been deposed by his nephew, Vikāṭavarman. To take revenge, the young hero asks his nanny and her daughter to help him to seduce Queen Kalpasundarī; therefore, he draws his self-portrait (*ahaṃ abhiliḥyātmanaḥ pratikṛtiṃ*) and has it sent to the queen who, inevitably, immediately falls in love with the beautiful young man.²⁴ Thanks to the nanny, the two lovers get in touch and

²³ When one character (usually the hero) says that the heroin is much more beautiful than her portrait it is only a pun to underline her dazzling beauty.

²⁴ *keśucid dīneṣu gateṣv ācaṣṭa mām madambā / vatsa mādhaivā picumandāśleṣiṇī yathā asau śocyamātmānaṃ manyeta tathopapādyā sthāpitā / kiṃ bhūyaḥ kṛtyam*

decide that Kalpasundarī should show the portrait (*citrapaṭa*, *citra*) to her very ugly husband to convince him that he could become as beautiful as the model of the image through a magical ritual. During the ceremony, Upahāravarman takes the place of the queen, questions the king and finally murders him. He can thus present himself to the courtiers as Vikaṭavarman in his (supposed) new garb.

Farther, in the same novel, there is the story of prince Mitragupta who must answer the riddles of a *brahmarākṣasa*; to do so, he narrates the adventures of the young Kalahakaṇṭaka who meets a painter; newly arrived in the town, this latter has just painted the portrait of a young woman. Struck by her extraordinary beauty, Kalahakaṇṭaka immediately guesses that she is the wife of a wealthy but impotent merchant; madly in love, he decides to seduce her.²⁵

In Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsagara* (eleventh century), other such stories can be found. For instance, in the first chapter of the ninth book (*Alaṃkāravatī*) King Pṛthivirūpa is so handsome that two monks tell him that only Rūpalatā, daughter of Rūpadhara, king of the island of Muktipura, would be worthy of becoming his wife. He then requests the painter Kumāridatta to make his portrait and to find a stratagem to show it to the princess and make her own portrait. Kumāridatta goes to Muktipura and, in front of the king, prides himself on being the best painter in the world; to test him, Rūpadhara asks him to paint

iti / punar aham abhikhyātmanah pratikṛtim 'iyam amuṣmaineyā / nitāṃ caināṃ nirvarṇya sā niyatam evaṃ vakṣyati / nanv asti kaś cid idrśākārah pumān iti / pratibṛhy enām / yadi syāt tataḥ kim iti / tasya yad uttaraṃ sā dāsyati tad aham asmi pratibodhanīyaḥ iti / sā 'tathā iti rājakulam upasaṅkramya pratinivṛttā mām ekānte nyavedayat / vatsa darśito'sau citrapaṭas tasyai mattakāśīnyai / citriyamāṇā ca asau' bhuvanam idaṃ sanāthikṛtaṃ yad deve'pi kusumadhanvani nedṛśi vapuḥśrīḥ samnidhatte / citram etac citrataram / na ca tam avaimi ya idrśam ihatyo nirmimite / kenedam ālikhitam ity āḍṛtavatī vyāhṛtavatī ca / mayā ca smerayodiritam / devi sadṛśam ājñāpayasi /

²⁵ *tadanantaram asau nitambavatīvṛttāntam aprākṣit / so'ham abravam / asti śūraseneṣu mathurā nāma nagari / tatra kaścit kulaputraḥ kalāsu gaṇikāsu ca atiraktaḥ mītrārthaṃ svabhujamātranirvyūḍhānekakalahah kalahakaṇṭaka iti karkaśair abhikhyāpitākhyah pratyavātsit / sa caikadā kasyacid āgantoś citrakara-sya haste citrapaṭaṃ dadarśa / tatra kācid ālekhyagatā yuvatir ālokaṃ mātrenaiva kalahakaṇṭakasya kāmāturaṃ cetaś cakāra / sa ca tam abravīt / bhadra viruddham ivaitat pratibhāti / yataḥ kulajādurlabhaṃ vapuḥ ābhijātyaśamsinī ca namratā pāṇḍurā ca mukhacchaviḥ anatiparibhuktasubhagā ca tanuḥ praudhatānuviddhā ca dṛṣṭiḥ / na caiśa proṣitaḥ bhartṛkā pravāsacihnasyaikavenīāder adarśanāt / lakṣma caitaddakṣiṇapārśvavartī / tad iyaṃ vṛddhasya kasyacid vaṇijo na atipumstvasya yathārhasambhogālābhapiḍitā grhiṇī tvayā atikauśalād yathā dṛṣṭam ālikhitā bhavī-tum arhati iti /*

the portrait of his daughter and is so satisfied with the result that he inquires about a husband-to-be for her who could match her beauty; of course, Kumāridatta displays at once Pṛthivirūpa's portrait: the princess falls in love with him at the sight of the painting and the wedding is promptly arranged after Pṛthivirūpa has seen Rūpalatā's portrait.²⁶

Even if, most of the time, these portraits used as dramatic devices were painted, there are also some mentions of sculpted likeness. One good example is the play by Rājaśekhara, *Viddha Śālabhañjikā*.²⁷ The story is somewhat similar to that of Ratnavālī but, here, the king falls in love with the young maiden by seeing her statue through a crystal wall.²⁸

Apart from the narrative and dramatic value of the portraits, we see that the first function of these physiognomic images was to help recognize and identify an individual. This is nothing but surprising and, on that point, Indian art does not differ from Western portraiture. If the first use was then identification—and for this, resemblance would have been a requisite—, many other functions can derive: proxy, memory, diplomatic gift, etc. In dramas and novels, we see very often portraits used as tools to conclude matrimonial alliances—and I do not see why such things would not have happened in ancient Indian kingdoms. In fact in the famous historical record, the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, Kalahṇa wrote about King Harṣa (1089–1101): “When he saw a picture of Candalā, the beautiful wife of Paramādi, the lord of Karnāṭa ([the Cālukya king Vikramāditya of Kālyana], he was struck by the god of love”.²⁹ But, physical identity does not exhaust all the biographical value of a portrait and, therefore, we have to continue our analysis.

²⁶ Somadeva, *Kāthasaritsagara or The Ocean of Story*, translated by C. H. Tawney, revised by N. M. Penzer (London, 1924–1928), vol. 4, 130–135; *Océan des rivières de contes*, édition publiée sous la direction de Nalini Balbir (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1997), 553–555.

²⁷ On the word *śālabhañjikā* designating a portrait in the round, see also *Kāthasaritsagara* 18.4.139–140: *kaliṅgasenā nāmāsti kaliṅgādhipati sūtā // tām dr̥ṣṭvā rūpakāreṇa tadrūpaghaṭanepsunā / vardhamānapuriyena kr̥teyaṃ śālabhañjikā //*

²⁸ For an in-depth analysis of *Viddha Śālabhañjikā*, see Phyllis Granoff, “Portraits, Likenesses and Looking Glasses: Some Literary and Philosophical Reflections on Representation and Art in Medieval India”, in *Representation in Religion. Studies in Honor of Mosche Barash*, ed. J. Assmann and A. I. Baumgarten (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 63–105.

²⁹ Mark Aurel Stein, trans. and ed., *Kalahaṇa's 'Rājatarāṅgiṇī': A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1900; reprint, Delhi, 1979), vol. 1, 335.

3.2. Portrait as a substitute

As often, portrait can be used when the portrayed model is absent. This kind of function exists everywhere in the world, but in India this role as a substitute seems to be especially important, because it has to do with the functions of images in general.

One of the most frequent themes of Indian literature is *viyoga*, which means 'love in separation'. In this context, portraits can be a very important device, since they can replace the absent lover. Two examples can be taken from Kālidāsa. Thus, in the second act of *Vikramorvaśī*, the king longs for the beloved *apsara* Urvaśī, while he is observed secretly by her.³⁰ His friend, the Brahman jester (*vidūṣaka*) tries to find some solace:

Vidūṣaka: Let your Majesty resort to sleep, which by means of dream, will unite you two; or draw a portrait of lady Urvaśī and remain gazing at it.
(*aha vā tatta bhodīe uvvaśīe paṭikidim ālihia āloanto ciṭhṭha* [sk.: *atha vā tatra bhavatyā urvaśyāḥ pratikṛtim ālikhyāvalokyamsthīṣṭha*])

Urvaśī (with delight): Light that you are, my heart, find consolation now (in these words).

King: Both (your proposal) are equally of no avail. This heart (of mine) is ceaselessly pierced through by the shafts of Love; how can I, then, get sleep which will bring about a union in a dream? Nor will my eyes fail to be overflowing with tears, O friend, even before I have finished delineating in the picture that fair-faced beloved (of mine).³¹

However, in the play, King Purūravas finally does not draw any portrait but transfers his feelings on a letter written by Urvaśī on a birch leaf (which his wife will later intercept, but this is another story). It then means that the same sentimental function can be given to a painted image or to a written document.

In *Abhijñānaśakuntalā*, the passage is more extant and meaningful. The situation, in act VI, is a classical one: King Duṣyanta has dismissed by error his beloved wife Śakuntalā and is longing for her. Secretly observed by Śakuntalā's friend, the *apsara* Sānumatī, he is, as in *Vikramorvaśī*, advised by the jester to look at Śakuntalā's portrait (*pratikṛti*) which he has started painting on a wooden tablet (*citraphalāka*):

³⁰ Incidentally, we can note that Urvaśī's companion is, once again, called Citralekhā, though this latter one does not paint anything.

³¹ Translation by M. R. Kale.

Vidūṣaka: Why! The personal attendant Caturikā has been ordered by you: I shall pass this time in the bower of the Mādhavī creeper. Bring there the portrait of her ladyship Śakuntalā, which is on the painting board and is drawn by my own hand.³²

Beautiful as it is, the whole passage is worth being quoted, because of the many themes developed: the image so true that only the speech is missing or that a bee is misguided, the realism of the setting, the feelings aroused by the portrait once again used as a substitute for the absent beloved one, etc.:

Caturikā: Here is my mistress in the picture (*citra*) (Shows the picture-board).

Vidūṣaka: Excellent, my friend! The representation of the (various) feelings (such as fear, curiosity, etc.) is beautiful on account of the exquisite delineation. My sight as though stumbles in the low and high regions.

Sānumatī: Oh this skill of the royal sage! I understand my friend is standing in front of me.

King:—

Whatever may be not-good in the picture (*citra*) is (constantly) being made otherwise (i.e. improved). Yet her loveliness is to a small extent imitated by the drawing (*rekḥā*). (st. 14)

S.: This is befitting an affection, (grown) intense through remorse and absence of vanity.

V.: Oh! Now, three ladies are seen (here). And all are beautiful. Which is her ladyship Śakuntalā here?

S.: Ignorant indeed of such beauty, this person has his sight in vain.

K.: Well! Whom do you guess (to be Śakuntalā)?

V.: I guess that she who is here painted, as though a little fatigued, by the side of the mango-tree, whose fresh foliage is glistening through the sprinkling (of water), with a mass of hair from which flowers have dropped down owing to the loosened braid, with a face on which drops of perspiration have broken out and especially with arms much drooping—she is Śakuntalā; the others are friends.

K.: Clever you are. Here is a sign of my passion.

The soiled impression of my perspiring finger is observed on the edges of the picture (*rekḥā*); and here my tear, that dropped on her cheek, is noticeable owing to the puff of the paint. (st. 15)

³² Edition and translation by S. D. Gajendragadkar.

Vidūṣaka: *ṇaṃ āsaṇṇapariāriā caduriā bhavadā saṃditṭhā / māhavīmaṇḍape imaṃ velaṃ adivāhissam / tahiṃ me cittaphalaāgadam sahatthalihidaṃ tattahodie saundalāe paḍikidiṃ āṇohi tti* (sk.: *nanvāsannaparicārikā caturikā bhavatā saṃdiṣṭā / mādhavīmaṇḍapa imāṃ velāmativāhayiṣe / tatra me citraphalakagatāṃ svahastalikhitaṃ tatrabhavatyāḥ śakuntalāyāḥ pratikṛtim ānayeti*)

Caturikā, this source of my diversion is (only) half drawn. Go and just bring the brush.

C.: Venerable Mādhavya! Hold the picture-board (*citra-phalaka*) till I come (back).

K.: I shall myself hold it.

(*Exit maid*)

K.: Indeed I,

Having previously abandoned my beloved who had arrived in person (and) again thinking highly of her who is (now) committed to a picture (*citra-arpitā*), have become, O friend!, possessed of a longing for the mirage, after having passed on my road a river of plentiful water. (st. 16)

V.: (*To himself*) Here his majesty, having crossed a river, has (really) gone to a mirage. (*Aloud*) Oh! What else is to be drawn here?

K.: Hear.

The river Mālinī is to be drawn with pairs of swans resting on its sandy banks; (and) on both sides of it (are to be painted) the sacred adjoining hills of the Himālaya, with deer reclining on them; and under a tree, possessing bark-garments suspended from its branches I desire to represent a doe rubbing her left eye on the horn of a black antelope. (st. 17)

V.: As far as I see, he should fill the picture-board with multitudes of long bearded-hermits.

K.: Friend! And another thing. A decoration of Śakuntalā, which was intended to be drawn here, was forgotten by us.

V.: What possibly?

S.: (Something) that will be appropriate to her forest-residence, tenderness and modesty.

K.:—

A Śiriṣa flower, O friend! With its stalk placed on her ear (and) its filament hanging down to the cheeks, has not been drawn; nor has a necklace of lotus-fibres, delicate like the rays of the autumnal moon, been formed in the interval of her breasts. (st. 18)

V.: Oh! Why is it that her ladyship stands, as though very much frightened, having covered her face with the palm of her hand, which shines like a red leaf? (*Having observed closely*) Ah! Here the whore-son, the bee, the robber of the honey of flowers, is rushing at her ladyship's face.

K.: Why! Let the impudent fellow be warded off.

V.: You alone, the chastiser of the undisciplined, will be able to drive him off.

K.: All right. Oh! You! The favourite guest of creepers-in-flowers! Why do you undergo the trouble of hovering about here?

Here the female bee, attached to you and seated on a flower, is waiting (for you), though she is thirsty; indeed, she does not drink the honey without you. (st. 19)

S.: Today indeed he has been courteously warded off.

- V.: Though prohibited, this class (of animal remains) perverse.
 K.: Thus, oh!, you do not conform to my command. Hear then now.
 If, O bee!, you touch the Bimba-like lower lip of my beloved, which is attractive like the uninjured young leaf of a tree and which was drunk only by me in festivals of love, I shall have you put in the prison of the hollow of a lotus. (st. 20)
 V.: How will he not fear one whose punishment is so severe? (*Laughing—To himself*) As for him, he has gone mad. I too have become as though of similar complexion through association with him. (*Aloud*) Oh! This is only a picture. (*bho cittaṃ kkhu edaṃ* [sk.: *bhoḥ citraṃ khalv etaḥ*])
 K.: How picture! (*kathaṃ citraṃ*)
 S.: I too have now realised the fact. What of him is experiencing what he has painted?
 K.: Friend! What meddlesomeness has this been perpetrated (by you)? While, with my heart wholly absorbed in her, I was experiencing the pleasure of (her) sight, as though she were present before my eyes, you have, by reviving (my) recollection, again transformed my beloved into a picture (*citrī-kṛtā*). (st. 21) (*Shed tears*)

In this passage, two words, which we have already seen, are used to designate the portrait: *pratikṛti* and *citra*. Though they are more or less synonyms, it is not impossible to see a slight difference: *pratikṛti* is used for the representation of Śakuntalā and highlights the role of the portrait as a substitute which is almost as alive as the real woman, whereas *citra* is more related to a physical object that is, the painting, and this is this very word which the jester pronounced at the end to show that this is *only* an image. In fact, the portrait is here a double illusion: on the one hand, in a positive way, it can give the feeling that the absent one is nevertheless present (even the bee is mistaken); on the other hand, in a more negative way, it appears to be only an illusion (though the word *māyā* is not used here) and makes the absence even more tangible.³³

This *viyoga* theme and the related use of portraiture is also acknowledged by the *Kāmasūtra*: “When a person kisses the reflection of the person he loves in a mirror, in water, or on a wall, it is called a ‘kiss showing the intention’. When a person kisses a child (sitting on his

³³ The beloved one who, at first, seems to be here (the image is made according to her—*prati-kṛta*) turns again into an image (*citra-kṛta*).

lap), or a picture, or an image, it is called a ‘transferred kiss’”.³⁴ Of course, in *Śakuntalā*, the portrait seems to be a faithful likeness; however the memory value of the image seems to be much more important than exact resemblance. As we have seen, in *Vikramorvaśī*, the same function can be assigned to a portrait or a letter. The image is then supposed to counteract the physical absence of the beloved one. In a way, the portrait plays a role more or less similar to a divine image set up in a temple which is there to make the deity present. Of course, as we know, the deity is really present in the cult image thanks to the installation ritual. However, I will show later on that this may have existed for portraits also. And, in a poetic way, the portraits mentioned in literature seem also to be imbued with the personality of their models.

Nevertheless, this substitute value of portraiture does not necessarily imply physiognomic likeness: what is important is the power of evocation of the image. If the same role can be played by a letter, hence the portrait can be more symbolic than resembling (once again, it is a possibility, not a necessity). In this regard, it is interesting to note that in the *Jayamaṅgalā*, the commentary of the *Kāmasūtra* written by Yaśodhara in the thirteenth century, it is said about the above mentioned passage that the image used as substitute can be an ‘imaginary likeness’.

3.3. *The Pratimānāṭaka or the ambiguity of likeness*

Thus physiognomic likeness is not always evident, even in a context where we would like to think it should be obvious. As a matter of fact, this ambiguity itself has been, at times, turned into a dramatic device. It gives me the opportunity to introduce at last another play which is oft quoted in relation with portraiture and which, for this reason, needs to be discussed: Bhāsa’s *Pratimānāṭaka* (*The Statues*). Bhāsa is a South Indian playwright who most probably preceded Kālidāsa: he may be dated from about the third century. This play has often been used as evidence to some archaeological facts, especially about the cult of royal images but, because it has so often been quoted, it is necessary to go back over it once more. Though the ‘statues’ are the title of the whole play, they are only dealt with in the third act and they do

³⁴ *Kāmasūtra* 2.3.28–29: ādarśe kuḍye salile vā prayojyāyāś chāyācumbanam ākārapradarśanārtham eva kāryam / bālasya citra-karmaṇaḥ pratimāyāś ca cumbanam saṃkrāntakam āliṅganam ca.

not intervene afterwards. This is one of the many literary variations on the *Rāmāyaṇa*: Rāma has just left for exile, Daśaratha has died of grief and Bharata, Rāma's half brother, unaware of the situation, comes back to Ayodhyā after many years far from his family. At the gate of the city, his charioteer announces that they must wait for an auspicious moment to enter; Bharata then wanders around and stops by a shrine (*devakula*)—sometimes also called *pratimāgrha*, literally 'house of statues'—which has just been cleaned and decorated because the queens are supposed to come and visit it. He decides to step in and honour the deities housed in it:

Bharata: (*going forth a little and seeing*) Here are offerings, as shown by the flowers and fried grain, well arranged. The walls have marks of five fingers with sandal-paste impressed on them. The doors appear beautiful with the garlands hanging on them. And the sands have been scattered. Is this a special decoration belonging to a *parvan* or a daily performance? To what deity can this place belong? No external sign (of a deity) is seen here, such as a weapon or a flag. Well, I shall know it on entering it. (*Entering it and looking*) Oh, the attractiveness of the workmanship (exhibited on) the stones. How wonderful the life-likeness (lit., the expression of inward feelings on the faces) of the images! These statues, though meant to be of deities, convey the conviction that they are human (*aho bhāvagatir ākṛtīnām / daivato dṛṣṭānām api mānuṣaviśvāsātāsām pratimānām*). Can it be that this is a group of four deities? Or let them be whatever they are. There is certainly an ecstasy of joy in my mind (on seeing them).

I allow that it is proper to bend the head just thinking these to be (statues) of deities; but my salutation will be in the manner of Vṛṣala (*śūdra*) wherein the deity is worshipped without (the accompaniment of) mantras. (st. 6)

(*Entering the keeper of the temple*)

Keeper of the temple: Oh, while I was taking my food (lit., attending to the function of living being) after having finished my daily duties, who can, indeed, this be, possessing a form almost resembling (lit., differing very little from) the statues, that has entered the statue-house (*pratimānām alpāntarākṛtir iva pratimāgrhaṃ praviṣṭaḥ*)? (*Enters*)

B.: I offer my bow to you.

K.: Do not, do not make a bow.

B.: Let not this be!

Is there anything to be found fault with in us? Or is someone superior (to us) being awaited? To what is this prohibition due? Is it your power to enforce certain rules (to be observed here)? (st. 7)

K.: It is not for these reasons that I forbid your honour. But I prevent a man of the Brāhmaṇa class from saluting these, mistaken them for deities. For, these honoured ones are Kṣatriyas.

B.: Is it so? These are Kṣatriya personages. Now who can their honours be?

K.: They are Ikṣvākus.

B.: (*With joy*) You say 'Ikṣvākus'. These are those (famous) rulers of Ayodhyā.

These are those (kings) who march with the gods when they have to destroy the city of the demons; these are (the kings) who got to Indra's world with their subjects by virtue of their good deeds; these are the kings who brought under their sway the whole earth conquered by the prowess of their arms; these are the kings that were long spared (lit., not destroyed) by Death that had to seek their pleasure. (st. 8)

Oh by chance, indeed, did I come across this great object. (*Pointing to the first statue*) Tell me then who this honoured king is.

K.: This, indeed, is Dilipa, the first performer of the Viśvajit sacrifice requiring the best things of all kinds to be collected for it, who kept burning the lamp of righteousness.

B.: My bow to him ever devoted to Dharma. Tell me who this honoured one is.

K.: This is, very surely, Raghu, who, when sleeping and being roused from sleep, had the expressions—An auspicious day to you, well betide (long life to) you—addressed to him by several thousands of Brāhmaṇas.

B.: Ah! How powerful is Death that over-stepped this protection! My salutation be to him, the fruits of whose sovereignty were enjoyed (lit., known) by the Brāhmaṇas. Tell me now—who is this revered king?

K.: This is, indeed, king Aja, who cast off the responsibility of government through grief caused by the loss of his wife, and who had the effects of the quality of foulness washed off from him by his constant ablutions at the conclusion of sacrifices.

B.: My homage to him whose penitence was laudable. (*Looking at the statue of Daśaratha and being perturbed*) Oh, I did not comprehend very clearly (what you said) owing to my mind being wholly taken up by the high respect (I felt for these). Now tell me—Who is this personage?

K.: This is Dilipa.

B.: The great-grand father of the great king. The next one?

K.: His honour, Raghu.

B.: The grand-father of the great king. And this one?

K.: His honour, Aja.

B.: The father of my father. What, what did you say?

K.: This is Dilipa; this is Raghu and this Aja.

B.: I ask you something. Are the statues of living men set up? (*dharamānānam api pratimāḥ sthāpyante*)

K.: Not at all; only of those that have passed away.

B.: Then I take leave of you.

K.: Stay.

Why do you inquire about this statue of Daśaratha, by whom his life and kingdom were given up in satisfaction of the promised gift to his wife at marriage? (st. 9)

B.: Alas, my father! (*Falls down in a swoon; but coming to consciousness again*)

Heart, be you satisfied now; hear of that death of my father of which you had fears; but take courage. If this base talk about (the demand of) the promised marriage-gift has reference to me, and again it proves true (in the eyes of the people) then (in that case) my body will have to be purified (proved innocent) by an ordeal. (st. 10)

Noble sir,

K.: 'Noble sir' is indeed the way of addressing strangers peculiar to the Ikṣvāku race. May it be, I ask, that you are Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī?

B.: Yes, yes. I am the son of Daśaratha, not of Kaikeyī.³⁵

Even if the statues do not appear after this act, their importance as dramatic device cannot be stressed enough: they are, indeed, the climax of the play. Likeness, in a way, is one of the recurrent themes of the drama—hence the title.³⁶ When entering, the keeper of the temple is at once struck by the likeness between the young prince and the four statues (*pratimānāmalpāntarākṛtir iva*). The same occurs when, a few moments later, comes the minister Sumantra along with the three queens:

Sumantra: This is that house of our king now existing as a statue (*idaṃ grhaṃ tat pratimānpasya naḥ*), possessing height scarcely to be found in a mansion; it is visited without a salutation by travellers unrestrained and entering without being announced by door-keepers. (st. 14)

(*Entering and seeing*) Madams, you should not, indeed, enter, you should not. Here has fallen (on the ground) someone resembling the king when in his youth.

Keeper of the temple: Enough of taking him for a stranger; lift him up; for he is Bharata. (st. 15)

The Queens: (*Advancing in haste*) Ah, child Bharata!

Bharata: (*Recovering a little*) Noble one,

³⁵ Translation by M. R. Kale.

³⁶ See for instance the analysis of the play by Charles Malamoud, in Line Bansat-Boudon, dir., *Théâtre de l'Inde ancienne* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2006), 1193–1199.

Sumantra: Victory to the great! (*With this half-uttered, sorrowfully*) Oh, the resemblance of voice; I thought it was the great king in the image that was speaking (*manye pratimāsthō mahārājo vyāharatīti*).

It seems then to be obvious for everyone but Bharata, since this latter inquires about the identity of statues representing his own ancestors and, above all, his father. To solve this ambiguity, one could reply that Bharata has been brought up for years far from his family and that he has forgotten what they looked like—but, at the same time, he is able to recognize at once the minister Sumanta! On closer examination, this ignorance and this ambiguity may be once again dramatic devices used by the poet to create a gradation in the feelings of his character and, consequently, in those of the audience: this kind of suspense is in tune with the literary theory of *rasa*. As a matter of fact, Bharata knows unconsciously that the statue represents his father but he is unable to acknowledge it because of the implication that his father has just died.

Much more information can be gathered from the *Pratimānāṭaka* and I will go back to this text in the next chapter when dealing with portraiture and worship. It is enough for the moment to note that likeness was something that poets were sometimes willing to play with. The conclusion is then that it was an artistic reality and, at the same time, that it was not always compulsory. Thus the opposition between *viddha* and *aviddha* is relevant. But above I said that the translation of *viddha* by ‘resembling’ was maybe too narrow. Now, we have seen that the evocative value of portraiture was sometimes more important than the physiognomic likeness. From this point of view, it is noteworthy that the literal sense of *viddha* is ‘filled with’ or ‘imbued with something’, especially a feeling. Therefore, I would be keen to think that the opposition between *viddha* and *aviddha* is much more related to an actual reference to the portrayed person: the image which is *viddha* may be resembling but, much more, it refers to a specific person who is supposed to be physically present thanks to this image, whereas an *aviddha* image could be any kind of picture.

4. TYPOLOGICAL PORTRAITS

It is quite normal that literature was much less interested by *aviddha* images because, in the absence of a specific reference to an individual, their dramatic value was of course weak. However, I have stated

that many Indian portraits were not physiognomic portraits. Perhaps, the adjective *aviddha* would be irrelevant for them because, even un-resembling, these portraits nevertheless referred to someone specific. But, artistically speaking, they would be deemed as ‘typological’. As a matter of fact, most of the preserved early Indian portraits would fall within this category. Although they are much less mentioned in literature proper, they can be referred to in other kinds of texts.

A very important normative source for the art historians is the famous *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*.³⁷ The third book is very long, and only a few chapters are useful for our study: chapters 35 to 43, which are often designated as *Citrasūtra*, and, to a lesser extent, chapters 44 to 85 called *Pratimālakṣaṇa*. Contrary to what has sometimes be said, the opposition between those two parts has nothing to do with a distinction between painting on the one hand and sculpture on the other:³⁸ as a matter of fact, chapter 38, which deals with the flaws to be avoided, speaks of flat images as well as in the round and makes use of the word *pratimā* on several occasions; in 43.31–35, it is explicitly stated that the rules governing painting apply also to sculpture, whatever medium is employed.³⁹ The *Citrasūtra* is thus concerned with iconometry and,

³⁷ The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* has sometimes been dated from the fifth century. However, the first genuine quotation from its third book (*khaṇḍa*)—the only one of interest for our purpose—is to be found in the *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* by Hemādri (1260–1309) (*Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, ed. Mukherji, xxxii). The text is then to be dated between the fifth and the thirteenth century. However there is a general agreement that the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* was composed prior to al-Bīrūnī (around 1000) and the description of some icons of Viṣṇu in chapter 44 of the third book is quite in tune with statues made in Kashmir between the sixth and the ninth century (Pratapaditya Pal, “A Brāhmanical Triad from Kashmir and Some Related Icons”, *Archives of Asian Art* 27 [1973–1974], 33–45 and “Dhanada-Kubera of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and Some Images from North-West India”, *Lalit Kalā* 18 [1977], 13–26). Since the *Brhat Saṃhitā*—which is one of its sources (Bruno Dagens, *Traité, temples et images du monde indien: études d’histoire et d’archéologie*, Articles rassemblés par Marie-Luce Barazer-Billoret et Vincent Lefèvre [Paris-Pondicherry: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2005] 81)—is well dated from the sixth century, the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* could be placed in the seventh or even eighth century.

³⁸ *Contra*, for instance, Stella Kramrisch, *Viṣṇudharmottara, Part III: A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image-making* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1928) and Calambur Sivaramamurti, *The Citrasūtra of the Vishnudharmottara* (New Delhi, 1978).

³⁹ *yathā citre tathaivoktaṃ khātāpūrte narādhipa / suvarṇarupyatāmrādi tacca loheṣu darśayet // śilādāruṣu loheṣu pratimākaraṇaṃ bhavet / anenaiva vidhānena yathā citraṃ udāhṛtaṃ // tathānena vidhānena purastakarma vidhiyate / dvidvidhaṃ tacca kathitaṃ ghaṇaṃ suśiraṃ eva ca // ghaṇair lohair śilābhiḥ ca dārumṛdbhiḥ sadā bhavet / carmaṇā suśiraḥ kāryo dārulohais tathaiva ca // deḃā mṛtikayā lepaḥ puste carmakṛte dṛdhaṃ / sūtre’nena vidhānena citravastre tathā likhet //*

at the same time, presents some general rules regarding the images, in a more or less secular perspective, whereas the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* is dedicated to iconography, in a more religious context. Once again, we could see a slight nuance in the use of the terms: indeed, *citra* seems to designate any kind of image and, more precisely, an image as a physical object, whereas *pratimā* is much more a 'personified' image, that is an image imbued with the personality (or the essence) of its model (be it a god or a human being). In the following pages, I will limit the study to the *Citrasūtra*.

As in the more ancient *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*,⁴⁰ the division of men into five categories is to be found according to a system based not on physiognomic but on iconometric rules:

There are five (types of) men to be known: *Haṃsa*, *Bhadra*, *Mālavya*, *Rucaka* and *Śaśaka*. I shall tell you the distinguishing features of (each of) them. Know that they all are equal in height and width (individually) according to the (given) proportion. O king, the height of the *Haṃsa* should be equal to 108 times his own digit. A *Bhadra* is 106 digits in height and *Mālavya* should be 104 digits. The height of a *Rucaka* man is 100 digits, and of a *Śaśaka* man 92. A *tāla* ought to equal 12 digits in extension.⁴¹

The chapter goes on giving the details for the proportions of the *Haṃsa* type, which is applicable for kings and gods and is the model for the other types. The other types are described mainly in chapter 42, where we find a mixture of divine and human beings belonging to every part of the society. *Rṣi*, *gandharva*, *daitya*, *dānava*, *vidyādhara*, ministers (*mantrin*), astrologers (*sāṃvatsara*), priests (*purohita*) and brāhmins are to be depicted according to the *Bhadra* mode (42.2–3ab and 9ab); the human beings in this list can be adorned but without excess (42.7). *Kinnara*, *nāga*, *rākṣasa* are made in the *Mālavya* mode (42.10), *yakṣa* in the *Rucaka* one and the 'secondary' men (*apradhānam mānavam*) in the *Śaśaka* one (42.11). The *piśāca*, the crippled and the like are not supposed to respect those rules of proportion (42.12). Not surpris-

⁴⁰ See Chapter 5, § 1.1.

⁴¹ *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (3.35.8–11): *haṃso bhadro'tha mālavyo rucakaḥ śaśakas tathā / vijñayāḥ puruṣāḥ pañca teṣāṃ vakṣyāmi lakṣaṇam // ucchrāyāyāmatulyāste sarve jñeyāḥ pramānataḥ / svenaivāṅgulamānena śatamaṣṭadhikaṃ bhavet // pramāṇam nrpa haṃsasya bhadrasya tu ṣaḍuttaram / caturbhiradhikaṃ jñeyam mālavasya tathā nrpa // śataṃ ca rucakasyoktamaṣṭonam śaśakasya ca / dvādaśāṅgulavistāras tālam ity abhidhīyate //*

ingly, the wives of all these categories of beings are to be depicted in the same mode as their husbands (42.13a).⁴²

From verse 24 on, the chapter then concentrates on different social categories. The courtesans (*veśya*) are depicted in the *Rucaka* mode (42.24cd), whereas the women from the nobility, dressed more modestly, are in the *Mālavya* mode (42.25); the widows are grey-haired and clothed in white dress, without any ornament; the noble women must be accompanied by a hunch-backed girl, a dwarf and an ugly woman, as well as an old chamberlain (42.29–30). The *vaiśyas* are in the *Rucaka* mode and the *śūdras* in the *Śaśaka* one; the text insists on the fact that the proportions depend on the caste: *yathājāty anurupeṇa rūpeṇa manujeśvara* (42.31cd). The army is then mentioned: the commander (*senāpati*), with an arrogant and mighty look, the warriors and foot-soldiers, the elephant-riders, the horsemen, the bards and the staff-holders (42.34–41). Next, it is the turn of the door-keepers (*pratihāra*) who are not too ostentatious (42.42), the merchants (*vaṇija*), with turbans, the musicians and dancers, dressed in flamboyant clothes and depicted with their musical instruments (42.43–44). The prominent citizens, in white dress, must be humble and pleasant at the same time (42.45). Lastly, the text describes the labourers and the wrestlers before going on with the animal world and the landscapes (especially the personified rivers). Finally, one must add that the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* might mention self-portraits (43.17ab), with the precision that they should not be displayed in the house of those who have made them⁴³—a curious point which remains unexplained.⁴⁴

The whole passage leaps somewhat from one subject to another, but it appears clearly that every level of society can be depicted in painting or sculpture. All these images are a mixture of naturalism and conventional idealization. Indeed the five categories of men and the proportion system attached to this repartition are a means to preserve

⁴² There is a little inconsistency because it is stated in 42.26cd–27ab that the wives of the *daityas* and *dānavas* are to be made in the *Mālavya* mode, whereas their masculine counterparts are supposed to belong to the *Bhadra* type.

