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Headdresses at Mansar

Claudine Bautze-Picron

Although most sculptures recovered at Mansar are mainly fragmentary, their high level of creativity and the extreme care with which they have been carved strike the mind. Most images excavated at site III (MNS-3)(JOSHI/SHARMA 1999-2000, pp. 128-9; BAKKER 2004, pp. 78-79) were probably the product of one single atelier and produced in a limited span of time, most probably the second quarter of the fifth century (BAKKER 2004, pp. 83-84) illustrating a situation which is repeatedly encountered at various periods – it will be enough here to mention images at Ajanta (caves 1-2, 19 or 26) (fifth c.), Śāmalājī (sixth c.), or, from a later period, Kurkihar in Bihar (ninth c.).[1] The royal patronage must have created an extreme emulating situation where artists' imagination could expand and design new forms to meet the demand for emerging iconographic types, it will be here sufficient to remind the deservedly often published and discussed stupendous Śaiva image discovered on this site in 1972 and today preserved at the National Museum (here Fig. 19).

This creative effervescence is particularly obvious when considering the headdresses illustrated among the sculptural remains from Mansar. The sumptuousness of the ornamentation and the multiplicity of forms which characterize male and female headdresses are indeed striking. As such, this situation is however not unique, sites like Ajanta or Śāmalājī share a similar display of utmost care brought to the carving of this part of the ornamentation.

Headdresses are indeed fundamental in Indian culture: unto this day, they contribute to define the position of the character within the society. As such, they are part of the character's identity and this explains the utmost care brought into their representation. My point is not here to discuss whether illustrated headdresses were inspired from actual headdresses; this is likely but from the very moment when they are represented, they become part of the artistic vocabulary and escape their historical background. Entering into the world of images, they undergo transformations and become part of the iconography. The emergence of new iconographic forms centred on Śiva is contiguous with the formal beauty of the images and the high level of their carving. The heritage of this atelier will not be altogether lost: as we shall see, elements drawn from various headdresses will be preserved in various contexts and in far-away regions in the fifth and sixth centuries.

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Different types of headdresses are observed, worn by male (6-9) and female (1-5) characters which are outstanding by the refinement of their carving; besides coifing characters of divine nature, they are also worn by 'attendants' or human (?) characters (7-8), being then eventually modified or with a simplified rendering. A final category concerns the hair-dressing of 'gaṇas' (9).

1. The hair is regularly curled on either side of the central line, forming a continuous wave and covering the front part of the head. A large diadem of tiny flowers with strings of square beads at its extremities is set against a round and plain hair-bun which covers the back of the head. A string of thick beads which hangs from a central ornament emerging out of the flowers falls between the two parts of the curled hair. Figs 1 & 2.[2]

Figs 1-2 (S1)

This headdress leads already at Mansar to further interpretations or variations:

a. The pleated hair framing the face is preserved but the elaborated diadem made of tiny flowers disappears and is replaced by one row of pointed leaves forming a ring around the bun. The central pendant still hides the middle line. Figs 3-4.

Figs 3-4 (S27 & S25)

Fig. 5 (S25)

b. The bun lies obliquely on one side, adorned by a flat band to which are attached the small leaves. Fig. 5.

c. A cloth can replace the neatly carved hair-locks. The circular bun is preserved at the back of the head but the front part is completely covered with two flat layers of cloth (Fig. 6) above which the pleated cloth spreads in two symmetrical parts separated by the bejewelled pendant which is attached to a fleuron lying against the bun. A row of pointed leaves forms a ring around the bun, replacing thus the elaborated diadem with tiny flowers mentioned above. See Figs 6-7.

Figs 6-7 (S26 & S28)

2. The front part of the hair is flat, with all hair drawn backwards. The central jewelled ornament is attached to the elaborated flowered diadem which surrounds the bun. Figs 8-9.

Figs 8-9 (S29 & S1)

Fig. 10 (S5)

3. Numerous small curls fall symmetrically on either side of the bejewelled pendant. Fig. 10.[3]

4. The bun becomes predominant: still lying obliquely on one side, it slips towards the top of the head and is richly adorned with a broad diadem made of tiny flowers and pointed leaves. A further circular ornament lies opposite to it whereas a row of thick beads runs along the hair line. Fig. 11.[4]

Fig. 11 (S8)

Fig. 12 (S21)

Fig. 13 (S53)

An even more gorgeous rendering of this headdress is observed on Fig. 12 where the bun is practically completely hidden by superimposed rows of flowers and leaves and where a broad garland of beads and leaves hangs opposite to it. The triangular fleuron filling the gap between the bun and the hanging garland is and

will remain a common element of the jewellery in the following centuries. Whereas utmost care has been here brought to the rendering of the ornaments, a plain flat headband hides the hair. This sobriety enhances the richness of the flowered ornamentation. See also Fig. 13 (damaged).

