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

1. Some study cases

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

¹ When discussing Indian portraiture with colleagues at conferences or other scholarly venues, I have been told more than once that, though my ideas may be interesting, the images I was referring to were not ‘real portraits’.
may, it is worth trying this kind of approach. Thus, before going back to a more comprehensive and conceptual perspective, let us examine some study cases.

1.1. Narasimha Gaṅga

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

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

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