

41. BODHISATTVA

Long Dai village, Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province, 7th century

Sandstone, H: 72 cm × W: 32 cm × D: 12.5 cm

Dong Nai Museum, BTDN LDO1

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Jean Boisselier, *The Heritage of Thai Sculpture* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1975), figs. 55 and 62; Hiram Woodward, Jr., *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand: The Alexander B. Griswold Collection, The Walters Art Gallery* (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1997), figs. 51 and 52.

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Early Vishnu images often wear a long *sampot*, but they are depicted frontally and a central pleat falls between the legs.

This two-armed figure wears a long *sampot*, which may indicate it was a bodhisattva, as bodhisattvas from this period, in both Cambodia and Thailand, are sometimes depicted with a long *sampot*,²⁹ while Hindu images of the region and period wear a short *sampot*; or if they wear a long one, it generally has a center pleat.³⁰ Both Buddhism and Hinduism were practiced during the Fu Nan period, though we know little of the actual practice. The occurrence of bodhisattvas, however, indicates that a form of Mahayana Buddhism existed in the Mekong area, as it did in Thailand during the same period. The *bodhisattva* is an enlightenment-worthy being who foregoes attaining enlightenment in order to assist others on their path. During the early Hindu-Buddhist period in Southeast Asia, the two bodhisattvas most often depicted were Maitreya, the future Buddha, and Lokeshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, but absent the visual clue of attributes, it isn't possible to identify this figure.

The *dehancement* of the sculpture is notable: the slightly flaring skirt at the bottom of the drapery, the bent knee, and

the outthrust hip give the image a sense of movement—an illusion often achieved in early pre-Khmer images. The remnants of earrings on his shoulders and the raised cord belt are the only ornaments visible on the slim figure, leaving the smooth surfaces of the youthful body and that of the garment unbroken.

LITERATURE

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; 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*, 2003; Ha Du Canh and J. C. M. Khoo, "Some Observations on Religious Sculptures in the Mekong Delta," in James C. M. Khoo, ed., *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan: Pre-Khmer Kingdom of the Lower Mekong Valley*, 2003.