NUOVA BIBLIOTECA DI STUDI CLASSICI E ORIENTALI
Supplementi alla rivista Studi Classici e Orientali
7

Resisting and justifying changes II

Testifying and legitimizing innovation in Indian and Ancient Greek Culture

ed. by
ELISABETTA PODDIGHE and TIZIANA PONTILLO

PISA
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

DIRETTORE (CHIEF EDITOR)
Cesare Letta (cesare.letta@unipi.it)

VICEDIRETTORI (ASSISTANT EDITORS)
Marisa Bonamici, Saverio Sani, Mauro Tulli

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO (SCIENTIFIC BOARD)
Roberto Ajello, Anna Anguissola, Franco Bellandi, Maria Carmela Betrò,
Marisa Bonamici, Pier Giorgio Borbone, Maria Domitilla Campanile, Antonio Carlini,
Bruno Centrone, Jesper Eidem,
Fabio Fabiani, Margherita Facella, Franco Fanciullo, Rolando Ferri,
Maria Letizia Gualandi, Umberto Laffi, Cesare Letta,Gianfranco Lotito,
Giovanna Marotta, Enrico Medda, Serena Mirto, Claudio Moreschini,
Filippo Motta, Guido Paduano, Lisa Piazzi, Giovanni Salmeri,
Saverio Sani, Mauro Tulli, Biagio Virgilio

COMITATO CONSULTIVO INTERNAZIONALE
(INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD)
Pascal Arnaud (Lyon), Sebastian P. Brock (Oxford), Michael Erler (Würzburg),
Robert A. Kaster (Princeton), Agnès Rouveret (Paris),
Robartus Van der Spek (Amsterdam), Lucas Van Rompay (Duke University NC), Robert
Wallace (Evanston), Nigel Wilson (Oxford), Vincent Zarini (Paris)

REDAZIONE (EDITORIAL STAFF)
Maria Isabella Bertagna, Daniele Mascitelli, Giovanni Mazzini, Andrea Nuti,
Andrea Raggi, Chiara Ombretta Tommasi

http://www.sco-pisa.it

Volume pubblicato con il contributo dell'Università di Pisa - Dipartimento di Civiltà e forme del sapere

Resisting and justifying changes II : testifying and legitimizing innovation in Indian and Ancient Greek culture / ed. by Elisabetta Poddighe and Tiziana Pontillo. - Pisa : Pisa university press, 2023. – (Nuova biblioteca di Studi classici e orientali; 7)
306 (WD)
I. Poddighe, Elisabetta II. Pontillo, Tiziana 1. Evoluzione culturale - India 2. Evoluzione culturale - Grecia antica

CIP a cura del Sistema bibliotecario dell'Università di Pisa

L'opera è rilasciata nei termini della licenza Creative Commons: Attribuzione - Non commerciale - Non opere derivate 4.0 Internazionale (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Legal Code: *https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.it*

L'Editore resta a disposizione degli aventi diritto con i quali non è stato possibile comunicare, per le eventuali omissioni o richieste di soggetti o enti che possano vantare dimostrati diritti sulle immagini riprodotte.
L'opera è disponibile in modalità Open Access a questo link: *www.pisauniversitypress.it*

© Copyright 2023 by Pisa University Press

Polo editoriale - Centro per l'innovazione
e la diffusione della cultura - Università di Pisa
Piazza Torricelli 4 - 56126 Pisa
P. IVA 00286820501 · Codice Fiscale 80003670504
Tel.+39 050 2212056 · Fax +39 050 2212945
E-mail press@unipi.it · PEC cidic@pec.unipi.it
www.pisauniversitypress.it

ISBN: 978-88-3339-766-5

Pubblicazione realizzata con il contributo dell'Università degli Studi di Cagliari e del Dipartimento di Lettere, Lingue e Beni culturali – Fondi FFABR (Fondo di finanziamento per le attività base di ricerca)

UPI
UNIVERSITY PRESS ITALIANE
Opera sottoposta a
peer review secondo
il protocollo UPI

To the Memory of
Alexander Dubyanskiy, Peter John Rhodes, Jaroslav Vacek

CONTENTS

Elisabetta Poddighe, Tiziana Pontillo
A second stage of our shared research on the topic of resisting and justifying changes in Indian and ancient Greek Culture 9

1. ANCIENT AND MIDDLE INDOARYAN SOURCES

Duccio Lelli
A poet at the assembly: some remarks on a feature of Rudra in the Atharvaveda 21

Paola M. Rossi
From conquering the sun to conquering heaven: spatio-temporal cosmographies and sovereignty in the Ṛgvedic and Atharvavedic collections 37

Chiara Neri, Tiziana Pontillo
The ascetic whom the gods worship: conservative unorthodox meditative traditions in the Vrātyakāṇḍa *and in the* Suttapiṭaka 89

Edeltraud Harzer
Inconvenient truth: three instances of Vrātyas' memory erased. Semantic shifts in lexicon in the "Between the Empires" period 135

Diletta Falqui
Perception of Vedic ritual semantics in the Mahābhārata 145

Danielle Feller
Legitimizing the Brahmins' superior status. Rāmāyaṇa *strategies* 167

Ariadna Matyszkiewicz
Sanskrit tricks in the Jain grand narrative: discursive and literary devices in Jinasena's Ādipurāṇa 189

Cinzia Pieruccini
Natural sceneries. Recreating patterns in Sanskrit court plays 205

Chiara Policardi
Variations on the elephantine theme: Jyeṣṭhā-Vināyakī,
from independent goddess to Gaṇeśa's female form 223

2. ANCIENT GREEK HISTORY AND LITERATURE

Giorgio Camassa
Dall'immutabilità, su cui vigila la entrenchment clause,
alle regole di cambiamento delle leggi I 267

Elisabetta Poddighe
The Athenians' oaths to use "whatever laws Solon
should make" and to change nothing for ten years:
should we believe Herodotus' account? 283

Valeria Melis
Revising the myth in the light of historical changes:
the case of Zeus the "tyrant" in Aristophanes' Wealth 331

Morena Deriu
Conservative and innovative trends concerning
pederasty in the Amores *ascribed to Lucian*
(with a look at Roman law on castration and Lucian's satire) 351

Paola Pisano
ṛbhavaḥ sūracakṣasaḥ*: the Sun and immortality*
in the Vedic myth of the ṛbhus and in early greek wisdom traditions 373

3. SANSKRIT TECHNICAL LITERATURE

Tamara Ditrich
Possible commonalities linking the Aṣṭādhyāyī
and the Abhidhamma*: an example of* pratyaya / paccaya 403

Valentina Ferrero
Pre-Pāṇinian occurrences of sarvanāman + akac
and Pāṇini's analysis of the meaning of akac 423

Davide Mocci, Tiziana Pontillo
How to select the right verbal person: a change
of perspective between Pāṇini and his commentators 443

Anita M. Borghero
Fulfilling the venerable prescriptions:
some stratagems from the Mahābhāṣya 493

Mittal Trivedi
Creating the body of the word: understanding the aṅga *in the* prakriyā *of the* Siddhāntakaumudī *and the* Prakriyākaumudī 505

Madhulika Chebrol
Eternality and fluidity of Dharma: from Manusmṛti *to* Manubhāṣya 523

Sudipta Munsi
Killing ritually and beyond 545

Monika Nowakowska
A matchless match – a case of an exchange on a shared ground: Kumārila and ananvayālaṃkāra 565

Chettiarthodi Rajendran
Confronting the iconoclast: Abhinavagupta's strategies to counter Bhaṭṭanāyaka 583

4. MEDIEVAL AND MODERN INDIA

Lidia Sudyka
Varadāmbikā-pariṇaya Campū – *the Tuluva dynasty in the eyes of Tirumalāmbā* 599

Michał Panasiuk
Annadāmaṅgala *and changes in the Bengali literature in the 19th century* 611

Martin Hříbek
Benoy Kumar Sarkar's positive Hindu sociology and political thought: legitimising strategies for the state and the nation 627

Tatiana Dubyanskaya
"Made in heaven": Premchand and his predecessors on spiritual union and love 651

Marta Karcz
Modern Sanskrit dramas – between tradition and innovation 663

Chiara Policardi
(University of Milan)

VARIATIONS ON THE ELEPHANTINE THEME: JYEṢṬHĀ-VINĀYAKĪ, FROM INDEPENDENT GODDESS TO GAṆEŚA'S FEMALE FORM

Abstract

An Indian female deity characterised by an elephant face is usually identified with Gaṇeśa's female form. She is known as Vināyakī, Gaṇeśanī, Gaṇeśvarī, Gajānanā, and with numerous other epithets. However, very early on, this little-studied elephant-faced figure appears as an independent, albeit minor, divinity in her own right. The earliest material attestations of this figure date from the first centuries BCE-CE and come from Rairh (Rajasthan) and Mathura. Particularly significant appear to be the connections with the goddess Jyeṣṭhā or Alakṣmī, who, in some texts, is described as elephant-faced and as riding a donkey; she traditionally represents misfortune and disease.

The autonomous character of Vināyakī, detached from the orbit of Gaṇeśa, seems to emerge particularly in the Tantric context. After the 8th century, she sometimes features as one of the Eight Mothers and is often included in groups of *yoginī*s in both Vidyāpīṭha (7th-8th century) and Kaula (post-10th century) scriptures. The *yoginī*s' pantheons of these textual traditions find a degree of correspondence in different extant pre-11thcentury *yoginī* temples. Indeed, an elephant-faced female sculpture is enshrined in the *yoginī* temples of Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharial in Odisha and of Bheraghat in Madhya Pradesh. Furthermore, various sculptural collections of *yoginī*s also include such a figure.

This contribution, adducing illustrative rather than exhaustive evidence, outlines the formation and development of this elephant-faced female figure. Relevant textual passages are analysed, from the earliest attestation in the *Baudhāyanagṛhyaśesạsūtra* to the subsequent purāṇic inflections right up to some significant appearances in Śaiva tantric literature. Hence, figurative representations of salient interest dating from the 1st century BCE up to the 11th century are listed and briefly described. In the concluding section, I try to interpret texts and images, reading them in parallel, proposing a tentative outline of the different phases in the religious-historical evolution of Vināyakī, and highlighting the dynamics that led to the interpretation of the figure as the female form of Gaṇeśa.

1. *Introduction*[*]

An Indian female deity characterised by an elephant face is usually identified with Gaṇeśa's female form. She is known as Vināyakī, Gaṇeśanī, Gaṇeśvarī, Gajānanā, and with numerous other epithets. That is, she is not known by a consistent name. Also, in textual and figurative traditions her iconographic attributes vary. To a certain degree, this has afforded her fluctuating features across time and space, among which the elephant face is the invariable and most salient trait, the one that provides her with a distinctive identity.

After the few studies published by Indian scholars in the Seventies (Mundkur 1975; Agrawala 1978; Sharma 1979), this elephantine goddess has remained largely neglected by scholarship. Several aspects of her personality and religious-historical trajectory remain nebulous, and need to be re-examined in the light of recent research paradigms and newly acquired sources. In secondary literature, this divine figure is, as a rule, uncritically interpreted as Gaṇeśa's female form or *śakti*, or his consort – an interpretation that, not surprisingly, coincides with the understanding held by *communis opinio* in India today. As will be discussed, such an assumption is valid only from the Gupta period onward and only in some cases.

Indeed, very early on, this elephant-faced goddess appears as an independent, albeit minor, divinity in her own right. The earliest material attestations date from the first centuries BCE-CE and come from Rairh (Rajasthan) and Mathura. Particularly significant appear to be the connections with the goddess Jyeṣṭhā or Alakṣmī, who, in some texts, is described as elephant-faced and riding a donkey, but in extant figurative representations is usually depicted as a human-faced old woman. She traditionally represents misfortune and disease, but in the early stages of her cult she was presumably conceived as an ambivalent goddess, expressing the subtle balance between auspicious and inauspicious valences.

The autonomous character of the elephant-faced goddess, detached from the orbit of Gaṇeśa, seems to emerge particularly in the Tantric context. After the 8th century, she sometimes features as one of the Eight Mothers and is often included in groups of *yoginī*s. An elephantine *yoginī* occurs, under various names, in both Vidyāpīṭha (7th-8th century) and Kaula (post-10th century) scriptures – in particular, in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmatatantra, Brahmayāmalatantra* and *Ṣaṭsāhasrasaṃhitā*. The *yoginī*s' pantheons of these textual traditions find a degree of correspondence in different extant *yoginī* temples. Indeed, an elephant-faced female sculpture is enshrined in the sixty-four *yoginī* temples at Hirapur (second half of the 9th century) and Ranipur-Jharial (early 10th century) in Odisha and in the eighty-one *yoginī* temple at Bheraghat in Madhya Pradesh (last decades of the 10th century). Moreover, various sculptural collections of *yoginī*s include such a figure as well.

---

[*] This article can be read in dialogue with Policardi 2022. The latter primarily outlines the possible phases of religious-historical development of the elephant-faced goddess, addressing issues of interrelation between local and Tantric traditions. The present work, taking up some arguments discussed there, is mainly devoted to presenting and analysing significant evidence bearing on this figure, based on which the various development threads can be followed in greater depth and, to some extent, unraveled.

This contribution, adducing illustrative rather than exhaustive evidence, will outline the formation and development of this elephant-faced female figure. Relevant textual passages will be analysed, from the earliest attestation in the *Baudhāyanagṛhyaśesaṣsūtra* to the subsequent purāṇic inflections right up to some significant appearances in Śaiva tantric literature. Hence, figurative representations of salient interest dating from the 1st century BCE up to the 11th century will be listed and briefly described. In the concluding section, I will try to interpret texts and images, reading them in parallel, proposing a tentative outline of the different phases in the religious-historical evolution of Vināyakī and highlighting the dynamics that led to the interpretation of the figure as the female form of Gaṇeśa.

2. *Literary Appearances*

The following pages will provide a survey of some of the relevant occurrences of the elephant-faced goddess in different typologies of texts, spanning several centuries. Attention will also be devoted to mentions of the names Vināyakī (or similar appellatives) and Jyeṣṭhā, even if no iconographic feature is mentioned. The discussion is divided into three sections, in each of which the texts are discussed as far as possible in chronological order. In the second section, "purāṇic" is to be intended *lato sensu*, as referring to sources that can be considered as an expression of the "orthodox", Brāhmaṇical vision.