⁴³ *citrakarma na kartavyam ātmanaḥ svagrhe nrpa /*

The reading is to be found in several manuscripts but, before P. D. Mukherji's critical edition, everybody had read *ātmana* and understood more or less that in one's house the work of painting should not be done by oneself; see *Citrāsūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, ed. Mukherji, 262–263.

⁴⁴ P. D. Mukherji (*ibid.*) thinks a magical association could be attached to such image, but this explanation remains vague.

in the arts the hierarchy inherent to the Indian society. Moreover, a lot of details (colours of the dress, retinues of the depicted persons, poses and attitudes) indicate that these images or portraits are stereotyped—one could even use the word *cliché*. But, from this perspective, the Indian world does not differ notably from the age-old habit in Europe to depict an artist or a bourgeois in one way and an aristocrat in another.

This long list does not concern especially portraits but, conversely, they could be comprised in it. Besides, the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* is here taken only as an example—though such extant description is not so frequent in Indian normative treatises. It should not, then, be taken as the source for the typological portraits that can be found here and there but as an indication that such images/portraits were taken into consideration in the texts dealing with image-making. Be it as it may, it is obvious that most of the portraits mentioned in the previous chapter more or less correspond with such kind of description.

5. PORTRAITURE AS SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL MARKER

Even more than the physiognomic ones, typological portraits underline the social value of the 'genre'. Literary examples recall well how a portrait, more than any other work of art, can act as a social instrument. First, a portrait (and in particular a painted one) is an ideal subject for an exchange. This gift can be done in a sentimental or emotional way, or as a token of friendship, or—and this is the aspect that is most common in literature—a pledge of love. In sum, the portrait fully fulfils its function as a substitute which, if it does not fully replace a person, re-enacts his or her memory. At the same time—but it is not inconsistent with a sentimental value—the portrait may be a more diplomatic object: we naturally think that marriages can be arranged and concluded through such work of art.

Furthermore, this type of image is one of the most effective ways to display the social status of the portrayed persons. To begin with, even if it is possible to discern in some cases a certain individualisation of features, the very existence of a portrait seems to be related to the wish for the patron to show above all that he can afford to commission a work of art—which requires some wealth. Then it is quite remarkable that despite the smallness of many of these portraits, the emphasis is often placed on the marks of status, as the sacred cord when the sitter

is a Brahmin, or more generally on the rich costumes and jewellery. In other words, the picture is here to show that the portrayed person is someone important. For instance, the entrance of the cave at Karle is flanked by couples (Fig. 31) who are often conveniently identified as simple *mithuna* but who may be representations of donors:⁴⁵ the features are not individualized but all the pairs have been differentiated by the attitudes and even more by the variety of the costumes, the hairdos, the ornaments. The bronzes of Kashmir or, to be more precise, the Gilgit ones, as we have seen before, often show small donors on the pedestal: most of them are dressed with all the attires of the Paṭola Śāhi kings and Tocharian nobles. I have already introduced the famous bronze donated by Nandivikramāditya Nandi in year 90 (AD 714/5). The Buddha from the Norton Simon Museum is rightly famous for its superlative quality and has been published several times.⁴⁶ The Buddha is flanked by two bodhisattvas and on the base a couple is playing flute; besides four characters appear as devotees: to the left of the Buddha there is a young male holding a string instrument, attended by a bearded man offering a wreath; opposite kneels a beautifully adorned lady holding a pot followed by a monk. Though he has recently tried to interpret the group as a mythological one (not very convincingly, to my point of view), P. Pal has first proposed a connection with King Jayapida who, according to the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, was a renowned musician. Since identified donors are very frequent on Gilgit bronzes, I think that this interpretation is quite likely. Another donative inscription—especially studied by O. von Hinüber⁴⁷—by Jayamaṅgalavikramāditya Nandi, dated year 82 (AD 706/7) mentions ten princesses or king's daughters (*rājaduhitā*). Two of them are of interest for us because of their donations and their subsequent portrayals. Namovuddhā married Nandivikramāditya Nandi and thus became second queen (*śāmadevī*), while her sister Devaśrī was a bit less fortunate and married only the treasurer Saṃkaraseṇa. Devaśrī and Saṃkaraseṇa are the donors of the famous Buddha between two *stūpas* purchased by John D. Rockefeller

⁴⁵ Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 62.

⁴⁶ E.g. Pratapaditya Pal, *Bronzes of Kashmir*, no. 22 and *Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum, volume 2: Art from the Himalayas and China* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2003), 30–33, no. 2; Fussman, “Chilas, Hatun”, pls. 35, 37, 38 and 39.

⁴⁷ Oskar von Hinüber, “Bronzes from Gilgit and Their Inscriptions”, in *South Asian Archaeology 2001*, 525–530.

3rd and now kept at the Asia Society, New York.⁴⁸ Nandivikramāditya Nandi donated another bronze in year 91 (AD 715/6), now part of the Prtizker Collection:⁴⁹ the king is represented to the right of the Buddha, along with the kneeling Namovuddhā, while an official, the *kalyāṇamitra* Vikhyātarakṣita, is on the left. Without going into too much detail, it is interesting to note the differences in the depictions of the royal couple and of the official one; this is even more obvious since the two females were sisters: the sculptors have cautiously taken into consideration the differences in rank. The same kind of considerations could be made about the donors carved on the walls of the Tamil temple in the tenth century.⁵⁰ But examples are in fact innumerable.

Ultimately, if anything, representation of a social type often prevails on realism and individualism of traits. This is quite consistent with the long description in chapter 42 of the *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, mentioned above: not only the different types of characters must be represented according to a hierarchical classification but clothing and other accessories are described in order to be immediately able to identify who we are dealing with. In sum, they are mostly stereotypes—and we understand why the term ‘portrait’ about these images is sometimes questioned by some authors. In this regard we can note that, though only the rich were probably able to commission portraits, there was not—at least to the best of my knowledge—any prohibition, denying any social class an access to portraiture.

Even stereotypical or idealized, these images relate to an individual who cares to leave his name to posterity. The fact is notable in a civilization that was sometimes denied the sense of history. On the contrary, portraiture is demonstrating a true sense of history because we see a number of people—who could indeed afford it—inscribing their personality over time by means of an image. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the process is not very different from that which consists in engraving an inscription to commemorate a donation or an important act. In this regard, the impact of the portrait was perhaps even stronger in that, the majority of the population being illiterate, it was more accessible. Because of the importance of the transmission of a

⁴⁸ Numerous publications, e.g. Pratapaditya Pal *et al.*, *The Arts of Kashmir* (New York-Milan: Asia Society, 5 Continents Editions, 2007), fig. 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fig. 44.

⁵⁰ See Kaimal, “The Problem of Portraiture in South India”.

name and social status, the veracity of the traits of the person—besides nowadays virtually unverifiable—was not the only aspect sought.

The historical dimension of portraiture can also be illustrated in Cambodia with the famous case of the supposed representation of Queen Rājendradevī as Devī from the Lolei temple. This image, referred to in epigraphy, follows the stylistic characteristics of the late ninth century, but in a quite clumsy way, which led A. Le Bonheur to assume that the portrait has been redone in the twelfth century, in an attempt to preserve the appearance of the original.⁵¹ It is therefore clear evidence that the inclusion of work in a given period made sense.

There is no need to stress too much: even more than to display external signs of wealth, it is this ability to place a person in history that makes the portrait a powerful instrument of social prestige. But as so often in the Indian and Indianized world, the individual is not isolated but is part of a family or group and therefore it is often as well the lineage as the individual that is exalted through portraiture. It is true that many of the portraits that have survived are in fact small figures represented as devotees at the feet of deity. It is thus—like the foundation inscription—a way to perpetuate the gift and the act of devotion, the initial vow being thus somehow frozen for eternity.⁵² But, as I said above, it would be artificial to oppose religious sentiment to social affirmation. The two may well go hand in hand.

⁵¹ Dalsheimer, *L'art du Cambodge ancien*, 154–155.

⁵² Schopen, “What’s in a Name”.

CHAPTER THREE

PORTRAITS, WORSHIP AND DIVINE IMAGES

In the preceding pages, we have seen that early Indian portraits share a lot of features with images in general, and representations of deities in particular. Besides, among the preserved portraits, a vast majority is still in temples, or at least comes from them; many of them are also linked, in one way or another, to divine images. All this raises a lot of tricky questions: had the commemorative value of portraits, as we have observed it on a social angle in the previous chapter, also a religious perspective? If so, had it anything to do with death and ancestor worship? On the whole, did portraits receive some kind of cult? This is what I will try to examine in this chapter.

1. PORTRAITS, COMMEMORATION AND DEATH

I have already mentioned one of the first clearly attested example of commemorative portraits: Nanaghat. Let me just remind that only the feet of the seven characters carved on the wall of the cave remain today, but we know their identity: Śimukā, founder of the Sātavāhana dynasty, Śiri Sātakarṇi, probably the second king of the lineage, Nāganikā, his widow and patron of the monument, three Sātavāhana princes and one of their vassals and father of Nāganikā. For J. Rosenfield, the ‘sanctuary’ was one of the oldest examples of portraits in India and could have served as a prototype for other sanctuaries, such as Māṭ. However, he explains the existence of these images by the links (both commercial and political) between the Sātavāhanas and the Iranian or Iranized Kṣatrapas. There is no doubt that such links existed, but once again, without rejecting the possibility of artistic influences—which in this case are not demonstrated—it is very likely that we are facing a position of principle.

Besides, this cave has sometimes been brought together with the shrine in which the third act of the *Pratimānāṭaka* takes place; it has also been compared with the *devakulas* at Māṭ and Surkh Kotal. However, Giovanni Verardi has made his point that all these connections were not always consistent, since at Māṭ and Surkh Kotal the royal

statues were installed in a temple dedicated to a deity (or deities) and were probably considered as attendants, whereas Nanaghat may not have been a cult place at all but, instead, a place excavated by the Sātavāhanas in order to exalt their dynasty while offering a resting dwelling to the travellers.¹

All we can say is that Nanaghat's originality lies more in the fact that, to date, it seems to be the oldest example of a gallery of family portraits, in a monument the function of which remains, for the rest, quite mysterious. The commemorative value is obvious but the living (Nāganikā, at least) and the dead (Śimukā and Śiri Sātakarni, for instance) are on an equal footing. In other words, it does not indicate that commemorative portraiture was always associated with the after-life.

The repeatedly used example of Bhāsa's *Pratimānāṭaka*—the date of which is relatively early (if compared with the first preserved images)—has undoubtedly helped to reinforce the idea that portraits are necessarily posthumous. However, the idea was based solely on this text in which, as already noted, it is not expressly said that portraits of living people should not be made. It is also noteworthy that Bharata himself questions the idea. Anyway, this play demonstrates the existence of commemorative portraits and, a few centuries after, we find the same in the *Raghuvamśa* by Kālidāsa:

Rāma, who was a treasury of affection, distributed houses provided with suitable furniture to his friends; then, with tears in his eyes, he entered the house which contained the offerings for his father, his father who remained only as a picture!²

Another example of a portrait which is at the same time sort of divine image can be found in the Tamil epic by Ilāṅkōvaṭikal, the *Cilāppadikaram* (*The Tale of the Anklet*, third-fourth century). In the third book, after having burnt Madurai to avenge her husband's death, Kannaki flees to the mountains; she last appears to a group of country girls then ascends to heaven and becomes goddess of Fidelity. Immediately, the villagers start addressing a cult to her; but this new worship is rapidly adopted and somewhat appropriated by the Cēra king who orders the quest of a stone in the Himalaya to have an image of the

¹ Verardi, "The Kuṣāṇa Emperors as Cakravartins", 230–232 and 244–250.

² 14.15: *veśmāni rāmaḥ paribarhavantī viśrāṇya sauhārdhanidhiḥ suhṛdbyaḥ / bāṣpāyamāṇo balimanniketam ālekhyasēśasya pitur viveśa //*

new goddess carved. This image is thus, without any doubt, a cult and a divine image; but, since the model is at first a mortal and since the testimony of the villagers who have seen the living Kannaki is taken into consideration, we can surmise that this statue can also be deemed as portrait. So, the *Cilāppadikaram* testifies to the fact that a link can exist between the statue of a goddess and a portrait and shows, in an accelerated way, a process of apotheosis of a hero or a heroine.

This Tamil epic can be compared with a particular form of commemorating art especially popular in the south of the Indian sub-continent: the *virakkal* or 'hero-stones' (Fig. 32).³ These stones mark, through inscriptions and one or more bas-reliefs, the death in combat of a warrior or the sacrifice of a widow. Usually there is either a representation of the deceased, several scenes referring to the circumstances of death, the arrival of the deceased in heaven and ceremonies undertaken by his family. It is therefore clearly a form of portraiture, both individual and familial.

Such practice has sometimes been linked with megalithic cultures, but it has been shown that these links are rather doubtful, since there is a significant time gap and since the two categories of sites are quite distinct.⁴ In the Tamil country, one could find a few echoes of this practice in the Saṅgam poetry but, in general, archaeology cannot locate any such commemorative slabs (which are a representation of the deceased) before the start of the our era.⁵ In fact, according to D. R. Patil, the main source for these commemorative pillars, out of some practices attested in the Veda, is essentially the relic worship in Buddhism. It is true that many older examples come from the major Buddhist sites from the Andhra coast.

In Southeast Asia many examples of posthumous portraits are to be found. Thus, one frequently finds in Cambodia the expression *Kanlon Kamraten Añ* which obviously refers to a deceased queen. For

³ On the hero-stones in general, see Settar, S. and Gunther D. Sontheimer eds., *Memorial Stones, A Study of their Origin, Significance and Variety* (Dharwar: Institute of Indian Art History, Karnatak University and Heidelberg: South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, 1982). Hero-stones are also attested in Northern India, up to Rajasthan, as soon as the Gupta period, but the phenomenon seems to be much more important in the South.

⁴ D. R. Patil, "The Origin of Memorial Stone", in Settar and Sontheimer, *Memorial Stones*, 47–58.

⁵ K. V. Soundara Rajan, "Origin and Spread of Memorial Stones in Tamil-Nadu", in Settar and Sontheimer, *Memorial Stones*, 59–76. Besides, all the most ancient known examples are located on the fringes of the Tamil country and the Mysore plateau.

example, in Phnom Kañva four texts (K. 231; *IC*, III, 72–75), dating from around 965, relate to a *Kanloñ K.A. Rājaguha*, ‘the dead queen in the royal cave’, probably a kind of burial.⁶ The same term is applied to the mother of Jayavarman VII, Cūḍāmaṇi, for example in an inscription from Bantay Chmar (K. 226; *IC*, III, 70–71); we also know that the queen had been represented at Ta Prohm in the garb of Prajñāpāramitā. One could also cite an inscription from the Bapuon temple (K. 967; *IC*, VII) which evokes the posthumous image of king Rājendravarman ‘who went to Śivaloka’: *vraḥ rūpa vraḥ pāda kamraten añ ta stac dau śivaloka*.

To sum up, it is extremely common to find references to images of distant ancestors, who are more or less lost in legend and who tend to be deified or, more simply, of recently deceased relatives. However, the history of portraits in India and Southeast Asia cannot be limited to these posthumous images. Moreover, in the technical treatises, there is no particular indication that these images must be made *post mortem*. In chapter 52 of *Dīptāgama*, a verse—corrupt enough, it is true—even seems to consider both possibilities: the production of a statue of the king during his lifetime or after his death.⁷ Likewise, in a Jain context, one sometimes finds images of religious teachers deemed in epigraphy as *jīvantasvāmī*, that is ‘image of the living lord’—usually, as we will see later (chapter 4), this term applies to an image of a Jina before he becomes a monk, but here it is evidently used for a portrait made in the lifetime of its model.⁸

Therefore, we might think that the portraits of living characters belong to a secular context, while the posthumous portraits are more religious. This is not so, as the *Dīptāgama* seems to indicate. Epigraphy also demonstrates that. Here are three examples from Tamil Nadu. Thus, at Kurur, a certain Maḍamuḍaiyār-Varaguṇa-toṇḍar built all or part of the temple and is represented as a praying figure over the inscription recording his gift (*ARE*, 298 of 1917). At Tiruvarur, in 1128, a Brahmin from Tirumarugal offers a perpetual lamp, the foot of which is in his likeness, to the temple (*ARE*, 509 of 1922). Finally, at the temple of Rājarājeśvara in Tanjavur, Ādittan Sūryan, governor

⁶ This interpretation remains nonetheless hypothetical.

⁷ *Dīptāgama* 52.31cd–32: *jītir vairajitir vāpi nṛpaberaṃ sukārayet/ sahaśakti-samāyukta(ṃ) vajiti jīva tu vā/ nṛpāṇāṃ maraṇakāle striyaś ca maraṇaṃ vinā/* See also vol. II of the critical edition, p. 554.

⁸ See Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 23, fn. 14.

of Poygai-nāḍu and administrator of the temple, offered before 1014 (*i.e.* before the end of the reign of Rājarāja I) a group of bronzes representing the four main Nāyanmār along with the king and his principal wife (*SII*, II, 38).

At most one might say that the posthumous function of portraiture seems clearer in Southeast Asia than in the Indian subcontinent. But this impression may be the result of the sources at our disposal. Let us indeed remember that Southeast Asian epigraphy comes mainly from a religious context, whereas literary evidence is late. Besides, portraits of Jayavarman VII, which were almost certainly set up in his lifetime, are there to tell us it is by no means an absolute rule.

Now the question that remains is to know what the real intention behind the ‘commemorative’ function of portraiture was. Again, the answer might differ according to the context. I can nevertheless propose, in a schematic way, the following explanation. First, set up in a temple, a portrait embodies a sort of perpetual devotion; this is a kind of ever-lasting homage. For instance, at Menal, in Rajasthan, there is a portrait (*svamūrti*) of the Cāhamāna prince Meghanāda installed in the Mahānāleśvara temple; the inscription (*EI*, xxxvii, part iv) dated from Vikrama 1312 (AD 1255) states that “Megha Cāhamāna, the virtuous warrior, perpetually worships Blessed Śiva of Mahānāla, by means of his own portrait for the increase of his own life span, progeny, fortune, happiness and fame” (*śrīman mahānāla śivāya tadguṇaḥ sacchāhumānaḥ subhataśca meghaḥ / āyuhṣutaśrīśukhakīrtivṛddhyai nityaṁ svamūrtiṁ sa namaskaroti*).⁹ Linked to the perpetual devotion there is thus another idea, that of the acquisition of merit (*punya*) earned through the setting up of such kind of portrait, either by the model of the image or another person. To mention another example from West India, there is a twelfth century inscription (*EI*, xli, 58–60) which indicates that the Gahadavala queen Kelachchadevī was dissuaded to commit *satī* after the demise of her husband and, instead, commissioned a Śiva temple “for the increased merit and fame of king Pṛthivīdeva who had gone to heaven” (*svargāya ya(yā) tasya vai pṛthivīdevanṛpasya puṇyayaśasorvṛddhyai*); there, she installed her own portrait along with that of the king described as “oozing the nectar of the gods” (*devāmṛtasyandinīm*). Obviously, the merit earned through the construction of the temple and the setting up of the portraits was

⁹ Quoted in Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 45.

a way to secure the immortality (*amṛta*) of the king and, perhaps also, of the queen.¹⁰ Logically, the acquisition of merit leads to the final purpose of commemorative portraiture: to secure a better rebirth or even a good place in heaven.¹¹

2. PORTRAITURE AND FUNERARY AND/OR DYNASTIC TEMPLES

Images of deceased persons set up in temples are then undoubtedly an important aspect of portraiture in India. Therefore, it is necessary to inquire further to know if there was a sort of ancestor worship or, more generally, if any kind of cult was offered to these portraits—or, more exactly to these portrayed persons. As often, a straightforward answer to the question is not evident; but some study cases can help us reach some explanations.

2.1. *The Pratimānāṭaka*

In the preceding chapter, I have introduced the famous *Pratimānāṭaka* mostly in relationship with the likeness issue (and its ambiguity). It is now time to examine another feature of this famous—but intriguing—text: the funerary worship of the statues.

As a matter of fact, a certain ambiguity seems to be attached also to the function of the shrine called *devakula*. Even if all the characters seem to know what the monument is and are not too much surprised—Sumanta nevertheless has to explain to the queens that this is the ‘house of the deceased king now living as a statue’, as if it was not that usual—Bharata is fully ignorant of this type of shrine (once more, we may wonder whether this ignorance does not fulfill the poet’s intention). The cult offered to the statues is also problematic. Yet, it is said that they receive some offerings (*bali*), which is in accordance with the *śraddha* rites—but nothing more is added. Besides, it is not clear whether the images could be done while the models were alive: Bharata asks the question, which means that that would not shock him. Besides, as Charles Malamoud remarked, only sixteen days have elapsed since Daśaratha’s demise and it seems to be too short a span of time for the carving of the statue, even if this materialistic remark

¹⁰ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

may not be totally relevant in the context of a theatre play. Be it as it may, the keeper's answer is negative (which, incidentally, serves the dramatic intention of the playwright). Therefore, it would be in contradiction with the Kuṣāṇa and Sātavāhana portraits which, at least for some of them, had been made during the life-time of the portrayed kings. The only thing that seems to be sure is that the *Pratimānāṭaka* does not formally forbid the making of portrait of living persons. In fact, even if this play is indeed an important testimony, its aim is above all dramatic and poetic and the statues are, once more, used as devices: that should warn us to be a bit careful in comparing this text with archaeological remains; the connection may exist to some extent, but it is not Bhāsa's purpose to give a minute description of real monuments.

All we can gather on the worship in this play is that the Brahmins are not supposed to bow in front of portraits of *kṣatriyas*.¹² As for the *Raghuvamśa*, it simply says, about the same sanctuary, that one should bring offerings (*bali*) in it. Likewise, in a Jain context, Haribhadra (seventh century) says in his *Yogabindu* (100–115) that one should honour one's parents, relatives and religious teachers upon their death by temple worship on their behalf or in their homes, by setting up their portraits and worshipping them—but it could also be understood: by worshipping images sponsored by them—or by performing their funeral rites.¹³ This leads us to address the issue of portraits seemingly related to funerary rites and/or monuments and, then, to question the role of these images in a temple according to archaeological facts.

2.2. Kuṣāṇa dynastic shrines

If the *Pratimānāṭaka* has been so often compared with some actual temples, especially from the Kuṣāṇa period, it is because the word *devakula* is to be found also in epigraphical records from these shrines. As a matter of fact, dynastic shrines, or at least monuments comparable to the temple dedicated to Rāma's ancestors, are known at the beginning of our era: Māṭ and Surkh Kotal, to which we should add one, known only

¹² Act III, after strophe 7: *kintu daivataśaṅkayā brāhmaṇajanasya praṇāmaṃ pariharāmi / kṣatriyā hy atra bhavantaḥ* /.

¹³ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 24.

by an inscription, at Rabatak.¹⁴ The first two seem at first to be quite well known, but they pose many problems. The Māt monument was poorly excavated in 1911–1912 and publication does little clarification. All we can say is that the main building, open to the east, was 30 m long by 18 m wide; at the northwest end was a circular structure that was to form the cella, while the royal portraits were found in the southeast, perhaps in what was a secondary chapel. According to the inscription, the temple, called *devakula*, was built under Vima Kadphises and was restored by the time of Huviška. In fact, the comparison with temple A at Surkh Kotal is necessary to understand the monument of Māt.¹⁵ At Surkh Kotal, therefore, in Bactria, temple A was on the acropolis; open also to the east, it rested on a podium measuring 47 m by 40; the cella was surrounded on three sides (north, west and south) by a corridor which was blocked shortly after the construction of the monument, which seems to have occurred at the beginning of the reign of Kaniška or even in the last years of Vima Kadphises. After a few years, the cult was interrupted and, in 31 of the Kaniška era, during the reign of Huviška, general Nokonzok, according to the inscription SK 4, undertook the renovation. The abandonment of the sanctuary seems to have occurred between year 80 and 120 of the Kaniška era. After the great fire that ravaged Surkh Kotal on an unknown date (between AD 250 and 300?), the temple was partly re-used for a Śaiva cult. Like at Māt, it appears that the three royal statues originally stood in the southeastern part of the temple. Inscription SK 4, in Tokharian, said that the monument was a *bago-laŋgo*, which seems to correspond to the Sanskrit *devakula*, and is called ‘Temple of Kaniška’, but it was dedicated to the goddess Wanind; it also refers to the presence of gods who had to be relocated for a time, because of a lack of pure water for the cult—which is likely to correspond to the repairs of the year 31.¹⁶

¹⁴ On the Rabatak inscription, see Nicholas Sims-Williams and Joe Cribb, “A New Bactrian Inscription of Kanishka the Great”, *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 4 (1995/96): 75–142, and Gérard Fussman, “L’inscription de Rabatak et l’origine de l’ère śaka”, *Journal Asiatique* 286.2 (1998), 571–651.

¹⁵ On Surkh Kotal, see Daniel Schlumberger, Marc Le Berre et Gérard Fussman, *Surkh Kotal en Bactriane, volume I. Les temples: Architecture, sculpture, inscriptions* (Paris: De Boccard, 1983) and, for a comparison between Surkh Kotal and Māt, Gérard Fussman, “The Māt *devakula*: A New Approach to Its Understanding”, in Srinivasan, *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, 93–199.

¹⁶ For the reading of this inscription, I follow the French translation proposed in Gérard Lazard, Frantz Grenet et Charles de Lamberterie, “Notes bactriennes”, *Studia Iranica* 13.2 (1984), 199–232.

The comparison of Surkh Kotal with the Rabatak inscription suggests that it describes the consecration and renovation of a very similar temple (also called *bago-laṅgo*), dedicated to several major Iranian¹⁷ gods and where were probably statues representing Kaniška and several of his ancestors. It is therefore possible that Kaniška did build, directly or indirectly, a number of shrines bearing his name and where he housed royal portraits. If Māt was perhaps Śaiva, Surkh Kotal and Rabatak seem to have been dedicated to more Iranian beliefs: even if it is not fully established that they were Fire temples, it is possible to detect by different places traces of syncretism; at least there is no reason to oppose Indian and Iranian religions: Kuṣāṇa rulers seem to have adapted to the local context. It is important to note that the portraits, although of a large size, were placed in a subordinate position in relation to images of gods which, if they have now disappeared, were nonetheless the only object of worship mentioned in the inscription. These inscriptions show that the gods referred to are those whom Kaniška felt he held his power from, hence his title of ‘son of the gods’ (Sk. *devaputra*; Tokharian *bagopooro*). However, this term does not denote divinization as such, and less so a cult. The presence of portraits in the temples, whose dynastic role is clear, therefore, was aimed at reflecting the personal and familial worship of the sovereign, offering thanks to his election gods for the power he had received from them; at the same time, the presence of statues of his ancestors showed direct dynastic legitimacy.

The notion of dynastic art applied to the Kuṣāṇas has been challenged, especially by G. Verardi. On the contrary, the recent discovery of the inscription of Rabatak tends to reinforce this interpretation. However, Verardi’s suggestion that the portraits of the Kuṣāṇa rulers reflected the purely Indian conception of Cakravartin merits consideration.¹⁸ But, once again, there is actually no reason to oppose this Indian approach to Iranian concepts: to say nothing of common (but remote) origins, we may think that traditions are joined on these modes of representations of the royal figure and their relationships with the gods.

¹⁷ But two Indian deities seem to be mentioned too.

¹⁸ Verardi, “The Kuṣāṇa Emperors as Cakravartins”, 250–275.

2.3. South Indian 'funerary' temples¹⁹

Is it possible to see other similar examples in a 'purely Indian' context? Actually, in Indian studies, one finds the expression 'dynastic temple' quite often applied to a number of shrines. Often it is simply a way to characterize the political and royal origin of any foundation, as the Rājārāṣeśvara temple in Tanjavur, for example. One sometimes speaks of 'funerary' temples, known in Tamil country under the title *paḷḷipaṭai*. Because this 'funerary' aspect has of course a lot of bearing on the interpretation we can make of portraiture, it may be useful to discuss this issue a little. As a matter of fact, it seems that the term *paḷḷipaṭai* appears much less often in epigraphy than in the twentieth century studies! To the best of our knowledge, it can be found in the following examples:

Place	Name of temple	Name of the patron	Name of the honoured person	Origin of the identification
Cholapuram (ex. Kāṭṭuttumbūr, near Vellore)	Śiva	Rājāditya, of the Western Gaṅga dynasty	Prthivigaṅgaraiyar, father of Rājāditya	<i>EI</i> , VII, no 26A
Tondaimanad	Kodaṇḍarāmeśvara or Ādityeśvara	Parāntaka I	Kodaṇḍarāma <i>alias</i> Āditya I	<i>SII</i> , VII, 529
Tenneri	Uttama Cōḷiśvara (today Kandaliśvara)	Śembiyaṇ Mahādevī or Rājārāja I	Uttama Cōḷa	<i>ARE</i> , 198 of 1901
Melpadi	Ariṇṇigai Īśvarar (today Cōḷeśvara)	Rājārāja I	Ariṇṇaya, son of Parāntaka I and grand-father of Rājārāja	<i>SII</i> , III, part I, 15, 16 and 17
Ramanatha Koyil	Pañcavanmade-viśvaram	Rājendra I?	Pañcavan Mahādevī, step-mother of the king	<i>ARE</i> , 271 of 1927

The earliest occurrence of this type of temple, at least according to the inscriptions, is the Cholapuram temple, in the ninth century, built

¹⁹ This whole development is based on one of our previous studies; see Lefèvre, *Commanditaires et artistes*, 288–293.

near the resting place of the father of the donor. All other examples where this designation is clearly attested are royal Cōla foundations and all but one (but the case is unique, as we will see) date from the tenth century. Each is designed to commemorate a direct ancestor of the founder. Tondaimanad temple was built by Parāntaka I in honour of his father Āditya I who seems to have died in this place (*ARE*, 230 of 1903). Tenneri temple was built before the 10th year of Rājārāja in honour of Uttama Cōla, but the inscription does not state precisely whether the king is the founder or if the monument is due to the patronage of Queen Śembiyaṇ Mahādevī. However, it is certain that Rājārāja had a *paḷḷipaṭai* built in honour of his grandfather Ariṇjaya, who died in Arrur. The last example, at Ramanatha Koyil, is atypical in that the temple does not commemorate the death of a king (who died in battle?) but of a queen. This is the latest occurrence and an attempt to erase the word *paḷḷipaṭai* from the inscription, as if that term had become embarrassing, has already been noted by some authors.²⁰

To this list we might add a few other temples. At Tirunamallur, the now called Tiruttonḍiśvara temple was built as Rājādityeśvara by Rājāditya during the 28th year of Parāntaka I. However, the inscription can also lead to understand that the construction is due to Queen Kōkkiḷāṇ, mother of Rājāditya (*ARE*, 335 of 1902).²¹ In addition, a fragment of sculpture representing a man mounted on a kneeling elephant is interpreted by P. Kaimal as a representation of Rājāditya's death in combat²² and, therefore, this author sees a *paḷḷipaṭai* built by the queen in memory of her son in this temple.²³ However, this interpretation remains speculative, the term *paḷḷipaṭai* being nowhere mentioned. The same applies to Konerirajapuram where, however, the record under the portrait of Gaṇḍarāditya says explicitly that Śembiyaṇ Mahādevī did raise the temple in memory of her deceased husband. The presence of a similar relief at Anangur, another foundation of the queen (*ARE*, 75 of 1926), could infer that another temple was dedicated to Gaṇḍarāditya, although no inscription will come to confirm this hypothesis. Finally, a third portrait of this type is to be found at

²⁰ *ARE*, 1927, II, 13, and K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas* (Madras: University of Madras, 1935–1937), vol. 2, 223.

²¹ S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Temples, Parantaka I to Rajaraja I* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1971), 64.

²² The Larger Leiden Plates (v. 20) thus indicate that Rājāditya was killed on an elephant while fighting the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.

²³ Padma Kaimal, "Early Cōla Kings and 'Early Cōla' Temples: Art and the Evolution of Kingship", *Artibus Asiae* 66.1 (1996), 60.

Kuttalam on the Uktavedīśvara temple, built again by the pious sovereign (*ARE*, 103 of 1926): several authors have interpreted this portrait as Uttama Cōla and have inferred that this was the *paḷlipaṭai* temple of the king, the more so because, as Konerirajapuram, it opens to the west.²⁴ We will see below that this issue was also raised in Angkor Wat. But, it should be noted, that, like in Cambodia, apart from these last two examples, all the others open to the east: the orientation does not seem to be a determining factor as to the nature of these temples.

Obviously these last additional four examples can give rise to discussion. But even if we accept them into the *paḷlipaṭai* category, it appears that those are still quite few in number and that they are all concentrated between the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the eleventh. We should now address the ‘funerary’ value of these temples, advanced by several scholars. The meaning of the word ‘funerary’ in English can be rather problematic but its primary meaning implies a close relationship with a grave. From the beginning of the twentieth century on, it has been hypothesized that the South Indian temples found their origins in the earlier megalithic structures.²⁵ In addition to the general forms common to megaliths and shrines, it was said that some temples could be built on the tomb of a holy person. Human bones have been found in the foundations of some shrines although the information on this subject is far from precise.²⁶ Besides, the South Indian temples have also been brought to the *vīrakkal* practice commemorating the death of the hero in combat.²⁷ As such, it could be made out that some of the temples that I have mentioned above actually bear representations of the deceased in a style that might be closer to that of *vīrakkal* and some of the kings mentioned in the inscriptions (Āditya, Rājāditya, Gaṇḍarāditya, Ariṇjaya) seem indeed to have died in combat. Conversely, the late example of Ramanatha Koyil could indicate a ‘corruption’ of the practice, since it is linked to a queen, and that would explain the disappearance of this custom. However,

²⁴ David Theron Sanford, *Early Temples Bearing Rāmāyaṇa Relief Cycles in the Chola Area. A Comparative Study* Ph.D. dissertation (Los Angeles: University of California, 1974), 181 and 191 fn. 56; Kaimal, “The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 970–1000 A.D.”, 155.

²⁵ *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department, Southern Circle, Madras, for the year 1915–1916*, 28–35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁷ R., Nagaswamy, ed., *Seminar on Hero-Stones* (Madras: State Archaeology Department of Tamil Nadu, 1974); Kaimal, “Early Cōla Kings”, 57.

the links between some temples of the tenth century and the culture inherited from the proto-history are somewhat difficult to establish. It will also be noted that the practice of erecting a temple or a *liṅga* in a cremation field is attested in the Hindu ritual manuals. Thus, the *Rauravāgama* devotes an entire chapter (Kp. 30) to the ‘field-*liṅga*’ (*kṣetraliṅga*) that can be understood as a *liṅga* of *samādhi*, i.e. linked to the tomb of a saint, buried and not cremated.²⁸ It is even stated that, where appropriate, the *liṅga* may be replaced by an image that faces south (Kp. 30.6–9a), which is the case with the royal portrait at Konerirajapuram.