5. A further style of a probably female coiffure should be described. The hair forms a broad band of hair framing the face, as if backcombed. All hair is drawn backwards, eventually falling on the shoulders in thick waves, and an ornamental device crowns the head. See Figs 14 & 15.

Figs 14-15 (S22 & S24) *Fig. 16 (S23)*

A variation is observed with an ornamental band reproducing the structure of a honeycomb (Fig. 16; also: NIGAM 2004, pl. 11.23); the hair is here all drawn backwards in thin parallel locks probably tied together on the top of the head. The honeycomb diadem is prominent and bears the central bejewelled pendant and a triangular fleuron above one ear.

6. The *jaṭāmukuṭa*. Out of the coiled up hair, thick curls fall on one side. All hair being tied together at the top of the head, the front part is flat and bears a beaded diadem with triangular fleuron on the side opposite to the falling curls. Fig. 18 (also in BAKKER 2004, pl. 6.17). See also Fig. 17 (but much damaged).

Figs 17-18 (S49 & 9)

The very same headdress is worn by the 'Śiva-gaṇa/nidhi' (BROWN 2004, pp. 59-61)[5] also from Mansar and preserved at the National Museum, New Delhi (Fig. 19): the lower part of the *jaṭāmukuṭa* with the spiral hair is here more developed than on any of the images under survey here (but compare to Fig. 23). The headdress includes all elements noted here in various sculptures: the *kapāla* attached to the flat diadem, the bejewelled fleuron, the ringlets, and the pearled garland falling on one side, the small flowers carved here at the top and at the back of the skull (BAKKER 1997, pp. 149-51 for a detailed description of the image and further references).

Fig. 19

The spiralling lock can be here hidden by a band of flowers and pointed leaves from where can fall an *utpala*. A row of thick pearls forms a diadem put above the hairline. See Fig. 11. The same is observed on Fig. 21 but a long pointed leaf falls from below the *jaṭā* in the opposite direction and a further flower, perhaps an *utpala*, also lies above the head, partly hidden by the bun of hair; the diadem is here broad and plain but supports the triangular fleuron. On Fig. 5, the triangular fleuron mentioned above is carved above the lower part of the matted hair. See also Fig. 20 (damaged).

Figs 20-21 (S52 & S6)

7. The same *jaṭāmukuṭa* is also encountered in a more realistic manner on heads of ascetics. The coiled hair can eventually be slanting, but the structure remains the same: broad hair-locks are drawn towards the top of the head where they are

tied together and curled up together in a spiral out of which ringlets fall down. See Fig. 22. Flowers, in this case *utpalas*, can be attached to the lower part of the *jaṭā*, enhancing the link to Śiva, see Fig. 23. Also S63 (damaged).

Figs 22-23 (S14 & 13)

8. Some heads belonging most probably to human or divine 'attendants' present a rather different type of coiffure: an ornamental item, showing a band adorned with tiny flowers, is put on the top of the head. The hair spreads all around it, either in thin locks showing a waving line or in thick and short curls. See Figs 24 and 25 (also in BAKKER 2004, pls 6.19-20).

Figs 24-25 (S16 & 20)

9. Small and bulky male characters that are probably the *gaṇas* who belong to Śiva's surrounding present hair-dresses which are peculiar to them. Two broad types can be distinguished, the first one reproducing the *jaṭāmukuṭa* described above (6-7), see Figs 29-30, and the second one with thick short curls framing the face (S30, right character, but much damaged) or spread from the top of the head on all directions (Fig. 26) or backwards (Fig. 27).

Figs 26-27 (S37 & S38)

A further hair-dressing is observed, probably inspired from the previous one but where the hair is no more rendered in a naturalistic manner; broad, short and

plain curls all spread out (Fig. 28 & S31); a similar hair-dressing is observed at Mandasor (HARLE 1974, pl. 101).