2.1. *The earliest occurrence of an elephant-faced goddess, called Jyeṣṭhā*

The earliest known textual occurrence of an elephant-faced goddess is found in the *Baudhāyanagṛhyaśesaṣsūtra* (BGŚS), which along with the *Baudhāyanagṛhyaparibhāṣāsūtra* (BGPS) constitutes an important appendix (*pariśiṣṭa*) to the *Baudhāyanagṛhyasūtra* (BGS). In the corpus of Vedic ancillary literature, this is one of the longest texts concerning domestic ritual. As Lubin (2016a) shows, existing Sanskrit editions are problematic and require revision. The dating of the text is also a complex matter, as the BGS and its appendices are a layered composition, which incorporated new material over time[1]. In previous studies, they have been dated between the 6th and the 3rd centuries BCE (Leslie 1992: 113; cf. Agrawala 1978: 5), but, according to Lubin (2016b: 592): "[...] the various chapters of the Śeṣa probably were added well into the middle of the first millennium CE". This means that the *pariśiṣṭa*s have probably reached their current form in the dynamic historical context of the Gupta era. Such a milieu, as is well-known, saw the codification of cultural models that would be decisive for the subsequent centuries.

The BGŚS describes *pūjā* rituals for various Hindu deities, including goddesses like Durgā, Śrī, and Jyeṣṭhā (III, 9), the latter followed by the *kalpa* for the god Vināyaka (III, 10). The text prescribes that, during the ritual of veneration, the goddess Jyeṣṭhā is to be praised with several epithets[2], including *hastimukhā*, 'elephant-faced', which assumes particular interest. Also significant are the appellatives *kuṃbhī*, *nikuṃbhī,* and *prakuṃbhī*, since these derive from the term *kumbha*, which, among its various meanings, also defines the forehead of an elephant. The goddess is also called by the name Śrī and defined with the two terms *vighnapārṣadā* and *vighnapārṣadī*, which refer to her divine action over *vighna*s or obstacles.

The description of the ritual dedicated to the god Vināyaka immediately follows that of Jyeṣṭhā. Vināyaka is similarly defined as *hastimukha* and *vighnapārṣada* (III, 10, 6), and towards the end of the *adhyāya* he is called Gaṇeśvara (III, 10, 9).

Clearly, the contiguity of their *kalpa*s in the text and the identity of some of their key epithets indicate a close connection between the two deities. This, however, does not necessarily imply that Jyeṣṭhā should be regarded as simply the female form of Vināyaka; indeed, here she is not (yet) called Vināyakī. We should take into consideration the possibility of an autonomous existence of a goddess whose aspect and functions were similar to those of Vināyaka-Gaṇeśa, perhaps precisely because of the significance attributed to the elephant. It is possible that, after an independent genesis and formative phase, the two deities were in some way inevitably associated in a few subsequent cults, but, as we shall see, possibly in not all the cases.

---

[1] See Lubin 2016a, 2016b, 2016c.

[2] BGŚS III, 9, 5: *ity āvāhyehalokakīrtaye namaḥ paralokakīrtaye namaḥ śriyai namo jyeṣṭhāyai namaḥ satyāyai namaḥ kalipatnyai namaḥ kalihṛdayāyai namaḥ kuṃbhyai namo nikuṃbhyai namaḥ prakuṃbhyai namo 'jāyai namaḥ śriyai namo varadāyai namaḥ hastimukhāyai namo vighnapārṣadayai namo vighnapārṣadyai nama ity*. Ed. Harting 1922: 20.

The BGS and in particular its appendix BGŚS are among the most interesting texts for studying the new ritualistic elements that were assimilated in the domestic forms of worship in the period of transition from Brāhmaṇism into Hinduism. These innovations came from ritual and cultural environments that were largely marginal within the Vedic milieu, and maybe even ethnically different. According to Lubin (2016c: 144-145),

> "like many others, I regard such offerings as an innovation in the Vedic religion, and indeed a borrowing from a substrate or neighboring culture with which the Vedic priesthood and its traditional clientele were in contact—a culture the identity of which will likely remain forever uncertain […]. At no point is there direct acknowledgment that either the deity or the ceremony is non-Vedic, but an indirect acknowledgment of this may be perceived here and there".

This begs the question as to whether the elephant-faced goddess Jyeṣṭhā can be considered as one of the non-Brahmanical figures whose cult is assimilated in the Hindu mainstream during the formation of the *Gṛhyapariśisṭa*s.

2.2. *Purāṇic texts*

Mentions of Vināyakī without reference to her iconographic features

One of the earliest mentions of the goddess Vināyakī is found in the *Matsyapurāṇa*. Assigned by some scholars to a date not later than the 6th century CE (Mundkur 1975: 293; Rocher 1986: 199) and thus often considered as one of the earliest Purāṇas, the *Matsyapurāṇa* comprises a list of circa two hundred *mātṛ*s created by Śiva to defeat the demon Andhaka. This *asura*, when wounded, just like Raktabīja in the *Devīmāhātmya*, has the capacity to duplicate himself from each drop of blood. To kill the innumerable Andhaka demons, the goddesses are instructed to lick his blood. Vaināyakī is mentioned as seventy-second in the list (*Matsyapurāṇa* 179.18; cfr. Agrawala 1970: 23)[3]. The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, which was compiled before the 10th century since al-Bīrūnī used it extensively[4], relates the episode of the fight against Andhaka in nearly the same words as the *Matsyapurāṇa*. Here too, the goddess Vināyakī is one of the numerous *mātṛ*s created by Śiva to combat the demon (I.226.16). Thus, in these passages we have just a name comprised in lists of goddesses termed "mātṛs" who, instructed by Śiva, fight ferociously and drink blood.

---

[3] According to Agrawala (1970: 27), the list also includes Jyeṣṭhā as the last-mentioned goddess, while in Apte's edition (1907) Jyeṣṭhā is not mentioned.

[4] Rocher (1986: 252) reports three different dates proposed for the text: "between A.D. 600 and 1000, between 450 and 650, between A.D. 400 and 500".

The *Liṅgapurāṇa* also features the goddess in a scenario connected to war. Dated variously from the 5th to the 10th century (Rocher 1986: 187-188), this text mentions a goddess by the name of Vināyakī in the list of divinities that are present in the *āvaraṇa* (outer circles) of the Victory-consecration ritual (*jayābhiṣeka – Uttarabhāga* 27.215).

Instead, in the *Agnipurāṇa* the goddess occurs in the description of *nyāsa* rites, that is to say rites aiming at divinising or "cosmicising" the adept through imposing mantras upon his/her physical body. The compilers of the *Agnipurāṇa* drew upon a vast range of tantric materials, and of these, texts related to the Kubjikā tradition must have been especially conspicuous (Serbaeva 2009: 326). The reconstruction of the textual borrowings is particularly complex because it is most likely that this Purāṇa, rather than relying directly on primary tantric sources, mostly drew upon compendia, that is to say upon "second-hand" materials. Chapters 123-149 of the *Agnipurāṇa* appears to be a summary of the *Yuddhajayārṇava,* a text that mainly deals with astrological themes and which, in turn, is a digest. Nonetheless, the identification of the *Agnipurāṇa*'s sources allows us to establish that the work, in the form known to us, must have been composed after the end of the 11th century[5].

Chapter 145 of this text deals with three kinds of *ṣoḍhanyāsa*s or sixfold *nyāsa*s, rites that involve imposing six forms or aspects of the deity on the body of the practitioner. The goddess Vināyakā is mentioned in the context of a ritual explicitly defined as Śākta. She is one of the fifty female alphabet deities that make up the goddess Mālinī, who is found especially in the Trika and Kubjikā Tantric traditions. The passage dealing with Vināyakā in the *Agnipurāṇa* is similar to those found in some texts of these systems (see below), since here too she is said to correspond to the letter *ḍha*, which should be placed on the left arm (*ḍha vāme ca vināyakā*, *Agnipurāṇa* 145.11d).

In this survey of Vināyakī's purāṇic appearances it is interesting to mention three possible instances in which the goddess occurs alongside the group of Eight or Nine *mātṛ*s, as one of the "additional" *mātṛ*s or as the ninth member of the group.

According to the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira, composed in ca. the 6th century, the *mātṛ*s' cult was one of the most influential religious traditions of the time. At 58.56 the author affirms that *mātṛgaṇaḥ kartavyaḥ svanāmadevānurūpakṛtacihnaḥ*, 'The group of Divine Mothers should be represented with the characteristics peculiar to the Gods whose name they bear' (tr. Bhat 1982: II. 561). This work is probably the earliest textual source that deals with the iconography of the Seven Mothers; however, it does not directly mention their names. A few centuries later, in the 10th century, Bhaṭṭotpala – or simply Utpala –, in his comment on the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā,* feels that the canonical names of the *saptamātaraḥ* should be specified in this passage, and then he adds that there are some more goddesses, such as *yāmyaḥ, vāruṇyaḥ, kauberyaḥ, nārasiṃhyaḥ, vaināyakyaḥ.* This seems to suggest that other divine female figures fluctuated around the Brāhmaṇical Seven Mothers and that since they were analogously interpreted as counterparts of Brāhmaṇical male gods, they could be accepted in mainstream religious cults.

---

[5] See Serbaeva 2009: 326, 328. For a discussion of the possible periods of compilation proposed by various scholars see Rocher 1986: 136-137.

The second instance concerns a passage in the *Devīpurāṇa*. In actual fact, the mention of the elephant-faced goddess here is rather doubtful, but the general interest of the text for the tradition of female Hindu deities and also the work-in-progress nature of the studies on it have led me to briefly discuss the passage. The *Devīpurāṇa*, dating from ca. the 8th-9th century, is the earliest and most influential Purāṇa centred on the tradition and cult of the Goddess; it represents a vital testimony for the formation of public Śāktism (Sarkar 2017: 180-181; Hatley 2018 ed.: 121-123; Hatley 2021: 83, 96, 101-102). Despite its importance, analytic research has only recently been carried out on the text, mainly because of a problematic textual transmission and the limitations of the printed editions[6].

Chapter 87 of the *Devīpurāṇa*, entitled 'Hymn of Praise to the Mothers', contains a description of each of the Seven (or Nine) goddesses in the form of a eulogy offered by the god from whom she arose. The last figure praised, after Cāmuṇḍā, is called Gaṇanāyikā (another name for Vināyakī) in Śarmā 1976 edition (87.33). The text affirms that the goddess *gajendravadanāṃ śubhāṃ sakalavighnavidhvaṃsanīm*, 'has the auspicious head of an elephant and destroys all obstacles' (tr. Hatley 2021: 94). However, according to Hatley (2021: 94, 112 n.67), the verses should be intended as referring to Gaṇeśa, insofar as this female name, Gaṇanāyikā, that closes the hymn and, likewise, the name Bhairavī in the opening verses "though found in some manuscripts, are unlikely to be original". Nonetheless, I wonder if such *variae lectiones* might be of interest, if not from the strictly philological point of view, for the general understanding of the thought-world underlying the *Devīpurāṇa*. That is to say, in the textual tradition of a work dedicated to the Goddess two deities generally appearing in their male forms, Bhairava and Gaṇeśa, are sometimes seen as feminine: might this reflect the increasing importance assumed by the female divinity in the process of transmission of the *Devīpurāṇa*? Of course, only further philological studies will confirm (or question) the male nature of the ninth member of the group of Mothers in this chapter in the early-mediaeval redaction, also assessing the value of variant readings for the cultural history of the text's reception.

---

[6] For details on the extant manuscripts and an assessment of the printed editions, see Hatley 2018 (ed.): 256-257.

In the first of the seven *khaṇḍa*s of the "late" *Skandapurāṇa* (SkP), the *Maheśvarakhaṇḍa*, chapter 62 deals with the practice of Mahāvidyās[7]. The text explains the Aparājitā Vidyā and teaches the invocation of different goddesses. Vināyakī is mentioned among the most common names of the Aṣṭamātṛs: Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Vārāhī, Vināyakī, Aindrī, Āgneyī, Cāmuṇḍā, and Vāruṇī (late SkP, I.62.60).

In at least one extant iconographic depiction the elephant-faced goddess is apparently represented as one of the Eight Mothers, namely in the panel found at Rikhiyan (discussed below), where she is flanked by Nārasiṃhī and Vārāhī (Fig. 3). Hence, it is presumable that in the mediaeval centuries, in some areas of the Indian religious landscape, she was interpreted as a member of the Aṣṭamātṛs, or at least was considered as being closely connected to them.

Some relevant mentions of elephant-faced mātṛs *and* yoginīs

The original or "early" *Skandapurāṇa* might have been composed around the 6th century by a group of Śaiva Brāhmans affiliated to the Pāśupata tradition, as illustrated by various scholars working on the critical edition of this voluminous text (with the oldest manuscript dated to 810/11 CE; see, among others, Yokochi 2013 ed.: 33-76). In the myth narrating Devī's conflict with the demons Sumbha and Nisumbha, the stanzas at 64.20-26 offer an interesting attestation of the animal-faced nature of early Mother Goddesses. As she prepares for the battle, the goddess Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsinī expands in size by means of yogic practice (*yogam āsthāya*), then an array of goddesses of fearsome aspect (*bhīmadarśanāḥ*) emerges from her limbs. Remarkably, each of these deities is said to be accompanied by women with the head of a specific animal or bird, and these form the host of the main goddess Kauśikī: "Vāyasī leads a crore of women with the heads of crows; Upakā the same number of women with the heads of owls; [...] Jayā women with the heads of elephants" (Yokochi 2013 ed.: 124-125). These women might mirror independent local goddesses that are subsequently identified as manifestations of the main Devī – indeed, in the language of myth, they are said to be *dehasambhavāḥ* or to have sprung from her limbs. Then, the text narrates that Kauśikī distributes these female figures in various countries and cities, actually assigning a kingdom to each of them (early SkP 68.1-9). As Sarkar (2017: 79) highlights, such a picture

---

[7] The seven *khaṇḍa*s published under the title of *Skandapurāṇa* by the Veṅkateśvara Press in 1910 are individual texts composed in different areas and at different times in mediaeval India, and then put together in the colonial period and ascribed to a single *Skandapurāṇa* by paṇḍits. This composition, on a general level, is a completely different text from the "early" SkP (ca. 6th-7th century), which I will deal with shortly.