In summary, both the megalithic cultural substrate and the *āgamic* literature can justify the existence of temples commemorating more particularly a deceased person. However, are these temples also graves? The issue is tricky, because of the notable lack of excavations. But we can make the following comments. In the *Tamil Lexicon*, the first meaning of *paḷlipaṭai* is the conduct of funeral rites, especially for a king. The corresponding Sanskrit word seems to be *svargārohanaprāsāda*, indicating first the ascent to heaven and then the funeral rites, but which does not necessarily imply the presence of remains or bones.²⁹ In addition, the inscription of Cholaipuram states that Rājāditya did raise a temple to Śiva and an ‘abode’ for the deceased at the place of burial (*īśvarālayamum atitāgaramum eduppittu kaṇḍuṇḍu śevviytāṇ*): even if they are close, it is therefore doubtful whether the two monuments are but one.³⁰ Also, if Āditya I died indeed at Tondaimanad, there is no basis as far as I know to associate the other sites with the death of the king. Moreover, if one accepts that all the temples listed above are indeed *paḷlipaṭai*—which is far from sure, as we have seen—it means that Gaṇḍarāditya would have had two (Konerirajapuram and Anan-gur), as well as Uttama Cōḷa (Tenneri and Kuttalam). In conclusion, it seems difficult to admit that *paḷlipaṭai* temples are actually covering the burial remains of dead kings (and are sort of mausoleums). Subject to new discoveries, it seems prudent to consider them as memorial

²⁸ *Le Rauravāgama. Un traité rituel et de doctrine śivaites*, introduction, traduction et notes par Bruno Dagens et Marie-Luce Barazer-Billore (Pondicherry: PIFI, 2000), vol. 1, 159 fn. 1.

²⁹ This term appears for instance in a text on architecture discovered by M. A. Dhaky: see P. O. Sompura and M. A. Dhaky, ‘Svargārohanaprāsāda’, *Svadhyay*, vol. 5, 191–195 (in Gujarati), quoted in *Royal Patrons and Great Temple Art*, ed. Vidya Dehejia (Bombay: East India Book Co, 1988), 112.

³⁰ The Tamil *-um* suffix means ‘and’, ‘also’.

temples, erected probably at the death of the sovereign in order to ensure a kind of apotheosis.³¹ There is then nothing to say with certainty that these temples had actually a funerary function. Some have undoubtedly been built to commemorate the deceased, but this practice seems to have been more current than suggests the relatively limited use of the term *pallipatai* in epigraphy. Besides, it is remarkable that some of these *pallipatais* are conspicuously devoid of any portrait, whereas one can find many portraits in South Indian temples without any (obvious) funerary orientation.

Now, if one looks at it more carefully, one could find many other temples of such kind in other parts of South Asia: to mention only a few, we can cite the Bhojpur temple, built by king Bhoja and the Brahmā and Mātariṅgeśvara temples at Khajuraho.³² Their commemorative aspect should be intended in a broader meaning than a strict funerary function: they would indicate a form of personal cult. Therefore, the portraits attached to them should be interpreted in the same way.

2.4. 'Funerary' temples in Southeast Asia

In Indianized Southeast Asia, the issue of funerary temples has been raised in a much broader way, but recent studies seem to have done justice to it.³³ The fact remains that some inscriptions are a little confusing. Above we have seen the case of a cave apparently dedicated to a deceased queen in Phnom Kaiva. Likewise, epigraphers working on Javanese material have often spoken of the funerary destination of many foundations. Thus, the Kavi-Rocks copper-plate of ca. Śaka 850, though incomplete, records the foundation of a *śīma dharmma* at Air Kali, which H. Kern has translated by 'funerary temple'.³⁴ But, as a matter of fact, this is far from being obvious. In the third copper-plate from Kvak, doubt is permitted. Undated—but probably promulgated between AD 878 and 883—it seems to record the turning of some land into *śīma* for the benefit of a temple (*prāsāda i laṇḍa*) which

³¹ As such, these temples could be compared with *stūpas*, monuments the origin of which is clearly funerary but which are not always built over human remains and can have a more symbolic and commemorative function.

³² Dehejia, *Royal Patrons*, 101–112.

³³ Overall, Soekmono, *The Javanese Candi* (English translation of a book released in 1974) addresses this problem and sums up the several previous theories, especially pp. 1–12 for Javanese archaeology and pp. 33–50 for a comparison with Cambodia.

³⁴ Himansu Bhusan Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java (up to 928 A.D.)* (Calcutta: Mukhopadhyay, 1971–1972), vol. 2, 249–254, no. xcvi.

was probably dedicated to a *sang devata lumāḥ i kvak*, i.e. the deified being cremated at Kvak; freeholds were created to present him regularly *caru* offerings; but the precise identification of the *devata* remains partly unknown.³⁵ On the other hand, the pillar of Śrī Maṅgala (Caṇḍi Asu) of Śaka 796 (AD 874) says that the *Pamgat* of Hino, *Pu Apus*, founded a *sīma lmaḥ dharmmanira* at Salingśingan; once again, W. F. Stutterheim translates this expression by 'funerary temple' but, as H. B. Sarkar has remarked, this can by no means be considered as final: to tell the truth, if the foundation definitely appears to be a personal one, nothing indicates a funerary purpose, *Pu Apus* being alive at the time of the foundation.³⁶

Early in the nineteenth century, scholars and archaeologists surmised that the word *caṇḍi*, commonly used to designate a temple in Java, had a funerary connotation. It must be stressed that already at that time they were aware of the existence, during the Indianized period of Java (*zaman hindu*), of commemorative portraits. The funerary orientation of temples was then strongly connected to the portraiture issue, which is of course relevant for our purpose. The interpretation of *caṇḍi* as a tomb gained much weight with the discovery, in different monuments, of buried caskets containing compartments (nine, generally) and sometimes (but not always) ashes. The most important of these findings was probably done by Yzerman at Loro Jonggrang (Prambanam) in 1891. Even though nothing proved that these ashes were of human origin and, besides, the amount of ashes was not enough for a whole body, the assumption rapidly turned into an accepted fact. At the same time, Javanese literature was scrutinized in this way, especially the *Paraton* and the *Nāgara-Kertāgama*. It soon appeared that *caṇḍi* was quite rare in these texts but was synonymous with *dharma* (or *sudharma*, or *sīma dharma*); in many instances, it was clear that *dharma* designated a temple in which was installed the image ('portrait-statue') of a deceased king. Hence the 'confirmation' that *caṇḍi* was a tomb, in spite of the fact that it is never said in these texts that ashes or any human remains were buried in temples.

³⁵ Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java*, vol. 2, 282–283, no. CVIII; Soekmono, *Javanese Candi*, 67–68. If we connect this plate with the Trutjuk inscription, it is possible to surmise that this foundation was made for King Rake Kayuwangi by the high official (*Patih*) Pu Catura.

³⁶ Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java*, vol. 1, 194–196, no. XXXII.

It would be too long to recall here all the efforts made to comfort this belief in the funerary purpose of the Javanese temples, which has been precisely detailed by R. Soekmono.³⁷ Then, in the 1930s, the debate reached continental Southeast Asia and extended to Cambodia. It all began with a sort of dispute between J. Przyluski and G. Coedès to know whether Angkor Wat was a temple or a tomb.³⁸ As a matter of fact, in spite of different approaches, the two scholars thought that Viṣṇu's worship was closely tied to the worship of the deceased king Sūryavarman II under the posthumous name Paramaviṣṇuloka. Besides, the fact that this temple opens to the west, contrary to almost all the other Khmer temples, appeared as a further argument. Leaving aside the debate on the interpretation—to which I will turn back later (§ 4)—of the expression *kamrateñ jagat* and *devarāja*, it must be said that the funerary orientation of Khmer architecture was also, for some time, strengthened by the discovery of caskets quite comparable to the Javanese ones and also of some bigger stone vessels³⁹ which were rapidly considered as sarcophagi. In fact, all this so-called sarcophagi—too small to contain a whole body—where found empty and, since then, they have been proved to serve only as receptacle for holy water or oil.

To sum up, all these assumptions regarding the funerary nature of temples and portraiture in Java and, to a lesser extent, in Cambodia rely on preconceived ideas and misconceptions. Had they been analyzed in the wider context of Indianization and not as isolated specimens, the Javanese *caṇḍis* would have been interpreted as perfectly normal Hindu or Buddhist temples and the caskets would have been recognized for what they are everywhere in India and Southeast Asia: foundation deposits. Nowhere is there any clear evidence of a link between these caskets and human remains nor between human remains and portraits. One further argument in this sense is the often quoted Phimeanakas inscription where queen Jayarājadevī recalls that she erected portraits of members of her family 'known to her or of whom she had heard': how could the images of persons of whom she

³⁷ For instance, it was proposed to read some narrative bas-reliefs according to the *prasavya* direction, that is, contrary to the *pradakṣiṇa*, according to funerary rites.

³⁸ This debate started by a paper by Jean Przyluski, "Pradakshina et prasavya en Indochine", in *Festschrift für Moriz Winternitz*, 1863–23. Dezember 1933, ed. Otto Stein and Wilhalm Gampert (Leipzig, 1933).

³⁹ The ones from Angkor Wat and Phnom Bakheng are 140 cm long.

had only heard of be related to ashes or any kind of remains? Besides, we have seen numerous examples of portraits of living persons.

It does not of course mean that there is no connection between temple and death: both the temples and, eventually, the images housed in them can help commemorate a deceased one, but it does not appear to be systematic at all. Furthermore, commemoration should not be confused with funerary function in the narrow sense of a ritual connected with the resting place of a body. In this respect, in Southeast Asia as in India, the commemoration of a dead person in a temple does not seem to be independent from the more general worship performed in this shrine. As already noted, the terms *dharmma* or *sīma dharmma* are found in the fourteenth century Java, in the *Nāgara-Kertāgama*; but, in this book the portraits are in fact double-meaning images since the dead are represented in the guise of Śiva or Buddha—unless they lend their traits to these deities. We might wonder if that was not already the case in the ninth and tenth centuries. In the *Nāgara-Kertāgama* still, these images are called *arcā*, which is without any ambiguity applied to an object of worship. One should note that the cult is directed to a deity and, by delegation, if I can say so, it involves a dead person. Once again, it is difficult to detect an autonomous cult of portraits. However, double-meaning images indicate a form of apotheosis, on which more in a short while.

To conclude tentatively, it is clear that the worship issue is not to be raised systematically for all kind of portraits. The different examples above show that the situation can be quite different in the Kuṣāṇa temples, in South India or in Southeast Asia and that in each region and in each period we can find different cases. However, we can note that, if a cult is never totally clear, it happens that in some contexts—which have to be defined precisely—*some* portraits can be given a status slightly different from images of other mortals, notably through an installation ceremony. These portraits are either set up during the lifetime of their models or after their demise but they always survive the portrayed ones: their function is then much more a memorial than a funerary one. And, they are part of a broader cult: in other words, if there seems indeed to be sort of worship of portraits, this worship appears to be always associated to that of a main deity.

3. DIVINE PORTRAIT, HUMAN PORTRAIT

More often than once in this study, I have stressed the close relationship between portraits and divine images. Just above, we have seen that the cult of portraits—if it can be attested—does not seem to be independent from the worship of a deity. That is why it may be useful to examine more in depth the nature of this relationship. The fact that divine images can be interpreted as some kind of portraits—as I will try to demonstrate in the following pages—can then help us understand the nature of portraiture in a religious context.

3.1. *Myths on the origin of images*

I will start this survey with two stories on the origin of images in general. As far as I know, the most ancient text on that topic is probably Nagnajit's *Citralakṣaṇa*. Since it is mentioned by Varāhamihira, in his *Br̥hat Saṃhitā* (57.4b),⁴⁰ a text written in the sixth century AD, then the *Citralakṣaṇa* is anterior; it could reasonably be dated from the fifth century AD, though at least part of the text could be even earlier.⁴¹ Nowadays, in spite of the recent reconstitution of the supposed Sanskrit original, it is known only through its Tibetan translation.⁴² Contrary to the other texts of the *Tanjur* (of which it is now part), its Buddhist orientation is far from being obvious: as a matter of fact, it seems to have been included in that corpus whereas its origin may

⁴⁰ 'The face of an image should be 12 digits in both length and width, according to its own digit; however, it is said by Nagnajit, in the South, that it should be 14 digits long' (*svair aṅgulapramāṇair dvādaśa vistīrṇam āyatam ca mukham / nagnajitā tu caturdaśa dairghyeṇa drāviḍam kathitam* //).

⁴¹ The Tibetan text of the *Citralakṣaṇa* has been edited and translated into German by B. Laufer in 1913; this translation has been in its turn translated into English, first by W. Rau in 1955 (but it remained unpublished and only 200 copies have been released) then by B. N. Goswamy and A. L. Dahmen-Dallapiccola in 1976. In 1983, Asoke Chatterjee Sastri proposed a reconstitution of the Sanskrit original based on the Tibetan version, accompanied with a new English translation. For a general survey of this text, see Gustav Roth, "Notes on the *Citralakṣaṇa*", in *South Asian Archaeology 1987, Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe held in the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice*, ed. Maurizio Taddei with the assistance of Pierfrancesco Callieri (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), Part 2, 979–1028.

⁴² The *Citralakṣaṇa* is now part of the *Tanjur* along with three other treatises, dealing with iconography and iconometry of the Buddha: the *Daśatālanyagrodhaparimaṇḍala Buddhapratimālakṣaṇanāma*, the *Sambuddhabhāṣita pratimālakṣaṇavivaraṇanāma* and the *Pratimāmānalakṣaṇanāma*.

have been Hindu or Jain; besides, all the images mentioned in this text are in fact secular ones.

The story is as follows. In very remote times, men used to live happy and in good health for thousands of years; but, once, the son of a Brahman passed away whereas still in his youth; therefore, the father went to the king and complained, begging him to call his son back to life and, thus, restore order. The king called then Yama, god of Death, who declared it was impossible to resuscitate the young boy. A quarrel aroused between the king and the god, which turned to a fight, first between the king and the *pretas*—or ghosts—then with the god himself; finally the king was victorious⁴³ and Brahmā appeared to restore peace between the two fighters: he proposed the king to draw a likeness of the demised boy (v. 205–207); once it was done, he gave life to the image.

You should paint handsomely a picture resembling the son of the Brahman, corresponding to his form, and with the help of colours; this is certain to lead to your salvation!’ After Brahma had thus spoken, the judicious king said: ‘May it be granted to me to behold this boy of the Brahman!’ Upon this he painted him: Brahma let him, such as he was (as he was painted) rise again, and gifted him as a living person to the Brahman.⁴⁴

On that last point, the text is not very clear: it is a bit difficult to know whether the portrait gives birth to a ‘replica’ of the son or, more simply, if the quality of the portrait is so high that it looks as if alive and imbued with soul. In a way, this could be one of the earliest mentions of what would later be known as an installation ritual (*pratiṣṭhā*), that is, a ceremony in which life is given to a cult image.

The passage ends with Brahmā explaining to the king that the art of making images came from the need to create *caityas*, or cult places; therefore, he was the first to paint (or draw) and then he taught men. Finally, he advises the king to go to Viśvakarman to be taught further in the art of image-making (v. 341–344).

⁴³ Because of his victory upon the naked (*nagna*) *pretas*, the king earns the title of *Nagna-jit*.

⁴⁴ *An Early Document of Indian Art. The Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnaji*, translated and introduced by B. N. Goswamy and A. L. Dahmen-Dallapiccola, following the German edition of the *Citralakṣaṇa* based on the Tibetan Tanjur, edited and translated by Berthold Laufer (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1976), 68.

In a more specifically Hindu context, one could also mention a passage from the famous *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, which starts its *Citrasūtra* (chapter 35 of the third book) with the legend of *apsara* Urvāśī's birth;⁴⁵ this version differs from the more common story, probably to be in tune with the general purpose of the *Citrasūtra*:⁴⁶ the two great *ṛṣis*, Nara and Nārāyaṇa are immersed in such a deep asceticism that the gods, particularly Indra, are afraid of their getting too much power and try to distract them by sending their beautiful wives to them; furious to be thus disturbed, Nārāyaṇa creates the *apsara* Urvāśī by painting her shape on the ground with mango juice; the young maiden is so beautiful that the goddesses flee out of shame. Once he has recovered his calm, Nārāyaṇa decides to teach Viśvakarman the art of making images (*citra*) 'at the imitation of the Three Worlds' (*trailokyānukṛti*, which would mean, more or less, in a realistic or naturalistic way?), as should be done with dance.⁴⁷

What is interesting here is that the process is inverted: first the image is created and then comes the model! Therefore, this image can only be deemed a portrait *a posteriori*. Nevertheless, in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, it is a portrait which is at the origin of image-making. Moreover, one can highlight the very precise mention of *anukṛti*, 'imitation' (from *anu-KṚ*-, 'to do afterwards'), which sort of corresponds to the

⁴⁵ The same story is already told, but in a more extant way, in the first *khaṇḍa* (129.1–15).

⁴⁶ Thus, in the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (4th *khaṇḍa*), Nārāyaṇa creates the *apsara* by hitting, out of wrath, his thigh (*ūru*). The date(s) of both the *Devī Bhāgavata* and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* being uncertain (for both of them, the proposals span from the fifth to the eleventh century AD), it is quite impossible to say that one is older than the other and to know, on a chronological basis, which one has changed the story. However, the poetical etymology given by the *Devī Bhāgavata*—Urvāśī deriving from *ūru*, 'thigh', whereas, in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* it derives from *urvyāṃ*, 'on the ground' (according to Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English dictionary, the etymology would be *uru-AŚ*-, 'to pervade')—is a topos in Indian literature: one can find the same in the prologue of Kālidāsa's play, *Vikramorvaśī* (*ūrudbhavā narasakhasya muneh suraśtrī*; see also act I: *sthāne khalu nārāyaṇam ṛṣim vilobhayantyastadūrusambhavām imām dṛṣtvā vṛḍitāḥ sarve apsarasa iti*) and also in the *Harivaṃśa* (App. I, no. 15, v. 26 of the critical edition: *nārāyaṇoruṃ nirbhīdya sambhūtā varavarṇinī / elasya dayitā devī yośidratnam kim urvaśī //*).

⁴⁷ *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 3.35.1–5: *ataḥ param pravakṣyāmi citrasūtram tavānagha/ urvaśī srjitā pūrvam citrarūpā nṛpātmaja//nārāyaṇena muninā lokānām hitakāmyayā/ prāptānām vañcanārthāya devastrīṇām mahāmuniḥ// saha kārarasam grhya urvyāṃ cakre varastriyam/ citreṇa sā tato jātā rūpayuktā varāpsarāḥ// yām dṛṣtvā brīḍitāḥ sarvā jagmustā devayoṣitaḥ/ evaṃ mahāmuniḥ kṛtvā citram lakṣaṇasamyutam// grāhayā māsa sa tadā viśvakarmāṇam acyutam/ yathā nṛte tathā citre trailokyānukṛtiḥ smṛtā//*

Aristotelian *mimesis*. But here it is not only Nature which should be imitated, but the Three Worlds, which opens of course wider perspectives. In the same way, as we have seen before, the etymology of the Sanskrit words *pratimā*, *pratīkṛti*, etc., is also associated with the idea of copy, imitation and likeness.

Whatever the antiquity of this last story might be, we can see that in two important texts dealing with the making of images in general the origin is a portrait which is so close and so resembling its model that it can serve as its substitute. Such a phenomenon would seem commonplace in the Western tradition, but, strangely enough, is seldom highlighted in scholarship on Indian art.

3.2. Divine images as portraits

Interestingly, the Indian religious traditions—regardless of their sectarian affiliations—are more or less in tune with this pattern. The most obvious example is probably that of the images of the Buddha. It is indeed a very well-known fact that the Buddha was not represented during the first centuries of Buddhism. The date and the place of appearance of the first anthropomorphic representations have been—and, to some extent, still are—a matter of huge controversy. The situation may become clearer around the first century AD, thanks first to the golden medallion found at Tillya Tepe in Bactria⁴⁸ then to the

⁴⁸ The Tillya Tepe medallion was found on the chest of the man buried in tomb IV (Victor I. Sarianidi, *The Golden Hoard of Bactria from the Tillya-tepe Excavations in Northern Afghanistan* [New York: H. N. Abrams; Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1985], 250, pl. 131; Pierre Cambon, ed., *Afghanistan, les trésors retrouvés. Collections du musée national de Kaboul* [Paris: RMN, 2006], 199, no. 119; Fredrick Hiebert and Pierre Cambon, eds., *Afghanistan. Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul* [Washington: National Geographic, 2008], 276, no. 119). Gérard Fussman (“Monnaie d’or de Kaniška inédite au type du Buddha”, *Revue numismatique*, 6e série, 24 [1982], 165–169) has argued that, on palaeographic grounds, it could have been minted between 50 BC and AD 50, then, according to his own dating of the first Mathuro-Gandharian Buddhas, proposed a date in the last quarter of the first century BC. This date is acknowledged by V. I. Sarianidi and G. A. Koshelenko (“Monety iz raskopok nekropolia, raspolojennogo na gorodishche Tillya-tepe”, in *Drevnaya Indiya*, ed. Grigori M. Bongard-Levin [Moscow, 1982], 315). If the standing man on the medallion is indeed Buddha, it most probably pre-dates the first images from Mathura and Gandhara, since the Jupiter-like figure looks as a first attempt, quickly abandoned, to give a specific shape to the Buddha. However, since the date of these images is still a matter of debate, they are not really conclusive about the date of the medallion. The only fixed chronological criterion, at Tillya Tepe, is the Roman coin of Emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37) found in tomb III (Hiebert and Cambon, *Hidden Treasures*, 261, no. 95): the tomb should logically be slightly posterior to the coin and it is more or

Kaniṣka coins, some of which bear an image of a standing man in monastic dress labelled either *Boddo* or *Sakamono Boudo*. To put it simply, this appearance seems to be the consequence of the developing Mahāyāna School. But it is not our concern to deal at length here with that debate. The only important point for our purpose is that many Buddhist texts did their best to justify the appearance of the Buddha image, which seems to imply that some people were uncomfortable with that innovation. For instance, in the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasārvastivādin, it is said in different places that Anāthapiṇḍika, aware of the difficulty to keep order in the monastic community when the Buddha was away, asked him the right to set up his portraits, made of Jambu wood, to preside over the monks; the Buddha gave his consent, as long as the images were not adorned.⁴⁹ I could multiply textual evidence—and, as a matter of fact, I will go back to this issue in the next chapter, but with a different perspective; for the moment, it will be enough to note that the first images of the Buddha were supposed to be portraits and that, in a way, all subsequent images are more or less portraits too. In this respect, let us remind that in Buddhist literature the term *vigraha*—the general meaning of which is ‘form’, ‘figure’—is first linked to the notion of bodily relics. This very word then confirms what is to be inferred from the legends quoted above: the portraits *are* the Buddha himself, imbued with all his qualities; therefore they can replace him when he is absent and, *a fortiori*, after his demise. The resemblance between the model and the image is then the *sine qua non* condition for its authentication and its efficiency as substitute (in fact, it is

less accepted that all the tombs of the site are contemporaneous. The medallion could nevertheless be a bit more ancient than the tomb. Besides, recently, Tanabe has argued that the standing man may not be the Buddha at all but Hercules (Katsumi Tanabe, “Not the Buddha but Hercules on the Gold Token from Tillya-Tepe: A Review of the Relevant Legends and Images”, in *Religion and Art: New Issues in Indian Iconography and Iconology (Volume 1 of the proceedings of the 18th conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, London, 2005)*, ed. C. Bautze-Picron [London: The British Association for South Asian Studies, 2008], 33–48).

⁴⁹ This reference from the Sino-Japanese sources has been found in *Hôbôgirin, dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d’après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, publié sous le haut patronage de l’Académie Impériale du Japon et sous la direction de Sylvain Lévi et J. Takakusu, rédacteur en chef, Paul Demiéville, troisième fascicule : Bussokusechi-Chi (Paris : Adrien Maisonneuve, 1937), article ‘Butsuzô’ (i.e. *Buddha-pratimā*). For the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasārvastivādin, cf. p. 211 (Taishō 1452 V and 1442 XXVIII [782b]); a Khmer version of the story is summed up in François Bizot, “La consécration des statues et le culte des morts”, in *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge*, ed. F. Bizot (Paris: EFEO, 1994), 101–135.

resembling because it *is* the Buddha). As a consequence, all the latter images of the Buddha (and, to a lesser extent, of Mahāvīra) are to be considered as living persons. One can still observe this in Southeast Asia, even if these countries follow the Theravāda trend which, initially, did not require the representation of the Master.⁵⁰

As a matter of fact, the assimilation, in Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, in Jainism, of a cult image to a portrait is all but surprising: both religions are not revealed but are the development of a preaching by a founder, whose personality, even if surrounded by legend, is nevertheless historically attested. It is of course impossible to say whether these first portraits were resembling or not—they seem in fact to have been partly idealized—but they are deemed as nonetheless credible likenesses. One can find the same kind of situation in other religions with a clearly identified founder, as in Christianity.⁵¹ On the contrary, Hinduism is a revealed religion; therefore, one has to question the role given to images in it.

In Hindu scriptures, one does not find obvious stories as in Buddhism or Jainism. However, the situation does not seem to be contradictory either. First of all, the same terms—as *pratimā* or *bimba*—are in use. Second, we have seen that in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, which is obviously a Hindu text, images originate from a portrait. Finally, if no founder is worshipped in Hinduism, there are nevertheless in the Hindu pantheon some heroes (*kṣatriya*) with a relative historicity.⁵² In the next chapter, I will go back to this point but, for the time being, it will be sufficient to mention the *Vīras*, or the deified heroes. The cult of *Vīras* was attested by the time of Pāṇini (fourth century BC), since it is mentioned in the *Aṣṭādhyayī* (IV.3.99). The most famous

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Bizot, “La consecration des statues”, 101–105; Robert L. Brown, “The Miraculous Buddha Image: Portrait, God or Object”, in *Images, Miracles and Authority in Asian Religious Traditions*, ed. Richard H. Davis (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), 37–54; Phyllis Granoff, “Divine Delicacies: Monks, Images and Miracles in the Contest between Jainism and Buddhism”, in Davis, *Images, Miracles and Authority*, 76–90.

⁵¹ Jesus’ iconography is also codified but the legend (since the fourth century onwards) has it that it is based on the famous ‘Veronica’s veil’, the piece of cloth used by the saint to clean the face of the Christ climbing to Calvary and on which his limbs remained printed. The name Veronica may be derived from *vera icona*, ‘the true image’. In the same vein, there is the tradition according to which the first portrait of the Virgin was made by Saint Luke who became, for this reason, the patron of painters.

⁵² It may not be out of purpose to recall that Buddha and Mahāvīra were themselves *kṣatriya*.

Viras are certainly the Vṛṣṇis from Mathura, praised in the well-known Mora Well inscription. Among the Vṛṣṇis, the most important are Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma and his younger brother Vāsudeva/Kṛṣṇa. Thus, the central character of the *Mahābhārata*, before becoming a famous god and an incarnation of Viṣṇu, is probably based on a human prototype, even if lost in a legendary mist. As for the hero of the other main 'epic', Rāma, the historians are at stake when looking for a historical prototype but most Hindus will not doubt his existence (in a more general way, it is one of the peculiarities of epic literature to rely on human prototypes). Rāma's images may not be deemed as real portraits, but they are always fashioned on a human representation, in a rather specific way.⁵³

Besides, one can make the following remarks. As in Buddhism, Hinduism requests the exact representation of gods and goddesses, because this exactness is the condition of the efficiency of the image. This likeness is not based on the mundane existence of the models but on the normative prescriptions enounced in numerous treatises such as *Purāṇas*, *Śilpaśāstras*, *Āgamas*, *Tantras* and the like. The descriptions are characterized by an exceedingly minute precision. Moreover, these texts are supposed to be revealed, which means that it is the god or the goddess who is speaking and describing him- or herself.⁵⁴ From this point of view, fantastic anatomy (like multiple heads or arms) is just a reflection of the true nature of the depicted deity.

Another important thing is the fact that all the installation rituals (*pratiṣṭhā*)—regardless of the sectarian affiliation—aim at transforming the divine image into the deity him- or herself. For example, in the Pāñcarātra school of Vaiṣṇavism, there are five categories of Viṣṇu's manifestations, from his most supreme aspect to the image housed in a temple: *Para*, *Vyūha*, *Vibhava*, *Antaryāmin* and *Arcāvatāra*.⁵⁵ The term *arcāvatāra* is very interesting because it means that the cult (*arcā*) image is perceived as an incarnation (*avatāra*, literally 'descent').⁵⁶ This

⁵³ There are very scarce occurrences of images of four-armed Rāma, but to the best of my knowledge, they are very late (e.g. late Cōla or Vijayanagar period; see for instance Lefèvre, *Commanditaires et artistes*, fig. 13).

⁵⁴ Sometimes, one can find some expressions at the first person.

⁵⁵ F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and their Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1916; reprint, 1973), 31–66.

⁵⁶ See P. N. Srinivasachari, *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita* (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1943; reprint, 1970), 159–162.

concept has later been accepted by the Vaikhānasas, as can be seen in the chapter 33 of the *Prakīrṇādhikara*.⁵⁷

The situation is a bit more complicated in Śaivism. However, especially in the Śaivasiddhānta School, one finds a similar idea in the theory of creation-dissolution based on the *tattva* scale.⁵⁸ Śiva's nature is triple: Absolute, and called Parameśvara, he is non-manifest (*niṣkala/avyakta*) because he is above everything; during the creation process, he manifests himself progressively, from the 'non-manifest and manifest' (*vyktāvyakta/sakalaniṣkala*) stage (called Sadāśiva) to the manifest (*sakala/vyakta*) one (Maheśvara). Three kinds of representation correspond to these three stages: the *liṅga*, the *mukhalinga* and the images (*mūrti*). This is clearly expressed in the *Dīptāgama* (1.5cd–9),⁵⁹ but also in the *Ajitāgama* (1.25–32), in the *Suprabhedāgama* (*Jñānapāda* 1.19–20, quoted in *Śaivaparibhāṣamañjarī* 3.49–50) or in the *Vātulaśuddhākhyā* (1.15, *ibid.* 3.54b).⁶⁰ So, according to Śaiva theology, it is evident that these images are considered real embodiment of the deity.

3.3. Ritual installation (*pratiṣṭhā*) of portraits

If the ritual treatises mention occasionally images of devotees or other characters in which we can probably recognize portraits, they do not specify the use made of such representations. Only, to my knowledge, the *Dīptāgama* brings special lighting. As a matter of fact, this ritual treatise devotes an entire chapter (no. 52) to an original issue, rarely found in other *āgamas* so far: the installation ceremony (*pratiṣṭhā*) of

⁵⁷ Gérard Colas, *Viṣṇu, ses images et ses feux ; les métamorphoses du dieu chez les vaikhānasa* (Paris: EFEO, 1996), 48 and 115.

⁵⁸ Richard H. Davis *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe. Worshipping Śiva in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 114–122.

⁵⁹ *śivaḥ sadāśivaścaiva maheśaśca tridhā bhavet/śivaṃ paramasaṃyuktaṃ nirguṇaṃ niṣkalaṃ dhruvaṃ/arūpamavikāraṃ ca tṛptāmṛtamanāmayam/ anādhāraṃ saṃśeṣaṃ bhaktigamyam parātparam/niṣkalaṃ manaso'ṭitamapyavācyamarūpakam/ tasmātsadāśivaṃ tatvaṃ sakalaṃ niṣkalānvitam/ vyaktāvyaktamayaṃ sūkṣmaṃ nādarūpamanāmayam/ tasmānmaheśamutpannamatyantagahanaṃ param/jyotirūpaṃ param vyaktaṃ maheśam sakalaṃ viduḥ /.*

⁶⁰ See also Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Śaiva Temple Forms: Loci of God's Unfolding Body", in *Investigating Indian Art, Proceedings of a Symposium on the Development of Early Buddhist and Hindu Iconography held at the Museum of Indian Art Berlin in May 1986* ed. Marianne Yaldiz and Wibke Lobo (Berlin: Museum für Indische Kunst, 1987), 338–340.

an image of the king (*nṛpa* or, more generally, *kṣatriya*) and indicates that one should do the same for the image of a devotee (*bhakta*). It is obvious that the portrayed person (accompanied, or not, by his consort) is a real one, because there is a clear indication that the height of the image is based on that of the model, according to the wish of the patron (perhaps the king himself). His proportional height, based on the ‘eight *tālas*’ system, is calculated according to that of the patron: the image can go up to his chin, his neck or his arm, but must not be taller than him.⁶¹ It is then quite an impressive statue, which reminds us, for example, of the portraits of Kṛṣṇadevarāya or Tirumalarāya set up at Tirupati. He is depicted either standing, seated, recumbent or walking (as in a procession). It seems that three alternatives are proposed regarding the attributes: he can have his hands joined in *añjali*, or holding bow and arrow, or sword and shield. He may be accompanied by the queen, smaller by half a *tāla*, holding a parrot or a lotus.⁶² A rather obscure passage (but the interpretation of which can be corroborated thanks to a passage from the *Kāmikāgama*) seems to mean that this image can be made either when the king is alive or after his death. The image can be installed in different places—this is not very clear—whether in the royal palace, but also, as it seems, in a temple. But most of the chapter is dedicated to the installation ceremony itself. The ceremony follows the same pattern as for the images of Śiva. It is just a little simplified: the setting of jewels in the pedestal is not mentioned (perhaps there is a lacuna in the text); there is no sojourn in water and the description of the offerings is very brief. For the rest, one finds the following: germination of the shoots, opening of the eyes, purifications with various substances, procession, installation in a temporary pavilion, installation of vases containing the syllable-germ (*bīja*) of the image, offering and night vigil, bath of the image and the imposition of syllable-germ on his heart and then offering of food. At various times, the image is honoured with various acts of reverence (donations of clothing, fumigation, etc.). However, once the installation is completed, the text does not say what happens to the

⁶¹ 52.5–6: *pratimā tu prakartavyā yajamānecchayā punaḥ / adhikam kārāyēd vidvān putrapautravinaśanam // kaṇṭhāntaṁ vāpi bāhvantaṁ cibukāntaṁ idaṁ kuru / aṣṭatālapramāṇena nṛpaṁ vai parikalpayet //*

⁶² 52.7cd–9: *sarvalakṣaṇasamyuktaṁ sarvābharaṇabhūṣitaṁ // rājānaṁ kārāyēd dhīmān dhanurbāṇasamāyutaṁ / khadgakeṭakasamyuktaṁ hṛdaye’ñjalisaṁyutaṁ // sthānakaṁ vā sthitaṁ vātha śayanaṁ yānakaṁ tu vā / devyās tu vāmahaste tu śukaṁ vā cotpalaṁ tu vā //*

image. But, it must be remembered that, apart from a few differences, this royal 'portrait' is treated like other divine images: the entire ceremony, particularly the imposition of the *bīja*, enlivens it. It is hardly possible to say more, but we note that the image is no longer a simple stone statue or, more likely, metal but has a soul and, consequently, the model is supposed to be physically present in it.⁶³

It is possible that a closer scrutiny of ritual texts, Hindu or not, may reveal other such kind of mentions. As mentioned above, we may have a first allusion in the *Citrakṣaṇa*. Besides, in his study on medieval Jain temple portrait, J. C. Laughlin insists on the fact that the inscriptions very often refer to the consecration (*pratiṣṭhitā*) of these images; some of them have jewelled eyes and *tilakas* and are still bathed and anointed today.⁶⁴ The same can be found in some Javanese inscriptions. For instance, Bhaskara, *Pamgat* of Air Asih, who was the royal priest (*śaṅkhaḍhara*) of the last Kediri king, Kṛtājaya, was consecrated as Viṣṇu and the inscription reads: (*ng*)*arcca Wiṣṇupratirūpa pagawayana swātmapratiṣṭa sang Pamget ing Air Asih*.⁶⁵ Like in the *Dīptāgama*, such portraits are enlivened and empowered through a ritual and, obviously, the installation of some of them was even considered as a means to earn merit.⁶⁶

⁶³ Contrary to an idea quite common since the time of Coomaraswamy (*Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* [London: Kelmscott Press, 1908; 2nd edition, New York, 1956; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003], 70–75), the installation ceremony is much more than just the 'opening of the eyes' of the image. In recent years, some publications have been released on the subject by historians of religions, but art historians are not always familiar with them. See for instance a synthesis in the introduction of the second volume of the critical edition of the *Dīptāgama* (pp. 11–24) or the volume IV of the *Somaśambhupaddhati*. See also, among others, Marie-Luce Barazer-Billoret, "L'installation des *liṅga* et images dans les temples selon les *āgama* śivaïtes", *Bulletin d'Etudes Indiennes* 11–12 (1993–1994), 39–69; N. Ramacandra Bhatt, *La religion de Śiva* (Palaiseau: Editions Agamat, 2000), 252–267; Gérard Colas, "L'instauration de la puissance divine dans l'image du temple en Inde du Sud". *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 206.2 (1989), 129–150 and *Viṣṇu, ses images et ses feux*, notably 308–314; Shingo Einoo and Jun Takashima, eds., *From Material to Unity—Indian Rituals of Consecration* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005).