Fig. 28 (S30, left character)

Figs 29-30 (S32 & 33)

A rich ornamentation can be added, as seen on Fig. 29: a flat diadem above the front wears two *kapālas* whereas a goat-head hides the front part of the *jaṭāmukuṭa* and leaves fall from the same *jaṭā* (two *kapālas* were perhaps also attached to the head-dress of the figure at our right in S30, only one is still visible) On Fig. 30, a bejewelled fleuron is attached to the very same diadem above the right ear while the hair cascade on the left side.

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Though tedious as they can be, such descriptions allow a clear insight into the structure of the ornamentation. It is thus evident that certain rules of composition prevail in the organisation of the headdresses. For instance, when two deities sit/stand side by side, their headdresses are carved in such a way that they are harmoniously integrated within the overall composition. Considering the heads of Fig. 11 (and perhaps also of Fig. 5)[6] for instance, one sees how the buns are slanting in opposite directions. Or looking at Śiva's headdress which is usually asymmetric, one notes how the hair falls on one side of the head, creating thus an empty space on the other side normally filled with a bejewelled fleuron.[7]

One notes the presence of flowers or leaves as part of the ornamentation, either woven together and forming a band girding the bun (Figs 1, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 20, 21, 25), eventually attached to a narrow beaded strip (Fig. 9). Tiny flowers can also be woven as a net and adorn the upper part of the headdress (Fig. 24). Isolated flowers, eventually the *utpala*, can be attached to the bun or the *jaṭā* (Figs 11, 23, 29).

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The slanting *jaṭā* will tend to disappear when worn by Śiva: looking at the sixth-century carving of cave 21 at Ellora for instance, we note an altogether completely different type of matted hair which is put on the top of the head with thick curls falling symmetrically on either side (BERKSON 1992, pp. 138-9, 150). Only the dancing god, taken by his movement, shows a somehow asymmetric hair-dressing with curls falling on one side (BERKSON 1992, pp. 132-3). The slanting bun worn by female images also tend to disappear; it is still observed on Umā's head in the same cave 21 (Fig. 31) in a composition similar to the one noted at Mansar (Figs 8-9), but the female attendants seen behind the goddess all wear a bun lying at the top of the hair, and showing a symmetric composition. The two divergent rows of pointed leaves still run around the bun at Ellora.

Fig. 31

Similarly, the *jaṭā* stands right above the head in the various panels of Elephanta where the asymmetry is created by the tiny curls falling only on one of the side of the matted hair (BERKSON et alii 1983, pls 10-11, 23, 37, 45 & 49, 51, 61-62, 64, 66). There is no doubt also that this asymmetry explicitly expresses here movement: the meditating Śiva of the cave sits in perfect equipoise with the matted hair on the vertical symmetry axis and three curls spreading on each shoulder (BERKSON et alii 1983, pls 68-69). But at an earlier period, such as the one illustrated in the artistic production of Mansar, the asymmetry is an inherent feature of the god's personality: he stands between two worlds, the world of nature and the human world of reason, between the unconscious mind and awareness. Simultaneously, and beneath this movement, emerges the god who stands behind the structure of the universe as he is visualized when depicted on the *liṅga* (WILLIAMS 1982, pls 113, 161-2, 171, 182-3) and where the image is ruled by a fully frontal view and its corollary a perfect symmetry. Later on, at Elephanta, the view in profile related to movement becomes rare (BERKSON et alii 1983, pls 59-62) and even a depiction of the dancing god shows him in a frontal position (ibid, pl. 64).

Fig. 32

The first type of female headdress described above finds an echo in a female image recovered at Sahrī-bāhlol (Fig. 32; PAUL 1986, pl. 64 & pp. 135-8; SCHASTOK 1985, fig. 90):[8] curls spread in parallel rows on either side of a central line, all hair is drawn at the top of the head but forms a knot on the proper left side which is symmetric to a flower and a leaf falling on the proper right side. Further ornamentation is added, which is more typical of the region where the image was recovered (TISSOT 1985, pp. 194-5). From Gandhāra, this curling of the hair will be introduced in Kashmir where it is one way of depicting the front part of the hair on Śiva's head carved on the *liṅga* (Fig. 33, also in SIUDMAK 1992, fig. 54.7 & p. 454 [see also the other figures showing numerous variations in the carving of the god's headdress], and PAL 2003, cat. 52; PAL 2007, fig. 94 p. 91). It is also preserved in sixth-century sculptures at Deogarh for instance, where it adorns a male head (*The Golden Age*, cat. 95) and at Vartol where it is worn by a Mātṛkā and falls above the ears (SCHASTOK 1985, fig. 49)(Fig. 34).