> "at pan-Indic scale maps out regional female deity cults, which eventually became identified with the warrior-goddess. With the latter as the central axis, these regional cults are used to plot the chief points of a mythologically represented Śākta 'empire'".

Elephant-faced goddesses (in the plural) are depicted in the *Vāyupurāṇa* as well, which is generally recognised as one of the oldest and most authoritative Purāṇas. It most likely dates from the 4th-5th centuries, although some later interpolations belong to the 9th-10th centuries (Rocher 1986: 245). In the description of Śiva's servants, the text introduces a group of figures designated as *paricārikā*, 'attendants'. Along with several other feminine figures of human-animal aspects, goddesses with faces and bellies like those of elephants (*gajavaktrodarā*s*,* 261d) and elephant-faced female deities (*gajānanā*s*,* 262a) are mentioned. They are said to live in the abode of Śiva and to sport with the *gaṇa*s, their "colleagues" in the employ of the god.

The late SkP, in *Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 88.23, also depicts elephant-faced female deities, who are called *gajamukhī*s. They are one of the groups of innumerable *mātṛ*s who arose from a sacred *kuṇḍa* to help the two widowed queens of the king of Kāśī against enemies. Just like the above-mentioned passage from the early SkP, here too the animal-faced goddesses play the role of feral, free-roaming, and warrior characters.

Of special relevance is a myth found in the same *khaṇḍa* (*Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 81) which narrates that the goddess Lakṣmī was rendered elephant-faced by a Brāhman's curse. But Viṣṇu intervenes, and performing great penance gives her back her splendid countenance. In a slightly different version of the story found a few chapters later (*Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 85) it is the elephant-faced Lakṣmī herself who joyously performs austerity so that Brahmā, after a year, pleased by her efforts, changes her back. The god proclaims that she will be known by the name Mahālakṣmī and that 'A man who devoutly worships you as elephant-faced shall become a king on the earth and Lord of elephants' (85.13, tr. Tagare 1960). This narration might be read as a transposition into mythical language of the awareness of the deep connection between the elephant-faced goddess Jyeṣṭhā-Alakṣmī and the goddess Lakṣmī, typically portrayed with elephants sprinkling her with water. In fact, here they are somehow considered as two aspects of the same goddess called Mahālakṣmī. In other words, these sister-goddesses of good and bad fortune can be seen as different sides of one personality.

The most popular of the seven *khaṇḍa*s that compose the late SkP is the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, which is still the most influential text on Varanasi. In the Pūrvārdha, the text relates how, in order to liberate Kāśī from the king Divodāsa, Śiva sends a group of sixty-four *yoginī*s who fly to the sacred city. A list of their sixty-four names is provided (I.45.33-52), and twenty-four out of these sixty-four appellatives hint at animal features. The first *yoginī* name on this list is Gajānanā, 'Elephant-faced'. Such a privileged position in this series might mirror the importance and the constant presence of the elephant-faced goddess in *yoginī* groups, which also seems to be confirmed by the sets of sculptures enshrined in *yoginī* temples.

2.3. *Tantric texts: some relevant mentions of Vināyakī, Jyeṣṭhā, and elephant-faced goddesses*

In the domain of Tantric texts, one of the earliest descriptions of Vināyakī is found in a Buddhist scripture, the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, aka. *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, assigned to the class of Kriyātantras. Considered as one of the earliest specimens of Buddhist Tantras, this text was in part circulating by the beginning of the 8th century, as can be inferred from the Chinese translations (Sanderson 2009: 129, n.300).

In chapter 30, a goddess called Vināyakā is described[8] as being furnished with an elephant trunk (*hastākārasamāyuktām*) and as not being single-tusked (*anekadantāṃ*)[9]; she is powerful (*mahaujasām*), a deity that causes obstacles (repeated twice in the few lines: *vighnakartā* 30.14; *vighnakārakām* 30.15). Furthermore, she is defined as *aśvarūpā*, 'with the form of a horse', which does not make much sense, since in the previous verse she has just been depicted as elephant-faced. Agrawala (1978: 19) suggests emending *aśvarūpā* to read *aśvārūḍhā*, presuming that the text is referring to a representation of a goddess on a horse. However, this would be the only case in which the goddess is described as riding a horse. It might be possible to read a reference to a donkey behind the term "aśva". Indeed, three closely related species are found on the Indian Subcontinent: the domestic horse (*Equus caballus*), the domestic donkey (*Equus asinus*), and the khur or Asiatic wild ass (*Equus hemionus*). They share typical morphologic traits, so that the three animals are not easily distinguished in iconographic representations[10]. We can speculate on the reasons that led the authors to choose the term *aśva* over of a lexeme for donkey: maybe they had in mind images of a goddess riding an animal that could be interpreted as a horse, or maybe this was an attempt to ennoble the *vāhana* of the goddess, or perhaps in some local forms the goddess was actually depicted on a horse.

---

[8] *siddhirvināyakāṃ tatra vighnakartā sajāpinām | hastākārasamāyuktānekadantāṃ mahaujasām || 30.14 || aśvarūpā tathānekā + + + kāraśālinām | īśānasya sutāṃ divyāṃ vividhāṃ vighnakārakām ||* Ed. Śāstrī 1920-1925. Martin Delhey is working on a critical edition of the text; as highlighted in the description of the related project conducted at the University of Hamburg (*https://www.tantric-studies.uni-hamburg.de/research/projects/manjusriyamulakalpa.html*), the published Sanskrit text just consists in the transcription of a single manuscript, which appears to be highly corrupted.

[9] The feminine compound *anekadantā-* sounds unusual: does it mean that the goddess is endowed with two tusks? Is the text negating the single tusk feature typical of Gaṇeśa? According to Agrawala (1978: 12, n. 58) the passage should be emended to

Interestingly, Vināyakā is then said to be the divine daughter of Īśāna, i.e. Śiva (*īśānasya sutāṃ divyāṃ*). As Sanderson (2009: 129) highlights, this Buddhist Tantra assimilated materials from non-Buddhist sources, in particular from Śaiva texts. This begs the question as to whether in this case Vināyakī was already seen as the female form of Gaṇeśa, and thus she was considered, like him, as Śiva's offspring, or rather does this passage reflect the existence of an independent goddess brought within the Śaiva orbit in the same way as the other *mātṛ*s – a goddess who, in the centuries in which the more recent layers of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* were composed, was being enshrined in *yoginī* pantheons.

The first millennium tantric scriptures that most deeply concern the cult of *yoginī*s belong to the Vidyāpīṭha ('Female Mantra-deities Corpus') branch of the Bhairavatantras and to the Kaula ('[Tradition] of the [Goddess] Clans') stream that followed. The Tantras of the Vidyāpīṭha, dating from the 7th-8th centuries, predate the *yoginī* temples by at least

---

read *hastākārasamāyuktāmekadantāṃ,* which indicates a single-tusked goddess. Krishan (1999: 65, n. 31) deems instead that such an emendation is not justified, and that the compound should be interpreted as referring to the goddess's many teeth. In my view, it might be possible that the text refers to an elephant-faced goddess with two tusks, as also attested in the iconography (see *infra*, the sculptures from Harshagiri and Giriyek).

[10] See van der Geer 2008: 226-227; 229-230; 259-263; Plate 28 and Fig. 525.

two centuries, while the considered Kaula scriptures, post-10th century, belong to the period of major *yoginī* temples.

The *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* (SYM), one of the principal surviving exemplars of Vidyāpīṭha literature, was most likely composed around the 7th century. It is considered the foundational work of the Trika tradition, insofar as the majority of later Triad developments either appear to have been influenced by it or refer to it as an authority. A list of twenty-four *yoginī* names is given (58-60) in chapter 20 (Törzsök 1999 and forthcoming), in the context of the description of an elaborated Khecarīcakra. Among these, at least six hint at theriomorphic traits, which suggest, respectively, the appearance of a lion (Siṃhī), a goose (Haṃsī), the face of an elephant (Gajānanā), elephant ears (Gajakarṇī), the aspect of a cat (Biḍālī), and the face of a camel (Uṣṭravaktrā). *Yoginī*s connoted by animal faces feature again in chapter 25[11]: 'They have extraordinary faces such as bear, tiger, elephant, demon, horse, boar, and other faces. Seeing them, one should not rejoice, nor should be angry'. Interestingly, the SYM puts on stage groups of *yoginī*s featuring animal-human figures depicted as decidedly theriocephalic, just like the *yoginī*s in sculpture; among them, the elephant-faced *yoginī* is quite a recurrent presence.

The *Brahmayāmala* (BraYā) is more or less coeval with the SYM and, along with it, represents the earliest surviving scriptural source that teaches the cult of goddesses and *yoginī*s. Within the Vidyāpīṭha, the BraYā is one of the very few surviving Yāmalatantras or Union Tantras. These texts are centred on the cult of a bipolar deity, a *yāmala* or god-goddess couple, which in the BraYā consists of the *bhairava* known as Kapālīśa, 'Lord of the Skull', and his consort Caṇḍā Kāpālinī, 'Grim Bearer of the Skull' (Hatley 2018 ed.: 3-141). The core pantheon of the BraYā is completed by several groups of goddesses that surround Kapālīśabhairava and his consort: "the Four Devīs or Guhyakās; the Four Attendants (*kiṅkarī*), also called the Consorts (*dutī*); the six Yoginīs; and the Eight Mothers (*matṛ*), in descending order of cultic status" (Hatley 2018 ed.: 10).

These six Yoginīs of the central BraYā pantheon are defined by interestingly expressive names: Kroṣṭukī ('Jackal Woman'), Vijayā ('Victoria'), Gajakarṇā ('Elephant-ears'), Mahāmukhī ('Big-mouth'), Cakravegā ('Wheel-speed'), and Mahānāsā ('Big-snout'). Three kinds of figures are suggested: Kroṣṭukī and Gajakarṇā clearly indicate animal appearances, Vijayā and Cakravegā evoke martial and auspicious features, while Mahāmukhī and Mahānāsā suggest physical disproportion (Hatley 2014: 207). The presence of a female figure characterised by elephantine traits in the core pantheon of this scripture appears of relevance.

---

[11] SYM 25.74cd-75: *vikṛtair ānanaiś cāpi ṛkṣavyāghrānanais tathā* || 74|| *gajā*syā *rātricārāsyā aśvasūkarakādibhiḥ* | *dṛṣṭvā tān tu na hṛṣyeta na ca kopaṃ samācaret* || 75 || Edition by Törzsök forthcoming.

It does not seem out of place to briefly observe that in the BraYā and, more in general, in early Śaivism, the name Jyeṣṭhā refers instead to a goddess belonging to a triad of deities – the other two are Vāmā and Raudrī – whose worship is the subject, for example, of chapter 86 of the BraYā (the *śaktitrayavidhānapaṭala*). These three *śakti*s are frequently associated with Sadāśiva and represent cosmogonic powers (Hatley 2018 ed.: 432, n. 7) or are involved in the process of phonic creation (e.g. in *Kubjikāmatatantra* 16.42cd-43, and 16.68 where a fourth goddess is added, Ambikā[12]). According to Hatley (2007 ed.: 224, n. 86), the identities of the three goddesses of the Trika pantheon – Parā, Aparā, and Parāparā – might have been modelled on this earlier triad.

The Kaula movement came to permeate most cults of the Bhairavatantras around the 8th-9th centuries, introducing important transformations. The main focus increasingly shifted from antinomian practices, often involving the manipulation of impure substances, to meditative, yogic, and erotic rituals aimed at ecstatic experiences[13]. Ultimately, the worshipper became “the temple of his deities” (Sanderson 1988: 680).

The bulk of Kaula tantric literature is traditionally divided into a tetradic schema of Āmnāyas, ‘Traditions’, referring to the four directions (Sanderson 2014: 57-68). The Western Kaula tradition of the Paścimāmnāya is centred on the cult of the goddess Kubjikā. The root-text of the Kubjikā tradition is the *Kubjikāmatatantra* (KMT). A great number of Nepalese manuscripts transmit this Tantra, the oldest of which date from the first half of the 12th century[14]. The cult is thus attested with certainty from the beginning of the 12th century, but it presumably existed earlier.

In the meditation practices described by the KMT a highly significant place is occupied by a system of *cakra* called Pañcacakra, consisting of the Devī-, the Dutī-, the Mātṛ-, the Yoginī- and the Khecarīcakra. Each of these *cakra*s is the seat of numerous goddesses, who give the name to the single *cakra* and who symbolise diverse forces active on both cosmic and microcosmic levels. The second *cakra*, called Dutīcakra, localised in the region of the navel and just above, comprises nine groups of nine Dutīes ('Female Messengers'). The eighth group is formed by the goddesses

---

[12] See Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 168.

[13] See Sanderson 1988: 679-690; Hatley 2007 (ed.): 153-162; Sanderson 2014: 57-58.

[14] The critical edition of the *Kubjikāmata* by Goudriaan and Schoterman, published in 1988, is based mainly on ten manuscripts, selected from many. See also Schoterman 1982: 5-6; Sanderson 1988: 686-688; Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 1-7.

> "Lambā ('Flabby'), Lambastanī ('Flaccid-breasted'), Śuṣkā ('Emaciated'), Pūtivaktrā ('Fetid-mouthed'), Mahānanā ('Big-faced'), Gajavaktrā ('Elephant-faced'), Mahānāsā ('Big-nosed'), Vidyut ('Lightning') and Kravyādanāyikā ('Lady of the flesh-eaters') (KMT 14.89). Their names express their individual inauspicious features which apparently accords with their involvement in destruction." (Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 77).