⁶⁴ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 34–39.

⁶⁵ Soekmono, *Javanese Candi*, 78.

⁶⁶ In this respect, we can mention the Jain spiritual teacher of the Tapāgaccha, Hīravijayasūri, who died in 1595. Shortly after his death, between 1597 and 1617, seven portraits of him were set up as memorials. As J. C. Laughlin (*Ārādhakamūrti*, 177) explains: "Some evidence from the portraits suggest that Hīravijaya was considered to be more than a mere monk in death: in particular, some of the portraits were erected for the merit of the donors, suggesting that the donors imagined that there was a spiritual benefit to be derived from devotion to the deceased Hīravijaya; such a benefit would presumably result from supernatural powers that Hīravijaya attained by rebirth as a god."

At this point of the study, it is still difficult to find a clear, positive, proof of cult or worship offered to a portrait. But, nothing seems to go against this idea either. On the contrary, it is quite obvious that from a religious perspective (either Hindu, Buddhist or Jain) there was no real difference between a portrait of a mortal and a divine image, this latter being more or less conceived as a 'portrait' of the deity. The difference being virtually non-existent, we could then surmise that human portraits could be worshipped in the same way as divine images. Perhaps this is going too far, but nothing really forbids it. What is really noticeable is that 'portraits' can be ritually installed and, henceforth, imbued with the physical presence and essence of the portrayed person. Thus, the substitute value is much more than a metaphor—as it is the case in Western art—but becomes a reality. As a consecrated divine image, a portrait can then be much more than a painting or a sculpted piece of wood, metal or stone: it can be a living entity, imbued with a soul.

Even if we cannot, so far, detect a cult *per se*, this very fact is enough to give this portrait a particular status. To be complete on this issue, we should then go back to double-entendre images to see whether portraiture can imply a sort of deification or divinization or at least a kind of apotheosis of the 'model'.

4. PORTRAITURE AND DEIFICATION

In the case of double-entendre image, worshipping the god or goddess may then be, at the same time, a form of worship or, at least, a tribute to the person portrayed under the garb of the deity. Again, this practice does not necessarily take place after death. The apotheosis—it must undoubtedly be understood in its strict etymological sense: the closeness to the divine—can be carried out during the lifetime of the 'model' and we understand that, beyond the strictly speaking religious fact, it has much social, political and ideological impact. But it is necessary to broaden the scope of the debate to see that the apotheosis, or what I have called elsewhere the 'association to the divine',⁶⁷ can be expressed in many ways, not only through double-meaning images.

In this regard, we can mention the Vedic ritual known as *Agnicayana* ('piling-up-of-fire'): thus, the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (7.4.1) says that,

⁶⁷ Lefèvre, *Commanditaires et artistes*, 298.

during the setting up of the fire altar, one has to place on a lotus leaf a golden plate with a figurine made of gold which is to represent the sacrificer (*hiranyapuruṣa*). Like the 'golden Sītā' from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Rāma has to perform the *aśvamedha* ceremony, this statuette is a kind of 'portrait'. During the *Agnicayana*, broadly speaking, the patron (*yājamāna*) is equated with the sacrifice: therefore the dimension of the patron is used to set up the fire altar and the patron represents, at the same time, Agni and Prajāpati himself (10.2.1.5.2). To reinforce this assimilation, the small gold figurine set on the altar is said to be Prajāpati, Agni and the donor at the same time (7.4.1.15). The idea to represent in a single image both a deity and an individual can therefore be traced back almost to the Vedic period. However, this assimilation is not definitive: it seeks to restore, during the time of the sacrifice, the cosmic balance and to recover, in the person of the patron, the unity of Prajāpati; the *yājamāna* is thus not completely divinized.

Previously, we have seen that *liṅgas* and other aniconic cult objects could be considered, more or less, as some kind of 'portraits'. Of course, according to Western criteria that want a portrait to be realistic and faithful to the features of the model, it may seem absurd. But according to the criteria of the Indian and Indianized world, where a divine image can simultaneously be a real person, it is not illogical. On the contrary, this logic is here led to its end. Moreover, this practice highlights the importance of the name that is given to the divine image. Indeed, it is also common to see the name of the patron or one of his relatives, or one of his superiors, together with the name of the deity. Therefore, each image is 'personalized' because, in addition to any local name of the divinity, it often adds the name of a devotee of some importance. For example at Pedaganjam, in Andhra Pradesh, an inscription of the Viśveśvara temple, dated Śaka 1192 (AD 1270), under the Kākatīyas, says that a merchant named Peddiśeṭṭi, son of Pinnaśeṭṭi, has installed a picture of Śiva called Pinneśvara, *i.e.* after the name of his father (ARE, 761 of 1922). One can then wonder where the difference is with the images about which an inscription says explicitly that it is also a 'portrait'. The only difference may lie in the fact that the sources at our disposal are more or less explicit.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Once more, Southeast Asia is often less ambiguous—almost matter-of-fact, so to speak—than India, in that it is often explicitly said that divine images are at the same time portraits. But this would lead us to reinterpret many Indian occurrences where the name of a historical figure is part of divine onomastic.

Does it mean that these portraits and these double-entendre cult objects reveal a sort of deification of the 'portrayed' persons? To answer this tricky question, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that sacredness has a different meaning in India, compared with the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Indian and Indianized context, divinity is a much broader concept—we could almost say a multi-layered one! At the same time, the concept of divinity, being less absolute, is also more relative. There is in fact an evolutive gradation in the realm of sacredness. To quote G. Flood:

There is nothing in Hinduism which is inherently sacred. The sacredness of time, objects or persons depends upon context and the boundaries between the sacred and the everyday is fluid. (...) The sacred in Hinduism is mediated through innumerable, changing forms which bear witness to a deeply rich, religious imagination, centred on mediation and transformation.⁶⁹

Deification through portraiture, then, would not mean that the portrayed persons are considered as main gods; on the contrary, we have many examples when they rather appear as secondary or local deities or member of a much wider pantheon. For example, we have seen above that, in Gujarat, Tejaḥpāla and his relatives have been represented as *lokapālas* or even *kṣetrapālas*: they are 'deified' as celestial guardians of the main deity (in that case a Tirthankara) housed in the shrine.⁷⁰

The *devarāja* issue is broader than that of portrait, but it nevertheless touches on two points which concern us here: 1) assimilation, in one form or another, of a sovereign, or even a historical figure in general, with a divinity and 2) the origin, local or Indian, of this practice. Since the studies by H. Kulke and even more by C. Jacques, we have had a clearer view on that matter and, therefore, I refer to these papers for more details.⁷¹ Let me just retain the information in connection

⁶⁹ Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9–10.

⁷⁰ Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 104–105.

⁷¹ Hermann Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, translated from the German by I. W. Mabbett; with an introduction by the author and notes on the translation of Khmer terms by J. M. Jacob (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1978). Claude Jacques, "Les kamraten jagat dans l'ancien Cambodge", in Bizot, *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge*, 213–225 (reprint of: "The Kamraten jagat in Ancient Cambodia", in *Indus Valley to Mekong Delta: Exploration in Epigraphy* ed. Noboru Karashima [Madras: New era Publications, 1985], 269–286).

with my own approach. It is almost established now that the Sanskrit term *devarāja* is a translation of the Khmer *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja* and that this expression does not refer to the large *lingas* set up by the kings at the top of mountain-temples, or State temples. In fact, without totally rejecting a link between *kamrateñ jagat ta rāja* and the supreme god Śiva, it appears to be simply a particular *kamrateñ jagat* (that is, a local deity; sk. *bhūmidevatā*), insofar as it applies to the king, but not fundamentally different from others. In fact this term—which does not appear prior to the tenth century in the epigraphy—is a variant of the more general expression *vrah̥ kamrateñ añ* which applies also to various local deities, which, in some cases, may be organized into a hierarchy. As the term is used in many historical documents dealing with real persons, it seems to reveal a form of ancestor worship.

The *kamrateñ jagat*, thanks to recent studies, now appears as a creation unique to Cambodia, but which would have taken a conventional ‘Indian’ aspect. C. Jacques supposes that these same deities—protective deities, belonging to a local pantheon, and perhaps deified historical figures—were not systematically represented.⁷² In a way, in the guise of an Indian deity, it would then indicate the worship of a deceased person—or possibly alive, in the case of the ruler in office—which calls for broadening the concept of portraiture in Cambodia.

When looked at carefully, the phenomenon may be extended to the whole of Southeast Asia. It is a well-known fact that the worship of many local deities still co-exist with Buddhism but it seems to have existed before the arrival of the major Indian religions. In Champa, the *kuts* (sort of tombstones) may include a portrait of a deceased king or queen. One of the oldest and most well-known is that from Po Nraup which combines the shape of the *linga* (pedestal and shape of the stele) with the *kut* itself;⁷³ besides, on the back of the stele, there is not one but two characters: it can be seen as a deity arising from the *linga*—a sort of *mukhalinga* in a way—and multiplying, or as a form of filiation between the god and the king, represented with similar features. For P. Mus, *kuts* were not remainder of a more or less degenerated Hinduism in Champa, but rather a sign that Hinduism had given a more advanced plastic expression to older cults. And indeed, we may agree with him that the divine manifestations in Champa—Śiva but also

⁷² Jacques, “Les *kamrateñ jagat*”, 221.

⁷³ Paul Mus, “Cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa”, *BEFEO* 33 (1933), fig. 33.

Lokeśvara—had close links with representations of kings and ancestors, and that there existed older creeds which would be given not a new meaning, but rather a new mode of expression by the Indian religions. Similarly, in Cambodia and Thailand, the cult of the spirits of the soil, often known as *neak ta*, seems to be related to that of *kamraten jagat* in the Angkorian period. Very often, *neak ta* are perceived as land-clearer ancestors bestowing their protection to the community that reveres them. It is significant that the stories reported by anthropologists about the origin of *neak ta* often speak of old Brahmanic images that serve as receptacles for these spirits.⁷⁴ We see of course the reuse of ancient statues which may have taken place well after Brahmanism has disappeared from these countries; but, at the same time, it allows to think that these ancient religions have also facilitated the establishment of the major Indian deities in Southeast Asia.

The two creeds should not really be confused, however. For some authors,⁷⁵ it would be better to speak of juxtaposition: the character associated with the deity is more or less worshiped but is not considered as a supreme deity. I would like to qualify this view. The link between the two entities (human and divine), as between the two images, appears to be narrower, in that one cannot be separated from the other. We have spoken so far of double-entendre images. However, the double meaning is a figure of speech very common in Sanskrit and known as *śleṣa*.⁷⁶ While in some cases it is only a *tour de force* to demonstrate the mastery of the poet, however, the objective is to establish a subtle relationship between the two aspects which enlighten each other; in principle, “the passage from the direct meaning to the indirect one takes the shape of an implicit reasoning, an element of which is implied”.⁷⁷ In the case of cult objects which are both divine images and human portraits, we can say that the god gains a form of proximity with his devotees, while the human being thus represented

⁷⁴ Ang Chouléan, *Les êtres surnaturels dans la religion populaire khmère* (Paris: Cedorek, 1986); Alain Forest, *Le culte des génies protecteurs au Cambodge. Analyse et traduction d'un corpus de textes sur les neak ta* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992).

⁷⁵ Bizot, “La consécration des statues”, 124.

⁷⁶ The *śleṣa* (literally, ‘union’ or ‘connection’) is a linguistic process according to which a signifier (or a group of signifiers) bears two parallel signified which are on the same linguistic level. For an overall presentation of this phenomenon, see Marie-Claude Porcher, *Figures de style en sanskrit. Théories des Alamkāraśāstra. Analyse de poèmes de Venkaṭādhvarin* (Paris: Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1978), 339–399.

⁷⁷ Porcher, *Figures de style en sanskrit*, 397.

acquires a portion of divinity. It may be recalled here that some ritual treatises establish a hierarchy between the faithful according to their proximity with the divine. Thus, the *Mānasāra* (sixteenth century?) gives a complex description of the devotees, classified into four categories according to their proximity with the divine realm:

- The *sālōkya*, who dwells in the same place with the deity
- The *sāmīpya*, who dwells close to the deity
- The *sārūpya*, who has the same shape as the deity
- The *sāyujya*, who he is absorbed into the deity⁷⁸

The third stage is then the identity of the features (*sarūpya*) of the devotee with that of the god but it is not yet the final stage which leads to a total union (*sayujya*).

A possible deification would not mean that portraits are considered to be images of transcendent or immanent divinities. On the contrary they would act as intermediaries. As a matter of fact, we do not see any trace of a worship independent from a main cult: the presence of a symbol, as a *linga*, or a divine image—either the main cult image or an image combining a representation of a god with a portrait—is necessary to associate the portrayed person to the cult. They can be compared with some sort of medium, on which it has been said:

The possessed man or woman recapitulates the temple icon. Both contain power and are identified with the deity. Both icon and possessed person are not merely representation of the deity but have actually become the deity within the particular, circumscribed, ritual situation.⁷⁹

From this, we can gather another idea: like for the possessed person, the ritual value of a portrait is not necessarily permanent—which, incidentally, is quite in tune with the *Agnicayana* ceremony mentioned above. So, the portraying value of a statue representing, say, an important king of the past may well disappear and the statue becomes a simple local deity (*Yakṣa* or other).⁸⁰ In the same way, after a few

⁷⁸ 59.1–2: *adhunā vakṣyate sarvabhaktānāṃ lakṣaṇaṃ kramāt / pādaṃ caturvidhaṃ proktaṃ tadvaśānmānaṃ grhyate // prathamam sālōkyam atha dvitīyaṃ sāmīpyam ucyate / sārūpyam ca tṛtīyaṃ syāt ājyujyaṃ ca caturthakam //*

⁷⁹ Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 15.

⁸⁰ See below chapter 4, § 2.2.

generations, a double-entendre image can become a 'one-way-only' image representing, accordingly, Buddha, Śiva or Durgā. At the beginning of this study, I said that the intention to portray was at the core of the definition of portraiture. Likewise, it is now obvious that the perception (or even conscience) of images as portraits is essential to the value given to these images and the eventual cult which may be associated with them.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGIN OF PORTRAITURE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF HEROES

So far, I have tried to show, on the one hand, that portraiture was not only an ubiquitous but also an ancient practice in early India and, on the other hand, that there are a lot of common features between portraits and a more religious and divine iconography. In this chapter, I would like to examine more closely these issues, this time in an historical, that is to say chronological, perspective. The main idea—quite in tune with what has been said in the previous chapter regarding the myths on the origin of images—is that ‘portraits’ and ‘divine images’ more or less derive from the same sources, that is representations of heroes, deified or not.

If, up to now, this study rested on relatively firm ground, we are now in the realm of hypotheses; therefore, the following pages should be read as tentative ones, because it will be sometimes difficult or even impossible to put forward indubitable proofs. However, it is my hope that there will be enough converging arguments as to give a plausible picture of the beginnings of portraiture and iconography in South Asia.

1. PORTRAITURE IN PRE-AND PROTO-HISTORICAL TIMES

If there is a question to which it is difficult to answer, it is the age of the most ancient portrait in India. Reasons for this are various: the disappearance of a large number of portraits probably made of perishable materials, the uncertainty about the chronology of early Indian art and the dating of a large number of works in particular, and the impossibility to find, for the most ancient times, a document used to identify unambiguously a particular image as a portrait. To make matters worse, the first proper artistic events to develop in the Indian subcontinent—namely the production of the Indus cities, or even before—are related with civilizations whose links with the Vedic one remain problematic. I can then only express assumptions or rely on probabilities, bearing in mind that a portrait is defined by the three

criteria expressed at the beginning of this study: intention to portray someone specific, perception of an image as a representation of this person and function of the image.

On Neolithic sites, such as Mehrgarh, Nausharo or Nindowari, many human figurines in terracotta have been unearthed, exclusively female for the most ancient periods, then both male and female.¹ Beyond the differences in style and modes of figuration, one can hardly see portraits in these figures, since stylization is very obvious. However, we can note that most of them have been found in quite diverse archaeological contexts which are never the original one: they seem to have been thrown away, because of a very occasional use—which leads us again to the function issue. In one case, at Mehrgarh, a figurine has been found in a tomb in the hands of the deceased, close to her face. A careful observation of these small clay images—especially the presence of holes—suggests that they had probably no divine function but were associated with temporary rituals of a more or less magical nature, perhaps a kind of healing.² On this assumption, we could therefore interpret these figures not as portraits, of course, but as some sort of substitutes for those who possessed them.

Among the images unearthed on the Harappan sites, almost none seems to represent a deity.³ Of course, it is not sufficient to say that they conversely represent real characters. However, doubts may be raised, especially if one considers the image conventionally called the 'priest-king'. It belongs to the later phase of occupation of Mohenjodaro (between 2100 and 1750 BC). The identity of the character is particularly problematic; moreover, many elements of this sculpture could have been brought from Mesopotamia, but, at the same time, we know that some Mesopotamian sculptures represented real people, for example the statue of Satam (2400–2350 BC), grandson of a king of Uruk, kept at the Louvre.⁴ Therefore, identifying the 'priest-king' as

¹ Jean-François Jarrige *et al.*, *Les cités oubliées de l'Indus. Archéologie du Pakistan*, Musée national des Arts asiatiques Guimet (16 novembre 1988–30 janvier 1989) (Paris: RMN, 1988), 65–70.

² Catherine Jarrige, "Human Figurines from the Neolithic Levels at Mehrgarh (Balochistan, Pakistan)", in *South Asian Archaeology 2003*, ed. Ute Franke-Vogt and Hans-Joachim Weisshaar (Aachen: Kommission für Archäologie Aussereuropäischer Kulturen, Linden Soft Verlag, 2005), 34.

³ Leaving aside the very problematic case of the seals bearing the so-called proto-Śiva.

⁴ Jarrige, *Cités oubliées de l'Indus*, 196.

a portrait is not implausible. Besides, the way the cloth is worn, with a bare shoulder, seems closer to the later Indian tradition (one thinks of the Buddhist monastic robe) than to the Middle East, which would indicate a local tradition, or at least a local adaptation of a foreign custom. However, the small number of images comparable does little to support this hypothesis.

Another piece that gave rise to various interpretations is the famous torso of a naked man from Harappa, preserved at the National Museum in New Delhi (Fig. 33). Usually dated around 2000 BC, the doubts raised about the excavation method⁵ and the comparison with another torso from Lohanipur (Fig. 34), usually dated from the Maurya period, could suggest that the torso from Harappa is not earlier than the third or fourth centuries BC. They are sometimes considered—especially the statue from Lohanipur—to be representations, or at least prototypes, of Tirthaṅkaras.

More recently, G. Roth issued a hypothesis, the mention of which can be useful for my purpose. For clarity sake, let us outline his reasoning. The starting point of this article is a study of the *Citrakakṣaṇa*. This treatise, as we know, is attributed to a Nagnajit, but it is also the name of the king who appears at the beginning of the book and who fights against Yama to revive the son of a Brahmin, before becoming the first man to draw a portrait. As, during this battle, the king defeats the *pretas*, who are naked, the text states that the king has earned the title ‘Conqueror of the naked (beings)’ (*nagna-jit*, cf. v. 283–287). Later in the first chapter, the Nagnajit title seems to refer to Viśvakarman, then it is not mentioned any more in the next two chapters. This term is also known from many texts, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain as well, in which it refers to a king of Gandhara.⁶ This region seems to have developed an art of wrestling, performed, as in the Greco-Roman world, by naked men. As evidenced by different weights or dumbbells, votives or real, found in Gandhara, and by many narrative reliefs, wrestling was a long standing tradition in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, and it is likely to have existed before any contacts with the Greek world, as would imply also some evidence from Mathura.⁷ In addition, the

⁵ See Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 89–90.

⁶ Roth, “Notes on the *Citrakakṣaṇa*”, 986–996 for many references.

⁷ On the weights and wrestling in Gandhara, see for instance (for the paper itself but also for the references contained in it) Paul Bernard et Ch. P. Jullien, “Haltères

Divyāvadāna (chapter 26) speaks of two naked athletes (*mahānagnau*) accompanying Aśoka when he entered Takṣaśilā.⁸ In this passage and others, G. Roth sees the trace of a kind of veneration of naked athletes in northwestern India.⁹ Thus, the term 'Nagnajit' before being assigned to the king of the *Citralakṣaṇa* would have designated a kind of champion represented naked, as a form of apotheosis. This type of image would be associated with the idea of the Great Man (*Mahāpuruṣa*). Therefore, the torsos from Harappa and Lohanipur could be 'portraits' of such heroes, and if they are not Tirthaṅkara, they could nevertheless be their visual source.

It must be admitted that speculation here is important and that the demonstration of G. Roth is sometimes complex. However, in relation to other facts which I shall mention a little later, this hypothesis might be meaningful. Let us just consider the following points: at an uncertain time, between the final period of the Indus civilization and the Maurya period, we would see, in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent and possibly also at Mathura, sport champions or men regarded as heroes being depicted naked; the practice of this kind of sport does not need specific reference to the Mediterranean world and can be purely Indian, as is suggested by the treatment of bodies in the case of our two torsos (especially the relatively pronounced abdomen); finally these representations of men, possibly divinized, could serve as a model for subsequent images, which are more clearly those of deities. In short, this kind of images would correspond to the process described in our previous chapter where the argumentation was mostly based on written data.

votives de lutteurs dans le Gandhara", *Studia Iranica* 11 (1982), 33–47; for more material related to Mathura, see Charlotte Schmid, "Représentations anciennes de Kṛṣṇa luttant contre le cheval Keśin sur des haltères: l'*avatāra* de Viṣṇu et le dieu du *Mahābhārata*", *BEFEO* 86 (1999), 65–104.

⁸ One should also highlight the fact that wrestling is often mentioned in Buddhist literature among the activities of the young prince Siddhārtha, Buddha-to-be.

⁹ Roth, "Notes on the *Citralakṣaṇa*", 991.

2. PORTRAITURE IN THE EARLY-HISTORICAL PERIOD (MAURYA-ŚUNGA TIMES)

2.1. *Early human figures*

If we move forward in time, we continue nevertheless to face problematic artefacts. Indeed, the question to know whether human figures (in stone, at least) were made during the Maurya period has long been debated. A number of heads and busts of men, particularly from Sarnath have, in this regard, attracted various interpretations. As pointed out by S. P. Gupta, in the absence of purely objective criteria—the archaeological stratigraphy is unclear and contested—opinions are divided: based on the style of crowns one could go back to the sixth-fifth centuries BC, but the headbands with flowers would probably point to the turn of our era.¹⁰ Not without caution, the author proposes to date them from the end of the second century BC. Among them, one can include a moustached head (Fig. 35): the treatment of the face (broad receding forehead, broad nose, fleshy lips) and the presence of this almost Gallic moustache make this piece rather unique in India. Other comparable items wear headgears that, in some ways, are reminiscent of Hellenistic art, but their overall workmanship and some decorative details are typically Indian.¹¹ Devoid of the famous polished—which is not typical of the Maurya period, contrary to what has long been thought—let me cite also a hairless head adorned with a turban and bearing a large disc as earring (Fig. 36). The ornaments are here very Indian, even if the wide facial features may be less typical. To sum up, we can see in these images a mixture of elements that appears to pertain to a purely local tradition and others that seem derived from foreign influences (Iran and beyond). However, if one accepts these traces of influences from outside India, it should be noted that they are already highly integrated; in any case, they cannot be considered as imported artefacts. We could actually see these apparently non-Indian features as the mere representation of the elements of foreign costume or jewellery. S. P. Gupta has pertinently suggested seeing in some of these heads and busts portraits of foreigners, at a time when, as we

¹⁰ Swaraj Prakash Gupta, *The Roots of Indian Art: A Detailed Study of the Formative (Mauryan and Later Mauryan) Period of Indian Art, 300 B.C.–200 B.C.* (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp., 1980), 86–89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pl. 36b, 37b and 38b.

know, trade, notably in the Northwest, intensified. This would explain the discrepancies: the 'non-Indian' features would betray the representation of a foreign character, while the workmanship would be in tune with the Indian tradition.

It is clear that identifying these images as portraits (of donors?) remains partly speculative. Out of their original context, it is impossible to assert or prove anything. It is possible that these works have had a particular meaning in a narrative context, or were depictions of foreigners in general, without reference to specific individuals.¹² But, conversely, the idea that these are portraits is equally likely.¹³

2.2. Portraits or Yakṣas?¹⁴

2.2.1. The issue: statues and the cult of Yakṣas

If these isolated heads are not uncommon, art in the Early-Historical period, however, is more characterized by the creation of monumental statues which are generally identified as Yakṣa, *i.e.* some kind of spirits of nature.¹⁵ These images have given rise to much debate about their date and, if some scholars proposed to go very far back in time, most of them nowadays tend to place them rather in the Śuṅga period. Despite this uncertainty, these enigmatic statues have been the subject of many peremptory judgments. Thus, according to A. K. Coomaraswamy: "Yakṣa images are the oldest known images in India."¹⁶ More recently, in what is probably one of the most comprehensive studies on the issue, R. N. Misra said:

¹² One could mention many such examples, like the Siamese mercenaries depicted on the walls of Angkor Wat.

¹³ This hypothesis has already been proposed by A. K. Coomaraswamy regarding the heads from Sarnath, and also others from Bhita and Mathura (*History of Indian and Indonesian Art* [London: E. Goldston, 1927], 19–20 and figs. 20 and 21).

¹⁴ This whole development is an extended version of Vincent Lefèvre, "Yakṣas or Portraits? A Re-evaluation of the so-called 'Yakṣa Statues' from the Maurya-Śuṅga Period", in *South Asian Archaeology 2007. Proceedings of the 19th Meeting of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology in Ravenna, Italy, July 2007*. Vol. II: Historic Periods, edited by Pierfrancesco Callieri and Luca Colliva (Oxford: Archaeopress, BAR International Series 2133, 2010), 157–163.

¹⁵ On Yakṣas, see Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, 2 pts. (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1928–1931; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001); Ram Nath Misra, *Yaksha Cult and Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981) and Doris Meth Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes. Origin, Meaning and Form of Multiplicity of Indian Art* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), especially chap. 15, pp. 197–210.

¹⁶ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, 18.

The Yakshas seem to imbibe the idea of the supernatural in their acts, form and appearance, to the widest possible extent. And there is hardly any reason to doubt the impact of primitive-religion on it. How the general traits of primitive-religion moulded themselves into the form of a particular deity, i.e., Yaksha, is difficult to reconstruct. The earliest mention of Yaksha is found in the *Rgveda*, but not as a deity inhering in itself the primitive beliefs. What we find there is an intellectual concept in the form of a symbol and abstraction. (...) But it suffices here to say that the word might have been of a non-Aryan origin and the high-god concept applied to it in the Vedic period might have been due to the fact that a section of the Aryans upheld it. (...) That the Yaksha were originally non-Aryan deities hardly need be doubted, and his non-Aryan character is reflected by the institution of idol-worship, rituals of the cult, the nature of worshippers and the status of the Yaksha priests vis-à-vis the Vedic priests. (...) It is significant that Yakshas' images are the first anthropomorphic representations of any deity in stone and present a uniform iconographic standard in spite of geographical distances between their find-spots. Since image-worship was a pre- or non-Aryan institution and the Yaksha sculptures are the oldest known historical sculptures so far, it may be pleaded that this occurrence is not merely coincidental; it might be indicative of a pattern, flowing from the one to the other.¹⁷

It should be noted at the outset that the whole debate on Yakṣa, despite some much argued statements, is heavily based on *a priori* and prejudices. The first of these ideas is the identification itself of these statues, presented as the oldest of Indian art. Another point, evident in the above quotation, is the belief—not proven, as it seems—in the pre-Vedic or non-Aryan origin of the Yakṣa cult.¹⁸ Without going into this debate, we must admit that the two authors mentioned above—among others—have undertaken considerable work to better understand the personality of the Yakṣas. But, they have left aside an important historical question: if the Yakṣa cult, whatever its origin, was so important as to give birth to the first religious images which, subsequently, became the model for most divine images (Hindu, Buddhist or Jain), what conclusion should we draw about the religious history of India in the first centuries BC, compared to the teachings of the texts? and how to explain the relegation of these divine beings—allegedly so important—in a wholly secondary position by the turn of our era?

¹⁷ Misra, *Yaksha Cult*, 7.

¹⁸ This idea seems to have been proposed first by James Fergusson (*Tree and serpent worship, or Illustrations of mythology and art in India, in the first and fourth centuries after Christ, from the sculptures of the Buddhist topes at Sanchi and Amravati* [London, 1868], 244).

In short, if the study of Yakṣa is not the first purpose of this book, however, we see that the identification of these monumental statues is likely to pose serious problems and it is appropriate to consider whether other identifications are possible or not.¹⁹

2.2.2. *The debate: Yakṣa or royal portrait?*

To clarify things, it is perhaps useful to remind some historiographical data. My presentation will focus on four statues: the two 'Yakṣas' from Patna kept at the Indian Museum (Figs. 37 and 38), the Parkham one (Fig. 39), kept at the Government Museum of Mathura and finally the one from Pawaya (Fig. 40).

The identification of the first two as Yakṣas seems to go back to Cunningham, although he is not really their finder.²⁰ His arguments in this direction were as follows: the reading of the term *yakkhe* in the inscription on the headless statue from Patna, the fact that the characters seem to hold fly-whisk and the fact that when 'discovered' these images were worshipped locally as a kind of deities. Then, when he discovered the statue from Parkham, A. Cunningham wrote:

The statue is a colossal standing figure of a man cut in the round, 7 feet in height from head to foot and 2 feet broad across the shoulders. (...) The statue is made of grey sandstone, and still retains many traces of having been highly polished. The figure is called *Devatā* or "the God", and has been in its present position for an unknown length of time. All the other remains at Parkham are of red sandstone, and comparatively modern. Both arms being broken off just below the shoulders, it is difficult to say what was the action of the figure. But I suspect that the statue was that of a Yaksha, or attendant demi-god, who carried a chauri over the right shoulder.²¹

Obviously, this identification was then only a working hypothesis. *Faute de mieux*, it was followed by everybody. From then on, other statues comparable in size, style and appearance were identified as Yakṣas, including the one from Pawaya, which has an inscription stating he is called Maṇibhadra, but where the word *yakṣa* does not appear.

¹⁹ It is noteworthy that, more recently, some scholars, without formally rejecting this identification, sort of sidestepped the issue; this is the case with S. Huntington's major book on Indian art (1985).

²⁰ The two statues were unearthed in 1812 by Francis Buchanan, but were transferred to the Indian Museum only after A. Cunningham's survey tour (A.S.R. 1882, 3).

²¹ A.S.R. 1885: 41–42.

However, in 1919, K. P. Jayaswal proposed a new reading of the inscriptions on the statues from Patna, which he proposed to identify as two kings of the ancient Śaīsunāga dynasty (483–409 BC, according to him): Aja-Udayin (Fig. 37) and Nandi-Vardhana (Fig. 38). During two years, from Calcutta to London, this article gave rise to passionate debate, with some scholars following enthusiastically Jayaswal's proposal,²² others fighting it hard.²³ The arguments ranged from mere principles—as if the 'concept of Yakṣa', according to some, could not be questioned—to discussions on very specific palaeographic details. Although it is not clearly stated anywhere, it appears in retrospect that Jayaswal's proposal was strongly against the dominant position on Indian art that I quickly mentioned in the Introduction of this book and that this historical, not to say historicist, interpretation on the beginnings of anthropomorphic representation faced many prejudices. Buoyed by the heat of debate, Jayaswal persisted in its historicist vein and went so far as to identify the 'Yakṣa' from Parkham as King Ajātaśatru, because, in the inscription on the pedestal appeared 'Kuṇika', another name of the king of the Śaīsunāga dynasty.²⁴

²² One further argument for the identification of these two statues as royal portraits was also the almost contemporaneous discovery of the *Pratimānātaka*.

²³ The main references are (according to the chronological order): Kashi Prasad Jayaswal, "Statues of Two Śaīsunaka Emperors (483–409 B.C.)", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.1 (1919), 88–106; Rakhal Das Banerji, "A Note on the Statues of Śaīsunāga Emperors in the Calcutta Museum", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.2 (1919), 210–215; Brindavan Chandra Bhattacharya, "Saisunaka Statues", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.3 (1919), 402–404; Vincent Arthur Smith, "Alleged Portrait Statues of Saisunaga-Nanda kings", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.4 (1919), 512–513; Lionel D. Barnett, "Saisunaka Statues", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.4 (1919), 513–516; Kashi Prasad Jayaswal, "Another Saisunaka Statue (cir. 515 B.C.)", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.4 (1919), 550–551; Mm H. P. Sastri, "Sisunaga Statues", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 5.4 (1919), 552–563; Rakhal Das Banerji, "Inscriptions on the Patna Statues", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 6.1 (1920), 40–50; Kashi Prasad Jayaswal, "The Statue of Ajatasatru Kunika and A Discussion on the Origin of Brahmi", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 6.2 (1920), 173–204; R. C. Majumdar, "Inscriptions on the Alleged Śaīsunaga Statues", *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 6.4 (1920), 474–480; R. P. Chanda, "Four Ancient Yakṣa Statues", *Journal of the Department of Letters, University of Calcutta* 4 (1921), 47–84. To this, we should add an article by O. C. Gangoly in the *Modern Review*, October 1919, and other contributions by R. C. Majumdar and R. Chandra in volume 49 (March 1919) of *The Indian Antiquary* (pp. 25ff.) which I have not been able to consult.

