

## 27. BUDDHA

Binh Hoa village, Long An Province, c. 6th century

Wood, H: 133 cm × W: 38 cm

Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, BTLS 1618

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Vo Si Khai, "The Kingdom of Fu Nan and the Culture of Oc Eo," in James C. M. Khoo, ed., *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan: Pre-Khmer Kingdom of the Lower Mekong Valley* (Bangkok: Southeast Asian Ceramic Society and Orchid Press, 2003), 65 and 85. The Binh Hoa statue dates to 1490+/-150 BP, c. A.D. 460 (that is 200–900 cal D (95.4 percent probability) or 390–690 cal A.D. (68.2 percent probability), the same date as the Phong My Buddha.

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Ha Du Canh and James C. M. Khoo, "Some Observations on Religious Sculptures in the Mekong Delta," in Khoo, ed., *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan*. For carbon dates of wood Buddhas found in the Mekong region, see Vo Si Khai, in *ibid.*, 65 and 85; Le Xuan Diem, Dao Linh Con, Vo Si Khai, and Van Hoa, *Oc Eo: nhung Kham Pha moi* (Ha Noi: Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1995), 272–75, 449.

Surprisingly, a number of wooden Buddhas have been preserved in soil with a high water table in the Mekong delta. They have been found at the sites of Thap Muoi, Phong My, Binh Hoa, and Mound Thap. Carbon-14 dating of these works places them from the early fourth to the end of the seventh centuries.<sup>14</sup> Given the dating of stone Hindu and Buddhist art from the period, a sixth-century date is probably the earliest that we can assign to these figures, which range from 30 centimeters to 3 meters.<sup>15</sup>

This elegant Buddha, with his left leg slightly flexed as if about to walk, has his right hand raised in either *abhaya* or *vitarka* (probably *abhaya*) *mudra*. Later Thai sculptures of the walking Buddha generally show him with his right hand in this same gesture.

Details remain visible in the wood. His facial features are still clear enough to see that his mouth may have been turned up in a slight smile, while the smooth contour of the wood from forehead to eyelid suggests the eyes were downcast. Whether the Buddha's monastic robe covered both shoulders or only one is

impossible to tell, as the wood is worn smooth over his shoulders and torso, but it is clear that he holds the end of his monk's robe in his left hand. His slender, youthful body and the slight bulge of his belly, with the intake of breath, *prana*, attest to the artist's knowledge of Gupta sculpture from India.

### LITERATURE

Louis Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong*, vol. 4, 1963; *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan; Co Vat Viet Nam (Vietnamese Antiquities)*, 2003; Bui Phat Diem, Dao Linh Con, and Vuong Thu Hong, *Khao Co Hoc Long An: Nhung The Ky Dau Cong Nguyen (Archaeology in Long An Province: Centuries in the Early Christian era)*, 2001.