Indeed, the text defines these goddesses as 'the Dutīes within the fire of the destruction. They abide in the state of destruction. Endowed with countless qualities and energy, they destroy the world' (*kālānalāntare dūtyaḥ saṃhārapadasaṃsthitāḥ | anantaguṇavīryāstāḥ saṃharanti carācaram* || KMT 14.90; tr. Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 194, 242). Significantly, here, an elephant-faced goddess is comprised in a group of deities characterised by grotesque or fearsome traits, and such an animal appearance is analogously considered as a feature that symbolically expresses the destructive power or the dire nature of the goddess.

Instead, the name Vināyakī in the KMT appears to designate an alphabet deity. Chapter 24 enumerates the Rudras corresponding to phonemes of the Sanskrit syllabary, associating them with specific parts of the body; a similar list then follows, which presents "the fifty Śaktis who reside in the Mālinī from *na* to *pha* (20c-35)" (Goudriaan, Schoterman 1988 eds.: 127). On the latter list, Vināyakī corresponds to the letter *ḍa* and the body-part associated with her is the left arm (24,28cd: *vināyakī ca lāmā ca ḍa-ḍhau bāhudvayaṃ priye*). Thus, Vināyakī is here (and likewise in KMT 17,100) identified with a phoneme of the Sanskrit alphabet and explicitly conceived as a part of the goddess Mālinī. The mantric identity of the latter alphabet deity consists of a special rearrangement of the Sanskrit syllabary in which the *akṣara*s are considered in a non-standard order, namely from *na* to *pha*. This *nādiphāntakrama* assumes particular significance in ritual practices (*nyāsa*) whose purpose is the purification, empowerment, and divinisation of the physical body of the adept by the projection of the phonemes on different body-parts. As Vasudeva (2007: 518-519) points out, some early Tantras of the Trika and various texts of the Kubjikā tradition (which presumably incorporated Trika materials) present this garland of re-ordered phonemes of the Sanskrit syllabary correlated to a pantheon of fifty female deities that preside over the individual letters and represent the forces embodied in the alphabet to be transferred to the body of the adept. Vināyakī, with slight variations in her name, also appears as a phoneme-deity in *Triśirobhairavatantra*, *Ṣaṭsāhasrasaṃhitā* and *Kularatnoddyota*[15]. She also features in the *Agnipurāṇa*, as discussed above.

Hence, in KMT Vināyakī and Jyeṣṭhā appear fundamentally as *śakti*s, the former as a body *śakti* related to the Mālinī's phoneme *ḍa* (or *ḍha*), the latter as a member of a group of four goddesses representing phases of the phonic process (as referred to *supra*). Of interest is the Dutī with the name of Gajavaktrā, 'Elephant-faced', who appears to be endowed with inauspicious and destructive powers.

Besides the KMT, a considerable number of texts expound the doctrines and the practices of the Kubjikā cult, forming a large scriptural corpus which in itself attests the prominence of this tradition. Two enlarged versions of the *mūla*-text assume special relevance for the present study: the *Śrīmatottaratantra*/*Kādiprakaraṇa* of the *Gorakṣasaṃhitā* and the *Ṣaṭsāhasrasaṃhitā.* Both these works incorporated materials from the oral tradition, expanding and elaborating subjects which were only cursorily alluded to in the KMT itself (Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 4).

Significantly, a passage in the *Śrīmatottaratantra* (ŚM) describes Vināyakī and provides iconographic details. This scripture is still unedited, but quoted by both Dehejia (1986) and Heilijgers-Seelen (1994) on the basis of two different manuscripts[16]. The ŚM is basically identical to the first part of the so-called *Gorakṣasaṃhitā*, namely the section named the *Kādiprakaraṇa* of the *Gorakṣasaṃhitā,* edited by Pāṇḍeya in 1976[17]. While closely related to the *Kubjikāmatatantra*, both the *Śrīmatottaratantra* and the *Kādiprakaraṇa* of the *Gorakṣasaṃhitā*, as alluded to above, significantly depart from the root text, presenting their own interpretation of several subjects and adding new sections.

---

[15] For details on the specific passages of these texts featuring the goddess Mālinī and her phonematic sequence, see Vasudeva 2007: 520-529. In his reading, the phoneme associated with Vināyakī is in all cases *ḍha*, while according to Goudriaan, Schoterman's 1988 critical edition, the goddess is identified with the letter *ḍa* in both the KMT passages (24.28 and 17.100; see pp. 129, 351 and 444).

[16] Dehejia based his study on the Devanāgarī manuscript No. 4/2506 of the National Archives, Kathmandu, while Heilijgers-Seelen relies on the Newari manuscript No. 2-220/1548, dated N.S. 729 (=1608-1609 C.E.), from the same Nepalese collection. Over thirty manuscripts of the *Śrīmatottara* are extant only in the National Archives in Kathmandu. See Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 8-12.

[17] Three different texts or sections of texts are known under the title *Gorakṣasaṃhitā*: the *Kādiprakaraṇa*, the *Bhūtiprakaraṇa*, and the *Yogaprakaraṇa*. However, their contents are extremely different: the first is strictly related to the *Kubjikāmatatantra*, the second deals with alchemy, while the third concerns *haṭhayoga*. For details on the substantial identity of the *Śrīmatottaratantra* and the *Kādiprakaraṇa,* with the *Śrīmatottaratantra* probably representing the earlier version of the two works see Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 8-12.

The passage featuring Vināyakī[18] is mentioned by Sharma (1979: 50), but left unnoticed by Agrawala 1978. This description of the goddess clearly echoes typical portraits of Gaṇeśa. Indeed, she is characterised as elephant-faced (*gajavaktrā*), but also as *lambodarā*, 'potbellied', a regular epithet for Gaṇeśa; among other attributes, she has a *modaka* in one of her left hands, and is mounted on a mouse (*ākhupṛṣṭhasamārūḍhā*). She is garbed in elephant hide (*gajacarman*), a feature that usually connotes Śiva, but which is also found in iconographic descriptions of various female Śaiva deities (see e.g. Mahālakṣmī and Bhairavī in the *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* chapter 6 analysed by Bühnemann 2003: 40-41). Thus, the *Śrīmatottaratantra* / *Kādiprakaraṇa* of the *Gorakṣasaṃhitā* appears to conceive Vināyakī as the female form of Gaṇeśa.

The eighteenth chapter of this text features an interesting group of theriocephalic *yoginī*s (18.8ff.). These figures are named individually as Ḍākinī, Rākiṇī, Lāmā/Lākinī, Kākinī, Śākinī, Hākinī, Yākinī/ Yakṣiṇī, and Kusumāyudhā/Kusumā. This series of goddesses occurs in a great number of Kaula and yogic texts[19]. They are usually six in number (the same number as in KMT 15.36cd-83), are referred to as *ḍākinī*s or *yoginī*s, and the forms of their names may present slight variations.

In the passage in the ŚM[20] the eight goddesses occupy the fourth *cakra*, localised in the region of the throat and called *Yoginīcakra* after them. Seated on the eight petals of a lotus, they appear as fearsome deities characterised by animal heads and with the same animals figuring as their *vāhana*s. These are: a cat (*biḍāla*), an owl (*ulūka*), a vulture (*gṛdhra*), a crow (*kāka*), a lion (*siṃha*), a tiger (*vyāghra*), a bear (*ṛkṣa*), and an elephant (*gaja*), respectively. Each of these *yoginī*s has eight arms holding different attributes, and from each of them eight secondary goddesses emerge. The latter are said to have the same appearance as the figure from whom they derive: this means that the sixty-four resulting goddesses are all animal-faced[21]. The addition of an eighth *yoginī*, called Kusumāyudhā/Kusumā and characterised by an elephant face and an elephant *vāhana*, is a peculiar trait of the ŚM; she presides over the eighth group of eight elephant-faced *yoginī*s, found in the north-east and connected with the sacred site of Devīkoṭa.

---

[18] *Gorakṣasaṃhitā* I, chapter 7, ed. Pāṇḍeya 1976, p. 37: *nīlābhā nīlavarṇā ca nīlalohitapiṅgalā | gajavaktrā mahākāyā trinetrā mukuṭojjvalā || lambodarā sthūlahrasvā caturbhujakṛtāyudhā | modakaṃ daśanaṃ vāme parśusūtraṃ ca dakṣiṇo || vaḍaramālā śiro tasyā varṇahārāvalambiṇī | ākhupṛṣṭhasamārūḍhā sarvābharaṇamaṇḍitā || vināyakī mahādevī gajacarmaparicchadā |.*

[19] See Kiss 2011: 194, n.31.

[20] The chapter of the *Kādiprakaraṇa* dealing with the Yoginīcakra (chapter 19) is incomplete, but its contents can be inferred from the corresponding chapter of the *Śrīmatottaratantra* (chapter 18). See Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 147-149.

The occurrence of this set of animal-faced goddesses in the ŚM bears witness to the application of the theriocephalic pattern to a well-known, widespread, and significant group of *yoginī*s, related to the yogic system of *cakra*s. Such portrayals therefore attest to the liveliness of the composite animal-human images even in the later facets of the Kaula textual tradition, which, on the one hand, were connected with yogic teachings, and, on the other, were coeval with the construction of the *yoginī* temples, where, as discussed below, the elephant-faced female figure is quite often to be found.

Another relevant scripture belonging to the Kubjikā tradition is the *Ṣaṭsāhasrasaṃhitā* (ṢSS)[22]. As regards the date of composition of this text, just like the KMT, only the *terminus ante quem* can be established, on the basis of the oldest manuscripts. These date from the 12th century, that is to say approximately from the same period as the oldest KMT manuscripts. Thus, it is probable that shortly after the composition of the basic scripture, a more extensive treatise was deemed necessary, and the 3500 verses of the KMT were recast with expansions and additions, thereby composing a 6000-verse version, called after its length (Schoterman 1982 ed.: 12-13).

As was the case in the KMT, in this text too Vināyakī appears as one of the goddess Mālinī's fifty *śakti*s in 7.20cd-21ab (*ḍa-ṇa-madhyagataṃ gṛhya, ū-ḍha-madhye dvitīyakam || vināyakī ca lāmā ca, bāhū dakṣiṇavāmakau* | Schotermann 1982 ed.: Appendix II): she corresponds to the syllable *ḍa* and her location on the body is on the right arm.

An elephant-faced goddess features, instead, in the unpublished fifteenth chapter of the ṢSS, which contains a detailed description of the iconography and worship (*pūjā*) of sixty-four *yoginī*s[23]. According to Schoterman (1982 ed.: 14), this *paṭala* corresponds to chapters eight and nine of the KMT, but the description of the sixty-four *yoginī*s is manifestly a peculiar feature of the ṢSS – indeed, the association between *yoginī*s and the number sixty-four is absent from the root text.

---

[21] The diagrammatic structure of this Yoginīcakra is illustrated by Dehejia 1986: 47.

[22] The first five chapters of this text have been critically edited by Schoterman (1982) on the basis of mainly two manuscripts – in total, he identified three manuscripts transmitting the text.

[23] In what follows, I refer to the draft edition of the chapter by Sanderson, as reported in Serbaeva 2006: II.14 and Appendix 7.6.

The fifteenth chapter of the ṢSS is entitled *Mātṛcakroddhāra* and envisions the sixty-four *yoginī*s as eight-times-eight, closely linking them to the Eight Mothers – the standard seven from Brāhmī to Cāmuṇḍā, plus Mahālakṣmī. Bhairava, the narrator, explains that the goddesses should be visualised in eight lotuses, while a ninth central lotus corresponds to Kubjikā's mantra (15.81-99). Each of the sixty-four *yoginī*s is then named and described in detail (15.100-165). Bhairava subsequently states that if one visualises these deities or draws them on tissue (*athavā tu paṭe likhya*, 173c) all one's desires will be fulfilled, and all the *siddhi*s acquired. He adds that this *pūjā* will allow a king to obtain a kingdom (*rājyabhraṣṭo ālabhed rājyaṃ,* 171ab) or the desired victory (*jayārthī jayaṃ āpnoti*, 171c). After the victory over the enemy, a king should erect a shrine on the battleground dedicated to Śikhāsvacchandabhairava and the sixty-four *yoginī*s (15.166-178).

This last fact is remarkable. Indeed, the same royal power that could obtain advantages from the worship of *yoginī*s would have provided patronage for the construction of the stone temples dedicated to the goddesses. Significantly, the passage prescribes not only a visualisation of the sixty-four *yoginī*s, but also a figurative representation of them, although there is no mention of any three-dimensional images. Especially in the light of these two circumstances – the involvement of the royals and the hint at concrete images of *yoginī*s – it is noteworthy that the ṢSS is coeval with the construction of the major *yoginī* temples.

In the iconographic section of the chapter (15.100-165), eleven *yoginī*s are described as theriocephalic. Among these, Vāmanī (15.153) is most likely elephant-faced[24]: her mount, which consists of a mouse (*mahākhuyānā,* 15.153a), and her attributes, which include a *laḍḍuka*, let us presume that she is considered as a female form of Gaṇeśa, and thus that she has an elephant face. While this is not explicitly stated in ṢSS 15.153, she is clearly represented with an elephant face in the line drawings found in two Nepalese manuscripts of the *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* (PLSS). The latter text professes to be a compendium based on several Āgamas. Bühnemann (2003: 9-10) assumes as *terminus ante quem* for the compilation of this work the year 1168 C.E., which is the date of the oldest manuscript. The sixth chapter of this compendium gives a detailed description of the iconography of a great number of Śaiva deities, including the sixty-four *yoginī*s and

---

[24] ṢSS 15.153: *pītā mahākhuyānā syād vamanī vibhratī karaiḥ | kuṭhāraṃ laḍḍukaṃ vāme panasaṃcākṣamālikā* || 153 ||.

Bhairava (6.327-400). This iconographic description, when compared to ṢSS 15.100-165, proves to be congruent for the most part, as highlighted by Serbaeva (2006: 29, 32-33, 114-116), who has identified the ultimate common source of different parallel textual descriptions in this ṢSS passage, completing the analysis by Bühnemann (2003). Bühnemann's work reproduces the two sets of drawings from the only extant illustrated manuscripts of the PLSS. These illustrations depict the Śaiva pantheon as described in chapter six of the PLSS with inscriptions in classical Newari or in Sanskrit naming the deities and referring to some of their attributes. These images, to some extent, represent a bridge between the textual descriptions and the iconic renderings of the deities. While it is not possible to establish a biunivocal correspondence between written (and drawn) representations and the extant *yoginī* temple sculptures, it is clear that they are typologically congruent, reflecting closely related religious visions in mediaeval India, post 10th-century.