²⁴ Jayaswal, "The Statue of Ajatasatru Kunika".

As a matter of fact, this intense debate was ended by an article by R. Chanda (1921) which completely demolished Jayaswal's palaeographic method. Though I am not at all a specialist on that matter, I feel that the demonstration is sound and that the doubt about the precise content of Jayaswal's readings is permitted. However, Chanda argued also that the inscription on the Patna statue was probably much later than the statue itself.²⁵ Be it as it may, he returned to the traditional identification of the statues as 'Yakṣas' without providing additional arguments—which is unfortunate, given that these latter are in fact quite weak. It is regretful that, because of its own excesses, the current which led to see ancient portraits in these statues has in fact strengthened the 'Yakṣa position'. A few years later, the important study by Coomaraswamy was released. If he admitted in passing that the 'Yakṣa' from Deoriya might be a king,²⁶ he in turn rejected completely this idea about the statues from Patna and Parkham and, from then on, the 'Yakṣa interpretation' has become the rule. However, I believe that we have been deprived of a debate and that we should quickly review again the elements of interpretation on the 'Yakṣas'.

2.2.3. *The Yakṣa in ancient literature*

As noted above, the identification of monumental Maurya-Śuṅga statues created a serious problem of religious history: once it was accepted that these colossi were Yakṣas and, moreover, were the only cult images known from this period, it was necessary to give them some sort of 'personality'. It went then to Coomaraswamy and others after him to find in the literature of ancient India the justification for this type of identification and, beyond, the cult that seems to arise.

If the word *yakṣa*, sometimes masculine, sometimes neutral and quite often used in an adjectival way, is common in many texts, it seems to designate a concept, or a personality sometimes benevolent and sometimes malicious, or even any deity: the picture which emerges is therefore, to say the least, complex and contradictory. Most authors seem to agree that the term comes from the root YAKṢ-, 'to appear suddenly'. In the Veda, it is difficult to recognize in this term a well-defined entity. An often quoted passage from the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*

²⁵ Chanda, "Four Ancient Yakṣa Statues", 75.

²⁶ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣa*, 38.

indicates that Prajāpati is an emanation of Brahman-Yakṣa whose likeness he retains:²⁷

Om, verily, the Brahman was this in the beginning, just alone, only self-existent. It willed: "I am the large *yakṣa*. Come, let me measure out from myself a second god of like measure with myself".²⁸

Therefore *yakṣa* appears more or less as a synonym for *deva*: the mention of the second god implies indeed that *mahad yakṣa* is the first. The term is also mentioned in the *Keṇopaniṣad* (3.1–2):

Brahman once saw to the victory of the devas. The devas became elated by the victory, and they thought, this victory is ours, the greatness is ours. Brahman noticed this conceit and appeared to them. But they did not know it, and said: 'What spirit is this (*kim idaṃ yakṣam*)?'²⁹

Yakṣa can also be translated here by 'spirit' or 'ghost' but it is the idea of appearance that prevails. In fact, in both quotations, *yakṣa* is neuter and a translation of the term by 'apparition' or 'manifestation' would be quite accurate. In other words, it is difficult to rely on these passages to speculate on the existence of a high god called *Yakṣa*!

Epics make *Yakṣa* a semi-divine being, belonging to a series of similar beings with whom he is more or less confused: *Devas*, *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras*, *Kinnaras*, *Guhyas*, *Rakṣāsas*, etc. However, the concept of emergence is still present in the passage of *Mahābhārata* where Yudhiṣṭhira meets his father Dharma as a '*Yakṣa*' disguised as a blue heron (III.297–299).³⁰ In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (VII.4.9–13)—which is probably later than the rest of the work—gives the following explanation of the origin of *Yakṣas* and *Rākṣasas*:

Once Prajāpati, after creating the water, appeared himself on a lotus on the surface of the wave, which he entrusted to the custody of the beings he created for this purpose. As these beings, who had humbly submitted to the author of their existence, tormented by the fear of hunger and thirst, asked him what to do, Prajāpati approached them all with

²⁷ See Srinivasan, *Many Heads*, 205 and fn. 42.

²⁸ *om brahma ha vā idaṃ agra āsīt svayaṃ tv ekam eva tad aikṣata mahad vai yakṣaṃ tad ekam evāsmi hantāhaṃ mad eva manmātraṃ dvitīyaṃ devaṃ nirmama iti.*

²⁹ *brahma ha devebhyo vijigye / tasya ha brahmaṇo vijaye devā amahīyanta / ta aikṣantāsmākam evāyaṃ vijayo āsmākam evāyaṃ mahimeti// tad dhaiṣāṃ vijajñau / tebhyo ha prādur babhūva / tan na vyajānata / kim idaṃ yakṣam iti//.*

³⁰ See for instance III.297.18: *yakṣo'ham asmī bhadraṃ te nāsmi pakṣī jalecaraḥ / mayāite nihatāḥ sarve bhrātaraḥ te mahaujaśaḥ //.*

a playful air: ‘Be the zealous guardians of the waters, descendants of Manu!’, he bade them. Some of them, who were hungry, answered: ‘We will keep them’, and others, who were thirsty, said: ‘We will venerate them’. The Creator said: ‘Those of you who say “rakṣāmaḥ” (we will keep) will become Rākṣasa, and that those of you who said “yakṣāmaḥ” (we will venerate) will become Yakṣa!’³¹

Of all these examples, it appears that in the Vedic texts, the word *yakṣa* seems to refer above all to a concept which can be applied to any deity, and that, little by little, it began to designate a kind of secondary divine being with poorly defined contours.³² In any event, it is difficult to detect behind this term the existence of an important deity with a well-defined personality.

In the Jain texts, Yakṣas rank among the *vyantara* or *vāṇamantara* gods, along with the Piśācas, the Bhūtas, the Rākṣasas, the Kinnaras, etc. As in Buddhism, their personality seems quite ambivalent and it is rather late that iconography attributes a number of Yakṣas to each Tīrthaṅkara.

In Buddhism, precisely, the term *yakṣa* appears usually in the pāli form *yakkha*. It is, again, very difficult to detect a well-defined entity. Indeed, sometimes the term *yakkha* is used about the Buddha (e.g. *Majjhima Nikāya* I.386) or Sakka (e.g. *Majjhima Nikāya* I.252), and in the *Jātakas* it is then often synonymous with *devatā*. In addition, the legend of the historical Buddha says that at his birth the future Buddha was presented to Śakyavardhana, tutelary ‘Yakṣa’ of the Śākya clan. But in the *Lalitavistāra* version (chap. 8), the newborn is brought to the temple of the gods (Śiva, Sūrya, etc.), which suggests once again that the term *yakṣa* could be applied for the major gods (*deva*). Finally, in the *Vinaya-Piṭaka* (I.277), *yakkha* serves to gloss *amanussa* (Sk. *amānuṣa*) and the commentary states that it is a dead man who

³¹ *Rāmāyaṇa* VII.4.9–13: *prājapatiḥ purā sṛṣṭvā apah salilasambhavaḥ / tāsām gopāyane sattvānasṛjāt padmasambhavaḥ // te sattvāḥ sattvakartāraṃ vinitavad upasthitāḥ / kiṃ kurma iti bhāṣantaḥ kṣutpipāsābhayārditāḥ // prajāpatis tu tān sarvān pratyāha prahasanniva / ābhāṣya vācā yatnena rakṣadhvam iti mānada // rakṣāma iti tatrānyair yakṣāma iti cāparaiḥ / bhunṅṣitābhunṅṣitair uktas tatas tān āhabhūtakṛt // rakṣāma iti yair uktaṃ rākṣasās te bhavantu vaḥ / yakṣāma iti yair uktaṃ yakṣā eva bhavantu vaḥ //*

³² As R. N. Misra himself remarked (*Yaksha Cult*, 6): “Theses anecdotes about the Yaksha origin are fundamentally in opposition to the Vedic concept of the primordial Yakṣa”, even though it is not clearly stated what the ‘primordial Yakṣa’ is supposed to be.

wishes to return.³³ This latter term appears also in a text already cited: the *Citralakṣaṇa*, the most ancient Indian text on image-making. The third chapter (618 v.) details at length the measurement system and the proportions of images and Brahmā states that the measurements apply for different kinds of beings (528–539):

Brahmā himself has expounded for me on the different bodily proportions of the kings and other beings; I will explain exactly these methods of measurement to you, as will you do it to other men. The following measurements are applicable to Asuras, Nāgas, Rākṣasas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Siddhas, Vādāna and Jaritars, Piśācas, Pretas, Kumbhāṇḍhas and the host of the Vidyādhara, for the human beings, Amānuṣas and Kings.³⁴

Obviously, *amānuṣa* is a category between the images of human beings and those of kings: hence, we can surmise it designates some kind of mortal. It is quite consistent with the above quoted passage from the *Rāmāyaṇa* which designates the ‘Yakṣas’ as ‘descendants of Manu’.

To sum up, in Buddhism, *yakṣa/yakkha* remains undetermined, but it is clear that the beings designated by this term are more or less worshipped in a *caitya*. Therefore, one can wonder whether the term is not a very large one which can be applied to all forms of non-Buddhist worship but which could possibly be recovered by Buddhism.

2.2.4. *Back to the portrait interpretation?*

From this short survey, it appears that the ‘Yakṣa’ never appears as a proper deity, unless the term is used in the abstract sense of ‘apparition’. One has to wait until the time of Epics (and yet!) to see ‘Yakṣas’ included in a series of semi-divine beings, even if their personality remains unclear. As such, it is almost impossible to see the trace of an independent cult of some importance and I wonder whether it is not a pure (if unconscious) invention by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century indologists. Let me remind that the texts mentioned above have been read that way because of the idea that, in the first centuries BC,

³³ Quoted in Misra, *Yaksha Cult*, 2, fn. 3. According to the *Pali-English Dictionary*: ‘*amanussā*, not human being (but not a sublime god either), a being half-deified and of great power as regards influencing people (partly helpful, partly harmful)’.

³⁴ *An Early Document of Indian Art. The Citralakṣaṇa of Nagnajit*, translated and introduced by B. N. Goswamy and A. L. Dahmen-Dallapiccola, following the German edition of the *Citralakṣaṇa* based on the Tibetan Tanjur, edited and translated by Berthold Laufer (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1976).

colossal images were erected in honour of ‘Yakṣas’—which, methodologically speaking, is rather peculiar. This identification—which, as we have seen, was at one moment questioned—once deprived of this fragile textual support, is in fact only based on the following arguments:

- The occurrence of the term *yakkha* in the Bharhut inscriptions;
- The reading of the word *yakkhe* in the inscription on one of the statues from Patna;
- The name Mañibhadra given to the ‘Yakṣa’ from Pawaya by his inscription.

I leave aside, until the next paragraph, the first point. The second argument, advanced by Cunningham, is not accepted by all palaeographers;³⁵ it may then not be taken for totally certain; besides, as shown above, the meaning of *yakṣa* can be quite large or vague: it could be only ‘apparition’ or ‘image’. It leaves the name of Mañibhadra, which is attributed to a ‘Yakṣa’ in some late Jain texts, but especially in the *Mahāmāyurī*. This latter is a Buddhist text containing various spells and, more importantly, a long list of ‘Yakṣas’, presented as the tutelary deities of a number of cities and regions. According to Sylvain Lévi who has studied this particular passage: “the Yakṣa is essentially a divine character closely associated by tradition with local memories.”³⁶ Two remarks should be made about this passage. On the one hand, we find among the ‘Yakṣas’ a few major gods (Viṣṇu, Kārttikeya, etc.), which, once again, calls to question the specificity of the term *yakṣa*. On the other hand, this text, which dates from the third-fourth centuries AD,³⁷ was translated into Chinese several times between the fourth and the eighth century, but the famous list is absent from the first translations and appears for the first time in AD 516.³⁸ Used in relation

³⁵ See Rakhal Das Banerji, “A Note on the Statues of Śaiśunāka Emperors” and “Inscriptions on the Patna Statues”. More generally, it is noteworthy that those who read *yakkhe* are also in favour of the ‘Yakṣa’ thesis and it is a well-known fact that in palaeography the reading may depend on what one wishes or at least expects to read.

³⁶ Sylvain Lévi, “Le catalogue géographique des Yakṣa dans la *Mahāmāyurī*”, *Journal Asiatique* 5 (1915), 119.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24–26. R. Chanda (“Four Ancient Yakṣa Statues”, 78–79) quotes M. M. Śāstrī according to whom the text may not be anterior to the ninth century though a work with this title is mentioned in Bāṇa’s *Harṣacarita* (first half of the seventh century): “It is difficult to say whether the *Mahāmāyurī* published by Sylvain Lévi is

with the images with which we are concerned here, one must admit that this evidence is definitely late and we may even question its real authenticity.

If we want to find the name Mañibhadra in an older source, we must turn to the *Mahāniddesa* (I.92 and others).³⁹ This text, which is a gloss on the 16 *sutta* of the *Aṭṭakavagga*,⁴⁰ dates, according to Sylvain Lévi, from the third-second century BC.⁴¹ Mañibhadda(vattikā) is mentioned alongside with Puṇṇabhadda, Vasudevattikā and Baladevattikā. Behind these two latter names, one recognizes Vāsudeva and Bālarāma, the two main Vṛṣṇis. Mañibhadra is then placed on the same level as these two deified heroes and, as the term *yakṣa* does not appear here, we could qualify him instead of 'Vīra'. I will go back later to this Vīra issue. Regarding the representations of the Vṛṣṇis, it suffices for the moment to say that, although history is mixed here with legend, we seem to face here 'portraits'—certainly made *a posteriori*—of real people or having a more or less valid historical existence. In addition, images of 'Vīras' correspond to the process expressed in the treatises on image-making and according to which divine images are derived from portraits. The 'Vīras'—and they could be compared with the 'naked heroes' I mentioned above—can often be quite close to some of the famous 'Yakṣas' and in some cases it is difficult to distinguish one from another: this is the case of 'Yakṣa' from Biravai (the village name is derived from the Sanskrit *vīra*!) holding a sword on his side.⁴²

In this context, it is tempting to return to the interpretation advanced by Jayaswal, at least in part. Indeed, the inscriptions on some of the statues give some names (Kuṇika, Mañibhadra, Vaṭa Nandi, etc.). It is impossible to clearly identify these characters (and even to be sure

the same as the text referred to by Bāṇa. But we may safely infer the similarity of the subject-matter from the identity of the name of the texts. Śaṅkara, the commentator of Harṣacarita, writes: *mahāmāyūrī buddha-vidyā, śivamantra iti kecit*. "Mahāmāyūrī is a Buddhist text; some say it is a Śaivite formula." As *Mahāmāyūrī* was recognised as a holy text in the first half of the seventh century A.D., it must have been considerably older." We may doubt the validity of such an argument.

³⁹ Quoted in Misra, *Yaksha Cult*, 43, fn. 20.

⁴⁰ The *Aṭṭakavagga* is part of the *Suttanipāta*, which belongs to the *Khuddakarikāya*.

⁴¹ See Jean Filliozat et Louis Renou, *L'Inde classique, manuel des études indiennes* (Paris, Hanoi: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1953), vol. 2, § 1968.

⁴² Srinivasan, *Many Heads*, pl. 16.10. This example demonstrates that, on the whole, we should be a bit more cautious when using this kind of labels which, in the end, give the impression to designate something precise whereas they are only a way to name an image the identity of which is rather mysterious.

of the reading), but it may be quite possible that they were kings, or at least important people. The rapprochement with the ‘Viras’ could suggest a kind of apotheosis of heroes and/or ancestors. From this point of view, they appear as portraits of a particular kind, as they are divinized—and the influence of these images on the future iconography of the three major Indian religions is, in this respect, significant. Indeed, we saw that images of gods were considered as portraits. Furthermore, we know that, from an artistic point of view, some representations of the Buddha (and possibly the Jina) maintain close relationships with our famous ‘Yakṣas’. But the Buddha images are always presented by textual evidence as portraits, or portraits of a Cakravartin.⁴³ If we therefore identify these Early Historical statues as portraits of kings⁴⁴—which might be allowed by epigraphy—we get after all a rather consistent picture.

2.2.5. *The case of Bharhut*

We now have to consider the case of the figures from Bharhut. Indeed, the large characters adorning the railing of the monument have long been recognized as ‘Yakṣas’ and ‘Yakṣīs’, whose names are given since many of them are accompanied by short labels in which the word *yakkha* also appears. However, except for Kubera and Virūdhaka, many of these supposed ‘Yakṣas’ and ‘Yakṣīs’ cannot be identified: their names do not appear elsewhere. And those who are supposed to be known from elsewhere are always related to very different sources from one another.⁴⁵ Therefore these identifications do not always seem to be very consistent. Moreover, these figures do not correspond to the canon of the colossal statues from Parkham, Patna, etc. Unfortunately, there is no satisfactory solution to the identification of these

⁴³ See § 3.1.

⁴⁴ Perhaps deified, though nothing clearly proves it either.

⁴⁵ See for example Ajakāla, unknown in other sources (Heinrich Lüders, ed. and trans., *Bharhut Inscriptions*, revised by Ernest Waldschmidt and Madhukar Anant Mehendale, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, II, pt. 2 [Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist of India, 1963], 74–75, no. B3, pl. XXIX), Suchiloma, mentioned in *Suttanipāta* (New Edition by Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith [London, Pali Text Society: Oxford University Press, 1913], 47ff.) and *Samyuttanikāya* (Edited by Leon Feer. 3 vols. [London, Pali Text Society: Oxford University Press, 1884], 207ff.) (Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions*, 79, no. B9, pl. XXXI) and Sudarśana (*Mahābhārata* 13.2.4ff.) who, in the *Mahāmāyūrī* is either a Yakṣa (S. von Oldenburg, “Mahā-māyūrī-vidya-rajñī”, *Zapiski vostochnago otdelenija Imp. Russk. Archeol. obschestva* (1899), II, 231) or a Nāgarāja (*ibid.*, 246) (Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions*, 79–80, no. B10, pl. XXXII).

characters, but it seems unlikely, once again, that the word *yakṣa* refers to a specific category of divine beings.⁴⁶ The case of Bharhut gives then no reason to reinforce the 'Yakṣa' thesis presented above.

On the other hand, there are on the same monument some medallions decorated with anonymous male and female busts (Fig. 41). Given the diversity of the donors of the building, one wonders if they are not representations of some of them. In one case at least, it is almost certain to identify a portrait. Indeed, on the corner pillar of the southeastern quadrant, on the south of the eastern door, we can see a royal figure riding an elephant and holding a reliquary (Fig. 42). The king is accompanied by two squires and, on the other side of the pillar, there is a man holding of a banner surmounted by Garuḍa. Moreover, on the corner pillar of the southwestern quadrant, on the west of the southern door, there is a female standard bearer on a horse (Fig. 43) who corresponds to the other group and seems to be part of the same procession. The scene likely evokes the foundation of the *stūpa*. Since the monument is not related to the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, it is possible that the king is Aśoka.⁴⁷ Another possibility is that it is not the first founder, but the one who has erected, as we learn from epigraphy,⁴⁸ the eastern gate, King Dhanabhūti.⁴⁹ In addition, since an inscription specifies the name of his wife and son (Nāgarakhitā and Vādhapāla), this seems to confirm this hypothesis by identifying the two other banner holders.

Another figure from Bharhut is more problematic. It represents a warrior whose accoutrement indicates clearly a foreigner (Fig. 44). The inscription above the head of the figure indicates the name of a donor: Mahila. Based on that name, approximated with Mihira, as well as on the warrior's boots, Barua proposed to see a solar deity, a view which seems to be followed by Coomaraswamy.⁵⁰ However, J. N. Banerjea has, meanwhile, proposed to see this more or less idealized

⁴⁶ I would be tempted to understand the word *yakkha* in the inscriptions as 'this is the representation/image of...'

⁴⁷ Benimadhab Barua and K. G. Sinha, ed. and trans., *Bharhut Inscriptions* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1926), I, 33.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁹ According to A. K. Coomaraswamy (*La sculpture de Bharhut*, traduit par Jean Buhot [Paris: Annales du Musée Guimet, 1956], 41, fn. 1), Dhanabhūti might have added new relics to the first deposit and have considered himself as the living incarnation of the first founder.

⁵⁰ Barua and Sinha, *Bharhut Inscriptions*, II, 68–70; Coomaraswamy, *La sculpture de Bharhut*, 62.

picture as an Indo-Greek king, which is plausible and is, as far as we are concerned, ultimately less problematic.⁵¹ Besides Mahila's sword is reminiscent of the way the 'Yakṣa/Vīra' from Biravai is portrayed.

After this presentation on Early Historical statues, I cannot claim to have solved the 'Yakṣa' riddle. It only seems possible to say that the word *yakṣa* appears to have a very vague meaning, at least at first; in a second (but much later) phase, it was applied to a class of secondary divine beings. In fact, it seems that the identification of Yakṣas as main deities may be a sort of fabrication by nineteenth century indologists. Be it as it may, I can say that the identification as such of the colossal statues referred to above is rather unsecure. It remains then to know who these characters really are. Although it is not possible to demonstrate conclusively, it is possible that they are portraits of rulers or dignitaries. Likewise, it is difficult to determine whether these portraits were made during the lifetime of their models or are more akin to a form of ancestor worship. But we have seen that the Yakṣa title could be used to designate a sort of deified mortal (*amānuṣa*); maybe they are divinized portraits: if it is so, they could be also the first examples of double-entendre image in India. Nevertheless, the influence of these images on the later religious iconography—Hindu, Buddhist or Jain—is consistent with the pattern described in the previous chapters.

3. PORTRAITS AND THE FIRST 'DIVINE IMAGES' AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ERA (KUṢĀṆA PERIOD)

Although the precise chronology—both relative and absolute—of the first indisputable cult images is still a matter of debate, it is quite clear that the first representations of the Buddha, the Jina and the most important Hindu gods appeared more or less contemporaneously at the beginning of our era, that is during the Kuṣāṇa period or even a little before. Most of this issue is naturally far beyond the scope of my study. However, in the Buddhist, Jain and Vaiṣṇava contexts, the first images are sometimes related to portraiture. Thus, it may be useful to examine briefly these traditions.

⁵¹ Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), 293, fn. 1.

3.1. *Stories on the origin of the images of Buddha and Mahāvīra*

As already reminded earlier in this book, many Buddhist textual traditions tried to justify the appearance of the Buddha image with legends according to which portraits of the Buddha were created during his lifetime and with his consent, if not his blessing. For instance, in the *Ekottarāgama*, which, according to André Bareau, belonged to the Mahāsāṅghika tradition,⁵² it is said that, when the Buddha went to the Trayastrimśa Heaven to preach the Law to the gods, the Buddhist community was in despair; since Ānanda was of no help, Udāyana, king of the Vatsas, was advised by his counsellors to have a sandalwood image of the Buddha, five feet high, made; he was soon followed by the king of Kośala, Prasenajit, who had an image made out of gold in order to reflect the golden complexion of the Buddha; finally, when the Blessed One descended again on Earth at Samkasya, he was shown the two substitutes by the kings and declared them to be imbued with all sort of merits.⁵³

Narrating his travel to India in the *Fo guo ji*, the Chinese pilgrim Faxian told more or less the same story. In Samkasya, he indeed saw a statue of the Buddha but he attributed it, as it seems, to King Aśoka, that is, after the *parinirvāṇa* (chapter 17).⁵⁴ But, when dealing with the site of Sravasti (chapter 20), he tells a legend much alike that

⁵² André Bareau, "Les débuts de la prédication du Buddha selon l'*Ekottara-āgama*", *BEFEO* 77 (1988), 69–96.

⁵³ *Taishō* 125 XXVIII (quoted in *Hōbōgirin*, fasc. 3).

⁵⁴ Chapter 17: "As Buddha descended from his position aloft in the Trayastrimśas heaven, when he was coming down, there were made to appear three flights of precious steps. Buddha was on the middle flight, the steps of which were composed of the seven precious substances. The king of Brahmā-loka also made a flight of silver steps appear on the right side, (where he was seen) attending with a white chowry in his hand. Śakra, Ruler of Devas, made (a flight of) steps of purple gold on the left side, (where he was seen) attending and holding an umbrella of the seven precious substances. An innumerable multitude of the devas followed Buddha in his descent. When he was come down, the three flights all disappeared in the ground, excepting seven steps, which continued to be visible. Afterwards king Aśoka, wishing to know where their ends rested, sent men to dig and see. They went down to the yellow springs without reaching the bottom of the steps, and from this the king received an increase to his reverence and faith, and built a *vihāra* over the steps, with a standing image, sixteen cubits in height, right over the middle flight. Behind the *vihāra* he erected a stone pillar, about fifty cubits high, with a lion on the top of it. Let into the pillar, on each of its four sides, there is an image of Buddha, inside and out shining and transparent, and pure as it were of lapis lazuli." I follow J. Legge's edition and translation, also accessible on the Web: <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/fa-hien/f151/>.

from the *Ekottarāgama*, except that only Prasenajit has a sandal-wood image made:

When Buddha went up to the Trayastriṃśas heaven, and preached the Law for the benefit of his mother, (after he had been absent for) ninety days, Prasenajit, longing to see him, caused an image of him to be carved in Gośīrṣa Candana wood, and put in the place where he usually sat. When Buddha on his return entered the *vihāra*, Buddha said to it, "Return to your seat. After I have attained to *parinirvāṇa*, you will serve as a pattern to the four classes of my disciples," and on this the image returned to its seat. This was the very first of all the images (of Buddha), and that which men subsequently copied. Buddha then removed, and dwelt in a small *vihāra* on the south side (of the other), a different place from that containing the image, and twenty paces distant from it.

We find almost the same story told in 629 by another famous Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang.⁵⁵ Somewhat earlier in his book, when describing Kausambi, he had given more information on the statues patronized by Udāyana:

In the city, within an old palace, there is a large *vihāra* about 60 feet high; in it is a figure of Buddha carved out of sandal-wood, above which is a stone canopy. It is the work of the king U-to-yen-na (Udāyana). By its spiritual qualities (or, between its spiritual marks) it produces a divine light, which from time to time shines forth. The princes of various countries have used their power to carry off this statue, but although many men have tried, not all the number could move it. They therefore worship copies of it, and they pretend that the likeness is a true one, and this is the original of all such figures.

When Tathāgata first arrived at complete enlightenment, he ascended up to heaven to preach the law for the benefit of his mother, and for three months remained absent. This king (*i.e.* Udāyana), thinking of him with affection, desired to have an image of his person; therefore he asked Mudgalyānaputra, by his spiritual power, to transport an artist to the heavenly mansions to observe the excellent marks of Buddha's body, and carve a sandal-wood statue. When Tathāgata returned from the heavenly palace, the carved figure of sandal-wood rose and saluted the Lord of the World. The Lord then graciously addressed it and said, "The work expected from you is to toil in the conversion of heretics, and to lead in the way of religion future ages."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Samuel Beal, trans., *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen tsiang (A.D. 629)* (London: Trübner and Co., 1884; reprint, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), vol. 2, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 235–236.

We will find later the theme of the theft of the statue and its immovability.

Finally, let us cite another version taken from the *Divyāvadāna*, the famous Buddhist legend book. In chapter 37 (according to Cowell's edition), it is said that Bimbisāra, king of Magadha, wants to make a gift to Rudrāyaṇa, king of Roruka; asked for a piece of advice, the Buddha suggests to offer his own image painted on cloth. However it happens that the painters (*citrakarāḥ*) are so impressed by the extraordinary personality of the Buddha that they are unable to draw his likeness; therefore, he casts his shadow on the cloth in such a way that the painters have just to draw the limbs and then color them.⁵⁷ After receiving the 'portrait' and listening to Buddhist preachers, Rudrāyaṇa chooses to become a monk and leaves the throne to his son. But the latter is so oppressive against his people that Rudrāyaṇa decides to come back to his capital with the monk Kātyāyana; upon his arrival, he is murdered by his son and Kātyāyana is almost buried alive; he however manages to escape and announces that seven days after the city will be destroyed by a sandstorm—a prediction which, of course, becomes reality!

One can find almost the same story told by Xuanzang, the only difference being that it is not a painted cloth that is sent to Rudrāyaṇa but the sandalwood statue made by Udāyana which flies miraculously from Kausambi to Roruka, in Turkestan:

After going 30 *li* or so from the field of battle we come to the town of Pimā. Here there is a figure of Buddha in a standing position made of sandalwood. The figure is about twenty feet high. It works many miracles and reflects constantly a bright light. Those who have any disease, according to the part affected, cover the corresponding place on the

⁵⁷ *Bhagavān āha / tathāgatapratimām paṭe likhāpayitvā prābhṛtam anupraheṣaya / tena citrakarā āhuyoktāḥ / tathāgatapratimām paṭe citrayatha / durāsadā buddhā bhagavantāḥ / te na śaknuvanti bhagavato nimittam udgrahītum / te kathayanti / yadi devo bhagavantam antargrhe bhojayed eva svayaṃ saṃjñāpaya bhagavato nimittam udgrahītum / rajñā bimbisāreṇa bhagavān antargrhe upanimantrya bhojitaḥ / asecanakadarśanā buddhā bhagavantāḥ / te yam evāvayavam bhagavataḥ paśyanti tam eva paśyanto na trptim gacchanti / te na śaknuvanti bhagavato nimittam udgrahītum / bhagavān āha / mahārāja khedam āpatsyante na śakyante tathāgatasya nimittam udgrahītum / api tu paṭakam ānaya / tena paṭaka ānitaḥ / tatra bhagavatā chāyā utsṛṣṭā uktāś ca / raṅgaiḥ pūrayata tasyādhaṣṭāś charaṇagamaṇaśikṣāpadāni likhitavyāni anulomapratilomadvādaśāṅgaḥ pratityasamutpādo likhitavyo gāthādvayaṃ ca likhitavyam / ... (The *Divyāvadāna*, A Collection of Early Buddhist Legends, now first edited from the Nepalese mss. in Cambridge and Paris by E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil [Cambridge, 1886], 547, 6–20).*

statue with gold-leaf, and forthwith they are healed. People who address prayers to it with a sincere heart mostly obtain their wishes. This is what the natives say: This image in old days when Buddha was alive was made by Udāyana, king of Kauśambi. When Buddha left the world, it mounted of its own accord into the air and came to the north of this kingdom, to the town of Ho-lo-lo-kia. The men of this city were rich and prosperous, and deeply attached to heretical preaching, with no respect for any other form of religion. From the time the image came there it showed its divine character, but no one paid it respect.

Afterwards, there was an Arhat who bowed down and saluted the image; the people of the country were alarmed at his strange appearance and dress, and they hastened to tell the king. The king issued a decree that the stranger should be covered with sand and earth. At this time the Arhat's body being covered with sand, he sought in vain for food as nourishment. There was a man whose heart was indignant at such treatment; he had himself always respected the image and honored it with worship, and now seeing the Arhat in this condition, he secretly gave him food. The Arhat being on the point of departure addressed the man and said, "Seven days hence there will be a rain of sand and earth which will fill the city full, and there will in a brief space be none left alive. You ought to take measures for escape in knowledge of this. They have covered me with earth, and this is the consequence to them." Having said this he departed, disappearing in a moment.

The man, entering the city, told the tidings to his relatives, but they did nothing but mock at him. The second day a great wind suddenly arose, which carried before it all the dirty soil, whilst there fell various precious substances. Then the men continued to revile the man who had told them (about the sand and the earth).

But this man, knowing in his heart what must certainly happen, excavated for himself an underground passage leading outside the city, and there lay concealed. On the seventh day, in the evening, just after the division of the night, it rained sand and earth, and filled the city. This man escaped through his tunnel and went to the east, and, arriving in this country, he took his abode in Pima. Scarcely had the man arrived when the statue also appeared there; he forthwith paid it worship in this place and dared not go farther. According to the old account it is said, "When the law of Śākya is extinct then this image will enter the dragon-palace."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, vol. 2, 322–324. This story is also narrated by Kṣemendra in his *Avadāna-kalpalatā*, chapter 40.

According to E. Huber, this legend would indicate that the *Vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādins, to which the *Divyāvadāna* is related, has been amplified and modified in Turkestan.⁵⁹

Interestingly, this legend has a parallel in the Jain tradition.⁶⁰ For the sake of clarity, it is worth examining the texts chronologically. It all starts with the mention of an image of Jīvantasvāmī, *i.e.* Vardhamāna Mahāvīra before he renounces the world.⁶¹ According to U. P. Shah, the most ancient text alluding to this image may be Vācaka Saṅghadāsa gaṇi's *Vasudevahiṇḍī*, which is derived from Guṇaḍhya's *Bṛhat Kathā*; it would not be later than the beginning of the seventh century but could be much earlier.⁶² This image is located in Ujjain. According to a later commentary by Kṣemakīrti, the monk Ārya Suhastī went to this city, where he converted Aśoka's grand-son, Samprati, in order to worship this image. In AD 733, Jinadāsa, in his *Āvaśyaka Cūrṇi*, gives more detail regarding the origin of the statue: in the city of Campā lives a goldsmith called Kumāranandī who has a Jain friend, Nāgila; both of them are granted a rebirth as gods, respectively Vidyunmālī and Acyuta Indra and the latter advises the former to have a sandal-wood image of Mahāvīra made. Later this image comes in the hands of Udāyana, king of Vītabhayapattana in Sindhu-Sauvīra. Common to the Buddhist and Jain traditions, Udāyana is also supposed to be a contemporary of Mahāvīra. The statue is then stolen by Pradyota, king of Ujjain, who replaces it by a copy. This theft leads to a fight in which Udāyana is finally victorious; however he appears to be unable to remove the image from its new location and gives it up when he is told that the city of Vītabhayapattana is about to be destroyed by a sandstorm; the image is then left at Daśapura (Mandasor).

The story is again narrated by Haribhadra (eighth century), in his *Āvaśyaka Vṛtti*, and finally by Hemaçandra, in chapters 11 and 12 of the 10th book of the *Triṣaṣṭi-śalākā-puruṣa-caritra*. This latter text contains some interesting precisions. First of all, it is said that the god Vidyunmālī has the image made after he has seen Vardhamāna

⁵⁹ Edouard Huber, "Études de littérature bouddhique, VIII : La destruction de Roruka", *BEFEO* 6 (1906), 335–340.