Fig. 33

Fig. 34

Flowers are a major element of the hair ornamentation at Śāmalājī (SCHASTOK 1985, 33; Figs 35-36), where they form an elegant and sophisticated 'drooping sway' (SCHASTOK 1985, 33) which hangs behind the ear and which, I would suggest, evolved out of the single flowers noted at Mansar (compare in particularly with the long leaf in Fig. 21). The main modification is that at Mansar, such flowers – the *utpala* – or leaves were integrated in male headdresses whereas at Śāmalājī and elsewhere, they are seen on the head of Mātṛkās (SCHASTOK 1985, figs 13, 15, 49). Similar flowers and leaves are

observed in the group of Mātṛkās in cave 21 at Ellora where they are combined to the band of flowers (BERKSON 1992, pp. 139-40; Fig. 37).

Fig. 35

Fig. 36

Beside Śāmalājī, flowers adorn the headdresses, mainly of female characters, at Sahrī-bāhlol (TISSOT 1985, pl. XXI.3-4; SCHASTOK 1985, fig.90; here Fig. 32) or other sites in northern Pakistan (TISSOT 1985, pl. XXI.2, 5; XXII.9) – reflecting thus a fashion which spread on a large area in north India in the fifth and sixth centuries.[9] They are also preserved on Śiva's head in cave 21 at Ellora (BERKSON 1992, p. 133) and in cave 1 at Elephanta where this ornamentation reaches its peak of magnificence with various kinds of flowers spread through the headdress of the main image of the cave (BERKSON et alii, pls 40-41, 44).

Similarly, the wreath of flowers surrounding the bun appears in cave 21 at Ellora on the heads of Gaṅgā (BERKSON 1992, p. 130), of different Mātṛkās (BERKSON 1992, pp. 141-3) (Fig. 37), of Umā (BERKSON 1992, p. 132), of Śiva (BERKSON 1992, pp. 138-9).

Fig. 37

Fig. 38

Fig. 39

It appears also on the head of a Mātṛkā from Āmjhara, being thus contemporary to the Śāmalājī group (SCHASTOK 1985, pp. 80ff) (Fig. 38), in a composition which heralds the headdress observed on the female images attending to the door-guardians of the shrine in cave 29 at Ellora (Fig. 39). Flowers are here woven into an elaborated garland the extremities of which are dangling behind the ears at Ellora; only some isolated pointed leaves arise here out of the garland.

Thin chains, plain at Āmjhara, pearled at Ellora, radiate from the top of the bun and are attached to the band of flowers.

This band of flowers forms eventually the crown which adorns the victorious Durgā as known at Udayagiri (HARLE 1970; *The Golden Age*, cat. 17; here Fig. 40).

Fig. 40

Fig. 41

Even rare types of headdresses, such as the one illustrated on Fig. 14 could make their way outside the region: this one is for instance observed at Elephanta (BERKSON et alii 1983, pls 45 & 48 for a detailed view; Fig. 41).

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It is evident that the atelier active at Mansar was utmost creative in introducing models of headdresses which were going to form the substratum for later developments and in carving them with extreme care while adding to the matted hair or to the bun rich jewellery and flowered ornamentation which partakes of the deity's personality. Although we can here only but speculate since images only survived as fragments (the loss of the arms and hands implies quite understandably the impossibility of knowing which attributes were depicted), it is evident that flowers and leaves belong to the iconography of Śiva, and of characters related to him, such as ascetics (Fig. 23), Umā (?) (Fig. 13), or the Mātṛkās at a later period. A whole and elaborated visual language is put in place at Mansar associating the characters with the nature, with the forest through the depiction of flowers and leaves, or even of animals, or in relating them to the night or even to death through the moon crescent or the skull. These elements as well as the structure within which they are strictly organised will be inherited in the following centuries as we have seen above.

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Illustration

All pictures are drawn from the Mansar Photographic Repository, except: Fig. 31: AIIS ar_044200; Fig. 32: SCHASTOK 1985, fig. 90 (pl. LIII); Fig. 34: Schastok 1985, fig. 49 (pl. XXX); Fig. 35: SCHASTOK 1985, fig. 13 (pl. VIII); Fig. 36: SCHASTOK 1985, fig. 15b (pl. IX); Fig. 37: BERKSON 1992, p. 141; Fig. 39: AIIS ar_001315; Fig. 41: BERKSON et alii 1983, pl. 48; Figs 19 (National Museum, New Delhi), 33 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), 37 (Dungarpur Gallery), 39 (Government Museum Mathura): Photos JOACHIM K. BAUTZE.