In the closing of this discussion on tantric sources, we turn to a passage describing the elephant-faced goddess found in a scripture of the Śaiva Siddhānta, the *Suprabhedāgama*. Probably composed (or altered) after the 12th century[25], the Kriyāpāda of this text contains seven and a half verses devoted to the *sthāpana* of Jyeṣṭhā, i.e. to the installation of the image of the deity (Brunner 1967: 58). The goddess is here described as elephant-faced (*gajānana,* 45.2) and as riding a donkey (*khararūḍhā,* 45.3)[26]. The fact that a female deity by the name of Jyeṣṭhā is depicted in a South Indian Āgama with *both* the elements at play in the present discussion, namely the elephant face and the donkey *vāhana*, is particularly valuable. Iconographic evidence of such a combination is found in a *yoginī* sculpture enshrined in the temple at Hirapur in Odisha, which will be discussed in the following section.

3. *Figurative Representations*

Among the extant figurative representations, I shall list and briefly describe below the fifteen apparently most significant ones. Evidence up to the 11th century have been taken into account[27].

---

[25] On the lateness of this work and on the processes of alteration of the text, see Brunner 1992: 32-33.

[26] *udadhaumatthyamāne tu cotthitā sā gajānana* | *kālāñjananibhā devī sarvābharaṇabhūṣitā* || 45-2 || *k[h]ararūḍhā kalepatnī sukhaghnāduhitātanuḥ* | *jānupārśvau maṇirvāthā vṛṣāsyaṃ vṛṣabhaṃ tathā* || 45-3 || Ed. 1931.

[27] For further details on the cited *yoginī* sculptures and temples see Policardi 2020.

1. RAIRH, near Jaipur, Rajasthan, terracotta plaque, now in the Government Museum of Amber, 1st century BCE-1st century CE. N° GM-MAG-RJ-841746 (Sharma 1979: Fig. 1).

The first currently known figurative representation of an elephant-faced deity dates from the 1st century BCE to 1st century CE and was excavated in Rairh near Jaipur (Puri 1941: 29, Pl. XIV, Fig. f). It is a small (height 8 cm) and very weathered terracotta plaque, but it most probably portrays a female figure standing facing frontwards. Her elephant head seems to be adorned with a towering headdress, her trunk is lying on her chest, slightly curled to her right. She is wearing a girdle and only has two arms; unfortunately, the hand attributes are no longer discernible. Notwithstanding the unskilled execution, this relief is noteworthy because it represents the earliest known depiction of an elephant-faced deity, and, significantly, it is a female deity.

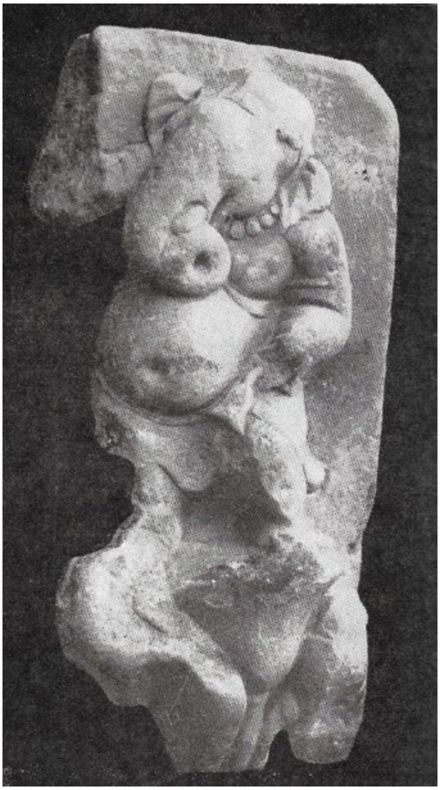

Fig. 1. Vināyakī from Mathura, sculpted image, now in the Government Museum of Mathura, early Gupta period, ca. 4th century. N° 509 (Photo: after Sharma 1979, Fig. 5), ABHINAV PUBLICATIONS DELHI.

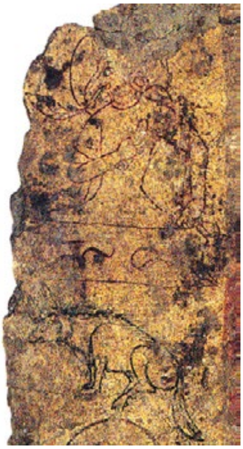

Fig. 2. Possibly elephant-faced goddess with a donkey *vāhana*, Dandan Oiliq, Buddhist temple CD4, eastern corridor (Photo: after Lo Muzio 2017, Fig. 7).

2. MATHURA, fragmentary stone relief, now in the Government Museum of Mathura, Kuśāṇa period, ca. 2nd century CE. N° 33-2331 (Sharma 1979: Fig. 2; Panikkar 1997: Pl. 6).

This fragmentary relief from Mathura (height ca. 13 cm), now held in the local museum, presents a row of five *mātṛ*s, seated in *bhadrāsana* and with their hands in *abhayamudrā.* They are all characterised by bird or animal heads. According to Agrawala (1978: 21), the figure on the extreme right can be identified as elephant-faced on the basis of her large ears and of the proboscis turned to her right and curved inwards in its lower portion. However, as Sharma remarks in a useful postscript note (1979: 50), these elephantine traits, and in particular the lower part of the trunk, are now partly damaged. Indeed, observing the relief as reproduced in Sharma (1979: Fig. 2) and in Panikkar (1997: Pl.6) it is almost impossible to recognise the lineaments of an elephant in the figure on the right; thus Panikkar (1997: 41-42) just speaks about bird-like features for some of these five figures. Hence, Agrawala's 1978 study and the figure reproduced therein (Ill. 4) also assume the value of historical documentation for a previous state of conservation of the relief, which indeed included an elephant-faced *mātṛ*.

3. AMARAVATI, fragment from the *stūpa*, now in the Government Museum of Chennai, ca. 2nd-3rd century CE (Mundkur 1975: Fig 2; Sharma 1979: Fig. 4).

This fragment from the Amaravati *stūpa* displays a pair of *yakṣa-yakṣī* represented with rotund human bodies and ostensibly elephan-

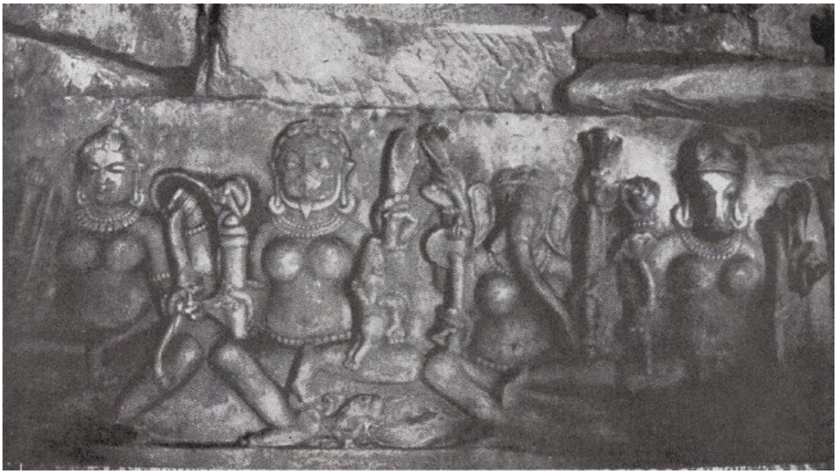

Fig. 3. Vināyakī with other *yoginī*s, from Rikhiyan, Banda district, Uttar Pradesh, ca. 10th century (Photo: after Sharma 1979, Fig. 9), ABHINAV PUBLICATIONS DELHI.

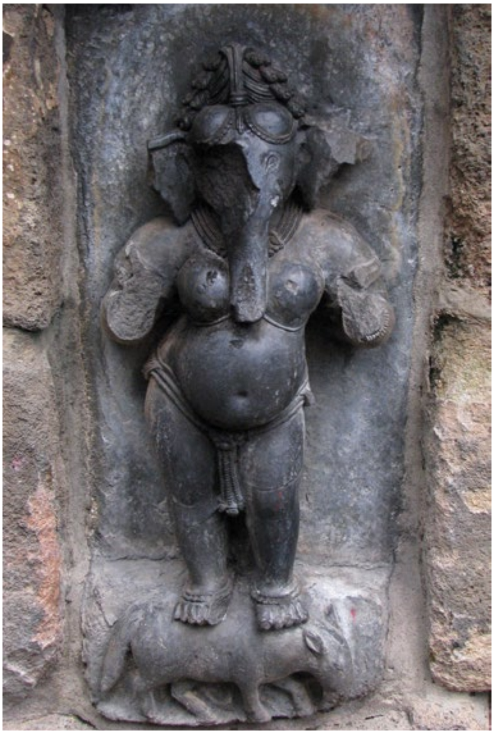

Fig. 4. *Yoginī* n° 38, elephant-faced, Hirapur *yoginī* temple, Odisha, second half of the 9th century (Photo: Chiara Policardi).

tine faces although with no proboscis or tusks. The female figure presents prominent breasts, while the lines of her head are partly damaged (Mundkur 1975: 296). These figures appear on the *stūpa* relief as Buddha's garland-bearers, which is a recurrent decorative motif in early Buddhist art.

4. MATHURA, stone sculpture, now in the Government Museum of Mathura, early Gupta period, ca. 4th century. N° 509 (Fig. 1).

This sculpted image appears to be the only specimen of Vināyakī from the early Gupta period. Found at Mathura, the two-armed deity is represented standing with a potbelly. In her left hand she holds a lotus bud with stalk; also, although barely discernible, she seems to be wearing a tiger's skin.

5. DANDAN OILIQ, Khotan Oasis, Xinjiang, mural painting, ca. 8th century (Fig. 2).

In this Central Asia site, some Buddhist temples have recently been discovered (Lo Muzio 2017). In the shrine named CD4, a large fragment of a mural painting depicts the god Skanda along with other deities, mainly female. Among the latter, there is a possibly elephant-faced goddess accompanied by an animal which is clearly not a mouse and resembles the *vāhana* of the Hirapur *yoginī*: it could be a donkey (Lo Muzio 2017: 75-76). This painting would not only attest the affiliation of the goddess to the group of the Seven Mothers far away from the heart of Indian culture, but it would also be another example of the combination of the auspicious symbolism of elephant with that inauspicious of the donkey in a single female iconography.

6. LOKHARI, Banda district, Uttar Pradesh, stone sculpture, now in Garhwa Fort (near Allahabad), first half of the 10th century (Sharma 1979: Fig. 7).

A *yoginī* temple must have once existed on a hilltop near the small village of Lokhari, in Uttar Pradesh. Twenty sculptures that should have been part of the shrine were documented by Dehejia (1986: 156-162). The sculptural set comprises an image of an elephant-faced goddess, who, just like the other Lokhari *yoginī*s, has a minimal character, both in the very modelling of the forms and in the figurative formula. Only the figures of the *yoginī* and her *vāhana* are carved on a plain slab of coarse-grained sandstone rounded in the upper extremity. The goddess is represented sitting with her right leg doubled against her mount and her left resting on the ground. She only has two arms, is wearing a tiara and holding a thunderbolt in her left hand and a *bilva* fruit in her right, which are not the typical attributes of Gaṇeśa. Her *vāhana* is peculiar as well: she is sitting on an elephant, which appears to mirror her elephantine face.

For centuries, the Lokhari *yoginī*s have remained on the hilltop exposed to the weather and vandals. In the 1980s Dehejia found twenty sculptures lying among scattered stones. The traveller who visits Lokhari about forty years later will only find a few remaining pieces of the figures. Some of them (including the elephant-faced one) and some broken pieces are now found in a storage area in the Garhwa fort (60 km from Allahabad)[28].

7. RIKHIYAN, Banda district, Uttar Pradesh, sculpted stone slab, now in Garhwa fort (near Allahabad), 10th century. N° RK 7 (Fig. 3).

At another site in the Banda district, Rikhiyan, long rectangular slabs were found, each carved with four images of *yoginī*s seated in a row (Agrawala 1978: 21). This suggests that once existed a *yoginī* temple presumably rectangular in shape. Just like the Lokhari *yoginī*s, here too the style is not elaborate, indicating an early date of execution. Most of the slabs have been moved to the Garhwa fort.

A photograph taken in 1909 by the Archaeological Survey of India captures an interesting group of *yoginī*s (Dehejia 1986: 120). Vināyakī is represented as elephant-faced and single-tusked; her proboscis is turned to her left. In her four arms she holds clockwise a battle-axe, a cobra, a lotus, and a staff. The *vāhana* is apparently absent. On her right she is flanked by a lion-faced *yoginī*, maybe Nārasiṃhī, who has a child with the aspect of a boar sitting on her lap. A boar-faced *yoginī*, presumably Vārāhī, is to the left of Vināyakī. The goddesses are all seated in *lalitāsana*. The features of these and other figures allow us to presume that the Rikhiyan *yoginī* temple also included the Seven or Eight *mātṛ*s among the (sixty-four?) *yoginī*s, and that perhaps Vināyakī, given her position on the slab, was part of the group.

8. HIRAPUR, near Bhuvaneshvar, Odisha, dark chlorite sculpture, Hirapur *yoginī* temple, second half of the 9th century. N° 38 (Fig. 4).

This sculpture is enshrined in a circular *yoginī* temple that rises on the outskirts of Hirapur. This shrine is the smallest of the extant *yoginī* temples and comprises exactly sixty-four *yoginī*s, carved from finegrained dark chlorite, which allows a high degree of artistic refinement. At least ten of them are theriocephalic.

---

[28] Dehejia (1986: 156) briefly describes the elephant-faced *yoginī* found at Lokhari but does not reproduce the picture. Sharma (1979: 29) discusses the representation and includes a photo (Fig. 7), which, despite the poor quality, is particularly valuable since, to my knowledge, the image cannot be found in any other publication nor online.