⁶⁰ U. P. Shah, "A Unique Jaina Image of Jīvantasvāmī", *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda* 1.1 (1951), 72–79, and "Sidelights on the Life-Time Sandal-Wood Image of Mahāvīra", *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda* 1.3 (1951), 358–367.

⁶¹ *Jīvantasvāmī* is also a title applied to images of Jain religious teachers; see Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 23, fn. 14.

⁶² Shah, "A Unique Jaina Image", 72.

in his palace at Kṣatriya-kuṇḍa-grāma: it is for this reason that the future Mahāvīra is portrayed as a prince and that the image is called Jīvantasvāmī.⁶³ Then we are told that Pradyota dedicates the city of Daśapura to the worship of the image stolen from Vītabhayapattana, made while Mahāvīra was alive.⁶⁴ Last but not least, the copy of this first statue disappears during the destruction of the city but is found again, thanks to an inscribed grant given by Udāyana, by king Kumārapāla (Hemacandra's patron) who installs it in a temple of his capital city of Patan in Gujarat.⁶⁵ Besides, all these texts agree on the fact that after Mahāvīra's visit to Vītabhayapattana Udāyana turns a Jain monk and places his nephew on the throne; like Rudrāyaṇa in the Buddhist version, he is murdered upon his return to the city which is destroyed, according to the prediction.

Obviously both Buddhist and Jain traditions have in common the story of a destroyed city in which there is an image of the Buddha or Mahāvīra fashioned during his lifetime. The main differences are the fact that, on the Buddhist side, the portrait is a painting which is an original whereas, on the Jain side, the remaining image is a copy of the original statue; besides, the location of the city is not the same: Turkestan in the Buddhist version (if one follows Xuanzang) and Sindh in the Jain one.⁶⁶ Of course, one can wonder which one of the two versions borrows from the other. It is a bit difficult to decide, the more so because it may also be the same legend (perhaps drawn from more or less actual facts) 'buddhicized' in one case and 'jainized' on the other—but I will go back to this point in a short while. It is a well-known fact that Buddhism and Jainism, from the very beginning, have very much in common and that the images of the two founders appeared more or less contemporaneously, though it is usually assumed that the representations of the Jina served as model for those of the Buddha (at least in the seated position).

⁶³ *Triṣaṣṭi-śalākā-puruṣa-caritra* 10.11.379–380: *vidyunmālyapi tasyājñāmurārikṛtya satvaraḥ / kṣatriyakuṇḍagrāme' smān apaśyat pratimāsthītān // gatvā mahāhimavati chittvā goṣṛṣacandanam / asman mūrtim tathā dṛṭāṃ sālaṃkāraṃ cakāra saḥ //*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 10.11.604–606: *pradyoto'pi vītabhayapratimāyai viśuddhadhiḥ / śāsanena daśapuraṃ datvā'vantipurīm agāt // anyedyur vidiśāṃ gatvā bhāyalasvāmināmakam / devakiyaṃ puraṃ ca nānyathā dharaṇoditam // vidyunmālīkṛtāyai tu pratimāyai mahīpatiḥ / pradadau dvādaśagrāmasahasrān śāsanena saḥ //*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 10.12.36–93.

⁶⁶ Shah, "Sidelights", 363.

This development has been quite long, but this length was necessary to demonstrate both the importance of the phenomenon and the relationship between the two traditions. As a matter of fact, the date and the geographical origin of these different versions may vary, but it is evident that the themes are very much alike. The occasion and the patron are not always the same, but every time an important (royal) person has an image of the Master made during his lifetime: in one case, the Buddha is absent but when he comes back he accepts the existence of the portrait; in another, he himself suggests the fashioning of the image in order to be sent to a place where he does not dwell. One difference lies in the fact that the implication of Mahāvīra, contrary to the Buddha, is much more discreet. Obviously all these legends aim at obliterating the non-existence of any image contemporaneous to the Buddha (or Mahāvīra) and at justifying the appearance of the first images. Moreover, it must be stressed that this justification was based on the very idea of portraiture, which clearly indicates that the notion was universally accepted, if not during Buddha's time, at least before the beginning of the Common Era.

As we know, statues of the so-called Yakṣas have been the models of the first images of Buddha, bodhisattvas and Jinas. Thus, I wonder whether the statues mentioned in the texts cited above were not alike these 'Yakṣas'. Of course, these literary testimonies do not really validate my theory regarding the 'Yakṣas', but they are nevertheless quite in tune with it: it seems indeed to be clear that the first Buddhist and Jain cult images derived from pre-existing portraits and we know precisely some earlier statues which might have been 'portraits'. It may be only a coincidence—but perhaps not...

It was also important to my point to show that one textual tradition borrows from the other. Contrary to U. P. Shah,⁶⁷ I would be much inclined to think that the original version is Buddhist and has been adapted to a Jain milieu. To begin with, Buddhist texts give us a richer and more varied version and some sources seem to be definitely earlier. But the main argument pertains to the aspect of the mentioned 'portraits'. Indeed, Mahāvīra is depicted as a prince, with ornaments and paraphernalia, and not as a Jina. Incidentally, Jīvantasvāmī images

⁶⁷ U. P. Shah is adamant about the anteriority of the Jain tradition ("Sidelights", 360 and 363) but this is mainly due to the fact that the author relies mostly, on the Buddhist side, on the somewhat late accounts by the Chinese pilgrims and does not take into consideration the early date of the *Divyāvadāna*.

are attested in Jain art but they are quite rare and certainly much later than the Kuṣāṇa period, during which Mahāvīra was always depicted as a Tirthaṅkara or Jina. This tendency to reinforce the *kṣatriya* aspect of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra—this later title being very significant in this context!—to the detriment of his religious teacher aspect (whereas the Buddha is described as a monk) does not only mean that the Jain textual tradition is weaker than the Buddhist one, but also that there was perhaps a necessity to establish a link with an iconography well-attested at that time.

In other words, it would indicate that the main innovation was not the representation of historical persons (either during their lifetime or after their demise) but their depiction as religious leaders. Conversely, it is probably another evidence that, much before the Kuṣāṇa period, statues or paintings portraying kings, princes or warriors—deified or not, but this is another issue—were a common practice.

3.2. *The Vṛṣṇi Vīras and the first representations of Kṛṣṇa*

A rather similar phenomenon can be observed in Hinduism, more exactly in the Vaiṣṇava milieu. During the three first centuries of our era, the first Vaiṣṇava cult images were created at Mathura and its surroundings. Long thought to be representations of Viṣṇu, they are now universally acknowledged as images of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.⁶⁸ Though at that time Kṛṣṇa was probably already considered as a deity, he is nevertheless based on a human prototype.

The cult of deified *kṣatriyas*, as we know, seems attested from the time of Pāṇini on (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* IV.3.99). The most famous among them are those of the Vṛṣṇi clan whose first representations appear on the coins of Agathocles in the second century BC,⁶⁹ that is, almost contemporaneously with our monumental statues. The famous inscription of Mora Well near Mathura (*EI*, xv, 194–200), dated from the first third of the first century AD, may mention images of the Vṛṣṇi Pañcavīra. The text is incomplete and the reading by H. Lüders has sometimes been

⁶⁸ See for instance N. P. Joshi, *Mathurā Sculptures (A Handbook to appreciate the sculptures in the Archaeological Museum, Mathurā)* (Mathura: Archaeological Museum, 1966); Herbert Härtel, “Archaeological Evidence on the Early Vāsudeva Worship”, in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dedicata*, ed. Gherardo Gnoli and Linello Lanciotti (Rome: IsMEO, 1987), 573–587; Doris Meth Srinivasan, “Vaiṣṇava Art and Iconography at Mathurā”, in Srinivasan, *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, 381–392.

⁶⁹ Jean Filliozat, “Représentation de Vāsudeva et Saṃkarṣaṇa au II^e siècle avant J.-C.”, *Arts Asiatiques* 26 (1973), 113–124.

questioned.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, one can understand that, under the reign of Mahākṣatrapa Śoḍāsa, a woman called Toṣā built a stone ‘temple’ (*śailadevagr[ha]*) to house the images of five heroes, whom we know to have had a more or less proven history in a (very) distant past. This inscription was brought to torsos found on the site and kept in the Mathura museum (Figs. 45 and 46). In addition, another inscription, slightly later since it is usually dated from the reign of Kaniṣka (*EI*, xv, 200–202), carved on the pedestal of an image of a woman, was also found at Mora.⁷¹ According to Lüders, it would be a picture of ‘Toṣā’. In spite of the difference in spelling, it is tempting to identify her as the Toṣā who installed the images of more or less deified heroes and, some years later—perhaps after her own death—, was herself represented by their side. Nevertheless, it is highly hypothetical and it raises a chronological issue (not to speak of the difference in craftsmanship). More recently, Doris M. Srinivasan has proposed that Toṣā—who, consequently, would differ from Toṣā of the Mora inscription—would be another name for Ekānaṃśā, that is, the Vṛṣṇis’ sister.⁷² If it is so, the statue would not be the portrait of a female donor, but would be part of the heroes’ images. This identification is far from impossible, but there are two small problems: on the one hand, if the female statue was part of a group, why was it done some decades later? And, on the other hand, D. M. Srinivasan does not explain why Ekānaṃśā would be called Toṣā—but this name has been partly reconstructed by Lüders and may not be reliable.

Be it as it may, the Mora group, along with other representations of the Vṛṣṇis, can be stylistically compared with some of the so-called ‘Yakṣas’ mentioned above. Doris M. Srinivasan has elaborated a lot on that point: “If these indications accurately reflect some interconnections between Yakṣa worship and Vīra worship, then it would seem reasonable to suppose that early Vīra images would have some Yakṣa components factored into them and that a pattern of provenances

⁷⁰ On this matter, see for instance the review by G. Fussman of Srinivasan, *Many Heads* in *BEFEO* 85 (1998), 472–476 (especially p. 473). On the contrary, D. C. Sircar (*Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*. Vol. 1 (*From the Sixth Century B.C. to the Sixth Century A.D.*) [Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1942. 2nd ed., rev. and enl., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965], 122) follows Lüders’ reading. More recently, R. Salomon (*Indian Epigraphy. A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the other Indo-Aryan Languages* [New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 87) does not seem to question it either.

⁷¹ This image can be seen in Srinivasan, *Many Heads*, pl. 16.4.

⁷² Srinivasan, *Many Heads*, 213–215.

in Yakṣa art and Vīra art could be established.”⁷³ From her perspective, this statement is quite logical. But, if one follows my own point of view on ‘Yakṣas’, there could be a more simple explanation: these images look more or less the same because they represent the same type of persons. In other words, the ‘Vīras’—and among them, the most famous ones: the Vṛṣṇis—would not be modelled on the ‘Yakṣas’ but the so-called ‘Yakṣas’ would in fact be heroes, deified or not (this is another, though related, issue). As often in Indian studies, the abuse of Sanskrit terms is misleading: on the one hand, I have tried to show that *yakṣa* was probably given a much too precise meaning; on the other hand, the use of *vīra*—the meaning of which is simply ‘man, warrior, hero’—seems to imply that we are dealing with a specific category of beings (especially when the term is written with a capital V which, of course, does not exist in Indian scripts).

Another argument in favour of this ‘heroic’ identification can be gathered from some dumbbells found at Mathura and adorned with a depicting of Kṛṣṇa fighting the horse-demon Keśin. These dumbbells have been studied at length by Charlotte Schmid, to whom I would like to refer the reader for further information.⁷⁴ It suffices here to remind that in the *Mahābhārata* and, even more, in the *Harivaṃśa*, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, from the Vṛṣṇi tribe, is presented as a mighty wrestler (*malla* or *mahāmalla*).⁷⁵ Already at the beginning of this chapter, I have mentioned the very ancient tradition of wrestling in India. Willem Bollée has dedicated an interesting article to the sodalities or brotherhoods of warriors in ancient India, among whom the Malla tribe:⁷⁶ it seems that because of their heroic feats they were bestowed a special status, that is, they could be considered as more or less deified entities after their death. The representations of Kṛṣṇa fighting Keśin—which coexisted in the Kuṣāṇa period with the more divinised four-armed Kṛṣṇa (and which were less frequent also)—were then probably reminiscent of this heroic and ‘mortal’ origin of the Vṛṣṇi. Of course, here, the origin is lost in the mist of legend, but it is interesting to find again the pattern according to which ‘divine images’ were more or less modelled

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁷⁴ Schmid, “Représentations anciennes de Kṛṣṇa”.

⁷⁵ It would explain why the Greeks identified Kṛṣṇa as Heracles.

⁷⁶ Willem B. Bollée, “The Indo-European Sodalities in Ancient India”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 131 (1981), 173–191.

on 'portraits'. In this respect, it is rather logical that the iconography of Viṣṇu derived from that of Kṛṣṇa, more than the reverse.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, it is essential to remain very cautious: we are not on solid grounds and it is not possible to draw firm and definite conclusions. However, at different periods and in different places, according to different approaches, it seems possible to discern the existences during, say, the first centuries BC (but how remote in time could we go?) of images of warriors and heroes. It is quite probable that some of these statues were depictions of people the historicity of which was already lost in legends but there is nothing to imply that it was an intangible rule. Thus, it is also plausible that some of them were made during the lifetime of their models or at least shortly after their death.

Were the images simple memorials which gradually turned into objects of worship? Or were they conceived as such at the outset? It is impossible for me to say, though I would be inclined to believe that different situations may have coexisted. According to Cunningham's report, shortly after their discovery, the two statues from Patna which he deemed as 'Yakṣas' were worshipped by the local people. Likewise, in ancient times, it is not impossible that statues first conceived to be portraits were finally seen as divine images. Though the original context in which the Early-Historical statues were set up is far from clear, it seems evident that it was related, in one way or another, to a form of cult. But, as I argued before, a hero or an ancestor could be worshipped, or associated to a cult, without being considered as a main deity. Be it as it may, these images served probably as models for the cult divine images when, around the beginning of our era, the shift in religious sensibility—what is usually called *bhakti*—led to the development of the Indian religious iconography. By this, I mean the justification of the images as well as a true formal model.

However, portraiture is only one explanation for the elaboration and the development of religious iconography. The representation of the Buddha, the Jinas and Kṛṣṇa may be inspired (and justified) by the previous heroic 'portraits', but the images of the monk (Buddha) or the ascetic (Jina) are true inventions of the time. Besides, portraiture completely fails to explain Śaiva and Śakta iconography. It would then be ridiculous to see a hidden portrait behind every divine image—far from that. My point is only that portraiture should be taken into consideration when dealing with the origins of Indian art.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROYAL PORTRAIT, PORTRAIT *PAR EXCELLENCE*?

More often than once in this study, emphasis has been given to royal images. This is not only the consequence of their semantic richness. It is tempting to say that the king has not only a place of choice but is absolutely essential to the history of portraiture. As a matter of fact, it would seem more appropriate to speak of *kṣatriya* rather than king. Indeed, in the rituals as well as in artistic production, the *kṣatriya* is the patron *par excellence*. It is he who, from the Vedic time on, takes the initiative of the sacrifices and commissions the Brahmins to perform them. In this respect, the oldest ‘portrait’ that can be detected is perhaps the little gold statuette representing at the same time Prajāpati, Agni and the patron in the ritual of the ‘Piling-up-of-the-Fire’ (*agnicayana*) described in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*.¹ In the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, the mentioned portraits are those of kings or members of their families.² When we get to actual images, there is still a strong royal presence. The case is sometimes ambiguous for images of the so-called ‘Yakṣa’, while *Vīra* are, by definition, *kṣatriyas*. As for Buddha and Mahāvīra they have in common to have belonged to that class and—especially for the Buddha—to have been assimilated to a Cakravartin.

My purpose, then, is to examine the role of royal images in the history of Indian portraiture. As a matter of fact, the approach will be twofold. On the one hand, I will argue that royal images have served as models for other—I would even be inclined to use the term ‘standard’. On the other hand, I would like to address the political and even the ideological role of such portraits, because it can help us understand the semantic richness of portraiture in India and Indianized Asia.

¹ See here chapter 3, § 4.

² One could object that Droṇa is a Brahmin; that said, Droṇa’s main characteristic, throughout the story, is to break from his class and act as a *kṣatriya*.

1. THE KING AS MODEL

1.1. *In normative treatises*

Once again, I will start with the most ancient text on image-making, the *Citralakṣaṇa* attributed to king Nagnajit.³ In its present state, it is subdivided into three chapters of unequal length. The first one (431 verses) deals, as we have seen, with the origin of the art of image-making, the first image being a posthumous portrait; the second one (96 v.) presents, in a very general way, the different categories of divine images and the importance of sacrifice and ritual offerings, while the third one (618 v.) details at length the measurement system and the proportions of images. It is then with this last chapter that we will be concerned here. I have already quoted the passage where Brahmā mentions the different kinds of beings to be reproduced (528–539).⁴ It is noteworthy that the gods are not part of the list and that all the categories of beings are placed on the same level. However, soon, Brahmā concentrates only on the images of men (557–573):

Now shall be fully expounded the measurements of kings and human beings. Hear now what concerns the surface extent of a Cakravartin as it is explained. He is well-proportioned, as the Nyagrodha-tree. Concerning the length of the Cakravartin, it should amount to 108 digits (*aṅgula*) according to the measurements of his own finger; in no case is the digital measurement of others applicable to him. The length measurement of the above-mentioned kings and the Cakravartin Kings should now be pronounced. Now hear my elucidation on what are the measurements of his face and the remaining parts of his body.

It would be a little reductive to state that the *Citralakṣaṇa* deals only with portraiture; but the image presented as a model is that of a human being, not a god, and it is an idealized imitation of reality. Moreover, the text clearly states that the system used for the image of the Cakravartin applies for any image of men. Indeed, if the very precise description of the Cakravartin extends to more than five hundred verses, then, from verse 1057, the text goes on explaining that everyone must be represented according to his individuality:

³ All the following quotations are taken from *An Early Document of Indian Art*, trans. B. N. Goswamy and A. L. Dahmen-Dallapiccola.

⁴ Chapter 4, § 2.2.3.

The prescription concerning those who have the rank of the wise (*paṇḍita*) is that, in short, the proportions of their principal limbs, head, neck, two arms, thighs and calves (are those) which apply to all human beings. The doctrine in this matter culminates in the sentence that everyone should have his measurements according to his own digits.

Finally, we learn that the body of the Cakravartin is, of course, perfect, but that, based on the model of his body, it is possible to draw other figures which are less perfect. The text mentions four other categories of kings and then five categories of human beings:

I have instructed you in the measurements of the Cakravartin; I have taught you the definition of the measurements of all the Great Men (*puruṣottama*) and Gods; now, through the power of your own understanding, you are in a secure position and can paint yourself all the fours such as the Sādhus, etc. One should know that as regards the length of the Sādhus, it is to be made 106 (digits) and of the Vyañjanas there should be 100. The Mālavas have an addition of 4. The length of the Giridharas is to be made 98 digits. The Rulers of Men, the Masters, shall be painted (in the same way as) the form of the lesser human beings: their length and breadth measurements shall all be verified, and their proportions determined through computations. Thus, in the case of those born of woman, one should exercise one's own judgement: in their length, considering that there is one additional digit in the case of Kings, they should be reduced correspondingly by some digits in measurement.

So, in our most ancient text, we can already find a complex system.⁵ On the one hand, everyone has to be painted or sculpted according to his own proportions: we could say it looks like an anthropomorphic system of representation, according to fractional units. On the other hand, the Cakravartin, presented as the ideal model, entails lesser beings to be depicted according to their own digit but smaller in size: the system seems therefore modular at the same time. The main idea to be kept in mind is that this proportional system is meant to establish a hierarchy between the different categories of beings. Besides, the number 108 is considered to be the most perfect one in Indian numerology and, hence, shows that the naturalism of the representation is already tempered by some idealization. Lastly, we also find in the *Citrakṣaṇa* an idea that will be found again and again in later texts: the division of the images of kings—and, more generally, of the whole society—into

⁵ It seems to imply that simpler systems may have existed before and that the *Citrakṣaṇa* relies on earlier (but now lost) sources.

five classes (Cakravartin, Sādhū, Mālava, Vyañjana and Giridhara), all with a determined height.

The next text in the chronological order is Varāhamihira's *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, the main subject of which is astrology. However, it also concerns a wide range of topics. It is a sort of compilation, which implies that Varāhamihira had a whole set of texts and sources at his disposal which have since then disappeared. Chapter 58 (*pratimālakṣaṇam*) is a general description of images according to the system of measures base on the digit (*aṅgula*).⁶ The standard height of image seems to be 108 digits—it is then a fractional system—, but it is only for the superior class: the medium and the inferior ones are less by 12 digits in succession, *i.e.* 96 and 84 digits respectively. Only two images are exceptions: Rāma and Bali, who are 120 digits high (58.15). It is interesting to note that till verse 30, the chapter gives details about an image 108 digits high, which can be any image; it is only from verse 31 onwards that it describes the images of gods. In the chapter 68, on the signs of men (*puruṣalakṣaṇam*), which deals with physiognomy, we find again (68.105):

The height of the best type of men is 108 digits of themselves, that of the medium type, 96 digits, and that of the inferior one, 84 digits.⁷

Of course, here we are supposed to deal with real persons, not images. But the next chapter gives explanations about the five Great Men (*pañcamahāpuruṣalakṣaṇam*) and here we find (69.7):

The height and extent of the two arms outstretched (from one end to the other) of a man belonging to the *Haṃsa* clan are 96 digits; and those of Śāśa, Rucaka, Bhadra and Mālavya are 99, 102, 105 and 108 digits respectively.⁸

However, in the rest of the chapter (69.10–30, especially 18, 21 and 29), the descriptions give somewhat different proportions. This inconsistency has been noted by Bhaṭṭotpala, Varāhamihira's commentator.

Compared to the *Citralakṣaṇa*, the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* marks a further step since a modular proportional system is now combined with a

⁶ I follow M. R. Bhatt's edition, especially for the numbering of the chapter which sometimes differs slightly in other editions.

⁷ *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* 68.105: *aṣṭaśatam śaṇṇavatīḥ parimāṇam caturaśītir iti puṃsām / uttamasamahīnānām aṅgulaśaṅkhyā svamānena //*

⁸ *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* 69.7: *śaṇṇavatir aṅgulānām vyāyāmo dīrghatā ca haṃsasya / śāśa rucakabhadramālavyaśaṃjñitās tryaṅgulavivṛddhayā //*

fractional one; a new unit is added: the span (*tāla*), which is equal to the height of the face (*mukha*); in most cases, the span is 12 digits high.⁹ That addition set aside, it is noteworthy that the system expounded is based on anthropomorphic proportions: 8×12 , with variations to 7×12 and 9×12 —this latter giving a height equal to 108 digits. Compared to the images of human beings, the divine images make use of the same system but a little more refined. And this system, more or less complicated, will be presented further in later treatises.

As in the *Citrakṣaṇa*, Varāhamihira divides the men into five categories. According to 69.31, these five categories are Great Men (*mahāpuruṣa*) or even Kings (*bhūpa*). The physiognomic criteria are related to astronomical principles: *Haṃsa* (Jupiter), *Bhadra* (Mercury), *Mālavya* (Venus), *Rucaka* (Mars) and *Śaśaka* (Saturn).

Let us now go back to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. For the sake of clarity, I have already quoted a passage from chapter 35 of the third book in which the division of men into five categories is to be found: they are the *Haṃsa* (108 digits), *Bhadra* (106), *Mālavya* (104), *Rucaka* (100) and *Śaśaka* (92). At first sight, it seems to be quite similar to the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*; but, here, the system is more elaborated and it is not based on physiognomic but iconometric rules; lastly the proportions are different. The chapter goes on giving the details for the proportions of the *Haṃsa* type, which is applicable for kings and gods and is the model for the other types.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that this *Haṃsa* is 108 digits high, exactly like the Cakravartin in the *Citrakṣaṇa*. The other types are described mainly in chapter 42, where, as already seen, we find a mixture of divine and human beings belonging to every part of the society.¹¹ The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* can then be compared with the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*, attributed to a king Bhoja and which could be dated from the eleventh century. As its title implies, this text deals mainly with architecture, but the main topic of the last chapters (75 to 80) is the making of images. A few verses can then be found about the images of men: once again, they are divided into five proportional categories—the names of which are common to other texts while the measures differ: *Haṃsa* (88 digits), *Bhadra* (94), *Mālavya* (96), *Rucaka* (92) and *Śaśaka* (90).

⁹ Let us remind that in 58.4, Varāhamihira quotes Nagnajit (hence, the *Citrakṣaṇa*) and says that in the South (*drāviḍa*) the face can be 14 digits high.

¹⁰ See also 42.1 : *yathā devās tathā citre kartavyāḥ pṛthiviśvarāḥ* !.

¹¹ Chapter 2, § 4.

In later texts, which are mostly ritual treatises (*āgamas*, *saṃhitās* and other *tantras*), ‘portraits’ or at least ‘representations of men’ are seldom mentioned—with the noticeable exception of the *Dīptāgama*.¹² In them, the iconometric system is made according to the ‘*tāla* scale’—what twentieth-century indologists often call *tālamāna* though, to the best of my knowledge, this expression is never used in Sanskrit texts.¹³ In this regard, it is interesting to mention another text attributed to a king, but this time a South Indian one: the *Mānasollāsa*, supposed to have been composed dated around AD 1131 by the Cālukya king Someśvara. It deals with several topics, among which the making of images, in chapter 2 of the first book and even more in chapter 1 of the third book: after a survey of the different types of building, it addresses the issue of decor and painting; the development on materials is followed by a summary on the measurement system and then an account on iconography. It is a well-known fact that the *Mānasollāsa* compiles facts and ideas drawn from several sources¹⁴ and, hence, is

¹² For instance, all chapter 16 is devoted to iconographic and iconometric rules; there is an extant list of beings who can be turned into images, according to a system of proportional measurements based on the *tāla* (span): men are mentioned in the ‘eight *tālas*’ category; it means their height must be 96 digits (8×12)—in other words, it corresponds to the anthropometric system expounded in the *Brhat Saṃhitā*. Men are thus depicted after the main deities and supernatural beings but before the secondary supernatural beings. (16.25–34 : *uttamaṃ daśatālena brahmaviṣṇumaheśvarāḥ / umā durgā mahālakṣmī cāmuṇḍī ca mahī tathā // brahmāṇī jyeṣṭhā raudrāṇī vaiṣṇavī ca sarasvatī / madhyamaṃ daśatālena kṣetrapālaṃ tathāiva ca // ādityaṃ guharudrāś ca āryakaṃ vajradhāriṇaṃ / ṛṣayo’psaraso’śvinyau kaniṣṭhaṃ daśatālakaiḥ // vārāhi ca tathendraṇī kaumārī cānyadevatān / kārayel lakṣaṇair yuktaṃ navatālena cānala // agniṃ caṇḍeśvaraṃ caiva yamaṃ ca varuṇaṃ tathā / vāyuṃ cāpi kuberam ca garuḍagāndharvayakṣakān // siddhacāraṇanāgendraṇ vidyādharaṅgaśvarān / uttamaṃ navatālena kārayel lakṣaṇānvitān // ardhatālavihināḥ syur vidyeśā nirṛtis tathā / tad dvyāṅgulavihināṃ syād divyamānuṣamānakam // rākṣasān asurāṃś caiva madhyamaṃ navatālakaiḥ / adhamaṃ navatālaṃ syād anyeṣāṃ devamānakam // aṣṭatālā narāś tatra saptatālāḥ piśācakāḥ / ṣaṭtālaṃ kubjakānāṃ tu pañcatālo vināyakaḥ // vāmanaṃ ca tathāivaṃ syāc catustālāṃ tu bhūtakaṇ / tritālāḥ kinnarā jñeyā evaṃ tālakramaṃ viduḥ //).*

¹³ For more extant assessment on iconometry, see for example T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Talamana or Iconometry, being a Concise Account of the Measurements of Hindu Images as given in the Agamas and other Authoritative Works*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 3 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1920); John F. Mosteller, *The Measure of Form. A New Approach for the Study of Indian Sculpture* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1991); and Bruno Dagens, “Māna in the Arts: Architecture and Image-Making”, in *Kalātattvakośa*, ed. by Kapila Vatsyayan (New Delhi: IGNCA) vol. II, 367–384, reprint in *Traités, temples et images du monde indien*, 97–124.

¹⁴ See, for instance, G. H. Khare, “Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi and Matsya Purāṇa”, *New Indian Antiquary* 2.9 (1939), 620–24.

not always coherent nor homogenous: it explains why it can refer to different measurement systems. Indeed, when it deals with the making of images in general (which can then, of course, include, human beings and portraits), the text gives the classical list of measurement units, from the atom to the span (*tāla* or *vitasti*) and indicates that a standing image should be nine *tālas* high¹⁵—nine *tālas* are of course equal to 108 digits, so the *Mānasollāsa* is here in tune with the *Citralakṣaṇa* and the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. But, further in the text, when it deals with religious iconography, it is said that the main gods should be depicted according to the ten *tālas* mode (or only seven *tālas* for Viṣṇu in his dwarf *avatāra*)—however the whole system, supposedly well-known, is not expounded: it seems to confirm that this rather complex fractional-modular canon is only a further elaboration of a simpler system used for the ‘normal’ images that is, images of men (including portraits).

Previously,¹⁶ I have mentioned that the *Mānasāra* (chapter 59) gives a more complex description of the devotees, classified into four categories according to their proximity with the divine realm. Now, each of these categories correspond to a system of proportions: the *sālokya* is to be made in the nine *tālas* superior mode (112 digits), the *sāmīpya* in the ten *tālas* inferior mode (116 digits), the *sārūpya* in the ten *tālas* intermediate mode (120 digits) and the *sāyujya* in the ten *tālas* superior mode (124 digits), exactly like the images of the main gods (59.5–6). Once again, the proportional system is a means to highlight the hierarchy between the different devotees.

1.2. *The king as visual source*

Tedious as they may appear, all these data can be rather informative, but it is necessary to propose now a summary. Of course, all the texts used above differ in their dates, their geographical origins, their religious orientations and even their general purposes. It is thus not surprising to find close similarities as well as important differences

¹⁵ 3.1.193–197: *tatra mānaṃ pravakṣyāmi śarīre navatālam / paramāṇvādibhedena yathā bodhaḥ prajāyate // paramāṇubhir aṣṭābhis trasareṇur nigadyate / trasareṇubhir aṣṭābhir bālāgram abhidhiyate // bālāgrair aṣṭābhir likṣaḥ yūkā likṣāṣṭakam bhavet / yūkāṣṭakam yavaḥ prokto yavāṣṭakam athāṅgulam // ekāṅgulam bhaven mātṛā dve mātṛe golakam kalā / trimātṛam ardhyardvakalā bhāgaś ca caturaṅgulam / trayo bhāgā vitastih syād vitastis tāla ucyate / tālas tu mukham ākhyātaḥ vyavahārāya kovidāḥ //*

¹⁶ Chapter 3, § 4.

between them.¹⁷ That said, as far as iconometry and iconography are concerned, it is possible to draw some permanent features.

From the point of view of iconometry, one sees that, progressively, the system is made more and more complex. Our most ancient source, the *Citralakṣaṇa*, bases its system of representation on an idealized anthropometry around the figure of the Cakravartin. This system is more or less resumed by the *Br̥hat Saṃhitā* which, nevertheless, sets up a system of multiplication of measurements units based on some physiognomic data. Then the system reaches its climax with the canon based on the multiplication of *tālas*, from one to twelve (or from 12 to 120 digits). In the ritual treatises, like the *āgamas*, it is even more complex since they offer the possibility of variations by adding (superior mode) or deducting (inferior mode) 4 digits to each step in the *tāla* scale. Consequently, the canon is at the same time modular and fractional: the module is not the digit of the image anymore but that of the patron or the priest; therefore, the digit used as module differs from the digit of the image as absolute value: for example, in the 10 *tālas* superior mode, the height of the image is 124 digits but the height of the face is in fact 13,5 (and not 12 anymore). There is only one case when this *tāla* scale fits exactly with the ancient, and simpler, system: the nine *tālas* medium mode, since $9 \times 12 = 108$ digits, which is exactly the height of the Cakravartin in the *Citralakṣaṇa*, the *Mālavya* type in the *Br̥hat Saṃhitā* and the *Haṃsa* type in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. It is noteworthy that the old and simple system is mainly concerned with images of human beings, whereas the *tāla* system is more suitable for divine images: once more, we feel that the latter are based on the former.

Leaving aside the differences, we note that the main interest of these systems of proportions is to establish a hierarchy between the different depicted characters. Of course, this hierarchy seems to be much more important in texts dealing with ritual and religious iconography than in those concerned with 'fine arts'. In the most ancient texts—but the *Viṣṇudharmottara* remains more or less in their tradition—the purpose is more secular than, strictly speaking, religious and a relatively specific depiction of a man lies at the base of the whole system. It may indeed be deemed as a portrait, though it is idealized and tempered by

¹⁷ See, for example, the chart in *The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, ed. Mukherji, 14.

some conventional features. I could then conclude that the system for making divine images is inspired by this kind of idealized, or stereotyped, portrait—which is consistent with what I have argued before.

Now, if we turn to iconography, we notice that, apart the *Viṣṇudharmottara* where all the social classes are mentioned (but all these images cannot be considered as portraits), all our texts insist on two types of human beings: the king and the devotee. The first of these human beings is the Universal Sovereign, or Cakravartin, ‘the one who sets the Wheel into motion’. Most of the time, the Cakravartin is presented as a mythical person, a sort of ideal to be reached or imitated by the kings and lords; as an iconographical type, it is often considered as the model for the image of the Buddha. There are some sculptures depicting a king and labelled ‘Cakravartin’, especially reliefs from Amaravati or the surrounding areas during the Sātavāhana period, for example in the Musée Guimet, Paris (Fig. 47), at the Government Museum, Chennai, and at the British Museum.¹⁸ To date, these reliefs have never been deemed as portraits. However, we may question the idea that ‘Cakravartin’ designates only an abstraction. Though it is imbued with a notion of ideal, it is also a title borne by several actual sovereigns. For instance, many Indian kings or kinglets have included this term in their titles. Therefore, it is quite possible that when a treatise such as the *Citrakakṣaṇa* details the proportions of an image of the Cakravartin, it in fact describes a royal portrait, most probably that of Nagnajit, who is also the listener of the text.¹⁹ This hypothesis could be confirmed by a comparison of the Sātavāhana reliefs of a ‘Cakravartin’ kept at Chennai or at the Musée Guimet above mentioned and the famous panel from Trichy depicting the Pallava king in the guise of Śiva Gaṅgādhara (Fig. 22): the gesture of lifting the arm to have water descending on earth is indeed quite similar.

In the *Citrakakṣaṇa*, it is clear that the royal image is the model for all the other representations of human beings: it is enough to examine their dimensions and to decrease the proportions in order to respect the hierarchy between common men and the Cakravartin or even the gods. Likewise, in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, the *Haṃsa* type, suitable for kings and gods, is the model for the other four types. This position of

¹⁸ Robert Knox, *Amaravati. Buddhist Sculpture from the Great Stupa* (London: The British Museum, 1992), 179.

