

goddess's bed chamber, whereupon, in a rage, he decapitated the guardian. Faced with the instant despair of his consort, the god ordered his servants to procure the head of the first living creature they found so as to bring the young man back to life: they found a single-tusked (*ekadanta*)¹ elephant. Other texts on the contrary describe Gaṇeśa as the sole creation of Śiva who gave birth to him while absorbed in a deep meditation. Jealous of the boy's beauty, Pārvatī cursed him with being ugly and transformed him into an obese creature with a ridiculous elephant's head.

Considered as the one who surmounts obstacles, Gaṇeśa is the god invoked before each undertaking: as well as having the extraordinary physical force of the elephant, one of his attributes is the axe (*paraśu*), which slices, cuts and tears down. The Gaṇeśa of M̃y S̃on E 5 would have held the axe in the upper left hand, as seems to be shown in a photograph taken at the moment of his discovery in 1903. After losing certain parts since that time – this hand but also the lower right – it is impossible to confirm today. Gaṇeśa is often considered as a protector of crops. His mount, the rat (*ākhu*), could have been subjugated by him to this end. The association of the deity with the world of agriculture, vegetation and, more widely, with nature, is betrayed by the attribute in the now missing lower right hand: this is a radish (*mūlakakanda*), a large wild radish with an acrid taste that is much appreciated by elephants. The identification of this attribute is certain, not only from the old photographs but also because the radish is frequently held by Gaṇeśa in Indian images, notably in the 6th-8th centuries.² Described as a glutton in the sacred texts, which are not loath to provide petty details, Gaṇeśa holds almost constantly a bowl full of sweets, the *modaka* (sometimes *laḍḍuka*), into which he plunges his trunk with which he crams himself, and hence his obesity. This attribute is also a metaphor for the innumerable universes to which the god accords his protection by taking them... into himself! Although partly broken today, the fourth attribute held by the Gaṇeśa of M̃y S̃on E 5 is a rosary. This string of grains, associated with asceticism, accords the god an image as rich in symbolism as it is complex in appearance. Among the other remarkable iconographic features of this sculpture, is the tiger skin (*vyāghracarman*)³ draped around his hips, borrowing perhaps from the iconography of Śiva, the third eye, here above the bump of



Fig. 1 Parmentier's 1909 drawing shows he once held an axe in his left hand.

the trunk, which Gaṇeśa shares with numerous other divinities. The necklace below the god's neck constitutes, with the belt closed with a huge buckle, the only item of gold jewelry. The rest (bracelets, stomacher and Brahmanical cord) are made of serpents and treated with some realism and much finesse: their bellies are striped and their back is covered with scales.

Aside from the tiger skin, which one would not really consider part of the dress of the god, the costume is a complex drape, though logical and comprehensible. One extremity of the piece of material it is made of is taken forward and under the belt at the waist, forming a sort of pocket opening on the left leg. The second extremity of the tissue passes between the legs and is caught by the belt at the level of the kidneys, falling freely into a small pleated fold. This costume goes back fairly directly to the supporting figures of the first riser of the M̃y S̃on E 1 pedestal and allows us to consider the M̃y S̃on E 5 Gaṇeśa as a work from the same period or slightly later (end of the 7th or early 8th century). The two side folds of the material down the thighs seem to constitute the ends of a belt attached to the gold work of the belt it covers. At a slightly more advanced stage in the evolution of the costume, these side folds will receive a more decorative treatment, as for example on the celebrated Viṣṇu of Ā Da Nghi.⁴

- 1 This is one explanation for why Gaṇeśa has a single tusk, with the other sometimes serving as an attribute. It is also told that the god himself tore off a tusk to throw at the face of the moon who was laughing at his clumsiness. For all these legends one should consult Robert L. Brown (ed.) *Gaṇeśa, Studies of an Asian God*, New York, State University of New York, 1991; Amina Okada and Prithwindra Mukherjee *Gaṇeśa ou la mémoire de l'Inde*, Paris, éditions Findakly, 1995; and Paul Martin-Dubost, *Gaṇeśa, l'enchanteur des trois mondes*, Mumbai, Franco-Indian Research Pvt. Ltd., 1997.
- 2 Amina Okada and Prithwindra Mukherjee *Gaṇeśa ou la mémoire de l'Inde*, Paris, éditions Findakly, 1995, pp. 20, 23, 30, 31, 63 (fig. a), 65, among others. This attribute is often replaced, seemingly a little later, by the broken tusk.
- 3 A rare element that one finds on old Indian images, and with a remarkable resemblance to one found on a magnificent Gaṇeśa discovered in Gardez, Afghanistan and dated 753 by inscription. This piece is illustrated in Paul Martin-Dubost, *Gaṇeśa, l'enchanteur des trois mondes*, Mumbai, Franco-Indian Research Pvt. Ltd., 1997, p. 313, fig. 3.
- 4 Boisselier 1963 (1), pl. 6, fig. d.