The elephant-faced *yoginī* numbered as 38 is standing elegantly in a slight *tribhaṅga* pose. She is pot-bellied and has four arms, but all her hands are unfortunately broken. Richly bejewelled, she is depicted with a towering *jaṭāmukuṭa* over her elephantine head. Her feet rest directly on her *vāhana*, in a posture that is unparalleled in other Vināyakī representations. The mount has been identified as a mouse by Agrawala (1978: 26) and Sharma (1979: 34), but it is undoubtedly a donkey, as Dehejia (1986: 92) and other scholars have recognised. Its robust body and oval ears would fit the representation of a large rat such as the bandicoot, the species usually represented as Gaṇeśa's mount in sculpture; however, the tail is completely different from the long and sparsely-furred scaly tail typical of all species of rats and mice, and also its feet are not splayed and brush-like, as is typical of these rodents[29]. The tufted tail and what appear to be large hooves clearly suggest a donkey, even if the characteristic erect mane is missing.

9. RANIPUR-JHARIAL, Odisha, sandstone sculpture, Ranipur-Jharial *yoginī* temple, early 10th century. N° 22 (Fig. 5).

This sculpture belongs to a sixty-four *yoginī* temple located deep in the interior of Odisha. All the *yoginī*s arranged along the circular enclosure walls are dancing: each is invariably depicted in a pose that is common to several Indian classical dances, known as *ardhamandī* in classical *bhāratanāṭya*. Such an iconic programme pervaded by a dancing note finds no parallels in any other *yoginī* temple.

The sculpted images are carved from the same rough coarse-grained sandstone that was used to construct the walls. The choice of such particularly soft stone has heavily marked the destiny of the sculptures, which to date appear badly weathered. Nonetheless, it appears clear that at least fifteen of the surviving sculptures have non-human, animal faces. This *yoginī*, numbered as 22, presents an elephant face with a high headdress of matted locks adorned with stringed jewels. She is wearing a *sāṛī* whose folds are visible between her legs. She has four arms and in her upper right hand carries an object that can no longer be deciphered, while the attribute in the corresponding left hand is clearly a *paraśu*; her front hands are broken.

---

[29] See van der Geer 2008: 74-82.

10. HARSHAGIRI, near Sikar, Rajasthan, fragmentary stone sculpture repurposed in a wall outside the Bhairava shrine, Harṣa temple complex, ca. 9th-10th century (Fig. 6).

This torso of an elephant-faced goddess is found on Mount Harsha in northeast Rajasthan, within a temple complex dedicated to Śiva, the tutelary deity (*kuladeva*) of the Śākambharī Cāhamānas.

As the temple complex is still a lively centre of devotional activities, several buildings have been extensively rebuilt and renovated over time. Besides Śiva, other deities have found a space within the site, and an important place is occupied by goddesses. Cecil (2020: 131) documents the presence of various images of *mātṛ*s and *yoginī*s, observing that

> "At present, nearly all the images of these goddesses are rebuilt in walls and under worship in small shrines within a circular open-roofed structure on the eastern end of the complex […]. The original purpose and date of the structure are impossible to determine; its architectural layers preserve numerous historical moments and building phases".

Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the building hosting the images presents some of the distinctive traits of the typical *yoginī* temples, namely the circular plan and the hypaethral character.

The elephant-faced sculpture presumably portrays a *yoginī* (Cecil 2020: 131-132; see also Lanius 1971). Only the torso is partially preserved and since it is now embedded in a wall, it is difficult to imagine whether the goddess was standing or sitting. Nonetheless, it is still possible to appreciate the finely chiselled details. Her head, encircled by a lotus halo, presents a high *karaṇḍamukuṭa* with a jewel on her forehead. The proboscis, between the prominent tusks, is turned to her left. Her left arm is bent to the front, carrying an empty bowl in her hand, which Cecil (2020: 134, Fig. 48) interprets as a wine cup. Her right arm is instead broken at the elbow. Notwithstanding the damaged condition, the two tusks and an empty bowl among the attributes make it difficult to read the figure as the female form of Gaṇeśa.

11. SUHANIA, Morena district, Madhya Pradesh, sculpted stone slab, now in the Gujari Mahal Museum of Gwalior, ca. 10th century. N° 190 (Fig. 7).

The elephant-faced goddess is graciously standing in *tribhaṅga* pose inside an architectural frame of two flanking pilasters. Pot-bellied, she wears a knee-length lower garment, while various jewels ornate the nude upper half of her body and a *karaṇḍamukuṭa* crowns her elephantine head. She carries a *paraśu* in her right hand, a lotus-bud in her

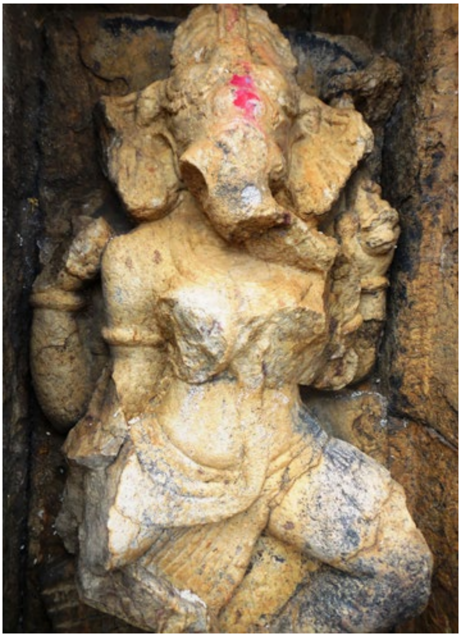

Fig. 5. *Yoginī* n° 22, elephant-faced, Ranipur-Jharial *yoginī* temple, Odisha, early 10th century (Photo: courtesy of Marialuisa Sales).

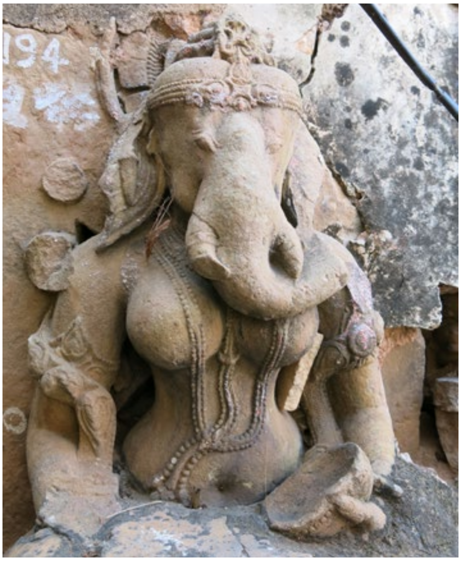

Fig. 6. Elephant-faced *yoginī* with wine cup, sculpture repurposed in a wall outside the Bhairava shrine, Harṣa temple complex, Harshagiri, near Sikar, Rajasthan, ca. 9th-10th century (Photo: courtesy of Elizabeth A. Cecil).

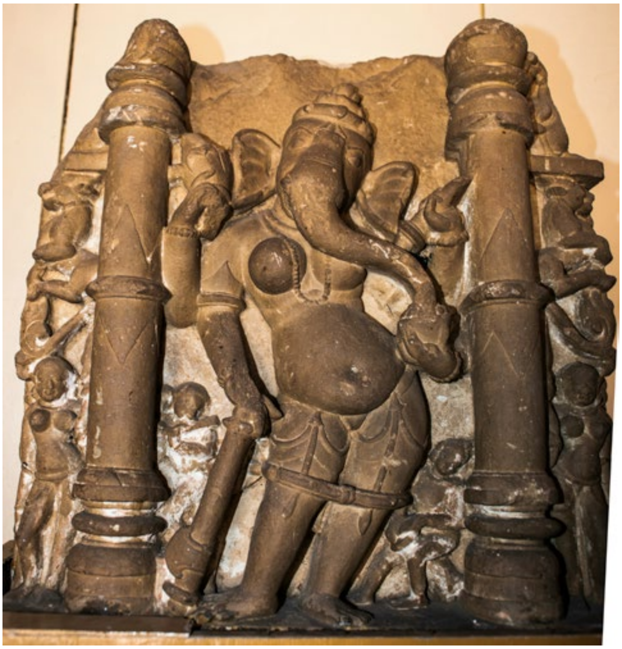

Fig. 7. Vināyakī, Suhania, Morena district, Madhya Pradesh, now in the Gujari Mahal Museum of Gwalior, ca. 10th century. N° 190 (Photo: courtesy of David Smith).

upper right hand, while possibly a damaged dagger in her upper left. Her left normal hand holds a bowl of *modaka*s, into which the curled end of her proboscis is dipping. Near her feet two small figures of male attendants are featured, a flute-player and a drumbeater, suggesting an atmosphere of music and dance, possibly alluded to also by the flexed bodily pose of the goddess. The image does not seem to belong to a *yoginī* temple, insofar as the style and the treatment of the sculpture do not resemble other known *yoginī* sculptures.

In this case, the pot-bellied characterisation and the attributes seem to suggest that the goddess is conceived as the female form of Gaṇeśa, although the mouse *vāhana* is missing.

12. HINGLAJGADH, on the border between Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, sandstone sculpture, now in the Birla Museum of Bhopal, middle of the 10th century. N° 209 (Fig. 8).

The area of Hinglajgadh in Madhya Pradesh has yielded more than five hundred sculptures, including enough *yoginī* images to indicate that a *yoginī* temple once existed on the site. Most probably the area was a remarkable centre of Śākta devotion.

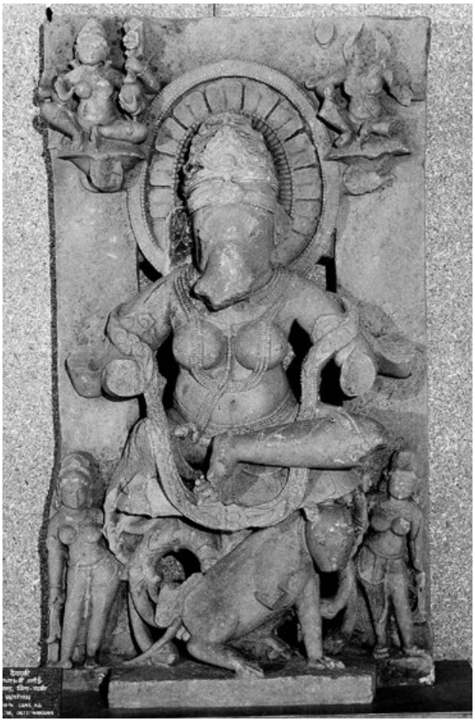

Fig. 8. Elephant-faced *yoginī* from Hinglajgadh, on the border between Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, middle of the 10th century. N° 209 (Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies).

The elephant-faced *yoginī* is represented seated on a full-blown lotus, with four female attendant figures flanking her, two along the base of the slab and two flying at its top. Her head, encircled by a petalled halo, is adorned by an elaborate crown, in the style of her richly bejewelled body. Both her trunk and her four arms are broken. Although the *vāhana* is partly damaged, it is a prominent presence below the goddess's throne. It is likely a bandicoot, as some of the characterising features of the species are visible, namely the five nails, and the long, thin, and sparsely furred tail[30]. Its size is particularly conspicuous, and it is portrayed crouching on its hind legs, apparently with a chain around its neck.

---

[30] I am grateful to Alexandra van der Geer for confirming my identification of the mount as a bandicoot, although, according to her, "not a prize-winner" (personal communication, May 2021).

13. BHERAGHAT, near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, stone sculpture named Śrī Aiṅgiṇī in the inscription, Bheraghat *yoginī* temple, last decades of the 10th century (Fig. 9).

This *yoginī* sculpture is housed in one of the perimetral cells of the largest and most imposing *yoginī* temple, situated on the top of a hill at Bheraghat. Probably, this shrine was to some extent a royal chapel, a cultual place especially reserved for the Kalacuri dynasty (Dehejia 1986: 138-139).

With slightly larger than life-size dimensions, the Bheraghat *yoginī*s are characterised by sensuous bodies and assured elegance, evoking a mature beauty. Six of the Bheraghat *yoginī*s have animal faces. However, we can plausibly suppose that the original iconic programme comprised more, since only twenty-four of the eighty-one faces are in a state of preservation that allows to assess their human or animal nature.

The elephant-faced *yoginī*, richly carved in elaborate details, sits at ease in *lalitāsana* on a lotus leaf. She has a towering hairstyle and a third eye on her elephantine forehead. Her four arms are extensively damaged. Various attendant figures surround the goddess, among which one of the most interesting is an elephant-headed male figure, sitting below the goddess's throne with his left hand supporting her left folded leg. Agrawala (1978: 28) remarks that "This Ganapati portrayal in a subordinate role below the goddess is rather curious and a unique feature of the present sculpture". But it is far from being certain that this male attendant is to be read as Gaṇeśa. The inscribed label on the pedestal identifies the *yoginī* as Śrī Aiṅgiṇī, a name not found elsewhere in reference to the elephant-faced goddess (Agrawala 1978: 29), presumably a local name, which does not connect her with Gaṇeśa.

14. SHAHDOL, Madhya Pradesh, sandstone sculpture named Śrī Vasabha in the inscription, now in the Indian Museum of Kolkata, last quarter of the 11th century. N° A.25218 (Fig. 10).

Just like Hinglajgadh, the site of Shahdol in Madhya Pradesh has also provided a large group of *yoginī* images, while no remains are left of the temple that enshrined them. All the Shahdol *yoginī*s are characterised by a dense and elaborate sculptural style, which has led Dehejia (1986: 173) to date them to the second half of the 11th century, an assessment that the palaeographical analysis of the inscribed labels on the pedestals also seems to confirm.