¹⁹ As a matter of fact, Nagnajit is at the same time the supposed author of the text and the person to whom it is recited.

the normative literature is rather consistent with what we can observe historically: the first genuine images made in India seem indeed to be those of kings or *kṣatriyas*—and one should be reminded that even the Buddha and Mahāvīra were *kṣatriyas* themselves.

In more practical terms, it also appears that the idealized portrait of the king has provided a standard for the achievement of most of the images. At least, systems of proportions seem to have been built (and developed) from the figure of the Cakravartin. More specifically, it is therefore questionable whether some historical sovereign could not in turn provide a model for artists of their era. It is impossible, because of lack of evidence, to demonstrate this. When, however, we are confronted with a relatively homogeneous and centralized artistic production, one may question the existence of such a model. This is particularly true in Cambodia, where the successive styles have been identified and where we know that royal portraits, usually hidden under divine traits, were numerous. It is known that in the late twelfth century Jayavarman VII multiplied his portraits and that other images, without being a physical imitation of the king, testify of the same canon and the same aesthetic. By analogy, one could hypothesize that in the previous periods the style was also declined from a model given, one way or another, by the sovereign.²⁰ If we accept this idea—which does not seem implausible—we notice that the portraits of Jayavarman VII—whose so-called ‘realism’ has always been presented as exceptional—are simply less unusual: the difference would not so much come from their ‘realism’ than from the fact that the portraits represent only the king (not the king as a Hindu god) and that the images were produced in multiple copies.

2. PORTRAITURE AS POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

This hypothesis of the anteriority of royal portraits or images on all others may or may not be accepted and—surely enough—would need further discussions. But, for the time being, I would like to focus on another aspect of these images. A portrait is, of course, a ‘re-presentation’ which, strictly speaking, means ‘to present’ or ‘to depict anew’:

²⁰ See also Ludvine Provost-Roche, *Les derniers siècles de l'époque angkoriennne au Cambodge (env. 1220–env. 1500)*, PhD dissertation (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris III, 2010), vol. 1, 86–87 and 104.

in other words, even if the portrayal is supposed to be faithful, there is a certain amount, conscious or not, of interpretation or bias. In the introduction to this book, I have followed Philippe Bruneau in using the ‘pose’ metaphor: it means that a portrait proposes always, in a way or another, a discourse on the portrayed person. This is true for any kind of portrait, but, because of the very peculiar nature of the portrayed ones, this is even more obvious with royal portraits. As a matter of fact, their purpose was, more often than not, political, not to say ideological. Therefore, their study is definitely a good introduction to the semantic value of portraits in South Asia.

2.1. *Diplomacy, propaganda and legitimization*

That portraits were used in political and diplomatic relations can be inferred by the exchanges of portraits to conclude matrimonial alliances between ruling families. The situation is so often met in literature that it must have reflected a real practice—even if, more often than not, portraits in dramas and novels are able to create ‘love at first sight’, which, unfortunately, may not have been so frequent in the ‘real’ life! Besides, as we have seen, the *Rājatarāṅginī* seems to testify of this practice.

In that kind of situation, portraits are much more than an indication of what the portrayed person looks like: they act as substitutes in that they actually ‘represent’ the absent one. Therefore, their symbolic value is but an important one. This can be also inferred from a passage from the *Kaliṅkattupparani*, an historical chronicle of the reign of the Cōla king Kulōttuṅga I (twelfth century) written in Tamil by Jayaṅkontāṇ: about one of the more or less mythical ancestor of the king, Karikala, it is said that one of his vassals had failed him; then the king had the vassal’s portrait made and erased the eyes of the image which was shown to the vassal’s supporters to warn them what the punishment could be.²¹ It is difficult to be sure that we are not dealing here with a mere legend but, be it as it may, it shows nevertheless that portraits could be seen as vehicles for political and propagandist messages.

For exalting royal ideology, portraiture can be used in multiple ways. The first use is also the most immediate and obvious one: it is of

²¹ T. G. Aravamuthan, *The Kaveri, the Maikharis and the Sangam Era* (Madras, 1925), quoted in Coomaraswamy, “Nāgara Painting”, 27.

course coinage. Despite the existence of numerous studies on numismatics, it remains difficult to assess what proportion of the population could actually participate in the monetary exchange. However a significant number of people must have had these everyday objects in their hands. The fact to include on one side of a coin a portrait was not innocent. First, the portrait of the sovereign is a means to authenticate the currency—and we must remember that this object is valuable only if it raises the confidence of those who use it. But from this point of view, the portrait is a symbol of authentication among others, along with many other dynastic emblems, and not all the royal families had recourse to it. Then, as minting is normally a privilege reserved solely to the king or at least to a limited number of people, the picture that adorns one side of the coin is a clear sign of sovereignty and a means to mark the royal presence with the people. Hence, the monetary portrait can convey a more or less complex ideological discourse. To give but a few examples, one can mention the fact that Kuṣāṇa and Gupta kings are generally represented on their coins with a halo, a characteristic they share with the divine images. However the legitimization process is not always restricted to the main dynasties, and other families have also used portraiture to consolidate their authority: thus, at Satrunjaya, the dignitary Desala had his portrait along with those of some members of his family and that of king Mahīpāla set up in the temple in order to remind his patronage of the temple but also to demonstrate his link with the royal power and his eminent position in the Śvetāmbara Jain community of fourteenth century Gujarat.²²

As already said, the monetary portraits are often more idealized image of kingship than the specific portrayal of an individual installed on the throne. It is thus significant that the Gupta sovereigns are often depicted holding a bow, sometimes in majesty, sometimes in a fight position. The presence of the bow underlines the parallel between the Gupta king and the king *par excellence*: the divinized hero Rāma. Indeed contemporary literature—we think of the inscriptions, and even more so of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*—develop endlessly on this parallelism.²³ It is not innocent either that Śrī is usually minted on the

²² Laughlin, *Ārādhakamūrti*, 79–85.

²³ Pratapaditya Pal, “Rāma, Kāma and the Archer-Type of Gupta Coins”, in *Investigating Indian Art*, ed. Marianne Yaldiz and Wibke Lobo, 261–266; Barbara Stoler Miller, “A Dynasty of Patrons: The Representation of Gupta Royalty in Coins and

obverse of the coins since the king, like Viṣṇu and Rāma, is the one 'who bears Śrī on his chest'.

Beyond coinage, royal portraits are bearers of a historical discourse. It should also be acknowledged that this historical discourse is rarely explicit. This is probably the Cambodia of Jayavarman VII which offers the clearer example. Not only did the king make multiple copies of his portrait (Fig. 30) he shipped to the four corners of his kingdom but he associated the images of his predecessors to his foundations, either physically or through inscriptions. Thus epigraphy of the Bayon refers to numerous 'portraits-statues', such as Parameśvara of Hariharālaya, the posthumous portrait of Jayavarman II placed in the temple of Preah Ko (K 293; IC, III, 193–197).²⁴ And, as far as Jayavarman VII was concerned, it is certain that setting up his likeness in his entire kingdom was a way to indicate the extent of his power. In a way, it is not very different from our present-day autocrats who put their photographs at every corner...

2.2. *Historical reliefs*

Another characteristic of Cambodia is also to have inserted portraits in historical bas-reliefs. This is particularly true at Angkor Wat and the Bayon. At Angkor Wat, the narrative bas-reliefs adorn the galleries of the first gallery.²⁵ Most of them are mythological scenes, even if it is not forbidden to think that the battle of Laṅkā from the *Rāmāyaṇa* is one of many occurrences of parallelism between Rāma and the king. But one of these reliefs displays a military parade attended by king Sūryavarman II (Fig. 48), founder of the monument, and his dignitaries, some of whom are identified by inscriptions. The king appears twice, first among his ministers, then in the parade proper. Recently, Robert Brown has proposed an interpretation that is little less literal than usual: the relief of the southern gallery would not represent an

Literature", in *The Powers of Arts: Patronage in Indian Culture*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 54–64.

²⁴ Jacques Dumarçay et Bernard-Philippe Groslier, *Le Bayon. Histoire architecturale du temple. Inscriptions du Bayon*, Mémoires Archéologiques III-2 (Paris: EFEO, 1973).

²⁵ On Angkor Wat reliefs, see Georges Coedès, "Les bas-reliefs d'Angkor Vat", *Bulletin de la Commission Archéologique de l'Indochine* (1911), 170–220 and "Etudes Cambodgiennes VII: Seconde étude sur les bas-reliefs d'Angkor Vat", *BEFEO* 13 (1913), 13–36; and Vittorio Roveda, *Sacred Angkor. The Carved Reliefs of Angkor Wat* (Bangkok: River Books, 2002).

actual, historical, procession but would be a metaphor of a specific oath addressed to the king.²⁶ Whatever the interpretation we chose, the ideological value of this relief is obvious: it is a great demonstration of power which is very clearly put on the same footing as the divine exploits carved in the other galleries of the temple.

Some decades later, other narratives bas-reliefs were carved in the new temple of the Bayon, in the centre of Angkor Thom. Founded by Jayavarman VII, this monument has known different phases of construction, during the reign of the king but also during those of his successors. Chronology is then problematic and it impacts on the interpretation of the reliefs. However it is quite sure that at least some of them have a historical value. First seriously studied by Georges Coedès, then by Bernard-Philippe Groslier and Jacques Dumarçay, they have been subjected recently to a new analysis by Ludvine Provost-Roche.²⁷ The reliefs of the outer gallery seem to be contemporaneous with Jayavarman VII and the scenes are rather in accordance with what we know of his reign. On the contrary, the reliefs of the inner gallery seem to be somewhat later; besides, they are not stylistically homogenous and there are signs of recuttings. Therefore, it is probable that they were started under Jayavarman VII but that the work was continued—and perhaps modified—under his successors, notably Jayavarman VIII. In this regard, it is possible that we see not one but two, or even three, successive kings.²⁸ But the exact identification of the portraits is not the main issue here: whoever the king(s) is (are), we are dealing with historical scenes or at least with an iconography the interpretation of which was related to historical facts.

Angkor Wat bas-reliefs, along with those of the Bayon and Banteay Chmar, may seem to isolated examples. Yet we can find a precedent:

²⁶ Robert L. Brown, "Ritual and Image at Angkor Wat", in *Images in Asian Religions: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 346–366. Therefore, the depiction of heaven and hell, which follows this royal procession/oath at Angkor Wat, would be related to the reward or punishment for respecting the oath or failing to keep it (*ibid.*, 359).

²⁷ Georges Coedès, "Quelques suggestions sur la méthode à suivre pour interpréter les bas-reliefs de Banteay Chmar et du Bayon", *BEFEO* 32 (1932), 71–81; Dumarçay et Groslier, Bayon, 155–182; Provost-Roche, *Derniers siècles de l'époque angkorienne*, 83–113. On different aspects, this last author disagrees with Vittorio Roveda, "Reliefs of the Bayon", in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clarck (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 312–324.

²⁸ Provost-Roche, *Derniers siècles de l'époque angkorienne*, 111–112.

those in the gallery surrounding the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl temple built in the second half of the eighth century at Kanchipuram, in South India, by Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (731–796). Well studied many years ago by C. Minakshi,²⁹ these reliefs are carved on the walls of the gallery surrounding the temple; numbered from 1 to 9 they are divided on small panels on two registers: the narrative must be read from left to right and from top to bottom; walls 1 and 2, on the one hand, and 6 and 7 on the other must be viewed as a single unit. Some small captions have enabled the interpretation of some scenes; the others have been interpreted by deduction. The whole reading proposed by Minakshi is then quite convincing but may be subjected to further assessments. In the appendix to this chapter, there is the whole list of panels with their tentative interpretation. In general the narrative corresponds quite well to epigraphical *praśastis*, that is, panegyrics: we find first the mythical descent of the Pallava dynasty; the eponym ancestor appears on panel I (upper register) of wall 2; from wall 5 onwards, it is possible to follow the successions of the kings well known for their military and artistic achievements at Kanchipuram and Mahabalipuram, up to the reign of Nandivarman II, the patron of the temple. Of course, this latter receives the biggest share (walls 6 to 9). It is interesting to note that this king belonged to a younger branch, and had faced a civil war to ascend the throne. Therefore, this series of dynastic portraits was more than an exaltation of the royal family—of which we have many examples, from the *devakulas* of Māt and Surkh Kotal to the Pudu Maṇḍapa of the Madurai Nāyakas—but addressed the need to justify a *coup d'Etat*, which, though rather unquestionable, was nonetheless challenged. The struggle for power is moreover clearly indicated at some places. The use of historical facts and figures in the narrative was then a means to legitimize Nandivarman's right to ascend the throne. But, what is interesting also is, as we will see below (§ 3.2), that he made also use of artistic references to establish a link with the achievements of his ancestors.

²⁹ C. Minakshi, *The Historical Sculptures of the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāl Temple, Kāñchīpuram* (Mem. A.S.I., LXIII) (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1941).

3. ALLEGORICAL PORTRAITS

Even if ideologically biased, the images mentioned so far correspond to the triumvirate enounced at the beginning of this book—intention/perception/function—and hence are truly portraits. However, as often in South Asia, expression is not always obvious at first. Parallels can be drawn with literature, where ‘curbed’ expression is often favoured. Regarding visual portraits, we could then speak also of allegory and metaphor, terms from literary analysis, since royal portraits³⁰ operate in a very similar way to many texts in the Indian and Indianized world. One has often made a comparison between portraits and inscriptions. Indeed, such figures of speech are exceedingly common in epigraphy. Rājarāja I Cōla has used them repeatedly. One can find use of *upamā* or comparison:

Having accomplished the conquest of the regions and made all kings tributary, that lord of kings (Rājarāja) lived happily in his town, honoured by (his) people, just as Indra, worshipped by the world, was in heaven.³¹

However, royal portraits rarely function in a direct way. Most of the time, allusion seems preferred. More than a genuine historical discourse, it is perhaps better to speak of an allegorical discourse, in which a kind of portrayal can be inferred also by a more general iconography. To make my point of view more explicit, I would like to focus on two examples, rather well known but at the same time very meaningful: the Guptas and the Pallavas.

3.1. *Allegorical portraits under the Guptas*

The case of the Guptas is particularly interesting, not because of a so-called ‘Golden Age’, nor because they are supposed to be the first truly Indian great dynasty since the Mauryas, but because it is the first time, to date, that we can find clear evidence of the same principles ruling both literary and visual compositions. Although authorship and dating of texts in early India is still a matter of controversy, it seems

³⁰ I do not argue that the phenomenon is strictly limited to royal portraits but this is certainly where it is more obvious as well as meaningful.

³¹ Larger Leyden Plates (EI, xxii, no. 34, v. 32): *kṛta-digvijaya]ssa rājarājaḥ karadikṛtya mahipatīnaśeṣān / nyavasat svapure sukhan nṛpendras tridive lokanamaskṛto yathendraḥ //*.

quite obvious that the Guptas patronized poets and playwrights who glorified the dynasty in their writings. One can think, of course, of the poets who composed some of the panegyrics inserted at the beginning of some copper-plates. But it is more of interest, here, to mention these *kāvya* works who praised the rulers in a more allegorical way. Such is the *Mudrārākṣasa* by Viśākhadatta: the play is supposed to take place at the court of Candragupta Maurya but it refers indirectly to Candragupta II, the most famous Gupta emperor. Likewise, Kālidāsa seems to have made reference to his patrons in the titles of some of his works: thus, though the hero of his drama is King Purūravas, he has chosen to call the play *Vikramorvaśī*, Vikrama (valiance) referring to Vikramāditya, name of a legendary king but also one of the titles of Candragupta, as is evident from some of his coins. Besides, the writer has also composed a poem praising the birth of god Kumāra, or Skanda (the *Kumārasambhava*), probably because Candragupta's son and heir was himself called Kumāra(gupta). Finally, the *Raghuvamśa* can be read as a way to liken the Guptas with Rāma's lineage.

We could then say that literature from the Gupta period offers not really portraits of the rulers but at least some allegoric praises. However, as we have seen on several occasions, these devices are also to be found on the coins. The representation of the king as a bowman is indeed reminiscent of the images of Rāma, or Vikramāditya. Kumāragupta has been also the only one to have his homonymic god minted on the obverse of some of his coins. Moreover, the representation of Samudragupta playing the lyre is to be brought together with the Allahabad *praśasti* which praises his gifts as a poet and musician.

Numismatic portraits are certainly true portraits, but alongside them there is only one place, as far as I know, where we can find visual depiction of a Gupta king. Not surprisingly, it is also the only site clearly associated with the dynasty: Udayagiri, near Vidisa in Madhya Pradesh. The whole hill is home of several caves and sculptures, the most famous being the so-called Cave 6 which is in fact a monumental bas-relief representing Viṣṇu in his boar incarnation (Varāha) rescuing the goddess Earth from the Ocean (Fig. 49). The god represented as man with a boar head is surrounded by many figures; at his feet are a *nāga* or snake-king, associated by the liquid world, and two small devotees, one bigger than the other (Fig. 50). The political value of the whole panel has been acknowledged for a very long time: the representation of the God as saviour of the Earth is an allusion to Candragupta's military achievements; two figures could especially be significant in

this regard: the two river goddesses, Gaṅgā and Yamunā, who would represent the territory under the dynasty—the more so if we accept the idea that Allahabad or Prayāga, at the confluence of the two rivers, was the Gupta capital. Varāha could then be deemed as a double-entendre portrait of Candragupta II, though such a term is not to be found in secondary literature and even if most of the authors preferred to speak of ‘allusion’ and ‘allegory’. Only a few (V. S. Agrawal, J. Harle) have been so far as to identify the devotee as a portrait of the king. As Michael Willis remarked recently, this was not without creating some problem, since the king would have been represented worshipping a god who would also be himself!³²

As a matter of fact, Willis’ book is, to my knowledge, not only the most recent study on Udayagiri but also the only one to go so deep in the use of some many different sources (archaeology, texts, numismatic, epigraphy, astronomical data) to explain the whole signification of the site (this is also a global synthesis after several publications). Some aspects may be discussed, for sure, but he must be felicitated for giving such a comprehensive and global overview. Moreover, he summarises the previous studies and approaches, so there is no need for me to do it again.³³ For Willis, the two plateaux separated (or joined) by a low ridge serving as passage have been organised very systematically. This ridge functioned as a water passage, water flowing from the large tank on the western side of the hill to the tank in front of the Varāha panel—Varāha would then have appeared, at least during the rainy season, as really stemming out of the water. Some of the most important features of the site have also been placed according to astronomy. Thus, the summer solstice is the only moment of the year when the whole passage is completely void of any shadow, the more so because it is aligned east-west, like the path of the sun; conversely the passage is overshadowed during the winter solstice. At the top of the passage, there is a sculpted panel representing Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa sleeping on Ananta (Fig. 51) and attended by several smaller figures among whom a kneeling devotee (Fig. 52). Once again, this panel was completely lit only during the summer solstice, that is, at the end of the *uttarāyaṇa*, when normally the god is ritually ‘put to sleep’. Moreover, the date recorded in the inscription from Cave 6 may correspond

³² Willis, *Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 56–57.

³³ *Ibid.*, 46–55.

to June–July 401: astronomical calculations seem to indicate that in 401, at the moment of the summer solstice, the moon also illuminated the whole passage and possibly the Nārāyaṇa panel. Therefore, Willis propose to identify the kneeling devotee as Candragupta, the one ‘who is protected (*gupta*) by the moon (*candra*)’. The sculpture would then commemorate a special religious performance by the king.³⁴

Going back now to the Varāha panel, it is carved just at the exit of the passage. As noted above, the water effect in the tank would have been at its maximum after the rainy season. Besides, facing east, the panel is lit by the raising sun during all the *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*: this is when, in the month of Kārttika, the waking day of Viṣṇu, after four months of sleep, takes place. The Nārāyaṇa and Varāha panels would then be the beginning and the end of a ritual cycle. Hence, the Varāha panel must be viewed as the beginning of a new era, which is quite in accordance with a politico-ideological interpretation of the iconography. Now, if Candragupta is portrayed in the Nārāyaṇa panel, he must also be associated with Varāha. The simplest solution would be to identify as such the devotee kneeling behind the *nāga*. However, Willis goes further and I refer to him for the detail of his argumentation to reach his conclusion.³⁵ He makes use of the famous inscription from Cave 6 who mentions a Sanakānika prince perhaps called Soḍhala (this is Sircar’s reconstruction), son of Viṣṇudāsa, meditating on the feet of Śrī Candragupta, and interprets the whole panel as a double-meaning or, more exactly, a multiple-meaning iconography; as a matter of fact, he sees four layers, acting as ‘variation on a theme’.³⁶

- The kneeling figure is the Sanakānika prince Viṣṇudāsa, submitted by Samudragupta, worshipping Varāha, who would be also a metaphorical representation of Samudragupta;
- The kneeling figure is Soḍhala and Varāha a metaphorical representation of Candragupta;
- The kneeling figure is Samudragupta worshipping Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa under his boar incarnation; the attendant figure would be Hariseṇa;

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30–37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55–73.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

- The kneeling figure is Candragupta, attended by his minister Virasena, worshipping the god for whom he has performed a special ritual.

Though I find Willis' argumentation for the whole site very convincing, on this specific point he may want to combine too many interpretations, in order to suppress any difficulty. However, this 'multiple-meaning' interpretation is very much in tune with what I have argued before in this book.

Leaving aside the specific identification of the kneeling figure (as far as I am concerned, I think that Candragupta II remains the most convincing one), I would like to summarise the most important aspects. Udayagiri was set up according to astronomical data to perform a Vaiṣṇava ritual in relation with Candragupta's conquests. In this regard, the Varāha panel was the conclusion of the ritual: at the same time an exaltation of the cosmic god and also the achievement to reach, that is, the beginning of a new era of splendour. The religious iconography is then clearly combined with an ideological allegory to enhance the deeds of a king and his dynasty. It is all the more noticeable that portraits were part of this iconography.

Before leaving Udayagiri—the study of which goes far beyond my scope—I would like to stress one last point which may seem anecdotal at first but which may be more significant after close scrutiny: because of its antiquity, the whole site has suffered from erosion, especially from water (very obvious in the lowest part of the Varāha panel) and other damages; however, the portrait of the kneeling devotee is more or less beheaded and so is the one on the Nārāyaṇa panel. It can naturally be an accident but I wonder whether this is not due to their function as portrait: this would correspond to what I have said above about the *Kaliṅkattupparani*, and we will see another example in the next paragraph.

3.2. *Allegorical portraits under the Pallavas*

After the Guptas, the Pallava dynasty is probably the one which has made the wider use of portraiture in an ideological and allegorical way. Contrary to the Guptas, examples are more numerous and chronologically more extant, but they are mainly concentrated in the port of Mahabalipuram and, to a lesser extent, in the capital city of Kanchipuram, except the first one. Indeed, the most ancient Pallava

portrait, so far, comes from the southern limits of the kingdom, in fact from the Cōla country: this is the Mahendravarman/Śiva Gaṅgādhara from the Lalitāṅkura Cave at Trichy. I have abundantly dealt with this carving before, so there is no need to insist again. Only two points can be stressed here. To begin with, this first example—at least, the first one to be preserved—is already a complex one, since it is a double-entendre image. Second, it is the first instance of the Descent of the Ganges myth in the Pallava ideology. The use of this myth can be explained, at Trichy, because of the Kaveri flowing below the hill where the image was carved. But, be it the cause or the consequence, we will see that this myth was to play an important role during the reigns of Mahendravarman's successor.

Mahendravarman's son was Narasiṃhavarman I, who thanks to his military exploits, especially against the Cālukyas, earned the title Mahāmalla or Māmalla, then given to the main part of the kingdom—hence, the name Māmallapuram should be preferred to the modern official spelling, Mahabalipuram. Most of the monuments from this site are attributed to this mighty king. Among the most famous are the five 'rathas', monolithic temples traditionally called after the five Pāṇḍavas brothers. As Michael Lockwood has shown, all the *sthūpikas* or pot-finials of the five rathas have been broken, whereas those of the Gaṇeśa ratha, definitely attributed to the reign of Parameśvaravarman (c. 670–700), are intact: the five rathas would then be anterior and would have been desecrated during a Cālukya raid, perhaps in 668.³⁷ The biggest one, the so-called Dharmarāja ratha, is unfinished. The numerous titles of Narasiṃhavarman carved on the monument leave no doubt as to its paternity, but it seems that the temple was taken over by Parameśvaravarman who added, notably, the Somāskanda panel in the upper cella. Among the figures adorning the niches of the first level, the one on the southwestern corner is the only one to be depicted two-armed, without any divine attribute (Fig. 53): therefore, he is usually identified as a portrait of Narasiṃhavarman, which is very likely. However, since the carving of the ratha started logically by the summit, so that the ground-floor was the last to be ready, the question remains to know whether the iconography of this level dates from Narasiṃhavarman or Parameśvaravarman's reign: in other words, it is

³⁷ Lockwood, *Pallava Art*, 123–128.

difficult to know if the portrait was made in the life-time of its model or if it is commemorative.

About the Somāskanda panel, a brief excursus may be necessary. The Somāskanda issue during the Pallava period raises many questions which go far beyond the scope of this study.³⁸ It seems to be a peculiarity of the reigns of Parameśvaravarman and his son Narasiṃhavarman II Rājasimha (c. 700–728), during which such panels were inserted in the back wall of the cellas. The question is then to know whether it was the main cult object or whether it was combined with a *liṅga*. It seems possible that the former situation was met under Parameśvara and the latter under Rājasimha and that only after the *liṅga* became the sole cult object in South Indian Śiva temples. As a matter of fact, one can find other instances of a manifest image of Śiva combined with a symbolic one (e.g. Elephanta) and this would illustrate the manifestation process of Śiva, from Paraśiva to Sadāśiva and finally Maheśa.³⁹ In this regard, the originality of the Pallavas would consist mainly in the choice of the Somāskanda iconography. A clue can be found in their epigraphy. Thus, in the foundation inscription of the famous Kailāsanātha temple at Kanchipuram (which was originally called Rājasimheśvara, after his founder), we can find the following verse:

Just as Guha [Kārttikeya or Skanda] was born of the Supreme Lord (*parameśvara*) Śiva, the destroyer of the warlike Pura, thus from the supreme lord Ugradaṇḍa (Pallava), the destroyer of the city of Raṇarasika, there was born a very pious prince (*subrahmaṇya kumāra*), the illustrious Atyantakāma (Rājasimha), the chief of the Pallavas, who crushed the multitude of his foes by his power (or: spear), whose great statesmanship was well-known and who had got rid of all impurity (by walking) on the path of the śaiva doctrine.⁴⁰

Because of the analogy but also the play on words (*parameśvara*, *subrahmaṇya*, *kumāra*), we understand that the Somāskanda panel could be interpreted as a double-entendre portrait of the king with

³⁸ I have tried to summarize this whole issue and the previous publications on that matter in my *Commanditaires et artistes*, 91–95.

³⁹ Srinivasan, “Śaiva Temple Forms”.

⁴⁰ *SII*, I, 12–14: *teṣaṃ vaṃśe prasūtāgraṇarasikapuronmardanādugradaṇḍāt subrahmaṇyaḥ kumāro guha iva paramādiśvarādattajanmā / śakti(h) kṣuṇṇārivarggā viditabahunayaś śāivasiddhāntamārgge śrīmānatyantakāmaḥ kṣatasakalamalo dhūrdharah pallavānām //*

his queen and his heir.⁴¹ It means also that during the Pallava period, Somāskanda may have been viewed as the representation of three divine entities, whereas later (especially during the Cōla period, when procession bronzes were produced) it became an image of Śiva alone.

This digression—which is not totally out of purpose either—being done, let us go back to the rathas. The Arjuna ratha can, in many ways, be compared to the Dharmarāja. It is decorated by many niches. On the first level, the central niches of each wall are occupied by a deity: Śiva with the bull to the south, Viṣṇu on Garuḍa to the north and a god riding an elephant to the east. They are surrounded by unidentified figures. The god on the elephant has been identified sometimes as Indra, sometimes as Subrahmaṇya and sometimes as Aiyaṇar Śāsta.⁴² This latter identification is really interesting not only because of its local South Indian flavour, but also because it would identify the other figures who would be part of the legend of Aiyaṇar. But, if the male figures in the corner niches could be *dvarapāla* or guardians, the riddle remains for the couples on each side of Viṣṇu (one niche is unfinished) and Śiva. They look like royal couples and H. Heras has proposed to identify them with Mahendravarman I, Narasiṃhavarman I and Mahendravarman II.⁴³ This is not unlikely, but this identification relies only on a visual comparison with the portrait of the Dharmarāja ratha and the two from the Ādivarāha cave (see *infra*): not only these are not identified with total accuracy, but I have argued before that likeness is not a reliable criterion. However, a close scrutiny of the historical bas-reliefs from the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl temple shows that the panel identified as the coronation of Rājasimha (wall 5, panel XIII, lower register)⁴⁴ has a couple the position of which is strictly similar to one of the Arjuna ratha (Fig. 54). Of course, it does not prove undoubtedly that these couples are royal portraits but it could indicate that by the time of Nandivarman Pallavamalla they were conceived as such.

⁴¹ This interpretation could explain why the Somāskanda may have been the unique cult object during Parameśvaravarman's reign, that is, when the king was identified to Śiva, whereas under Rājasimha, the king was 'only' the son and hence a *liṅga* was needed.

⁴² Susan L. Huntington, "Iconographic Reflections on the Arjuna Ratha", in *Kāladarśana*, ed. Joanna Williams (Leiden – New Delhi: E. J. Brill, 1981), 57–67.

⁴³ Henry Heras, "The Royal Portraits of Mahābalipuram", *Acta Orientalia* 13 (1935), 163–173.

⁴⁴ See also Minakshi, *Historical Sculptures of the Vaikuṇṭhapuram Temple*, pl. X.4.

As mentioned above, two portraits are also carved in the cave now known as Ādivarāha. In the cella is an image of Varāha lifting the Earth goddess, quite similar to the more famous one in the Varāha cave and, of course, to the Udayagiri panel. When entering the cave, one can see on the left a king seated on his throne and attended by two queens (Fig. 55); an inscription identifies him as *Siṃhaviṇṇapōttrāthirājan*; on the right there is a standing king holding the hand of his queen while a second one is following (Fig. 56); here the inscription reads *Mahendrapōttrāthirājan*. Once again, the cave has been founded by Narasiṃhavarman I and completed by Parameśvaravarman—though R. Nagaswamy has argued that all the monuments of Mahabalipuram were creations of Rājasimha's time, but without gaining much support.⁴⁵ It is usually surmised that the seated king is the father and the standing one, the son; this chronological order is quite in tune with the circumambulation order, so it seems acceptable. Now, in spite of the labels, the identification of the portraits depends, according to the different scholars who elaborated on that issue, on the personality of the founder, on the one hand, and on whether he had his own portrait set up in his temple, on the other. The different possibilities can be synthesized in the following table:

Founder of the temple	Seated king <i>Śrī Siṃhaviṇṇapōttrāthirājan</i>	Standing king <i>Śrī Mahendrapōttrāthirājan</i>	
Mahendravarman I (c. 580–630)	Siṃhaviṣṇu II (c. 560–580)	Mahendravarman I (c. 580–630)	Aravamuthan, <i>Portrait Sculpture</i> , 12 Heras, “The Royal Portraits of Mahābalipuram”, 164
Narasiṃhavarman I Māmalla (c. 630–668)	Narasiṃhavarman I Māmalla (c. 630–668)	Mahendravarman I (c. 580–630)	H. Krishna Sastri, <i>South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses</i> (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1916; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995)

⁴⁵ R. Nagaswamy, “New Light on Mamallapuram”, *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India* (1962), 1–50.

Table (*cont.*)

Founder of the temple	Seated king <i>Śrī Simhaviṇṇapōt-trāthirājan</i>	Standing king <i>Śrī Mahendrapōt-trāthirājan</i>	
Narasimhavarman I Māmalla (c. 630–668)	Simhaviṣṇu II (c. 560–580)	Mahendravarman I (c. 580–630)	Lockwood, <i>Pallava Art</i> , 60 and 113 Michael D. Rabe, “The Māmallapuram <i>Praśasti</i> : A Panegyric in Figures”, <i>Artibus Asiae</i> 67 (1997), 228 Kaimal, “The Problem of Portraiture in South India, circa 870–970 A.D.”, 72
Narasimhavarman I Māmalla (c. 630–668) but completed by Parameśvaravarman (672–700) who added the portraits	Narasimhavarman I Māmalla (c. 630–668)	Mahendravarman II (668–672)	K. R. Srinivasan, <i>Cave Temples of the Pallavas</i> (New Delhi: ASI, 1964; reprint, 1993), 173 James C. Harle, <i>The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent</i> (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994), 278
Narasimhavarman II Rājasimha (700–728)	Narasimhavarman II Rājasimha (700–728)	Mahendravarman III (heir apparent, dead before his father)	Nagaswamy, “New Light on Mamallapuram”

The oldest theories can be forgotten: no monuments of Mahabalipuram can be attributed to Mahendravarman anymore and it is very unlikely to inverse the father and the son. Conversely, the Rājasimha hypothesis is very weak. We have then two serious hypotheses: in both, the cave has been founded by Narasimhavarman I but in one case the portraits would have been added during Parameśvaravarman’s completion; in both, the portraits would be those of direct ancestors. Though sound and logical, the Parameśvaravarman’s hypothesis can be dismissed: this king was a strong Śaiva who, as we have seen, favoured the Somāskanda iconography. On the contrary, Narasimhavarman was Vaiṣṇava and, as we will see below, we can find another example of this ruler setting up portraits of his two immediate predecessors.

I may have tested the patience of my reader who might think that, so far, these Pallava portraits are undoubtedly royal images but that

the allegory is not very obvious. It was nevertheless necessary to elaborate on these examples to show that portraiture among the Pallavas was a strong tradition before turning to an outstanding artwork: the monumental sculpted rock that I will call for the moment the 'Great Penance'. But, before doing so, let us just add a few words about the Ādivarāha cave. If we accept the 'Narasimhavarman hypothesis', we can wonder with Michael Rabe whether the king was not represented in the temple though he main cult image, that is, Varāha.⁴⁶ Contrary to the Gaṅgādhara from Trichy, there is here no evident epigraphic statement.⁴⁷ But, the king is famous for the capture of the Cālukya capital, Badami, known in ancient times as Vātāpi; now Vātāpi is also the name of a demon killed by Viṣṇu in his incarnation as a man-lion... We may then find in the Ādivarāha cave a praise of the conquering king as well as an exaltation of his lineage—very much like at Udayagiri. But further arguments can be drawn from the Great Penance panel (Fig. 57).