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[1] One could add numerous further names to this list, but I limit myself to sites with which I am acquainted and where an intensive production took place in a rather short span of time.

[2] Also reproduced by JOSHI/SHARMA 1999-2000, pl. 8 & p. 130 where the group is identified as 'Lakshmi with an attendant': but if the main image is a goddess, then she is definitely not Lakṣmī but more likely Umā/Pārvatī holding an *utpala*. However, I would rather suggest to see here an 'anonymous' group which might have installed in the vicinity of an entrance (and leading the way to the representations of the river-goddesses).

[3] The wide open eyes, the open mouth with teeth visible, the gesture of the hand sustaining the head, are all elements pointing to an expression of anger (?), bewilderment (?), or stupefaction, most probably an emotion related to a very specific iconography. Compare to Fig. 17 which similarly shows a male frowning face, probably of Śiva in a frightful mood.

[4] It is worth underlining the fact that the goddess does not sit at the god's left side as should be the case – this position suggesting a marriage scene, perhaps of Sītā and Rāma as proposed by HANS BAKKER.

[5] BROWN rightly stresses that the skull or the moon can belong to 'the headdresses of other iconographical forms….' (2004, p. 59). The skull appears here in two occurrences: Fig. 29 & S30 (right character); Fig. 29 presents also a headdress with a goat-like head, a further element of Śiva iconography. None of these images can be, however, identified with aspects of the god. Taking into consideration further 'contemporary' testimonies at Udayagiri for instance or later, in the excavated sites of Maharashtra, I would rather surmise that the central image of the temple would have been a *liṅga.* Considering also the fact that the *nidhis* constituted a major pair at the gate of shrines in Ajanta for instance (BAUTZE-PICRON 2002), and that those of cave 19 clearly and directly relate to this image from Mansar (see BAKKER 1997, pp. 149-53), and wear in their headdress elements showing their Buddhist affiliation – whereas the Mansar image has Śaiva elements, I would indeed tend to subscribe to BROWN's identification although,

as remarked by HANS BAKKER in a personal communication, the moon crescent appears apparently only in the iconography of Śiva.

[6] Both heads were discovered at the same site, they share similar features, which leads me to strongly suggest that they belonged to a single group.

[7] A similar observation is made for instance at Elephanta: BERKSON et alii 1983, pl. 45 (and details on pls 48-49). Although in this case, the *jaṭāmukuṭa* stands right at the top of the head and is not more slanting, the curls fall out of it on the proper right shoulder, thus outwards of the composition and in a symmetric position to the one of the large bun of the god's wife which rests on her left shoulder.

[8] SCHASTOK denies a relation between this image and images from India proper: However, one has to consider the fact that the Sahrī-bāhlol image belongs to the 'periphery', i.e. it was obviously through its iconography inspired from Śaiva models, perhaps even Mātṛkās. The overall style reflects a completely different perception, which is stiff and does not show the fluidity encountered elsewhere. Each element is clearly delineated and isolated. PAUL identifies her with Māheśvarī, and thus relates her to the Mātṛkās. One might here argue that such an image is the source for the headdress at Mansar, and that it directly relates to the more naturalistic way of depicting hair in Gandhara, this might be but a major point is its iconography which is Śaiva in nature: the way motifs travelled was not at random and not the result of mere fancy or specific taste for such or such form. Rather, motifs (and their forms) are part of an overall language which explicitly contributes to the elaboration of iconographic images.

[9] One can also relate 5th-6th c. cast images of the Buddha discovered in the region to the art of the Northwest: 1) from Hamlapuri (Ramtek), JAMKHEDKAR 1991, fig. 3 (also JAMKHEDKAR 1988, pp. 50-51; *The Golden Age* 2007, p. 96 fig. 2); 2) from Phophnar, JAMKHEDKAR 1991, jacket book illustration (also JAMKHEDKAR 1988, p. 46; SHARMA/SHARMA 2000, figs 23.A-C & p. 87; *The Golden Age* 2007, p. 95 fig. 1) and JAMKHEDKAR 1988, p. 48.