This figure is labelled as Śrī Vasabha (corresponding to Vṛṣabhā in Sanskrit): indeed, she is clearly bull-faced. She has eight arms and holds a mace with a skull on it in her upper left hand. A decorated halo lies behind her head, and the elaborate carvings on the entire slab on which the goddess is sculpted show various groups of figures. An elephant-faced

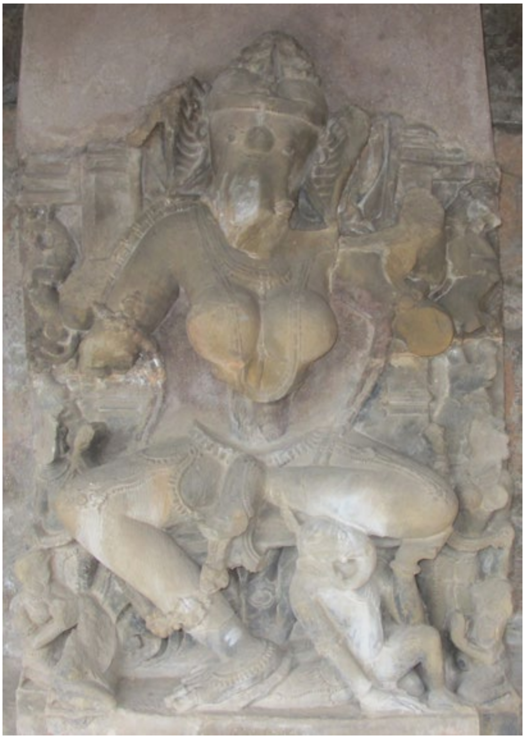

Fig. 9. *Yoginī* named Śrī Aiṅgiṇī in the inscription, No. 41, elephant-faced, Bheraghat *yoginī* temple, near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, last decades of the 10th century (Photo: Chiara Policardi).

child with a curved trunk sits comfortably in the palm of the *yoginī*'s left hand, while, below her seat, her lion *vāhana* rears on its hind legs, its body curved to look at its rider. The elephant appears again in the elephant-faced female attendant seated below the *yoginī*'s throne, in the left corner of the panel. She is carrying a lotus and a flower in her upper hands, while her lower right hand holds a damaged mace and the lower left one is broken. The two figures with elephant faces have been interpreted as child Gaṇeśa and his female counterpart Vināyakī (Agrawala 1978: 32; Sharma 1979: 34), but this is not beyond doubt, and other readings might be possible.

15. GIRIYEK, Patna district, Bihar, sculpted stele, now in the Indian Museum of Kolkata, 11th century. N° 3919 (Fig. 11).

The elephant-faced goddess is sitting in a *padmāsana* posture on a lotus seat placed on a richly decorated base, and her elegant figure is

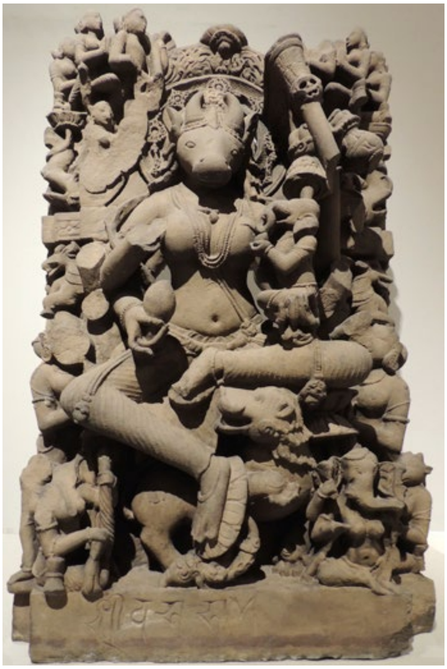

Fig. 10. Bull-faced *yoginī* from Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh, with elephant-faced child and female elephant-faced attendant, named Śrī Vasabha in the inscription, now in the Indian Museum of Kolkata, last quarter of the 11th century. N° A.25218 (Photo: courtesy of Stella Dupuis).

clearly not pot-bellied. The sculpture is well preserved, so that it is possible to appreciate the details of the high headdress on her elephantine head, with the proboscis elongated between two tusks and turned to her left. She has four arms and is holding a battle-axe in her upper left hand, a conch-shell in her normal left hand, placed on her thigh, while in her normal right hand she raises a staff and in her upper right she holds a small vase. Both Agrawala (1978: 25) and Sharma (1979: 35-36) inscribe the piece in the domain of Pāla art. At present, there is no indication that the sculpture belonged to a *yoginī* set.

4. *Interpretative Remarks*

While the previous sections primarily present and analyse significant evidence, the ensuing pages are substantially interpretative in nature. Various issues and queries, only hinted at so far, will now be brought

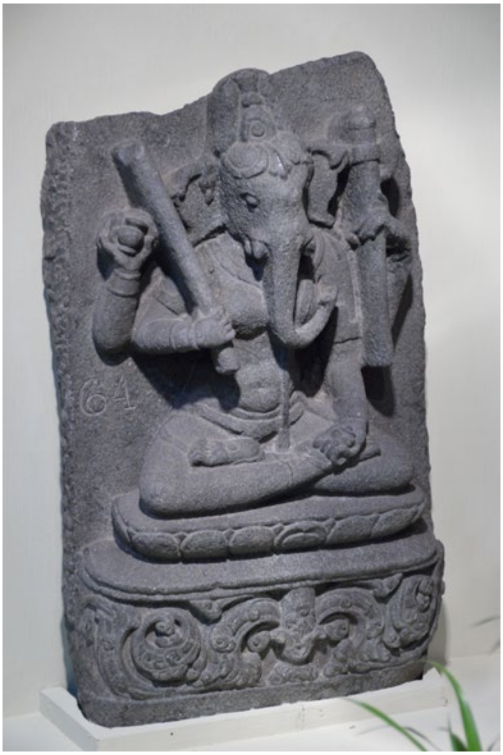

Fig. 11. Vināyakī from Giriyek, Patna district, Bihar, now in the Indian Museum of Kolkata, 11th century. N° 3919 (Photo: courtesy of Biswarup Ganguly).

into clearer focus and, as far as possible, addressed on the basis of the analysed data, tying up a few loose ends.

The first point to consider is whether these elephant-faced figures in texts and images reflect not one, but different deities that, in various times and places, are depicted with an elephant face, but have no other connection between them. While this may be true, the very fact that, in scriptures and in sculptures, an elephant-faced figure is almost invariably enshrined in circles of *yoginī*s does not seem meaningless and appears as a sufficient indication, I believe, to make the hypothesis of a single elephant-faced goddess, without a monolithic personality, worth investigating.

4.1. *On the entanglements of Jyeṣṭhā and Vināyakī*

Traditionally, Jyeṣṭhā is described in the texts and represented in iconography with features that characterise her as an "old" corpulent woman, with drooping lips, large pendulous breasts, and a sagging belly. She carries a banner depicting a crow or sometimes a crow is depicted alongside her[31]. Material records portraying Jyeṣṭhā, which can still often found in the outskirts of villages in South India, attest a wide diffusion of her cult in the 7th and 8th centuries. In contemporary India her image is rarely a cult object, but, when recognised, it inspires fear (Leslie 1992: 114). While she is thus commonly imagined and represented with a human face, in various phases of her cult she was envisaged as elephant-faced, as attested by the BGŚS and *Suprabhedāgama* passages discussed above.

According to some scholars (e.g. Lal 1980: 169) the description "hastimukhā" in BGŚS can be interpreted as "long nose" thus metaphorically referring to Jyeṣṭhā's ugliness; however, as mentioned, a different compound, i.e. "gajānanā", is used in the *Suprabhedāgama*, and it seems unlikely that here too it should be read as metaphorically describing a pendulous, human nose.

In the attempt to disentangle the intricate (and under certain respect tenuous) connections between Jyeṣṭhā and Vināyakī, a key element is represented by the ass *vāhana*. In Indian culture, donkeys are endowed with a peculiar symbolism: they are considered impure, demonic, ominous and disease carrier, and are thus associated, in Vedic and post-Vedic literature, with inauspicious goddesses (Ferrari 2015: 67-81). It is possible that, much like the early mediaeval formulation of Śītalā, the elephant-faced goddess Jyeṣṭhā was associated with the ass precisely because of her function as controller over *vighna*s, or obstacles, a function she shared with the male deity Vināyaka. The ass, a wild animal connected with unpredictability, chaos, and excess, symbolised her power over adverse occurrences. In the early phase it was an ambivalent power, capable of both creating and destroying or removing the obstacles: at the risk of somewhat simplifying the complexity at stake, we could hypothesise that the elephant face expressed the positive function of averting evil, while the donkey *vāhana* evoked the adversities, which were, however, brought under control by the goddess.

Subsequently, presumably from the early Gupta era onwards, the benign role of dispelling obstacles and thus promoting success and prosperity became the sphere of influence of Vināyaka/Gaṇeśa *par excellence*, while Jyeṣṭhā was merely considered as the goddess causing misfortune and disease. Due to natural (religious) selection, so to speak, Jyeṣṭhā's vehicle and symbol became the crow, while, presumably, the elephant-faced goddess was automatically interpreted as Gaṇeśa's female form. However, in my view, the ass *vāhana* accompanying the elephant-faced *yoginī* in the Hirapur temple might be one of the strongest indications that a legacy of the original autonomous existence of (Jyeṣṭhā-)Vināyakī probably survived in some places and time periods and was then incorporated in the tantric tradition of the *yoginī*s.

---

[31] See Dhal 1978: 158-163; Lal 1980: 160-179; Leslie 1992: 115-120.

4.2. *Do the considered artistic records represent the female form of Gaṇeśa?*

It is interesting to note that, according to the textual tradition, Gaṇeśa's *śakti* is not Vināyakī but Buddhi and Siddhi or Ṛddhi. The latter are invariably represented as human-faced and not elephant-faced. In particular, if represented in a pair with Gaṇeśa, as a rule the female goddess has a human face; to my knowledge, leaving aside later tantric Buddhist representations, there are no representations in which both the god and the goddess have elephant faces (Agrawala 1978: 17-18; Krishan 1999: 48). Thus, Vināyakī, when related to Gaṇeśa, does not appear to be properly considered as his consort but as his female form or female manifestation. Naturally, such a distinction between consort and female form easily fades away in popular or devotional contexts.

The iconography of Vināyakī may echo that of Gaṇeśa be it in the rendering of her physique, particularly with the pot-bellied characterisation, in the hand attributes (such as the *paraśu* and the bowl of *modaka*s) or in the mouse/bandicoot *vāhana*. Thus, the commissioners or the artists, while visually conceiving a Vināyakī image, in some cases had the figure of Gaṇeśa in their mind as a model or, sometimes, as a more nuanced reference. Among the considered examples, the parallel with Gaṇeśa is manifest in the sculpture from Suhania (characterised by chubby features and by the battle-axe and bowl of *modaka*s as attributes) and in the *yoginī* from Hinglajgadh (accompanied by a bandicoot *vāhana*).

However, in several cases, the goddess iconography has no apparent connection with Gaṇeśa's features. Taking into consideration a degree of uncertainty due to the partial damage of some of the images, there do not seem to be any parallels with Gaṇeśa's iconography in at least eight cases out of the fifteen considered, namely the Rairh terracotta plaque (1); the Mathura fragmentary relief (2); the Amaravati *stūpa* relief (3); the Mathura Gupta sculpture (4); the Lokhari *yoginī* (5); the Hirapur *yoginī* (7); the Harshagiri torso (9); and the Bheraghat *yoginī* (12). In some of these instances, it is not only the absence of typical Gaṇeśa's attributes, but also the presence of a different *vāhana* that opens up more possibilities regarding the identity of the female figure, such as the elephant at Lokhari, the donkey at Dandan Oiliq and

Hirapur, and the elephant-headed male attendant at Bheraghat. Significant hints of the existence of the goddess outside the orbit of Gaṇeśa are also the double tusks at Harshagiri and at Giryek, and the ostensibly not pot-bellied shape at Dandan Oiliq, Lokhari, Rikhiyan, Harshagiri, Hinglajgadh, Bheraghat, Shadhol, and Giryek. Each of these latter representations appear to reflect a locally inflected religious vision of the elephant-faced goddess.

4.3. *Possible phases of the religious-historical development of the elephant-faced goddess*

To address the religious-historical development of the elephant-faced goddess it may be useful to identify four phases:

1. Jyeṣṭhā, elephant-faced, ass-riding goddess (first centuries BCE-CE and afterwards);
2. One elephant-faced *mātṛ* among numerous *mātṛ*s (Kuṣāṇa period and afterwards);
3. Sometimes included in the group of the Eight Mothers (after the Gupta era);
4. Included in groups of *yoginī*s (from the 9th century).

While such a schema is useful for framing the complexity, it can capture only the surface of a process that undoubtedly entailed gradual and not necessarily quite so linear interplays. Although there are some mutual distinctions, the four zones constitute a continuum in which there are nuances and overlaps along the way[32].

Clearly, the elephant-faced goddess shared some personality traits with Vināyaka, notably her physical appearance and her function as controller of obstacles, intended as the capacity of both creating and removing the adversities. However, it is possible that originally she was not considered as his female form. With Gaṇeśa's rise to prominence and subsequent immense popularity, and the parallel decline in the worship of Jyeṣṭhā around the 10th century, the god came to play a not marginal role in Vināyakī's religious history. It was as late as the 5th century when Gaṇeśa acquired a prominent position in the Hindu religious landscape, and from that moment onward, in some times and in some places, the elephant-faced goddess was to some extent automatically interpreted and thus portrayed as the god's female form. The unambiguous hint of such an association with Gaṇeśa is the mouse/ bandicoot *vāhana* which identifies the god at least from the 9th century onward. Such a mount is attested in the passage from ṢSS and in the *yoginī* sculpture from Hinglajgadh.

---

[32] For further elaboration on the four development phases, see Policardi 2022.

