



Fig. 2 Skanda with head (Courtesy Photographic Archives, Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Paris).

Kumāra ('child', 'boy', 'prince') Kārttikeya ('of the month of Kārttika'), Guha ('he who is hidden')..., such epithets abound for describing Skanda (the 'destroyer'), the god of many aspects who is still widely venerated in South India (Karnāṭaka, Tamiḷnāḍu).⁴ Commander of the army of gods (*devasenāni*), Skanda is easily recognized here from his mount: the peacock (*śikhivāhana*, *mayūravahana*), which is admirably sculpted in stone. With legs folded, the bird is sadly without its head, originally reaching the god's hips, which was not found during the excavations. Perfectly frontal, it opens its wings to form a pedestal supporting Skanda, while the sumptuous tail, spread in a circle, forms the back, the mandorla of the moulded slab the deity leans against. A fine network of incisions into the stone running over the bird's body evokes with precision the characteristic plumage of the creature; on the back this yields a formal play of great beauty.

Hieratic, frontal and upright (*samapāda*), as befits images of him standing, Skanda has a childlike, juvenile appearance (*kumārārūpa*). In addition he has this aspect (*bālaveśam*) in the form of a small undergarment. The *vajra* he holds in his right hand as well as the hair held in five chignons (*śikhaṅḍaka*) also assist in identifying him.⁵ The young boy wears several pieces of



Fig. 1 Peacock's tail.

jewelry: simple anklets and bracelets, armbands with flowers in a simplified Đông Dương style, a double necklace with pendants point to the subsequent jewelry style. The head, sadly lost in about 1988, once bore particular earrings, mixing flower motifs and pendants with pearls inserted into elongated lobes. There is still a trace of one of them above the *vajra* held by Skanda in his right hand. The diadem with florets was another example of an art in transition between two styles. The face, bearing signs of the Đông Dương style (treatment of hair tresses set across the brow and temples, linked eyebrows, sinuous and raised...), also attests to the evolution of this stage of less expressive eyes and general simplification of sculpture. One can only hope that the head of this piece, happily known and published for a long period, might one day be recovered.

4 In Champa, a comparable though without doubt older (?) image (inv. 62) was discovered in group A. See Parmentier 1918, p. 417 and fig. 121, p. 418; Boisselier 1963 (1), p. 161.

5 Boisselier 1963 (1), p. 160 and fig. 89. Ducrest and Vandermeersch 1997, no. 65, p. 122.