Since the end of the eighteenth century, so much has been written about this gigantic sculpture that it hardly needs to be introduced again. I am not going then to dwell into a new and thorough discussion but will retain only the elements useful for my purpose. Among the many interpretations of the depicted scene, two have gained supports. The first one to be proposed is the Kirātārjunīyam: the ascetic standing on one foot would be Arjuna being granted the weapon *paśupata* by Śiva who is appearing to his side. This episode from the *Mahābhārata* became the subject of a drama by Bhāravi, in the sixth century. Further arguments were brought by T. N. Ramachandran who interpreted the small Viṣṇu temple and the meditating ascetic in front of it as an allusion to Nara and Nārāyaṇa, that is, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa before their descent on Earth.⁴⁸ Besides, the penance of Arjuna took place along the Ganges, evoked by the cliff (in which water from a tank above might have flown) and the *nāgas*; moreover, the main figure in the cliff is a *nāginī*, that is, a snake-princess, who might be Ulūpī, one of Arjuna's wife.⁴⁹ However, this theory faces also some

⁴⁶ Rabe, "The Māmallapuram *Praśasti*", 228–229.

⁴⁷ *Contra* M. Rabe, I do not think that the list of the 10 *avatāras* at the entrance of the cave is very illuminating.

⁴⁸ T. N. Ramachandran, "The Kirātārjunīyam or 'Arjuna's Penance' in Indian Art", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 18 (1950–1951), 1–111.

⁴⁹ Rabe, "The Māmallapuram *Praśasti*", 235–236.

difficulties, the main one being that most of the figures in the relief (deities, human beings and animals) direct their attention towards the cliff and that some even have their back to the ascetic and Śiva. Hence, other scholars, beginning with V. Goloubew, have proposed to see in the relief the penance of Bhagīratha in order to obtain the descent of the Ganges on Earth to purify the remains of his ancestors.⁵⁰ This second theory has received since then strong support but also critics, because, again, it is possible to find some discrepancies between the myth (or, more exactly, some textual renditions of the myth) and the visual composition. In 1982, the great Pallava specialist M. Lockwood, while strongly supporting the Descent of the Ganges theory, suggested that in fact the panel could combine the two stories;⁵¹ for this, he relied on the comparison with literature and with the common use of *śleṣa* in Pallava inscriptions. The idea, also mentioned by S. Huntington,⁵² was developed in a very detailed and convincing paper by P. Kaimal.⁵³ In parallel, the relief became the main subject for M. Rabe who devoted a long article and then a whole book to it.⁵⁴ This study is so complete that it is best to refer to it. What follows owes a lot to M. Rabe and I disagree with him only on a few details.

For Rabe too, the Great Penance combines multiple meanings, though, if he had to choose, he would probably give more weight to Arjuna's than to Bhagīratha's penance.⁵⁵ As a matter of fact, he forwarded a third theory: Aśvatthāman's penance. In the *Mahābhārata*, Aśvatthāman is Droṇa's son, and one of Arjuna's most terrible enemies. Strangely enough, though he is not a very sympathetic character in the Epic, he was given much importance by the Pallavas who presented him as their mythical ancestor. According to several inscriptions, Aśvatthāman performed a penance, like Arjuna; when the *tapas*

⁵⁰ Victor Goloubew, "La falaise d'Arjuna de Mavalipuram et la Descente de la Gaṅgā sur la Terre, selon le Rāmāyaṇa et le Mahābhārata", *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1914), 210–212.

⁵¹ Reprinted in Lockwood, *Pallava Art*, 160–166, especially p. 160.

⁵² Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 303–304.

⁵³ Padma Kaimal, "Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Māmallapuram", *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994), 1–27.

⁵⁴ Michael D. Rabe, *The Great Penance at Māmallapuram: Deciphering a Visual Text* (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2001).

⁵⁵ "With respect to the question of whether Arjuna or Bhagīratha is the primary archetype of the monument's patron, there can no longer be any doubt. It is Arjuna and his penance that best accounts for the inclusion and disposition of every other figure." (Rabe, "The Māmallapuram *Praśasti*", 236).

became too strong, the gods, feeling threatened, sent him a seductress; from this encounter was born a son who, because he was deposited on a bed on young sprouts (*pallava*), was named Pallava. According to the version, the identity of the seductress varies: she is sometimes an *apsara*, but in the Rayakota plaques of Skandaśiṣya (*EL*, v, 49–53), she is a *nāginī*, like in the cliff. Therefore, the whole relief can be interpreted as a visual panegyric of the Pallava dynasty and its ‘descent’.

This interpretation can be backed by many further arguments. Apart from the epigraphic statements *stricto sensu*, we can find, as we have seen above, their visual counterpart at the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl temple; from this point of view, there Aśvatthāman is depicted exactly in the same position as the main ascetic from the Great Penance in the scene representing the birth of Pallava (wall 2, panel I, upper register).⁵⁶ Moreover the Great Penance panel is framed by rows of lions: these lions may seem strange at first glance, because of the very rigid and stylized way they are carved, whereas all the other animals are very naturalistic. Would have the sculptors lacked the ability to make naturalistic lions? We can doubt that; but these lions can be found in other Pallava caves and, moreover, on the seals of the dynasty. Thus, these lions are heraldic symbols, which underline the fact that the whole sculpture is a visual panegyric.

I would however diverge a little bit from Michael Rabe in giving more importance to the Descent of the Ganges than he did. As a matter of fact, at the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl temple, three panels after the one depicting the birth of Pallava there is another which C. Minakshi deemed as an ‘allegory of the dynasty’ because there is, on the left, the Descent of the Gaṅgā, with Bhagīratha in the same position than on the Great Penance, and, on the right, Bhū-Varāha, exactly in the same depiction as the panel in the Varāha cave or the main cult object in the Ādivarāha cave. In the Kailāsanātha (Rājasimheśvara) temple at Kanchipuram, in the foundation inscription, the genealogy starts with an ode to the Gaṅgā.⁵⁷ And again, in the Kasakudi plaques, we find:

From him came Droṇa, the preceptor of the Kurus, who was produced from the semen (of Bharadvāja) in a pitcher called *droṇa*; whose victorious banner was an altar painted on the skin of a black-buck; (and) who completely mastered (the four branches of) the science of archery, which resemble the four oceans.

⁵⁶ Minakshi, *Historical Sculptures of the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāl Temple*, pl. III.2.

⁵⁷ *SII*, I, 1890, 12–13, v. 1.

From him came the sage Aśvatthāman, who was an incarnation of (Śiva) the enemy of Cupid; who deserved the confidence of the inhabitants of the world; (and) at the rising of whose anger Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Bhīma became terrified (and) threw down (their) weapons without any opposition.

The glorious Pallava, (during whose rule) the earth was untouched (even) by the smallest calamity, was suddenly born to him on a litter of sprouts (*pallava*) by the (nymph) Menakā, that had been sent to him by Śakra (Indra), who was afraid of (losing) his position (on account of the sage's austerities).

Though born from a race of Brāhmaṇas, he possessed in the highest degree the valour of the Kṣatriyas, which was inherent in him. Does not the thunderbolt possess by nature the quality of burning, though it springs from the cloud?

From him was produced Aśokavarman, who removed the distress of suppliant kings, (but) who distressed those who faced (him) in battle, (and) who, though bright as the moon, possessed a spotless fame (while the moon has a spot).

From him descended the powerful, spotless race of the Pallavas, which resembled a partial incarnation of Viṣṇu, as it displayed unbroken courage in conquering the circle of the world with all its parts, (and) as it enforced the special rules of all castes and orders, and which resembled the descent of the Gaṅgā (on earth), as it purified the whole world.⁵⁸

From this passage, it is clear that both myths combine much more than they are alternatives of each other. On the whole, the Descent of the Gaṅgā is too much present in the Pallava ideology and imagery to be dismissed from the Great Penance panel. What I am unable to say is whether this analogy was developed because of the existence of the old portrait of Mahendravarman as Śiva Gaṅgādhara at Trichy or whether this image was carved because the allegory already existed.⁵⁹ In fact, if there is a story less referred to in Pallava ideology, it seems to be Arjuna's penance! But this is not to say that it is not represented either on the Māmallapuram relief. The three myths should be put on a same footing and the ascetic seen as Arjuna, Bhagīratha and Aśvatthāman at the same time. As we know, each theory faces some discrepancies,⁶⁰ but this is easily explained if the three stories were meant at the same time. In fact, the use of multiple meanings creates many constraints. In literature, *śleṣa* or *dhvani* compels poets to use rare terms or intricate

⁵⁸ *SII*, II, II, 355.

⁵⁹ Let us remember that all the inscriptions are definitely later than the Trichy sculpture.

⁶⁰ I have already mentioned the figures not facing Arjuna and Śiva, but the opponents to the Ganges theory argued that Śiva does not appear as Gaṅgādhara, etc.

constructions. Likewise, the sculptors had to find solutions suitable for each story. But these ambiguities have also their advantage. As P. Kaimal puts it: “The absence of such unequivocal signs creates space for the coexistence and interaction of multiple voices and therefore meanings”.⁶¹ As I have stated before, *śleṣa* is not only a literary *tour de force*: the different meanings interact so as to give a more powerful signification. Thus, we have here a triple image of the Pallava king (especially Narasiṃhavarman, who commissioned the sculpture): mythical ancestor (Aśvatthāman), mighty warrior and model of kings (Arjuna) and provider and protector of water (Bhagīratha)⁶²—this latter aspect was not insignificant in a region where rice culture is important, the more so because the Palar basin, compared with the more southern Kaveri delta, is rather dry. As for Aśvatthāman, as the Kāśakūṭi plaques make clear, it was certainly a means for the dynasty to justify its Brahman origin. The union with the *nāga* princess⁶³ is an ancient myth very popular in Tamil Nadu where it seems to be associated with the Cōḷa dynasty (in the *Māṇimekalai*, for instance): it may evoke the arrival of a ‘foreign’ dynasty and its alliance with an autochthonous tribe and, as is well known, the Pallavas came originally from the north.⁶⁴

Finally, the theory of the ‘descent of the Pallavas’ proposed by M. Rabe allows us to identify ‘real’ portraits in the panel. These are the beheaded ascetics in front of the Viṣṇu temple who could be the direct ancestors of the king (Fig. 58). As a matter of fact, since Viṣṇu is Nārāyaṇa, the praying ascetic in front of the small temple could be identified as Nara. Thus M. Rabe has proposed to see also in the figure of the ascetic sitting just in front of the sage a portrait of the king (and supposed patron of the panel) Narasiṃhavarman; this could be confirmed by the presence, just below Nara, of a lion: ‘Narasiṃhavarman’ can indeed mean ‘the one who is protected (*varman*) by Nara and the

⁶¹ Kaimal, “Playful Ambiguity”, 9.

⁶² In this regard, the Great Penance panel should be analysed along with the adjoining panel depicting Kṛṣṇa Govardhana—another iconography linked with protection—which is also framed by heraldic lions.

⁶³ The Velūrpālaiyam chart mentions also this marriage but here this is not Aśvatthāman but a Vīrakūrca.

⁶⁴ This myth has been later adopted in Cambodia; see Georges Coedès, “Etudes cambodgiennes I: La légende de la nāgī”. *BEFEO* 11 (1911), 391–393 and Victor Goloubew, “Mélanges sur le Cambodge ancien I: Les légendes de la nāgī et de l’apsaras”, *BEFEO* 24 (1924), 501–510.

lion (*siṃha*); therefore, the two other ascetics might be his father and grand-father, Mahendravarman and Siṃhaviṣṇu—we would then find here the same pattern as in the Ādivarāha cave. The three figures sit in the same vertical axis with the main ascetic identified as Bhagīratha/Arjuna/Aśvatthāman, which would illustrate the ‘descent’ of the dynasty. At the same time, these sculptures are, strangely enough, the only ones to have been vandalized and one may wonder if it is not the consequence of their political character, perhaps during a Cālukya invasion of the Pallava kingdom. As at Udayagiri, the whole panel is an allegory of the power of a ruler and his family but the portraits *stricto sensu* are limited to secondary figures, which may have been the target of an ultimate revenge.

What is remarkable with the Pallavas is that, apart from their epigraphic statement, we find two visual panegyrics. The first one, the Great Penance at Māmallapuram, is truly an allegory in that it makes use of a religious and mythological iconography as an ideological metaphor. On the contrary, the reliefs adorning the gallery of the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl are much more literal. Maybe this is due to the difference of the political situation: Narasiṃhavarman I, in the middle of the seventh century, brought the dynasty to its apogee (even if the Cālukya threat never disappeared), whereas Nandivarman, in the middle of the eighth century, was from a cadet branch and needed to expose more explicitly his links with his ancestors, while facing local unrest. Moreover, he used visual references to reinforce this process of legitimization.

While there are many instances of portraits (royal and non-royal) in Tamil Nadu after the Pallavas, it is remarkable that neither the Cōḷas nor the Pāṇḍyas felt the need to develop such kind of dynastic and allegorical portraiture. However, with the Nāyakas, we find again, not allegorical portraits, but gallery of portraits praising the whole dynasty.⁶⁵ The reason is not obvious at first. But, as a pure guess, I would make the following comment: contrary to the Cōḷas, Cēras and Pāṇḍyas, very ancient local dynasties already mentioned in the third century BC, neither the Pallavas nor the Nāyakas originated from the Tamil country. Was this use of portraiture a way to legitimize their power in that region?

⁶⁵ On the Nāyaka portraits see the publications by Crispin Branfoot.

3.3. *Portraiture and political metaphors*

The Guptas and the Pallavas may seem exceptional, because of the semantic richness of some of their artistic achievements. However, they are not unique. These examples are important since they can direct our attention to that phenomenon of political metaphors. In fact, after a close scrutiny, many instances could be found. Here are only a few glimpses.

To remain in South India, the Cōlas built an imperial power much greater than the Pallavas. It is not very surprising that their iconography reflects also an ideological discourse. Yet, it is less explicit and less striking. I have argued elsewhere that along with some small portraits, Rājārāja I also developed the iconography of both Tripurāntaka and Caṇḍeśa.⁶⁶ The former would be a representation of the sovereign's claim to *digvijaya*, whereas the latter would be a metaphor of his devotion towards Śiva as well as his ability as administrator since Caṇḍeśa was, at that time, considered as the treasurer of the temple. This double metaphor would have been imitated by Rājendra I, Rājārāja's son and successor. If we take these two iconographies separately, my hypothesis may seem unwarranted. However, in both Tanjavur and Gangaikondacolapuram, the two myths are always narrated in parallel. From a religious and mythological point of view, there is no justification. But if we take the personality of the king as a common link, then the parallel can make sense. But I must admit that it lacks the force of the Gupta and Pallava examples.

Among the other possible political portrayals, the *Rāmāyaṇa* depiction is almost too evident. It is not necessary to elaborate too much. But one of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s interest is that it is not to be found in India only, but also in Southeast Asia. I have already mentioned Angkor Wat but in Java, in the fifteenth century, we can see another beautiful application at Caṇḍi Panataran.⁶⁷ One of the peculiarities of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Southeast Asia is that it has often been 'buddhicized' but it had of course retained its royal ideology.

⁶⁶ Lefèvre, "The 'Portraits' of the Cōla King Rājārāja I".

⁶⁷ Kenneth R. Hall, "Ritual Transitions and Kingship in Fifteenth-Century Java: A View from the Caṇḍi Panataran Complex", in *Structure and Society in Early South India. Essays in Honour of Noboru Karashima*, ed. Kenneth R. Hall (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 276–312; Ann Rasmussen Kinney, *Worshipping Siva and Buddha. The Temple Art of East Java* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 179–213.

This leads us to a tricky question, which I do not pretend to solve but which I would like to present to my readers. Is this political use of portraiture, or of allegorical portrayals, confined to the realm of Hinduism? Or does it exist also in the other Indian religious traditions? I do not know enough about Jainism to give an answer but, regarding Buddhism, I think it may be possible to find some examples, at least in Māhāyāna, which was more fit for that purpose than Theravāda. For instance, recently, D. Klimburg-Salter, incorporating the ideas of G. Taddei on the allusions to the Cakravartin king in the Bamiyan paintings, particularly through the Pañcavārṣika ceremony,⁶⁸ has suggested that some images of bearded monks are representations of Mahākāśyapa who would be also a portrait of the king.⁶⁹ Indeed Mahākāśyapa is the disciple chosen by Buddha to convey the Dharma to Maitreya. The investiture was done by the gift of a robe and this gesture is just echoed in the ceremony itself: therefore, the king would be given by the Buddha himself the role of transmitting the Dharma. But this would need much further development.⁷⁰

Like so often in this study, this chapter must be looked as preliminary reflections leading, hopefully, to more specific analyses. My point here was to propose a short synthesis on the royal portrait, since its importance was already evident throughout the previous chapters. To sum up, this importance is twofold: on the one hand, portraits of kings appear to have been the model for many other images, including possibly divine images; on the other hand, because of the peculiar nature of the portrayed person, these portraits can reveal a lot on the semantic function of images.

⁶⁸ The *Pañcavārṣika* is a Buddhist ceremony aiming at insuring the material and spiritual welfare of a community; performed by the king, it reinforces his position in the cosmic order. If, according to some sources, it could date from Aśoka's time, it seems to have been especially in fashion between the sixth and the eighth century. Xuanzang describes it thoroughly (Samuel Beal, trans., *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen tsiang* (A.D. 629) [London: Trübner and Co., 1884; reprint, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983], vol. 1, 21–22, 55, 217). On the role of this ceremony at Bamiyan, see Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *The Kingdom of Bāmiyān: Buddhist Art and Culture of the Hindu Kush* (Naples and Rome: Istituto Universitario Orientale and IsMEO, 1989), 123–127.

⁶⁹ Deborah Klimburg-Salter, "Mahākāśyapa and the Art of Bāmiyān", in *South Asian Archaeology 2001*, ed. Catherine Jarrige and Vincent Lefèvre, vol. 2, 535–549.

⁷⁰ Likewise, it would be useful to examine again the old idea according to which the first bodhisattvas from Gandhara might be portraits of local princes; see Benjamin Rowland, "Bodhisattvas or Deified Kings. A Note on Gandhara Sculpture", *Archives of the Chinese Society of America* 15 (1961), 6–12.

More particularly, portraits can be useful tools in the study of divine kingship,⁷¹ an issue which caused much ink to flow.⁷² It is unfortunate that so many distinguished scholars have written on this subject without taking into consideration archaeological and visual sources. This is not to say that these artefacts should replace the study of texts and inscriptions, but they could usefully supplement them. In this regard, do royal portraits indicate a form of deification or prove the existence of a divine kingship? To begin with, it depends a little on what we mean by 'divine'. If it is some kind of absolute or transcendent essence, it seems quite unlikely; if, as I have stated before, the meaning is vaguer, then it is debatable.

What is sure is that royal portraits contributed to confer to their models a special status, above the mere and simple mortals. I have argued that portraits (royal or not, by the way) could be ritually installed and, as such, enlivened. However an independent worship is far from obvious. When portraits are only 'simple' ones, that is, with only one meaning, like for instance the dynastic portraits of the Kuṣāṇas, we note that they were nevertheless put in a secondary position in the temples, as perpetual devotees. The ambiguity exists only in the case of double-meaning images or divine depictions which served at the same time as a political and ideological allegory or metaphor. No doubt that such a practice was not allowed for anybody and that it enabled the portrayed one to share, at least partially and for a moment, a sort of divine bliss. But this deification, if we have to use that word, was more immanent than transcendent. It would have existed only as long as the metaphor was understood. And, as we have seen, out of a specific context and milieu, this is not always evident.

⁷¹ Ronald Inden (*Imagining India* [London: Basil Blackwell, 1990; reprint: Indiana University Press, 2000], 237) has suggested speaking of 'theophanic polities' instead of 'divine kingship'. Though the meaning of this new expression is far from obvious at first, I think that the suggestion is quite sound.

⁷² On the divine nature of the king in India, see for instance Edward W. Hopkins, "The Divinity of Kings", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51 (1931), 309–316; Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966); Sheldon Pollock, "The Divine King in the Indian Epic", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.3 (1984), 505–528; Inden, *Imagining India*, 162–212.

APPENDIX

VAIKUNṬHAPERUMĀḌ TEMPLE, KANCHIPURAM: ICONOGRAPHY OF THE SURROUNDING GALLERIES

Wall no. 1

No. of panel	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Upper register	Viṣṇu	Brahmā	Aṅgiras	Bṛhaspati	Śamyu	Bharadvāja	Droṇa	Āsvatthāman
Lower register	Coronation scene	King in his court	King on his throne	King giving orders	Crowning scene: Viṣṇugopa?	King and his ministers	King looking at an elephants procession (scene of war?)	Void, except one character (Samudragupta's invasion?)

Wall no. 2

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Birth of Pallava	Royal couple (Pallava's wedding?)	Hunting scene	Pallava family compared to the Descent of the Ganges and to Varāha	King on his throne	King on his throne
Coronation scene (Kumāraṇṣṇu?) and elephant procession	King and queen performing a horse sacrifice (after the recovery of Kanchipuram?)	Coronation of an heir apparent (Viṣṇugopa?)	King with elephants and horses	King on his throne (Buddhavarman?) in front of a <i>caitya</i>	Coronation of Nandivarman I

Wall no. 3

I		II		III	
Elephants and horses procession		Nandivarman I on his throne			
King, queen and ministers in front of a battle					

Wall no. 4

IV	King on his throne	V	King giving orders	VI	Horse sacrifice	VII	King listening to a report	VIII	King on his throne	IX	King on his throne holding a stick	X	King looking to a man fighting a lion	XI	King holding a sword with his counsellors	XII	Entertainment scene (dance and fight)	XIII	King on his throne	XIV	King in his court	XV	Nandivarman imploring Śiva Pinakapāṇi	XVI	Nandivarman fighting the Nāga King Phanindra	XVII	Nandivarman's victory (and his wedding with a Nāga princess?)
Simhavarman inspecting the battle field and listening to reports							Attack against the royal camp		Seated king		Elephants and horses procession		Seated king and battle?		Battle												

XVIII	King sitting on a rock, giving orders	XIX	Seated king	XX	King looking at an elephants and dancers procession	XXI	King and queen on throne	XXII	King on his throne	XXIII	King and dancers (?)	XXIV	Nandivarman's death on battle field (?)	XXV	Coronation of Simhavarman II among soldiers
Simhavarman in his camp		Coronation of Kumāraviṣṇu (?) and elephants procession		Seated king and soldiers procession		Coronation of Simhavarman III (?)		Military procession		Battle		King with his ministers and elephants fight		Two camps on each side of a river	

Wall no. 5

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
People riding elephants	Cult scene in a temple. King listening to a report. Cutting of a tree	Man riding an elephant. Two horse riders in front of a house. Seated king	Three seated Brahmins and 4 people	Coronation of Simhaviṣṇu	Simhaviṣṇu seated in front of a temple	Simhaviṣṇu on his throne and coronation of Bhimavarman	Bhimavarman on his throne	Coronation of Mahendravarman I	Coronation of Narasimphvarman I Māmalla
Victorious Paramēśvaravarman and his queen	King going to Badami	Stop on the road to Badami	Third stop	Fight against the Cālukyās	Pallava forces superior to the Cālukya ones	Pallava army towards Badami	King giving orders to his army	Seizure of Badami	Paramēśvara in front of the Cālukya palace

XI	Fight against the Cālukyas	XII	Narasimhavarman listening to his general bringing back trophies	XIII	Court scenes	XIV	King listening to a request	XV	Narasimhavarman I intervening in Sri Lanka	XVI	Narasimhavarman reinstalling Mānavamma on Sri Lanka throne	XVII	Coronation of Mahendravarman II	XVIII	King on his throne	XIX	Mahendravarman II without his crown and coronation of Parameśvaravarman I	XX	Parameśvaravarman on his throne	XXI	Battle (Peruvalanallūr) and victory over the Cālukyas (Vikramāditya kneeling in front of Parameśvara)
Preparation for new fights Coronation of Narasimhavarman II Rājasimha with his consort											Attack of a fort		King in front of a temple in construction (Kailasanātha temple?)		King listening to a report		King looking at the return of a wounded or dead man		Coronation of Parameśvaravarman II		Void

Walls no. 6 and 7

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Brahmans procession	The delegation speaks to Hiranyavarman	Hiranyavarman looks for a candidate for the succession: Pallavamalla proposes himself	Queens and courtiers excited by the departure of the prince	Hiranyavarman looks at his departing son	Nandivarman Pallavamalla bids farewell from his father	Nandivarman, on his way to Kanchi, is welcomed by his vassals	Nandivarman and his vassals	Kanchi inhabitants greet him	Coronation of Nandivarman II Pallavamalla
Void	Soldiers in an ambush		Army in the forest		Nandivarman hearing of a victory		Nandivarman hearing of a victory	Capture of the Kālidurga fort	

XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII
The new king is advised to fight the Cālukyas	Nandivarman is defeated	The king and his general Udayacandra	Secession against Nandivarman	Udayacandra ends Citramāya's rebellion	Military procession	Military procession	Nandivarman listening to a report
Battle of Maṇṇaikuḍi against the Pāṇḍyas	Nandivarman on his throne	Nandivarman hearing of the Maṇṇaikuḍi victory	Nandivarman listening to his general	Pallava cavalry fighting the Gaṅgas	Nandivarman hearing of the victory	Elephants procession	Nandivarman negotiating with the Gaṅga king

Wall no. 8

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Booty offered to Nandivarman	Men and elephants	Nandivarman receiving trophies	Return of the army	Nandivarman honoured by his vassals	Nandivarman honoured by his vassals	Departure for a new battle?	Battle against the Rāṣṭrakūṭas
King and his court listening to a report	King and his ministers	Battle against the Rāṣṭrakūṭas	King on his throne	Four seated people	Pallava army advancing	King and his ministers	General instructing the army

Wall no. 9

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Nandivarman receiving homage	Nandivarman receiving homage	Army advancing	Nandivarman issuing orders	Victorious Nandivarman back in Kanchi	Nandivarman on his throne	Elephants attacking	
Battle	Viṣṇu	Nandivarman in front of a Viṣṇu temple with an Aḷvār shrine	Battle		Torture scene	Homage paid to Nandivarman	Victorious Nandivarman

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The first objective of this study was to emphasize the importance of portraiture in the Indian culture. While doing so, my intention was to give some ideas on:

- The multiplicity of images which can be deemed as portraits;
- The multiplicity of shapes and forms that these images can take;
- The multiplicity of functions attributed to them;
- And, finally, the antiquity of the phenomenon.

Of course, apart from a few exceptions, portraits can hardly be presented, from an aesthetical point of view, as the main achievements of Indian art. This statement can nevertheless be nuanced if we include in portraiture a certain amount of double-entendre and allegorical images which related to a specific, historically attested, person and hence can be deemed (also) as portraits. However my purpose was not to do a coffee-table book with only beautiful images but to draw attention to a large historical phenomenon. As far as I see it, this phenomenon seems important for at least two main reasons. First, portraits are, by definition, representations of real individuals and, as such, they can reveal a lot about self-perception; to put in another way, this kind of visual discourse can supplement texts in informing us on how some people in early India wanted to be perceived; in this regard, the study of portraiture appears to be of utmost importance for the understanding of kingship. Second—but, of course this issue is closely related to the former—portraits reveal a clear historical conscience on the part of those who made them and/or commissioned them: on the one hand, it demonstrates an appraisal of the past (mostly in its commemorative function); and, on the other hand, it indicates an intention to supersede the flight of time in giving a ‘future’ (if not an eternity) to the portrayed mortals. Of course, this relation to history goes against the idea, false but so common for so long, that India is a static and a-temporal society, only concerned with ‘Ideal’. Incidentally, here lies, it seems to me, the main reason for the lack of interest for portraiture in Indian art—and this is true, as I indicated in my introduction, for those who have followed (consciously or not) Hegel as well as for those who have followed Coomaraswamy.

Though chronology remains to be precised, it seems that portraiture was an ancient practice—perhaps, as I have argued, one of the most ancient artistic practices. Such an idea, if applied to, say, European art, would not shock anyone but, strangely enough, it appears to annoy many indologists who prefer to see divinities embodying ‘spiritual’ concepts in every image. My hypothesis regarding the ‘early historical Yakṣas’ should be seen as a tentative one and can (should?) be discussed. But, more than the exact identification of these statues, my point is that the representation of real characters—sometimes heroes of the past—played a role in the development of Indian art and, therefore, we should consider the interaction between portraiture and the beginnings of religious iconography—exactly as, for more ‘recent’ artworks, we must inquire for the metaphorical and political (not to say, biographical) reasons for choosing a specific iconography. In other words, we should try not to think of Indian art only as ‘idealistic’ or ‘spiritualistic’. Likewise, we should be careful before accepting, for ancient images, some tentative identification inherited from the past scholarship as if they were indubitable truth and regardless of their implications on our understanding of the (religious) history of South Asia. But, conversely—because every rose has its thorns—we should be careful also not to go to the opposite extreme, that is, explaining everything through the lense of portraiture, in a sort of historicist way. Portraiture is only one possibility, but one that should not be discarded too easily.

Now, the issue is also to know, apart from its supposed historical role and the forms it has taken, if portraiture in South Asia has something specific that would differentiate it from portraiture in other civilizations. One first element of answer is perhaps that, if it is a long established practice, it can nevertheless not be considered as an artistic genre as such. On the whole, artistic genre meant as a separate category is a peculiarity of Western art and the concept does not seem to be relevant when applied to the Indian one. But this goes further: as a matter of fact, there is a very strong link, or a continuum, between ‘portraits’ and the other types of ‘images’; one could even speak of a ‘non-differentiation’, since divine images could be viewed as ‘portraits’ of these deities. From all this, it emerges that the whole concept of portraiture in South (and Southeast) Asia is at the same time hazier and much wider than in the West. Hazier, because it is not clearly distinct from other kinds of images and is not perceived as a genre *per se*. Wider, because the link between a person and an image can

be conveyed by a multiplicity of means. Like in literature, the artistic achievements in India or Southeast Asia are not always straightforward and use allusion and allegory a lot.

But it means also that portraits share the same specificities of South Asian 'images' in general. And one of the most striking aspects of South Asian images is that they are really inhabited and enlivened, thanks to the ritual of installation. Of course, this has nothing to do with 'idolatry': before being a divine image, that is, a divinity, an image is a piece of wood, metal, stone or paper; the installation ritual consists in inviting, through different means, the deity into this image which becomes then only one of his or her possible incarnations; besides, this embodiment is not necessarily eternal: though the image will always keep a part of sacredness, the deity may leave it, if he or she is not properly taken care of. Likewise, a portrait—and here, I should remind my reader that the distinction is much more evident when I translate terms which, in Sanskrit, can mean at the same time 'portrait' and 'image' or 'manifestation'—can be enlivened. This was probably not the case for all of them. For instance the painted portraits exchanged as token of love were most probably only paintings; if, as we say also in the West, they looked 'as alive', it should be understood as a figure of speech. But, in the case of portraits installed in a religious context—or at least for some of them—it appears that the model was physically present into his or her image. From this point of view, it is quite remarkable that the first literary mentions of portraits (the Epics) designate them only by the name of the model with an adjective relating to the material: in other words, they are another self. Once again, this presence was not necessarily for ever: as I have argued many times, the 'portraying value' of an image is often a transitory one. But, be it as it may, I think there is here a real specificity of Indian portrait.¹

As I have already stated, this study should be viewed as a set of preliminary reflections to propose a large-scale approach of portraiture in South Asia. That said, many things require much further elaboration and a genuine history of portraiture is still to be written. Contrary to what I have done here, such a history should insist more on the changes in terms of chronology, of space, but also of functions. Of

¹ From that point of view, Mughal miniature portraits would probably be closer to the Western and Persianized traditions.

course, these three aspects are not exclusive of each other but should combine themselves.

For the sake of clarity, I have emphasized the importance and the antiquity of portraiture in the Indian civilization. But this point, in a more historical approach, would need to be qualified. More precisely, I have more or less left aside the issue of external influences. On the whole, I argue that India had no need of impulse from outside to get the idea of portraiture. But it does not mean that important, or even crucial, influences may not have occurred, at certain moments and in certain areas, especially from the point of view of forms (that is, also, styles) and functions attributed to portraits.

Regarding the relationships of Indian art with foreign civilizations, two completely opposite views exist. The first one, which has long been prevalent among European indologists, considered that all the major developments of Indian art were the consequences of influences from the West (first the Middle East and then Europe). Just to give some examples, let me mention: the stress on the Aryan 'invasions'; the Indus civilization seen as an Eastern extension of the Mesopotamian cultures; Maurya art seen as derived from the Achaemenid one;² and, last but not least, the importance given to Gandhara, because of Greco-Roman influences (the representation of the Buddha being almost presented as a Greek invention). Of course, in this perspective, portraiture could not be anything but an importation from Persia.

The second view goes to the other extreme: everything is specific to India, which is completely autonomous; the Vedas are the roots and all the rest are nothing but further developments. Sometimes a more or less mysterious Dravidian substratum is substituted to this Vedic heritage. This short presentation is a bit over simplistic and the truth (whatever it is) surely lies in between these two extremes. It would be stupid to deny either the strong identity or originality of India, as distinct from other civilizations, than the multiple interactions with Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and even China. For instance, archaeological excavations, during the past decades, have demonstrated that the subcontinent had known original Neolithic cultures (which interacted at the same time with Central Asia) and there is a sort of continuum between some of these cultures and the Indus civilization,

² John Irwin has masterfully demonstrated the originality of the so-called 'Aśoka's pillars'.

some aspects of which are to be found in the later Indian civilization.³ Likewise, the art from Gandhara cannot be understood either in isolation nor only through its interaction with the West, but at the same time in close relation with what happened around Mathura.

As a matter of fact, when culture and art are concerned, an influence can be really accepted only if it corresponds to something in the mind of the borrower. There is then a process of selection which makes all the interest of the product of the interaction between two traditions. It is in this perspective than a history of portraiture in South Asia should be, according to me, elaborated. Likewise, it would certainly be worthwhile addressing the specificity of portraiture in Southeast Asia. There, the Indian influence can be denied with difficulty and, in many ways, Southeast Asia proposes a clearer view on many things Indian. But, there also, there has been a process of selection and of interaction with a local substratum (or, it would be more exact to speak of local substrata). Therefore, if I am sure than Southeast Asian portraits share a lot of features with Indian ones, they have also some peculiarities, which remain to be inquired. For instance, I feel that the issue of cult and of relation with the divine realm should be viewed from a different angle. But this would need a proper study...

To sum up, it is quite difficult to exhaust all the semantic and artistic richness of portraiture, be it in India or anywhere in the world. As a matter of fact, there is not even an Indian portraiture, but Indian portraits. However, beyond the views expressed in this book and which may be criticised and even rejected, it is my hope that I have given a few glimpses on what this kind of study can offer for the knowledge on India.

³ Jean-François Jarrige, "Du néolithique à la civilisation de l'Inde ancienne: contribution des recherches archéologiques dans le nord-ouest du sous-continent indo-pakistanaï", *Arts Asiatiques* 50 (1995), 5-30.

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