It might be possible to interpret the case of Vināyakī in the frame of the hermeneutical category of "reuse". According to Freschi, Maas 2017, the designation "adaptive reuse" may be applied to a case in which a text, a concept, or an image preserve, at least partially, their traditional outlook, but acquire new meanings in a new context. In Vināyakī's development trajectory two main shifts can be identified: her reinterpretation as Gaṇeśa's consort around the Gupta era and her resemantisation as a *yoginī* in the tantric context. Referring to the distinction between "simple re-use" and "adaptive reuse" theorised by Freschi, Maas (2017: 14), the degree of adaptation in this case is, in my view, somewhat halfway between a mere repetition of a previous use (simple re-use) and a resemantisation where "the reuser expects his or her audience to recognise the reused elements in order to achieve a well-defined purpose" (adaptive reuse). In the case of this deity, a specific therianthropic figure experiences a process of transformation and resemantisation in the course of time, finally emerging as a *yoginī* in the tantric tradition. It is a phenomenon of reuse and appropriation of a pre-existing conceptual and figurative form, which acquires new meanings when confronted with new religious contexts (the Gupta mainstream Hindu religiosity and the tantric milieu). The fundamental reason behind this reuse is arguably to maintain a thread of continuity with traditions deeply rooted in popular beliefs: something familiar is updated and used in a new guise, and its forms are clearly recognisable. While there is a degree of awareness of the reutilisation and, of course, human agents who make it happen, it is not a programmatic effort as might be the choice of a new ruler to reuse previous models to exalt his power, but it is chiefly the result of a historical process of religious development. Thus, in the scale from extremely simple re-use to programmatically, elaborately adaptive reuse, the case of the elephant-faced goddess stand, I believe, in the central nuanced area. The very fact that a specific form – in this case the animal-human, elephant-woman combination – is updated and reused attests its vitality and significance[33].

5. *Conclusions*

The genesis of the elephant-faced goddess usually called Vināyakī presumably took place in a ritual and cultural context that was largely marginal within the Vedic tradition. In other words, it is possible that this goddess, in the early period known as Jyeṣṭhā-Alakṣmī, had been an indigenous goddess before she made her first Sanskritic appearance in the BGŚS and thus in Vedic literature.

---

[33] See Hegewald, Mitra 2012.

Arguably, she was originally an independent figure that underwent several shifts, from being one of the numerous Mothers of the Kuṣāṇa period to being associated to the Eight Mothers in some post-Gupta occurrences, eventually coming to be considered as the female form of Gaṇeśa with the rise in popularity of the latter god. Hence, when around the 7th century the cult of *yoginī*s was assuming relevance, she was merged in this class of tantric goddesses. That is, her animal-human nature lends itself to a reutilisation in a new, tantric context, where her originally ambivalent nature re-emerges. The donkey *vāhana* of the Hirapur *yoginī*, indeed, might not simply stem from the genuine inventiveness of the artists, but possibly reflects the fact that both those who conceived the sculpted image and possibly the sculptors themselves were aware of a connection with Jyeṣṭhā, or better with the ambivalent goddess who presided over inauspiciousness, ill luck, ruin or destruction whatever her name was at that time in the oriya religious milieu. Such a bipolarity, the interfusion of auspicious and inauspicious aspects, is one of the distinctive traits of tantric *yoginī* figures. In the tantric phenomenon, local, minor beings or semi-deities are frequently elevated to potent deities, capable of transforming the adepts (Policardi 2020).

Thus, the specific case, here examined, of a deity that combines animal and feminine features appears to epitomize both variation and continuity – that is, variation on a religious theme and thus on the related iconographic expression, and significant continuity with antiquity. As a matter of fact, one of the characteristic dynamics of the South Asian cultural history is the oscillation between the two attitudes, variation and continuity, where the fixed point is the general Indic trend towards transforming or re-utilising rather than discarding significant cultural manifestations.

Bibliographic References

Primary Sources

Agnipurāṇa. A Collection of Hindu Mythology and Traditions, 3 Vols., ed. by R. Mitra, Calcutta, 1873-1879.

BraYā *Brahmayāmalatantra*

Hatley, S. (ed. and transl.), 2007. *The Brahmayāmalatantra and the Early Śaiva Cult of Yoginīs*, PhD dissertation (supervisor H. Isaacson), University of Pennsylvania.

Hatley, S. (ed. and transl.), 2018. *The Brahmayāmalatantra or Picumata, volume I. Revelation, Ritual, and Material Culture in an Early Śaiva Tantra: Chapters 1-2, 39-40, and 83,* Collection Indologie, no. 133 (Early Tantra Series, no. 5), Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry/École française d'Extrême-Orient/Asien-Afrika-Institut Universität Hamburg.

BGŚS *Selections from the Baudhāyana-Gṛhyapariśiṣṭasūtra*, ed. and transl. by P.N.U. Harting, Utrecht, 1922.

Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṃhitā. With English Translations, Exhaustive Notes and Literary Comments, 2 vols., ed. and transl. by M. R. Bhat, Delhi-Varanasi-Patna-Madras, 1982.

Devī Purāṇam (First Critical Devanāgari Edition), ed. by K. P. Śarmā, New Delhi, 1976.

Gorakṣasaṃhitā, Sarasvatībhavanagranthamālā Vol. 110, Part 1, ed. by J. Pāṇḍeya, Varanasi, 1976.

KMT *The Kubjikāmatatantra. Kulālikāmnāya Version*, Orientalia Rheno-traiectina Vol. 30, ed. by T. Goudriaan, J. A. Schoterman, Leiden, 1988.

Liṅgapurāṇam, ed. by J. Vidyāsāgara, Calcutta, 1885.

Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series 70, 76 and 84, ed. by T. G. Śāstrī, Trivandrum, 1920-1925. GRETIL e-text by members of the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon Input Project (accessed 27th January 2022).

Śrīmadvaipāyanamunipraṇītaṃ Matsyapurāṇaṃ, Ānandāśramasaṃskṛtagranthāvaliḥ 54, ed. by N. H. Apte, Pune, 1907.

ṢSS *The Ṣaṭsāhasra Saṃhitā. Chapters 1-5*, ed. and transl. by J. A. Schoterman, Leiden, 1982.

SYM *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*

Törzsök, J. (ed. and transl.), 1999. *The Doctrine of Magic Female Spirits. A Critical Edition of Selected Chapters of the Siddhayogeśvarīmata(tantra) with Annotated Translation and Analysis*, PhD dissertation (supervisor A. Sanderson), University of Oxford.

Törzsök, J. Forthcoming. *The Teaching of Powerful Yoginīs. A Critical Edition of the* Siddhayogeśvarīmata *with an Introduction and Annotated Translation.*

SkP *Skandapurāṇa*

a. Early *Skandapurāṇa*

Yokochi, Y. (ed.), 2013. *The* Skandapurāṇa*, Vol. III. Adhyāyas 34.1-61, 53-69. Critical Edition with an Introduction and Annotated English Synopsis,* Supplement to Groningen Oriental Studies, Groningen-Leiden.

b. Late *Skandapurāṇa*

Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa, K. (ed.), 1986-1989. Śrīskandamahāpurāṇam, 7 vols., Delhi: Nag Publishers. Reprint of the Veṅkateśvara Press edition (śrīveṅkaṭeśvara mudraṇālaya), Bombay, V.S. 1967 = 1910 e.c.

Suprabhedāgama, no editor ascribed, 1931. Published by Devīkoṭaparipālanasaṃgha. E-text available at muktabodha.org (Muktabodha Indological Research Institute under the direction of Mark S. G. Dyczkowski). Catalogue no. M00090, 2007 (Accessed 27th January 2022).

Śrīvāyumahāpurāṇam, ed. by V. M. Chaturvedi, N. S. Singh, Delhi, 1983. First published 1933.

Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇam, ed. by Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa Kṣemarāja, Bombay, 1912. Repr. Nag Publishers, 1985.

Secondary Sources and Translations

Agrawala, S.V. 1970. *Ancient Indian Folk Cults*, Varanasi.

Agrawala, P.K. 1978. *Goddess Vināyakī. The Female Gaṇeśa*, Varanasi.

Bhattacharji, S. 1970. *The Indian Theogony. A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Purāṇas*, Delhi.

Brunner, H. 1967. "Analyse du *Suprabhedāgama*", *Journal Asiatique* 255 (1), 31-60.

Brunner, H. 1992. "*Jñāna* and *kriyā*: Relation between Theory and Practice in the Śaivāgamas", in T. Goudriaan (ed.), *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism. Studies in Honor of André Padoux*, New York, 1-59.

Bühnemann, G. 2003. *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*, Leiden.

Cecil, E.A. 2020. *Mapping the Pāśupata Landscape. Narrative, Place, and the Śaiva Imaginary in Early Medieval North India,* Leiden-Boston.

Dhal, U.N. 1995. *The Goddess Lakṣmī. Origin and Development*, New Delhi.

Dehejia, V. 1986. *Yoginī Cult and Temples. A Tantric Tradition*, Delhi.

Ferrari, F.M. 2015. *Religion, Devotion and Medicine in North India. The Healing Power of Śītalā*, London-New York.

Freschi, E., P.A. Maas (eds.) 2017. *Adaptive Reuse. Aspects of Creativity in South Asian Cultural History*, (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes), Wiesbaden.

Hatley, S. 2014. "Goddesses in Text and Stone: Temples of the Yoginīs in Light of Tantric and Purāṇic Literature", in B. Fleming, R. Mann (eds.), *Material Culture and Asian Religions. Text, Image, Object,* London, 195-225.

Hatley, S. 2021. "The Seven Mothers (Sapta Mātaraḥ): Origin Tales from the Old *Skandapurāṇa* and *Devīpurāṇa*", in M. Slouber (ed.), *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses. Hindu Tales of the Divine Feminine from India and Beyond*, Berkeley, 83-114.

Hegewald, J.A.B, S.K. Mitra (eds.) 2012. *Re-use. The Art and Politics of Integration and Anxiety*, New Delhi.

Heilijgers-Seelen, D. 1994. *The System of Five Cakras in Kubjikāmatatantra 14-16,* Groningen.

Kiss, C. 2011. "The *Matsyendrasaṃhitā*: A Yogini-centered Thirteenth-century Text from the South Indian Śāmbhava Cult", in D. N. Lorenzen, A. Muñoz (eds.), *Yogi Heroes and Poets. Histories and Legends of the Nāths*, Albany, 143-162.

Krishan, Y. 1999. *Gaṇeśa. Unrevelling an Enigma,* Delhi.

Lal, S.K. 1980. *Female Divinities in Hindu Mythology and Ritual,* Poona.

Lanius, M.C. 1971. "An Image of Vaināyikī from Harshagira (Sikar) Rajasthan", *Oriental Art* 17, 38.

Leslie, J. 1992. "Śrī and Jyeṣṭhā", in J. Leslie (ed.), *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, Delhi, 107-127.

Lo Muzio, C. 2017. "Skanda and the Mothers in Khotanese Buddhist Painting", in E. Allinger, F. Grenet, C. Jahoda, M.-K. Lang, A. Vergati (eds.), *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central Asia. Process of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archaeology, Religion and Polity*, Vienna, 71-90.

Lubin, T. 2016a. "Towards a New Edition of the *Baudhāyanagṛhyasūtra",* in A. Parpola, Koskikallio (eds.), *Vedic Investigations*, Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference, New Delhi, 317-40.

Lubin, T. 2016b. "Baudhāyanīya contributions to Smārta Hinduism", in J. E. M. Houben, J. Rotaru, M. Witzel (eds.), *Vedic Śākhās. Past, Present, Future. Proceedings of the Fifth International Vedic Workshop,* Cambridge, 591-606.

Lubin, T. 2016c. "The Vedic Homa and the Standardization of Hindu Pūjā", in R. K. Payne, M. Witzel (eds.), *Homa Variations. The Study of Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, New York, 143-66.

Mundkur, B. 1975. "The Enigma of Vaināyakī", *Artibus Asiae* 37 (4), 291-302.

Panikkar, S.K. 1997. *Sapta Māṭṛkā, Worship and Sculptures. An Iconological Interpretation of Conflicts and Resolutions in the Storied Brahmanical Icons*, Delhi.

Policardi, C. 2020. *Divino, femminile, animale. Yoginī teriantropiche nell'India antica e medioevale*, Alessandria.

Policardi, C. 2022. "Female Gaṇeśa or Independent Deity? Tracing the Background of the Elephant-faced Goddess in Mediaeval Śaiva Tantric Traditions", in A. Acri, P. Rosati (eds.), *Tantra, Magic, and Vernacular Religions in Monsoon Asia. Texts, Practices, and Practitioners from the Margins*, London, 78-97.

Puri, K.N. 1998. *Excavations at Rairh during Samvat Years 1995 & 1996 (1938–39 & 1939–40 A.D.)*, Jaipur.

Rocher, L. 1986. *The* Purāṇas, Wiesbaden.

Sanderson, A. 1988. "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions", in S. Sutherland, L. Houlden, P. Clarke, F. Hardy (eds.), *The World's Religions*, London, 660-704.

Sanderson, A. 2009. "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period", in S. Einoo (ed.), *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, Tokyo, 41-350.

Sanderson, A. 2014. "The Śaiva Literature", *Journal of Indological Studies* (Kyoto), Nos. 24 & 25 (2012-2013), 1-113.

Sarkar, B. 2017. *Heroic Shāktism. The Cult of Durgā in Ancient Indian Kingship*, Oxford.

Serbaeva, O. 2006. Yoginīs *in* Śaiva Purāṇas *and* Tantras. *Their Role in Tranformative Experiences in a Historical and Comparative Perspective,* Universitè de Lausanne PhD dissertation.

Serbaeva, O. 2009. "Tentative Reconstruction of the Relative Chronology of the Śaiva Purāṇic and Śaiva Tantric Texts on the Basis of the Yoginī-related Passages", in M. Ježić, P. Koskikallio (eds.), *Parallels and Comparisons. Proceedings of the Fourth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas*, Zagreb, 313-348.

Sharma, B.N. 1979. *Iconography of Vaināyakī*, New Delhi.

Shastri, J.L. (ed. and transl.), 1951. *The Liṅga-purāṇa. Part 1-2,* Translated by a Board of Scholars, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, Vols. 5-6, Delhi.

Tagare, G.V. (transl.). 1960. *The Skanda-purāṇa*, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, 23 Vols., Delhi.

van deer Geer, A. 2008. *Animals in Stone. Indian Mammals Sculpted through Time,* Leiden.

Vasudeva, S. 2007. "Synaesthetic Iconography: 1. the Nâdiphântakrama", in D. Goodall, A. Padoux (eds.), *Mélanges tantriques à la mémoire d'Hélène Brunner,* Pondichéry, 517-550.